

Male Silence and Patriarchal Control: A Review of Critical Perspectives in Post-1990s Indian English Fiction

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Silence is often described in its simplest form as the lack of sound or the act of not speaking. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it means “complete absence of sound” or “the state of abstaining from speech.” The origin of the word can be traced back to the Latin word *silentium*, which refers to “stillness” or “quiet.” However, this narrow definition does not capture the full meaning of silence in human life and society. Silence is not only about the physical absence of noise. It can also take on many different roles and meanings depending on the situation. At times, silence may be a personal choice, when someone decides to remain quiet for reflection or inner peace. In other cases, it can be a sign of repression, when people are forced into silence by authority or power. Silence can also serve as a form of resistance, where refusing to speak becomes an act of protest or defiance. On another level, it can represent deep thought, meditation, or emotional withdrawal. At the same time, silence may also be used as a tool of control or oppression, when voices are deliberately suppressed. Thus, silence is not just the absence of speech or sound. It is a complex human and social phenomenon that carries multiple layers of meaning depending on the context.

Silence has always interested philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists because it is never just empty or meaningless. Its role depends on the situation in which it occurs, and it always carries significance. From a philosophical point of view, silence has been understood in different ways. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, silence begins where language fails. He believed that there are things that cannot be expressed in words, and in such cases, one must remain silent. Here, silence is a boundary to human expression. Martin Heidegger, however, looked at silence differently. He did not see it as mere absence or emptiness but as a way of truly existing. For Heidegger, silence allows human beings to reflect, to connect with the world, and to reach an understanding that goes beyond spoken words. Jacques Derrida further challenged the separation between speech and silence. He argued that silence is already part of language because every statement or utterance carries meaning not only through what is said but also through what is left unsaid. In this sense, silence is active – it helps shape meaning and cannot be separated from speech. Thus, philosophy views silence not simply as the lack of communication but as a deep and powerful way of expressing existence and meaning.

In psychology, silence is often connected to inner life, hidden emotions, and trauma. In psychoanalysis, silence may be seen as resistance – when a patient avoids speaking in order to protect themselves from facing difficult truths. Sigmund Freud described silence as a form of repression, where the unconscious mind cannot express. Later, psychologists such as Carl Rogers gave silence a more positive role. In his client-centered therapy, silence was not a sign of resistance but a necessary space for reflection, trust, and growth. It allowed clients to process emotions and experiences that words could not yet fully express. Trauma studies also

highlight the role of science. People who have gone through violence, grief, or severe suffering often fall silent, not because they choose to, but because language is too limited to capture the depth of their pain. In this sense, silence itself becomes a witness to trauma – it speaks when words fail.

From a Sociological perspective, silence is seen in relation to society, culture, and power. In daily life, silence can show respect, politeness, or self-control, especially in cultures that value restraint over constant speech. But silence also works within systems of power. Michel Foucault argued that power operates not only through speech but also through silence. Social institutions like schools, families, and governments often decide what can be spoken and what must remain unspoken. In this way, silence can be used to control people, to keep certain voices unheard, and to ensure that some truths remain hidden. Silence here is not only personal – it is collective and political. It reflects inequality by keeping certain groups or individuals without a voice.

In Indian English fiction written after the 1990s, silence emerges as an important theme for exploring issues such as political unrest, social inequality, gender discrimination, and communal violence. Most research on silence in this body of literature focuses on women – on how patriarchy, caste, and colonial histories have forced them into silence (Spivak 28). However, the silence of men has not been studied with equal attention. Many male characters in contemporary Indian novels also face conditions where they are unable to speak, not only because of political and social forces but also because of personal trauma. These portrayals question the traditional image of masculinity as dominant, outspoken, and powerful. Instead, they reveal men struggling with identity crisis, where silence becomes both a way to endure oppression and, at times, a quiet form of asserting agency.

This study explores the role of male silence in six major post-1990s Indian English novels: Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* (2017), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* (2020), and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999). These texts span different historical and political contexts – ranging from the Emergency period and the Naxalite movement to Partition, communal riots, and modern struggles of class and gender. Despite their variety, they all highlight male characters whose silence is shaped not only by external oppression but also by the weight of patriarchy, which denies men the freedom to express vulnerability. Their silence, though less discussed than women's, plays an equally powerful role in reshaping how we understand voice and identity in South Asian writing.

