



Women's Voices, Conflict and Changing Social Identities: Exploring Violent and Non-Violent Communication in Postmillennial Indian English Fiction

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Abstract

Postmillennial Indian English fiction has created important literary spaces for examining women's experiences, identities, conflicts, and forms of resistance. Contemporary women characters are increasingly represented not only as victims of social and domestic restrictions but also as individuals who speak, question, negotiate, remember, refuse, write, and construct identities of their own. This paper examines women's voices, conflict, changing social identities, and violent and non-violent forms of communication in selected postmillennial Indian English fiction. The study focuses on Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On*, Manju Kapur's *Home*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind*, Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The study follows a qualitative method based on close reading and comparative textual analysis. Feminist literary theory, postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, theories of gender and identity, agency and resistance, and the concept of non-violent communication are used to examine the selected texts. The paper understands violent communication in a broad sense that includes threats, insults, humiliation, controlling language, emotional manipulation, social exclusion, coercion, and forms of speech that deny another person's dignity or freedom. Non-violent communication is understood through dialogue, listening, empathy, negotiation, testimony, storytelling, and self-expression. The analysis shows that

women's voices cannot be understood through a simple opposition between silence and speech. Silence may represent oppression, fear, protection, reflection, or strategy, while speech may function as resistance but may also reproduce existing power structures. The selected novels demonstrate that women's identities are continuously negotiated through family, marriage, education, caste, class, religion, sexuality, migration, and political conflict. The study argues that communication is an important form of social power and that the struggle for women's identity is often a struggle over the right to speak, to be heard, and to define one's own experience. The paper concludes that postmillennial Indian English fiction presents women's resistance as a complex process involving speech, silence, memory, writing, negotiation, solidarity, and the reconstruction of selfhood.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English fiction has undergone significant changes during the last few decades. Women characters who were traditionally represented mainly through domestic roles such as daughter, wife, mother, widow, or daughter-in-law are increasingly represented through a much wider range of experiences. Contemporary Indian English fiction presents women as educated individuals, professionals, writers, migrants, political subjects, survivors, lovers, activists, and people searching for identities beyond traditional social expectations. This transformation does not mean that patriarchal structures have disappeared. Rather, contemporary fiction shows that women negotiate these structures in new and often complicated ways.

The postmillennial period is particularly useful for studying this transformation. In this paper, postmillennial Indian English fiction refers broadly to Indian fiction in English published from 2000 onwards. This period has been marked by rapid social and cultural changes in India. Globalization, urbanization, higher education, changing employment patterns, migration, digital communication, changing family structures, and greater public discussion of gender have affected both everyday life and literary representation. E. Dawson Varughese observes that post-millennial Indian fiction engages with the changing cultural and social landscape of contemporary India and presents new relationships between literature, place,

identity, and everyday experience (Varughese). The contemporary Indian novel therefore provides an important space for examining changing ideas of gender and social identity. Gender is not created only through biological difference. It is also shaped by social expectations, cultural practices, family relationships, language, and institutions. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is useful in this context because it explains how gender is repeatedly produced through social acts and cultural expectations (Butler). In many Indian families, for example, a woman is expected to perform the role of the "good daughter," "good wife," "good mother," or "respectable woman." These identities appear natural because they are repeated through everyday behaviour and communication. When a woman questions these expectations, conflict may emerge. Communication is therefore central to the construction of identity. The language used by family members, husbands, communities, and institutions can define what a woman is expected to become. Communication can support relationships, but it can also become a means of control. A woman may be told where she can go, whom she can meet, what she can wear, what she should study, whom she should marry, or what kind of behaviour is acceptable. Such communication may not always appear violent in a physical sense, but it can restrict freedom and create psychological pressure.

This paper uses the term "violent communication" in a broad literary sense. It includes threatening, insulting, humiliating, controlling, coercive, discriminatory, or silencing forms of communication. Marshall Rosenberg's concept of Nonviolent Communication provides a useful framework for distinguishing communication based on recognition, empathy, needs, and dialogue from communication based on blame, judgment, coercion, and domination (Rosenberg). The present study does not treat Rosenberg's model as a clinical or psychological test for fictional characters. Instead, it adapts its basic principles to examine how communication functions within literary relationships. The idea of women's voice is equally important. Voice is not simply the physical act of speaking. It also involves the ability to narrate one's experience and have that narration recognized. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of the subaltern raises the question of whether marginalized subjects can speak in ways that challenge dominant systems of representation (Spivak). A woman may speak but still remain unheard. Her experience may be dismissed, misunderstood, translated by others, or considered less important than the voices of socially powerful people.

