

Power and Rebellion: Exploring the Master-Servant Relationship in Preeti Shenoy's *A Place Called Home*

E. Logeshwari

Research Scholar

Department of English and Foreign Languages

Alagappa University

Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

logeshelango697@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. P. Madhan

Professor and Head

Department of English and Foreign Languages

Alagappa University

Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The master-servant relationship has long been prevalent in many communities and is frequently marked by notable differences in privilege, authority, and resource availability. The domestic labour marketplace reflects the life management styles of various social classes, whether they are employers or employees of domestic workers. However, her happy married life is in danger of being destroyed when Mrs. Shetty reveals her history. However, she fearlessly confronts it all by going to Mrs. Shetty's house in Delhi, exposing the humiliation she and her mother have experienced and warning Mrs. Shetty not to meddle in her affairs ever again. This article discusses how the relationship between masters and servants in the book *A Place Called Home* reflects societal inequalities. Alka's story highlights the potential to declare one's individuality

despite structural obstacles and demonstrates the bravery needed to face societal prejudice. As a result, *A Place Called Home* turns into a moving meditation on the pervasive problems of class inequality and the human price of social mobility.

Keywords: Communities, Domestic workers, Humiliation, Warning, Inequalities.

Preeti Shenoy, a well-known author, blogger, motivational speaker, and self-taught artist, is among the top five fastest-selling modern Indian writers. She is well-known for her fictional works and has had a significant impact on literature, thanks to her captivating tales and relatable characters. She has written books about heroes who bounce back from adversity and begin afresh. She has won several awards for her writing, and different regional languages have translated her writings. Given that Forbes' longlist of the most essential Indian celebrities includes her, her influence extends beyond the literary world. Shenoy has represented India at many international literary festivals in Birmingham, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi. Her exceptional literary accomplishments have been acknowledged and commended by prestigious media outlets, including the Times of India, BBC World, Cosmopolitan, The Hindu, Verve, and others. Preeti has won several awards for her work, including the Times of India's AuthER Awards' Popular Choice Fiction Award 2021 for her book *When Love Came Calling* and Amazon India's Most Popular Self-Help Book of 2021. She has also received the New Delhi Institute of Management's Business Excellence Award and the 2017 "Indian of the Year" award.

Preeti Shenoy's writings are renowned for being easy to read and direct while addressing significant issues, including relationships, self-discovery, mental health, personal growth, gender inequality, socioeconomic class disparities, and challenges experienced by young adults. One of the main topics of her books is human relationships. She has a loyal following because of her ability to portray relationships and emotions profoundly and sympathetically. Her stories often explore the intricacies of everyday life while highlighting the triumphs, failures, and quandaries that her characters face. She hopes to encourage and

inspire readers with her novels, provoking them to consider their own lives and discover significance in their experiences.

Preeti Shenoy's first book, *34 Bubblegums & Candies* (2008), marked the beginning of her literary career. The scholarly community began to recognize Shenoy as a prospective writer as a result of her enormous popularity. *Life is What You Make It* (2011), *Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake* (2012), *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *It Happens for a Reason* (2014), *It's All in the Planets* (2016), *A Hundred Little Flames* (2017), *Love A Little Stronger* (2018), *Wake Up, Life is Calling* (2019), *A Place Called Home* (2022), *The Rule Breakers* (2018), *The Magic Mindset: How to find your happy place* (2021), and *When Love Came Calling* (2020) are just a few of Preeti Shenoy's best-selling books since then. The novel *The Homecoming* (2024) is the follow-up to *A Place Called Home* (2022), the best-selling book by Preeti Shenoy.

The paper aims to examine how power functions in the master-servant dynamic from *A Place Called Home* and how overt and covert rebellion contribute to the upending of established hierarchies. The socioeconomic gap between the disadvantaged is one of the main features of the master-servant relationship in *A Place Called Home*. Shenoy realistically illustrates how rich people frequently depend on domestic assistance to run their lives while yet upholding a clear social barrier. This division reflects the larger social structure of India, where interpersonal ties are determined by class differences.

