



# ‘The Politics of Silence’ – Silence is the strong fence around wisdom from Indu Sundaresan’s *The Splendour of Silence*

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Silence can be used to exert power, control, or resistance in various contexts. The aesthetics of silence refers to the ways in which silence can be used to create meaning, convey emotion, or challenge dominant discourses. The moral implications of silence include the consequences of remaining silent in the face of injustice or oppression. The nuances of the silence theory lies in the understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of silence and its significance in various contexts is going to be analyzed in this current article through the work of Indu Sundaresan. For the present study the novel *The Splendour of Silence* by Indu Sundaresan’s taken which was published in the year 2006.

*The Splendour of Silence* is a historical novel that explores the themes of love, identity and cultural clashes in India during World War II. The story revolves around Sam Hawthorne, a 25 year old US Army Captain, who arrives in the princely state of Rudrakot in search of his missing brother. During the time he falls in love with Mila, the daughter of the local political agent, who is already betrothed to the local prince.

**Keywords:** Silence, identity crisis, dominant discourses, multifaceted, nuances, resistance.

*The Splendour of Silence* (2006) is a historical novel by Indu Sundaresan. The novel is set against the backdrop of India’s struggle for Independence from British rule. It explores the themes of love, identity, and cultural clashes in India during World War II. The story revolves around Sam Hawthorne, a 25 year old US Army Captain, who arrives in the princely state of Rudrakot in search of his missing brother. While there, he falls in love with Mila, the daughter of the local political agent, who is already betrothed to the local prince. Sam’s mission to find his brother becomes complicated when he meets Mila, and they start a passionate affair. Meanwhile, Mila’s brother Ashok becomes involved in a nationalist plot to bomb the car of the local British representative.

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The novel explores the complexities of love and identity in a culturally diverse and tumultuous setting. Sundaresan sheds light on the cultural differences and prejudices that exist between the British colonizers and the Indian population. The story touches on the impact of World War II and the Indian Independence movement on the characters and their lives.

Silence theory, also known as the study of silence or silences studies, is an interdisciplinary field that explores the concept of silence in various contexts. Here are some key aspects of silence theory as follows:

- Silence as a Construct: Silence is not just the absence of sound or speech, but a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can be intentional, unintentional, or imposed.
- Power Dynamics: Silence can be used as a tool of power, control, or resistance, and can reflect or challenge dominant discourses and social norms.
- Communication: Silence can be a form of communication, conveying meaning and significance in various contexts, including personal relationships, social interactions, and cultural practices.
- Cultural Significance: Silence can have different meanings and significance in different cultures, and can be used to convey respect, reverence, or contemplation.

Silence theory draws on various disciplines, including:

- Philosophy: Philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have explored the concept of silence in relation to human existence, consciousness, and perception.
- Sociology: Sociologists have studied the role of silence in social interactions, power dynamics, and cultural practices.
- Literary Theory: Literary theorists have analyzed the use of silence in literature, including its role in character development, plot structure, and themes.

Some key concepts in silence theory include:

- The Politics of Silence: This refers to the ways in which silence can be used to exert power, control, or resistance in various contexts.
- The Aesthetics of Silence: This refers to the ways in which silence can be used to create meaning, convey emotion, or challenge dominant discourses.
- The Ethics of Silence: This refers to the moral implications of silence, including the consequences of remaining silent in the face of injustice or oppression.

Overall, silence theory offers a nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of silence, and its significance in various contexts. Silence theorists explore the concept of silence in various contexts, including social interactions, power dynamics, and cultural practices. Some notable silence theorists and their contributions include:

- Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann: Developed the Spiral of Silence Theory, which explains how individuals remain silent when they believe their views aren't held by the majority, driven by the fear of isolation and social exclusion.
- Cecile Malaspina: Explored the concept of noise and its relationship to silence, highlighting the importance of understanding noise as a complex information-noise relation necessary for novelty generation.
- Tal Dotan Ben-Soussan: Discussed the neurophysiology of silence, including its potential to produce states of consciousness without content and its role in sensory saturation.
- Jacques Derrida: Contributed to the concept of grammatology, which identifies relevant opposing binaries like silent thinking vs. noisy speaking and silence-noise.
- Annemarie Samuels: Researched silence in the context of anthropology, highlighting its role in shaping social, political, and subjective worlds, particularly in relation to trauma, loss, and cultural practices.
- Max Picard: Emphasized the importance of silence in understanding human existence, consciousness, and perception, noting that "silence puts humanity to the test".
- Martin Heidegger: Explored the relationship between silence, thinking, and subjectivities, arguing that silence is necessary for genuine thinking and self-discovery.
- Hannah Arendt: Discussed the role of silence in thinking and politics, highlighting the importance of silence in maintaining individual freedom and autonomy.

