

Resignation As Resistance: Re-Reading Silence in Select South Asian Women's Poetry

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Abstract: This article re-examines the critical tendency to interpret silence and resignation in women's poetry as signs of passivity or ideological defeat. Through a comparative reading of Eunice de Souza, Gauri Deshpande, and Imtiaz Dharker, the study argues that what appears as emotional withdrawal or acquiescence often functions as a subtle mode of resistance within gendered structures of power. Rather than treating speech as the sole indicator of agency, the paper explores how muted irony, strategic reticence, and interiorized dissent become forms of negotiation in intimate, domestic, and religious spaces. Drawing upon feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks, the essay situates these poets within late twentieth-century South Asian contexts where overt rebellion is frequently constrained. De Souza's restrained irony, Deshpande's inward questioning, and Dharker's engagement with faith and embodiment reveal a poetics of withheld speech that unsettles normative expectations of feminine expressivity. Silence in these works emerges not as absence but as a charged and affective presence that registers structural constraint while tactically evading it. By foregrounding alienation and resentment as affective forces, this study reconceptualizes resignation as a politically nuanced modality of survival and resistance.

Keywords: *Silence, Constrained Agency, Affective Economies, South Asian Women Poets, Gendered Subjectivity, Postcolonial Feminist Criticism.*

Introduction

Silence in women's writing has long occupied a fraught and contested position within feminist literary criticism. Traditionally, silence has been interpreted as the mark of patriarchal repression, a symptom of internalized subordination, or an index of denied subjectivity. Emotional withdrawal, resignation, and tonal restraint have therefore frequently been read as evidence of defeat rather than as complex literary strategies. Within dominant feminist paradigms, resistance has been closely aligned with articulation. To speak has been understood as to claim visibility, to narrate experience, and to assert agency against structures of silencing. This framework has been historically indispensable, particularly in contexts where women's voices were systematically erased from literary and intellectual discourse. However, the privileging of speech as the primary marker of emancipation risks consolidating a binary in which voice signifies liberation and silence signifies passivity. Such a binary may obscure the more subtle ways in which power regulates not only who may speak, but how emotion, tone, and expression are structured within social hierarchies.

If power operates not merely through prohibition but through the shaping of affective norms, then silence cannot be reduced to absence. It may instead constitute a reconfiguration of agency within constraint. The regulation of emotional expression is central to the maintenance of gendered authority. Women are frequently expected to perform emotional legibility through nurturance, reconciliation, moral endurance, or moderated dissent. Even anger, when permitted, is often expected to appear controlled and intelligible within acceptable social scripts. In such contexts, refusal to dramatize emotion, reluctance to confess, and tonal minimalism may function as disruptions of affective expectation. Silence may thus operate not as surrender, but as a recalibration of presence.



This article argues that in the poetry of Eunice de Souza, Gauri Deshpande, and Imtiaz Dharker, resignation emerges as a subtle and affectively charged mode of resistance. Rather than dramatizing overt protest, these poets cultivate an economy of expression marked by irony, restraint, and emotional compression. Their poetic speakers frequently appear detached, reflective, or quietly resentful. Yet this apparent restraint encodes critique. The refusal to heighten emotion, the strategic withholding of confession, and the measured articulation of alienation together unsettle patriarchal expectations regarding feminine expressivity. Through comparative analysis, this study proposes that silence in these poetic works operates as an aesthetic strategy that both registers structural limitation and unsettles it from within.

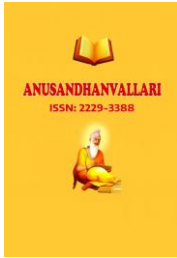
Feminist literary criticism has long foregrounded the recovery of suppressed female voices. From early consciousness-raising movements to poststructuralist engagements with *écriture féminine*, articulation has been aligned with empowerment. While these interventions remain foundational, they sometimes assume that agency is synonymous with audibility. Contemporary theoretical developments complicate this assumption. Sara Ahmed's formulation of affective economies demonstrates how emotions circulate socially and attach bodies to norms, shaping what can be expressed and by whom. Emotional life is not purely interior but socially organized. Within such affective regimes, women are often interpellated into recognizable emotional roles that stabilize patriarchal structures. Silence in this context may interrupt the circulation of expected feeling by refusing to supply the affective cues that sustain normative relationships.

