

The Tradition of Endogamy and Women in Preeti Shenoy's The One You Cannot Have

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Abstract:

The status of women in the society has been a global issue of interest for writers . This paper focuses on Preeti Shenoy's novel 'The One You Cannot Have' to explore the tradition of Endogamy and women as it's victim. This research paper aims to examine the factors of caste, class and culture affecting the mind-sets of Indian parents while making marital choices for their daughters. It makes an in- depth study of the tradition of caste and class Endogamy in the context of present novel. The select novel depicts the circumstances of a modern women, Shruti, who had to sacrifice her individual love and choice of life partner under familial obligation to maintain her family's dignity in a male-dominated society. Traditional caste Endogamy is still influential in the Indian society even after independence. Preeti Shenoy, an emerging writer of contemporary Indian English novel, depicts cross cultural love story of two persons , Aman and Shruti being North and South Indian respectively, who belong to two different communities of the Indian Society. Shruti had been in passionate love with Aman from a long period of four years but her father values his own custom, class and caste over her individual choice or love in perspective of marriage. Her marriage proposal with Aman was summarily rejected by her father because Aman was a North Indian and his caste , class and culture are different from Shruti's community apart from his family background.

Key Words : Caste, Class, Endogamy, Preeti Shenoy, Traditional Marriage.

Introduction

Preeti Shenoy is an emerging contemporary Indian English fiction Writer. She is well-known among the readers of romantic fiction in India. She has written more than 10 novels and many of them are bestsellers in India. She, as a writer, has been on the Forbes longlist of the most influential celebrities in India and among the five best-selling fiction

writers of India. She is famous for her best-selling novel 'Life Is What You Make It'. Her novels are centred on the harsh realities of life, and she tries to analyse love and relationships from various perspectives. She writes focusing on human relations. Her career as a writer began in the year 2006 through her blog and it successfully attracted her reader's mind. In the year 2008, her debut work, *34 Bubblegums and Candies*, A collection of short stories and anecdotes, was published. She has authored several best-seller novels and notable of them are: *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake* (2012), *It Happens for a Reason* (2014), *The One You Cannot Have* (2013), *Wake Up, Life Is Calling* (2016) and *A Hundred Little Flames* (2018). Her novels typically aim to explore the emotions and relationships of youths with special reference to the predicament of women.

Shenoy's novel consists of plots that have evolved from women's perspectives. Shenoy tries to draw the attention of the post-modern youths, who always try to decode the age-old codes. That's why her popularity as a writer rapidly grew and thousands of copies of her novels are sold pre-order online. The postmodern youths are progressive in thought and action. The post-modern age is becoming more complex and smart in terms of quality of life and relationships. Eventually, the writer also needs to be smart and reflective, giving vent to the thoughts and feelings of the modern generation. Shenoy, as a youth icon in her novels, presents the feelings of modern Indian women. Marriage is not merely a private union in India but a social contract bound by cultural and familial expectations. Endogamy, or marriage within one's caste, religion, or community, has historically been the foundation of the Indian marriage system. Even in the twenty-first century, when rapid modernization, urbanization, and exposure to global cultures have transformed social interactions, endogamy continues to regulate choices by framing them within community boundaries. Preeti Shenoy, one of the most widely read contemporary Indian English authors, addresses this enduring tension in her novel, *The One You Cannot Have*. Though marketed as a romance, the novel subtly highlights the restrictions imposed by family and society on matters of love. Aman, Shruti, and Anjali—the central characters—are trapped in webs woven by both their emotions and the dictates of endogamous norms. This paper examines how Shenoy's narrative not only depicts heartbreak and healing but also exposes the grip of endogamy on urban, educated individuals.

Literature Review

The intersection of love, marriage, and social restrictions has been a recurring theme in Indian English fiction. Vikram Seth's novel 'A Suitable Boy' highlights the influence of caste(religion) and class in terms of suitability for marriage, while Novels of Manju Kapur portrays women as a victim of societal norms in a patriarchal society. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have also written extensively on how family and social traditions shape women's autonomy. Unlike these writers, Shenoy situates her characters in a distinctly modern urban setting, yet demonstrates that societal expectations remain deeply rooted. Critics often interpret *The One You Cannot Have* as a story of moving on after heartbreak, but less critics have examined it through the lens of endogamy. This paper fills that gap by positioning the novel within the discourse of marriage systems examining the endogamous influence of caste and class in the tradition Indian society.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach:

- by examining the facts through interpretation and analysis of the text of the novel.
- The Research will use qualitative analysis method for critical analysis of the of the novel.
- Analyzing the dialogues, family interventions, and character choices that reflect endogamous pressures.
- Endogamy is conceptualized using frameworks from sociology, where marriage functions as a boundary-maintaining mechanism.
- Feminist approach is used to interpret the impact of Endogamy on lives of women.

This methodology enables a holistic analysis, having literary analysis of text of the novel with sociological and Feminist approach.

The Concept of Endogamy

The concept of endogamy is generally used for making the marital choices within the same religious group or specific social, ethnic or caste group rejecting those from other religion or outside of their group as unsuitable for marriage. Endogamy is defined to be as a traditional choice of matchmaking within the same cultural or ethnic group of people. It is also known as in-marriage system, endogamy is a custom of marrying within someone's own ethnic, class, tribe or caste group over the many generations. Hence there are many forms of endogamy found in the society such as caste endogamy, class endogamy, sub-caste endogamy, race endogamy, tribal endogamy and such other forms. Chiefly two types of endogamous practices are still found in Indian society, which are caste and class endogamy. There may be several other types of Endogamy but chiefly these two types have been widely seen in Indian society.