The above mentioned theorists offer valuable insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of silence, shedding light on its significance in various contexts, from social interactions to philosophical inquiry.

The significance of Silence in *The Splendour of Silence* are as follows:

(i) Metaphorical and Thematic Symbol: The title— 'The Splendor of Silence' —is deeply symbolic. It hints at layers of unsaid stories, withheld emotions, and truths that lie beneath the surface. The novel delves into these silences as a way to explore personal and political restraint. In fact, a reading group guide frames it this way: The 'silence' of the title is a theme that is repeated in several ways... "How does this natural silence operate as a symbol? In which sense is silence seen as a positive force, and in which negative? What ultimately is the splendor of silence?"

(ii) Character Secrets and Hidden Motives: Several characters carry deep secrets—a missing brother, forbidden romances, nationalist leanings—all of which feed into the silence that shrouds their lives. For example: Sam's quest: Searching for his missing brother Mike, Sam arrives in India burdened by unspoken motives and personal history. Mila's divided loyalties: Torn between her family, her betrothal, and her love for Sam, she embodies internal silence, unable to fully express her truth.

(iii) Societal and Emotional Underpinnings: In one vivid excerpt, a train compartment becomes a microcosm of colonial India's social tensions. The silence that stretches across the carriage—charged and restrained—mirrors broader societal transitions: "...the Rudrakot train from Palampore [...] some journeys conducted, as this one promised to be, in total silence" (SS 23).

This silence symbolizes changing power dynamics, shifting social norms, and the slow but inevitable movements toward independence.

(iv) **Literary Layers and Framing:** The novel uses silence structurally as well. It opens in 1963 with Olivia, living in Seattle, who receives a mysterious trunk and letter that “fill all the silences of her childhood” (SS 31). Through this artifact, the past speaks, breaking the silence that surrounded her family’s history.

The aspects and the role of Silence are emotionally deep; it expresses love and conflict along with personal truth. Silence in *The Splendor of Silence* isn’t emptiness – it’s loaded with meaning. It shapes character arcs, echoes historical moments, and ultimately becomes a force that must be broken to reveal what lies beneath.

The theme of silence in *The Splendor of Silence* by Indu Sundaresan is multifaceted and plays a crucial role in the narrative. Silence is woven throughout the story, symbolizing various aspects of the characters’ lives and experiences.

### **Silence as a Symbol:**

**Natural Silence:** The physical silence before a windstorm serves as a symbol, foreshadowing the turmoil that is about to unfold in the characters’ lives. This silence highlights the tension and anticipation that builds up before a significant event.

**Personal Silence:** Characters like Mila and Olivia experience silence in their personal lives, which is reflective of their inner struggles and secrets. Mila keeps her work in the Lal Bazaar a secret, while Olivia grows up with unanswered questions about her parents’ past.

### **Positive and Negative Aspects of Silence:**

**Positive:** Silence can be a source of strength and introspection, allowing characters to reflect on their thoughts and emotions. In some cases, silence is also a means of preserving dignity and honor, as seen in Mila's decision to prioritize her family’s expectations.

**Negative:** Silence can also be oppressive, leading to misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts. The lack of communication between characters can exacerbate tensions and create more problems.

### **Breaking the Silence:**

**Importance of Revelation:** The novel highlights the importance of breaking the silence and revealing secrets. When Olivia finally learns the truth about her parents’ past, it brings her a sense of closure and understanding.

**Consequences of Silence:** The story also explores the consequences of maintaining silence, particularly in the context of societal expectations and personal relationships. Mila's inability to express her feelings to Sam ultimately leads to tragic consequences.

On the whole, the theme of silence in *The Splendor of Silence* is complex and nuanced, reflecting the intricacies of human relationships and experiences. By exploring the various aspects of silence, Sundaresan creates a rich and thought-provoking narrative that invites readers to reflect on the significance of silence in their own lives.

Abbreviation:

*The Splendor of Silence* – SS

### **Works Cited:**

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