

**Marginalization and Subjugation of Women in Rama Mehta's *Inside the
Haveli***

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Abstract:

Women are the torchbearers of the society, but they are held aback due to lack of their physical attributes, which leads women into the cage of despair and hence marginalized in the society. The marginalization and subjugation of women enriches globally rooting from dominant patriarchal structures. The title *Inside the Haveli* itself points out marginalization and subjugation of women by the male dominant culture. "Inside" is an emblematic of every woman who is restricted to the margin and is not valuable for the outside world. "Haveli" stands for the state of Rajasthan and grim condition of women in Rajasthan. The women in the novel are trapped in a system like Catch-22 where they don't have any space. They are deprived of the facilities like education, basic right to express and freedom of thought. The paper attempts to throw light on marginalization and subjugation of the ignorant women characters who fail to understand the fact that they are being marginalized by the patriarchal society. This abstract enhances multifarious nature of oppression, encompassing social, economic, and political strata's, that limits the empowering face of women.

Keywords: Marginalization, Subjugation, Gender Discrimination, Deprived, Inside

Rama Mehta's novel *Inside the Haveli* tells us a story of Geeta, a girl born and brought up in Bombay. Gender discrimination is a separate treatment given to a man or a woman. Marginalization is a treatment of a person, group or concepts insignificant of peripheral. On the other hand, Subjugation is defeat or oppression of a person. It can be observed that subjugation and gender discrimination contribute to marginalization of a class, caste or a group of people.

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Women in the novel are never subjugated by men but they are marginalized by women who follow the patriarchal culture, believe themselves to be inferior to men. For example: "*Dhapu turned to her and triumphantly continued, I warned you the first day you came to the Haveli. Never get into an argument with the women in the haveli. We are all mean. The men are generous and understanding. They look beyond our little world.*" (P.104)

Women in the haveli "*Jivan Nivas*" are bound to keep Purdah which is the most significant example of subjugation of women and separate treatment to them. The haveli is divided into three parts that are male, female and servant sections. Women are not allowed to enter the other section unless they are invited or properly announced. The haveli from outside doesn't seem properly managed but "*Inside*" the haveli is well planned. It symbolically signifies strictures of rules laid by the male dominated culture. Moreover, Geeta compares the haveli with a cage in which birds are kept. According to V. Geetha, "Social structure and structure postulates an inside/outside dichotomy on gender basis. "*In Inside the Haveli this "Inside" is assigned only for women as women have no space in outside society.*" They are always put to the peripheries due to their gender. Women are advised to 'mourn separately' when a family member passes away. They are never allowed to join men.

Geeta as bride to Prof. Ajay Singh goes to Udaipur, where women are made to put on a veil. Purdah system has been harshly criticized by the authors like Imtiaz Dharkar and Rama Mehta. Purdah in the novel proves her separation from the outside world. Women are not allowed to show her face to the world. *“One of them came forward pulled her sari over her face and exclaimed in horror, where do you come from that you show your face to the world?” (P.17)*

The purdah is so excessively used that women cover their faces even when no man is there. They compel other women to have their faces covered because they want to assert their superiority over the working-class women. *“Women behind thick walls had no exuberance of the women in the street. They were dressed as dolls kept in a glass case for a marionette play.” (P.10)* Purdah here is considered as a thick wall which separated them from the men. It is not only a separation from the men but it as a denial of the basic human rights. For example: Geeta cannot breathe freely and feels suffocating because of the veil. Sometimes, she likes the veil as a tool of safety. None can understand her inner conflict. She tries to keep herself aloof from the other women in the haveli. At the same time, Purdah signifies the denial of their basic right to exist or to create an identity. *“She looked slyly through the muslin sari if anyone of her age was nearby. It was difficult to be sure who was who with their heads bent, their faces covered, everyone looked alike.” (P.112)* Purdah is as apt example of gender bias and marginalization.