Judith Butler's account of agency as constituted within power further illuminates the interpretive stakes of resignation. Agency does not stand outside normative structures but emerges through their reiteration and potential resignification. The repetition of gendered norms may open fissures within those very norms. Resignation, therefore, need not imply passive endurance. It may represent a refusal to engage on terms dictated by dominant frameworks of recognition. By declining spectacular protest or sentimental confession, the poetic subject may withhold compliance while avoiding overt confrontation. Such gestures complicate conventional understandings of resistance by foregrounding micro-political negotiations rather than revolutionary rupture.

The socio-cultural contexts from which de Souza, Deshpande, and Dharker write intensify the politics of silence. South Asian women's subjectivities are shaped by intersecting structures of religion, domesticity, urban middle-class respectability, colonial histories, and transnational migration. Within these contexts, speech is mediated by expectations of propriety and communal belonging. Public dissent may carry personal and social costs. Silence, therefore, becomes a terrain of negotiation rather than a simple absence of voice. It allows for oblique articulation, ironic distancing, and emotional understatement within intimate and domestic spaces. The private sphere, often idealized as apolitical, emerges as a site where affective micro-politics unfold.

In the work of Eunice de Souza, caustic minimalism destabilizes romanticized constructions of femininity within Catholic and urban middle-class milieus. Her compressed lines and sharp tonal shifts expose the moral hypocrisies embedded within familial and religious authority. Emotional withholding becomes a refusal to participate in sentimental narratives of female suffering. The speaker's ironic detachment denies readers the comfort of cathartic identification, thereby unsettling expectations of feminine transparency.

Gauri Deshpande's poetry, by contrast, frequently inhabits interior spaces of relational fatigue and quiet reflection. Resentment appears not as explosive anger but as measured awareness. Domestic conversation, casual exchange, and seemingly mundane detail carry undercurrents of emotional history. The refusal to dramatize conflict does not signal reconciliation; rather, it reveals the subtle endurance of structural imbalance. Silence here operates as shared knowledge among women, a coded language that resists patriarchal mediation.



Imtiaz Dharker's transnational poetics further complicate the dynamics of visibility and restraint. Negotiating questions of faith, migration, and gendered embodiment, Dharker's spare imagery and spatial metaphors articulate the tensions between belonging and estrangement. Silence in her work often signals both vulnerability and defiance, particularly within religious contexts where female speech is heavily regulated. Her restrained tonalities resist spectacle while exposing the fragility of imposed boundaries.

Across these varied articulations, resignation crystallizes into reflective distance. Alienation and resentment do not culminate in despair; instead, they produce a reorientation of subjectivity. The poetic speakers neither fully comply with normative scripts nor adopt explicitly insurgent positions. They inhabit an intermediate space that unsettles patriarchal legibility without seeking immediate validation. Such positioning resonates with postcolonial feminist critiques of universalist models of agency that assume transparent self-expression as the endpoint of emancipation. Silence, when read through this lens, becomes a deliberate modulation of presence.

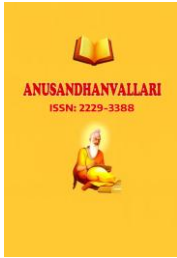
By situating South Asian women's poetry within conversations in feminist theory, affect studies, and postcolonial critique, this article expands the conceptual vocabulary of resistance beyond overt speech acts. It foregrounds the aesthetic and affective strategies through which agency persists in constrained environments. Rather than equating empowerment with volume, the study attends to tonal economy, ironic compression, and emotional restraint as politically meaningful practices. In doing so, it proposes that resignation in these poetic works constitutes not a capitulation to power but a nuanced mode of inhabiting its limits. Silence emerges as an embodied aesthetic through which the subject negotiates visibility, recognition, and survival within the ordinary textures of lived experience.

