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## 5. Housewives and Silent Voices: How Women's Stories Remain Untold

Collin Christina Voller, B.A. English (2022-26)

### Abstract

Indian housewives, particularly those from rural and semi-urban areas of Jamshedpur and Dhanbad, Jharkhand, with the interconnected themes of Identity, emotional labour, invisibility, lost desires, domestic silence, and quiet resistance, are often overlooked. The study, which is based on feminist literary theory, aims to comprehend how housewives' everyday emotional and psychological realities, which are frequently written off as unremarkable or non-literary, contain profound tales of adversity, fortitude, and silence. The study examines how caste, class, and education interact to influence the degree of emotional repression and marginalisation in the home, drawing on the frameworks of intersectionality (*Kimberlé Crenshaw*) and gynocritics (*Elaine Showalter*). This study questions conventional notions of literary value and authorship by fusing literary criticism with first-hand accounts. The thirty-five housewives' voices are given a platform by the survey-based methodology, which advances feminist and literary scholarship on the experiences of marginalised women.

**Keywords:** Housewives, Jharkhand, Marital Rape, Honour, Literary Representation.

### Introduction

The role of a housewife, or homemaker, is often regarded as a cornerstone of society, yet it frequently remains underappreciated and misunderstood. While the image of the serene homemaker managing a household may seem idyllic, the reality is far more complex. This article delves into the untold stories of housewives, aiming to uncover the intricate web of challenges they face and the toll they take on their mental health. From identity struggles to emotional labour, social isolation, and financial dependence, the role of a housewife is fraught with complexities that warrant deeper exploration (*Sahrawat, 2024*). *Webster's Dictionary* defines a housewife as a married woman who oversees her household.

In rural and semi-urban Jharkhand, India, where housewives are typically expected to maintain familial honour and carry out household duties within strict gendered boundaries, this role is particularly prominent. Both tribal and non-tribal households continue to adhere to these cultural norms despite socioeconomic shifts. However, traditional tribal gender relations have changed because of economic displacement, Christian missionary education, and the influence of mainstream patriarchal norms. Particularly in nuclear or male-dominated households, the modern tribal housewife frequently finds herself balancing the demands of child-rearing and domestic servitude with the preservation of her culture (*Xaxa, 2004*).

In Jharkhand, issues such as illiteracy, early marriage, and gender-based violence further shape the lived experiences of housewives. Women are often confined to the domestic sphere, with limited access to education and healthcare, especially in remote districts. In contrast to urban upper-caste women, a Dalit or tribal housewife in Jharkhand may experience several forms of marginalisation, including social exclusion, economic dependence, and gendered violence. Education level regarding rural and semi-urban areas of Jharkhand, where people are discriminated due to caste,

religion, culture and face economic instability, leads mostly women to leave their education and look after their homes. In a patriarchal society, women frequently face numerous challenges and restrictions because of strongly rooted social, cultural, and structural norms that promote male dominance and power.

The society is still unaware of the word “Marital Rape”, which has been in practice in marriages in ancient India. The main reason for this idea was the patriarchal framework of Indian society, and that women were considered ‘property’ or ‘conversation’ of their husbands (Kadamb, 2022). Even though in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the growing world, the mindset of the people coming from rural and semi-urban areas is not growing with the changing world. The idea of the literal meaning of feminism is acknowledged by many, but a woman to be a homemaker is termed as a Sanskaar or a gender-centric role to label women within the patriarchal society. Through changing literary representations, housewives become not only the guardians of the home but also important figures in the current conversation about identity, feminism, and social change.

The study examines through questioning how the roles, silences, and self-perceptions of housewives in rural and semi-urban Jharkhand depend on intersecting socio-cultural structures such as patriarchy, tribal customs, caste hierarchies, literacy levels, and religious beliefs. The research investigates how housewives in Jharkhand use silence as a form of subtle cultural resistance as well as an inherited gender role, and how *Mila Tuli's* theory of “*resistance in everyday life*” can be used to understand these practices. At last, the research answers how marital rape, housewife fulfilment, and the cultural framing of silence relate to the fictional narrative as well as the lived experiences of Jharkhand housewives as disclosed through field interviews.

