

Gender-biased Marginalization of Sita in *Inside the Haveli*

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Abstract

Women are marginalized in society at multi-level. They meet their pathos in male-dominant society at every step. Since many years, women face physical and mental torture on the basis of being woman. The gender biased outlook keep women undeveloped and un-progressed. An impact of tradition and culture postulates women as a weak flesh in other fields. The plight of women mounts when they face biased treatment from the society. The novel *Inside the Haveli* points out the plight of women at multi-level. The researcher deals with one of the characters namely, Sita and her gender-biased marginalization. The phallogocentric attitude of men gives birth to women subjugation. Sita faces many difficulties on the basis of being woman. In this paper, researcher points out gender-biased perception of Sita and how it affects her life without having any fault of her own.

Key Words: Patriarchy, subjugation, Phallogocentric attitude, gender-biased view

Rama Mehta was born in Nainital, India in 1923. She became a top sociologist, lecturer and novelist. She was an Indian sociologist. She is specially remembered for her novel *Inside the Haveli* written in 1977. This book received 1979 Sahitya Akademi Award for English.

She was one of the first women to be appointed to India's prestigious Indian Foreign Service. After her marriage, she was pressurized to resign her position. Her only novel *Inside the Haveli* is her remarkable contribution to Indian English Women's Fiction. Significantly, the novel and her other non-fictional books center on issues of Indian women trapped between the tradition and modernity.

For years after years, women get sidelined on the base of mere sex although, they resemble in to men in everything. But women remain at back foot for each activity.

It is so because they see themselves in relation to men. Naturally, this 'dependence syndrome' again becomes a cause for the outlook that the society adopts towards women. Women are always victimized in the name of gender. They get suppressed under the various norms in male-chauvinistic society. Regarding this, a sociologist Ernestine Friedl talks about male dominance where gender role is culturally produced. She comes across some societies where weaving, pottery-making and tailoring is attributed to males. But she has realized that male gains high prestige and power than in societies where women are dealt with such works. She defines (1981:450) male dominance as "a situation in which men have highly preferential access, although not always exclusive rights, to those activities to which society accords the greatest value and the exercise of which

permits a measure of control over others.” She also argues (1981:450) that the degree of male dominance is “a consequence of frequency with which men have greater rights than women to distribute goods outside the domestic group.” Because of all these things, males are dominant in the society. Thus, gender biased society plays a crucial role in shaping the women subordination

Inside the Haveli points out the marginalization of women in the feudal system. The novel focuses on the inner outburst of women behind the ‘purdah’ of the Haveli culture. Here, all women are obliged to follow the norms of society in the name of culture. Women in this novel assemble under the ceiling of the Haveli and feel secure under the impact of the feudal culture. The norms of the Indian social structure especially the feudal system appear more rigorous than anything else. Women cannot escape from the clutches of these norms but they reflect their bondage of these confinements. Later, they become habituated to this secured and safe side of life and enjoy the confinement on the name of ‘culture’. The whole novel depicts the appearance of many women in the Haveli but even the absence of men occupies the Haveli by their desires to fulfill. The central character of this novel Geeta faces the marginalization of patriarchal mind-set whereas Lakshmi, a servant of Haveli, gets marginalized at both the patriarchal and poverty level. All the servants in the Haveli such as Pari, Lakshmi, and Sita have the common thing of being marginalized at similar level of poverty. Thus, the marginalization of these women can be

different but they all are bound under the ceiling of the Haveli. The infrastructure of the Haveli plays a pivotal role in displaying the inner grief of women through this novel.

Sita is Lakshmi’s daughter. Lakshmi is a servant in the Haveli. Her mother discards her husband in the anger of being getting humiliated in the name of infidelity. In the whole procedure, Sita misses the maternal love but she gets nurtured by fellow servants of the Haveli with love and care. The privilege of the Haveli life makes Sita enjoy her childhood days with Vijay Bai Sa, a daughter of mistress of Geeta. She always remains a responsibility of the Haveli that to be fulfilled in the absence of her mother. Every other servant always makes her aware of her status in the Haveli. They make her realize about her belonging to the class of poverty-stricken people. Being an abandoned daughter, belonging to lower class community and being a woman she suffers from marginalization.

