

Narrating Silence, Liminal Subjectivity, and Feminine Selfhood in *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*

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Abstract

Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, the study employs an integrated framework of Speech and Thought Presentation (STP), feminist narratology, and Daoist philosophy to explore how this novel portrays narrative consciousness, gendered interiority, liminal subjectivity, and feminine selfhood. The study, based on the stylistic model of Speech and Thought Presentation (STP), is a discussion of how Usha Priyamvada has presented Radhika's inner consciousness and emotional problems, so that the reader can see Radhika's fragmented selfhood. Furthermore, she shows the complexity and multiplicity of a woman's interiority by using Free Indirect Thought (FIT) to display adequate narration of the character's thoughts through the narrator's voice. The Daoist concept of wu wei, which means 'action without action', is used as a framework to rethink Radhika's lack of action, indecision, and emotional isolation as variations of another kind of selfhood, a selfhood that stands outside the social norms and identities. Radhika is located between India and America, tradition and modernity, belonging and estrangement, a place where she finds she is always becoming, as in the Daoist philosophy. The study also illustrates the novel's new distribution of narrative power, giving precedence to women's minds over men's voices, and thus subverting the male-dominated forms of representation. This article presents a new, interdisciplinary critical analysis of *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* that draws from the fields of stylistics, feminist narratology, and Eastern philosophy, and thus helps to advance the debate about narrative consciousness, gendered interiority, and the politics of silence in contemporary Indian fiction.

Keywords: Daoism, feminine subjectivity, free indirect thought, liminality, narrative consciousness

1. Introduction

The notion of female consciousness has occupied a central position in modern literary studies, specifically the narrative texts that discuss issues of identity, displacement, and selfhood (Xu et al., 2014; Afzal et al., 2026). The dominant trend in contemporary feminist literary criticism is a focus on the nature of women's thinking, seeing, and negotiating their experiences through the inner consciousness. Narrative techniques that depict thought and subjectivity become fundamental to the literary study as it renders supports in examining how the identity of a character is constructed within the fictional text. Narrative functions as a mode through which individuals transform lived experiences into meaningful psychological structure, thus organizing experiences and constructing the self (Bruner, 1990). Likewise, Dan P. McAdams (2001) argues that identity is a product of the individual's self-narratives. The emphasis on interiority is important in Usha Priyamvada's *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, a novel in which external activity is never emphasized, and in which the psychological conflicts of a woman are central to her life as she struggles to reconcile the various cultural expectations placed upon her.

Previous research has often seen Radhika as a woman of alienation, as she is a modern-day Indian woman trapped between Indian tradition and Western individuality. Such readings offer insights into the novel's focus on diasporic consciousness and gendered expectations, but they can sometimes narrow Radhika's experience down to a conflict between the East and the West binary. This research article offers another possible interpretation by not reading Radhika merely as an alienated woman suspended between East (India) and West (America), but as a way of thinking in-between. Priyamvada builds a mode of consciousness using the Daoist notion of betweenness¹ (Park, 2009), non-

Narrating Silence, Liminal Subjectivity, and Feminine Selfhood in *Won't You Stay*, Radhika?

attachment² (Avergonzado, 2025), fluidity, and continuous becoming³ (Dang, 2026). Exhibiting personality traits like indecisiveness, silence, and emotional withdrawal does not justify Radhika's psychological fragmentation as just a symptom, but also a liminal condition that does not allow for a fixed identity or definitive resolutions.

The study will consider this argument in the light of the Speech and Thought Presentation (STP) framework developed by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (1981; 2007) and elaborated by Elena Semino and Mick Short (2004). The STP approach allows for a systematic analysis of the representation of speech, thought, and consciousness in narratives through direct, indirect, and free direct and indirect speech and thought representation. The combination of the voice of the narrator and the voice of the character, Radhika, minimizes the distance between the outer voice and the inner voice, thus allowing intimate access to the reader in understanding the changing mind of the character, Radhika. As Dorrit Cohn (1978) notes, these methods allow fiction to depict consciousness with psychological immediacy that is not possible in the normal mode of discourse.