The present paper examines these issues through six novels: Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On* (2004), Manju Kapur's *Home* (2006), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind* (2016), Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). These novels have been selected because they represent different forms of women's experience and different social locations. They also allow the study to move from family and marital relationships toward questions of caste, class, migration, religion, sexuality, political conflict, and collective identity. The research is guided by the idea that communication is a form of social power. The study examines how characters speak, remain silent, listen, argue, threaten, negotiate, remember, write, and construct narratives. It asks how these communicative practices affect women's identities and how women use communication as a means of resistance. The central argument of the paper is

that women's voices in postmillennial Indian English fiction are produced through conflicts over communication. Women become agents not simply when they speak, but when they gain greater control over the meaning of their own experiences. Voice, therefore, is connected with identity, recognition, dignity, and agency.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist literary criticism provides the basic foundation for this study. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* challenged the idea that womanhood can be understood simply through biological difference and emphasized the importance of social and cultural processes in the construction of women (Beauvoir). Elaine Showalter later developed important approaches to women's literary traditions and demonstrated the importance of studying women writers within their own cultural and literary histories (Showalter). These approaches are useful for the present study because the selected novels place women's experiences at the centre of narrative attention.

Indian women's writing, however, cannot be studied through a single universal model of female experience. Chandra Talpade Mohanty strongly questions representations that treat women from different cultural and historical contexts as one homogeneous group (Mohanty). Her postcolonial feminist approach is particularly important for Indian English literature because gender interacts with caste, class, religion, region, education, sexuality, and economic position. The experience of a middle-class educated woman cannot automatically be treated as identical to the experience of a woman from a marginalized caste or economically disadvantaged background. The concept of intersectionality further strengthens this approach. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that different forms of inequality may operate together and cannot always be understood separately (Crenshaw). In Indian English fiction, gender may be connected with caste, class, religion, sexuality, migration, and political identity. The selected novels repeatedly demonstrate this connection. A woman's social position affects not only her opportunities but also the extent to

which her speech is taken seriously. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is another important part of the framework (Butler). Gender identities are repeatedly produced through social practices. Language is one of these practices. When a woman is repeatedly described as obedient, respectable, emotional, selfish, or disobedient, language participates in creating and maintaining gender expectations. The conflict between socially assigned identity and self-defined identity is therefore also a conflict over language. Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity is useful for understanding identity as a changing and historically constructed process rather than a fixed condition (Hall). The characters examined in this paper often occupy more than one social position. Their identities change as they experience education, marriage, migration, political conflict, violence, or social transformation.

The concept of agency is also important. Naila Kabeer explains agency in relation to the ability to define goals and act upon them within social and structural conditions (Kabeer). This understanding is useful for literary analysis because women in the selected novels rarely possess complete freedom. Their agency often develops within restrictions. A woman may exercise agency by speaking, refusing, writing, earning money, seeking education, leaving a relationship, creating friendships, or choosing strategic silence. The concept of violence is broadened through Johan Galtung's distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung). Direct violence may be visible in physical assault, while structural violence operates through unequal social systems. Cultural violence can make such inequalities appear normal or acceptable. This framework helps explain why violent communication should not be limited to physical abuse. A statement that repeatedly tells women that they must obey, sacrifice, or remain silent can participate in a wider structure of gendered control.

Rosenberg's concept of Nonviolent Communication provides the communication dimension of the study (Rosenberg). His approach gives importance to observation, feelings, needs, empathy, and requests instead of judgment, blame, and coercion. In literary

analysis, these principles help identify communicative relationships based on recognition and dialogue. Non-violent communication in the selected novels does not mean that characters always remain calm or avoid disagreement. A woman may strongly reject an oppressive demand while still refusing to dehumanize another person. Thus, resistance and non-violent communication can exist together. The concept of voice is developed through Spivak's discussion of subalternity (Spivak). Speaking and being heard are not identical. A socially marginalized subject may speak while dominant structures continue to define the meaning of her speech. This distinction is central to the selected novels because women frequently struggle not only to express themselves but also to establish their right to interpret their own experiences. The theoretical framework of this study therefore brings together feminist literary theory, postcolonial feminism, gender performativity, intersectionality, agency, violence studies, and communication theory. These perspectives make it possible to examine communication as a meeting point between personal relationships and larger social structures.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The study follows a qualitative interpretive research methodology based on close textual reading and comparative analysis. The selected novels are examined as literary representations of communication, conflict, gender, identity, and resistance. The purpose is not to measure the frequency of words statistically but to understand how communication contributes to the development of characters and themes. The primary corpus consists of six novels published between 2004 and 2017. Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On* provides a narrative centred on family, memory, loss, and female subjectivity (Deshpande). Manju Kapur's *Home* examines family hierarchy, education, marriage, economic dependence, and women's aspirations (Kapur). Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* connects personal identity with class, migration, colonial memory, and political conflict (Desai). Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind* brings gender

