

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue-5 (October 2016)

The Criterion 

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-in-Chief
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Women as Ideological Slaves in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*

Archana Heer

Lovely Professional University,
Punjab.

Abstract:

This paper points out the reason by which the woman becomes an ideological slave. Ideologies are the most important part of society. Society mostly works according to these ideologies and with the help of these ideologies patriarchal society makes women as their slaves. Women become slave because they are nurtured according to the ideologies, those automatically places her on the place of have not's. Some women become slaves knowingly because they have no other choice than becoming a slave of the society and some women become slave unknowingly because they are illusion by the patriarchal society. Women of elite class come in the category of those women who become slaves invisibly. They are blind folded by the males of their society and they cannot see their slavery. They think that they have their own independent position in their house and outside the society but they have not. On the other hand women of lower strata of the society visibly become slave because the males of this stratum do not suppress women in hidden way but they suppress them openly.

Keywords: Ideologies, Ideological slaves, Marxist theory of ideology, Ideological State Apparatus, Repressive State Apparatus.

Ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs that our society follows and with these ideologies society gets a focused outlook on the world. Ideology is the most important part of our society. Society works according to the ideologies that are found in the society and that are coming from our ancestors. Ideologies make the society a better place to live. Society makes these beliefs to make the world a better place. But this statement comes under question mark when we see that ideology makes the society not society makes the ideology.

Society becomes the ideological slave, especially women because somewhere ideologies are made by men as per their comfort and acceptance. Simone de Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (330) In this process of becoming a woman, ideologies or patriarchal ideologies play an important role. From the birth of the girl till her death, she is caged in the ideologies. She becomes the complete slave of these ideologies. Georg Lucas and Antonio Gramsci find that the main function of ideology is to hide the inequality and injustice that prevails in the society. From the very beginning everyone starts conditioning the mind of woman according to the ideologies; as Althusser points out in his book *Reading Capital* that the "territory of philosophical ideology, or of a world outlook inscribed in the form of a 'system'" (31). And this system works until a woman becomes mature and also she is fully nurtured by these ideologies that makes her slave but with the mask. Women think that

these beliefs and rules are made for their welfare but this is the way how male society portrays it in front of females. As M.Thea Sinclair states in her essay “Women, work and skill: Economic Theories and Feminist perspectives”:

The labour market is not a gender-neutral context to which women simply bring a set of preconditioned attitudes, but is permeated by implicit gender ideology activated through the practices of management, unions, male workers, and women themselves...The significance of women’s unwaged labour continues to have a crucial effect on their identity as waged workers, in spite of their integral role within the paid labour force. (2)

Nurturing of women starts from their childhood. This process of nurturing varies from class to class. As the class goes down this process becomes crueler for the women. Elite class’ way of nurturing is more refined and sugar-coated than the middle class and lower class, but at the end result of this process comes as same for all the women- as ideological slaves. Along with the men, women also make other women as slaves because according to them they are maintaining hierarchy, what they have learned from their elders now it is their duty to pass on all these ideologies to their daughters, daughters-in-law and every women of their family.

Rupa Bajwa in her novel *The Sari Shop* discusses the levels of this conditioning process. She shows that how society makes the mind of the women towards the ideologies, that how women take these ideologies. Society according to the ideologies makes the set principles for an ideal woman- a perfect lady and whosoever tries to go out of these set norms becomes the evil woman for society.

Althusser divides the “Marxist Theory of State” into Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus. These both states play their roles in moulding of the society, especially women. Repressive State Apparatus does this with the help of violence and forcefully and on the other hand Ideological State Apparatus does emotionally. Agencies of Ideological State Apparatus are schools, churches, political system and literature. Through these agencies society makes the women as an ideological slave but in a hidden manner. The conditioning of women starts in their houses from their mothers, grandmothers and other members of the family. From the very young age mother starts telling her daughter that she is different from boys. She starts making her mind in a way that leads her towards the way of patriarchal ideologies. Mother and other elder women start telling her about the ways how she should behave, how she should talk, walk, eat and meet other people. Like in the novel Kamla’s mother tells her about the household chores, that it helps her in becoming a perfect girl, not for herself but for future, for her future-in-laws who always want that any girl who come in their house will be a complete girl who knows everything cooking, stitching, washing, cleaning and all the household chores. And Kamla also start listening to her mother and she washes her clothes by her own when she is very young. After her

mother's death her Bua takes the place of the person who is making Kamla- a perfect thing for marriage.

