

## THE MARGINALIZED PSYCHE IN RUPA BAJWA'S *THE SARI SHOP*

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### ABSTRACT

*The Sari Shop* is Rupa Bajwa's debut novel. Her depiction of the grim reality of life in multicultural, multilingual Indian society is amazing. She has drawn a number of male and female characters from the upper as well as lower strata of the society. Some of them are well etched, especially those of Ramchand and Kamla and project marginalized psyche. The hypocrisy of Rina and Mrs. Sachdeva is representative of stereotyped rich and neo-rich. The social realism depicted in the oeuvre is synonymous with the prevalent power equations in modern contemporary India. Rupa Bajwa has employed language effectively to depict this simulacrum. This paper is a humble effort to critique *The Sari Shop*.

**KEYWORDS:** Characters, Indian Society, Lower Strata, Marginalized, Psyche, Reality

### INTRODUCTION

All women novelists are the unacknowledged sociologists of the world.

Of late, many fiction writers of Indian origin are projecting the other side of 'Shining India' and 'Rising India'. Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga have won prizes for their debut novels depicting this other side of the coin. Rupa Bajwa in her debut novel *The Sari Shop* presents two diverse, contradictory faces/ aspects of India. It projects, on one side, the rich and epicurean India and contrasts it with the poor, exploited and deprived stereotyped characters. Oscar Lewis's theory of sub-culture of poverty is well known. This theory of sub-culture of poverty highlights the dearth of resources on part of the poor and at the same time, sheds light on their values. According to Oscar Lewis, "The subculture [of the poor] develops mechanisms that tend to perpetuate it, especially because of what happens to the world view, aspirations, and character of the children who grow up in it" (Moynihan, 1999). An analysis of the novel authenticates the validity of this theory and that of the theory of Erikson which sheds light on the significance of childhood experiences in moulding the character and qualities of a person.

### Part I

"Literature by women presents an "an imaginative continuum" (Warhol, 273). A certain recurrence of motifs and themes is seen in the oeuvres of women writers. Majority of these writers deal with stereotyped female and gender roles, patriarchy, marriage, son-preference and sterility. Some of these women characters are depicted as oppressed and exploited. The exploitation of women assumes different facets and ranges from physical exploitation to mental slavery.

In the novel *The Sari Shop*, Rupa Bajwa outlines exhaustively the roles and behavior deemed appropriate to the sexes in the upper strata as well as the lower strata of the society and expresses their values, customs, laws, and social roles. These are expressed in metaphors which become an integral part of the cultural construct and social system. The central symbol of the sari connotes various aspects of social position, status, and education of female characters in the

novel. The marginalized male character Ramchand worked in a sari shop, Sevak Sari House, and had seen “innumerable women choose saris” (*The Sari Shop*, 63). He had learnt to read their faces, expressions and moods and felt that “Though women were otherwise strange, alien creatures to him, there was one part of them that he knew intimately—the way they chose saris” (63). Mrs. Sachdeva, the English Lecturer in a local college, preferred decent colors and was against colors like orange and gold. She preferred something that could be worn in the college and was not meant for the village fair. Her instructions to Ramchand were clear, “some dullish colour, you know. Like brown or grey’, said Mrs Sachdeva condescendingly. She liked to look plain and business-like. She wasn’t one of the vain, idle housewives that this city was so full of. She was a literate woman, Head of an English Department” (28).