Domestic assistants can be men, women, or children, although traditionally, women have been selected for this position more often than males. Because of the widespread patriarchal attitudes, customs, and institutions, women are seen as having “natural” caring skills and qualities. Because masters have more social standing and authority than their subordinates, the master-servant relationship frequently upholds preexisting social structures. This power dynamic has the potential to result in abuse, exploitation, and the upholding of societal norms that support the uneven allocation of resources and power. Household tasks have traditionally

been handled by domestic servants employed by rich and aristocratic families. Social structures, where certain individuals or groups hold authority and influence over others, usually due to social status, income, or ethnicity, are the strong foundation of this dynamic.

At the beginning of the book, Seema is employed to work as a maid at Mrs. Shetty's house. Mrs. Shetty neglected Seema and her daughter, just expecting them to follow her instructions. Alka embraced her mother firmly as they slept on the tiny mattress, wrapped in their shared fleece blanket, one night when she was feeling very chilly. Alka, who couldn't stand the cold, begged her mom they ask Mrs. Shetty to get them a room heater. Her mother, however, disapproved of such a notion and advised her daughter to be happy with what they already had rather than requesting more. Alka was examining the unutilized room heater in the visitor's bedroom. One night, when no one was using the room heater, Alka went up to Mrs. Shetty and asked for it without her mother's knowledge. Alka was asked to apologise to Mrs. Shetty for requesting the heater when Seema overheard her daughter's request. Alka was determined and refused to apologise since she believed she had done nothing wrong. Alka was informed by Mrs. Shetty that she would be attending one of Delhi's best schools, which was also Tanvi's school. She also paid more for her education than her mother would have made if she were to labour for her for two full years. Sharply, she also informed her that "If I thought your room needed a heater, you wouldn't have to ask me for one. I'd have given it to you myself. There should be a limit to your greed. Don't ever ask me for anything again. I am taking care of you well, am I not? (APCH p. 15).

As a young child of ten, Alka could not comprehend Mrs. Shetty's analogy between her school fees and the room heater. Alka could only distinguish between right and wrong, and she was aware that she had done nothing improper. Despite not getting the room heater, Alka was glad she didn't apologise to Mrs. Shetty. However, after a few years, things changed. Even though Alka's mother was no longer employed as a maid at Mrs. Shetty's home, Mrs. Shetty

attempted to destroy Alka's happy marriage by disclosing her private history to her spouse, Subbu. Alka's marriage was strained as a result. Anger at Mom and annoyance at her unjust actions returned to Alka.

Alka arrived at Mrs. Shetty's house in Delhi, dressed nicely, and confronted her. She had known for a long time that people admired well-dressed individuals. Alka filled out the registration with her name, Mrs. Shekhar from the Inner Circle Club. Mrs. Shetty invited Alka into the house, assuming she was a member of the exclusive group. However, Mrs. Shetty became enraged and gave Alka the order to leave her house as soon as she revealed who she was. Alka, however, freely expressed her suppressed sentiments toward Tanvi and Mrs. Shetty without allowing them to speak. I would want to inform you that my mother and I did not deserve the torture you inflicted upon us.

Since Tanvi thought that Alka's mother was superior to Alka since she worked for Mrs. Shetty, Tanvi was also not spared by Alka. Alka will always remember the fact that she had "dared to come for it," and the episode at the celebration where Tanvi and her friends teased her for being invited. This encounter educated Alka and let him see Tanvi's actual character. She had acquired an important life lesson and knew who to avoid. Since she and her mother had paid off their obligation to them, Alka cautioned Mrs. Shetty not to interfere in her issues ever again.

Mrs. Shetty kept some limits in place. Alka was not allowed to play at Mrs. Shetty's house; she was only allowed to enter to perform housekeeping. Alka was used to Mrs. Shetty's regulations and had only ever left the room to go about her everyday business. She remembered that her mother had chastised her before she ran out to get more of the chocolates when she was tempted to devour the ones that Mrs. Shetty had stored in her kitchen for Tanvi. She told Alka not to do it anymore since the chocolates were expensive and used up all of their funds. Mrs. Shetty had been insensitive and cruel to Alka, even though she had just been a small child.

Seema and Alka were never allowed to sit on the sofas or at the dining table at Mrs. Shetty's house, and she only kept imported dairy goods and similar products in the refrigerator for them. Their little room had no seats, so Alka always spotted her mother sitting on the floor or standing in the kitchen. Mrs. Shetty would proudly display Alka as her charitable endeavour whenever her Inner Circle Club members visited her. Mrs. Shetty would speak to Alka in English while she served tea and snacks to the guests. The women were astounded by Alka's faultless response and commended Mrs. Shetty for her excellent work. Mrs. Shetty took pleasure in the praise, while Alka looked like a carnival monkey that had to outdo its master. Because she believed Mrs. Shetty was trying to boast to her acquaintances about her maid's daughter's ability in English, Alka hated everything.