Eunice de Souza — Resignation as Ironic Resistance

In the poetry of Eunice de Souza, silence rarely appears as absence; it manifests instead as tonal restraint, ironic understatement, and emotional economy. Her poems do not dramatize rebellion, nor do they indulge in confessional excess. Instead, they cultivate a sharp minimalism that exposes the structures of gender, religion, and domestic authority through withholding. Resignation in de Souza's work is not surrender but a calculated refusal to perform emotional legibility.

In "*Advice to Women*," the speaker offers what initially appears to be flippant counsel: "Keep cats / if you want to learn to cope with / the otherness of lovers." The poem's surface humour conceals a deeper affective critique. The comparison between lovers and cats destabilizes romantic intimacy by foregrounding distance, unpredictability, and self-containment. The line "Otherness is not always neglect" introduces a quiet recognition of relational asymmetry. Rather than protest abandonment, the speaker reframes it as structural. The closing line—"That stare of perpetual surprise / in those great green eyes / will teach you / to die alone"—is delivered without melodrama. The emotional flatness intensifies its impact. The inevitability of solitude is not resisted; it is acknowledged with almost clinical calm. This tonal restraint becomes the poem's most powerful gesture. By refusing overt anguish, the speaker denies the expectation that women must dramatize emotional injury. Resignation here operates as ironic clarity.

A similar strategy unfolds in "*Catholic Mother*." The poem stages a patriarchal tableau structured around religious authority and reproductive pride. The father is celebrated as "Father of the year," the "Pillar of the Church," and the smiling patriarch of a "Lovely Catholic Family." Institutional voices—the parish priest and Mother Superior—reinforce his symbolic stature. Yet the final line abruptly isolates the mother: "the pillar's wife / says nothing." The silence attributed to her is not accidental. It stands in stark contrast to the excessive speech surrounding her. The poem does not describe her suffering; it does not supply interior monologue. Instead, it leaves a gap. That gap is accusatory. Her muteness becomes a counterpoint to institutional verbosity. The poem's economy—its refusal to elaborate—renders her silence heavy with critique. Rather than speaking within the patriarchal script,



she withdraws from it. This withdrawal unsettles the celebratory narrative, exposing the cost of reproductive and religious conformity without declarative condemnation.

In *“Marriages Are Made,”* de Souza sharpens her ironic detachment further. The poem catalogues the invasive scrutiny imposed upon a prospective bride: her family history examined “for T.B. and madness,” her father’s solvency verified, her body inspected for defects, even her “stools” checked for the “possible / non-Brahmin worm.” The clinical absurdity of this list converts matrimonial arrangement into bureaucratic surveillance. Yet the tone remains measured, almost reportorial. There is no exclamation, no explicit outrage. The critique emerges through accumulation and precision. By presenting these humiliations in an emotionally restrained register, the poem exposes the violence embedded in normalization. The final description of her complexion being “just about / the right shade / of rightness” compresses caste, colourism, and patriarchal desirability into a single ironic phrase. Resignation appears here not as compliance but as a stylistic flattening that mirrors the dehumanization being described. The poem does not scream; it observes. That observational distance becomes its resistance.

Across these poems, de Souza’s minimalism performs what may be termed affective refusal. The speakers do not seek catharsis. They neither plead nor revolt spectacularly. Instead, they withhold emotional excess. This withholding disrupts the patriarchal demand that women render their pain narratively consumable. In many cultural contexts, female suffering becomes legible only when expressed through confession or spectacle. De Souza resists that script. Her irony cools emotion into sharp edges; her brevity prevents sentimental reconciliation. The result is a poetics of resignation that does not collapse into despair. Rather, it cultivates critical distance.

Importantly, this resignation does not erase awareness. On the contrary, it presupposes it. The speakers recognize the inevitability of solitude, the coercion of religious morality, the surveillance embedded in marriage. Yet recognition does not lead to rhetorical explosion. It leads to tonal containment. Such containment destabilizes normative femininity, which often demands emotional availability and expressive warmth. By presenting female subjects who neither console nor dramatize, de Souza reconfigures agency as interior clarity rather than outward declaration.

