

## **A study of Social Construction in the Sense of an Ending and That Long Silence**

**Ms.Ruchi Joshi**, Research Scholar, Department of English, Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar, Gujarat, India

---

**Article Received:** 05/03/2023

**Article Revised:** 07/03/2023

**Article Accepted:** 08/04/2023

**Published Online:** 09/04/2023

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2023.5.04.63

---

### **Abstract**

Despite significant progress toward gender equality in recent years, the social construction of gender roles continues to shape society. Even today, gender roles are 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 modern and progressive societies, gender roles are 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. Culture shapes gender roles based on cultural, historical, and economic factors. The present paper studies the part of social construction in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes. Despite their time and difference, social trap, marginalization, and double trap for women remain the same for both 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 current research paper aims to examine the distressing and aggravating social responsibility chain, which is the fundamental reality that operates in the literary work under study.

**Keywords:** study, culture, reality, responsibility, literary work.

### **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 individuals' expectations and behaviours based on their perceived sex. The social construction of gender roles is the process by which organizations 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 about men in much the same way as nature is 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 how society creates and reinforces ideas and expectations about gender, race, sexuality, and other social categories. These constructions are not natural or inherent but are 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. Still, they deliberately forget all those verses full of prejudice, hatred, and discrimination against women (Patwari).

Moreover, women's role has slowly and steadily changed with time. Women's history worldwide is known as the history of discrimination, suppression, and oppression, which is still 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 is she 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 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 created and accepted by the people in a society. (Social construct definition & meaning)

In the 21st century, feminism has focused on various 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 how 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 specific ways. Yet 'conditioning' and 'socialization', as Sacco says in *Why Women Want What They Can't Have*, exist and permit their role

In the 21st century, feminism has also been intersectional, recognizing how 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 between genders. By advocating for gender equality and recognizing diverse gender expressions and identities, feminism creates a more just and equitable society for all individuals.

“Gender is so pervasive that 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 is 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**

"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.

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Veronica is portrayed as an elusive and enigmatic character. Tony, the male protagonist, is in love with her, and their past events come to haunt him in the present. Veronica's personality 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 an authoritarian figure influencing Veronica's behavior and thoughts. Veronica is also subjected to scrutiny and objectification wherein she tends to act to take responsibility for her mother and Adrian, who is no more in the world now, further highlighting how 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. Jaya is also subjected to violence by her husband (not just physically but emotionally and mentally), Mohan, which further underscores women's violence and oppression in society.

Veronica and Jaya's characters reflect the more significant 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 necessity of reforms to social construction even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, the characters of Veronica and Jaya come from different cultural backgrounds and have different life experiences; they both serve as critical reflections of the ongoing struggles women face in a society that men often dominate.

### **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 story highlights how 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 fulfill traditional gender roles as a wife and mother. She is scheduled 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. He allows her wife to have freedom, yet typical social constructions define Jaya's life, 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 realized it was not love, but a 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 result from the patriarchal norms that view men as dominant and women as subordinate.

“A wife should always be a 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. If the scales tilt in your favor, God helps you both.” (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 how 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 how social structures and cultural norms shape our understanding of the past.

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 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 how dominant patriarchal narratives construct and shape our understanding of history. An interesting aspect to observe is that Tony narrates his side; even Adrian also keeps a diary, but Veronica chooses to remain silent only. Veronica reflects on her memories and punches the audience into believing 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. Instead, it highlights how our understanding of the past is always subjective and shaped by social constructions, which resulted in the lifelong suffering of Veronica Ford.

Additionally, the novel explores how language and communication can 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 structures of their time and culture.

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

Women may reject the social structure, but the social network never lets them. It isn't easy 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 work because of the so-called social network and rituals. Any woman who challenges social or cultural norms will become ill-fated or wrong in society. Under the 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 isn't easy to come out from the mindset 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 interests, abilities, and preferences. Gender roles are societal expectations defining how individuals behave based on their perceived gender identity. They often reinforce gender stereotypes that limit opportunities and create barriers to equality.

It is essential 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. By challenging gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity and diversity, we can create a more accepting and equitable society where everyone can be themselves.

## References

- "Social construct." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20construct>. Accessed 29 August 2022.
- Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of an Ending*. Vintage, 2017.
- Barry, Peter. "Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory." Amazon, Manchester University Press, 2019, <https://www.amazon.com/Beginning-Theory-Introduction-Literary-Cultural/dp/0719079276>.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press, 2019.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. "Becoming a Woman: Simone De Beauvoir on Female Embodiment." *Philosophy Now: a Magazine of Ideas*, [https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming\\_A\\_Woman\\_Simone\\_de\\_Beauvoir\\_on\\_Female\\_Embodiment](https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Beauvoir_on_Female_Embodiment).
- Deshpande, S. (2004). *How to Read – or Rather, How Not to Read Women's Writing*. Fischer, John Martin, and Mark Ravizza. "Responsibility and Inevitability." *Ethics*, vol. 101, no. 2, 1991, pp. 258–78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381863>. Accessed 15 April 2022.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Penguin, 2010. *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, 4.1.
- Lorber, Judith. *Night to His Day - California State University, Sacramento*. [https://www.csus.edu/indiv/s/shawg/courses/033/readings/social\\_constructions.pdf](https://www.csus.edu/indiv/s/shawg/courses/033/readings/social_constructions.pdf).
- Patwari, Hirday N. *The Status Of Women As Depicted By Manu In The Manusmriti*. 29 August 2022. 2 May 2017 <<http://nirmukta.com/2011/08/27/the-status-of-women-as-depicted-by-manu-in-the-manusmriti/>>.
- Sacco, Peter Andrew. *Why Women Want What They Can't Have: Why so Many Relationships Fail...* Booklocker.Com Inc, 2011.
- Simkins, Ronald. "Women, Gender, and Religion." *Journal of Religion & Society Supplement* 5, 23 April 2014, [https://www.academia.edu/3395351/Women\\_Gender\\_and\\_Religion](https://www.academia.edu/3395351/Women_Gender_and_Religion).