

Bread givers essay examples

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The novel, *Bread Givers*, by the author Anzia Yeziarska, is an apt portraiture of the cultural gap between the traditional lifestyle and the American way of living. The novel brings forth the opportunities and challenges which were omniscient in the American society for the female immigrants in the early 20th century. The plight and the nurture of dreams are both expressed through the lives and characters of the daughters of Reb Smolinsky, the Russian immigrant. The contradiction and resolution is the central premise of the novel.

Reb Moisheh Smolinsky is a name which stands for the unworldly man devoting all his time to the study of pious texts and in the course of the novel he does so. He expects his daughters to support him economically and even put up with his preaching at the end of the day at home. He even exercises his sovereignty in the family by chasing off all of his daughters' suitors as he feels that they are not ideal for his daughters. Bessie, who courts a man named David Levinsky is ill-treated by her father who makes unreasonable demands from him. She fails to exude the strength of character to disobey her father's decision and David soon gets engaged to some other girl, thereby breaking Bessie's heart. Later, Reb weds off her eldest daughter to an elderly widower who is a fish monger having six children. He acts similarly in the case of Mashah and exercises his patriarchal despotism. She is considered to be an "Empty-head" as she cared too much about her beauty in stark contrast to the life of piety followed by her father. She finds her love in a young pianist from an affluent family. Fania too falls for an impoverished poet who adores her and dedicates lyrics to her. But, in the eyes of the father, they are simply an

apostate and a beggar. He overrides his daughter's choices and marries them off with two other men. As a result, all of them end up having unhappy marriages and are left to lament on their hapless lives.

In stark contrast to the challenges which her sisters face in the chronology of the novel, Sara brings the breath of fresh air and ignites the hope of opportunities. She is exasperated with her father's despotic attitude and leaves the house to make a life of her own. She toils hard and eventually completes her college only to find a job as a teacher. She thus attains the freedom which the American society offers to every individual irrespective of gender and class. While her sisters embrace the passivity which is being attributed to them due to the economic stringency, Sara becomes the epitome of individuality and freedom. She finds emancipation in knowledge and succeeds in life. The novel thus documents the tradition of ethnic immigrant European Jews in the city of New York at the beginning of 20th century and delves deep into the varied challenges and opportunities which life offered to the women folk of the immigrant families.

The cultural gap in the family between Reb Smolinsky's traditional Russian lifestyle and Sara's independent way of living gives rise to a rift which constructs a major part of this novel. The novel exposes the conflicting stands between the two individuals on the basis of religion and the belief toward marriage and women and describes how Sara finally manages to balance between the two by the end of the story.

The two remain at loggerheads with each other throughout the novel on the issue of religion. Reb embodies the characteristics of traditional Jews of Europe, while Sara propagates the ideals of the Americanized Jewish people.

The Torah loses its omnipotence in her eyes as she treads on the path of establishing her independence and individuality against the authority of her father.

The family is shown to be starving from poverty while the patriarch, Reb, spends unproductive hours in his room. On the top of this, Reb donates any extra revenue which is earned by his daughters to charities rather than saving that up for the economic security of the big family. Sara aims to become a teacher later in her life. However, it is the religious preaching of Reb Smolinsky which makes her run away from her home and embark upon a life of independence.

This conspicuous outlook toward the women folk can be associated with the religious culture and tradition which is indoctrinated in Reb Smolinsky and he even utilizes the pious readings as the justification to his controlling the daughters of the family. He goes on to say, “ What's a woman without a man? Less than nothing-a blotted out existence, no life on earth and no hope in heaven”, which expresses the traditional view of women in the families of the immigrants. Reb propagates the belief that the women in the household need to serve him and take the financial onus on their shoulders while he would go on pursuing his studies in religion. Though the other three women accept this assumption, Sara breaks out of the shackles of the family and decries the erroneous traditional values which existed in Russian culture. Sara's father later arranges for an affluent businessman to marry her expecting to attain some riches in the process. However, Sara rejects the proposal and continues to live an independent life on her own without compromising with the drudgeries of life. She later comes to the

comprehension that her father and she are almost like one another, but they practice on different variations of the culture which channelize their lives.

Thus, this recognition of cultural differences makes her respect Reb Smolinsky for the person he is. She has all along nurtured in the innermost core of her heart the dream of becoming a teacher and spread knowledge in the society. Her father, is in fact, also a very dedicated preacher who told of the words of God and all his life has extended the arms to his children whom he thought would require the preaching the most. They both have shared the same desire and essence of teaching throughout their lives. Sara returns to Reb after marrying the person of her choice and it is hinted at that her father too will leave their stepmother and the volatile relationship between the father and daughter will find reconciliation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the two characters become the archetypal ones who embody the timeless conflict which arises from drastic differences in cultural beliefs. In the novel, Bread Givers, the father and the daughter finally reach the position where they can appreciate and understand each other.

References

Yeziarska, Anzia. (1925). Bread Givers. New York City: Persea Books.