The research article also brings the interpretation of the novel in line with the Daoist philosophy, which has been presented in the *Dao De Jing*. Daoist philosophy includes the importance of fluidity, non-dualism, and *wu wei*, a state of being that describes not passivity, but open non-coercive action and transformation (Tzu, 1963). From this perspective, Radhika's resistance to the preordained social roles is not just a sign of indecision, but fluid subjectivity. She lives constantly in the space of negotiation, in a space that rejects strict binary and fixed oppositions in accordance with Daoist principles. Through the integrated framework of Speech and Thought Presentation (STP), Daoism, and feminist narratology, the study aims to propose a new interpretive literary model for understanding the notions of identity, consciousness, and feminine selfhood in contemporary Indian fiction.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Methodology

The present study uses a qualitative textual and interpretive approach to explore the consciousness and feminine subjectivity present in Usha Priyamvada's *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*. For the analysis of the research paper, an interdisciplinary framework is designed that integrates the Speech and Thought Presentation (STP) (Leech & Short, 1981, 2007), Daoist philosophy (Tzu, 1963), and feminist narratology (Lanser, 1992). To highlight narrative techniques that express and mediate Radhika's inner consciousness, an intensive reading of the fictional narrative, *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, is performed.

For systematic analysis of the narrative discourse in *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, the Speech and Thought Presentation model (STP), proposed by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (1981; 2007), is used as the primary stylistic tool. The paper explores the narrative techniques that the feminist writer uses to create emotional conflicts, self-reflection, and the feeling of displacement in Radhika, the female protagonist of the fiction. The effectiveness of the framework is enhanced by complementing STP with a philosophical analysis that draws upon the concepts of Daoists as explicated in the *Dao De Jing* (originally written by Lao Tzu, later translated by D.C. Lau in 1963). However, the study does not interpret Radhika's expressions of hesitation, stillness, and emotional withdrawal as alienation, but as expressions of an unending transformation, openness, and detached subjectivity. Furthermore, feminist narratology, as defined by Susan Lanser in 1992, provides a critical perspective on the politics of narrative silence and voice, and gendered inner consciousness.

The application of these strategies enables the study to move beyond the conventional reading of cultural conflict and offer the possibility of analysing the narrative as a space to express feminine consciousness. As a result, the combination of stylistic analysis, philosophical interpretation, and feminist narrative criticism illuminates the intricate interplay between thought, silence, and the formation of identity in the novel.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Speech and Thought Presentation, the Daoist philosophy, and feminist narratology can be used together to analyse *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* as a process of becoming of feminine consciousness, a fluid, liminal, and continually evolving one.

2.2.1. Speech and Thought Presentation

Speech and Thought Presentation (STP) is one of the most effective models of contemporary stylistics that has been developed to investigate the fictional presentation of speech and the consciousness of the fictional characters. The

² *Wu wei* (no action that promotes spontaneity and non-interference, allowing things to follow their natural course).

³ *Zhuangzi* (all things are seen as changing according to their own nature and environment).

model was systematically developed by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in *Style in Fiction* (1981; 2007) and is divided into a continuum of stages of narrator involvement that vary from a high level of mediation in the narration to a lower level of mediation. They are Narrative Report of Speech Acts (NRSA), Narrative Report of Thought Acts (NRTA), Indirect Speech and Thought (IS/IT), Free Indirect Speech and Thought (FIS/FIT), and Direct Speech and Thought (DS/DT).

For Leech and Short, the selection of the consciousness of a character in the novel is not simply stylistic, but ideological and reflects the level of intimacy between the reader and the character. This framework was further developed by Elena Semino and Mick Short (2004), whose corpus-based research showed that readers' perceptions of character subjectivity and narrative authority are highly affected by the modes of speech and thought presentations. They stress that the representation of thought is especially significant because it provides a privileged window into fictional characters' psychological world. The present study will concentrate mainly on Free Indirect Thought (FIT), Direct Thought (DT), and Narrative Report of Thought Acts (NRTA). FIT plays a central role in the novel because its narration combines with the consciousness of the protagonist, without the use of reporting clauses.

In *Transparent Minds* (1978), Dorrit Cohn notes that these narrative devices can render consciousness of fiction with the utmost immediacy and keep the third-person narrative perspective intact. In contrast, Direct Thought (DT) aims to duplicate a character's internal narration with little or no mediation from the narrative. Direct Thought (DT), by contrast, attempts to duplicate the character's internal narration with little or no mediation from the narrative. At the other end of the spectrum is NRTA, or the non-dramatic representation of mental activity. These modes interact with each other, creating different levels of psychological distance and intimacy, and thus a sophisticated portrayal of Radhika's inner world. In fact, in STP, the very process of consciousness becomes the central action of the narrative.

