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Article

Representation of Silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's "The last gift and Admiring the silence"

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Abstract: With an emphasis on how silence functions as a narrative and moral tactic within the postcolonial migrant experience, this article explores how silence is portrayed in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Admiring Silence and The Last Gift. In these works, silence is not just a lack of communication; it is a multifaceted reaction to personal tragedy, colonial past, and displacement. The narrator's self-imposed quiet and narrative withholding in Admiring quiet expose the psychological fragmentation that results from such concealment while also revealing silence as a way of survival within a racially stratified host society. The Last Gift examines silence in a familial and intergenerational setting, where the protagonist's inability to express his history affects emotional bonds and passes on unsaid trauma to later generations. This article makes the case, using a comparative textual analysis, that Gurnah portrays silence as morally conflicted: it provides self-narrative control and security, but it also perpetuates emotional distance, misunderstanding, and alienation. Gurnah questions prevailing presumptions about voice and testimony in postcolonial writing by emphasizing silence as a key narrative element. She suggests that in defining migrant subjectivity and historical memory, what is unsaid is frequently just as important as what is uttered.

Keywords: Abdulrazak Gurnah, silence; postcolonial literature, migration and exile, diasporic identity, trauma and memory.

1. Introduction

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's work, silence plays a crucial and nuanced role. It serves as a narrative technique that articulates histories of trauma, relocation, and fragmented belonging in addition to simply being the absence of voice. Gurnah examines silence as a source of ethical conflict as well as a protective strategy in Admiring Silence (1996) and The Last Gift (2011), especially in the lives of migrants navigating the effects of colonialism, exile, and personal tragedy. In order to show how silence gets entwined with identity formation and survival in diasporic environments, these novels highlight characters who suppress their emotions, conceal their pasts, or refrain from speaking. The unidentified narrator in Admiring Silence emphasizes the psychological consequences of migration and the need to fit in with a hostile host community through his purposeful self-erasure and refusal to discuss his background. Here, silence serves as a tool for concealment, enabling the protagonist to go across racially segregated areas of Britain but also cutting himself off from historical and personal reality. In contrast, Abbas's long-standing resistance to discuss his painful past with his family is an example of how silence is shown in The Last Gift as a hereditary burden. His silence exposes how hidden history can endure as forms of emotional inheritance, shaping familial ties and causing gaps in knowledge, closeness, and understanding between generations. According to this article, Gurnah's portrayal of

silence serves as a complex narrative tool that captures the moral quandaries surrounding memory, the brittleness of migrant identities, and the legacy of colonial violence. Gurnah places silence inside a moral and emotional contradiction, rather than presenting it as solely repressive or liberating: quiet can provide solace, but it also feeds miscommunication and estrangement. Through a comparative analysis of The Last Gift and Admiring Silence, this study explores the crucial function that silence plays in Gurnah's investigation of postcolonial subjectivity by examining how it mediates between speech and secrecy, belonging and estrangement.

2. Main Part

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's Admiring Silence and The Last Gift, silence serves as a purposeful narrative and moral practice that facilitates the negotiation of trauma, relocation, and postcolonial identity. Gurnah portrays silence as an active means of meaning-making that influences both character interiority and narrative structure, as opposed to viewing it as a lack or defect. Silence controls what is disclosed, postponed, or kept hidden throughout both books, forcing the reader to consider absence as a key element of comprehension. The characters' lived experiences, whose articulation is limited by fear, fragility, and the lingering consequences of colonial power relations, are reflected in this narrative restraint. The first-person narrator's deliberate silence in Admiring Silence is closely linked to his status as a migrant and his knowledge of the host society's racialized scrutiny. His invention of a personal history and refusal to reveal his genuine roots are not just acts of deceit; rather, they are deliberate reactions to a setting where the truth may lead to rejection rather than acceptance. As a result, the narrator uses silence as a strategy for self-preservation, allowing him to move through social situations while retaining some control over his identity. But this self-imposed silence also results in a fractured subjectivity since the narrator's denial of his past causes him to become emotionally detached and unable to build long-lasting connections. Here, Gurnah portrays silence as a two-pronged tactic that, while providing protection from direct damage, progressively undermines the potential for closeness and self-coherence.