### **Review of Literature**

The reviewed literature collectively highlights how silence functions as a significant socio-psychological condition for Indian women, particularly housewives, under patriarchal structures. In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande powerfully captures how women like Jaya surrender individuality for marital harmony, where silence becomes a socially imposed survival strategy rather than a marker of weakness (Kolekar, 2017, pp. 51–54). This aligns with findings from Jharkhand showing that women internalise silence as a virtue and prioritise familial expectations over personal desires, even at the cost of mental and physical wellbeing (Sharma et al., 2018, pp. 154–158).

Marital silence further deepens when legal and cultural frameworks fail to acknowledge female autonomy, as seen in India’s continued non-recognition of marital rape, which normalises coercion within marriage and silences women experiencing sexual abuse (Kadamb, 2022). Literary representations by authors like Roy, Desai, and Divakaruni likewise foreground women’s emotional marginalisation and subtle forms of resistance often expressed through endurance, introspection, or narrative silence (Sanap, 2024; Altaf & Kaur, 2023). Scholars argue that such silence may also serve as psychological resistance, negotiation, and boundary-setting in restrictive family settings (Tuli, 2017).

Historical and cultural portrayals of women from mythological figures to modern narratives reveal a long-standing conflict between conformity and resistance, where restrained voices still contain feminist critique (Srivastava et al., 2023). Additionally, societal conditioning forces both housewives and working women to accept patriarchal expectations, including domestic sacrifices and the “double burden” of labour (Kumari & Singh, 2023). Media and literary studies further show that emotional manipulation reinforces silence, while collective support can empower women to reclaim agency (Bedi & Mahapatra, 2023). Comparative global perspectives, such as analyses of *Death of a Salesman*, demonstrate that the silencing of women is not unique to the Indian context. Linda Loman embodies emotional labour and marginalisation like many Indian housewives, where women sustain families while being denied voice and autonomy (Batchelor & King, 2014; Ananthan & Balachandran, 2015; Xiao Chang & Kim, 2021).

Although research on “Housewives and Silent Voices” is increasing, there is still a major gap in recognising the untold stories of housewives in Jharkhand. Existing feminist and gender studies have rarely focused on the region’s unique socio-cultural context, where rural and semi-urban environments intersect with caste structures, tribal traditions, economic inequality, and limited education. These factors reinforce patriarchal control and confine women to domestic roles, restricting their autonomy and future aspirations. Silence is normalised across generations, becoming a learned and socially rewarded behaviour for women. Moreover, critical issues such as marital rape remain largely unacknowledged in academic discourse, public awareness, and policymaking, despite being a significant part of women lived experiences.

### **Research Methodology**

Research methodology is a systematic approach to solving the problem in research. It is the science of studying how research is done scientifically. In this, we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher while studying his/her research problem, along with the logic behind it.

### **Research Approach:**

- The study uses a “Qualitative Research” methodology (which involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand the concepts and opinions) as well as “Quantitative Research” (which involves analysing and gathering numerical data that involves surveys, pie charts, and bar graphs).
- The research investigates the complex experiences and frequently ignored stories of *Jharkhandi* housewives from the perspectives of gyno criticism and intersectionality. Because it places a high priority on comprehending the complexities of women's lives within their sociocultural and personal contexts, this approach is well-suited to the study's goal (Creswell, 2014).

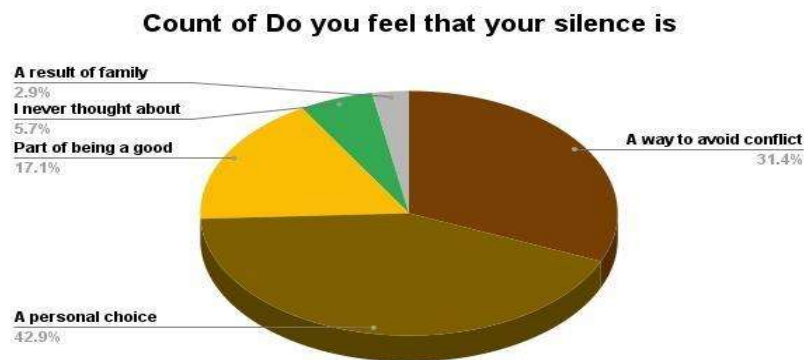
**Data Collection:** In this research,

- Primary source: Survey questions
- Tools: Mobile phone for audio recording, Notes on personal diary.