2.2.2. *Daoism and Subjectivity*

In contrast to Speech and Thought Presentation (STP), which is a stylistic approach to understanding consciousness, Daoism, the second integral component of the theoretical framework, is a conceptual approach to understanding inner consciousness. Daoism is based on the Laozi's *Dao De Jing* and the philosophical works of Zhuangzi, both of which question the notion of identity and oppose fixed dichotomies and hierarchical thinking. Rather, it is based on flow, relatedness, and the harmonious living together with the shifting dynamics of life.

The Daoist principles that apply to the present study are:

- *wu wei* ("non-action" or "effortless action"): In contrast to the literal meaning, *wu wei* is not "passive" or "inactive," but rather a way of being, of allowing something to happen that does not involve pushing or forcing.
- *hsü* (emptiness): it is more about openness, receptivity, and interior spaciousness than absence. Space allows for the change and regeneration of Daoism.
- *Yin*: Historically, it means receptivity, intuition, and the feminine subjectivity.

Daoism is founded on attributes that are typically overlooked in a patriarchy, such as silence, flexibility, and inwardness.

In addition, the study discusses the concept of liminality, which is not entirely a Daoist concept, but it is very similar to the Daoist notions of fluid becoming and the avoidance of fixed categories.

2.2.3. *Feminist Narratology*

Feminist narratology, the third component of the theoretical framework, explores how the narrative structures influence the representation of gendered experience. Theories of traditional narrative studies have been challenged by feminist narratologists like Susan Lanser (1992), Robyn Warhol, and Rita Felski, who have pointed out the ideological aspects of voice, focalization, and narrative authority, which have not been taken into account by the traditional theories.

Susan Lanser (1992) suggests that the voice of a narrative is intricately involved in structures of power and social authority. The allocation of narrative attention and interior access directly indicates power dynamics, prejudices, social inequalities, and cultural hierarchies that produced the story. Likewise, Robyn Warhol (2003) shows how the use of narrative techniques can impact readers' emotional response to women and their situations. Rita Felski (2008) also stresses the need to view literature as a place where the subjective experience of the reader and the social constructions come together.

In this context, Radhika's lack of voice is a way of being present in the story. She often does not express herself in public debate, but her inner voice remains accessible because the novel provides extended access to her inner voice, using Free Indirect Thought and other devices for presenting thought. There is, therefore, no speech, but there is plenty of thought. This reallocation of attention to the story is important because the male characters in the novel are mostly

portrayed through their actions and speech, whereas Radhika is given psychological depth and a central role in the story.

The novel thus emphasizes feminine interiority over patriarchy, making thought a space of resistance and self-definition. Feminist narratology can therefore be used to read Radhika's silence as a different form of narrative agency.

3. Free Indirect Thought and Daoist Consciousness

The integration of Free Indirect Thought (FIT), as a stylistic approach, and Daoist philosophy, as a conceptual approach, is one of the best interdisciplinary frameworks that develops a holistic understanding of Radhika's inner consciousness in the contemporary Indian fiction, *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*. The use of Free Indirect Thought (FIT) creates a liminal space where the narrator's voice becomes the representation of the characters' thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This stylistic approach aligns with the Daoist notion of identity as fluid, relational, and complex to be categorized. Unlike Western philosophy, where identity is defined as a permanent state of being, the notion of identity in Daoist philosophy is understood as a process of becoming, influenced by changing relationships and situations.

In addition, Free Indirect Thought (FIT) functions as a medium to represent the Daoist philosophy, which emphasizes the dynamics of the movement (transformation) rather than the fixity (closure). Similarly, Priyamvada's narration often switches from Radhika's external description to internal reflection, leading to a smooth flow of narration from the self to the other, from the certain to the uncertain, and from speech to thought. Moreover, Radhika's experiences are not depicted as fragmented but rather as an expression of a developing self, a sense of displacement, emotional insecurity, and cultural negotiation. The fictional text allows readers to access Radhika's ever-changing perceptions, while at the same time maintaining their indeterminacy, a condition that creates a subjectivity that refuses to be defined as belonging and identity, paving the path for a distinctly Daoist-feminist understanding of Radhika's journey.