Mrs Sachdeva was unlike other women like Mrs Gupta and Mrs Bhandari. Her husband too was a Professor and she was childless. For other upper class women, “She is nobody” (209). Mrs. Bhandari’s husband was D.I.G. in the police. Mrs. Sandhu’s husband was a Chief Engineer in the Punjab State Electricity Board. Mrs. Gupta’s family was the family of business persons. Mrs. Kapoor was the wife of Ravinder Kapoor, the biggest industrialist in Amritsar. All these women lived materialistic and epicurean lives. They desired “a beautiful house, status –family, a caring husband and good looks...what more could a woman ask for?” (13) Gokul, a shop assistant, summed up their lives by saying, “These women can be real headaches. If they are not bragging about their houses, it is their husbands. And if isn’t the husbands, it is the children” (209). Mrs. Kapoor was a middle aged woman dressed in a silk salwar suit and expensive looking shawl wearing gold and diamonds in her ears and wrists. She had the reputation of having bought pashmeena shawls worth ten lakhs. Her daughter Rina was a modern girl. Her first meeting with Ramchand took place in her home and she ‘sniggers’ at the ‘the sari-wala’. Ramchand ignored it and showed them saris. But what happened at their home was beyond his experience.

He had learnt to read their expressions and their moods very accurately. He could guess when they were definitely going to buy a particular sari. He could tell when they were in two minds and had to be pushed into buying one. He could immediately sense when they had made up their minds not to buy anything and were pretending to be interested (64). These two self assured women bought saris without exchanging words and bothering to find out their price. They chose their saris in a ruthless manner indicative of their expertise. Mrs. Kapoor was a status conscious woman. Due to her daughter, she had to be in contact with “ordinary, professor-type, service class women” (91). Rina knew that there were other things more important than money in the world. Out in the big world, she knew, people with learning were considered learned. It was not respect from few small towners or crass businessmen but what mattered was “respect from all over the world, from the academic, cultured world” (91). Rina was marrying a service class person—a military officer. That was her way to span the chasm in the society. Rina had a grand and lavish Indian style wedding. Ramchand too attended the wedding even though he was an uninvited guest there.

Three days after her wedding Rina visited Ramchand’s sari shop dressed up very simply. She glanced perfunctorily at the silk saris Ramchand was showing her. She talked to him and asked him personal questions. She asked him his opinion on different issues, tastes and emotions. He became awkward and garrulous and said things he did not mean. She left after casually buying a silk sari. Soon after five months, Rina, “recently married, rich, glossy and permed” (186) published her novel. Due to her interaction with him, she had become curious about Ramchand and had gone to meet him. She had been inspired to write the novel after seeing the “trembling sari-wala standing by the security guards and had heard him lie about being invited by her to the party” (186). In order to give identity to her protagonist named Sitaram, she had met him and had started working on the first draft of her novel while she was still on her honeymoon. Thus, she forged

an identity for herself. For her, money and marriage were not everything. Yet her father had enough money to take care of her needs even though he did not pay his employees on time.

## Part II

Parallel to the plot of these rich women and as an antithesis to it, the story of the mother of Ramchand, Sudha and Kamla has been set. Rupa Bajwa has very skillfully depicted the differences in their values, culture, family life, social and economic conditions and standard of living. Their priorities too were different in life. Ramchand's father was the owner of a small shop in Amritsar. His family lived in a smaller room behind the shop. He felt that his mother was the nicest woman in the world. His parents passed away in an accident when he was six. His uncle's wife and his grandmother were the other women relatives in his life. His father's shop was taken over by his uncle. Sudha was the wife of his landlord. Ramchand had seen her perform various domestic chores in all seasons for almost eleven years. He had seen her as a new bride with bridal ivory chooda on her wrists. At that time, he was just fifteen years old. To Ramchand, she was the most beautiful woman in the world. She smiled and nodded whenever she saw him. It was but natural that Ramchand had begun to fantasize about her in his spare time. Later "he came across many women in the sari shop, with its intense atmosphere of pervading femininity, but it was only the sight of Sudha, fully clothed, doing ordinary household chores, that could inflame Ramchand completely"(88-89). In quick succession, one after other, she gave birth to three children.

