

# Silence, Domesticity, and Emotional Labour: Everyday Feminist Consciousness in the Fiction of Zoya Pirzad

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**Abstract**—This article examines how feminist consciousness is articulated through silence, domesticity, and emotional labour in the fiction of Zoya Pirzad. Challenging feminist paradigms that privilege overt resistance and public activism, the study argues that Pirzad constructs an alternative model of everyday feminism rooted in women lived experiences within domestic spaces. Drawing on feminist theory and close textual analysis of *Things We Left Unsaid* and selected short stories, the article explores how emotional labour, manifested through caregiving, affective regulation, and the suppression of personal desire, operates as an invisible yet structuring force in women’s lives. Silence is analysed not as passivity but as a strategic mode of emotional survival and negotiation within patriarchal family structures. The article demonstrates that domestic space functions as a politically charged site where feminist consciousness emerges through routine, endurance, and reflective awareness. By foregrounding culturally specific forms of agency shaped by Iranian-Armenian contexts, this study contributes to global feminist literary criticism by expanding the conceptual boundaries of resistance beyond Western activist frameworks.

**Index Terms**—Everyday Feminism; Emotional Labour; Silence; Domestic Space; Iranian Women’s Writing; Zoya Pirzad

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Iranian women’s writing has increasingly foregrounded the everyday dimensions of women’s lives, offering nuanced representations of gendered experience shaped by family, domestic space, and emotional responsibility. Rather than centring narratives on overt political resistance, many women writers explore how power operates through routine practices, affective expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Such narratives reveal that gender inequality is sustained not only through

institutional structures but also through the ordinary rhythms of daily life. Within this literary context, Zoya Pirzad occupies a distinctive position in modern Persian literature. Her fiction is characterised by narrative restraint, minimalist prose, and sustained attention to domestic detail. Pirzad’s female protagonists are typically situated within marriage and family structures, where their lives are shaped by repetition, silence, and emotional obligation. Instead of dramatic confrontation, her narratives privilege introspection, observation, and emotional endurance, offering a subtle yet incisive critique of patriarchal norms.

Despite the growth of feminist literary criticism, everyday female experiences such as silence, domestic routine, and emotional labour remain comparatively marginal within critical discourse. Feminist scholarship has often equated agency with speech, visibility, and public resistance, thereby overlooking forms of feminist consciousness that emerge within domestic and relational spaces. As Elaine Showalter observes, women’s writing has historically been devalued because of its engagement with “domestic and personal experience,” domains long dismissed as politically insignificant (Showalter 13).

This article argues that Pirzad reconfigures feminist consciousness through silence, domesticity, and emotional labour rather than overt rebellion. By analysing *Things We Left Unsaid* (Cherāgh-hā-rā Man Khāmūsh Mikonam) and selected short stories, the study demonstrates how feminist awareness develops through everyday endurance, emotional regulation, and reflective silence. In doing so, the article contributes to transnational feminist literary criticism by challenging Western-centric models of agency and resistance.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Feminist literary criticism has long been concerned with the representation of women's oppression, identity, and agency within patriarchal societies. Early feminist critics emphasised the recovery of women's voices from literary traditions that marginalised female experience. Showalter's concept of women's literature as a "muted discourse" highlights how women's writing has been shaped by social restriction and exclusion (Showalter 11).

In studies of Iranian women's writing, scholars have noted a recurring focus on domestic spaces as sites of emotional conflict and self-awareness. Farzaneh Milani argues that Iranian women writers frequently employ narrative strategies, such as silence and indirection, to negotiate cultural limitations (Milani 52). However, much of this scholarship continues to interpret silence primarily as a marker of oppression rather than as a potential site of agency.

Critical work on Pirzad's fiction has largely concentrated on her minimalist style, psychological realism, and portrayal of marriage and family life. Scholars note her depiction of middle-class women navigating emotional isolation and routine domesticity (Talattof 89). Yet feminist analyses of her work rarely engage systematically with emotional labour or with the possibility of everyday feminist consciousness.