Excerpt 3.1.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 2)

"She thought fleetingly of Dan. All that had ended so very long ago." (Priyamvada, 2023)

The effective use of Free Indirect thought (FIT) diminishes the distinction between external observation and internal reflection, exhibiting seamless transition between narrative voice and the inner consciousness of the character. This narrative technique is evident from the statement that explicitly represents Radhika's sensory perception and self-reflection, hence demonstrating the amalgamation of Radhika's memory with the present state of her consciousness.

Although the utterance begins with a reporting verb, the succeeding statement, which presents Radhika's subjective recollection, is mentioned without any authorial mediation. It enables the reader to experience the emotional weight of Radhika's memory as it surfaces in her mind.

In similar lines, the Daoist philosophy of existence is defined as a continuous process of becoming, where past and present remain interconnected, thus representing the self as a continuous evolving being. By resisting the linear notions of identity and presenting Radhika's subjectivity as dynamic, unfinished, and constantly negotiated through experience, Usha Priyamvada creates a liminal space also referred to as psychological liminality.

Excerpt 3.2.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 4)

"Radhika suddenly found it difficult to breathe. She wondered if she should ask her next question."
(Priyamvada, 2023)

Usha Priyamvada uses Free Indirect Thought (FIT) to voice Radhika's consciousness from a third-person point of view, which is also one of her own (as a narrator). Through this technique, readers can access Radhika's hesitation and uncertainty, placing consciousness as a focal point for meaning-making. The relationship between narration and thought is fluid, which reminds us of the Daoist notion of becoming — one that sees identity as a constant state of change instead of a state of being. However, when Radhika is hesitant, she finds herself in a liminal zone between speech and silence, certain and ambiguous, action and restraint. Through staying in this liminal space, the narrative suggests an ongoing process of negotiating identity, of it being always in the making, always in the process of becoming.

Excerpt 3.3.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 8)

“That night, as she was falling asleep at Akshay’s house, she thought about him. She found the two men in her family, Papa and Vinay, deeply individualistic, and to some extent selfish and ambitious.” (Priyamvada, 2023)

Usha Priyamvada applies interior narration in third-person to foreground the evaluative consciousness of Radhika, which is used to scrutinize the character of male protagonists –Radhika’s father and brother – considering her perspective as fundamental for interpretation. The novel, *Won’t You Stay, Radhika?*, does not simply narrate the incidents; rather, it focuses on Radhika’s act of continuous comparison and evaluation, and of self-positioning, thus assigning Radhika consciousness narrative authority. The Daoist viewpoint represents interiority as relational and fluid selfhood, which emerges through interaction with others, rather than from a fixed essence. Here, identity is continually negotiated and provisional, while its process of becoming shifts constantly.

Excerpt 3.4.: *Won’t You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 8)

“Radhika suddenly melted from that touch. Her nostrils flared slightly. She bit her lips. She tried to control her emotions.” (Priyamvada, 2023)

The excerpt focuses on the emotional state of Radhika, which is clearly expressed through her physical responses, rather than verbal expression. This strategy leaves desire, vulnerability, and inner conflict to be felt rather than spoken. By giving more emphasis on the gesture over speech, Usha Priyamvada captures the differences between feeling and articulation. She proposes silence as an expression of subjectivity, not its absence. The Daoist philosophy of *wu wei* reads Radhika's restraint as a conscious form of agency, the one that is rooted in self-containment, rather than passivity. Her silence is an active response, a way of being that embraces balance, inner awareness, and non-coercive involvement with experience. This results in depicting female subjectivity in a subtle but potent form of resistance, through composure instead of confrontation.

4. Gender, Interiority, and Narrative Ethics

Within the fictional realm, the authority of a speech or social visibility are not the only criterion for determining the status of a character, but rather through privileged access to the character’s consciousness. Usha Priyamvada in *Won’t You Stay, Radhika?* carefully shifts the narrative from the outward and observable behavior and voice of the men to Radhika's inner world. The novel foregrounds her thoughts, perceptions and emotional reflections, thus making them the primary site for meaning-making and ethical enquiry. The emphasis on subjective experience thus allows the reader to interpret what happens, and also helps to define the novel as a reflection on identity, relationships and selfhood.