The importance of examining male silence lies in its challenge to dominant ideas of masculinity. R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is useful here, as it explains how patriarchal systems enforce a single, dominant model of manhood that not only marginalizes women but also silences men who cannot live up to such ideals (Connell 77). In novels like *Jasoda* and *What the Body Remembers*, male characters fail to meet patriarchal expectations because of poverty, historical wounds, or emotional limitations. They turn to silence, often carrying shame and inadequacy. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence helps us see how social inequalities are maintained through hidden forms of control, including silence (Bourdieu 170). This can be seen in *A Fine Balance*, where lower caste

tailors lose their voice under caste oppression, and in *The Lowland*, where men caught in political conflicts are silenced by the weight of duty and repression.

The link between silence, trauma, and violence is central to these narratives. In *A Fine Balance*, Ishvar and Omprakash embody silence as they suffer under caste-based violence and state cruelty, their quietness revealing both their helplessness and strength (Mistry 412). In *The Lowland*, Lahiri's characters, Udayan and Subash, are shaped by silences born from political struggle and family pressures (Lahiri 215). Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* uses silence to capture Velutha's position as a subaltern, where caste makes his voice disposable despite his humanity (Roy 268). In *A Burning*, silence takes on a new urgency – men are trapped between religious hatred and state violence, where even speaking on social media can bring erasure or death (Majumdar 134). Here, silence is not emptiness but an outcome of wounds too deep for words, a testimony to suffering.

Silence is also deeply tied to gender in these texts. Although men are privileged by patriarchy, they too suffer from the demand to remain strong and unemotional. This expectation often forces them into silence when they cannot express pain or vulnerability. In *Jasoda*, Nagarkar contrasts Jasoda's resilience with her husband's weakness, showing how patriarchy infantilizes men while still expecting them to be authoritative (Nagarkar 89). In *What the Body Remembers*, Baldwin places male silence within the trauma of Partition, where men struggle to speak about guilt and helplessness (Baldwin 241). Male silence in these contexts reflects not only personal failure but also the scars of history and culture.

Taken together, these novels show that male silence in post-1990s Indian English fiction is a complex sign of cultural and social struggle. It is tied to survival under authoritarian regimes, to caste and class inequalities, to the burden of patriarchal roles, and sometimes to quiet resistance. Silence becomes a way to express what cannot otherwise be spoken, and in doing so, it complicates our ideas of power, gender, and identity. This focus on male silence also adds to wider debates in literary studies about voice and power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question— "Can the subaltern speak?"—echoes here but with a shift: what if the male subaltern does not, or cannot, speak? (Spivak 104). These novels suggest that silence is not limited by gender but shaped by context, history, and power. By highlighting men's silences alongside women's, post-1990s Indian English fiction expands how we understand subalternity, resistance, and the many meanings of voice.

The study of silence requires a strong theoretical foundation because silence is never just the absence of words—it is shaped by history, society, and culture. To understand male silence in Indian English fiction, it is important to see how philosophy, critical theory, and gender studies have explained silence in relation to power, identity, and voice. These frameworks help reveal the many meanings of silence and provide tools for analyzing the selected novels.

Ludwig Wittgenstein offers one of the earliest insights into silence. In his famous statement, he says that Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent, he suggests that silence begins when language reaches its limits. Silence is not a weakness but a natural boundary of expression. In literature, especially when dealing with trauma or oppression, silence often stands for what cannot be said. For male characters in postcolonial India, this idea is important because speaking openly might expose them to punishment or reveal vulnerability. Silence, then, becomes both protective and unavoidable. Michel Foucault takes silence in another direction. In *The History of Sexuality*, he argues that silence is part of discourse—it is

controlled and organized by systems of power. Silence, therefore, is not neutral but used as a strategy by authority. In the Indian setting, silence is often enforced through political repression, caste barriers, and communal conflict. For instance, men in *A Fine Balance* or *A Burning* remain silent not because they lack words, but because speaking would put them at risk. Foucault's approach shows how silence acts as a disciplinary tool and how men's identities are shaped by what they are forbidden to say.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak adds another crucial perspective in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She argues that marginalized voices are often silenced because their speech is either ignored, erased, or distorted by dominant systems. While Spivak focuses mainly on women, the same logic applies to men who are pushed to the margins by caste, class, or politics. Characters like Velutha in *The God of Small Things* or Udayan in *The Lowland* reflect this condition: their silences are not only caused by external oppression but also by the fact that mainstream discourse cannot recognize or record their suffering.

