

# The bread givers, the smolinsky house is patriarchal in nature

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The Bread givers, The Smolinsky House is patriarchal in nature The autobiographical tone of the novel ' The Bread Givers written by Anzia Yezierska gives us an essence of patriarchy when the daughter of the Jewish-American family Sara Smolinsky values American traditions and believes in the concept of becoming self independent and in contrasts her father remains stuck to the traditions and values of Jewish culture. Patriarchy here is depicted is rather ironical in the sense that the story how a father's attachment to his own culture has devastated the lives of his daughters when they end up in arrange marriage. Instances of such patriotism have been displayed throughout the story where the writer says,' Traditional father searches for God through the Talmud and religious study' (Yezeirska, 1925, xvi) specifying that Moses' reading was confined only to reading Jewish sacred texts. Another instance where' mother believed she might earn a place in the heaven by serving her husband well' (Yezeirska, xvi) showed that the family was firm in traditional believes. Sara's father's attachment to Jewish culture has been depicted here as patriarchal characteristics.

Surrounded by the lives of his family, the patriarchal nature of the father has a powerful role to play in this novel. It gives a winning note to his values when his daughter's lives are destroyed due to his religious values and this rigidity has also been noted where Moses, even in dying state refuses to live with Sara and Hugo. The story was written somewhere between 1920 and the society and culture of that phase has an impact on the story. Even before that in the 19th century during the colonial period in America we find the prevalence of the class system. The upper class denoted the aristocrat class who were owners of large plantations. During the 19th century slavery was

also present in the society and the plantation owners usually owned large number of slaves and worked hard to achieve higher standards of living. Post colonization, the immigration of Jews to the New York City has been talked about in the story. More than a merge, there was a clash of the two cultures. More specifically a struggle between the old and the new world was clearly noticed. Jews of that period were very particular about their traditions and appeared to be conservative. The Jewish people restricted from interacting with people of different cultural background. This is depicted in the story. Where Sara Smolinsky is opening up to accept the new concept of self independence imposed in American culture, Moses remains about his Jewish beliefs despite various problems and misfortunes confronting the family. Besides Moses, the head of the family i. e. the entire ' Smolinsky House' was considered to be patriarchal in nature as they had to stick to the old Jewish views as imposed by Moses.

Critics have characterized this novel as a coming of age story which is mainly devoted to the working class. The Jewish family's poor financial condition has also been highlighted in the story. The women had been the victims of such conditions and they are shown struggling for money. Moses only keeps himself indulged in religious readings without lending any support. He even expects the women to earn for the family. This is clear from the quotes of Moses about his daughter Sara saying that ' She is only good to the world, not to her father. Will she hand me her wages from school as a dutiful daughter should?' (Yezeirska, xxxvi). Moses has also been portrayed as a character who has a big mouth and talks a lot. He claims his idleness and dependency on his wife as an instruction written in religious books. This is

evident in parts of the book by Moses' remarks, " It says in the Torah" and also says that, " Only through a man a woman has existence. Only through a man can a woman enter heaven" (Yezeirska, 1925, xxii). This also shows Moses' attitude towards women. Women were usually treated as servants of men even when they earned for family. Women tolerated everything owing to their old believes of getting into heaven by serving their men. Their desires and wishes were crushed down and were considered only as a scapegoat who would compromise and sacrifice.

#### References

1. Yeziarska, Anzia, *The Bread Givers*, New York: Doubleday & Co. 1925