

Silence and Subjugated Personal Loss: A Feminist Reading of Raam Mori's 'Twenty-First Tiffin'

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Paper Received on 20-11-2025, Accepted on 29-12-2025
Published on 31-12-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.4.653

Abstract

The contemporary landscape of Indian Writings in English Translation has increasingly drawn attention to the subtleties of everyday lives in regional settings. Raam Mori, a young Gujarati writer, engages with rural life, its understated textures, and the silent emotions of its people. This paper offers a feminist reading of Raam Mori's short story, *Twenty-First Tiffin*, translated from the original Gujarati. It argues that the central theme is not merely a transient emotional state but a profound and multi-layered exploration of personal loss as a sustained condition of female existence within a patriarchal domestic space.

Drawing upon feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, and subaltern studies—particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Elaine Showalter, Judith Butler, and Tillie Olsen—the paper argues that silence in the narrative is not merely a sign of oppression but a complex space of endurance, negotiation, and latent agency. Furthermore, the protagonist's personal losses are shown to be structurally produced rather than individually contingent, reflecting broader gendered injustices embedded within social, cultural, and economic systems. By foregrounding quiet resistance and interior transformation rather than overt rebellion, *Twenty-First Tiffin* expands feminist understandings of agency, loss, and voice in Indian regional literature.

Keywords: Identity, silence, subjugated loss, feminism, interior realism

Indian Writings in English Translation is a field which has gained unprecedented growth and critical acclaim, especially in the literary scenario of the twenty-first century. Recent years have seen a significant surge in the global

prominence of translated regional literature, marked by increased publishing efforts from major houses and a growing international readership interested in non-Western narratives. This movement challenges the long-standing dominance of the English-language canon within India itself and celebrates the rich multilingual literary wealth of the subcontinent. Works originally written in languages such as Malayalam, Bengali, and Gujarati are now finding new audiences who appreciate their authentic engagement with universal themes through a uniquely Indian cultural lens.

The contemporary landscape of Indian Writings in English Translation has increasingly drawn attention to the subtleties of everyday lives in regional settings. Raam Mori, a young Gujarati writer, engages with rural life, its understated textures, and the silent emotions of its people. His short story *Twenty-First Tiffin* becomes a poignant narrative of personal loss, situated at the intersection of familial duty, unexpressed love, and the inevitability of change. Through the metaphor of the tiffin—a container of sustenance and routine—the story unfolds as an exploration of memory, absence, and the quiet ache of separation.

Raam Mori (born 1993) is a notable figure in this contemporary literary movement. A Gujarati short story writer and screenwriter, Mori has gained recognition for stories often centred around women of rural Saurashtra. His short story collection *Mahotu* won the Sahitya Akademi's Yuva Puraskar in 2017. *Twenty-First Tiffin*, a story from this collection, has also been adapted into a critically acclaimed film, further attesting to its powerful and relatable themes. The story narrates the life of a woman engaged in running a tiffin service—a form of informal, feminised labour that sustains households while remaining largely invisible. It becomes an evocative site for feminist analysis, foregrounding how women negotiate survival, dignity, and identity within restrictive socio-cultural frameworks.

Drawing on textual evidence from the short story and situating it within contemporary Indian literary discourse, this paper demonstrates how Mori's work contributes to an emerging feminist discourse of *interior realism*. Silence becomes an aesthetic choice that aligns with feminist efforts to represent marginalised subjectivities without appropriation or sensationalism.

Silence, Loss, and Feminist Frameworks

Silence—whether imposed, internalised, or strategically adopted—has been interpreted as both a symptom of patriarchal oppression and a site of complex resistance. In Indian regional literature, silence often emerges as a lived reality for women whose voices are marginalised by caste, class, gender, and economic precarity. This paper argues that the protagonist's silence is not a passive absence of

voice but a condition produced by structural inequalities and gendered expectations. Simultaneously, her personal losses—economic insecurity, emotional deprivation, and social invisibility—are not individual failures but consequences of systemic patriarchy.

Neetal's mother perceives her life as reduced to a "tiffin-shiffin business," describing herself as "stale as the leftovers." The cycle of preparing the twenty-first tiffin becomes a symbol of the continuous erosion of her individuality. Her identity is subsumed by domestic labour, reflected in her "flat," "expressionless" face and "dry and empty" eyes. This condition is longstanding, as Neetal observes that her mother "has been like this from the beginning."

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" provides a crucial framework for understanding this silencing. Subaltern women, Spivak argues, are doubly muted—by patriarchy and socio-economic structures. Silence in *Twenty-First Tiffin* operates across social, economic, emotional, and narrative registers.

The tiffin service functions as a metaphor for invisible labour. Feminist economists have long argued that domestic and care work remains undervalued. In the story, the protagonist's labour sustains others while offering her minimal recognition. Her losses—economic instability, emotional neglect, erosion of self-worth, and social marginalisation—remain ungrieved, aligning with Butler's concept of ungrievable lives.

Recognition, Transformation, and Fragile Agency

Mori's restrained narrative avoids sentimentalisation. Loss is woven into routine, reinforcing its structural nature. Tillie Olsen's *Silences* further contextualises how economic deprivation and domestic responsibility mute women's lives. Elaine Showalter's concept of women as a "muted group" underscores how silence is culturally imposed rather than natural.

The narrative's turning point arrives with Dhruv Majumdar's request for the twenty-first tiffin. His recognition of the mother's skill initiates a subtle transformation. Her blushing, laughter, and renewed attention to appearance signal a reclaimed sense of dignity. These changes—dyed hair, matching bindi, carefully prepared food—represent quiet acts of self-affirmation rather than rebellion. However, Dhruv's departure reinstates loss. The mother's transformation reverses, revealing how deeply her self-worth depended on external validation. The story offers not liberation but a fleeting reprieve, underscoring the entrenched nature of her subjugation.

Neetal's perspective also transforms. Her final realisation marks the end of innocence as she recognises her mother's shared grief and silent suffering. The father remains emotionally absent, symbolising a masculinity that equates financial provision with relational responsibility, thereby perpetuating domestic collapse.

Conclusion

Raam Mori's *Twenty-First Tiffin* offers a compelling feminist narrative that foregrounds silence and subjugated personal loss as central features of women's lived experience. Silence emerges as both imposed and transformative, a space where agency is reimagined. Personal loss is shown to be structurally produced and gendered rather than incidental. By privileging endurance, interiority, and subtle transformation, the story expands feminist literary discourse and challenges dominant paradigms of resistance and voice.

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