Although emotional labour has been extensively theorised in Western sociological contexts, its literary articulation within non-Western domestic narratives remains critically underexplored (Hochschild 7). This article addresses this gap by examining how silence, domesticity, and emotional labour function together as interconnected sites of feminist meaning in Pirzad's fiction.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study places feminist theories of immanence, domestic confinement, and emotional labour in dialogue with Pirzad's culturally specific narratives. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of immanence provides a foundational framework for understanding women's confinement within repetitive domestic roles. Beauvoir argues that women are "confined to the sphere of the relative, condemned to immanence" (The Second Sex 29), a condition that sustains social continuity while limiting self-realisation. Betty

Friedan's critique of domestic confinement further illuminates the emotional dissatisfaction experienced by women whose lives are structured around marriage and household responsibility. Friedan famously describes this condition as "the problem that has no name," capturing the quiet despair that emerges within seemingly fulfilled domestic lives (The Feminine Mystique 57).

Arlie Hochschild's theory of emotional labour is central to this analysis. She defines emotional labour as the work of "inducing or suppressing feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (The Managed Heart 7). In Pirzad's fiction, emotional labour emerges as a structuring condition of women's lives rather than a peripheral concern. An intersectional feminist perspective further informs the analysis by recognising how gender intersects with ethnicity and cultural context. Pirzad's position as an Iranian-Armenian writer enables a nuanced portrayal of women whose experiences are shaped by multiple social affiliations. Within this framework, silence is conceptualised as relational agency, domesticity as a political space, and emotional labour as invisible yet essential work.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative textual analysis based on close reading and feminist thematic interpretation. The primary text is *Things We Left Unsaid*, supported by selected short stories from *A Day Before* and *Like All Afternoons*. These works are chosen for their sustained focus on domestic routine, emotional restraint, and interpersonal relationships. The analysis concentrates on narrative moments involving silence, caregiving, emotional suppression, and marital negotiation. Feminist theoretical concepts are used interpretively rather than mechanically, allowing theory and text to remain in dialogue. The study is limited to textual analysis and does not incorporate biographical or sociological investigation.

## V. SILENCE AS RELATIONAL AGENCY

Feminist scholarship has often associated agency with speech, visibility, and public articulation, while construing silence as a sign of submission or marginalisation. Such an approach, however, risks overlooking the social conditions under which speech

itself may be constrained or destabilising. In the fiction of Zoya Pirzad, silence emerges not as the absence of agency but as a contextually grounded mode of relational negotiation. Her female protagonists inhabit domestic and interpersonal environments in which open expression of dissatisfaction may provoke emotional conflict or threaten fragile relational equilibria. Within these circumstances, silence functions as a deliberate strategy of emotional self-preservation.

Silence in Pirzad's narratives operates as relational agency, shaped by women's attunement to power dynamics within marriage and family life. By withholding speech, women establish emotional boundaries and retain control over their inner worlds. This form of agency resonates with Beauvoir's observation that women's resistance often unfolds inwardly within restrictive social conditions rather than through overt confrontation (*The Second Sex* 31). Silence enables women to maintain psychological autonomy while avoiding direct conflict, thereby reframing agency as endurance and ethical self-regulation rather than opposition.

Pirzad's narratives do not idealise silence. Instead, they present it as an ambivalent practice shaped by constraint, responsibility, and care. Silence acquires meaning precisely because it is exercised within limitation, revealing a feminist subjectivity grounded in relational awareness rather than individual assertion.

#### VI. DOMESTICITY AS A POLITICAL SPACE

Domestic space in Pirzad's fiction is constructed as both a site of regulation and a site of reflection. Homes, kitchens, and family routines organise women's lives through repetition and obligation, reinforcing gendered expectations of care and emotional availability. These spaces often appear emotionally demanding, reflecting what Friedan identifies as the dissatisfaction embedded within domestic confinement (*The Feminine Mystique* 57).