It is observed that the approach of looking at women is influenced by gender discrimination. Even birth of a girl child is considered as an inauspicious incident and ill omen on the haveli because girl means a large expenditure. For example: Gangaram was right, had it been a boy, Sarju would have come out in the rain and thunder shouting in the shrill of voice, *‘It is a boy, it is a boy.’ Give me money.” (P.7)* Even women don’t accept birth of a girl child because they are molded according to the male dominated culture.

Issues like early marriage cause marginalization and subjugation of women. In matrimonial system of haveli girls are always inferior to the boys. According to the women final aim of a girl is to get married whereas a boy should go to school and continue the custom of his haveli. For example: The first marriage proposal for Sita is cancelled due to dowry issue whereas when she

marries Shivram, his family members demand Sita should stop going to school as soon as she is engaged. *“Marriage is only security for women.” (P.189)*

“I know it is not the custom in Udaipur to send girls to school. People are afraid to marry educated girls,” said Bhagwat Singh ji (P.130) Women are kept deprived of right to education. Irony is that women’s education is supported by men but opposed by women themselves.

It can be asserted that education plays a very significant role in life as it stands for domestic, socio-political, economic and cultural awareness and consciousness among the women. It also symbolizes reconstruction of the haveli system in Rajasthan but the male dominated system doesn’t want it to happen. It can be observed that the problems like marginalization, subjugation of women, gender discrimination are caused by lack of proper education and knowledge which is never allowed to women. It is also a conflict between the powerful and the powerless.

Marginalization and subjugation of women can be interpreted on existential level. A girl or a woman doesn’t have her own identity in the novel. Every woman is identified in relationship with a man as they are restricted only to life inside the haveli. Women are not even allowed to go outside the haveli without a man accompanies them. A man is allowed to remarry when he becomes a widower on the contrary a girl is bound to remain a widow all through her life. For example: Gopal Singhji has remarried his sister-in-law after the death of his wife. On the other hand, Pari who is the oldest servant of the haveli becomes a widow two years after her marriage. As Pari says, *“We should accept our fate.”* It discloses the fact that a woman is held responsible for the death of her husband.

The blessing *“May you always wear the red.” (P. 33)* points out the fact that a widow has no space in the society. A woman is revered only because of her husband. It shows the fact that a woman is always put to the margins even if it is not her fault.

Women are marginalized also by creating their stereotyped image. They are made to cover their faces because they are afraid to be tempted by men. They are marginalized and segregated due to a very biased view at them. *“They should not see your beautiful faces. To be young is*

dangerous.” Women are considered more rapacious than men. They are looked at as easier to fall prey to temptation. The statements like “*May you have many many sons*” proves that women are never considered as an intellectual phenomenon but bodily phenomena. Stereotyped image of women also causes marginalization and subjugation of women.

In this way, it could be said that women in India have been the silent victims and defenders of traditional family and social ideals. This purdah system was completely opposed to women's autonomy, according to Geeta and many other women, and it was also the main source of their personal pain. Purdah became a symbol of tradition and prestige that the women in the haveli had to adhere to under all circumstances after Geeta saw in this tale that ladies always kept their heads covered, even when there were no men around. Since “*they were the masters and their slightest wish was a command: women kept in their shadow and followed their instructions with meticulous care,*” purdah has come to represent women's quiet and submission to elders without question (IH, 21). Even at a women's gathering, Geeta was told to keep quiet and to stoop to touch the elders' feet, regardless of how many women there were. As a result, it is evident that she was pampered like a doll, entirely covered without speaking openly and wearing expensive jewelry and elegant saris. It demonstrates how a girl's freedom of thought, activity, and enjoyment of her friends are all outlawed after marriage.

While concluding it can be stated that the issue of marginalization and subjugation of women by the male dominated culture is a broader issue than is discussed even in the text. Most of the time women are subjugated by women who are the followers of male dominated culture. Women are not aware of the fact that they are being marginalized by a few at the center. Therefore, women must develop an approach of looking at themselves. Thus, we may conclude that in order to prevent marginalization and subjugation of women we need the basic and positive changes in the society.

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