Kamla was married to Chander who worked first in a factory and later on in the Sevak Sari House. She was deprived of childhood. Her mother worked in the houses of other people and after her mother's death, she began working in her mother's place- at home and in other homes as well. After her marriage, she shifted to Amritsar and started living with a 'stranger'. She had brought with her two frocks which she had worn in her childhood and a necklace of red beads. At that time, Chander worked in a factory and lived in a tiny room. Kamla was a good wife but felt very lonely. Her husband got drunk and often beat her. This made her sour. "She had begun to brood, had begun to be tired of her life" (152). Her life was dull and she was expected to bear children soon. Her "whole day would pass in working at chores that seemed to grow more pointless each day, and watching the light change from dull grey to a slightly brighter grey at noon, and then dull grey again, when evening fell" (152). Her life changed when she realized that she was pregnant. Her world too changed overnight. It became newer and fresher. Unfortunately, in the third month of pregnancy, she had a miscarriage. She bore the pain and misery all alone. She was devastated when the doctor told her she would not conceive again. That night Chander returned home more drunk than usual and without breaking down, but in an often trembling voice, she told her husband about it. He too was distraught and mumbled that he had lost his job and had incurred debt as he was without salary for three months. He blamed her for being unlucky for him. He kept a bottle of alcohol at home and Kamla started taking a few swigs from it. She would remove money from his pocket and buy a bottle for herself. She was so lost in her misery that "It didn't occur to Kamla that she could also look for the kind of work she had done before her marriage" (158). She smiled secretly when her head bumped against the wall when Chander threw her at it in stupor. Her forehead was full of bumps. In her stupefied, drunk condition, the news that Chander had obtained a job in a sari shop did not register. In no time, the pretty, cheerful girl had disappeared and Kamla became a stone eyed monster. Soon, Kamla had started drinking openly and Chander beat her daily. She was full of bitter poison. This poison mixed with alcohol, rage and recklessness, "Then, with the alcohol laced anger coursing like fire through her blood, she would sally forth into the world with red, angry eyes, abusing and swearing at everybody. A resigned beating at night from Chander would fail to dilute this poison and soon made her even more of a savage animal" (160).

She became a disgrace to her husband and neighbourhood. This addiction affected Kamla too. She did not take bath for three days and hence smelt rancid. There were rashes on her skin due to heat. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes were wild. She knew who to blame for and who was at fault. Her husband had blurted out the names of Gupta and Kapoor to her. She went to the Guptas and said that they were responsible for their (Kamla and Chander's) plight and swore at them. Her language was so abusive that ultimately police were called for and Kamla was arrested and put in a lock up. At night, Kamla was raped by two policemen in the lock up. Next morning, she tottered back home. Chander scolded her for staying out all night. He did not ask her the reason for it and missed the blood stained sari and failed to notice her "empty and hollow eyes" (171). He advised her to kill herself if she had any shame left in her. When Ramchand was sent to Chander's place to find out his reason for absence from the shop, he remembered his first meeting with her on the street and how she was beaten by Chander at home later. At the time of second meeting, that day of first meeting came back to him very vividly. That day had haunted him as a persistent sense of guilt remained in him. That day too Kamla kept mum but something made him stay put.

The tomb-like atmosphere in the house gripped Ramchand with its vulture-talons. It seemed far removed from the bustle of the street outside, from the busy city outside. It was an isolated world, where you could feel the air thick with despair, thick with unsaid words and unshed tears. It was like travelling into darkness and reaching the heart of it. Ramchand's mind went blank, His body went still. He waited (182).

She wore a cheap, purple nylon sari with a pattern of big white flowers on it. In a croaking voice and with a creaking body and a ghost like smile, she narrated the story of how the two policemen had raped her and after her having kicked the second police in the stomach, how he ill treated her with a 'lathi'. As a result, she was bleeding profusely. Then, "horror dawned on him slowly. Horror that he had never imagined he was capable of feeling. He saw that most of the white flowers on the purple sari below her hips were not white. They were rust-red. Stale-bloodstain-red" (184).