into conversation with caste, colonial history, tradition, and social change (Gokhale). Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* presents an intense account of marital control, violence, psychological domination, and the struggle of a woman to recover her identity as a writer (Kandasamy). Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* broadens the field to gender nonconformity, religion, caste, political conflict, displacement, and alternative communities (Roy). The novels were selected to provide diversity in terms of historical setting, social location, narrative method, and forms of conflict. They are not treated as representatives of every form of Indian women's writing. Instead, they provide a focused corpus through which the relationship between communication and identity can be examined in depth. The analysis pays particular attention to dialogue, internal narration, remembered conversations, storytelling, writing, silence, commands, threats, insults, negotiation, testimony, and interpersonal interaction. These communicative forms are interpreted in relation to power. The study considers whether communication expands or restricts the character's ability to define herself.

The methodology also distinguishes between direct and indirect communication. Direct communication includes spoken dialogue and explicit statements. Indirect communication includes silence, body language as narrated by the text, remembered speech, social expectations, written narratives, and internal monologue. This distinction is important because women's voices in fiction do not always appear through conventional dialogue. The analysis is comparative rather than chronological alone. Each novel is examined independently and then compared with the others. The purpose of comparison is to identify recurring patterns while preserving differences among the texts.

IV. WOMEN'S VOICES, SILENCE AND CHANGING SOCIAL IDENTITIES

One of the most important findings of the study is that women's voices cannot be reduced to the simple opposition between silence and speech. Silence may indicate oppression, but it can also

represent fear, self-protection, reflection, emotional withdrawal, or strategic choice. Similarly, speech can function as resistance but can also be used by powerful characters to control others. Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On* provides an important example of the relationship between silence and inner voice (Deshpande). The novel gives considerable attention to memory, family relationships, loss, and the internal experiences of its characters. What remains unspoken is often as significant as what is openly communicated. This creates a distinction between external silence and internal speech. A woman may not openly challenge the family, yet her internal narrative may question the values through which the family defines her. This distinction helps to understand women's agency more carefully. A woman does not become an agent only when she openly confronts authority. Reflection can be the beginning of agency. Recognition of one's own dissatisfaction can precede verbal resistance. The movement from internal awareness to external communication is therefore an important aspect of identity formation. In *Home*, Manju Kapur presents the family as both a place of belonging and a structure of authority (Kapur). The family provides emotional and economic security, but it also establishes expectations about women's behaviour. Education, marriage, sexuality, work, and family responsibility become subjects over which different generations possess different ideas. The younger female characters experience a tension between inherited expectations and new possibilities. The title *Home* itself is significant because home has multiple meanings. It can provide security and belonging, but it can also become a site of surveillance and restriction. Communication within the family reflects this duality. Older family members may communicate through instructions and expectations, while younger women increasingly seek discussion and negotiation. This change is important because negotiation represents a different form of social relationship. In a highly hierarchical family structure, communication may follow the pattern of instruction and obedience. In a changing family structure, women increasingly seek a relationship based on explanation, discussion, and mutual recognition. The transformation from obedience to

negotiation therefore represents a change in the meaning of female identity.

Education is another important part of this transformation. Education does not automatically remove patriarchy, but it can provide women with language, confidence, social networks, and opportunities to enter spaces outside the traditional family structure. It can also give women the ability to identify and describe forms of inequality that previously appeared normal. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* expands the discussion of identity beyond the immediate family (Desai). The novel brings together migration, class, colonial history, political conflict, and cultural belonging. Sai's identity develops within several competing social worlds. Her relationship with Gyan is affected not only by personal emotions but also by questions of class, ethnicity, nationalism, and political belonging. The novel demonstrates that communication between two individuals can contain the pressure of larger historical conflicts. Personal disagreements may therefore reflect social differences that extend far beyond the relationship itself. This makes communication a useful category for understanding how political and cultural identities enter everyday life. The same complexity appears in Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind* (Gokhale). The novel connects women's experiences with caste, social hierarchy, colonial history, and cultural change. Women's stories become part of a larger historical narrative. The importance of women's voices lies partly in their ability to preserve experiences that may be absent from official histories. Memory thus becomes a form of communication between generations. When a woman remembers and narrates an experience, she does more than recall the past. She gives that experience meaning and passes it to another generation. Women's narratives can therefore function as alternative historical records. The selected novels demonstrate that identity is not a fixed possession. It is created through relationships, expectations, memory, conflict, and communication. A woman may initially be identified as a daughter, wife, or mother, but these identities may later be questioned and reconstructed. This process can be understood as a movement from socially assigned identity toward self-defined identity. The movement is not