However, Mrs. Shetty never requested Tanvi to speak in front of all those women. Alka's mother told her she had absolutely nothing to be embarrassed of and that she couldn't understand all of this. This habit of playing in front of different audiences continued for many years. Alka attended the same prestigious Delhi school as Tanvi and was given free education by Mrs. Shetty. Alka was a brilliant young woman who worked hard in her academics, and at club meetings, Mrs. Shetty discussed the results of her exams. Because Alka had such potential and was considered a "worthy case," the club members decided to create a trust fund to help pay for her schooling. After Tanvi moved to the United States to continue her studies after high school, Mrs. Shetty came to terms with her daughter's absence and felt empty. Mrs. Shetty appeared to give Alka her whole attention and encouraged her to put a lot of effort into her academics, even though she didn't need any encouragement. Her academic performance had always been exceptional. During her club meetings, Mrs. Shetty was delighted to highlight Alka's progress. Alka was awarded for her perseverance and unwavering commitment to her academics. Alka had to do each of Mrs. Shetty's tasks, even though her peers were going out in honour of their achievements. Alka had the good fortune to be admitted into a prominent

women's institution in Delhi, where she began her bachelor's degree program. The Inner Circle Club members were motivated to gather money to support other worthy kids like Alka because she was only required to pay half of the tuition due to a scholarship. Alka kept to herself and avoided associating with others because of her upbringing, yet no one dared to make fun of her exceptional academic abilities. In the third semester of college, students were questioned about their future goals at a job counselling session. Alka thought she could start making money immediately after graduation, so she was prepared to start looking for a job.

She eagerly anticipated the day she would be able to live independently after being reared in jail. Ms. Senapathy, a science instructor at Alka's college, knew about Alka's history since her daughter-in-law was an active member of the Inner Circle Club. She persuaded the sociology department chair to support Alka's application to the Bangalore-based Management Institute. Despite not believing she had a chance, Alka was upset when she was chosen after passing the management entrance exam. She was hesitant to live far from her mother, even though she understood the advantages of receiving a top-notch management degree and could easily cover living expenses and tuition thanks to a trust fund the club had established for her. Seema recommended studying in Bangalore if it would help Alka get a good career. Mrs. Shetty encouraged Alka to continue her studies when she graduated with honours, and she did it with flying colours. Despite being allowed to have one Sunday off every month, Seema still had to go back to work by 6.30 p.m. shortly after completing the dishwashing and kitchen cleanup. Alka thought this was unjust, but Seema never complained. Alka was responsible for clearing things up after school and had to start working as soon as she got home from school.

Tanvi would become irritated and refuse to let anybody handle her possessions, even when Mrs. Shetty ordered Alka to clean the desk. However, Alka knew that if she found dust accumulated on Mrs. Shetty's desk, she would have to deal with the repercussions. Mrs. Shetty was unpleasant to Alka all the time. Little Alka finished all the chores she had been given, and

then she had to put extra pressure on Mrs. Shetty's lard-swollen legs. Until she was warned to stop, Alka would squeeze Mrs. Shetty's knees together while she sat on the padded chair with her feet on the stool.

Meanwhile, Seema had to grab a cup of ginger tea for Mrs. Shetty. Alka wanted to play at the park and had a lot of schoolwork to do, but Mrs. Shetty wasn't concerned and instructed her to stop massaging at sundown, which ruined her playtime. Unfavourable living circumstances: During her twenty-two years of dedicated employment at Mrs. Shetty's household, Seema cleaned toilets, took care of the house, cleaned up the vomit when she became sick, and changed her daughter's nappies when she was a newborn. She had gone above and beyond for them. They had lived in a single windowless room for many years, a dim, poorly ventilated 10 × 8-foot room that was a part of Mrs. Shetty's expansive mansion.

