

Muted Grooms and Loud Silences: From Women's Oppression to Men's Muteness in Indian Marriages

Bhavya Gaba
Independent Researcher

Abstract—Silence has always been gendered. For centuries, women carried it as their burden—silenced by households, customs, scriptures, and cultural conditioning. Feminism came in to break this silence, insisting that muteness no longer be confused with virtue but heard as violence. When women gained voice, society reorganized laws, rituals, and cultural forms to make their voices heard. Yet silence did not disappear; it shifted. In contemporary India, men—especially grooms—are increasingly the ones muted. Weddings choreograph their passivity, films trivialize their presence, and law sometimes presumes their guilt before they even speak. This shift is not equality; it is substitution. What was once women's enforced silence is becoming men's inherited muteness, dramatized by the rise of pseudo-feminism and female chauvinism. This paper examines the transition of silence: from the centuries-long suppression of women to the contemporary silencing of men. Drawing on literature, cinema, law, and cultural rituals, it argues that pseudo-feminism risks producing reverse patriarchy, replacing one form of injustice with another. The muted groom emerges not merely as a cultural figure but as a symbol of imbalance in the promise of gender justice. True equality lies not in trading silences but in building balance where both voices can coexist.

Index Terms—Feminism, pseudo-feminism, female chauvinism, muted grooms, Indian weddings, gender justice, Section 498A

I. INTRODUCTION

Silence is never neutral. It is not a passive condition but a cultural script, shaped and reshaped by power. Historically, silence was imposed on women. The ideal daughter was quiet, the wife submissive, and the mother perpetually patient. Patrilineal traditions glorified silence as virtue, ensuring that women's words were erased even as their sacrifices were celebrated. Feminist movements ruptured this system. From Simone de Beauvoir's articulation of woman as

“the Other” [1] to Indian reformers such as Savitribai Phule, women demanded that silence be recognized as oppression, not dignity. Voices emerged through literature, activism, cinema, and law [2]– [4].

Yet silence did not disappear; it was reassigned. In contemporary India, men—particularly grooms—are scripted into muteness. Rituals demand that they suppress tears while brides' emotional expressions are valorised. Cinema portrays them as props to women's stories [17]– [21]. In law, provisions like Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code often presume guilt before men are heard [9]– [12]. The cultural landscape raises urgent questions: if silence once required dismantling for women, must men now be protected from the same fate?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The link between gender and silence is well documented. Simone de Beauvoir argued that women's subordination was constructed through their enforced muteness [1]. bell hooks highlighted the need for inclusive feminism that resists selective histories of oppression [2]. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum [3] and Amartya Sen [4] defined dignity and freedom as essential to human flourishing, transcending gender divisions.

In India, Patricia Uberoi analyzed weddings as symbolic phases where ritualized silence is deeply embedded [7], while Sudhir Kakar explored childhood and family dynamics as normalizing muteness [8]. Cultural narratives reinforced this silence: *Mother India* sanctified female sacrifice [14], *Guide* represented resilience [15], and *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* portrayed weddings as spaces of compliance [16].

Newer works challenge these scripts. *Thappad* directly interrogated women's silence in marriage [19], while *Made in Heaven* presented brides as

narrative agents [21]. However, male perspectives remained muted, with films like *Shaadi Mein Zaroor Aana* reducing male grievances to melodrama [20].

Legal scholarship reveals a similar imbalance. While laws like Section 498A sought to protect women from cruelty and dowry harassment [10], judgments such as *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India* and *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.* warned of misuse [10], [12]. NCRB reports show conviction rates below 15% in such cases [9], demonstrating how men are often silenced in legal proceedings.

Globally, silence has shifted beyond women. Japan's "herbivore men" [22], South Korea's "4B movement" [23], and Western MGTOW groups [24] all show male retreat into muteness in response to changing gender roles.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach.

- Historical analysis: tracing silence as a patriarchal tool used against women [1], [7].
- Cultural observation: examining Indian weddings where brides' express grief while grooms embody stoic silence [17].
- Cinematic analysis: studying Bollywood and OTT narratives that reinforce male muteness [18]– [21].
- Legal review: analyzing judgments and NCRB reports on Section 498A misuse [9]– [12].
- Comparative perspective: situating Indian experiences within global parallels such as Japan's herbivore men, Korea's 4B movement, and Western MGTOW [22]– [24].

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are:

1. To examine how silence has historically functioned as a tool of women's oppression [1]– [4].
2. To analyze the contemporary shift where silence increasingly affects men, especially grooms [9], [12].
3. To investigate how rituals, cinema, and law reinforce male muteness [7], [17]– [21].

4. To explore how pseudo-feminism and female chauvinism contribute to new gender imbalances [2].
5. To compare Indian experiences with global patterns of male silence [22]– [24].
6. To propose frameworks for gender justice that move beyond substitution of silences toward balance.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study asks:

1. How has the cultural meaning of silence shifted from women to men in Indian society [1], [7]?
2. In what ways do Indian weddings ritualize the muteness of grooms [17]?
3. How does cinema reinforce or challenge male silence [18]– [21]?
4. What legal implications does Section 498A carry for male muteness in marital disputes [9]– [12]?
5. How do global movements like Japan's "herbivore men" [22], South Korea's "4B" [23], and MGTOW [24] mirror the Indian context?
6. Can feminism remain authentic if it ignores male silence, or does it risk becoming pseudo-feminism [2]?

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Weddings as Ritualized Muteness

Indian weddings dramatize silence as cultural necessity. Brides weep at *vidaai* as a sign of duty, but grooms are expected to remain stoic. A crying groom is seen as weak. Silence thus becomes compulsory, not chosen [7], [17].

B. Law and Presumed Guilt

Section 498A was enacted to protect women from cruelty and dowry harassment [10]. Yet misuse has been documented in cases like *Preeti Gupta v. State of Jharkhand* [11] and *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.* [12]. NCRB reports highlight conviction rates below 15% [9], showing how men face social stigma and legal silencing.

C. Cinema's One-Sided Narratives

Cinema once silenced women, but now often sidelines men. *Thappad* gave women strong voices [19], while *Vivah* [17], *Dil Dhadakne Do* [18], and *Made in Heaven* [21] rendered grooms passive or

secondary. Male muteness is framed as background to women's empowerment.

D. Global Parallels

Male muteness is global. Japan's herbivore men retreat from relationships [22], South Korea's 4B rejects marriage altogether [23], and Western MGTOW groups advocate disengagement [24]. These examples show silence as cyclical, shifting between genders.

E. Resistance and Satire

Men are reclaiming silence through satire. Cafés themed around misuse of marriage laws, memes, and online forums serve as alternative spaces for expression. Silence is reframed not as weakness but as resistance.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

The findings raise key implications:

- Feminism: Authentic feminism must resist pseudo-feminism and address male silence too [2].
- Law: Section 498A must balance women's protection with safeguards for men's rights [9]–[12].
- Culture: Rituals and films need to allow both genders expressive complexity [17]–[21].
- Mental health: Rising male suicides tied to marital conflict and legal stigma show silence has life-or-death stakes [9].
- Society: True equality demands balance—replacing one muted gender with another repeats, not resolves, injustice.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Silence is not absence but meaning. Historically, women bore silence as oppression [1], [7]. Today, men—especially grooms—are increasingly scripted into muteness [9]–[12]. To substitute one silence for another is not progress but regression disguised as empowerment.

The muted groom symbolizes imbalance and warns against pseudo-feminism recycling patriarchy in reverse [2]. Genuine equality emerges only when both sexes speak, are heard, and retain the dignity of choosing when to be silent. Silence must be transformed from oppression into agency.

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