

EMERGENCE OF NEW WOMEN IN BAJWA'S THE SARI SHOP

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ABSTRACT

"The Sari Shop" is the first novel written by Rupa Bajwa that was set up in Amritsar depicting two scenarios of women and social class from the perspective of protagonist Ramchand. The title "The Sari Shop" symbolises the collection of women attire that defines their unique choices and their own thought process. The novel represents two contrasting spheres of the Indian society existing beside each other. The gallery of women characters depicts the dimensions of "new women" along with harsh reality of the society. All the women characters redefine the term "new women" in their own unique ways while integrating in the society. This paper seeks to examine the lives of Indian women with different backgrounds in its numerous facets as portrayed in the novel..

Keywords: *New Women, Indian Women, self-Identity.*

Introduction

The existence of women is one of the great creations of God. Being a woman signifies purity, devotion, magnanimous, resilience, dignity, deference, forbearance. She is the initiator of home, relationships, bond. The life of a woman is extremely struggling in itself who is responsible for the domestic tasks, brought up of kids, taking care of the family members, and fulfilling all the responsibilities. The position of women in the society is considered as subordinate since the long period, the only difference is seen in the level of subordination in with the variation of society. Western society has different perspectives in comparison to eastern society specifically in regard to the condition of woman and their lives. India is always a patriarchal society with the secondary level of women. The identity of women in Indian society has gone through many changes since the ages. Indian society mostly excluded women from various community activities, authority and power. The man is considered as the symbol of strength, power, superiority, ego and has the right to access all the resources. The males have cultural authority in the society whereas females are marginalized considering them weak, subordinate, soft nature. They are on the periphery by various means such as social norms, cultural and religious institutions. Indian literature also shed the light on such condition of females and their sufferings. The works of Kamala Markandaya "Nectar in Sieve", "Some Inner Fury", "A silence of desire"; RK Narayan's "The Dark Room", Shashi Deshpande's "The Binding Vine" have shed the light on the sufferings and status of women. The women revolution against the plight drastically changed the scenario and introduced the concept of new women. It got the recognition in numerous sectors and Indian literature also emphasized upon it. The Indian English Literature displayed the women as the characters combat for the gender equality, justice, self identity, and freedom. The works such as "Small Remedies", "The Dark holds no terrors" by Shashi Deshpande"; "Lifting the Veil" by Ismat Chughtai, "Cry, the Peacock" by Anita Desai, Manju Kapur's "The Immigrants" shows the changing image of women in Indian society and emphasized upon the appearance of "new women".

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There is long list of female writers who supported the feminism in India through her writing such as Tarabai shinde, Shashi Desh Pande, Kamala Markandaya, Nayanthara Seghal, Anita Desai, Arundathi Roy, Surmaiya or Kamala Das, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shobha De, Anita Nair, Kiran Desai, Geetha Hariharan. These writers represented their female characters as heroes who pictured their journey towards betterment and being a rebellion against social injustice, corruption and taking a stand for their own strong and independent identity. The feminism emerges as a new social revolution where the female is giving the new meaning of being a woman in the society. The concept of new women shows an optimistic perspective where women are being heard, spoken, confident, strong and highly focused on their success and achievement in all the domains of life. The writings of Rupa Bajwa as a contemporary writer focus on the realistic aspect of the new women. The excellent writing skills of Bajwa is evident from her presentation of the characters and their individual differences in family life, social interaction, culture, education, cognition and financial status.

Bajwa's novel "The Sari Shop" was set up in Bajwa's hometown, Amritsar and the scene of city is creatively elucidated.

"The bazaar was throbbing with activity. The halwai was already installed in front of the Mishthaan Sweet Shop, pressing jalebi batter into squiggly shapes that floated and simmered in the oil in a big iron cauldron. All the shops had opened for the day".