From the perspective of gender studies, R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain male silence further. Connell argues that patriarchy does not empower all men equally—it creates an ideal image of masculinity that emphasizes authority, control, and speech, while pushing aside men who cannot meet these standards. Silence, for such men, becomes a sign of exclusion or emasculation. Yet at the same time, their silence exposes the limits and weaknesses of patriarchy itself. In *Jasoda*, for example, Nagarkar portrays a husband who is silenced by poverty, showing how patriarchy can strip men of power in domestic as well as public life.

Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence also helps us see silence in a new light. He explains that domination is not only imposed through direct force but also through cultural habits and social norms. In caste-based societies, silence becomes a subtle way of enforcing inequality, where lower-caste men are denied the right to speak openly or challenge authority. This is clearly shown in *A Fine Balance*, where Ishvar and Om remain silent before landlords, politicians, and officials. Their silence shows their awareness of the risks of speaking out but also reveals how power maintains itself through what is left unspoken.

Trauma theory, especially as explained by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*, adds another layer to the understanding of silence. Caruth argues that trauma often cannot be put into words—it appears instead through silence, fragmented speech, or delayed expression. Male characters who witness violence or live through displacement often remain silent because their pain is too great to describe. In *What the Body Remembers*, Partition violence leaves men unable to speak about their guilt and helplessness. Silence in such cases becomes a form of testimony: it communicates suffering when words cannot. Psychological approaches also stress the gendered side of silence. Patriarchal cultures discourage men from expressing feelings, teaching them that speaking about emotions is a weakness. This pressure leads men to suppress their voices and internalize silence. In literature, such silences break the stereotype of the strong, vocal man. Instead, they reveal men who are paralyzed by cultural expectations, unable to speak about their own realities.

Taken together, these theories show that silence has many meanings. It can be the limit of language, a strategy of power, a result of cultural conditioning, a burden of masculinity, or the mark of trauma. Male silence is not simply muteness, but a complex response shaped by structures of power, identity, and history. When applied to Indian English fiction, these

perspectives help us see silence as both oppression and resistance. The novels under study capture this complexity, portraying men caught in the struggles of politics, caste, patriarchy, and history, where silence becomes at once their wound and their weapon.

The link between silence and political violence is one of the most powerful themes in post-1990s Indian English novels. In societies shaped by authoritarian governments or violent uprisings, silence is not just a personal choice—it often becomes the only way to survive. At the same time, silence can also erase people's voices, especially those considered unimportant by those in power. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* show how silence works in two different political situations: the Emergency in India (1975–77) and the Naxalite movement in Bengal (1960s–70s). Both novels focus on men whose silences are deeply tied to politics, revealing how systems of power control speech, dissent, and even life itself.

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry places silence within the violent reality of Indira Gandhi's Emergency, a time when censorship, arrests, and brutalities against ordinary people became common. The two tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash, suffer not only from caste discrimination but also from state violence. They are forced into sterilization and treated like less than human by officials. Their silence in these situations is not weakness—it is an awareness of the dangers of speaking out. If they resist, they risk death or destruction. Pierre Bourdieu's idea of "symbolic violence" helps us see this more clearly: the tailors' silence shows how deeply they understand their position of vulnerability under power. In other words, silence here reflects both oppression and survival. Mistry also shows silence through Dina Dalal's lodgers, who live in constant fear of eviction. They avoid speaking openly against authority because they know their words can be used against them. Michel Foucault explains that silence is not outside power but part of it—authorities use silence as a tool to control people. In this novel, silence is a strategy for survival. By keeping quiet, characters like Ishvar and Om manage to live on, and their silence indirectly exposes the cruelty of the state.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* looks at silence in another way—through political rebellion and state retaliation. The Naxalite movement promised justice but brought both violence and bloodshed. Udayan, one of the brothers in the novel, joins the movement. His activism requires secrecy, which forces him into silence within his own family. He cannot openly share his political life, so silence becomes the cost of his rebellion. This shows the paradox of politics—fighting for change sometimes requires hiding the truth from those closest to you. But eventually, Udayan is silenced forever when he is executed by the state. This reflects Gayatri Spivak's idea of the subaltern: those at the margins cannot truly speak because their voices are erased by dominant powers. Udayan's story ends abruptly, leaving behind only silence, memory, and grief. His brother Subhash represents another kind of silence. Unlike Udayan, he avoids politics and chooses a quiet life. His silence is self-imposed, but it also raises questions: is staying silent in the face of injustice another form of complicity? The novel's very structure emphasizes silence. Lahiri does not give Udayan a full voice; instead, his presence is felt through fragments, family memories, and unspoken pain. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory explains this—trauma often resists words and shows itself through silence. Udayan's death is one such trauma; it cannot be narrated fully, only felt through gaps and silences in the text. Both *A Fine Balance* and *The Lowland* also challenge ideas of masculinity. In patriarchal societies, men are expected to be strong, vocal, and authoritative. But these novels show how politics strips men of speech, dignity, and control over their lives.