After two months, Kamla went to the Kapoor House and abused the family. When Ravinder Kapoor came out, she hurled a stone at him and it hit him on his forehead. He started bleeding. Next day, four men broke into Chander's home and beat Kamla black and blue in the presence of all her neighbours. They broke all things in her home. They broke her ribs, collar bone and her skull. They paraded her in the neighbourhood and later burnt her alive in her small house. It was rumoured that she was paraded naked before her death. Chander salvaged some things from the burnt down house. He found in Kamla's trunk two frocks and a string of red glass beads wrapped carefully in a Chinese silk scarf. He wondered as to why she had kept those things with her for so long.

### **Part III**

Ramchand and his friends frequently visited Lakhan's dhaba for food. Lakhan, whenever he got a chance, spoke of his dead sons. His wife was not able to come to terms with the death of her sons. It was a hot day. The family felt irritable and cooped up. The younger son, barely sixteen, wore a new blue turban. Both sons were constantly making this or that demand and so the mother asked them both to go out for an hour or so as they were ready. They wanted to go to Company Bagh- a public garden. When the mother pointed out the distance, they said they would go to the Darbar Sahib. So his sons had gone to the Golden Temple. It was the day of the siege of the Golden Temple. In the battle between the army and Sikh fundamentalists, innocent people were killed. Sikhs were killed on the spot. Lakhan's boys who "looked like monkeys" (110), but were in reality very good looking, too were amongst the victims. Lakhan, in a tearful voice,

narrated the story of their death:

My children, they had tied back the hands of my children behind them with their own turbans, made them stand in a row with others and then shot them. Along with many others. We didn't even find their bodies...It was so terrible, especially as my younger son was wearing that new turban. That navy-blue one-crisp and long. And they must have tied the poor boy's hands behind him with it. They must have felt horrible during the last moments of their short lives, the last moments when they knew they were going to die. Oh, so handsome they were (110).

Ramchand had always avoided any conversation with Lakhan as he would inevitably end up talking about his sons. But after Kamla's death, he went to the dhaba and asked for Lakhan. On learning that he was home, without any preamble, he burst into Lakhan's home. The old couple, in the laughterless, spick and span house, was surprised as well as angry to see him. Without any preface, he rushed to say, "I have come to say that I am sorry about your sons. It shouldn't have happened" (221). That night, Ramchand realized the futility of his studies. He was not able to save Kamla from Chander's beating and her life. He was inadequate in the face of Lakhan's grief. In a way, he was always running away from situations and life. He felt suffocated, inadequate and knew he was a coward, uncaring person. For the first time, he recognized,

What a grubby mean little life he had! Or may be he didn't have a grubby, mean life. Life was grubby. Grubby, mean, flabby and meaningless! Grovelling, limited, scared! Sick. Sick, sick! And he was the same too! Just to be alive meant to be undignified, Ramchand thought, his stomach aching with acidity. Because it wasn't just about your own life eventually ....( 112).

#### **Part IV**

There are varied sub-plots running in the text. Ramchand acts as the connecting link in *The Sari Shop*. His marginalized psyche is highlighted in the novel. He was the protagonist of Rina's novel and a visit to her home changed the course of his life. Right from childhood, his parents had spoken of sending him to an English Medium school but their untimely death disturbed the plans. As a consequence, he became quieter and withdrawn from everything. But after the visit to Rina's home, he started buying and reading books and learning English. He cleaned his room and wanted to rise above his station. He was attracted towards Sudha and fantasized about her. She and her husband too were striving to send their children to English medium school. Rina and Sudha made him aware of how many evenings he had wasted in life and he realized that "...his life was such a pothole. Shop, room, shop, room, shop, room" (74).

