

# In the Interstices of Silence and Utterance: Reimagining Intersectional Subjectivities in Global and Indian Marginal Narratives

**Dr. Rituparna Moharana**

Faculty In English, Department of English, Ravenshaw University

## **Abstract**

The paper explores how intersecting identities such as caste, gender, class, race, and sexuality shape the experience of marginalization and resistance in literature. Moving beyond a singular axis of oppression, this study examines how multiple forms of inequality coalesce to produce complex hierarchies of voice and silence. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subalternity, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's feminist postcolonialism, the paper investigates how marginalized subjects negotiate their position between enforced muteness and empowered self-expression. Through close readings of select global and Indian texts, the study demonstrates how literature becomes a site of both suppression and subversion, ultimately reimagining silence and speech as interdependent modes of agency.

## **Introduction: Mapping the Terrain of Marginality**

The discourse of marginality in literary studies has undergone significant transformation with the emergence of intersectional frameworks that challenge reductive understandings of oppression. Earlier paradigms often treated marginalization as a singular experience based solely on race, gender, or class. However, such approaches fail to account for the layered and overlapping structures of inequality that shape lived realities. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, foregrounds the simultaneity of these structures, emphasizing how systems of power interlock to produce complex forms of marginalization (Crenshaw 1244).

This paper situates itself within this intersectional paradigm to explore how literature articulates the nuanced experiences of marginalized subjects. It argues that marginal narratives cannot be understood through binary oppositions such as voice/silence, presence/absence, or agency/subjugation. Instead, these narratives operate within what may be termed the "interstitial space" a liminal zone where silence and speech coexist, overlap, and transform into each other.

By engaging with global and Indian texts, including Dalit autobiographies, African-American feminist writings, and queer narratives, this study examines how literature becomes a site of negotiation, resistance, and rearticulation of identity. It further explores how acts of storytelling, testimony, and translation function as counter-discursive practices that challenge dominant epistemologies.

## **Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality, Subalternity, and Feminist Postcolonialism**

Any meaningful exploration of marginal narratives must be grounded in a robust theoretical framework. This study draws upon three key theoretical perspectives: intersectionality, subalternity, and feminist pos-

tcolonialism.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides the foundational lens through which this paper examines the overlapping axes of oppression. Crenshaw argues that individuals experience marginalization in multidimensional ways, shaped by the intersection of various identities such as race, gender, and class (1244). This framework disrupts monolithic representations of marginalized groups, revealing instead a plurality of experiences.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern further complicates the question of voice and representation. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak interrogates whether marginalized subjects can truly articulate their experiences within structures of power that systematically silence them (Spivak 271). She suggests that even when the subaltern appears to speak, their voice is often mediated, appropriated, or distorted by dominant discourses.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's feminist postcolonial critique adds another dimension to this analysis by challenging Western feminist frameworks that homogenize "Third World women." Mohanty advocates for a contextual and historically grounded understanding of marginality that recognizes differences while fostering solidarity (Mohanty 337).

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a nuanced understanding of how intersectional identities shape literary representation. They also provide the conceptual tools to analyze the complex interplay between silence and speech in marginal narratives.

### **Silence as Strategy: Rethinking Absence and Agency**

Silence in marginal narratives has often been interpreted as a sign of oppression or absence. However, this paper argues that silence can also function as a deliberate strategy of resistance. Rather than being merely imposed, silence can be chosen, manipulated, and re-signified by marginalized subjects.

In many indigenous, Dalit, and feminist texts, silence emerges as a mode of survival within oppressive structures. It allows individuals to navigate hostile environments while preserving their sense of self. At the same time, silence can disrupt dominant narratives by refusing to conform to expected modes of expression.

Spivak's notion of the subaltern is particularly relevant here. She highlights how the subaltern's silence is not simply a lack of speech but a condition produced by systemic exclusion (Spivak 287). Yet, within this imposed silence lies the potential for resistance. Silence becomes a space of opacity that resists assimilation into dominant discourses.