By guaranteeing confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, the study upheld high ethical standards. The goal of the study, their right to withdraw, and their choice to refuse any question were all made abundantly evident to the participants. Interview notes or recordings were safely stored, and personal identifiers were left out. Before audio recording, consent was acquired, and to minimise discomfort, interviews were held in familiar, comfortable environments. Participants' privacy and emotional health were protected by the tactful handling of delicate subjects and the absence of any pressure to reveal more than they desired.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Through the lens of Intersectionality (*Crenshaw, 1989*), the research explores how class, the rural-urban divide, and educational attainment all influence women's experiences in Jharkhand, in addition to gender and patriarchy. The second theory (*Showalter, 1979*), Gyno criticism, shows how Women reinterpret silence as agency, acceptance as survival, and housework as identity when their voices are read on their own terms.



**Fig. 1 Silence chart**

#### **1. Patriarchy: Tactical Silences and Domestic Roles:**

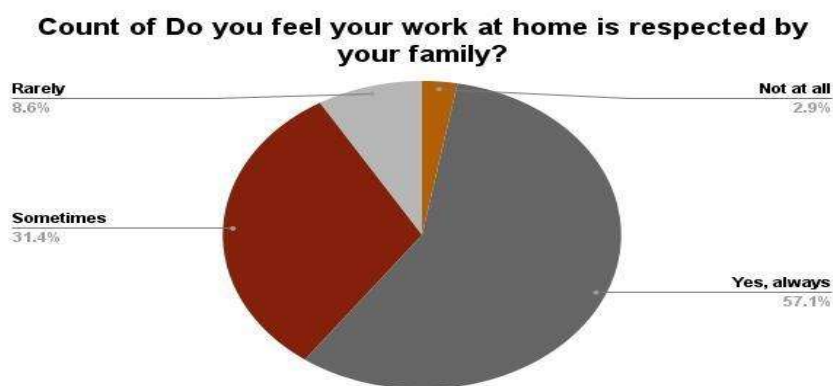
A significant 31.4% of women said they only received respect "sometimes," "rarely," or "not at all," despite 57.1% saying their domestic work was "always respected" (*GF-T9*). Gender hierarchy was also evident in decision-making: precisely half of respondents said they either "do not speak out" or only "sometimes" participate in household discussions (*GF-T8*). This silence is reinforced by economic dependency; while half get pocket money "frequently," the other half rely on sporadic or conditional access (*data view*). When asked directly about silence, 42.9% said it was "a personal choice," 31.4% said it was "a way to avoid conflict," and 17% said it was "part of being a good wife and mother" (*GF-T1*). This demonstrates that silence is not only enforced but also reframed as a virtue, a tactic that maintains economic stability and family harmony.

## 2. Tribal Traditions, Honour and Social Responsibility:

Silence and housewifery were framed by respondents from tribal communities (Ho, Santhal, and ST) as extensions of collective responsibility. For example, all Ho respondents (100%) chose silence as "a personal choice" in the caste cross-tabulation (GF-T10). The research implies that silence is still respected and considered a duty within kinship networks according to tribal customs. However, this does not eliminate gendered burdens; women are still expected to maintain deference in decision-making spaces while juggling domestic care with agricultural or petty market labour.

## 3. Caste Structures:

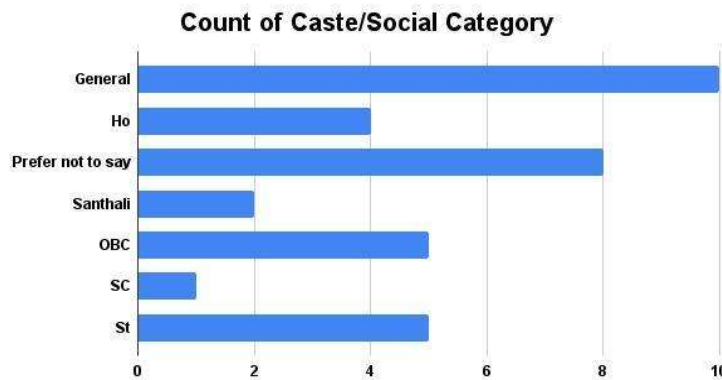
Women's experiences are also shaped by their caste identity. Just 47.1% of respondents



