
**The Unbridgeable gap between Haves and Have-nots in select novels: A
*Handful of Rice and The Sari Shop***

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Abstract:

In the present society, economic inequality has become increasingly pronounced. The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small elite has led to a widening wealth gap, with the wealthiest individuals and corporations amassing unprecedented levels of wealth. In contrast, many others struggle with poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to necessities. This disparity has raised societal conflicts, divided into two groups: Haves and Have-nots. Karl Marx's theory of the haves and have-nots, often called the theory of class struggle, can still be applied to present society, although it has evolved and taken on new dimensions. His theory emphasizes the exploitative nature of capitalism, where the haves, typically the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class, own and control the means of production, while the have-nots, the proletariat or the working class, sell their labor and power to survive. In the novels *A Handful of Rice* and *The Sari Shop*, there is a portrayal of an unbridgeable gap between the haves and have-nots. This gap is depicted through various socio-economic factors such as wealth, social status, and opportunities. The narrative explores the disparities between different classes and the challenges faced by those who are less privileged. This paper aims to explore the depiction of the haves and have-nots in the selected novels, *The Sari Shop* and *A Handful of Rice*, highlighting the stark disparities between different social classes.

Key-Words: Haves, Have-nots, Capitalist, Class struggle, Inequality, Poverty, Exploitation, Society

Introduction

In contemporary society, the division between the haves and have-nots can be seen in economic inequality affecting our society. The haves possess significant wealth, resources, and power, regarded as the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the have-nots are proletariats who lack access to these resources and face economic

hardships. The haves not only control economic resources but also employ influence over various systems and institutions, shaping policies and laws to maintain their dominance and seek advantage in existing society. This can perpetuate systemic inequalities and limit opportunities for social mobility for the have-nots.

Marx's theory of the haves and have-nots provides a framework for understanding and critiquing the inequalities and power imbalances that persist in modern society.

Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* portrays the haves as the wealthy bourgeoisie, represented by the customers who frequent the sari shop. These individuals have access to wealth, education, and social privileges. These capitalist-class people can afford expensive saris and indulge in a luxurious lifestyle. Their economic power and social status allow them to navigate the world easily. Another section is depicted as the have-nots by Bajwa and is represented by characters like Ramchandar and his wife, Kamla. Ramchandar belongs to the working class, struggling hard to make his own identity and climb the social ladder. He works long hours for meager wages and cannot fulfill his necessities, living in an uncommodious and impoverished area. The have-nots in the novel are depicted as marginalized individuals who lack access to education, healthcare, and other necessities. They face constant economic hardships, entangled in a cycle of poverty.

Similarly, another novel, *A Handful of Rice* by Kamala Markandaya, portrays the haves as the privileged upper class. At the same time, the have-nots are the lower-class individuals like Ravi, Apu, and Nalini. The haves in the novel enjoy economic prosperity, social status, and access to education and other social opportunities. They live in comfortable homes and have stable incomes, which allows them to live better lives with open opportunities. In contrast, the have-nots, like Ravi, face numerous challenges and injustices and cannot find a proper and rightful life for their families. Their only means of survival is labor power; they are usually landless, capital less and due to this, they are often suppressed and exploited. "who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital." (Manifesto 43) The have-nots are marginalized and suppressed, struggling to escape the cycle of poverty and improve their circumstances.

Both novels depict the haves and have-nots to shed light on our society's social and economic inequalities. They highlight the power imbalances, exploitation, and struggles faced by marginalized individuals, emphasizing the need for social change and equal opportunities for all. The whole society moves with the proverb might is correct; if you have wealth, power, and strength on you, and if you are penniless, will hardly fetch you anything. The novels *A Handful of Rice* and *The Sari Shop* portray an unbridgeable gap between the haves and have-nots, as this gap is depicted through various socio-economic factors such as wealth, social status, and opportunities.

