

**Voices from the Margins Reflected in Shilpa Raj's *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter***

**Mr. Jitendra Charles Tribhuvan**

*Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Vinayakrao Patil College, Vaijapur  
Research Scholar  
Dr. Bhaskar Pandurang Hivalee Education  
Society, Ahmednagar College, Ahilyanagar*

**Dr. Satish Govind Saykar**

*Professor and Head  
Department of English  
Radhabai Kale Mahila  
Mahavidyalaya, Ahilyanagar,  
Research Guide  
Department of English  
Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune*

**Abstract**

This research paper endeavors to discover the voice of the marginalized. Marginalization is the process of exclusion from the privilege and power found at the centre or mainstream enjoyed by the privileged section. They were destitute of resources which resulted in making their voice weak and handicapped. They lived with endless suffering, under the torture of dominant classes. The dominant classes torture and suppressed the backward classes by social, economic and political weapons to sustain their kingdom over the marginalized. It is well described in Shilpa Raj's memoir *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*. The power structure like Guna community, the wealthy landlords, the police and the local criminals are at the Dominant position. And the marginalized are the dalits, poor labourer, women, teenager and the children. The present paper investigates through the marginalized perspective, that how powerful dominant structures suppressed the voices of marginalized people. People who are marginalized are largely deprived of social opportunities. Their overall growth is restricted or rather decided by the people who are at the centre. Shilpa Raj explores the marginalized complexities in contemporary rural India. This paper sheds light on the voices of marginalized and their struggles of who are often overlooked and abandoned by society. By examining critical social issues such as the right to education, particularly for girls, their safety, caste-based discrimination, and the relentless pursuit of social justice, it underscores the urgent need for systemic change.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, destitute, exclusion, voices, power structure, untouchability, caste discrimination

Around the globe the crack of Marginality has widening the gap of so called educated and wise humans. Marginalized are forced to live on the edge or the periphery of things, rather than in the Centre. Many people across the globe experience exclusion in the social

environment in every sphere of their life. This exclusion could be due to external or internal differences. The term, Marginalization, is a social process in which specific members of society are targeted, they were given experience of less importance and their needs are ignored. In

other words, they are excluded and deprived with respect to even their basic human rights and opportunities.

According to Merriam-Webster, marginalization is "to put in an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group." And in Oxford Dictionary "treatment of a person, group, or a concept as insignificant or peripheral." It is the process of making a group of people less important. Marginalized people have very little control over the resources available to them and over their lives. This results in making them handicapped and weak and making no such prominent contribution to the society. They are prevented from participating in local social life. This has a tremendous impact on development of human beings and on society as well. As the objective of development of human being, is to create an enabling atmosphere for people to enjoy a productive, healthy, and creative life. The tendencies and actions of the dominant human societies exclude the people throw them outside the existing system of progress, protection and integration.

In India, Scheduled Castes, Hindu sub-communities, have long faced deprivation, discrimination, and social isolation, exacerbated by practices like untouchability, which denies them basic rights such as access to religious places, communal water sources, and education. Marginalization occurs through economic, social, cultural, and political means. Social marginalization excludes individuals from rights, opportunities, and resources, particularly in employment, health, and social participation. Economic marginalization denies equal participation in

the economic system based on income levels. Religious marginalization targets individuals or communities based on their religious beliefs, while language marginalization involves the deliberate suppression of a group's mother tongue. These forms of exclusion perpetuate systemic inequality and oppression. People living at the very lower strata of society are treated as less human. As a result of exclusion, the said communities or group could not use the available resources and failed to grab seen and deliberately hide opportunities. Their condition is helpless and piteous the other hand the wealthy class own more land, organization and they prosper in wealth with well education. With this they grab the political power, which is the byproduct obviously, and then positioned the said class as dominant in the society.

In *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* by Shilpa Raj, the theme of marginalization is intricately woven into the protagonist's life and experiences. The book presents a powerful exploration of how societal structures, deeply ingrained traditions, and cultural expectations lead to the exclusion and oppression of certain communities. The memoir focuses the lives of the oppressed, and the dominant landlords. This is a real journey and struggle of a girl named Shilpa, who belonged to marginalized community. In this memoir Shilpa describes, the destiny of marginalized members belonging to the lowest strata, her upbringing in a marginalized community. She gives insights into the intersecting oppression of caste, class and gender. Shilpa also reflects on her family's history, tracing their roots to a lower Hindu caste, where her great-

grandfather converted to Christianity to escape the indignities of the caste system. Despite being Christian, Shilpa's family remains marginalized as part of the "Scheduled Castes," facing poverty and limited opportunities due to their caste status. This underscores the deeply entrenched nature of caste discrimination, which perpetuates social inequality and hinders upward mobility for millions of people.

In her writing, Shilpa Raj highlights the issue of untouchability and caste discrimination in Indian society. She describes how the landlords from the upper castes in the village maintain a physical and social distance from lower-caste individuals, even during religious ceremonies. While the landlords display their wealth and social superiority, they continue to marginalize those from the Dalit community, reinforcing their lower status. Shilpa's father, Appa, was subjected to cruel treatment as a bonded laborer in a landlord's house, where he was denied basic dignity, such as sharing meals with the family and using the same utensils.

