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Literary Theories

Conflict between Home and Love: A Study of Indu Sundaresan's novel *The Splendour of Silence*

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Abstract: This study analyzes Indu Sundaresan's Pre-Independence historical novel, *The Splendour of Silence*, exploring the intricate tension between familial duty ("home") and personal desire ("love") in the life of its protagonist, Mila. As an educated, progressive Indian woman, Mila is caught between the extreme pulls of traditional Indian culture—personified by patriarchal expectations and the controlling nature of internalized matriarchal structures—and the promise of individual freedom offered by her love for an American man, Sam Hawthorne. The paper examines how the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of British colonialism, detailing the pervasive racial discrimination, gender bias, and the complex nationalist sentiments of the era. Ultimately, the study highlights the modern woman's predicament of "in-betweenness," shifting between modernity and tradition, and the inevitable sacrifices made when deep-rooted cultural bondage and family loyalty supersede personal liberation.

Keywords: Identity and Displacement, Female autonomy, Post-colonialism, Indu Sundaresan, Cultural conflict.



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Indu Sundaesan is one of the post colonial writers in India. Her novel *The Splendour of Silence* explores the various issues in the relationship between Indian culture and the Western Culture.

Milana is the daughter of an Indian Political agent Raman. The family lives in Rudrakot. Milana, the eldest daughter of Raman is very much attached to her father and her two younger brothers. As a motherless daughter, she behaves in a matured, responsible manner towards her family members. Sam Hawthorne, an American visits Rudrakot in search of his missing brother Mike Ridley who has enlisted himself in the British army stationed in Rudrakot. As she happens to meet Sam, they fall in love with each other. Though Mila is engaged to another Indian Prince Jai, her heart yearns to be in the company of Sam.

The background of the novel is pre-Independent. India. Indians were agitating against the British Colonisers as every Indian wants to enjoy political freedom. Many youngsters are involved in destructive activities against British administrators. Jai, the Indian Prince took up the mission of safeguarding the Indian Youths. Jai's first wife has no option but to accept the second marriage of Jai with Mila. Mila's family leans upon Jai as he is always helpful to Mila's family. Jai's first wife tries to tame Mila by injecting patriarchal rules on the mind of Mila thus: "because you will ride a horse in the regimental maidan without fear, but he must not be made or rather feel more than he is or rather you must make him more than he is. Let him be the man" (SS317- 18). This is the definition of how to be a wife, according to Jai's first wife. She does not approve of Mila's liberal outlook and modern education. As a typical Indian wife, she behaves as a culture custodian and advises Mila to boost the male ego of Jai. Only a passive woman can promote a dominating husband. Hence she advises Mila, "If we were to behave like men, then the men would have no one to look after, no one who would help them feel protective and masculine" (SS318). Jai's wife has internalised the values of patriarchal ideology and so she cannot approve of any progressive modern woman like Mila.

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The passionate love offered by Sam cannot be resisted by Mila. Consequently she is trapped between two extreme pulls-her tradition bound family and her deep love for Sam, an American who can give her a free life without any cultural, restrictions and social taboos. She states: "On the one hand, we are taught not to be individualistic, that fealty to our parents must supersede every other want and every other need, on the other, it is quite simply the question of freedom for my people. I choose to be loyal to my father, not because I am taught so, but because I chose so" (SS 323). As a woman belonging to traditional society, she is expected to have strong roots and cultural restrictions.

In India with the advent of the spirit of Nationalism, there was longing for freedom for women also. The father of India instructed Indian women to stand up for the liberation of Mother India. Gandhi was in favour of woman's emancipation in India. But it is the tradition bound women who impose restriction on other free women. The women in the Zenana dies. eagerly look at Mila as she rides on a horse like a man. Mila speculates, " Whether out of spite because they had themselves suffered, or because of a genuine concern, it was difficult to tell" (SS 317). Mila is disgusted with the limited space which suffocates her and curtails her free movements. Though she does not find fault with Jai, Mila's heart flees to Sam whose concept of individualism is captivating and irresistible. In traditional ambience, both matriarchs and patriarchs act as powerful agents to smother the freedom of modern women. It is understood that it is a woman who robs the liberty of another woman. Matriarchs wield much power over other women in order to assert their power.