Human suffering in *The Sari Shop*

The Sari Shop by Rupa Bajwa tells the story of Ramachandra, a shop assistant in a Seva Sari shop in Amritsar, India. The novel explores the exploitation

and class struggle faced by Ramachandra and other marginalized individuals. It highlights the stark disparities between the working class and the bourgeoisie, shedding light on capitalism's dehumanizing effects. Ramchandrar's low wages, long working hours, and limited opportunities for advancement reflect the exploitative nature of the capitalist system.

Ramchandrar's low wages make it difficult for him to make ends meet and improve his living conditions. He struggles to afford necessities and is constantly worried about his financial situation. Chandler tries to cope with challenging situations and stand firm to the difficulties, but scornful behavior by the wealthy customers and boss tears him, for which Kamla is often blamed and beaten black and blue. "Chander drunk often and beat her up. This was presently common, she knew. Men often beat up their wives. It was a matter of routine, nothing personal. It should not have worried her."

"Chander would return home frustrated each night, usually drunk, and he would fight with her, slapping her face and throwing her against the wall." (Bajwa 152, 159)

Furthermore, Ramchandrar's lack of opportunities for advancement highlights his exploitation. Despite his hard work and dedication, he remains stuck in a low-level position with no prospects for growth. Instead, he loses his job, is unpaid for three months, and is usually mistreated along with other co-workers who are being insulted by the manager for being superior to them. This inhumane treatment somewhere becomes the apple of discord for tribulation at home, resulting in straits in her wife's life, Kamla. She also became the victim of this social system and paid huge for it by burning dead. Overall, the exploitation of Ramachandra and his wife Kamla in *The Sari Shop* underscores the harsh realities faced by many poor individuals in our society, where they are trapped in a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities, which restricts their upliftment. Another character, Kamla, is also depicted as being exploited in various ways. Kamla does all the household chores, and her exploitation is primarily seen through a manipulative society and the lack of respect and dignity in her life. Kamla is a victim of many emotional misshapes, whether it is domestic violence, sexual assault, penury, or low social strata in the Indian society, which she is a part of, and unthinkingly blames and scolds her as not a good wife.

Moreover, she is regularly tortured and suffers harassment by her husband; this is somewhere social frustration, venting anger on Kamla. Kamla has not lived her childhood as a deprived child as her mother died at an early age, nor did she enjoy her married life due to penury. Until she was alive, she lived a miserable life and was bedeviled by her husband and tormented by the bourgeoisie's so-called guardians of society. Due to the ill-treatment of her husband, she lost herself entirely and became an alcoholic. Her habit made her steal money from her husband's pocket to buy a bottle for herself. She was so lost in her situation that "It did not occur to Kamla that she could also look for the kind of work she had done before her marriage." (Bajwa 158). Her condition also stresses the unfortunate reality that the lower ones who are suppressed or downtrodden are unable to muster courage against exploitation and surrender themselves to oppressors like Kamla and

resort to drinking or other ill habits. Furthermore, Kamla's lack of respect and dignity in society highlights her exploitation, often treated as inferior and subjected to mistreatment and abuse by factory owners and police officers. Her voice against injustice and opinions are disregarded, and she is seen as a disposable creature rather than a human deserving of fair treatment.

The Sari Shop by Rupa Bajwa explores the lives of marginalized individuals in Amritsar, India, through the lens of Marxist analysis. The novel delves into the struggles faced by Ramachandra, a shop assistant in a sari shop, and highlights the stark disparities between the working class and the bourgeoisie. From a Marxist perspective, the novel examines themes of exploitation, class struggle, and the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. It sheds light on the harsh realities of low wages, long working hours, and limited opportunities for advancement, perpetuating the poverty cycle and reinforcing the power imbalances within society. The Sari Shop critiques the capitalist system by portraying the exploitation of labor and the alienation experienced by the working class. It raises questions about social inequality and the inherent contradictions of a profit-driven society. Have-nots are swamped in the clutches of the bourgeois; history speaks of their struggles for emancipation. "nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and the oppressed class- the proletariat- cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class- the bourgeoisie" (Manifesto 21).