**Fig. 2 Respect chart**

from the general caste said they spoke up during family discussions, whereas 32.4% said they spoke either never or only occasionally (GF-T8). Additionally, different castes had different levels of respect for housework; for example, women from the General caste were more likely to select "sometimes" or "rarely" (GF-T9), whereas women from the SC, OBC, and Santhal castes reported 100% "always respected." This disparity illustrates how caste contributes to more stringent respectability standards, where women's silence safeguards family honour and guards against damage to one's reputation in socially monitored societies.

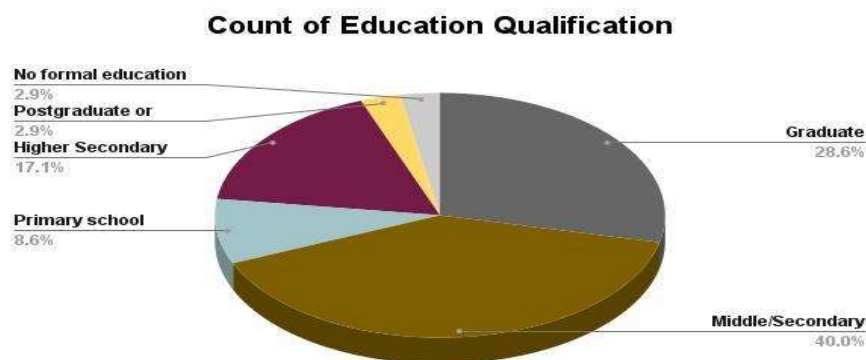
Fig.3 Caste chart



#### 4. Education and Literacy:

The largest groups were graduates (28.6%) and middle/secondary educated (40.0%), with educational backgrounds ranging from no formal education (1 respondent) to postgraduate (1) (GF-T4). But even among graduates, women reported little personal leisure time and little involvement in discussions, demonstrating that literacy did not equate to agency. According to the survey, 50% of participants felt either "sometimes" or not at all free to express their thoughts and feelings at home (GF-T7). Therefore, although education increases consciousness, it does not always eliminate cultural or patriarchal norms. Although social norms continue to frame women's silence as appropriate, literacy enables them to consider why they choose to remain silent.

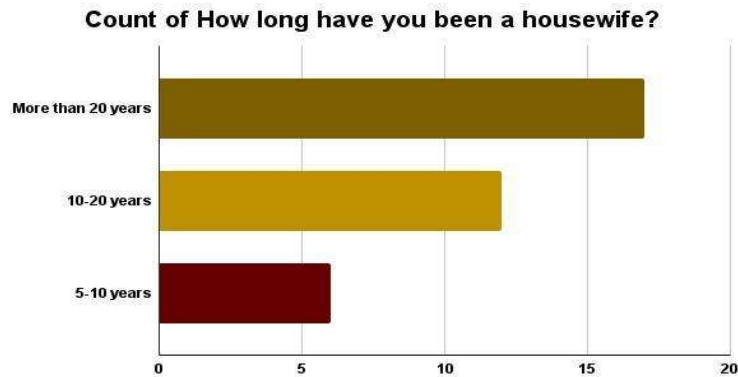
Fig. 4 Qualification chart



#### 5. The "Housewife Bargain" and Economic Instability:

Role acceptance was significantly impacted by economic instability. Thirty per cent had been housewives for ten to twenty years, and half had been for more than twenty years (GF-T5). Despite this longevity, more than half said they would like to work outside the home: 62.9% said they had wanted to work outside the home, and 10%

said they were either working or looking for work now (GF-T6). However, only 17.1% said they were "not interested," suggesting that limitations rather than preferences prevent people from entering the workforce. Silence was also reinforced by financial dependence. Silence turns into a kind of economic diplomacy, guaranteeing ongoing access to resources controlled by husbands, since only half of the population receives pocket money freely, while the other half only receives it conditionally or not at all.