The story begins with the day of protagonist Ramchand, worker of Sevak Sari House, famous for the variety of sarees among the customers. The shop fulfils the demand of customers as per their profession, social class, financial status and style. Though the beginning and ending of novel is about Ramchand, the lives of other characters were presented through the eyes of Ramchand. The female characters were the major attraction and strength of the novel. The gallery of female characters belongs to different sections of the society. The upper class of the society is portrayed by the characters such as Mrs. Sandhu/ Gupta/ Bhandari/ Kapoor/ Mrs. Sachdeva whereas the other section of the society is depicted by the characters as Kamla, Lakshmi, Sudha. All the characters have their own stories and strategies to strengthen their character. The female characters with the elite class have got their recognition buried somewhere in the society as their own identity is hidden in their husband's name. On the other spectrum, the women of other class have been recognized by their own names. Bajwa presented variety of women signifying elite class housewife living lavish lifestyle, middle class housewife fulfilling their homely duties, lower class housewife dealing with bitterness of poverty and craving for basic needs, working and educated women considered as elegant and knowledgeable, happy-unhappy lives of women.

Pathak (2015) described the characters of the novel as marginalized depending upon their social class.

Jamtsho and Thakur (2016) emphasized on the aspect of social class and its impact on the lives of people. The huge gap between rich and poor is clearly visible in the novel and the realistic aspect of modern India demonstrates the harsh reality of exploitation, hypocrisy, corruption, injustice, identity crisis, and feminism. Mahajan and Randhawa (2017) elaborated Bajwa's women as thoughtful, percipient, self-confident, ingenious, and smart. They have been portrayed as arising new women aware of their choices, and opinions and taking a stand for themselves. Bajwa's characters concealed their emotional side and chucked the traditional role of women focusing on their career. Kaur (2018) discussed that compromises are the major part of the life of a common man along with the exploitation by upper layer of the society. the money plays the major role in existence of a person and change their life from struggling phase to life full of luxuries and comfort, from injustice to justice.

The character of Rina Kapoor has been portrayed as a daughter of an industrialist belonging to the upper class of society. Being the part of creamy layer of the society, she never faced any financial crisis, and enjoyed all the luxuries and despite this, she aspires her own identity that is distinct from her parents and husband. She decides to become a novelist and wrote the novel for which she borrowed the protagonist character 'Seetaram' from the sari-wala, Ramchand who visited her during marriage preparations. She was "breaking the commercial streak that ran through her family and was trying to span the gap" as She chose her life partner belonging to the service class by herself and broke the tradition of marrying into a business family though her family was not fully pleased and she discussed with her better half that her father was not happy with the choice of having an army officer as his son-in-law still she stood with her decision as she states "I am not one of those girls who'll just marry a rich man and go to kitty parties. Besides, I don't really need any more money". She is aware of her choices everything from attire, makeup, jewellery, life partner, career aspiration, education which is evident from

her words as "I was thinking I must be very careful while buying both clothes and jewellery. I don't want the usual conventional bridal trousseau. I want a collection that is me". Her strong decision-making skills is evident in all her life choices. She is an open-minded character who has the capability to live the life on her own terms keeping the social norms aside which can be clearly observed with her visiting at The Sari shop only after three days of her marriage. Ramchand was surprised when he saw her at the Sari shop and felt that the newly married Rina Kapoor is not looking as of other newly wedded females who used to wear gold multiple strings and stay inside their homes for performing their after-marriage rituals, pujas and invitations and drapes themselves in heavy dresses but Rina Kapur is wearing simple salwar kameez along with diamonds only and roaming without anyone's company. Her wittiness, decision making, boldness, career orientation, ambitious, efforts towards establishing makes her new women. Her mother Mrs. Kapoor shows another dimension of womanhood, who is known for her lifestyle and an expensive shawl worth rupees Ten lacs. The character was shown to be famous for her high standard of living. Mrs. Sachdeva is portrayed as the mentor of Rina Kapoor, Sunday Tribune's columnist and Head of the English Department. She is an educated women from elite and cultured world who admires the new talent like Rina and motivates them enough to find out the niche of their life. She also cherished Rina Kapoor for marrying in the service class and breaking the traditions to marry in business class only. Bajwa's description for her attire shows her unique choices that resembles the business class. Ramchand thought her as "terribly knowledgeable and well read". She is well recognized in the society for her occupation, confidence, academics that shows her as a "new woman" though Bajwa also described the dark side of her personality when Ramchand shared the plight of Kamala thinking her as a female who may understand the pains and can stand for Kamala but she stated "I don't want to listen to all that vulgar rubbish again, that too in Hindi. Why are you bothering me about all this? It is no concern of mine. There have been some horrible, filthy things going on, and now respectable people are to be dragged into it? Let me just tell you one thing, you try this once more, and I'll speak to the shop manager about this. This just might cost you your job, do you understand?" the positive side of her personality shows her as a "new woman" whereas her dark side shows the hypocrisy where she is not even interested to listen the bitter reality of a female.

