

Our Punjabi Market*

by Kuldip Gill (1934-2009)

Betis (daughters) and bhenji's (sisters) hear the cry,
Come buy sari's, come buy our choli's,
Come buy, come buy
Petticoats, chunis, salvar/kamiz's,
Bangles, and bracelets,
Surma and mehndis
Bindi's and nose rings,
Creams to whiten your skin,
Or try threaded bow-like eyebrows
Come buy, come buy!
How shy she looks, her mother frowns,
But bhenjis know the sheers are fine
They twirl to see the lengha's line,
Oh, bhenji, make it mine, make it mine.
Together the beti and bhanji aspire
Add it to the bill, they whisper
And conspire to the merchant's
Cries: Come buy, Come buy!

Come buy! Come buy! The windows scream
The same dollars for two of anything.
Hindu videos, stock of best English-Punjabi dictionary,
New brass images of gods and goddesses.
In the Guru ka Bazaar, come buy, come buy
Gifts to the hundreds of wedding guests
In the beti's dowry—a crown for her husband;
The bride's home appliances. Come buy!
In gold jewelry shops - more per block than anywhere,
Bracelets and jeweled everything. Come buy, come buy
Our Indian groceries. Garlic, ginger, heaps of eggplant,
Capsicum, okra, mustard greens and cauliflower. Come smell
the lentil and buy our spicy chai. Come buy our golden sweets,
Burfi's flavoured pistachio, peppered cashews, almond, figs. Come buy,
Come buy! Star fruit, ginger root. Come buy, come buy your daughter's
Pots and pans, lunch boxes for her children, Main and 49th:
A bazaar, a cirque du soleil of sound and smell.
Come buy in the Punjabi vernacular, Hindi,
Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Tagalog,
Fiji-bat, Italian, Greek,
Mandarin and any other. Come buy!
Come buy! Come buy! At our Punjabi Market!

Poem from *A Verse Map of Vancouver*, edited by George McWhirter (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2009). Please note: poem is untitled in the book.