In his study of English, he had read about a policeman being a very useful and important public servant. He came across the word 'baton' and its synonyms such as 'club' and 'cudgel'. It reminded him of Kamla's words, "He did it with a lathi, the anguished voice said in his head" (188). Kamla's eyes and her story haunted him. The first time he had met her, Chander had beaten her and Ramchand had felt very helpless. He had felt sympathy for her and wanted to help her in some way or other. He had learnt her name only after her death. He wanted to ask Chander if he had known about her rape but could not muster courage to do so. After her rape, Ramchand became more withdrawn. His state of mind is projected well in the oeuvre:

Into his heart, crept a permanent feeling that everything was very wrong- a constant disquiet, a perpetual sinking feeling in the stomach. Sometimes he felt guilty. Maybe he should have spoken out. But why hadn't Chander's wife spoken up for herself? Maybe she wanted to keep it quiet. In that case, maybe he was right to keep quiet too (200).

He felt like crying out loud. He wanted to collect all the people in the shop and tell them everything. He had the silly hope that they would do something. He thought of telling Mrs. Gupta or Rina about it. He felt that being women, they would understand its urgency and significance. He had confided in Mrs Sachdeva because he felt that being an intellectual she would empathize. But her reaction jolted him completely. He wanted to give justice to Kamla after her death. He wanted to give justice to Lakhan as well. This was a new emotion, a very strong emotion, and it was a mix of irrational fear and anger. He felt, "What constant injustice! What a warped way of living! How wrong it all was! He felt reckless, strong enough to do anything, fight anyone for justice, for truth" (222).

In his childhood, his mother had once found him crying. "And he wasn't howling or throwing a tantrum or weeping like other children do. He was really crying, with real heart breaking sorrow, gulping and sobbing, his eyes full of grief" (40). His reaction on learning about Kamla's rape was almost similar. He cried loudly and blubbered. He felt debilitated, helpless and defenseless. Darkness smothered him. He had frequent nightmares. He dreamt he was alone in the sari shop. He was surrounded by saris and silence. There were shadows behind him. Small, prickly and invisible things crawled out of the white mattresses and moved on his body. Then the saris began to get longer and longer and began to flap. Bajwa describes the dream as

They flew out at him and whipped themselves around his neck, almost strangling him. A navy-blue sari floated in front of the window, like a curtain. It had no border, no embroidery, no patterns on it. It was perfectly plain, like a new, crisp, navy-blue turban.

Finally, a parrot green sari (the sort that he had once unsuccessfully tried to sell to Mrs. Bhandari), floated from the shelf towards him. He watched it as it drew closer.

It then descended over his head, engulfing him like a shroud, its black border suffocating him.

Throughout the dream, a dead woman's eyes followed him (227).

For the first time in his life, he shouted at his landlord. Then in the evening, he glared at Mahajan and dared him to do something. He picked up a chair and flung it at Hari and Chander who were laughing. He lunged at Mahajan and shook him in fury. He warned Hari not to laugh and asked Chander to have heart and courage and not to behave like an old woman. All his frustration and anger had been provided vent in this manner but as a result he was in the fear of losing his job. He spent twelve days locked up in the room. "A strange twelve days. He had crashed into a vacant state, all rage gone. No rage, no worries, no happiness, no ambition, no doubt, no grief. He felt completely blank" (232). On the thirteenth day, he realized that he had lost his job. He went to the shop and listened to the scolding of Mahajan who thought that he was drunk on that particular day. Ramchand did not protest and asked to be forgiven as it was the best way to save his job. In the evening, he cleaned the room but carefully avoided looking at the books. The books had enlightened him to a little

extent. This newly dawned awareness had made him more conscious of the plight of the marginalized, the resultant frustration plus helplessness and the power equation that existed in the society. Commenting on the end of the novel, Rupa Bajwa in an interview says,

For me, it was the natural turn of events. Ramchand's character is such that he could not break out of his boundaries. The idea was not to have Ramchand and Kamla fighting the system and coming out as winners in the end. The idea was just to try and understand them, and to understand everything else around us. In our complex society, it is really not easy to change the world, or even part of it, or even our own life sometimes (The Tribune, 2004).

This is the empirical experience of life.

## Part V

“In a society such as ours...there are manifolds of relations of power that permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (Foucault, 59) .