always complete or successful, and it does not necessarily involve complete separation from family or society. Instead, women negotiate the boundaries of identity within changing circumstances.

V. VIOLENT COMMUNICATION, PATRIARCHY AND CONFLICT

The analysis shows that violence in the selected novels operates at several levels. Physical violence is only one form. Language can also create fear, humiliation, dependency, and loss of autonomy. Violent communication may involve threats, insults, accusations, commands, controlling questions, emotional manipulation, sexual coercion, social humiliation, and the denial of another person's experience. When *I Hit You* provides the strongest example of this form of communication (Kandasamy). Meena Kandasamy's novel presents an abusive marriage in which the husband attempts to control the narrator's identity, relationships, writing, and personal freedom. The novel demonstrates that domination does not begin only with physical violence. It can begin with language and everyday control. The husband attempts to establish authority over the narrator's interpretation of herself. His control over her communication becomes a means of controlling her identity. She is not simply expected to behave as a wife; she is expected to accept a definition of what a wife should be. This produces a conflict between two identities. The imposed identity is that of the obedient wife, while the alternative identity is that of the independent writer and intellectual. Writing becomes important because it gives the narrator a means of recovering control over her own story. The struggle can therefore be understood as a struggle over narrative authority. If another person controls what a woman is allowed to say, write, remember, or think, that person exercises power over her identity. The narrator's writing challenges this power because it allows her to become the subject who tells the story rather than merely the object described by someone else.

The concept of violent communication also helps explain why insults and humiliation matter. Language can damage dignity even when it does

not produce visible physical injury. Repeated criticism can reduce confidence, while threats can create fear and dependence. Emotional manipulation can make a person question her own interpretation of events. This connects with Galtung's broader distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung). Physical abuse may represent direct violence, while gendered expectations can represent structural and cultural forms of violence. Communication can connect these levels because everyday language can normalize larger inequalities. In *Home*, for example, patriarchal expectations are often communicated through family practices and assumptions (Kapur). The problem is not necessarily that every statement is openly abusive. Instead, repeated expectations can communicate that women's choices are less important than family honour or tradition. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, political conflict demonstrates another form of communicative tension (Desai). Language related to ethnicity, nationalism, class, and political belonging creates divisions between characters. Personal communication becomes a place where broader political identities are expressed. The *Ministry of Utmost Happiness* similarly expands the meaning of violence beyond the family (Roy). Arundhati Roy brings together gender, caste, religion, sexuality, displacement, and political violence. The novel demonstrates that individual identities are shaped by institutions and political structures. A person's ability to live and speak freely can be affected by forces far beyond personal relationships. The novel's treatment of Anjum is particularly important for understanding changing social identities. Anjum's gender identity challenges conventional categories and demonstrates that social identity cannot always be reduced to traditional definitions of male and female (Roy). Her experience also shows that marginalized identities often face exclusion not only through physical structures but through language and social naming. The act of naming becomes important because names can recognize identity or deny it. When society refuses to recognize an individual's chosen or experienced identity, communication becomes a mechanism of exclusion. Conversely, when another person accepts and recognizes the identity of a

marginalized individual, communication can become an act of dignity. Thus, violent communication in the selected novels operates through both explicit and subtle forms of power. It may appear as physical threat, but it may also appear as social judgment, humiliation, restriction, or denial of identity.

VI. NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION, RESISTANCE AND NARRATIVE AGENCY

The selected novels also present communication as a possible means of resistance and relationship-building.

Non-violent communication should not be understood as passive or submissive communication. It may involve disagreement, refusal, protest, and difficult conversations. Its distinguishing feature is the possibility of recognition rather than domination.

