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Weaving a Dark Tale of Violence and Cruelty: Post Colonial Review of the Notion of Nation in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*

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Abstract

The Indian Novel in English is chiefly a Western genre but has adapted itself very well to the Indian cultural and social ethos. In the first stage, novels presenting the lives of protagonists and other historical characters governed the literary scene, in the second stage the novels were mainly concerned with political and social issues in a realist genre and psychological novels were concentrated more on the individual and probed their tensions and inner operations. The three phases could not be clearly different from one another rather they overlapped at several points. The novel under reading had characteristics of social realism as well as psychological scrutinizing. Rupa Bajwa's novel *The Sari Shop* was long listed 2004 Orange Prize for fiction. He dealt with the place of Amritsar, the busy and vibrant city of Punjab.

Keywords- *Violence, Nation, Double Marginalization, Asian Feminism*

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee

... this twice born fiction' has passed through several phases and reacted to the ever altering intricacies of Indian society. Defining the advancement of Indian Novel in English, Mukherjee shows three phases in its development: historical romance, social or political realism and psychological novel. (Mukherjee 19)

The fictitious tale showed the sights and voices of the North Indian city somewhat in the way R.K. Narayan made South India in his writings. The city with its antique markets and new buildings came alive in the novel. The liking for delicious and rich food and good attires as manifest in the ubiquitous eateries and garments shops has also been skillfully presented. The hero Ramchand worked as an assistant in Sewak Sari Shop. The shop was the centre

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point where the lives of numerous characters divided and the hero obtained an opportunity to understand the lives of upper and middle class females from close quarters.

Ramchand's service made him with yearning for a conscious existence he could never understand, a life far away from his lower-class background and disappointed visions.

Bajwa dealt with a dark story of inhumanity and cruelty. *The Sari Shop* was shown as postcolonial writing where the notion of nation was questioned. The nation was chiefly a western creation and it adopted frame in the colonial period as medium for imperialistic enlargement. Nations were constructions and "...not inscribed into the nature of things. (Gellner 49)

According to Benedict Anderson's idea about nation as "an imagined political community" (Anderson 6). It was an opinion that provided a sense of togetherness to men even if they had nothing else in general. The concept of nation boarded on the "...notions of collectivity and belonging, a mutual sense of community that a group of individuals imagines it shares." (Mc Lord 69).

This relationship between the individuals was matured by following definite rituals and enjoying national occasions. The national flag and anthem also served this target. All these integrating reasons strived to fetch large number of men together as one body. But in a society where social cruelty was the pattern, the disillusionment with the conception of nation soon set in.

Nation had been shown in myriad paths in literature. In the period before independence, the nation was celebrated typically as a mother in links that required to be emancipated from the cruelty of the Britishers. All nationalist's works presented as a medium to help the political struggle. During that time, the country served to unite the suppressed people against the common opponent. In the post-colonial stage, most nations witnessed and were still observing exuberant corruption where the distance between oppressor and the oppressed had been escalating firmly. The promised emancipation had evaded numerous parts of society. The decolonized countries had felt what Etienne Balibar defines as: ".....seeing nationalism of liberation turned into nationalism of domination." (Quated in McIcod 103)

Taking the structure given by Frantz Fanon the delineation of India in the fictitious tale as a society that had a sense of national awareness because frugal development and advancement had marginalized the lower. The nationalist description in the postcolonial fiction showed to blaim a society where some groups were permanently on the margins. In the modern times fictitious tales like *The White Tiger* and *Slum dog Millionaire* had also concentrated on the circumstances of the have not in India. However, *The Sari Shop* got this target in a better way because it did not attempt to sensationalize the shortcomings of the Country. Country was not a homogenous idea rather a collection of different groups held in a

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perishable equilibrium. As Homi Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* the country was torn within itself and was characterized by the debates of small parties often clashing in nature:

.....the performative necessity of nationalist representations enables all those placed on the margins of its norms and limits- such as women migrants, the working class, the peasantry, those of a different 'race' or ethnicity to intervene in the signifying process and challenge the dominant representations with narrative of their own. (Quoted in Mcleod 119)

There is something innate in idea of country that provided upliftment to fickleness because a country illustrated itself by including some groups and obstructing others. It also privileged the economically and politically forceful classes and marginalized the disempowered. A postcolonial society was rarely able to keep the powerful sense of national awareness and individuality that was a feature of colonial period. Frantz Fanon in his writing *The Wretched of the Earth* defined the several factors that endangered the development of a society based on chances and uniformities for all. After the decolonization proceeding national bourgeoisie that came into authority did not set out on a recent bottoming rather it waited more from the state and entered into the technique of dominating the labourers the native bourgeoisie which comes into power uses its class aggressiveness. (Fanon 125) to usurp efficacious status. In this manner were laid the roots of a society based on domination and focusing on force in a few hands. Thus the techniques of building up a country on a stable ground declined, "the national front which has forced colonialism to withdraw cracks up, and wastes the victory it has gained." (Fanon 128)

Fanon highlighted that the nation was gradually embibed in corruption and started to work along neo-colonialist lines. In such a society money was "not the fruit of labour but the result of organized protected robbery". (Fanon 154) The money in a few hands of people provided the rise to anger among people. National awareness happened "an empty shell" (Fanon 119) in such a society.