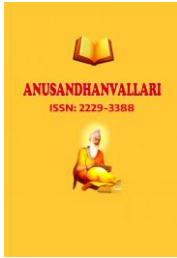
Thus, in de Souza’s poetry, silence functions not as erasure but as pressure. The unspoken reverberates against institutional noise. Resignation becomes a stylistic stance—ironic, compressed, and unsentimental—through which the poem refuses to collaborate with the very structures it critiques. In this sense, de Souza’s work exemplifies how muted expression can unsettle patriarchal authority more effectively than overt protest. The resistance lies not in raised volume but in calibrated withdrawal.

Gauri Deshpande — Resignation and Intimate Female Solidarity in *“The Female of the Species”*

In *“The Female of the Species,”* Gauri Deshpande constructs resignation not as defeat but as emotional discernment. Unlike overtly confrontational feminist poetics, this poem does not dramatize conflict between men and women. Instead, it stages a quiet reorientation of speech — a redistribution of intimacy. Through tonal restraint, domestic imagery, and indirect articulation, Deshpande reveals how women negotiate emotional survival within structures that render certain conversations impossible.

The poem begins with an intimate admission: “Sometimes, / You want to talk about / Love and despair and the ungratefulness of children.” The subjects invoked here are deeply personal — love, despair, motherhood — and immediately situate the speaker within relational and domestic contexts. Yet this desire for articulation is abruptly interrupted: “A man is no use whatever then.” The stark simplicity of this line carries enormous weight. It does not accuse; it does not rage. It merely concludes. The phrase “no use whatever” suggests recognition rather than resentment. The male figure is not violent, not cruel — simply inadequate to a certain emotional register.

This understated dismissal is significant. Instead of engaging in confrontation, the speaker withdraws expectation. Resignation here is not submission; it is recalibration. Emotional labour will not be expended where it cannot be



received. The poem then turns toward an alternative affective network: “You want then, / Your mother, / Or, sister / Or, the girl with whom you went through school.” The repetition of “or” creates an expanding circle of female intimacy across time. These figures represent continuity — childhood, adolescence, adulthood. The poem does not romanticize them; it simply lists them. The ordinariness of the listing is itself meaningful. Solidarity is presented not as ideological alliance but as experiential familiarity.

The inclusion of “your first love, / And her first child—a girl, / And your second” introduces generational layering. The specification “a girl” is particularly resonant. Female continuity is foregrounded without commentary. Emotional knowledge travels through shared gendered experience. The poem quietly suggests that certain affective truths are transmitted relationally rather than explained discursively. The scene that follows is almost disarmingly mundane: “You sit with them and talk. / She sews / And you sit, / and sip.” The verbs are gentle and repetitive — sit, sew, sip. Domestic stillness replaces emotional intensity. The act of sewing carries traditional connotations of feminine labor, yet here it becomes a backdrop for communion rather than confinement. The poem’s pacing slows through its line breaks, enacting the calm rhythm of shared presence.

It is in the apparent triviality of the conversation that Deshpande’s subtlety becomes most pronounced: “And speak of the rate of rice / And the price of tea, / And the scarcity of cheese.” These topics seem banal, economic, practical. Yet the poem’s closing movement reframes them: “You both know / That you’ve spoken / Of love and despair / And ungrateful children.”

The emotional subjects introduced at the beginning are never explicitly revisited in speech. Instead, they are displaced into everyday language. The phrase “You both know” signals a shared epistemology. Communication operates through implication, through coded exchange. What cannot be directly articulated is nonetheless understood. Resignation, therefore, becomes a form of strategic indirection. Rather than demanding acknowledgment from someone “of no use whatever,” the speaker relocates her emotional discourse to a space where it requires no explanation.

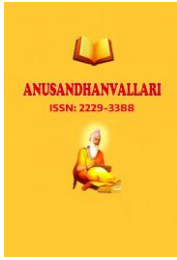
Importantly, the poem does not depict dramatic rupture with men. It depicts selective intimacy. The male figure is excluded not through confrontation but through quiet recognition of limitation. The women, by contrast, share a language that transcends literal speech. The conversation about rice and tea becomes a vehicle for articulating “love and despair.” Emotional density resides beneath surface banality.