Tradition of Endogamy and Women

We have heard the old saying that marriages are made in heaven but practically many factors play major role behind a marital arrangement. In Indian society women are expected to preserve the familial and customary duties for maintaining the social hierarchy of marital norms as per caste structure. Their any infringement of caste or class boundaries are considered as shame or dishonor for their families and a protest against traditional law of marriage. A woman's individual love or choice of life partner is ignored with an obligation to marry within her own caste group. The present paper attempts to focus on the traditional Endogamy, its influence on Indian society and women as its victim with reference to the novel, *The One You Cannot Have*.

Women as a victim of traditional Endogamy

The novel, *The One You Cannot Have* (2013), is a tragic love story of Aman and Shruti who belong to two different communities of the Indian Society. The novel aims to present traditional mindsets of Indian parents who prefer class, caste and cultural Endogamy, which are still prevalent in the contemporary Indian society, while making choices for marriage for their daughters. Shruti as a victim of Endogamy has to give up her true lover, Aman, under the pressure of her parents. Shruti tried to convince her father by arranging a meeting with Aman's mother but she did not know that her father would judge Aman's

family in terms of their class, caste and culture over her individual choice or love in perspective of marriage as we find in the novel:

My parents hit the roof when they knew that I had lied and gone with Aman to his house and that his mother had been a party to it. My father insulted her. She is a widow and has raised Aman all by herself. He made allegations about her moral character. I have never been so ashamed of my father. He questioned her about her property, her caste, her family. Then he went on to elaborate about our wealth and reach and prestige.(page-74)¹

Her marriage proposal was summarily rejected by her father because Aman was a North Indian and his family background and culture is different from Shruti's community apart from his caste. Finally, Shruti compromise to get married with Rishabh who is from her caste and choice of her parents. Women like Shruti are clear victims of traditional endogamy, as their individual rights to choose a life partner and personal happiness are often sacrificed to maintain societal and familial expectations. She is a victim of societal pressures that enforce endogamous practice of arranged marriages. Endogamy reinforces patriarchal order in society where women as its victim have to obey societal norms over their own desires. Shruti truly loves Aman but societal expectations to marry within her caste, class or community's standards force her to marry Rishabh, someone who is more "suitable" according to her family and society. Her personal choice is overshadowed by social norms to maintain familial obligations and adherence to cultural norm. In the novel, Shruti tries to convince Rishabh about her past life and circumstances under which she was compelled to get married with Rishabh. Her statement reveals the fact that her parents were against her marriage with Aman and her father insulted Aman's mother only because of that she belongs to a different caste and community with a weak financial family background or class: My parents were dead against this match as he is a north Indian. They wanted someone from our community..... my parents reiterated the importance of family background, of same caste and community in marriage.(Page 74-75)²

In the novel, Shruti's parents object to her relationship with Aman not because of incompatibility but because the union would cross social and community boundaries. This echoes the logic of caste endogamy: marriages are less about individuals and more about protecting caste and class honor. Shruti's eventual compliance, despite her love for Aman, demonstrates the authority of tradition over personal choice. Shruti's marriage to a man chosen by her parents reflects the prioritization of family reputation over emotional fulfillment. Shenoy carefully depicts the psychological burden which was laden on Shruti, who struggles between loyalty to family and loyalty to self. Shruti was deeply in love with Aman but her love was rejected by her parents due to Aman's different caste, class and culture. The clash between love and social expectation is central to understanding how endogamy operates as a mechanism of control. Set in urban India, the novel underscores the

paradox of modernity: technological advancement, education, and cosmopolitan life coexist with rigid adherence to traditional marriage norms. Amman and Shruti, despite being educated and modern in outlook, cannot escape the shadow of endogamous expectations. The novel foregrounds the psychological cost of restricting marriage choices. Aman is devastated by Shruti's withdrawal, struggling with grief and betrayal, while Shruti herself is trapped in a marriage that leaves her unfulfilled. Endogamy, thus, is shown as a cause of suppressed emotions, unresolved tensions, and compromised futures. By narrating the painful aftermath of a love sacrificed to societal restrictions, Shenoy implicitly critiques endogamy. Her portrayal reflects the lived experiences of countless individuals in contemporary India, where romantic love must negotiate the terms set by tradition. The title itself—*The One You Cannot Have*—becomes symbolic of how endogamy denies personal happiness in the name of caste and class honor.

Conclusion

Preeti Shenoy's *The One You Cannot Have* provides a poignant exploration of love constrained by societal expectations. Through the lens of endogamy, the novel demonstrates how tradition continues to govern marital choices even among urban, educated individuals. Shruti's struggle reveals the deep psychological impact of sacrificing love to preserve family honor and community boundaries and how women as a victim of caste endogamy are compelled to obey societal norms. A woman has to accept the life partner decided by her parents. Her choices for a life partner are ignored in terms of familial obligations. Her love is kept aside under the shadows of caste and class. She is not allowed to go against familial decisions. In Indian Hindu society, the tradition of arranged marriage has been endogamous since ancient times. In an Indian patriarchal society, matchmaking for a girl child has always been decided by her father. Thus, the Institution of marriage is endogamous in Indian society, and class, caste and culture matter when making choices of marriage for an Indian woman. The novel is not merely a story of heartbreak; it is a reflection on the endurance of endogamy in contemporary India. By highlighting the conflict between individual autonomy and social conformity, the novel becomes a subtle but powerful critique of a system that privileges tradition over human emotion.

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