Another agency of ISA's is school. Schools are the place where a person learns to become a better person. But in the case of women education adds as a one more quality that is essential in finding a better husband for her. It becomes a positive point in the resume of a girl for her marriage. Some girls, with the education, feels that they can go beyond the walls of patriarchal society but males allow them to go till the level of the wall from where they can easily bring them back. "Some theorists assume that men have interests in oppressing women analogous to their class interests: it is in the interests of all men to exploit women's labour or women's sexuality." (Women's World, 20) Like women are conditioned from their childhood to become slaves men also nurture from their childhood to rule over women. Their conditioning is also performed by their elder ones and they see in their houses that how their elder men oppress the women of their house and they learn from this. They start believing that they are born to rule over women because from their childhood they notice all the ideologies according to which women are weaker than men, they always need their help to do any work and they can suppress women and women never raise their voice against them because they are superior sex and women are inferior sex. Simone de Beauvoir says that males in the society are always treated as human beings and it expects from the women that they have to see at man as an ideal person to whom they always obey. The ISA agencies tell to the women that the best way to live in this world is to imitate the men, and in imitating the men the best way is to live the life according the ideologies of male society even if these set principles make them slaves. Patriarchal society always neglects women's role in the production, it can be inside the house or outside the house. Joy Lyon in her essay "Money and power: Evaluating income generating projects for women" states that women have a hidden role in the production even in their house and also outside the house.

Even after a decade of discussion of the inadequacy of conventional indicators, women's economic contribution is still ignored, or at least grossly underestimated, in censuses and other statistical data...The indication is that agricultural work done by family members is not counted as work; nor is exchange labour, household work, childcare, or 'informal sector' work. Often women's work is fragmented so that it is hard to measure or evaluate. (179-180)

Even women have a very big contribution in the society but their part of it is always taken as invisible as their duty not as a contribution. This ideology makes women a complete slave in the outside and inside world.

Literature is one of the main agencies of ISA's by which woman becomes an ideological slave. Feminist critics find that literature is also gender-biased. Most of the times literature shows a

woman in a way that is acceptable in the society. Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* states that literature presents that face of women that patriarchal society wants to see.

The representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialisation', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. (117)

Literature sets an example of a perfect lady in front of the society, and society starts looking at every woman according to that picture. In the novel *The Sari Shop* Ramchand reads in some essay book that, "A policeman is a very useful and important public servant. His duty is very hard... He guards our life and property..." (187). These are the lines that shows the face that depicts in the literature about the policemen but the truth that Bajwa shows is that the two policemen rape Kamla and tortured her like animal without any serious crime.

The agencies of Repressive State Ideology are the government, the Army, the Police. These all agencies make the woman an ideological slave forcefully. This way of conditioning normally applies on the lower strata of the society. Lower class people have no connection with the upper strata so they can easily be suppressed by anyone. Women of this class suffer most in the society. They are treated as non existing thing in the society and in their own houses too. In the novel, Rupa Bajwa gives an episode, "While they were having dinner, Kamla was being raped by the two policemen who had brought her in." (170) Bajwa states that while Gupta's son and daughter-in-law are enjoying their dinner on the other place the two policemen raped Kamla. This one line shows the plight of the lower class women that how she is ill-treated by the police, who is meant to help the people. The agencies of RSA are meant to help the people but in their list of people only upper class people are exist, there is no where name of lower class people.

There are two classes of women in Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop*: women of elite class and women of proletariat class. Women of both classes follow the social ideology in which women become proletariat and men become capitalists, as Althusser states Marx's words in his book *For Marx* that "ideology is an objective social reality" (12) and women accept this reality. But the difference in women of both the classes is that one woman of lower society loses her life in fight against the people who are the reason of her sufferings and on the contrary woman of elite class enjoys the comforts provided by males.

Men of upper class play their role as capitalist and dominate the proletariats or workers who work for them. They live their luxurious life happily but their workers do not even able to fulfil their basic needs. Women also support males in this thing. The perfect example of this is Mrs. Sandhu whose husband is a chief engineer in Punjab State Electricity Board and takes "gifts" from people. Rupa Bajwa states:

Many people commented that it was strange that a government officer, no matter how high-up, had been able to afford such a grand house - but then the Sandhus had property, land in their village and, of course, they added with knowing glances, these days which government officer doesn't take in something under the table?(13)

Everyone in the colony and Mrs. Sandhu also knows the reality behind the gifts her husband gets from other people with which they are renovating their home and also manages to give education to their children. Mrs. Sandhu supports her husband in this unethical pursuit. This is also the ideology of society to support husband in his every good and bad deed, even a female knows that her husband is doing something bad but she has no choice, she has to support her husband.