To understand the narrative structure of the feminist text, the study employs a feminist narratology framework, a complementary addition to the existing interdisciplinary framework. Feminist narratologist Susan S. Lanser (1992) suggests a strong correlation between structures of authority and power and the narrative voice. Similarly, Robyn Warhol (2003) emphasizes how readers' responses to fictional consciousness are circumscribed by gender. Though the male characters may have more power in the social and familial spheres, their voices are comparatively weaker in Priyamvada's novel; simultaneously, Radhika's consciousness becomes the interpretive prism that guides the understanding and assessment of events. Therefore, the story foregrounds the feminine interior, an alternative to the male discursivity and representation traditionally constructed around the supremacy of speech and action in the public sphere. In the novel, the subjective consciousness of Radhika is presented as an ethical reflection that redefines the notion of narrative authority as a reflective process of the inner and outer consciousness, emphasizing the role of the female in constructing meaning.

The overall narrative structure of the fiction, *Won’t You Stay, Radhika?*, exhibits a considerable shift in the control of the narration. Though male characters, such as Akshay, Manish, and Radhika's father, are largely presented through their external observable behavior, that is, speech and actions, Radhika’s character is constantly constructed through her interior consciousness, that is, reflection, memory, hesitation, and emotional self-examination. Radhika’s personal perspectives, which are continuously emphasized, enable the reader to discover her internal struggles, emotions, and moral quandaries.

Excerpt 4.1.: *Won’t You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 4)

Narrating Silence, Liminal Subjectivity, and Feminine Selfhood in *Won't You Stay*, Radhika?

“Radhika suddenly found it difficult to breathe. She wondered if she should ask her next question.”
(Priyamvada, 2023)

The depiction of Radhika's dilemma in third-person Indirect thought is an example of Usha Priyamvada's consistent narrative technique that she adopts to present the readers a direct glimpse into the protagonist's thoughts. Rather than depicting a character through observable behaviour or overt action, the novel foregrounds the feminine subjectivity through psychological reflection and interior experience. This narrative approach validates Radhika's inner voice as a source of narrative authority, which is influenced by the distribution of voice and perspective of a text (Lanser, 1992). *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* departs from the narrative norms of patriarchy, which typically equate authority with external acts and speech, and moves towards the realm of consciousness. So Radhika's unease and introspection are as much the focus of the story as her words or actions are. Thus, the inner reading and thinking of Radhika is as much the basis of interpretation and ethics as are Radhika's words or actions.

Excerpt 4.2.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 8)

“She found the two men in her family, Papa and Vinay, deeply individualistic, and to some extent selfish and ambitious.” (Priyamvada, 2023)

In *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, Usha Priyamvada uses the narrative form to position Radhika as an active observing subject with the consciousness that becomes the fundamental source of interpretation and evaluation. In the novel, the author does not give narrative authority to the male protagonists (Radhika's father and brother); instead, scrutinizes them through Radhika's reflective perspective, simultaneously challenging the traditional gender hierarchy. It is a characteristic feature of Usha Priyamvada's approach to feminine consciousness. She uses it as a tool of ethical evaluation in which male protagonists are not producers but objects of evaluation. Significantly, the reader's perspective on the familial relationship and interpersonal dynamics is shaped by Radhika's evaluative consciousness, which presents her father and brother in ways that mirror her own. This redirection of authority transcends from the masculine social power toward the feminine subjectivity, and locates Radhika's perceptions at the center of the meaning-making process. Usha Priyamvada posits an epistemic significance for the female inner world by displacing the narrative and ethical authority from male discourse to female interpretive power.

Excerpt 4.3.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 17)

“The truth was that he could not forget that Radhika had lived openly, like a wife, with that journalist for a year, and that after that, who knows how many more there had been over the next two years ...”
(Priyamvada, 2023)

Usha Priyamvada demonstrates Akshay's consciousness sporadically throughout the novel, as presented in the excerpts. This instance reveals gendered assumptions that significantly contribute to the narrative consciousness of the fictional text.

