

A study of Social Construction in The Sense of an Ending and That Long Silence

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Abstract

Despite significant progress towards gender equality in recent years, social construction of gender roles continues to shape society. Even today, gender roles continue to be perpetuated through media, education, religion, and family. Children are socialized to conform to gender roles from a young age, and individuals who do not conform to gender norms may face discrimination and ostracization whether directly or indirectly.

Even in today's modern and progressive societies, gender roles continue to be socially constructed, influencing how individuals behave, interact, and navigate their place in society. This research paper examines the social construction of gender roles even today. Gender roles are socially constructed and are not biologically determined. Society shapes gender roles based on cultural, historical, and economic factors. Gender roles vary from society to society, and even within a society, gender roles can differ based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and social class. The present paper studies the role of social construction in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes. Despite its time and difference, social trap, marginalization and double trap for women remain the same even today for both the characters Jaya and Veronica. The primary issue is that even if Jaya and Veronica attempt to escape, she is still bound by an implicit societal responsibility. The purpose of the current research paper is to examine the distressing and aggravating social

responsibility chain, which is the fundamental reality that operates in the literary work under study.

Preface

Harriet Beacher Stowe (Senator) said that women are the real architect of society but how far does it imply into reality in society? Gender roles are the expectations and behaviours assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex. Social construction of gender role is the process by which societies shape and maintain gender norms and expectations. Traditionally, gender roles have been binary and prescribed according to an individual's perceived sex. Men were expected to be assertive, competitive, and dominant, while women were expected to be nurturing, emotional, and submissive at any time and in any culture. Don't you think we need feminism to have security, protection, and equality for women from a societal point of view.?!?

“...defines the relationship between Culture and Nature because women are universally constructed as closer to nature and culturally devalued in relation to men in much the same way as nature is in relation to culture. Nature is viewed as feminine – compare such expressions as “mother earth” or “mother nature,” “virgin soil,” and “rape of the land” – and women's lived experiences, especially those involving birth and childcare, are viewed as closer to nature.”

relationship between Culture and Nature

(Simkins Women, gender, and religion)

Social Construction of Gender Role: Today's Reality

Social construction refers to the way that society creates and reinforces ideas and expectations about gender, race, sexuality, and other social categories. These constructions are not natural or inherent but are instead created through cultural norms, practices, and beliefs.

“Gender always braids with social class, race/ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, as well as social context to produce socially and historically constituted subjectivities.”

(Simkins Women, gender, and religion)

Manusmriti as the divine code of conduct and, accordingly, the status of women as depicted in the text has been 27 interpreted as divine law to establish the structure of society but they deliberately forget all those verses that are full of prejudice, hatred and discrimination against women (Patwari).

Moreover, slowly and steadily, women's role has been changing with time. Women's history all over the world is known as the history of discrimination, suppression, and oppression which is existed till today in various forms. Every day there are different examples of men's hypocrisy and terrible violence against women in India even in the 21st century. If the victim is never the cause of the crime, then how and why she is blamed or case is addressed with her name!!

Theoretical study

Feminism is an ideology and social movement that seeks to challenge and transform the social constructions and power imbalances that exist between genders. In the 21st century, feminism continues to be important because gender inequality and discrimination remain pervasive in society.

According to Merriam Webster dictionary,

Social construction is an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society. (Social construct definition & meaning)

In the 21st century, feminism has been focused on a variety of issues, not only apparent issues, including sexual harassment and assault, reproductive rights, and the intersection of gender with other forms of oppression such as race and sexuality. The #MeToo movement, for example, has drawn attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, and the ways in which women's experiences are often silenced and dismissed.

Feminism has also played a role in challenging gender norms and stereotypes. It has called for the recognition of non-binary genders and the acceptance of diverse gender expressions. It has also challenged the traditional gender roles that have placed expectations on men and women to behave and act in certain ways. Yet 'conditioning' and 'socialization' as Sacco says in *Why Women Want What They Can't Have* exist and permit its role

In the 21st century, feminism has also been intersectional, recognizing the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of oppression.

Overall, feminism continues to be relevant in the 21st century because it seeks to challenge and transform the social constructions and power imbalances that exist between genders. By advocating for gender equality and the recognition of diverse gender expressions and identities, feminism works towards creating a more just and equitable society for all individuals.

“Gender is so pervasive that in our society we assume it is bred into our genes. Most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and the texture and order of that social life. Yet gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly "doing gender”.

(Lorber Night to his day - California State University, Sacramento)

Text Study of The Sense of an Ending & That Long Silence

Both "The Sense of an Ending" by Julian Barnes and "That Long Silence" by Shashi Deshpande have female characters named Veronica and Jaya that play significant roles in the narratives. Even though the characters of Veronica in *The Sense of an Ending* and Jaya in *That Long Silence* come from different cultural backgrounds and have different life experiences, they both explore themes of memory, and identity but the same common ways in which women are often marginalized in society.

Veronica, in *The Sense of an Ending*, is portrayed as a character who is elusive and enigmatic. Tony, the male protagonist, is in love with her, and the events of their past, which come to haunt him in the present. Veronica's character is shaped by the fact that she is a victim of patriarchy and has been marginalized by the men in her life. Her father, Tony's friend, is a domineering figure who influences the way Veronica behaves and thinks. Veronica is also subjected to scrutiny and objectification wherein she tends to behave to take the responsibility for her mother and Adrian who is no more in the world now, further highlighting the ways in which women are often objectified and objectified in male- dominated spaces – no matter which social status and successful or independent she is and chooses silence for her entire life.