At the same time, Pirzad resists a reductive understanding of domesticity as purely oppressive. Domestic space becomes a formative environment in which women develop awareness of their emotional and relational positioning. Through moments of solitude and routine observation, women begin to recognise the asymmetrical distribution of emotional

labour within intimate life. Domesticity thus functions as a political space not through rupture or escape but through repetition, as insight accumulates gradually within everyday practice. By situating feminist awareness within the ordinary textures of domestic life, Pirzad reframes the home as a site where power is negotiated quietly and continuously. This representation complicates feminist binaries of private oppression and public liberation, foregrounding domesticity as a locus of slow, affective feminist consciousness.

#### VII. EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND EVERYDAY FEMINISM

Emotional labour constitutes a central structuring condition in Pirzad's fiction. Her female protagonists are consistently engaged in caregiving, emotional regulation, and the management of interpersonal harmony. This labour remains unpaid and largely unacknowledged, yet it sustains the emotional economy of domestic life. Hochschild's definition of emotional labour as the management of feeling to meet social expectations provides a critical lens for understanding these dynamics (*The Managed Heart* 7). Pirzad's narratives foreground the cumulative effects of such labour. Women anticipate others' needs, absorb emotional tension, and suppress personal dissatisfaction in order to maintain relational stability. Over time, this sustained emotional effort produces exhaustion rather than fulfilment, revealing the gendered costs of everyday care. Emotional labour is thus not presented as an incidental aspect of domestic life but as a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced within intimate relationships. Feminist consciousness in Pirzad's fiction emerges through this process of emotional recognition rather than through explicit resistance. As women become aware of the imbalance between emotional investment and recognition, endurance itself becomes reflective. Pirzad thereby situates everyday feminism within affective labour, reframing emotional awareness as a critical mode of feminist insight.

#### VIII. RECONFIGURING FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

Pirzad's fiction challenges the assumption that feminist agency must be visible, vocal, or

oppositional. Instead, it articulates a model of everyday feminist consciousness grounded in emotional awareness, relational responsibility, and ethical self-positioning. Feminist subjectivity develops gradually through lived experience, shaped by routine interactions and affective negotiation rather than ideological commitment.

This reconfiguration resists universalised feminist frameworks that equate agency with autonomy and rupture. Pirzad's protagonists do not seek emancipation through withdrawal from domestic life; rather, they renegotiate meaning and selfhood within it. Feminist consciousness thus emerges as a situated process, attentive to constraint and relational obligation. By foregrounding culturally specific forms of feminist subjectivity, Pirzad's fiction expands transnational feminist discourse. Her narratives demonstrate that agency may operate within limitation and care, offering an alternative feminist vocabulary rooted in everyday life.

#### IX. COMPARATIVE CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Situated within broader feminist debates, Pirzad's narratives align with Global South feminist perspectives that emphasise culturally embedded forms of agency. Such approaches recognise that feminist practice does not necessarily manifest through overt protest but may instead operate through endurance, negotiation, and ethical relationality.

Pirzad's depiction of silence and emotional labour illustrates how these practices can function as meaningful feminist responses shaped by social context rather than political disengagement. Her fiction thus contributes to feminist criticism by broadening the conceptual terrain of agency to include affective, relational, and everyday modes of feminist engagement.

#### X. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Zoya Pirzad reconfigures feminist consciousness through silence, domesticity, and emotional labour. By foregrounding everyday female experiences, her fiction challenges feminist frameworks that privilege visibility and overt resistance. Silence, routine domestic practice, and emotional endurance emerge as significant sites of feminist meaning rather than markers of submission.

By recognising emotional labour and domestic life as politically and ethically charged spaces, this study contributes to transnational feminist literary scholarship and calls for greater critical attention to everyday feminism in non-Western literary contexts. Pirzad's fiction invites feminist criticism to attend more closely to the subtle, sustained practices through which women negotiate power within the ordinary conditions of daily life.

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