Rupa Bajwa's work tried to show the fissures in contemporary Indian society. She had tried to create debate of the marginalized. The author had selected a pan-Indian theme for her fictitious tale as had been the custom of the Indian novelist writing in English. One of the issues facing the Indian writer in English was the big difference in readership and one way she had reacted to the challenge was "... by choosing themes and situations that have more or less the same validity all over the country." (Mukherjee 25)

The fictitious tale by Rupa Bajwa was based on a theme that dealt with an urban India. The examples of indigence might be different but poverty remains a harsh actuality in India. *The Sari Shop* was a social story and Amritsar could be observed to highlight India in microcosm. Urban India was characterized by lopsided advancement where there was an

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opening gulf between the upper and lower. The wealthy people had a fairy tale lifestyle and the poor not even the scanty income to meet their daily requirement. In the fictitious tale the upper and middle class people like Mrs. Sandhu, Mrs. Sachdeva, Mrs. Bhandari and the Mahajan of *The Sari Shop* had approached not only to material success but a conscious existence of excellence as well. For Ramchand the most sparkling fictitious tale was of the Kapoor family and witnessing Rina Kapoor's marriage happens an experience that was beyond his wildest dreams. In placing side by side to these upper class people there were six shop assistants including Ramchand and Chander who could just scrape a living. The spouse of Chander; Kamla lived a miserable life became theme of the fictitious tale that revealed the hypocrisy of a society built on the concept of domination.

The first chapter of the fictitious tale gave a glimpse into Ramchand's monotonous existence. He survived in a small room in the older part of Amritsar where the old and destroyed buildings littered with a refuse run into each other creating a sort of network: "Money, congestion and noise danced an eternal, crazy dance here together, leaving no moving space for other, gentler things." (Bajwa 5)

Ramchand's dissatisfaction with his conscious existence could be created out from the minute details the writer provided about his oversleeping, highlighting time staring outside and getting late for action. He had bouts of weakness when he had to deal customers on his own. He suffered from persevering headaches that refused to run away and got his shop suffocating. His regular routine and want of highlighting to the world gave him with repugnance "always the horrible feeling some gap, something missing, something that he didn't know, something that he couldn't see, something terribly important." (Bajwa 21)

Connected to economic irregularity were the big difference in chance for development and accepting one's efficacy Rina Kapoor appertained to an elitist family so she was motivated to provide went to her creativity. Men like Ramchand were nothing but extraneous persons for her. She was interested in the latter's conscious existence so that she could create him the centre point of a fictitious tale. Otherwise she was humorously pleased to see him came uninvited to her marriage. He was a foolish sari seller, and she celebrated the success of her fictitious tale based on Ramchand's conscious existence. In spite of her developed concepts he was a fodder for her creativity and nothing else. In contrast to Rina's attempts at self-awareness, Ramchand's attempts to provide himself a elementary education did not fetch the required alteration in his conscious existence. He protected every single penny to purchase books and stationery and was concentrated not to spoil his Sundays spending time idly around with his comrades because he memorized his nostalgia of his father's dream of sending him to an English medium school so that he could have a better conscious existence than his father ".... Try to become something in life, unless you want to continue to measure out besan, pack up sugar and haggle with house wives for the rest of your life." (Bajwa 43)

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Ramchand's wish for a life of excellence got corporal form when he went Rina's palatial home for the first time. His effort at self education visited on alternately before dying out finally. As the fictitious tale turned towards its end, Ramchand's soul was totally crushed and he had lost his wish to develop his conscious existence.

The Sari Shop was an effort to speak for the helplessness of the marginalized section of society. Ramchand and Kamala were characters of alerity. A character of otherness was behaved as an 'Other' and was looked at with surmise rage and callousness. Otherness was often extended as a result of hardness towards one who was taken as different from self. This idea of difference impeded the Other's unification in society. In the fictitious tale, scarcity was accountable for Ramchand and Kamala's estrangement and unfair behavior. Ramchand lost his parents early in conscious existence as a consequence of a bus accident and developed as an unwanted member of his uncle's home. Not only this, this voracious relatives relieved him of inheriting the shop of his father, thus securing his fortune forever. His childhood memories of his mother and father created him long for a conscious existence that could not be convalesce. He remembered the fond smells gunny shoe and marigolds and removed into his self Ramchand took a voyeuristic delight in seeing his landlord's family. He was attracted by Sudha and her persistent chores. Both the husband and the wife worked hard to provide a happy life to their three children. Ramchand's interest in this middle class family was an effort for desire fulfillment. In this happy family, he got the reflection of his sad childhood and lost future.

