

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

PEOPLE - THEN AND NOW: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF INTERLINGUAL, INTERCONTINENTAL AND INTERPERIODIC LITERARY MASTERPIECES viz. DICKENS'S *HARD TIMES*, PREMCHAND'S *KAFAN* AND PREETI SHENOY'S *THE RULE BREAKERS*

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Article info

Article Received: 28/02/2023

Article Accepted:27/03/2023

Published online:31/03/2023

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.11.1.213](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.11.1.213)

Abstract

This article aims to contrast three works which are written in different languages and different periods of literature in order to analyse how similar or different the society of the respective literary works were. The works under analysis are *Hard Times: For These Times* (1854), a Victorian English Literature by Charles Dickens, *Kafan* (1936), a Twentieth Century Indian Hindi Literature by Premchand which has been later translated into English by Frances W. Pritchitt and *The Rule Breakers* (2018), a Postmodern Indian English Literature by Preeti Shenoy. While the former two books belong to the same period of two different societies, the third book is an attempt to contrast them from the contemporary society of India, thereby an attempt to speculate how much similar or different the two related period works are and how much has society changed with time today. The book *Hard Times* verbalizes the impact of the industrial revolution on Victorian Society throwing light on the socio-economical aspects of the era. *Kafan*, (1936) is social-realist tale. Whereas *The Rule Breakers* is a post-modern realistic fiction. The characters of *Hard Times* and *Kafan* are comparatively similar in many aspects. The themes of both the works are similar in terms of poverty and class conflict, gender role, marginal life and the importance of femininity. At the same time, even after almost a century later, nothing much has changed in these social conditions. Even after such a long gap and development in all aspects of life, the themes of poverty, class conflict, gender inequality and marginal life are evident in the work *The Rule Breakers* by Shenoy, which this critical research paper will try to encapsulate.

Charles Dickens, Premchand and Preeti Shenoy have used simple and coherent language in their works, which is easy to grasp by the common man. The theme is not very complex but rather lucid and realistic. This study will probe the utilitarian principle in different ages and society as reflected in the literature of the age. It will interpret and analyse the status of genders in the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** *Hard Times*, *Kafan*, Shroud, *The Rule Breakers*, social conditions, utilitarianism, similarity.

**INTRODUCTION**

The best thing that writers can do is to portray the reality of the age they live in. Their works are a reflection of their time. Sometimes, they critically satirize the condition of the era, while sometimes they appreciate the era as well. The writing style, theme, social issues, all depends on the age they lived in. The novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, *Kafan* (The Shroud) by Premchand and *The Rule Breakers* by Preeti Shenoy too depict the social conditions of their respective ages. The characters of the three stories are comparatively similar in some way or the other. This analysis will be a comparative study of *Hard Times* and *Kafan*, written almost at the same time in different societies and different languages (*Kafan* was initially written in hindi and later translated into English), and their contrast with the situations in the modern society, taking references from Shenoy's literary world in *The Rule Breaker*. It will deal with the hellish condition of women in the two eras, the plight of poverty ridden people of the society, the gender roles and conditions in both the ages and other such social conditions of the time. Also, the philosophy of utilitarianism is discussed in the paper as well which is present in all these literary works.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- Critical evaluation of the socio-economical aspects of the era in which the mentioned literary works were written.
- To examine the reason behind the suffering of women, female discrimination, and bringout the similarities and differences in the characters from the work.
- To reveal the truth of utilitarian philosophy.
- To present an evaluation of the three works in terms of femininity, economic condition, cold-blooded characters and the analogy of three writers from divergent nations and time.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Many critical analysis have been attempted on the works *Hard Times* and *Kafan* since the time they were penned down as both the works are considered significant in reflecting the society of

their respective ages as well as the conditions prevailing therein. George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist, and political activist argues that "Dickens deliberately wrote *Hard Times* to make his middle-class reader feel "uncomfortable". In the same manner, liberal writers like Omprakash Valmiki have reacted strongly against Premchand *Kafan*. They allege that Premchand has shown the father-son combo Ghisu and Madhav as impoverished and they happen to be an iniquitous figure in the narration of their escapist portrayal. Charles Dickens tried to show the reality of the Industrial Revolution. Though, there were job opportunities after the revolution, yet there was child labor, sexual exploitation, dirt, and drunkenness. It converted happy England into a hazy and shabby England. Utilitarianism and Laissez-faire became popular philosophies during the industrial revolution. The utilitarian emphasized on the psychological requirement of human beings. J.W. Beach points out "Dickens in *Hard Times* attacks the characteristic ideology of industrial England. *Hard Times* shows Dickens' antagonism to both utilitarianism and Laissez faire. It is a passionate attack upon the Victorian scientific and pragmatic education prevalent in English schools of that period".