The tailors cannot protest, and Udayan is killed for raising his voice. Their silences undermine the stereotype of men as always powerful. Instead, they are shown as vulnerable, silenced, and powerless in front of political systems. Yet silence is not only a mark of weakness. In both novels, silence can also be read as resistance. Ishvar and Om's silence allows them to endure, showing that survival itself can be a form of defiance. Subhash's silence, too, opens the possibility of a different kind of masculinity—not based on violence or rebellion, but on caregiving, responsibility, and quiet strength. These alternative models challenge the idea that male identity must always be tied to loud, public assertion of power. In the end, both novels show that political violence shapes silence in profound ways. Whether under the Emergency's authoritarian rule or the Naxalite movement's turmoil, men are forced into silence—sometimes as victims, sometimes as survivors. Their silences are not empty spaces but full of meaning. They reveal how power works, how trauma resists language, and how masculinity itself can be redefined.

While governments and political systems often silence people through violence and surveillance, patriarchy creates a different kind of silence—one based on culture, family roles, and gender expectations. Traditionally, silence in patriarchy has been linked with women, whose voices are restricted within homes and social settings. But Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* show that men, too, can be silenced by the very system that appears to privilege them. Both novels reveal how patriarchy, while glorifying masculine authority, also denies men the freedom to speak about failure, vulnerability, and shame. In *Jasoda*, Nagarkar presents an unusual picture of patriarchy by focusing on Sangram, Jasoda's husband. As the supposed head of the family, Sangram should represent authority and control. Yet he fails to provide for his household, especially during drought and poverty. His dependence on Jasoda strips him of the commanding voice usually associated with the patriarch. Instead, his silence reveals feelings of shame and inadequacy. This muteness reflects his displacement within a system that demands he embody an ideal he cannot achieve. Sangram's silence is not simply personal—it is systemic. Patriarchy assumes that a man's worth lies in his ability to provide. When Sangram cannot live up to this, he loses the "right" to speak because patriarchy offers no language for male vulnerability. R.W. Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity helps explain this: men who fail to meet dominant ideals of manhood are pushed into subordinate roles, often expressed through silence. For Sangram, silence becomes proof of his marginalization within his own family. Patriarchy, therefore, does not just suppress women—it also dehumanizes men by binding them to impossible standards. Nagarkar also shows how silence passes from one generation to another. Sangram's children witness both their mother's strength and their father's muteness. His silence becomes a lesson in failure, teaching them what it means to be a man under patriarchy. Yet this silence is not entirely empty. By refusing to speak, Sangram indirectly criticizes the very system that demands he perform an impossible role. His muteness is both a wound and a protest, exposing cracks in patriarchal masculinity.

Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* explores male silence in a different setting—the Partition of India. The novel reveals how Sikh men, like women, were silenced by the trauma of communal violence. While much Partition literature highlights women's silence, Baldwin shows that men also carry unspoken grief, guilt, and helplessness. Patriarchal norms, however, prevent them from expressing these emotions openly. The men in the novel face

two conflicting expectations: they must protect their families, but they must also suppress their emotions. When violence overwhelms them and they cannot protect, silence becomes their only option. Their speechlessness reflects what Cathy Caruth calls the structure of trauma—the inability to put overwhelming experiences into words. Silence here is not passivity but evidence of the limits of patriarchal language, which offers no room for male vulnerability. At the same time, Baldwin shows that male silence during Partition is also linked to complicity. Many men participated in violence, while others stayed silent as witnesses. Silence, in this sense, expresses both guilt and helplessness. Patriarchy demands decisive action from men, but when action fails—or leads to brutality—speech becomes impossible. Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence helps explain this: silence reproduces patriarchal and communal structures even as it testifies to men's pain within them. Baldwin's storytelling itself mirrors this silencing. Male perspectives are often presented through gaps, silences, or indirect narration. This reflects how Partition silenced men's emotional lives, as patriarchal ideals of stoicism denied them the ability to mourn openly. Their silence becomes a cultural script, inherited across generations, where grief is left unspoken.