Rina Kapoor, Ravinder Kapoor's daughter thinks somewhere about herself. She wants to live her life on her own terms.

... I am not like the rest of the girls in Amritsar,' she was saying. 'I find them so stagnant sometimes, so content with the petty little lives they have made for themselves. I can't imagine being like that... As you know,' she went on, 'my father is so wealthy that I never really need to work. Despite that, I made sure I finished my Masters in English Literature. And I have been topping my class. I am a creative person. My mind just can't be still, and it can't be content with all these things. Of course I like wearing good clothes, jewellery, living well and in comfort, because, after all, look at the family I belong to. But that is not all, it is not the end of the road for me. It is a means to an end, It is not the end itself.'(81)

Rina does not want to be like other girls of Amritsar. She accepts that she also likes the things that other girls like jewellery, saris and other things but she wants to complete her studies and after that she wants to become an author. In the beginning because of her father and his position in the society, she suppresses her wishes because in the society this is not taken as respectable thing that daughters of rich people or girls of elite class do job.

Society is divided into different classes and people of dominant classes are very class conscious, but this consciousness is wanting in the dominated group. Lisa A. Keister and Darby E. Southgate state in their book "*Inequality: A contemporary approach to Race, Class and Gender*" that there are different levels of this class consciousness.

Class awareness is the most basic level of class consciousness; it implies only a cursory recognition of the existence of social classes and presumes no ability to place oneself in that structure. *Class identification* suggests a greater degree of self-recognition; it implies both an awareness of the presence of social classes and an ability to place oneself in the class structure. *Class solidarity* refers to an even stronger concept of class consciousness: A person who feels class solidarity shares interests, values, and desires with other members of the class group. Class solidarity also tends to imply awareness of other classes as *out-groups*. Finally, *class action*

refers to the strongest degree of class consciousness that leads to behaviours or actions taken on behalf of the class group. (157)

Mrs. Kapoor represents those people's bent of mind. She discriminates between rich and poor class. She detests middle class too.

Mrs. Kapoor got visibly irritated. 'Really, Rina, now these people have started to come to our home also. We are friends with the highest status families in Amritsar. Even in Delhi, people from top business families know of us. And just because of you, we have these ordinary, professor-type, service-class women coming here. (91)

Mrs. Kapoor retorts in this 'capitalist' way when Mrs. Sachdeva, HOD, Department of English, comes to their house to meet her daughter Rina Kapoor. She never likes that Rina has any contact with these middle class or 'service-class' people. She thinks that if these people come to their house then this thing is not good for their reputation in higher society. She is very upset with her daughter's contacts with these middle class people. These ideologies frame the mindset of the people about the class and caste distinction but we can also find ideologies related to the traditional customs like marriage. "After all marriages were sacred business" (118). This quotation describes the mindset of society about marriages. This very line gives the concept of marriages in the society.

... Her elder son Tarun's marriage had just been fixed up, and she was completely satisfied with the arrangement. The girl's name was Shilpa. She was a demure girl, not exactly pretty – she had rather indistinct features – but she did have a fair skin and was slim. That was all that mattered, thought Mrs Gupta. The rest could be worked on. She seemed meek and eager to please, her shy manner completely unlike the brash way some girls behaved these days. Anyway, she could be moulded. The real thing, the most important thing, was that her father was a rich and respected industrialist. The status of the two families matched exactly, so there wouldn't be any adjustment problems between the couple or between the families. Maybe, at a later stage, Tarun could even form a business partnership with her brothers... (16)

Mrs. Gupta's elder son is getting married with a girl named Shilpa and the most important thing that matters for everyone is the status of the families. Marriages for the rich families are like business deals; equality in status decides the course of marriage rather than human values. It reflects their class consciousness. They decide marriage's like they seek profit in marriages.