As John R. Harrison, author of *The Library of Isaac Newton* has pointed out "The target of Dickens's criticism, however, was not Bentham's Utilitarianism, nor Malthusian theories of population, nor Smith's free-market economics, but the crude utilitarianism derived from such ideas by Benthamite Philosophical Radicals, which tended to dominate social, political, and economic thinking and policy at the time the novel was written. The Gradgrind/ Bounderby philosophy is that the Coke town "Hands" are commodities, "something" to be worked so much and paid so much, to be "infallibly settled" by "laws of supply and demand," something that increased in number by a certain "rate of percentage" with accompanying percentages of crime and pauperism; in fact, "something wholesale, of which vast fortunes were made".

Likewise, Marxist critic Kantimohan specifies about *Kafan* that the caste problem is fictitious in the story. Ghisu and Madhav are poor, deprived, and

proletariat agricultural laborers who act as free agents and reject work if they are not in the mood or if they are not getting the wages they want. They cannot be exacted to toil by the upper castes as used to be the case earlier. The landlord was unable to call them when needed but they always came to the landlord when they needed money. However, they were still living miserable lives and they never wanted to work. Madhav's wife Budhia is suffering from labor pain but neither of them is taking steps to save her life. After her death, they beg money from the landlord and other villagers, but despite purchasing a shroud for Budhia, they use the money in fulfilling their appetite and dirty needs. To quote him, "Premchand artistic intention is not to portray the condition of the Dalits, but to bring the feudal-colonial exploitation of the peasantry into sharp relief because despite working much harder than Ghisu and Madhav, peasants did not fare any better".

G.S. Meena, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and a scholar on the works of Premchand says, "Premchand could have written from the point of view of a Brahmin, but he chooses the Dalit point of view". She then adds. "He made people realize the follies of the caste system and the oppression it inflicts on those who are relegated to the periphery. That is what makes him a successful author".

From the comprehensive study of Preeti Shenoy, it is found that no one has identified and conducted socio-economic analysis in the texts of Preeti Shenoy. Therefore the present study will prove helpful in filling up the research gap in the existing researches. Thus the present study attempts to explore the socio-economic analysis of her works and at the same time compare it with the works of other writers.

#### **TEXTUAL STUDY**

In the nineteenth century, India was under British rule. Britishers played a major role in affecting the social and economic conditions of the country. The condition of the Victorian society of Queen Victoria had an important relation with India. She proclaimed on Nov.1, 1858, after the Revolt of 1857 that the British East India Company would turn

into the British Crown i.e, Queen Victoria as a supreme monarch under whom India would be controlled. However, there were many similarities present between India of the nineteenth century and Victorian England. The most important similarity is among the working-class people. They were not in a very appreciable condition in both the nations. They were fighting for their survival, and all they wanted was money. The factory workers of England were not getting good working wages and the peasants of India were unable to get good prices for their production. Added to that, the condition of the working-class female was not good at all. They were not equally paid as male workers only because of gender differences. However, there was a twist & scene turn in both the societies. There was scientific research taking place in Victorian England. In nineteenth-century India, more emphasis was given to education than science or research. Even women were anxious to read and write. The introduction of the English language in India played a significant role in transforming India.

But there were certain conditions in which the conflict took place. The point which should be mentioned here is that the industrialization which took place in England was by deindustrializing and harnessing the minerals of India.

R.C. Dutt argued that "India in the eighteenth century was a great manufacturing as well as a great agricultural country, and the products of the Indian loom supplied the markets of Asia and Europe. It is, unfortunately, true that the East India Company and the British Parliament, following the selfish commercial policy of a hundred years ago, discouraged Indian manufacturers in the early years of British rule to encourage the rising manufacturers of England. Their fixed policy pursued during the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth was to make India subservient to the industries of Great Britain, and to make the Indian people grow raw produce only, to supply material for the looms and manufactories of Great Britain".

British India used to export cotton to England and they used to import the finished items from the same raw cotton making India its market. This led to

the decline of cottage industries in India at that time. But, soon in the 1850s, the first textile mill was started in India. It was cotton textile which was introduced in Bombay with the help of British trading companies. This was contemporary to Victorian period. Later on, in the nineteenth century, there was an introduction of the first steel company in India by the Tata Company in Jamshedpur, Bihar (at that time; now in Jharkhand). In 1905, the Swadeshi Movement also helped in boosting indigenous industries. The contemporary developments are mirrored accordingly in the literature of the times.

Besides, Child Labor received a boost from industrialization. The majority of the workers hired by the factory owners were children. They made maximum profit in hiring children as workers in the factories because they were easy to handle in comparison to adults. They were also paid less and the working hours were more. There was a horrible situation in Europe. The same was going on in India during the British rule. Children of poor families used to work in British Buildings in India. They were also exploited by the Britishers. So, there are similarities in social and economic conditions of the Victorian Society and the nineteenth-century India.