Both *Jasoda* and *What the Body Remembers* highlight how patriarchy reduces masculinity to performance. In *Jasoda*, silence is tied to Sangram's failure to be a provider; in *What the Body Remembers*, silence comes from men's inability to match ideals of strength in the face of violence and trauma. In both cases, silence undermines the stereotype of the strong patriarch, revealing instead men who are emotionally muted and diminished. Yet silence is not purely destructive. By showing the limits of patriarchal masculinity, these novels invite readers to question gender norms. Sangram's muteness, though rooted in inadequacy, challenges the assumption that men must always be providers. The silence of Sikh men during Partition highlights the unsustainability of masculine stoicism during crisis. These muted masculinities suggest that alternative ways of being male are possible, even if not fully realized. Thus, Nagarkar and Baldwin show that patriarchy, while privileging men, also renders them voiceless in keyways. Male silence in these novels emerges from failed expectations and unspeakable traumas. By exposing this paradox, both works broaden our understanding of silence, showing it as a shared condition of suffering across gender in patriarchal societies.

Silence in postcolonial literature is often more than the absence of speech. It is a way of showing pain, repression, and survival. Many writers use silence to mark experiences that are too deep or too violent to be put into words. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Megha Majumdar's *A Burning*, male silence becomes central. The men in these novels are silenced by caste, religion, communal violence, and the authority of the state. Their silence is not empty. Sometimes it shows trauma, sometimes it is a way of resisting, and at other times it is the only means to survive.

In *The God of Small Things*, silence takes shape in the life of Velutha, a Paravan carpenter. His love for Ammu crosses caste boundaries, but society refuses to allow him a voice. Being a Dalit man, he is already marked as untouchable, which means that even if he speaks, his words carry no weight. Gayatri Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" fits here. Velutha does speak, but the world does not hear him, because structures of caste erase his voice. His silence is not his choice; it is forced on him by the system. Roy shows this silencing most powerfully through the violence against him. Velutha is arrested and beaten to

death by the police. His body becomes a symbol of how society not only kills people but also erases their stories, desires, and humanity. Cathy Caruth, while talking about trauma, explains that some experiences are “unclaimed,” meaning they cannot be expressed fully in language. Velutha’s silence is such a testimony. Yet his silence is not only about pain. His relationship with Ammu, even though it ends tragically, is also an act of quiet resistance. His dignity and courage create a counter-story to the rules of caste. Thus, Velutha’s silence moves between suffering and defiance, showing both the cruelty of the system and the strength of the individual. Silence also shapes the life of Estha, Ammu’s son. Estha becomes silent after facing sexual abuse and after seeing Velutha’s brutal death. Unlike Velutha, whose silence is imposed from outside, Estha chooses silence as an escape from unbearable memories. He stops speaking for much of his adult life. His silence shows how trauma works—it blocks speech, making some experiences too heavy for words. Estha’s muteness also challenges ideas of masculinity. Instead of being strong, loud, and dominant, Estha becomes quiet, vulnerable, and withdrawn. His silence reflects grief and fear, which makes male subjectivity more complex and human.

Megha Majumdar’s *A Burning* presents silence in a different way. Here the focus is on communal violence and state power in modern India. The story mainly follows Jivan, a young Muslim woman accused of terrorism, but the male characters around her also reveal how silence functions under authoritarian systems. PT Sir, Jivan’s teacher, chooses silence in order to protect himself and advance in politics. He knows Jivan is innocent, but he does not speak up. His silence is an example of what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic violence, where silence becomes a way of maintaining the power of the ruling groups. PT Sir benefits by staying quiet, showing how silence is sometimes tied not to fear but to ambition. His silence strengthens the silencing of others, especially the marginalized. Interestingly, the hijra character Lovely is far more outspoken than the men. This contrast highlights male silence even more sharply. Those with privilege—judges, police, politicians—stay silent about injustice, while those at the margins attempt to speak but are silenced quickly. In this novel, silence becomes a form of survival. To speak against the state or its institutions could bring destruction. For many male characters, silence is not weakness but a practical strategy in a world where words can be used as evidence against them. Majumdar also shows silence at a collective level. The unnamed prisoners, bystanders, and victims remain voiceless. Their absence of speech reveals how authoritarian systems erase individuality itself. Michel Foucault’s idea is useful here: power controls not only what is said but also what is left unsaid. In *A Burning*, silence becomes part of the machinery of control, proving how states use silence as a tool to maintain order and obedience.