Both Ramchand and Kamla were from almost similar backgrounds. Ramchand and Kamla lost parents at an early age. Ramchand had fallen into the rut and wanted to come out of it where as Kamla wanted to be in it without making any attempts to rise above it. Foucault believed that power is embodied in various local, regional and material institutions such as the family and the market, etc. The process of power is complex and individuals are subjected to and constituted as effects and objects of power. The network of power permeates the society and the individual is the site and instrument of power (Nayar, 61). Mahajan exerted power in the shop and kept everyone under constant surveillance and monitored their movements. Nothing escaped his notice. It was a sort of panopticon. When Chander failed to report for work, Ramchand was sent to his place to find out his whereabouts. He told Ramchand to dress up well while visiting ‘big people’ like Kapoors. Mrs. Sandhu lived in the Power Colony. Many of her husband's underlings came to her place as cooks and gardeners or to do domestic chores. Mrs. Gupta too kept a sharp eye and iron control over how Shilpa (her daughter-in-law) looked, dressed and behaved. Mrs. Kapoor felt that Mrs. Sachdeva and Rina spoke deliberately in English just to show her up. Ramchand was completely ignored and sneered at in the Kapoor family. Rina Kapoor's novel too was an exploitation of poor Ramchand. Rina was also aware of the changing power equation in the society and mentioned how due to bribes, the service class had come up in life.

## Part VI

“Language is not ordinary thought... it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society” (Sapir, 29).

Rupa Bajwa's characters belong to multilingual and multicultural India. They come from varied social strata and their levels of education are also different. Naturally, to create verisimilitude and project authenticity, she has employed various narrative strategies. The state of mind of Ramchand has been described aptly through phrases like “lonely hours”

(21), “suffocate” (21), “to feel inadequate and suffocated” (111), “ the shop closing in on him” (24), “years of being jailed in the shop” (103), “get away for ever from the claustrophobia of the shop” (219), and “ locked up in his room” (232), etc. His loneliness has been highlighted in sentences like “ he spent long summer afternoons alone by the river” and “ Ramchand first came face to face with solitude” (46). Other expressions like “ stare vacantly” (03), “limbs and body both felt frozen” (03), “watery smile” (22), “ wan smile” (09), “wild eyed state” (222) and “looking blankly”, etc. shed light on his psyche. Kamla’s eyes too haunted Ramchand. Kamla knew that “She would be all alone in Amritsar with a stranger. In a new strange house” (148). After marriage, the pretty and cheerful girl Chander had married to had disappeared. The girl had become “lonelier and quieter” (153). She started “feeling claustrophobic” (154). At times, she was still as a statue” (158). Her eyes have been described as “unseeing eyes” (156), “ eyes stony” (157), her eyes began “ to stare without saying a word” (157), “stony eyed monster” (159), “red, baleful eyes” (167), “ empty, hollow” eyes (171), “ a dead woman’s eyes” (181), “ her eyes were like dark, twin tunnels that led nowhere” (182), “eyes that blazed” (183) and as “ the coal-like eyes, the two bottomless pits” (183).

Rupa Bajwa has resorted to the use of a number of tropes to bring verisimilitude to the text. Lakhan’s trauma has been revealed aptly in “Lakhan went round the dhaba, attending to things, talking to his helpers, moving mechanically, his eyes opaque like a blind man’s” (107). On being asked how his wife was “Lakhan’s mask-like face crumpled up in an instant” (107). On being interrupted mid-way in his sad story, “his (Lakhan’s) face had assumed its stony mask-like quality again” (111). On hearing the tragic story of the death of Lakhan’s children, “Ramchand sat still as a statue” (110). In the Kapoor family’s drawing room, Ramchand sat on the edge of a soft sofa, “feeling like a fish out of water” (61). Kamla glared up at the windows of Gupta’s house with red, baleful eyes, “looking a little like a rabid dog” (167). Describing the Gupta family she said, “You are like the jackals that feed off the carcasses of dead animals” (168). The atmosphere of the shop is “tomb-like” (123). The same trope recurs with a little variation in the description of Chander’s house, “The tomb-like atmosphere in the house gripped Ramchand with its vulture-talons” and Ramchand felt, “It was like travelling darkness and reaching the heart of it” (182). According to Gokul, Kamla’s behavior was unwise. She failed to understand that “While living in the same water, a small fish cannot afford to make enemies with crocodile” (199).