The situation has not changed much in the twenty first century as well. India has crossed a remarkable century since then, but yet the ideology of child labour, gender discrimination and exploitation has not changed despite home rule and education expansion. Poverty and exploitation is customary in today's society as well. People favour child labour and there are cases of abuse with females in society even today. A detailed study of situations and characters in the selected works will help in understanding it more clearly.

Louisa Gradgrind, who is the daughter of Mr. Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is its prime female character. In the same way, in the story *Kafan*; Budhia is the principal female character. Both are submissive characters. Louisa Gradgrind is an ideal daughter in the story. She does her best to be an ideal daughter. She married Mr. Bounderby just because her father told her to marry him. But, after her marriage, her life gets devastated. At the end of

the story, Louisa returns to her father's home by breaking her marriage. While Budhia, the prime female character, is the wife of Madhav. At the beginning of the story, we find that she is pregnant and is in labor pain. She feeds Madhav and Ghisu (her father-in-law). She worked grinding grain in the village. After marriage, Madhav became indolent. He hesitated to work. Instead, he used to beg for money and sleep. Budhia, all her life, worked as a laborer. Premchand has described the worst life of Budhia after marriage and her suffering. She died in pain, with her eyes open. She neither received a new saree her entire life nor after death. Both the writers portray the suffering of women in their respective stories. These characters bring tears to readers' eyes as victims of social and utilitarian philosophy. Likewise, in the story of modern time, *The Rule Breakers*, Veda, the main protagonist too is meek and submissive. Though educated and having a dream of becoming a lecturer in college, she has no say in her father's decision of getting her married off to Bhuwan before the completion of her studies. She is psychologically forced to get married to someone she does not know, just because he is her father's choice because the boy has a job and is not demanding any dowry. Not only she, but this blood of meekness runs in the other two female characters Shakubai and Kajol as well. Even though Shakubai sustains her family and bears the expense of her child's education, she does not have the courage to resist Rajaram's thrashing and harsh words. Nor does Kajol, their daughter, has the courage to stop the torture of her father. They silently suffer the torture and cry in silence. It is very well evident here that however progress the society makes, the condition of women remained the same, be it in the nineteenth century as Louisa and Budhia or the present one's Veda.

Just like Budhia was facing *Hard Times* in *Kafan*, Stephen Blackpool was facing the same issues in *Hard Times* and Shakubai in *The Rule Breakers*. Stephen Blackpool was a generous man in the Industrial town, Coketown. But he was facing a lot of problems in his life. He worked in the factory of Mr. Bounderby. His marital life was not good. He got married to a woman who was older than her and was also an alcoholic. In the factory, he was in love

with a worker named Rachael. He wanted to get a divorce from his wife, but he was not financially strong enough to pay for divorce papers in court. Also, he was not in a good condition to sustain a second marriage. It shows that the contemporary law was not for poor people. In the same way, Budhia, the lead and the only female character of *Kafan* by Premchand, was the most hardworking person in her home. She economically assisted her family. But, her husband Madhav never paid attention to it and instead became lazier and more arrogant. Likewise in *The Rule Breakers*, Shakubai and Kajol are the representatives of poverty and inhuman treatment in society. Shakubai earns for her family working as a maid in the colony but is still ill-treated by her husband Rajaram. Though Rajaram, too, works as a toilet cleaner in the offices near Kailas Mandir Colony, yet he finishes off all his earning on alcohol, and then yells at Shakubai for shortage of food in the family. Though she earns the bread for the family and educates her child, she is often brutally thrashed by Rajaram. Rajaram exercises so much of an ownership on Shakubai by virtue of being a male and her husband that when asked to leave her husband by Kajol, she replies, "it's not so easy Kajol. You will understand when you grow up" hinting at the inescapable helpless nature of woman in society. Dickens, Premchand and Shenoy satirically express the in-human conditions faced by the low-lives of the society through their characters.

The three selected works also shed light on the utilitarian principle which was evident earlier but now has become the part and parcel of our lives owing to the self engrossed style of living of the present world people received as a gift of development to mankind. In the *Hard Times*, Mr. Bounderby is a factory owner and a banker in coketown. He is a self-centered character. He was emotionless because he never thought about what his workers were facing. He exploits his workers. Bounderby often states that workers are all looking for "version, turtle soup, and a golden spoon", while all they want is good working conditions and fair wages for their work. He even treats Blackpool inferior to him when he asks him for divorce advice. His only concern was the fact. He also calls his wife

only a piece of the status building belonging. His life is based on the principle of facts and only facts where there is no place for fancy. Talking about *Hard Times*, the educational doctrine in the Victorian age was based on facts, figures, and calculations. Supporting this doctrine Gradgrind, the dominant person of Coketown, says, "Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts are alone wanted in life."