Although Akshay receives interior representation, it is occasional as compared to Radhika's sustained consciousness. Moreover, Akshay's interior consciousness represents patriarchal conventions of judging, doubting, and policing of feminine sexuality. This technique of representation significantly highlights patriarchal attitudes towards women, evaluating them based on traditional moral standards. According to Susan Lanser (1992), narrative perspective is associated with power, which is clearly indicated through the utterance. It exposes a masculine consciousness that tries to assert authority by making assumptions about Radhika's past. However, the judgment made by Akshay is not presented as an objective truth, but as a subjective and potentially flawed perception because the novel consistently grants readers more extensive access to Radhika's interior life.

Excerpt 4.4.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 12)

““How can you do this?” asked Manish. She started at his question. ‘Do what?’” (Priyamvada, 2023)

The interaction establishes gendered politics of judgment and a psychological liminal space that defines Radhika's subjectivity.

The implicit questioning by Manish positions Radhika as a woman whose actions require justification. However, Usha Priyamvada, by recording Radhika's immediate nonverbal reaction, subtly sifts the narrative authority from masculine interrogation toward feminine experience, before presenting Radhika's verbal response. Feminist narratology explains this narrative configuration as a deliberate intention to present Radhika's subjectivity as narrative authority over Manish's judgment, thus dismissing Manish's act of accusation by Radhika's interrogating the underlying assumption, exposing the socially constructed standards to evaluate feminine choices. Simultaneously, the interaction creates a state of psychological liminality, where Radhika is viewed in a productive state of becoming rather than in a static state of being, struggling between compliance and resistance, belonging and autonomy, social expectation and self-definition.

5. Silence as Resistance and Daoist Consciousness (*wu wei*)

Radhika's use of the silent is a major aspect of her personality that she uses as feminist resistance against patriarchal suppression. While her social space demands compliance, confession, and emotional transparency, she chooses to stay silent at crucial moments, thus refusing to respond to the queries of her family and romantic partners. This is not a passive silence but rather a positive means of self-affirmation. Usha Priyamvada strategically portrays feminine silence not as oppression but as a potent statement of agency and self-determination.

These moments can be productively understood as *wu wei* (action through non-action) – the Daoist approach, one that values restraint, non-coercion, non-directness of agency, over confrontation. By not expressing her emotions or explaining her decisions immediately, Radhika allows herself to remain independent in a context that tries to explain and control her identity. Radhika defies patriarchy by remaining silent and not performing her part as expected by society, thus creating a discourse of resistance against patriarchy.

Excerpt 5.1.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 11)

“‘Truly, Radhika, you made everyone so upset.’ ‘And what of the shock he gave me?’ retorted Radhika, her voice quavering.” (Priyamvada, 2023)

This conversation illustrates the gendered dynamics of social judgment that are prevalent throughout the novel. The accusation levelled at Radhika demands her taking responsibility for the entire emotional burden involved in the matter; whereas, Radhika's suffering and pain are either marginalized or ignored. Radhika, by questioning the non-mentioning of her suffering in the familial conversation, briefly disrupts a discourse that values the collective over the individual female experience. Radhika's response to the unfair expectations she has faced for keeping social and familial peace and harmony over her own emotional suffering is a challenge to the male-dominated norms of her society. The “quavering” sound in her voice also highlights the challenge of asserting resistance against a patriarchal society. Remarkably, in *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, such moments of direct verbal opposition occur only in exceptional instances. However, this is a short burst of voice in a conflict that is often dealt with silence, withdrawal, and non-disclosure, making this declaration all the more revealing for Radhika. The uniqueness of her experiences evokes the need to know that these experiences are unspeakable, not because they are unimportant, but because social structures limit their opportunities for expression. In the novel, this conversation is significant in terms of the general pattern of strategic silence, as speech and silence appear to exist in a dialectical relationship that is continually present. Radhika's voicing of challenge reflects the injustice of patriarchal judgements, and her silences are also acts of agency that reject those systems which call women to account for their actions, but ignore the suffering they cause. This engagement of voice and silence brings the complicated dynamics of resistance, subjectivity, and feminine agency to the fore.