This reconceptualization of silence challenges binary thinking and opens up new possibilities for understanding marginal agency. It suggests that silence and speech are not opposites but are interconnected modes of expression that can be strategically deployed.

### **Testimony and Storytelling: Literature as Counter-Discourse**

If silence represents one dimension of marginal expression, storytelling represents another. Literature provides a crucial platform for marginalized voices to articulate their experiences and challenge dominant narratives.

Dalit autobiographies, for instance, serve as powerful testimonies that expose the realities of caste-based oppression. Texts such as *Karukku* by Bama and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble transform personal narratives into collective histories, reclaiming agency through storytelling. These works

challenge the invisibility imposed by caste hierarchies and assert the legitimacy of marginalized experiences.

Similarly, African-American feminist writings, such as those by bell hooks and Audre Lorde, foreground the intersections of race, gender, and class. Lorde's assertion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" underscores the need for alternative modes of expression that resist dominant frameworks (Lorde 112).

Queer narratives further complicate the relationship between identity and expression by challenging normative constructions of sexuality and gender. These texts often employ fragmented, non-linear storytelling techniques to reflect the fluidity of queer identities.

Through these examples, it becomes evident that literature functions as a counter-discursive space where marginalized subjects can reclaim their voices and rewrite dominant narratives.

### **Translation, Hybridity, and the Politics of Representation**

The act of bringing marginal narratives into broader literary discourse often involves translation both linguistic and cultural. Translation plays a crucial role in making these narratives accessible to wider audiences, but it also raises important questions about representation and authenticity.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity provides a useful framework for understanding this process. He argues that cultural identities are not fixed but are constantly negotiated through interactions between different cultures (Bhabha 56). Translation, in this sense, becomes a site of hybridity where meanings are transformed and reinterpreted.

However, translation also carries the risk of erasure or distortion. Marginal voices may be appropriated or reshaped to fit dominant expectations, thereby losing their original context. This tension highlights the need for ethical approaches to translation that prioritize the integrity of marginalized narratives.

### **Intersectional Identities and the Fragmentation of Voice**

One of the key insights of intersectional theory is that there is no singular "marginal voice." Instead, marginality is characterized by diversity and fragmentation. Different identities intersect to produce unique experiences that cannot be generalized.

For instance, the experiences of a Dalit woman differ significantly from those of an upper-caste woman or a Dalit man. Similarly, the intersection of race and gender shapes the experiences of African-American women in distinct ways.

This fragmentation challenges the notion of a unified identity and calls for a more nuanced understanding of marginal narratives. It also underscores the importance of recognizing differences while building solidarities across diverse groups.

### **Reimagining Voice: Between Silence and Speech**

The interplay between silence and speech is central to understanding marginal narratives. Rather than viewing these as binary opposites, this paper proposes a more fluid understanding in which silence and speech coexist and interact.

Marginalized subjects often navigate between these modes, strategically choosing when to speak and when to remain silent. This negotiation reflects the complexities of power and resistance, highlighting the agency of marginalized individuals.

By reimagining voice in this way, we move beyond simplistic notions of empowerment and recognize the

multifaceted nature of marginal expression.

### **Conclusion: Toward an Ethics of Listening**

This paper has explored the complex dynamics of intersectional identity in global and Indian marginal narratives. By examining the interplay between silence and speech, it has highlighted the ways in which marginalized subjects negotiate their positions within structures of power.

Ultimately, the study calls for an ethics of listening one that recognizes the diversity of marginal voices and respects their autonomy. Such an approach requires us to move beyond tokenistic inclusion and engage deeply with the complexities of marginal narratives.

In doing so, we can begin to reimagine literature as a space of inclusivity, dialogue, and transformation where the interstices of silence and speech become sites of profound meaning and possibility.

### **Works Cited**

1. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
2. Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–1299.
3. Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984.
4. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary 2*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1984, pp. 333–358.
5. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.