

India Under Emergency: Rich Like us Nayantara Sahgal

Nigeenah Hassan
Research Scholar, Dept. of English,
Jeewaji University, Gwalior, MP.

Mukesh Sharma
Assistant Professor,
KRG Post graduate college Gwalior, MP.

Abstract :- Nayantara Sahgal is a writer with considerable number of political novels, stories, sketches and journalism. She belongs to rich Indian political traditions. She has the great ability to mix up facts with fictions. Sahgal's one of the main aspect of fiction is her traditional faith and attitude to politics and personal relationships. If we look towards the family of Sahgal her parents and relatives actively take part in struggle for freedom of nation. Politics entered into her life from early age and may be this is the reason how she brilliantly portray political events in her fiction. One such example is in her novel Rich Like Us. Rich Like Us offers the authentic picture of India under Emergency in 1975. Sahgal traces the impact of the Emergency on different characters of this novel and the social tension created by the Emergency. This paper seeks to examine the novel Rich Like Us and the use of historical events and effect and impact of such events on the common people .

Key Words: Emergency, Politics, Indian history, detention, vasectomy,.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Emergency declared in the year 1975 by Indira Gandhi was a traumatic period for the country. Some Indians were unable to welcome it, whereas some resented it. In the literary world, quite naturally the Emergency became the main theme of the political novelists. The declaration of Emergency meant curtailing of freedom in many ways: censorship, erratic arrests prevention of public meetings , roads lined up by steel helmeted policemen, the forced demolishing of the slums, the cruelly imposed vasectomies, suppressing the opposition of all sorts, and monopolization of power are just the highlights.

Sahgal's Rich Like Us presents a vivid picture of the excesses of the Emergency. Nayantara Sahgal won the Sahitya Akademy award in 1986 and the Sinclair prize in 1985 for this novel. The novel is set from 1932 to 1975 which includes both the Indian independence movement and its aftermaths, including the infamous political Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. As this novel boldly treats question of governmental policy, the majority of critics have treated novel as political novel. O.P. Mathur, for example, commends 'Rich Like US' solely as an

expose of the objective and functioning of Emergency. Jasbir Jain praises the novel as a discerning political biography, the story of a country in which the protagonist is India. Using the past as a point of reference, particularly the Gandhian Age, when love of freedom truly flourished, Nayantara Sahgal contrasts the troubled India in the Seventies and demonstrates how the Emergency infected democracy in the country. She presents the move towards dynastic succession by passing democracy, The Indian socio-political milieu, its disparities, rampant corruption and political upheaval during the period of Emergency of 1975. The imposition of Emergency and the subsequent curbing of rights fulfilled her dire prophecies.

Rich Like Us belongs basically to the Sahgal's tradition and the novel focuses on the human dimensions of the story predominated by political interest. The novelist believes that the emergency did not befall on the country overnight like a curse. It is actually the culmination of an erosion of moral values that set in among the politicians, civil servants and people at large after Independence. In such horrible conditions of Emergency in the country what is the fate of those who resist it while the majority reconcile to it? Sahgal in her novel Rich Like Us clearly shows all this through different characters of her novel.

A. Sonali as a victim of Emergency

Sonali is the main character as well as a miserable character in the novel, who suffers a lot in the wake of Emergency. She represents the good and modern Indian womanhood. She is intellectual and intelligent , independent yet committed to communal good unconditionally. In the wake of emergency when she refuses to interpret rules to the advantage of political bosses, she is frequently transferred without warning, also demoted and punished.

Ten minutes later a phone call informed me I was to go back to a posting to my state which I already knew, and the Union Government certainly knew there was no vacancy at my level. I hadn't merely be transferred without warning. I had been demoted, punished and humiliated, and I had no inkling why (Sahgal, Rich Like Us 31)

Sonali feels bitter and frustrated thinking that society values those in power higher than those who try to be honest and try to do their job sincerely. She feels completely alienated and her sense of rejection reacts with determination not to “grovel beg favors and act like a worm instead of a person” (Sahgal, *Rich Like Us*, 37)

Sonali finds for herself impossible to continue to work in such a corrupt environment. She refuses to be a part of the silent sycophancy and continues to fight as an administrator against the whole system.

“The Emergency had finished my career, but suddenly I don’t want a career. In the crumbling un-professionalism that bowed and scraped to a bogus Emergency” (32)

B. Injustice with Rose

Rose ;the London- born second wife of a rich businessman ,Ram, is the another character who suffers during emergency. Rose is a brave woman, but she is doomed by her honesty. She has been humiliated and robbed of even a decent living allowance by Dev, who keeps drawing money from the joint account of Ram and Rose by forging the signature of his paralyzed father. Rose was found dead in a well. The subversive law releases men like Dev of any crime, from the forging of Ran’s cheques to the murder of Rose.

During the period of Emergency the world’s largest democracy was looking nothing more than the dictatorship. Since the novel opens in the post-Emergency period, but travels back to more than a hundred and fifty year, analyzing and questioning the political relationships and the valve systems of the past. Emergency had different meaning to different people. To some, it was opportunity, plenty and power. To others, it was a time for hero-ship, while for the common men it was simply exploitation and deprivation of even the basic freedom. Sonali is transferred to a lower post and her successor, Ravi Kachru, takes over as Joint Secretary. She is demoted, punished and humiliated while Kachru always manages to be on the right side of power, by keeping out of controversies and avoiding wrong turns, sailing smoothly with the flow. He turns himself into a puppet in order to play a key role in the succession of Emergency.

“Kachru of course would get through any charade with fitness. It was the realities that floored him”. (26)

the beggar, though the a minor character in the novel, is still a powerful symbol of the effects of the ruthless Emergency. Makarand Paranjape observes: “ the crippled beggar is perhaps the most important symbol in the book..... the beggar represents the Indian masses who have been battered and crippled by the ruling class. They are silent and helpless... victims of endless oppression and injustice” (14)

sahgal’s novel *Rich Like US* is invested with the corporal specificities of the violence and chaos inflicted by history. Sara Ahmad writes, “bodies are capable of remembering histories, even when we forget them”. In Sahgal’s novel we see broken, disabled bodies symbolizing the ruthless state machinations on the hapeless citizens. Sahgal’s novel successfully depicts the impression of torture during the time of emergency on various characters. This novel gives a clear – eyed account of the events of Emergency itself and its brutality.

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