Rosenberg's model emphasizes the importance of identifying observations, feelings, needs, and requests instead of relying on blame and judgment (Rosenberg). When applied to literature, this framework helps identify moments in which characters listen to one another, negotiate differences, recognize suffering, or create space for another person's voice. Women's resistance in the selected novels often begins with communication. A woman may first question a social expectation before she openly rejects it. She may privately write before she publicly tells her story. She may discuss her experience with another woman before taking action. Communication therefore becomes part of the process through which awareness becomes agency. Writing is particularly important. In *When I Hit You*, writing provides the narrator with a means of reconstructing her identity (Kandasamy). The abusive relationship attempts to reduce her identity to that of a wife, while writing allows her to recover the identity of the writer. The act of writing transforms private suffering into a narrative that can be communicated to others. Narrative agency is therefore different from physical power. A person may not immediately be able to change her external circumstances, but she may begin to change the way her experience is understood. This is an important form of resistance. In

Moving On, memory and internal narration provide similar possibilities (Deshpande). The ability to remember and interpret the past allows characters to reconsider relationships and inherited identities. Memory becomes a form of communication between the past and the present. In Things to Leave Behind, storytelling has a historical dimension (Gokhale). Women's experiences become part of the cultural memory of a community. This demonstrates that communication can resist historical disappearance. When women's experiences are recorded and narrated, they become part of the social memory. The idea of non-violent communication also helps explain the importance of supportive relationships. Not every relationship in the selected novels is based on domination. Some relationships provide listening, recognition, emotional support, and mutual understanding. These relationships create alternative possibilities for identity.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is particularly important in this respect (Roy). The novel brings together individuals who have experienced different forms of exclusion. Alternative communities emerge in which people can share memories, grief, identity, and care. Such communities demonstrate that resistance does not always need to be individual confrontation. It can also take the form of collective communication and solidarity. This is especially significant for marginalized identities. When traditional institutions refuse recognition, alternative communities can create new forms of belonging. Communication becomes a means of creating social relationships in which individuals are valued rather than controlled. The novels therefore suggest that resistance can take many forms. Speaking is one form, but writing, listening, remembering, negotiating, refusing, and building supportive relationships can also challenge dominant structures. The concept of agency becomes more meaningful when it includes these everyday actions. Kabeer's understanding of agency as the ability to define and pursue goals within social constraints is particularly relevant here (Kabeer). The women in the selected novels do not always possess unlimited freedom. Their agency develops within difficult conditions. This also explains why silence may sometimes function as resistance. A woman may remain

silent because she refuses to provide information to someone attempting to control her. She may use silence to protect herself. She may withdraw from a conversation rather than participate in an abusive exchange. Such silence is different from silence imposed through fear. At the same time, the study does not romanticize silence. Forced silence remains a significant form of oppression. The important point is that silence must be interpreted in context.

VII. COMPARATIVE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of the six novels demonstrates that women's voices are closely connected with changing social identities. Although the novels differ in setting and narrative style, they repeatedly present communication as a site where power is established, challenged, and renegotiated. In Moving On, communication is strongly connected with memory and inner life (Deshpande). The novel demonstrates that women's voices can exist within internal narration even when external speech is limited. The movement from silence toward self-recognition becomes important for understanding agency. In Home, communication is closely connected with family hierarchy and changing expectations (Kapur). The family becomes a place where traditional definitions of femininity are communicated, but it also becomes a space where younger women question those definitions. Education and personal aspiration create new forms of negotiation.

In The Inheritance of Loss, communication becomes connected with class, migration, cultural belonging, and political identity (Desai). Personal relationships are affected by historical and political tensions. The novel demonstrates that identity is not purely personal because larger social conflicts enter intimate relationships. In Things to Leave Behind, women's voices contribute to the reconstruction of history (Gokhale). Gender is connected with caste, colonialism, tradition, and social change. Women's storytelling becomes a means of preserving experiences that may otherwise disappear from dominant historical narratives. In When I Hit You, violent communication reaches its most direct and intimate form

(Kandasamy). Language is used to control the narrator's identity, while writing becomes a means of resistance. The conflict between wife and writer demonstrates how communication can become a struggle over narrative authority. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, communication extends beyond individual relationships into questions of gender identity, caste, religion, political conflict, displacement, and community (Roy). The novel demonstrates that marginalized people can create alternative spaces in which identity is recognized and shared. The comparison therefore suggests that contemporary Indian English fiction presents women's resistance as increasingly complex. Resistance is not limited to leaving the family, rejecting marriage, or directly confronting men. It can involve education, writing, memory, self-definition, friendship, negotiation, and collective action.