Both novels bring out the double nature of silence. In *The God of Small Things*, silence comes from caste oppression and trauma, yet it also carries traces of dignity and resistance. In *A Burning*, silence arises from fear and survival under authoritarian power. For Velutha, Estha, and the men in Majumdar’s story, silence is never simple—it shows pain, memory, survival, and sometimes complicity. Most importantly, these novels question the link between masculinity and speech. Traditionally, masculinity is imagined as strong, vocal, and authoritative. But here, men are shown as silent, broken, or cautious. Their silence is not a lack of identity but a different way of existing in a violent world. It reveals that men too, like women, can be erased and silenced by larger systems. *The God of Small Things* and *A Burning* show silence as both trauma and protection. Silence is a wound, but it is also a

shield. It testifies to pain but also helps survival. These novels expand the discussion of silence in Indian English fiction by showing that men too suffer muteness because of caste, communal hatred, and authoritarian control.

The study of silence in *A Fine Balance*, *The Lowland*, *Jasoda*, *The God of Small Things*, *A Burning*, and *What the Body Remembers* show that male silence is not one single thing. It is shaped by history, trauma, power, and identity. In earlier thought, silence was often linked only with women under patriarchy. But these novels prove that men also become silent because of political violence, caste, communal conflict, and the heavy demands of patriarchy itself. Male silence can be forced or chosen. It can weaken men but also become a way of resistance. It is both a sign of suffering and a place for hidden strength. In *A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry shows how Ishvar and Omprakash lose their voices under caste violence and state cruelty during the Emergency. In *The Lowland*, Jhumpa Lahiri presents Subhash and Udayan, whose silence comes from betrayal, grief, and political secrets. In *Jasoda*, Kiran Nagarkar shows how patriarchy hurts men as well as women. Sangram and other men cannot express pain because they are bound by traditions that expect them to be strong providers, while women like Jasoda face endless labor and sacrifice.

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy explores caste and trauma. Velutha is silenced by caste because society refuses to hear him. Estha falls into silence after abuse and violence. Both show that silence is not just absence of words but a deep mark of pain. In *A Burning*, Megha Majumdar shifts the focus to modern politics and state power. Male characters become silent out of fear or opportunism. Silence here is survival, but it also shows complicity in injustice. In *What the Body Remembers*, Shauna Singh Baldwin situates silence during Partition. Sikh men suffer muteness from grief, guilt, and the pressure of masculinity, proving that they too are unable to voice their pain in times of violence. Together, these novels show that male silence runs across different times—the Emergency, the Naxalite movement, Partition, and today's communal politics. Silence is not accidental. It is part of the way society and power work in the subcontinent. Velutha, Ishvar, Udayan, Subhash, Omprakash, and the men in *A Burning* are silenced by larger systems. Foucault's idea helps explain this: silence protects power and strengthens it. Yet silence is not only defeat. It also hides resistance. In refusing to speak or in being unable to, these men reveal the cracks in the system that tries to control them.

Male silence in these novels also challenges the usual image of masculinity. Instead of showing men as strong and commanding, these books show men as vulnerable, grieving, and enduring. Silence becomes a way to question patriarchy itself, which harms men as well as women. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains this clearly. Not all men benefit from patriarchy. Those who are poor, oppressed by caste, or caught in political or religious violence are silenced instead of empowered. Spivak's question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—fits here too. These novels show that subaltern men also speak but are not heard, and their silence is wrongly seen as weakness.

In conclusion, post-1990s Indian English fiction widens our view of silence. It shows that silence is not only a woman's condition but man's also. Caste, patriarchy, communal hatred, and authoritarian power silence both genders in different ways. Looking at male silence does not erase women's pain; it adds to our understanding of silence as a shared human struggle. The silenced men in these novels remind us that silence is part of history. These are voices

erased from records but kept alive in literature. Their silence makes us aware of the cost of power and the fragility of voice. It teaches us to listen to what is unsaid. By bringing male silence into view, these novels disrupt old gender ideas and show that literature can make silence itself speak.

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