Gender-bias is the prominent factor of Sita’s marginalization in *Inside the Haveli*. Women face the gender stratification right from their birth in the Indian social structure. The Indian mothering breeds among the women a trait that develops in their minds from the very beginning of their lives. In upbringing of boys and girls, the mothers’ role appears very important. The mothers give water to the ‘masculine trait’ among boys that is why they escape the situation of conviction and on the contrary girls get trapped in all such situation. Many women become the victims of such a situation. Sita becomes the victim of gender-biased attitude right from of her birth. The Indian gender oriented social structure

prefers superiority of males to females. The reactions of relatives after Sita's birth throw the light on gender – oriented views of the Indian society. The conversation between Khyali, a cook in the haveli and Gangram, Sita's father is displayed in the following snap:

'Why worry? God takes care of all those. He sends into the world. Girls are a burden, I admit; said Khyali with sympathy, 'but what can one do once they are born? So for I have been lucky. But who can tell of the future?' (7-8)

The birth of girls always appears a one kind of burden on the mind of parents. The above remark expresses the same thing. Gangram becomes unhappy because of the birth of a girl-child Sita. The people always like to welcome boys than girls. The boys' birth confers the pleasure and assurance of security in the old days to everyone and girls' presence creates frowning faces of everyone as if their births are a menace in their lives. The situation gets expressed through the inner feelings of Gangram. He says:

---, Sarju would have come out in the rain and thunder shouting, in her shrill voice', It is a boy; it is a boy. Give me money.'(7)

The people in the Indian society are quite crazy after the birth of boys. Usually, such happiness spreads after the arrival of a baby boy. This differentiates the gender - biased perspectives of the Indian society.

Sita belongs to the poor class of servants. She, being a girl, receives partial treatment regarding her education and marriage. Sita gets uplifted by Geeta, a modern mistress of

the haveli. The people in the Haveli decide to arrange marriage at the teen age as per the tradition of society. Geeta expresses her displeasure for this but nobody listens to her opinion. For Sita's marriage, two proposals came and everyone approves of one bridegroom named Shivram who possess land and house. Everyone has become happy on account of securing such an educated husband for a servant daughter like Sita. It happens so because Sita is an abandoned daughter and belongs to the poor class. There is nobody who could take her responsibility. So, naturally people in the haveli decide to arrange her marriage to get rid of her burden. Her education stops after her marriage. The distribution of rights gets imbalanced after the marriage in case of women. The same happens with Sita, who desires to pursue her education. Education is denied to her later by forwarding the cause of household duties. Thus, the rules always appear different in case of girls.

Sita's education gets dissolved in the shadows of orthodox prejudices and gender-biased doubts. Her prospective in-laws dislike continuation of her studies. They donot want to allow their would be daughter-in-law to attend the school. Thus, both a being a lower class person and a woman, Sita's education gets discontinued as per the desires of her would- be- in- laws. Women cannot make their own decisions to stop or continue their studies. Majority of the girls suffer from such crisis in their lives. Family members allow their education only to secure a proper husband to them. The same happens with Sita which is reflected in the conversation of Geeta and her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law says:

---, 'Binniji, you have made Sita's life. We have all been proved wrong. But now we must accept their condition. Marriage is the only security for women. It is you who have made it possible for her to be married into a family with land, with a well, a brick house and bullocks. Don't insist further.' (188)

The lives of women settle only after the marriage. It is imbibed on the mind of every human being from generation to generation. Consequently, the academic career of women always falls in disaster before marriage and after marriage also. The incident of wedding ceremony also focuses the gendered attitude in case of Sita. At first, all decide to have engagement first and then marriage. But later Sita's future – in-laws send a word of sudden marriage because of the ailing condition of the head

of the family. Thus, marriages always go as per the desires of men rather than of women. A woman like Sita always accepts everything who is double marginalized in society. Sita gets marginalized on the basis of gender and then because of poverty. Thus, Sita becomes the victim of gender-biased society.

To conclude, the present research paper points out how patriarchal mindset is deep rooted in society giving birth to gender biased attitude. The novel *Inside the Haveli* focus the same attitude where women are suppressed generation to generation under the unwritten custom of society. To eradicate this, Indian parenting especially mothering should go with cautious and courage that may help to change the scene of women locus in society. The journey is long and tough one but may end in possibilities in coming years.

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