Another major finding is that women's identities are relational. They are formed through communication with parents, husbands, children, friends, communities, and institutions. A woman's identity may change when the relationships around her change. The study also shows that the meaning of "voice" should be expanded. Voice includes spoken language, internal thought, writing, memory, testimony, and storytelling. This broader understanding allows literary scholars to examine characters who may not appear politically outspoken but who nevertheless develop strong forms of self-definition. The relationship between violent and non-violent communication is also more complex than a simple opposition. The same character may experience both forms. A woman may face violent communication from one relationship while finding recognition in another. A character may also communicate aggressively when responding to long-term oppression. Literary analysis must therefore consider context rather than classify every angry statement as violent communication. The study further demonstrates that communication is connected with social recognition. A person can speak without being heard. A woman can tell her story without being believed. A marginalized individual can state an identity without receiving recognition from society. Therefore, meaningful voice requires not only expression but also some form of social

listening. This leads to an important conceptual distinction between speaking and having a voice. Speaking is an act of expression. Having a voice involves the social possibility of being recognized as a meaningful subject.

The selected novels show the struggle for both. The findings can therefore be summarized through a conceptual movement from socially assigned identity toward self-defined identity. Social structures first provide names and expectations. Individuals then experience conflict between these expectations and their own desires or experiences. Internal awareness develops, followed by communication, negotiation, resistance, or withdrawal. Through these processes, identity can be reconstructed. This process is not necessarily linear. Some characters move forward and backward. Some achieve only partial freedom. Some remain trapped by social structures. The importance lies not in a guaranteed final liberation but in the continuing struggle over identity and meaning. The paper consequently argues that communication should become a more central category in the study of contemporary Indian English women's fiction. Communication connects the private and public spheres. It shows how patriarchy enters everyday life and how resistance can emerge from ordinary conversations, memories, stories, and acts of self-expression.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Postmillennial Indian English fiction provides a rich field for examining the changing relationship between women's voices, communication, conflict, and social identity. The six novels examined in this study demonstrate that women's experiences cannot be understood through a simple opposition between silence and speech or between victimhood and resistance.

Communication operates as a form of social power. It can create belonging and understanding, but it can also establish hierarchy and control. Threats, insults, humiliation, commands, social judgments, emotional manipulation, and restrictive expectations can reduce women's freedom and influence their understanding of themselves. Such forms of communication are connected

with wider patriarchal, caste, class, religious, and political structures. At the same time, communication can become a means of resistance. Women's speech, writing, memory, storytelling, negotiation, and testimony provide ways of challenging imposed identities. The selected novels demonstrate that resistance does not always require direct confrontation. It can occur through education, self-expression, strategic silence, writing, supportive relationships, and collective communities. The analysis of *Moving On* shows the importance of internal voice and memory. *Home* demonstrates the tension between traditional family authority and changing female aspirations. *The Inheritance of Loss* shows how personal relationships are affected by class, migration, cultural identity, and political conflict. *Things to Leave Behind* connects women's voices with history, caste, and social transformation. *When I Hit You* presents the struggle against marital control through the conflict between imposed identity and narrative selfhood. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* expands the discussion to gender nonconformity, caste, religion, political violence, displacement, and alternative communities. Across these texts, women's identity appears as a continuing process rather than a fixed condition. Women are daughters, wives, mothers, writers, workers, lovers, migrants, political subjects, and members of marginalized communities, but these identities do not completely define them. Their voices allow them to question, modify, combine, or reject these categories.

The study also demonstrates that silence requires careful interpretation. Forced silence can be a clear sign of oppression, but strategic or protective silence can represent a form of agency. Similarly, speech does not automatically equal freedom. A woman may speak and still remain unheard. The real question is whether she has the social and narrative authority to define her own experience. The central contribution of this paper is therefore the argument that communication should be understood as a significant dimension of women's agency in Indian English fiction. Violent communication reveals how power can operate through everyday language, while non-violent and resistant communication creates possibilities for recognition, dignity, negotiation, and solidarity.

The study ultimately suggests that the transformation of women's identities in postmillennial Indian English fiction can be understood as a continuing movement between silence, awareness, expression, negotiation, resistance, and self-definition. Literature makes this process visible by allowing readers to enter the internal and external communicative worlds of characters. Women's voices in these novels are therefore not merely responses to patriarchal oppression. They are also creative acts through which women narrate their experiences, challenge inherited meanings, establish relationships, preserve memories, and imagine different forms of identity. The struggle to speak is consequently also a struggle to be recognized as the author of one's own life.

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