Deshpande’s tonal restraint is central to this politics. There is no overt anger, no rhetorical flourish. The poem resists spectacle. This resistance to dramatization itself challenges dominant expectations that female dissatisfaction must appear either hysterical or heroic to be meaningful. Instead, Deshpande locates agency in composure. The speaker neither pleads nor protests; she chooses her audience.

The title, “*The Female of the Species*,” acquires irony in this context. Rather than invoking biological determinism, the poem exposes the social patterning of emotional exchange. The “species” is not defined by instinct but by shared codes of communication forged within gendered experience. The female community becomes a space where emotional articulation does not require translation.

Thus, resignation in this poem is not surrender to patriarchal inadequacy. It is the recognition that certain relational structures cannot sustain particular forms of vulnerability. The speaker withdraws expectation and redistributes intimacy. This redistribution is quiet, but it is decisive.

Through plain diction, controlled pacing, and domestic imagery, Deshpande crafts a poetics of interior resistance. The emotional conversation that the poem withholds from male presence unfolds fully within female solidarity. Silence, here, is not absence. It is shared knowledge. It is the unspoken recognition that beneath talk of rice and tea lie entire histories of love, despair, and maternal fatigue. In refusing spectacle and centering mutual



understanding, *“The Female of the Species”* demonstrates that resistance may operate through emotional discernment rather than confrontation. The poem’s power lies in its quiet certainty: some conversations belong elsewhere. And in that elsewhere, resignation becomes strength.

Imtiaz Dharker — Veiling, Surveillance, and the Politics of Internalized Restraint in *“Purdah”*

In *“Purdah”*, Imtiaz Dharker transforms the veil from a merely religious or cultural marker into a layered metaphor for internalized discipline, surveillance, and fractured female subjectivity. Unlike overtly confrontational feminist poetry, *“Purdah”* traces how constraint becomes embodied, how shame is learned, and how resignation operates not as simple compliance but as a survival strategy within gendered and religious structures.

The poem opens with initiation into shame: “One day they said she was old enough to learn some shame. / She found it came quite naturally.” The passive construction — “they said” — immediately situates authority outside the girl’s agency. Shame is not self-generated; it is instructed. Yet the second line complicates this by stating that it “came quite naturally.” The irony here is crucial. What appears natural is socially produced. The poem exposes how discipline becomes internalized to the point where it feels innate.

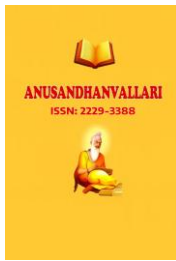
Dharker deepens this metaphor through striking imagery: “Purdah is a kind of safety. / The body finds a place to hide.” The veil is framed ambiguously — both protective and restrictive. Safety is offered, but at the cost of visibility. The comparison that follows intensifies the tension: “The cloth fans out against the skin / much like the earth falls / on coffins after they put the dead men in.” The association between cloth and burial collapses safety into suffocation. The veil becomes both shelter and symbolic grave. Resignation begins here — not as overt submission, but as bodily accommodation to enclosure.

As the poem progresses, perception itself becomes distorted: “People she has known / stand up, sit down as they have always done. / But they make different angles / in the light, their eyes aslant, / a little sly.” Familiar figures become watchful. Surveillance enters the everyday. The gaze is no longer neutral; it is angled, suspicious. The external world shifts once the body is veiled. Resignation here operates as hyper-awareness — a consciousness of being seen differently. The psychological fragmentation of the speaker intensifies: “She stands outside herself, / sometimes in all four corners of a room.” This striking image suggests dissociation. The self-splits under pressure. Identity is no longer singular but dispersed. The metaphor that follows — “as if she were a clod of earth / and the roots as well” — reinforces entrapment. The body becomes soil and entanglement simultaneously. Constraint is both external and internal.

In the second movement of the poem, religious atmosphere thickens the sense of structure and repetition. The call of “Allah-u-Akbar” “breaks its back / across the tenements.” The sonic violence implied by “breaks its back” complicates devotional serenity. Faith here is not dismissed, but its weight is palpable. The image of “words unsoiled by sense, / pure rhythm on the tongue” further emphasizes ritual repetition. Language becomes sound before meaning. The body is “rocked in time / with twenty others,” lulled into collective belonging. Resignation here is communal — the comfort of rhythm masks the absence of critical engagement.