Another ideology related to marriage is how a girl should behave on the day of her marriage as well as throughout her life. Cheryl B. Anderson in his book "Women, Ideology, and Violence" says that "An illustration of a polarized gender trait is found in descriptions of men who are valued as 'aggressive' but women who are valued as 'passive'(21)". A law prevails in the society that man is always offensive in nature and on the contrary girl is always defensive. A moral code is imposed on her. "Usually, brides sat coyly in a room, surrounded by giggling girls

and having their pallu and jewellery adjusted and readjusted by matronly women, who did this along with a stream of advice for a young bride.” (128) Everyone expects from a newly bride that she always sits in shyly manner, always be quiet on her marriage day, she does not even talk with anyone, surrounded by girls and elderly women who always ready to give her different advices and newly bride just listens to their advices carefully because these are the advices that play an important role in her coming life. Along with these advices there is also a type of marital ideological training that has given to every girl from the very beginning. Even from the time when she does not know even the meaning of marriage. “... But she told Kamla that girls must learn all household work, and the sooner they started, the better it was for them” (141). This is the ideology related with marital training that every girl learns in the very outset of her life by her mothers and aunts. It is one sort of socio-cultural training which shapes the mentality and social behaviour of girl. Behavior is a socially constructed notion which suppresses the flight of individual by caging it into norms. It has productive value too but in case of women this ideology works against them. Kamla’s mother tells her that every girl must know household chores. This is the first thing that every girl should know and as soon as she learns household chores she will be eligible for marriage. “... Her bua told her, ‘Now, after your mother, you’ll have to look after the house. You’ll have to take care of your father and brother, okay? Behave like a big girl now.’” (143). When Kamla’s mother dies, Kamla’s bua tells to very young Kamla that now she has to look after her house and her brother and father. Now after her mother’s death all the responsibilities of house come on her. She has to do all the work that her mother had been doing before. Now her position becomes equal to her mother in taking care of house. This is the ideology that is very common in all patriarchal societies. First a woman as mother takes care of family’s men then as a sister and after sister as a wife. Her only main work is to take care of men of her family. And these works never be praised and do not even count as work instead it takes as duty of a woman. Yildiz Ecevit says in her essay “Shop floor control: The ideological construction of Turkish women factory workers”: According to familial ideology in Turkey, the proper place for a woman is in the home, attending to housework and the children, while her husband is the breadwinner. (57)

According to traditional ideologies the only place for women is home and every household chore is their duty and the man in their family is the person who has the right to do work outside the house.

... She’d have to move there. Kamla dissolved into tears the moment she heard this. She wept and told her father she wouldn’t marry. Her Bhabhi tried to console her, but Kamla pushed her Bhabhi’s comforting arms away. Her father told her gently that she shouldn’t say such things. Everything had been finalized and she should just make up her mind to be a good wife. (147)

Yildiz Ecevit states in her essay “Shop floor control: The ideological construction of Turkish women factory workers” that there are set places for women to do work and to take decisions.

Since women's work drew such disapproval, it spread very slowly and was confined to the activities which were seen as 'suitable for women'...First, a male job was not appropriate for women because women *could not* do it owing to their physical weakness and/or lack of knowledge. Second, it was not appropriate because women *must not* do it for moral reasons. (57-58)

According to these set parameters a girl cannot take her own life's decision because men think that women do not have much intelligence for taking decisions and secondly it is immoral. Because of this ideology when Kamla's father finalizes her marriage with Chander and Kamla comes to know that she has to move on to Amritsar after marriage. She does not want to go far from her house but this is expected from a girl that she has to leave her house and family after marriage and has to live with unknown people whom she knows from few days, and also that she has to become a good wife and daughter-in-law by making up her mind according to her husband and her in laws. "Nothing could be done about it, and anyway, girls had to adjust." (148) this thing takes as the duty of a girl that she has to adjust in every situation. She cannot choose or live her own life according to her choices. Everyone has expectations from girls but their wishes do not matter to anyone. "No, Kamla, you will just wear the thin gold chain that your mother left behind and the gold earrings that your father has got made especially for your wedding. It may not be much, but it is enough for people like us. What will people think if you wear glass beads on your wedding day?" (149) Kamla wants to wear a glass beads necklace on the day of her marriage but her bua does not allow her to wear that just because she is more concerned about society not about her niece's wishes. Kamla tells her bua that, "Bua, if I wear my own glass beads and go to Amritsar, I'll feel I am still me" (149). Only by wearing a necklace she feels herself in her. But she does not even have this right. "... Calm down and listen to your elders. You are going to become a responsible housewife now. Don't act like a child... 'Enough Kamla, don't create trouble now. Be a good girl... (149-150)" Everyone tells girls that they should listen to their elders and always have to do things like they say. Their own choices do not matter in their life and even if they oppose elders for some time but cannot stand for their selves for a longer time because this is the ideology of society. And also everyone makes a complete set of mind that how a woman should behave in the society and what are the things that a good woman does. Gokul is telling about Kamla that she does not have any such quality that a good woman has. He states that:

And she has none of the symptoms of being a woman belonging to a respectable family. Doesn't take a bath every morning, doesn't do puja, doesn't wear sindoor in her hair parting... Gokul sighed. 'A woman should know her place. Maybe she has had difficulties, maybe she has had problems, but it is a woman's duty after all to take care of her husband and his home first, and later think about herself. (119-120)

Here Gokul describes how a girl should behave and what are the things that she has to do without even thinking about herself. Here Gokul presents the patriarchal society. He presents the rules and regulations that are made patriarchal society for women.

Cheryl B. Anderson in his book “Women, Ideology, and Violence” states that ideology makes the mindset of male that he is born just to rule on female.

Today, in the cultural setting of the West, 'men are commonly described as aggressive, assertive, independent, competitive, insensitive, and so on'. In fact, these traits are associated with maleness to such an extreme that they are thought to be innate and inevitable, but they are not. Instead, these traits are part of 'the ideology of patriarchy' that 'justifies and naturalizes male domination'. Because of the dichotomous logic on which gender construction is based, male domination necessarily implies female subordination. Of critical importance in gender theory is the fact that this pattern of male domination/female subordination is not seen universally, which reinforces the claim that those traits typically ascribed to men are socially and not biologically derived. (78)

And result of this conditioning of mind of a boy results in the domestic violence. Male bent out his anger by beating his wife.

She'd cook dinner and start to wait for Chander. He'd stagger in, drunk, after midnight sometimes. Either he'd quietly fall into bed and go to sleep, or he'd pick a fight with her and beat her. Later, he would comfort her and caress her, but with a slurred voice and clammy hands. (152)

Kamla everyday cooks food and waits for Chander to come back from work so that they have dinner together. But most of the times Chander comes back in drunkard condition and falls quietly to the bed or sometimes beats her and fights with her. This is the easiest way to take out his anger and everyday annoyance by beating the person who is lesser in power from him, i.e. Kamla because she cannot say anything to him because she is a wife and wife should be dominated by her husband according to the ideologies of society. Another thing comes out of these conditioning of men is that they start blaming women for their sufferings, like Chander does in the novel. He says to Kamla, “You have been very unlucky for me, Kamla. Ever since I married you, I have been having nothing but bad luck.”(156). When Chander feels like losing everything he blames Kamla for all this because this is the very common thing that we find in our society that if a person losses anything then he or she so easily blames the another person who is weaker from them, and Chander believes that because he lost his job then it must be happened because he marries with Kamla and she is unlucky for him.

The ideologies that we find in the society are the things that are coming from our ancestors to make the society better but patriarchal society moulds these ideologies according to their comfort. Now ideologies are used just to suppress the weaker person. And women are the main victims of these ideologies. Because all the ideologies work against women, they make

women as slaves in their house as well as in the society. Women not only become slaves but also start imitating the men. Women also start making other women as slaves. Whenever any woman find a chance to dominant another person they grab that chance immediately because they want to feel that they are just not only get suppress by other but they their self can also suppress others. This thing gives them some sort of satisfaction even if this satisfaction is just an allusion.

Works Cited:

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. London: New Left, 1969. Print.

Althusser, Louis and Étienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewster. Paris: Librairie François Maspero. 1968. Print.

Anderson, Cheryl B. *Women, Ideology and Violence*. London and New York: T&T Clark International. 2004. Print.

Bajwa, Rupa. *The Sari Shop*. New Delhi: Penguins, 2004. Print.

Ballaster, Ros, et.al. *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1991. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited. 2010. Print.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constane Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage Books. 2011. Print.

Keister, Lisa A, and Darby E. Southgate. *Inequality: A Contemporary approval to Race, Class and Gender*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Redclift, Nanneke and M. Thea Sinclair. *Working Women: International Perspectives on labour and Gender Ideology*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.