"On the very first day of the work, the landlord sent Appa back home to get his own plate and cup. He and his wife wouldn't let Appa eat or drink from any of them. Appa was not allowed to enter any of the rooms in the house, except for the entrance veranda where he slept and the cow shed where he worked to clear the dung" (Shilpa Raj 108-109)

Shilpa Raj exposes the harsh realities of poverty and economic marginalization in India, where the poor are trapped in cycles of debt and exploitation by the dominant class. Unable to repay loans from landlords,

families are forced into bonded labor, with minimal wages and occasional meals. Workers like Shilpa's grandfather earned just three rupees a day, and when debts couldn't be repaid, women and children were sent as unpaid laborers. Fear of the system prevented resistance, with tragic consequences, like the suicide of a woman whose husband couldn't escape the debt trap.

Kavya's story highlights the exploitation of young poor girls caught in oppressive social systems. Her relationship with Prashanth, a gangster, was seen as scandalous, driven by a desire for money and materialism. When she ran away with him and her mother, it reflected the limited choices available to her. After her death, the truth was hidden, reflecting how marginalized lives are ignored. Kavya's tragic end underscores the exploitation and violence faced by girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose deaths are often dismissed. The community's refusal to honor her burial and the shame surrounding her life and death emphasize the deep social inequalities and rigid norms that silence those on the margins. Kavya's life reflects the broader societal forces that limit the agency of young, poor girls, trapping them in cycles of violence and oppression.

Dr. George, a former Army officer, founded 'Shanti Bhavan,' a residential school aimed at uplifting poor, marginalized students, particularly from lower castes. However, the dominant community, including landlords and village leaders, opposed this initiative, fearing that educating these children would empower them and weaken their control over the marginalized. To maintain their power, they spread false rumors, alleging that the

children were being harmed or killed. Some, like the landlord Murga, even resorted to violence, attacking Dr. George to halt the school's operations and prevent the marginalized from gaining independence. This highlights the extreme and oppressive measures taken by the powerful to keep the marginalized in subjugation and deny them opportunities for progress.

“Someone had flung the rock through the glass window and DG got hurt. They learnt that a powerful landlord Murga Gunna was behind the trouble. Since the school opened, many landlords resented the fact that their own children were not getting the education that Shanti Bhavan offered to children from poor families. Furthermore, as many found employment in projects run by the foundation and earned fair wages, the subservient village community was beginning to gain a measure of independence, and landlords blamed the foundation for their having lost control over poor.” (Shilpa Raj 219)

In Shilpa Raj's narrative, the education of marginalized children is central, highlighting the significant barriers they face, including financial struggles, lack of resources, and a dominant social structure that perpetuates poverty. This reflects how caste-based marginalization works in many parts of India, where people from lower castes are often relegated to specific, stigmatized roles and are denied access to opportunities that are available to higher castes.

Shilpa Raj's narrative shows how higher caste customs are imposed on lower classes, dictating even their basic choices. For example, while higher castes forbid cow

slaughter, they sell old cows to lower castes for beef, keeping the butchering hidden to maintain social order. Additionally, the police exploit people like Shilpa's father, extorting bribes without legal oversight. This highlights how both social norms and corrupt systems control and exploit the marginalized, trapping them in a cycle of oppression.

Shilpa Raj's memoir *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* sheds light on the divide between the dominant classes—such as landlords, police, criminals, and religious and political leaders—and the marginalized, who endure forced labor, exploitation, and systemic abuse in the village of Thattaguppe, Karnataka. The memoir explores the complexities of Dalit identity and the struggle for dignity and equality in modern Indian society. Shilpa's personal story of resistance, including her decision to continue her education at Shanti Bhavan rather than succumbing to societal pressure to marry, represents a broader narrative of marginalized girls who defy societal expectations. The novel also highlights the intersectionality of gender and caste, as the protagonist faces double marginalization—both as a woman and as a member of a lower caste. In a patriarchal society, her journey to claim her identity, dreams, and freedom is further hindered by societal expectations of women, particularly in marginalized communities. The constraints placed on her because of her gender highlight how women in marginalized communities experience compounded forms of oppression. Shilpa's journey from an oppressed girl to a postgraduate trainee psychologist serves as an inspiring example of overcoming adversity and the need for

societal change. Despite being marginalized, the protagonist's journey is also one of resilience and resistance. Her quest for education, self-expression, and empowerment is a direct challenge to the forces of marginalization that seek to keep

her in her place. *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* offers a compelling portrayal of how marginalization operates on multiple levels—through caste, gender, and cultural expectations.

#### Works Cited:

- Raj, Shilpa. *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*. New Delhi: Rupa 2017.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Marginalization*. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marginalization>
- Abrams, M.H. & Harpman G.G. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Cengage Learning 2015.