Mrs. Sandhu is characterized as the elite class women who is preoccupied with her social interactive sessions, urbanized home, position of her husband and achievements of her children. She as a woman, has her own priorities that revolves around her family members and maintenance of her home that indicates "Power Psychology". Her efforts are beautifully described by Bajwa for taking care of her son and sacrificing her own comforts during his exam preparations. She as a new woman understands her priorities and responsibilities and fulfils them. Mrs. Bhandari, Mrs. Gupta are depicted as the women belonged to elite class who have their own taste in dress, life style, social interaction. They are represented as liberated, refined, well cultured, and talented females of the society who have their unique identity though Bajwa titled them with the names borrowed from their husbands. The dark side of their personality is revealed only during the interaction with the lower section of the society.

The other section of the society included the characters of Sudha, Lakshmi, and Kamla. Sudha is picturized as a simple traditional housewife who immersed herself in the family responsibilities and happily enjoying the duties. She is portrayed as an ideal housewife of an Indian society who is taking care of her three children, fulfilling the needs of her husband who spends her whole day from changing the bedspread, chopping, dusting, frying, cleaning, washing. Lakshmi is the wife of Ramchand's colleague, who has her own desires and aspirations but because of her financial status, she has displaced her desires from the luxuries of life to buying same sized onions.

One of the characters that truly depicts "New Women" in Bajwa's Novel is Kamla. She is the true rebellion, and best symbol of determination. As the child, she faced motherless childhood, gender discrimination, child labour, still she faced the situations bravely and started earning and supporting her family as well as managing household tasks efficiently. She was exposed to various experiences in her adulthood life ranging from losing her maternal home ties, apathetic and alcoholic husband, child miscarriage, home violence, rape, injustice, and ultimately being killed by the goons sent by the capitalist as she raised her voice against the exploitation of factory owner. He was responsible for adding more infortune in the marital life of Kamla and Chander by not paying three months salary to Chander. She has been represented as the only character who has the courage, strength and strong willpower though her voice was silenced by burning her alive. Bajwa has not represented the character of Kamla as the timid but as a warrior who was not recognized for her awareness but got the bench mark of an alcoholic and mad woman who is the burden on her husband.

The characters of Bajwa are representing both the aspects of their personality. "Every coin has two sides" is the justified statement in the novel as all the characters show their positive as well as negative aspect depending upon the class with whom they are interacting. The common aspect of all the characters is "the sari", that bounds the lives of all the female characters but their social class reflects its pattern covering Crushed tissue, Kaanjeevaram, Banarasi Silk, satins, cotton to nylon saree.

Conclusion

The novel "The Sari Shop" depicts the reality of the society. It is the combination of humour, comedy, tragedy. It depicts the picture of modern India that has Corruption, Power politics, injustice, hypocrisy. Bajwa's new women is developing herself and trying to get her own identity in both the sections of society though their ways of recognition was completely different. The roles of women have not represented any kind of emotional attachment, and are moving towards betterment with their own pace.

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