The narrator's awareness of the power relations governing speech highlights the ethical complexity of silence. His silence betrays an unconscious understanding that some stories are unacceptable or incomprehensible in the context of prevailing cultural norms. The narrator opposes a type of narrative consumption that requires confession without ensuring understanding by withholding complete revelation. In this way, silence serves as a critique of postcolonial norms that associate empowerment with speaking. Gurnah argues that silence could be a reasonable reaction to structural marginalization, challenging the notion that communication is intrinsically liberating. Silence functions within a familial and intergenerational framework in The Last Gift, exposing its long-term ethical and emotional ramifications. Abbas's traumatic memories formed by loss and displacement is the source of his steadfast refusal to talk about his past. His silence generates emotional distance and confusion while also attempting to keep the family stable and limit suffering. His wife and children's perceptions of him and themselves are shaped by the lack of a clear history. Gurnah illustrates how, despite its protective intent, silence frequently causes unintended harm by depriving others of information that is essential for intimacy and a sense of belonging. The limitations of using silence as a coping strategy are shown by the slow and delayed disclosure of Abbas's history. The temporal fragility of repressed narratives is highlighted by the fact that when speech does eventually emerge, it does so under the strain of disease and impending death. The ethical conflict that arises from silence is revealed by this delayed articulation: although people may argue that they have the right to keep their pasts private, doing so unavoidably has an impact on other people. Gurnah emphasizes that some losses caused by silence cannot be made up for by a late confession, framing this moment as terribly inadequate rather than redemptive. Silence is inextricably linked to colonialism's historical legacy and its epistemic cruelty in

both books. The world in which colonial histories have marginalized or cast doubt on some lives and experiences is reflected in the characters' reticence to talk. A prevailing narrative order that requires coherence, transparency, and legibility while refusing equal respect causes silence. Gurnah highlights the fragmented, unfinished character of postcolonial subjectivity and undermines linear historical narratives by emphasizing silence. What is left unsaid in these texts is an acceptance of the limitations of language in expressing experiences molded by trauma and exile rather than a narrative failure.

Gurnah, however, opposes romanticizing stillness. The Last Gift and Admiring Silence both highlight the psychological toll that prolonged silence takes, such as strained relationships, miscommunication, and estrangement. It becomes clear that silence is morally ambiguous, existing between agency and withdrawal, survival and loss. Gurnah presents a complex picture of postcolonial life through this ambivalence, one in which neither silence nor words can fully address the difficulties associated with exile. Rather, meaning is found in the conflict between what is spoken and what is not, confirming silence as a crucial, consequential factor in the formation of both individual and societal histories.

3. Conclusion

In examining how silence is portrayed in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Admiring Silence and The Last Gift, this article makes the case that silence serves as a crucial narrative, moral, and psychological force in his investigation of the experience of postcolonial migrants. Silence appears in both books as a significant reaction to pain, displacement, and the lingering effects of colonial power rather than just as a lack of speech. Gurnah highlights the intricacy of silence as a survival tactic while also revealing its significant emotional and interpersonal implications through individuals who conceal their pasts and feelings. When the two works are compared, it becomes clear that silence affects people on a personal, familial, and historical level. While The Last Gift shows how unsaid trauma may be passed down through generations, forming identities via absence rather than articulation, Admiring Silence explores how silence allows self-defense in a racially divided society but also causes alienation and disintegration. Thus, Gurnah's work questions prevalent postcolonial presumptions that link witness to healing and voice to empowerment. Rather, he portrays silence as morally ambiguous, existing between struggle and retreat, agency and loss. Gurnah also explores the boundaries of language in depicting experiences influenced by colonial violence and exile by incorporating silence into character psychology and narrative structure. According to his research, some histories are difficult to fully express, and in situations where words is ineffective, silence itself may have significance. In the end, this study emphasizes Gurnah's contribution to postcolonial literature as a writer who redefines silence as a potent and significant style of expression that is crucial to comprehending the emotional realities of migration, memory, and belonging.

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