

Marginalisation as an Impediment to the Progress of the Society: An Analysis Of Preethi Shenoy's *The Rule Breakers*

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Abstract

Literature of the oppressed is gaining prominence in the present literary scenario as subaltern studies. The exploitation, grief, suppression, subjugation and enslavement of a particular group of people are termed as marginalization. It is an act of assuming that particular race, caste, community, ethnicity and gender are superior, and others are inferior. The marginalization results from various stereotypes and preconceived notions. Some people are pushed to the edge of the society and accorded lesser importance and their needs and desires are ignored totally. The urban cultural setup appears to be an egalitarian society on the surface level, but in reality, there is imbalance in power structure. The hegemony of patriarchy subjugates women as the marginalised. This paper aims to trace the ramifications of marginalization in Preethi Shenoy's *The Rule Breakers*. Myriads of marginalization are mirrored in the novel like – women treated as the other, fear of a man to expose his homosexuality and psyche of the people in the lower social strata. This paper looks into various dimensions of marginalization prevalent in the Indian cultural setup and points out the necessity of annihilating the bias.

Keywords: Preethi Shenoy, *The Rule Breakers*, Marginalization, subjugation, patriarchy, gender bias, homosexuality.

The literature of the oppressed is gaining prominence in the present literary scenario as subaltern studies. The exploitation, grief, suppression, subjugation, and enslavement of a particular group of people are termed as marginalization. It is an act of assuming that particular race, caste, community, ethnicity, and gender are superior, and others are inferior. The marginalization results from various stereotypes and preconceived notions. Some people are pushed to the edge of society and accorded lesser importance and their needs and desires are ignored totally. They are pushed to the margins drawn away from the centre of privilege and excluded from society. The idea and nature of marginalization varies and is not universal. Marginalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and there is no single rule to comprehend it. In socio-cultural view, there are numerous people in the periphery like Dalits in India, Black slaves, Native Americans, and even Muslims. The centre and periphery are the key terms of marginalization. They are the paradigms of a hegemonic structure. Writers have taken up the role of reformers by giving voice to the voiceless people.

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Gender discrimination is discussed elaborately by the theorists in the present day. Women are always seen as the weaker sex and are a burden to the family. Women are pushed to the periphery and are always treated as the other. By and large, women are denied privilege and power in society. In some cases, men whose sexual orientation otherwise have a fear to expose the same in society. They are in constant anxiety that if their gay status is revealed, they will be excluded from society. Homosexuals are looked down by the people and are treated as an outcast. There is a great rift in the economic status of the people. The people from the slums lack money and education which further pushes them to a demeaning state. Marginalization due to gender bias, sexual orientation, and economic and educational status are discussed in Preethi Shenoy's novel *The Rule Breakers*.

Shenoy gives the story of a typical middle-class family, with four daughters and a son in a mountainous town of Joshimath. The story revolves around the eldest daughter Veda, a studious quiet and obedient girl. She has great dreams about her career that goes unheeded and is married even before completing her degree. She becomes a prey into the family with a terrible mother-in-law and a non-committal husband Bhuwan. Though she shifts from her parental home of Joshimath to Pune, she feels lonely and isolated. She fails in her exams due to her domestic duties. With the help of her neighbour Kanika, she joins the school called Sankalp, which teaches the underprivileged children. Finally, she ventures and starts a school Rocket along with her friends Kanika and Ron.

Gender discrimination is grounded in Indian soil from time immemorial. Glancing through the Vedas and Histories, women are side-lined, occupying a secondary status. Indian family treats a boy child as a treasure and female child as a liability. In the book *The Rule Breakers*, the family is with four daughters Veda, Vidya, Vandana, and Vishali – finally, the youngest one being Animesh celebrated as the prince of the house. Veda the eldest daughter of the family is a responsible and studious girl. But her father never cares about her grades in college, on contrary if Animesh's grade falters he questions Veda, "Didn't you help your brother? What is the use of getting high marks? You have to ultimately get married and go away. He has to earn" (RB9). Veda is thoroughly irritated by this partial treatment, but she never questions her father in the name of respect and listens to him quietly.

The patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in Indian society. Since the girl child is the subordinate position, parents do not consider education or career of their daughters as a priority. Society conditions women to perform domestic duties and set aside her dreams and visions. Simon De Beauvoir throws light, "The heavy curse weighing on her is that the very meaning of existence is not in her hand" (550). Marriage is the sole purpose of a woman's life, so when a girl gets a prospective groom, her education comes to a halt. Veda has dreams of becoming college lecturer, but with the supposed good proposal, her education and career take a back seat. Rajender, Veda's father is elated by the proposal as it sufficed the rules of the society:

Veda, the boy is earning very well. He is working in a multinational company in Pune. They are a very good family. The boy's father is a very good academician. They have their own home too in Pune. More than anything, he is a single child. So, everything they have will automatically go to him. I think this is an excellent match. (RB25)

Veda is left without a choice but to get married, as there are three more daughters in the family. Additionally, Bhuwan's family never demands any dowry. This criterion brought a sigh of relief from Rajender. In India, marriages are made on the societal norms and condition and are not based on love between the two individuals.

Marriage as an institution makes life more miserable for women, as they undergo a series of changes. The change in place, people and customs bring a shock to a woman. Veda is shifted to Pune from her hometown. The urban cultural setup of small apartments and house help, doing mechanical works are different from the way she lived in Joshimath. Veda starts attending college in Pune and finds it very different from her college. Since she joins in the final year as a married woman, she is side-lined, which she confesses, "I am a wallflower here, always on the side-lines" (RB68). She feels so embarrassed as a married girl in the college, as others treat her differently, "The way the girls screamed when they discovered the fact – it was like I have a disease or something" (RB68). The marital status protected Veda like a fence and she is further alienated and isolated.

Domestic violence is a great threat to Indian women. Women are abused not only by men but also by women in the family. Women fall into a muted group not able to articulate their sufferings, "Mutedness results from lack of power and might lead to being overlooked, muffled and invisible" (Emory A). The hegemony or the power structure prevalent in the family setup gains a dominant position for a mother-in-law and submissive position for a daughter-in-law. Domestication is a terrain of patriarchy where the intra-woman relationship is strained. Older women abuse younger women verbally and physically. Veda is one such victim of domestic violence, as she is assaulted by the scathing words of her mother-in-law Padma Devi. Padma constantly reprimands Veda about everything like cutting vegetables and cooking. Veda's father-in-law is a considerate man and he consoles her saying that his wife has a sharp tongue. But Padma treats Veda like a puppet in her hands and resents as Veda expresses in her letter to Vidya, "I don't know what responsibility she wants me to take on. She decides everything that has to be cooked. I do whatever she tells me to do. What more she wants from me?" (RB71). The miseries of Veda piles-up by her father-in-law's sudden demise. Veda is blamed about as a bad omen by her mother-in-law for the death of her father-in-law. Padma accuses Veda has brought a curse to the family and asks her to perform pooja daily early in the morning. Due to the domestic responsibilities Veda lags in her academics and this early morning pooja is yet another blow to education. When Veda tries to voice her suffering, Padma Devi fumes with anger and her temper frightens Veda. Veda being soft

natured girl obeys her mother-in-law out of fear. She approaches Bhuwan for support but in vain. Veda accepts her fate and undergoes the torment within herself with her dreams fading away with time, as she writes to her sister Vidya, "My mother-in-law thinks I am to blame for my father-in-law's death. I wish Bhuwan would stand up for me. He doesn't. I kind of feel alone" (RB80). She starts accusing herself of her father-in-law's demise.

The verbal assault blows up to physical abuse for Veda. When Veda stays back in the college library for studying, Padma Devi's anger grows out of proportions. She could not bear her daughter-in-law coming back home late in the evening. Padma grabs Veda's hair and threw all her books in the corridor. She shouts on top of her voice and speaks demeaning. After abusing her she asks Veda to prepare tea for her and press her leg. Veda is shattered by the humiliation and is broken beyond redemption. Veda is denied any parental support as Veda's mother advises her to adjust and it is a common problem that would slow down with time. Veda feels all the more depressed and her only lifeline is her letters to her sister Vidya.

Sexual orientation of a human being has a strong influence on society. Due to the fear of rejection and social stigma, people fear to expose their sexual orientation. To keep up in society's streamline, they mask their real identity. In doing this they tend to spoil another person's life by getting married for society's sake. Bhuwan outwardly appears to be a normal man, but actually, he is gay. The fear to keep up the family honour and the exclusion from the society, he agrees to the wedding proposal. Bhuwan does not show any interest in marriage and is non-committal in his relationship with Veda. Bhuwan is in a homosexual relationship with his college friend Vikram. Padma Devi also likes Vikram, so there is no suspicion when they spent time together. Veda discovers a pile of letters while cleaning the house and is shocked to find the truth. Waking up from her shock, Veda confronts Bhuwan about his relationship. Bhuwan confesses his sexual leanings:

Like any other group of people, we homosexual men are attracted only to a certain type of men who spark our interest. Everyone thinks that first because we are gay. We will have a sexual desire for all men. That is absurd! Straight men think they should be afraid of us as we hit on them, which is ridiculous. Gay men are NOT predatory and it's not like we cannot control our desires and that we lust after every man. (RB297)

Veda is compassionate about this confession and for the first time, they feel connected and friendly towards each other. Veda sympathises Bhuwan for leading a secretive life and she shares her goals and ambitions.