Suppression in A Handful of Rice

A Handful of Rice by Kamala Markandaya explores the struggles faced by an ordinary, lower-class individual, Ravi, who eludes the village where the starving situation has raised the city for a positive future. His lack of education and limited opportunities in a village made him migrate to Madras, but on his visit, he realizes the real world is full of unemployed all around. The novel also highlights the harsh realities of labor exploitation, as Ravi is subjected to harsh working conditions, long hours, and low wages. Additionally, the social and cultural suppression Ravi faces due to his lower social status reflects the power dynamics and inequalities within society.

A Handful of Rice was written by renowned woman novelist Kamala Markandaya, portraying poverty and the struggle of working-class people. Ravishankar, the novel's protagonist, comes to the city wanting to get a job and live a prosperous life but is entangled in the clutches of poverty. Ravi's journey undergoes various ups and downs, which end in desolation. She has painted a dark picture of the urban and rural life of Indian society, where people belonging to lower strata are being suppressed and exploited as heroes. Ravi is also suppressed by the elite class people and humiliated by memsahibs, and his condition gets worse due to his honesty as corruption prevails. His honesty is awarded with agony and left with a despicable situation. "So many stones, she said, and he saw she had cupped her hands and filled them with rice, and all among the long white grains were small black stones, freely sprinkled in like mustard seeds. One paid for this corruption... You asked for food, and they gave you stones." (Markandaya 241)

Ravi becomes prey to social and economic exploitation; additionally, he faces social and cultural suppression due to his lower social status. The novelist has illustrated the inhumane nature of have-nots towards the protagonist of *A Handful of Rice*. He is often treated with disdain and discrimination by those from higher classes, who view him as inferior, creating a massive gap between rich and poor. The working class is treated as an object and just a source of making money. Ravi has thought of a bright future and tries hard to make it better and provide all comfort and necessities to his family but slips to unsuccess. Tailors like him were exploited and given low amounts for the stitching work. Ravi could not stop himself from this exploitation and moved forward to raise his voice. However, his father-in-law and wife Nalini stopped him from doing so as this action may cancel the contract, "Rebel and a contract might be lost, the steady wage would come to an end, and then what of Nalini? He had to think of her, he had to think of himself for that matter." (Markandaya 79) and for ages, this system has been going on, haves are always on top serving as guardians and lawmakers of society. As stated by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, one day, proletariats will stand against this tyranny and end this exploitation as history speaks about this struggle. "The history of all the hitherto existing society in the history of class struggles." (Manifesto 31).

Ravi's condition is worsening as he cannot afford milk for his baby and is incompetent in providing proper health treatment to his wife and son Raju. He blames the social system for the unnatural death of his son. "I do not blame myself for not getting the doctor. I blame them. Them. Society. Guilty of casual murder." (Markandaya 273). This social suppression further marginalizes Ravi, limits his opportunities for personal growth, and refrains him from further advancements. Overall, Ravi's suppression and exploitation in this novel highlight the systemic inequalities and injustices faced by individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The proletariats, or regarded as have-nots, are the social class of wage earners, those members of a society whose only possession of significant economic value is their labor power or capacity to work. They exist because of class struggles; from the primitive stage till now, the chain of suppression subsists. Social stratification benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor, as they can exploit them. It subjugates the lower strata and benefits the upper strata. Balwinder Kaur's paper "Psycho-Analysis of Ramchand in *The Sari Shop* explores the class distinction and their unfulfilled desire. Where the commoners are not only exploited by the rich but also victimized by the same class. The author highlights that law exists for the rich while the poor accept injustices."

The novel illuminates the struggles and challenges faced by people from lower strata who are suppressed and exploited, accentuating the need for social change and equal opportunities for all, as human beings are created equal and can exercise their full rights. The novels *The Sari Shop* and *A Handful of Rice* offer a Marxist critique of the capitalist system, emphasizing the need for social change,

equal opportunities, and the dismantling of exploitative structures perpetuating social and economic inequalities.

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