As a result of this principle, his obedient daughter Louisa marries the loveless businessman and arrogant person. Mr. Bounderby is also the one who practices utilitarianism. His utilitarian philosophy is the same as Mr. Gradgrind. He is not concerned about his employees as human beings, but about how much their hands can produce while working.

The same was with Madhav (character of *Kafan*; husband of Budhia). He is a heartless and emotionless person. Instead of taking care of his wife during pain, he was more concerned about the stuff (potatoes) he was eating. When his father (Ghisu) asks him to see her because she's been writing in pain the whole day; Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?" (English translation of the story by Frances W. Pritchett). This shows how stonehearted he is. He enjoyed life with his wife for a whole year and now when she is in pain, he is more concerned about pulling out a potato and peeling it.

However, when we time travel and come to *The Rule Breakers*, we find no change in the utilitarianism in its characters. Rajinder marries off her educated and ambitious daughter Veda to Bhuwan before the completion of her education because he had a job and all the more 'they had demanded no dowry' (Shenoy 49). Just to save some pennies of dowry, he pushed his daughter to a lifetime of hell. Bhuwan is yet another utilitarian from among the piles of such people in the novel. Bhuwan was a gay and in relationship with Vikky, but still he did not disclose it to his family and went on to marry and shatter an innocent girl Veda's life forever. Not only this, but he did not disclose it to Veda even after marriage until after some months

into marriage she discovered this truth herself. Shenoy exposes here how much can people be mean and self-centered so as to exploit someone's life completely. Rajaram too exhibits this utilitarian policy in himself. He scolds and thrashes Shakubai badly very often for not arranging proper food with her earning, when he himself wastes all his earnings on alcohol instead of contributing in the family expenditure. All the characters, Mr. Josiah Bounderby, Madhav, Rajinder, Bhuwan and Rajaram showed their emotionless state. All of them were hard-hearted people and didn't care about others. *Hard Times* - For These Times (commonly known as *Hard Times*), *Kafan* (The Shroud) and *The Rule Breakers* model the utilitarian philosophy.

Charles Dickens has always used simple language in his novels. His priority was to give a message. His writing style was clearly detailed. He used to satirize the situation (like in *Hard Times*). He mixes up the imagination with practicality and presents the readers with a great composition. Premchand's novels were never pretentious and out of realism. He used simple language. His literary works describe the problems of the rural peasant\working class. He avoided the use of high Sanskrit Hindi. Premchand showed the true pain and agony of the farmers and the poor class. As in *Kafan*, he shows how money can become so evil to someone who is not concerned to buy a shroud but spending the money on eating, drinking and merry making. While Preeti Shenoy's is a lucid narrative style which maintains simplicity in form till the very core. She gives the real picture of the contemporary society, raises its problems and at the same time suggests amends and solutions to them in a very accepting way. It is this characteristic of Shenoy that has made almost all her novels a bestseller, *The Rule Breaker* being no exception.

## CONCLUSION

The study attempted a comparison of the situations of three different works of three different ages – A Victorian English Literature, a Twentieth Century Indian Hindi literature and a Contemporary Indian English Literature. On close analysis it is found that the situations in both the earlier literatures were very much similar. Poverty and ill-treatment of

the female mass were the part and parcel of the earlier society but nothing much has changed with time in the present world as well. Though people have gained wisdom and economic standard with time, yet the working class is still left to burn on the pyre of utilitarianism. The female section of the society was on the mercy of the male section earlier, in both the societies i.e. the developed British society and the then under developed Indian society and their condition has not yet changed much even in the contemporary society. It says that 'time heals the wound' but the wound of feminine exploitation has not been healed completely even after a full century. Women still have a marathon to run to gain equal status as men in society and Preeti Shenoy very clearly states this through her characters in *The Rule Breakers*.

To conclude, *Hard Times*, *Kafan*, and *The Rule Breakers* are undoubtedly social-realistic tales. All the stories show the agony and suffering of the working-class people as well as the marginalized people. The study also reveals the pain of women, which they were unable to express. The use of simple language by the writers advocate that it was mainly written to mirror the age it was written in. Two nations only have physical boundaries, but the mentality of the writers is always the same which is depicted in *Hard Times*, *Kafan* and *The Rule Breakers*. Time demanded to reveal the reality and the conditions of the female and the lower-class people; so that they could get aware of the truth and work for themselves and so was it fulfilled by time, with the masterpieces of Charles Dickens, Premchand and Preeti Shenoy.

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