Kamala was also an 'Other' and the writer attempted to underline the anger of a female compelled to live a conscious existence of impoverishment Kamala was initiated into harsh conscious existence after the sudden demise of her mother. She operated as a maid operating works for other people as well as resolving her own home to perfection. When she was married to Chander, she left herself to her destiny as other girls of her class performed. She had trouble depriving herself from her known surroundings but she started her new conscious existence with a sense of resignation. The expectation of the happiness of motherhood fetched a new beginning in her pessimistic life but her miscarriage transformed her world into reversed condition. Her spouse often drank hard and beat her on one pretext or the other. Her negativity got aperture in dependency to liquor. She first drank surreptitiously and started taking money for her methodical quota. From a coy pretty girl she happened a foul mouthed hag. Rupa Bajwa's attention on poor class was similar to Mulk Raj Anand's depiction of the same in his novels. R.S. Singh presented Anand's characters as stable and high powered at the same time and the same kept for the characters of *The Sari Shop* too:

.... static because they are alone, weak and helpless, and dynamic because they try to understand the causes of their plight and in their own ways wage battle

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against the social and economic forces that deny them their human rights.
(Singh 39)

The fictitious tale criticized the social order where the lowest of the lower were subjected to cruelty and the higher class people had the machinery of society functioning for them. In a tragic episode, Kamala scolded the Gupta family because they had not paid three months wages to her spouse while firing him. For Kamala, the Guptas revealed the inhuman people who dominated their poor labourers and lived a conscious existence of opulence at their expense:

She had the destiny of many others like her, yet for no known reason (She wasn't even educated), she had trouble accepting it... She was full of bitter poison. And when this poison mixed with alcohol, rage and recklessness filled her. (Bajwa 160)

It was the strength of wealth that demeaned Kamala. She was caged where the two policemen, raped and harassed her. When her volley of reproaches did not cease she was beaten and burnt to demiss. The voice of mad lady was silenced forever. The women in the fictitious tale were preoccupied with lustre to pay need to grave objects of conscious existence. Rich females like Mrs. Gupta and Mrs. Sandhu were harassed with creating descriptive schedules to purchase sarees. The most significant concern in their lives was to create certainty that the presents they purchased showed their position in society. The so-summoned trained college professor Mrs. Sachdeva scolded Ramchand for defaming the name of respectable men like the Guptas and Kapoors because she was not willing to know about Kamala's rude demise. The writer focused people like Rina Kapoor and Mrs. Sachdeva who claimed to be special from common women and were following some sort of academic business but in actuality were profoundly complicit with the order. Ramchand's effort to struggle the order and later deprived himself of it turn worthless and he had to return to his service:

Life was grubby. Gurbby, mean, flabby and meaningless! What was the point of trying to learn, to develop the life of your mind, to whitewash your walls, when other people lay huddled and beaten in dingy rooms. (Bajwa 112)

The writer highlighted the double marginalization of females in society. Kamala was discouraged because of her gender and her status. The functionings of male- oriented society confirmed that she was the victim of domestic violence through her spouse himself was marginalized in society. Chander had the popularity of being the simplest person in the shop. Nobody had ever observed him raise his voice but he tortured his spouse like a cruel man. The status of females like Kamala in society was really lamentable. The writer tried to highlight how the woman character's self was created by the twin forces of gender and class. The socially privileged females in the fictitious tale failed to empathize with her damage

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because of the limitation of class. Rupa Bajwa's position among Indian writers could not be prophesied on the foundation of her first writing but she emerged as a sincere author who revealed her attachment with the social problems imposing urban India. The delineation of theme of scarcity and class distinction connected her to authors like Mulk Raj Anand and Kamala Markandaya. Iyengar saw that social life in a nation like India was so full of difference that "...the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be literally inexhaustible." (Iyengar 327)

Bajwa's writing was an addition to the fictitious tale of social protest. Her accomplishment lied in the fact that she had not been a scribbler but a record of the human condition in terms of strength, grace and universality. She defined her characters' awareness of class in a realist way and also provided a perception into the innermost ideas of the characters. Her work was well stocked with provincial records but excelled them to reveal the functioning's of force that marginalized the 'Other'.

David Cairns and Shaun Richards in "What is My Nation?" showed the important psyche behind the compulsion of the idea of the 'Other':

The process of self-fashioning required the continued presence of an 'other' so that the maintenance of subtle points of differentiation from the colonizer would continue to reproduce, not only the subordination of the colonized, but the super ordination of the colonizer... (Cairns and Richards 135)

As Ashcroft et al. represented in the Post-Colonial Studies Reader:

....it nationalism frequently takes over the hegemonic control of the imperial power, thus replicating the conditions it rises up to combat. It develops as a function of this control, a monocular and sometimes xenophobic view of identity and a coercive view of national commitment. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 117).

In this connection Avtar Brah, the renowned diasporic critic observed:

Asian feminism was one of the most creative and vigorous forces within contemporary black politics in Britain. It draws upon the political traditions of women and men in the sub-continent, but its identity is indelibly composed within the British social and political dynamic. (Brah 83)

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