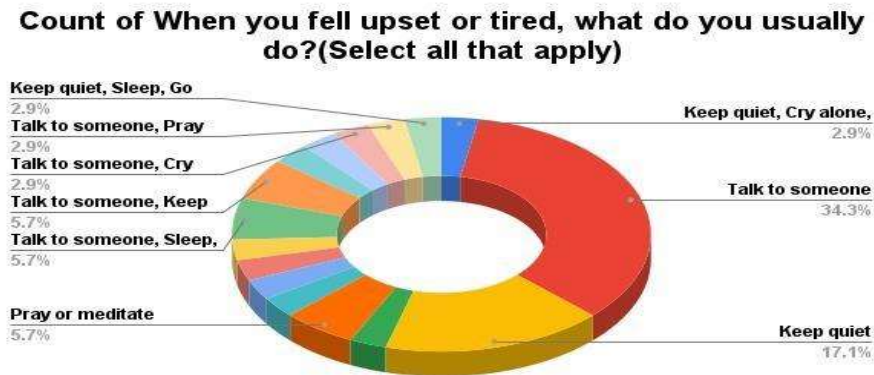


**Fig. 5 Role of the housewife**

#### **6. Silence as a coping mechanism:**

Sexual control increases women's vulnerability in marriage, according to the novel and the field data from Jharkhand. While 50% of women in the survey said they did not feel free to express themselves at home and frequently resorted to "keeping quiet" or "crying alone" as coping mechanisms, Jaya's lack of sexual consent in *That Long Silence* reflects the normalisation of marital rape (Google Form Survey, GF-T7). Despite not being specifically asked about sexual violence, 14.3% of respondents said they had experienced marital violence, which echoes Jaya's unspoken suffering and demonstrates how dominance is accepted in cultural marriage frameworks (Google Form Survey).

Fig. 6



### Conclusion

The study shows that housewives in Jharkhand negotiate their roles within a complex structure shaped by poverty, patriarchy, and limited educational resources. Their acceptance of domestic duties is not merely passive obedience but a necessary survival strategy in a restrictive socio-economic environment. Despite facing barriers, many women still nurture aspirations for education, reflecting a subtle form of resistance against the constraints imposed on them. Silence emerges as a powerful coping mechanism, used deliberately to maintain peace or avoid abuse, yet it also exposes how deeply women's voices are restricted by intersecting structures of gender, caste, and class. The unique geographical and cultural context of Jharkhand further shapes the lived realities of women, embedding their struggles and resilience within regional traditions and community expectations. Finally, the study reveals the troubling normalisation of marital rape, where silence is misinterpreted as consent, exposing a harmful patriarchal belief that denies women bodily autonomy within marriage.

The research challenges the dominant narrative that all silence in domestic women is oppression. (Deshpande, 1989; Desai, 1980; Roy, 1997). Through fieldwork in Jharkhand, it explores how many housewives find identity, self-worth, and contentment (46.7%) in domestic life and how their voices complicate the victim-centric lens of literary and feminist discourse. In many Indian families, silence is taught as a virtue linked to dignity or patience (20%), as a religious ideal like devotion, and as a family strategy to avoid conflict (23.3%). It emphasises how empowerment in caste-affected, rural contexts may differ from urban or Western models by fusing literary analysis with fieldwork in Jharkhand (Crenshaw, 1989; Showalter, 1985). By doing this, it adds stories of silent agency and cultural negotiation to the feminist literary canon and elevates the voices of non-metropolitan housewives.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research:

The study acknowledges certain limitations that affect the generalisation of its findings. The research was conducted with a small sample drawn only from semi-urban and rural settings, excluding urban and tribal women whose experiences might differ significantly. Additionally, the exclusive use of gyno criticism and

intersectionality, though valuable, left out other theoretical lenses, such as psychoanalytic and economic frameworks that could provide a more holistic understanding of women's silences and roles. The study recommends expanding the research to include a broader and more diverse population across rural, semi-urban, and urban areas of Jharkhand, as well as specifically focusing on tribal communities. Future research could also examine how silence is transmitted across generations and incorporate men's perspectives to better understand patriarchal reinforcement. Further, linking the findings with empowerment initiatives such as adult education programs, vocational training, and policymaking can strengthen the practical impact of such research. Using varied feminist theories may also offer deeper insights into the socio-cultural realities of housewives in Jharkhand.

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