As an educated woman who wants to reform the marginalized classes in the society, Mila decides to educate the poor prostitutes living in the margins of society. A British priest requests that Mila visit the brothels and teach the women some alphabet. On one such visit, Mila was seen by Sims, a British soldier. He propagated to everyone that Mila is also a prostitute and reported it to Mila's brother, Kiran. When Kiran begins to assault Sims for this allegation. Kiran is humiliated by Sims, who pours the contents of the latrine box on Kiran's head. Though Kiran loves to be in the company of British people, he is much insulted due to the racial prejudice of British administrators. Gender discrimination exists among, British people. They cannot accept a progressive Indian woman like Milawhoas, who has social awareness and modern education.

Though there exists a genuine love between the American Sam Hawthorn and Mila the Indian woman, they are culturally different. Sam wanted to save his brother Mike Ridley from the prison, even at the cost of Ashok's life. He gives more priority to his own American identity and his brother's freedom. Mila also takes pain to safeguard her own brothers, Ashok and Kiran. When Ashok is arrested for his attempt to bomb British Colonel's car, it is Jai, the Indian who rushed to the spot to rescue Ashok from the British men's strict action against him. There is sheer selfishness in Sam's pursuit of fulfilling his mission, though Mila's family has provided much hospitality to American Sam. It is quite obvious that though Sam loves Mila sincerely, he betrays his real identity as an American while maneuvering to save his brother rather than safeguarding Ashok, the brother of Mila.

A home is a space, any individual yearns to go back. For a woman, home only protects her from women hunters and sexual abuses. As home is a basic structure in Indian culture, woman cannot desert her family and other relationships. It is the family members and relatives who offer much protection in times of danger. British people align themselves with only white men. They abhor black Indians. Though black Indians offer them much help, such kind gestures are not recognized by white men. It is due to the gender bias and racial discrimination existing in Western people. As soon as Sam's mission is finished, he leaves India. He requests Mila to accompany him to America. This offer is highly tempting and exciting for Mila, the modern Indian woman.

Moreover, such elopement with Sam to America can secure her freedom from the rigid restrictions of Indian society. She promises Sam to follow him, but she cannot fulfil her assurance as she is held up by the pathetic predicament of her family members. The tragic condition of her broken father forbids her walking out of the home boundaries. Her heart pushes her forward to drift away from her home. Yet she cannot desert her father who needs her nursing and love at home, The same bondage is traced in Sam when he shows keen interest in saving her rescuing brother in prison. Sam has to oblige his mother's order to release his brother Mike, Ridley from the prison centre. Defying Mila's warning, Sam accomplishes the task. Thus, Sam exposes his real identity as an American rather than being an Indian.

Kiran is enamored by the sophisticated life style of British soldiers and follows their Western culture, without adhering to native culture. But when his sister Mila's name is scandalized, Kiran explodes and asserts his identity as an Indian. The novelist observes that Kiran would not have experienced humiliation at the hands of British soldiers, if he had aligned himself with Indian culture and Indian friends. Indu Sundaresan has presented Mila as a character constituted of both native and Western thoughts. The free spirit of Mila cannot be accepted in the oppressive atmosphere in Indian traditional society. The American Sam offers her an escape route to the liberated ways of life. But the female culture and her womanly feelings prevent her from crossing the line of control. Her formal marriage with Jai is decided by her father, though it does not bring her any happiness. Following Mila's premature death, her blue-eyed daughter Olivia is sent to her biological father Sam Hawthorn, in order to avoid cultural conflicts in her future life. This novel explains the predicament of modern woman standing on the crossroads between modernity and tradition. This novel explores the in betweenness in the life of displaced woman and the consequent chaos and double consciousness.

According to Jean Baudrillard: “Post modernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, electricity, nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random of swirl of an empty signal”.

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