One of the most unsettling sections emerges in the encounter with the “new Hajji, just fifteen,” whose “eyes a startling blue” and “sly flower” introduce sexual tension under the guise of piety. The sacred space is not immune to desire. The girl’s body responds — “Your breasts, still tiny, grew an inch.” Growth is involuntary. Shame and desire collide. The veil does not eliminate sexuality; it intensifies its surveillance. Resignation, in this context, is not purity but containment.

Dharker expands the scope to diasporic space: “in this strangers’ land.” The purdah becomes psychological — “the purdah of the mind.” Even migration does not dissolve enclosure. The women “veiled their eyes / with heavy



lids.” The veil migrates inward. It becomes posture, gaze, self-regulation. The phrase “Bought and sold, and worse, / grown old” compresses transactional marriage, endurance, and aging into a single resigned trajectory.

Yet the poem does not remain entirely within compliance. Small ruptures surface. The line “Break cover. / Break cover and let the girls with tell-tale lips” signals an impulse toward exposure. The repetition of “Break cover” suggests urgency. However, the command is fragile; it exists within the poem but does not fully transform its structure. Freedom “rattles” only as “one coin, one sound.” The metaphor of the coin returns — echoing earlier references to comfort. Freedom is reduced to faint metallic noise. It exists, but minimally.

The final image of “Shaking your box to hear / how freedom rattles...” captures the poem’s complex negotiation between desire and containment. Freedom is imagined as something small, contained, and uncertain. It does not explode; it echoes faintly. Resignation remains, but it is not empty. It contains awareness.

What distinguishes “*Purdah*” is its refusal of simplification. Dharker does not reduce the veil to oppression alone, nor does she romanticize it as protection. Instead, she reveals how systems of gender, religion, migration, and memory intersect within the female body. Resignation becomes layered: learned shame, internalized surveillance, muted desire, strategic adaptation.

Silence in this poem is not absence. It is sedimented experience. The veil both hides and speaks. The body both conforms and registers tension. By embedding resistance within imagery rather than declaration, Dharker crafts a poetics of quiet exposure. The poem does not culminate in rebellion; it culminates in awareness.

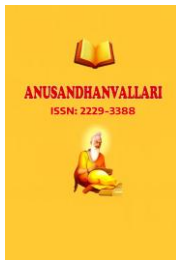
Thus, “*Purdah*” exemplifies resignation as a complex affective condition — neither simple submission nor open revolt, but a sustained negotiation with structures that discipline visibility. Through fragmented subjectivity, religious rhythm, and diasporic displacement, Dharker demonstrates how silence can carry critique without overt proclamation.

Resignation as Affective Strategy in De Souza, Deshpande, and Dharker

Although Eunice de Souza, Gauri Deshpande, and Imtiaz Dharker emerge from distinct socio-cultural locations, their poetic strategies converge in their nuanced engagement with resignation as a mode of affective negotiation. None of these poets construct resistance through overt slogans or declarative protest. Instead, they cultivate tonal restraint, irony, and emotional withholding as subtle interventions within patriarchal structures.

In Eunice de Souza’s poetry, resignation is articulated through caustic minimalism and clipped expression. Her poetic voice frequently adopts a surface detachment that conceals sharp critique. The brevity of her lines, the refusal of sentimentality, and the use of understated irony create a space where anger is compressed rather than declared. This compression does not indicate defeat; rather, it reflects a refusal to perform expected emotional excess. The poetic speaker appears controlled, almost indifferent, yet the restraint itself exposes the absurdities of gendered expectations. Resignation here functions as intellectual clarity. It strips away illusion and leaves behind a stark recognition of social constraint.

Gauri Deshpande, by contrast, develops resignation within intimate, domestic conversations. In “The Female of the Species,” emotional depth is displaced onto mundane exchanges about household economics and daily life. The discussion of “the rate of rice” and “the price of tea” becomes a coded language through which unspoken experiences of love, despair, and maternal disappointment circulate. The poem demonstrates that articulation need not be explicit to be meaningful. Silence and substitution operate as protective strategies within spaces where direct confrontation may be socially disruptive or emotionally unsafe. Deshpande’s resignation is relational; it acknowledges limitation while sustaining solidarity among women. The quiet recognition shared between speakers produces a form of collective endurance that is neither loud nor theatrical.