Alka and her mother shared a bathroom, and when she used the icy water, her hands became scarlet, and her teeth chattered. There was no hot water in the shared bathroom that was connected to their little room. They were prohibited from using the house's other restrooms. Before Alka departed for school each morning, her mother would warm water on the stove for her to shower, but she was unable to ask her to do so for the simple purpose of washing her hands. The rich and the disadvantaged receive very different treatment in the healthcare system. Seema was suffering from too much labour and subpar living conditions.

During Seema's two illnesses, she just took some over-the-counter medicine that Mrs. Shetty had given her. Seema was losing weight gradually, and the doctor had told her to stay in bed for at least 15 days because she had a lung illness, most likely pneumonia. However, she was unable to take time off from work and ended her life because she persisted in receiving injections with steroids from the local physician.

Shenoy's book considers how the master-servant relationship is changing in modern society rather than only offering a static portrayal of it. Traditional hierarchies are coming under

scrutiny as workers' rights become more widely known and domestic help becomes more financially independent. These shifting standards are gently incorporated into Shenoy's story, which emphasizes situations in which employees stand up for themselves or bargain for better conditions for their employment.

The article on master-servant relationships that is currently available emphasizes how class, power, and personal goals affect people's lives for generations. The determination and sacrifices made by those in lesser positions of power, as well as the transforming power of education and willpower, are highlighted by Seema's desire to provide her daughter Alka with a brighter future. Alka's voyage signifies the conclusion of the cycle of slavery as she gains financial independence and advances in society. Even after progress is made, her emotional struggle with her family's history is a reminder of how deeply ingrained injustices and power imbalances may leave scars that last a lifetime. The meeting between Alka and Mrs. Shetty symbolises her wish to face the humiliation that she and her mother endured and reclaim their honour. Not only is her outburst an act of rebellion towards the repressive system, but it also serves as a cathartic catharsis of the pain and hatred accumulated over the years. The story eventually reinforces the idea that genuine empowerment involves both monetary achievement and emotional release as Alka gains her independence and demands respect, asserting control over her entire life narrative and defying the societal systems that once imprisoned her. This work, therefore, offers a striking commentary on the complexities of master-servant relations and the long-lasting impact of societal systems on personal identity and self-worth.

A Place Called Home by Preeti Shenoy is an engaging examination of the master-servant relationship, presenting it as a complicated combination of emotional connection, exploitation, reliance, and power. She invites readers to consider the moral implications of domestic work and the socioeconomic systems that influence interpersonal relationships via her sophisticated narrative. Shenoy adds to the larger conversation on privilege, class, and

social transformation in modern India by providing a realistic yet provocative portrayal of this connection.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2026 by E. Logeshwari, Prof. Dr. P. Madhan Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Shenoy, Preeti. *A Place Called Home*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2022.
- Kumar, M. H. A. 2023. "Exploring the Push and Pull Factors, Psychosocial Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms of the Housemaid Aayi in the Novel *A Place Called Home* by Preeti Shenoy." *Anhad Lok* 9 (5): 285–288. <https://scholar.google.com>
- Kumari, B. 2022. "Redefining Womanhood from The Pages of Preeti Shenoy: A Critical Study." *Journal of Survey in Fisheries Sciences* 9 (1): 603–605. <https://scholar.google.com>
- Kodali, S. 2016. "The Image of New Woman Mirrored in Modern Indian Fiction." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)* 4 (2): 333–337.
- "IJCRT1135789." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*. Accessed April 2025. <http://www.ijcrt.org>
- Ray, Raka. 2000. *Fields of Protest: Women's Movements in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Parry, Jonathan. 2001. "Classes of Labour: A Critique of the Labour Process Theory and the Concept of Unfree Labour." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7 (2): 291–315.
- Neetha, N. 2008. "Regulating Domestic Work." *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (37): 68–72.
- Palriwala, Rajni, and Neetha N. 2010. *The Care Diamond: State Social Policy and the Market in India*. UNRISD, Gender and Development Programme Paper No. 13.
- Bannerjee, Swapna M. 2004. *Men, Women, and Domesticity: Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- John, Mary E. 1999. "Feminism, Poverty and the Emergent Social Order in the Age of Globalization." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (22): WS34–WS44.

- Dube, Leela. 2001. *Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Srinivas, M. N. 1956. "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (4): 481–496.
- Uberoi, Patricia. 1993. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sreerekha, M. S. 2017. *Home, Belonging and Identity in the Indian Diaspora: Engaging with Preeti Shenoy's Fiction*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.