The fear of social exclusion remains the primary reason for people to reveal their sexual orientation. Even the own family abhor the LGBT people and treats them differently. In the case of Bhuwan, his mother avoids speaking to him when she discovers his sexual

orientation. Veda counsels her mother-in-law to talk to Bhuwan. Veda is even happy to see Bhuwan and Vikki together, and they volunteer for The Rocket school of Veda, during weekends. Bhuwan and Veda are tangled in a web of marriage for societal compulsion. They both have a sigh of relief after opening up and accepting each other. They carve their paths in life, erasing the boundaries and overcoming the marginalization.

Social inequalities result due to the difference in economic status. There is a rift in the society due to the unequal economic system. Majority of the people who belong to lower social strata feel exploited and alienated. The objective of Marxism is to destroy such segregation and create a classless society. Many ventures are undertaken by the government as well as the NGO's following Marxist ideals. In the novel, Shenoy gives a clear picture of a ghetto, Sitawadi in Pune, where the poor people reside. Shakubhai the house help of Veda resides in Sitawadi in a small house. Shakubhai's husband is a drunkard who beats her and abuses her verbally. He resents his job of a servant in multinational companies. He would vent out his loathing, when drunk, "To slog like servants in city? Do you know I wash toilets? I clean the shit of office goers" (RB110). He detests the upper-class people and would throw up all the anger on his wife Shakubhai. She has a smart and clever child named Kajol. In spite of going to school, Kajol helped her mother by doing her work as domestic help, when she was sick. People of the lower social class invested in their children's education for their upliftment. Shakubhai also sent Kajol to an English medium school, as she wanted her daughter's life to be without any suffering.

Many NGOs are working for the betterment of society and the upliftment of the downtrodden people. 'Sankalp' is one such organization that teaches the children from the slums. Kanika, a friend and neighbour of Bhuwan works for 'Sankalp'. Due to the domestic duties and depression, Veda fails in her exam and she feels dejected. When an opportunity is lost, it is replaced by another, as Veda meets Kanika and gets to know about the school. Kajol, who accompanies her mother to Veda's house is also a student of Sankalp. So, Veda is motivated to work for Sankalp along with Kanika. With the help of Bhuwan and Kanika, she convinces her mother-in-law and starts her career. Veda loves her profession and breathes freedom after her wedding. Sankalp earned good friends for Veda like Kanika and a Britisher Ronald. He visits India for a contract with Sankalp, interested with their projects he willingly assists them in teaching for tenth class board exams. The trio Ron, Kanika and Veda work untiringly for the poor children to excel in their board exams. In spite of their good intentions, they are caught up in a huge quandary, as a boy named Sanju dies. Sanju tries to get the board exam question paper by bribing the goondas of the city. In the process, they beat up Sanju and he loses his life. The father of Sanju complains about them and an investigation is fixed. The inquiry blames them for motivating Sanju to get the question papers by unlawful means. Veda explodes before the inquiry commission and three of them walkout quitting their job. Veda, Kanika and Ron work hard with students and their labour becomes fruitful, as all the students clear the board exam. They feel happy about their accomplishments. Ron is a part of

Carman Foundation that funded for the Sankalp. Ron is extremely frustrated about the treatment met at Sankalp, so he writes a long report regarding the dispute. He attaches the mark sheet of the students who appeared for the board exam, stating that he would like to start a new school. The rocket is launched in Veda's life too, as she moves away from Bhuwan's house. She shifts her residence to the first floor of the Rocket school. Veda emerges from the ordeals and develops into an empowered and brave individual.

Preeti Shenoy decodes the marginality in a present-day progressive society, that is believed to be with democratic ideals. Shenoy gives voice to the muted group through her narrative voice. She employs various types of narrations – first person, third person and epistolary narration. She delves deep into the psyche of human minds and brings out the trauma faced by the subjugated people. The hierarchy of power structure elucidates the subjugation prevalent in society. The people in the periphery are subjugated by the dominant ones at the centre with power. The paradigms of power need to shuffle creating an egalitarian society. Shenoy looks into the marginality, paving the way for liberation and tapping the consciousness in deconstructing the marginality.

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The Rule Breaker is abbreviated as RB.

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