Similarly, Jaya in *That Long Silence* struggles with her identity as a woman in a patriarchal society. She is expected to conform to traditional gender roles and is often dismissed by the man in her life – ultimately her husband. Jaya is also subjected to violence by her husband (not just physically but emotionally and mentally), Mohan, which further underscores the violence and oppression faced by women in society.

Both Veronica and Jaya's characters reflect the larger issue of women's marginalization in society and the need for women to assert their voices and identities. They both challenge patriarchal norms and highlight the importance of women's perspectives and experiences which affirms the need of reforms to social construction even in the 21st century.

Thus, the characters of Veronica and Jaya come from different cultural backgrounds and have different life experiences, they both serve as important reflections of the ongoing struggles faced by women in a society that is often dominated by men.

A Study of social construction in *That Long Silence*

Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence* explores the social construction of gender and the expectations placed on women in patriarchal societies. The novel highlights the ways in which gender is socially constructed and how these constructions can limit and oppress women under the title of freedom.

The character of Jaya, the protagonist, is expected to fulfil traditional gender roles as a wife and mother. She is expected to subordinate her desires and ambitions to those of her husband and family. Jaya's husband, Mohan, embodies the patriarchal expectations of a husband who is domineering and abusive towards his wife. Apparently, he allows her wife to have freedom yet Jaya's life is defined by typical social constructions, and she struggles to find her own identity and assert her actions. It punches Jaya to think and believe,

“And then, as we grew into young women, we realised it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for us.” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*)

The novel also highlights how social constructions of gender can perpetuate violence against women. Jaya's experiences of domestic violence at the hands of her husband are a result of the patriarchal norms that view men as dominant and women as subordinate.

“A wife should always be few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA you should be a BA. If he is 5'4'tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3'tall. If he is

earning five hundred rupees you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage...No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in favor of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favor, God help you, both of you.” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*)

Additionally, the novel explores how gender is constructed through language and communication. Jaya's voice is often silenced or ignored by the men in her life, who view her as inferior and unworthy of being heard. The novel also highlights how gender roles are reinforced through language and how this can be used to silence and marginalize women.

Overall, *That Long Silence* demonstrates the ways in which social constructions of gender can limit and oppress women. The novel highlights the need to challenge these constructions and to create spaces where women's voices and experiences are valued and heard. It is a powerful critique of patriarchal societies and a call to action for gender equality and women's empowerment.

A study of Social construction in *The Sense of an Ending*

Julian Barnes' novel *The Sense of an Ending* explores the construction of memory and the ways in which our understanding of the past is shaped by social constructions and cultural norms.

The protagonist, Tony, reflects on his memories of his youth and the events that shaped his life. As he revisits his memories, he realizes that his understanding of the past is not objective but is instead shaped by his own biases, and indirectly his behavior and aptitude forced Veronica to behave typically as she was socially constructed and naturalized for certain behaviors. For example, his understanding of masculinity and gender roles is influenced by the social constructions of his time. Barnes states rightly in the text,

“What you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed.” (*Barnes The sense of an ending*)

The novel also highlights the ways in which our understanding of history is constructed and shaped by dominant patriarchal narratives. An interesting aspect to observe is, Tony tends to narrate his side, even Adrian also keeps a diary but Veronica chooses to remain silent only. Veronica reflects on her own memories and punches the audience to believe that her understanding of the past is limited by the dominant narratives that exist within society. The

novel challenges the idea that there is a single objective truth and instead highlights the ways in which our understanding of the past is always subjective and shaped by social constructions which resulted in the life long suffering of Veronica Ford.

Additionally, the novel explores the ways in which language and communication can be used to construct meaning and shape typical social constructions. The characters in the novel use language to construct their identities and to create narratives about their lives. These narratives are shaped by the social constructions of their time and culture.

Overall, "The Sense of an Ending" explores the ways in which memory, history, and identity are socially constructed. The novel challenges the idea that there is an objective truth and highlights the ways in which our understanding of the past is shaped by social constructions and dominant narratives. It is a powerful critique of the limitations of memory and the ways in which our understanding of the world is always mediated by cultural and social norms.

Women may reject the social structure, but social structure never lets them.

It is really very difficult to be free from a conservative mindset. The deeply rooted social and cultural structure is so strong that if any woman wants to be free then even, they can't because of the so-called social structure and rituals. If any woman challenges any social or cultural norms, she will become ill-fated or bad in society. Under the title name of cultural values and relationships, so many things are imposed on her. Women accept all social values and cultural things as universal social acceptance. It is really very difficult to come out from the mindset which is already given by society. If any women do not follow their rules, they are blamed. They are considered ghastly women in society.

Conclusion

Thus, it is destined that Jaya and Veronica are being forced to conform to traditional gender roles that may not align with their individual interests, abilities, and preferences. Gender roles are societal expectations that define how individuals should behave based on their perceived gender identity, and they often reinforce gender stereotypes that limit opportunities and create barriers to equality.

It is important to recognize that everyone has the right to express their gender identity in a way that feels authentic to them, regardless of whether it conforms to societal norms or not. By challenging gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity and diversity, we can create a more accepting and equitable society where everyone is free to be themselves.

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