Excerpt 5.2.: *Won't You Stay, Radhika?* (Chapter 22)

“Manish ... tried to reach out and touch her shoulders, but she moved away, murmuring, ‘Darbaan is standing right over there.’” (Priyamvada, 2023)

Through verbal and nonverbal exchange, in this episode of *Won't You Stay, Radhika?*, Usha Priyamvada reveals Radhika's choice of expressing resistance implicitly to avoid confrontation. Though the remark is short and insignificant, it does not outright refuse Manish's offer; instead, it is a way to redirect the interaction, to set and protect Radhika's personal boundaries. This response highlights a complex model of agency, one that is sensitive to the dynamics of women's agency in socially limited contexts. By mentioning the watchman, Radhika strategically manages her distance from Manish and indirectly refuses him, showing how resistance is not only about opposition

Narrating Silence, Liminal Subjectivity, and Feminine Selfhood in *Won't You Stay*, Radhika?

but also about negotiation. This moment is one of the best examples of *wu wei* (non-coercive action) and autonomy (non-confrontation) within the Daoist sphere of thought. Manish does not try to push his way through to Radhika, nor is she passively accepting his advances; instead, she reclaims control through a subtle, measured withdrawal, one that doesn't just prove themselves to be the right move, but gives her back her freedom and agency in the situation as well. Usha Priyamvada, therefore, portrays feminine subjectivity as equal to power in its capacity to restrain, to be strategic, to stand back and say, "No".

Excerpt 5.3.: *Won't You Stay*, Radhika? (Chapter 23)

"No, Papa I want to leave. Manish...a friend of mine...' she stopped mid-sentence." (Priyamvada, 2023)

The incomplete utterance and extended silence exemplify Radhika's resistance against her father, a patriarchal figure, who seeks an explanation about Radhika's choice to settle in India. The act of non-disclosure allows silence to be a form of self-determination, helping Radhika to keep her personal life to herself and to resist the external demand of justification regarding her relationship with Manish. This act of Radhika calls into question patriarchal notions according to which a daughter's choices and private life need to be made accessible to her family. Most importantly, the unfinished speech leaves a space or a lacuna for a narration, and emphasizes that even silence is a valuable message. Silence was not an indication of weakness or lack of ability but rather of autonomy, as Radhika refused to be held accountable. This moment is representative of the Daoist principle of *wu wei*, which is often translated as non-action; however, here it symbolizes being silent as one of the most powerful ways of being active. By refusing to talk, Radhika serves to disrupt the hierarchy that attempts to control her identity and choices. Her silence, therefore, is more expressive than her argument; it is not for the purpose of confronting patriarchy, but rather for actively challenging it.

Excerpt: 5.4.: *Won't You Stay*, Radhika? (Chapter 23)

"Radhika suddenly melted from that touch. Her nostrils flared slightly. She bit her lips. She tried to control her emotions." (Priyamvada, 2023)

The extract emphasizes Radhika's feelings instead of her verbal expressions. The deliberate technique of Free Indirect Thought (FIT) allows Usha Priyamvada to express Radhika's emotions via a series of carefully orchestrated bodily reactions, all while revealing her vulnerability and self-restraint. The shift from speech to nonverbal expression allows the narrative to reflect the complexities of Radhika's inner consciousness – her desire, her conflict and her emotional uncertainty – and demonstrates that these emotions are still controlled through conscious self-control. Thus, silence becomes an effective tool of expression, where depth of emotion is conveyed without explicit revelation. From a Daoist perspective, *wu wei*, the idea of not doing, is the silent stance of self-mastery. She is emotionally impacted but restricting her outbursts, repressing expression as a form of agency. In response, she demonstrates a Daoist awareness that strength comes from balance, composure, and inner awareness, not from confrontation or force. Restraining from reacting openly foregrounds feminine subjectivity as having a certain strength of resistance, in which silence and self-control are loci of autonomy and power.

Free Indirect Thought (FIT) is one of the most important strategy employed by Usha Priyamvada in the narration of *Won't You Stay*, Radhika?. It helps in revealing how Priyamvada creates an active arena for silence, and how the feminine subjectivity is re-imagined as a process of becoming. More than alienation, the novel provides a complex consideration of consciousness. Through strategic application of Free Indirect Thought (FIT), Usha Priyamvada develops a distinct Daoist narrative consciousness in which identity is understood as fluid (becoming) rather than stable (being). Radhika inhabits a Daoist liminal space where identity remains fluid, unresolved, and open to becoming. The fictional text, *Won't You Stay*, Radhika?, contributes to the transformation of silence from a symbol of patriarchal victimhood to a narrative mode of feminine self-exploration. The novel thus redefines feminine subjectivity not through action or speech but through interior movement, uncertainty, and contemplative resistance.

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