Intiaz Dharker's poetics introduce an additional dimension shaped by transnational identity and religious negotiation. Her engagement with themes of faith, exile, and belonging often foregrounds constraint without dramatizing rebellion. Instead of declarative rupture, Dharker's poetry frequently employs measured reflection and spatial imagery to suggest negotiation within boundaries. Resignation in her work becomes a way of inhabiting contradiction. The poetic subject neither fully rejects nor fully submits to inherited structures; instead, she navigates them with strategic awareness. This orientation aligns with a politics of survival that resists through redefinition rather than confrontation.

Across these three poets, resignation emerges not as passive acceptance but as an affective recalibration of agency. Each poet refuses the assumption that feminist resistance must be vocally explosive. Instead, they demonstrate that irony, tonal minimalism, and strategic silence can destabilize normative frameworks from within. Their poetic practices challenge the binary opposition between speech and silence by revealing how meaning circulates through understatement and withdrawal.

The comparative perspective also reveals differences in emphasis. De Souza's irony is sharp and often individualistic, foregrounding disillusionment. Deshpande's restraint is communal and domestic, rooted in shared female experience. Dharker's negotiation is spatial and transnational, shaped by movement across cultural and religious borders. Despite these variations, all three poets reconceptualize resignation as a conscious aesthetic choice rather than a symptom of defeat.

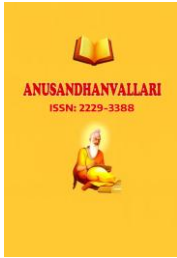
By placing these poets in dialogue, it becomes evident that resignation in late twentieth-century South Asian women's poetry operates as a micro-political practice. It registers structural limitations while simultaneously refusing to internalize them as absolute. In doing so, these poets expand feminist literary discourse beyond paradigms of overt protest and invite a more layered understanding of agency. Resistance, in their work, is not always loud. It is often quiet, sustained, and strategically embodied.

Conclusion

This study has sought to reconsider the critical assumption that resignation in women's poetry necessarily signals passivity, defeat, or ideological surrender. Through a comparative reading of Eunice de Souza, Gauri Deshpande, and Intiaz Dharker, the analysis demonstrates that resignation functions as a complex affective and aesthetic strategy embedded within gendered structures of power. Rather than equating agency solely with vocal assertion or overt protest, these poets reveal how silence, understatement, tonal restraint, and emotional minimalism operate as subtle yet persistent forms of resistance.

Eunice de Souza's ironic compression exposes patriarchal absurdities through disciplined detachment. Her refusal of sentimentality and her sharp tonal economy transform resignation into intellectual clarity. Gauri Deshpande's domestic poetics, particularly in "The Female of the Species," illustrate how shared silences and coded conversations among women create intimate spaces of recognition that circumvent dominant discursive expectations. Intiaz Dharker's negotiation of faith, belonging, and identity further expands this framework by presenting resignation as strategic navigation within intersecting cultural and religious constraints. Across these varied contexts, resignation emerges not as a collapse of will but as a recalibration of expressive possibility.

By engaging feminist theories of silence, postcolonial critiques of audibility, affect theory, and micro-political conceptions of resistance, this study contributes to ongoing debates about voice and agency in South Asian literary studies. It suggests that resistance need not be spectacular to be effective. In fact, the refusal to perform expected emotional excess or declarative rebellion may itself unsettle normative frameworks of femininity. The quiet voice, the withheld confession, and the controlled tone become politically meaningful precisely because they resist incorporation into dominant narratives of both compliance and protest.



Ultimately, the poetics of resignation examined here invite a more nuanced understanding of feminist agency. They compel critics to move beyond binary distinctions between speech and silence, submission and defiance, visibility and invisibility. In the works of De Souza, Deshpande, and Dharker, resignation is not the end of resistance but one of its most sophisticated forms. It is an embodied aesthetic of survival that registers structural constraint while tactically inhabiting and reworking it.

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