Reality Effect has been employed effectively to create simulacrum in the narrative. Mrs. Kapoor has been portrayed as “a middle-aged woman dressed in a blue silk salwaar kameez and an expressive-looking shawl” and “Gold and diamonds glittered on her ears and her wrists” (62). Her daughter was a young woman with permed hair. She wore blue jeans, a slinky blouse with a purple and blue floral pattern and a black woolen cardigan. Silver bangles jangled at her wrists. Mrs. Sachdeva wore a muted rust and beige silk sari and a thin string of pearls around her neck. There were tiny pearl drops at her ears and her hair was done back in a plain bun (91-92). The same effect has been used to paint characters of Sudha (86-87) and Lakhan’s wife (220), Gokul and Chander (09-10), Mrs. Bhandari (26) and Mrs. Sandhu (12). Reality Effect is also reflected in the description of Mrs. Gupta’s room (15). The prestige symbols of both the upper strata and lower strata of the society have been put to excellent use. Crystal ornaments of Mrs. Gupta (15), white Opel Astra car (169), Feng Shui objects (15) and cordless Japanese phone (19), etc were the Prestige symbols of the rich and Bata shoes with laces (30), new white shirt, black trousers, new socks, and bar of Lifebuoy soap were the prestige symbols of the poor people like Ramchand.

Code mixing and code switching strategies employed in the novel are eye catching. To indicate various moods of the protagonist Ramchand, Hindi movie songs have been utilized. “*Aa Chal ke tujhe main le ke chaloon*” (50) and “*Ye dil*

*na hota becahra*" (57) can be cited as examples. The plot of '*Kaho na Pyar hai*' has been skillfully employed to point out various longings of Ramchand. Various honorifics and appellations are given in the regional language. Names of eatables and ornaments too are in Hindi. Short sentences like "*Arre nahin bhai*" (30) too are noticed. Rare instances of calque (literal translation) too are observed. All these devices and other narrative techniques make a reading of *The Sari Shop* a meaningful and insightful experience.

## Part VII

Rupa Bajwa had visited sari shops frequently and the impression of one shop assistant had stayed with her. She had depicted his character in one of her short stories too. The same developed into a sensitive and complex novel as she used this information while writing *The Sari Shop*. Commenting on his character, she has said in one of her interviews, "Ramchand almost lived with me, peering over my shoulder while I boiled eggs, standing at windows looking out towards the sunshine on cold winter mornings and walking silently by me whenever I went out. His pain was mine, his headaches became mine, I was happy and hopeful when he was. Imagination merged with reality" (Narrative Beginnings, Verve online). She painted many other identifiable characters. Some like Kamla, Ramchand and Mrs. Sachdeva have been created and etched out in minute detail and observation. These are well rounded characters. Then there are many stock characters too providing a touch of realism to the novel. The setting of the novel is in Amritsar. The novel begins with description of a street fight and this is followed by an elaborate description of Amritsar- new as well as the old. Rupa Bajwa has dexterously projected the power equation prevalent in our society and its deft manipulation by the rich and wealthy. She has shed light on the trauma of the marginalized and an insight into their psyche is the very essence of the text. The sociolinguistic, multicultural, multilingual references in the novel, fine characterization, juxtaposition, flashback, contemporaneity, use of Reality Effect, various Prestige Symbols and effective tropes make a reading of *The Sari Shop* an unforgettable aesthetic experience.

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