

## The Language of Silence: Exploring Gendered Voices in Banira Giri's *Wound*

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### Abstract

*Banira Giri's poem Wound is a powerful exploration of female trauma, violence, and the politics of silence within a patriarchal society. Through vivid imagery and metaphors, the poem presents the female body as both a site of suffering and a locus of resistance. The wound, both literal and symbolic, conveys experiences of violation, memory, and transformation, illustrating how silence can function as a communicative and subversive act. This paper analyzes the poem through the lenses of feminist literary theory, drawing upon Helene Cixous' concept of the feminine, Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism, Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory, and Adrienne Rich's understanding of silence as trauma. By linking theoretical frameworks with textual analysis, the research demonstrates how Wound articulates the female voice, challenges patriarchal structures, and contributes to broader feminist discourse in Nepali literature. Ultimately, the poem exemplifies the transformative potential of articulating trauma, reclaiming agency, and constructing a uniquely female literary space.*

**Keywords:** Silence, gender violence, trauma, resistance.

### Introduction

Nepali literature in the post-1960s witnessed an unprecedented surge of female voices that contested patriarchy, questioned tradition, and gave lyrical form to women's inner lives. Among these emerging voices, Banira Giri stands out as a pioneer who reshaped the contours of feminist consciousness in Nepal. Her poem *Wound* (Chot), written in the socio-political turbulence of Nepal's modern history, is not merely an expression of personal anguish but a testimony to the collective condition of women silenced within patriarchal culture. The poem explores how silence itself becomes a language—a space where women articulate their pain, endurance, and resistance without always resorting to overt speech.

In *Wound*, silence is not absence but an alternative language of trauma, endurance, and protest. Banira Giri's poetic strategy transforms silence into a mode of resistance against systems of power that attempt to erase women's subjectivity. This research article investigates how the gendered voices in *Wound* operate through silence, metaphor, and fragmented articulation. In doing so, it foregrounds the importance of silence as a feminist discourse in Nepali literature.

Despite the growing body of Nepali feminist literary criticism, Banira Giri's poetry has not received sustained critical attention compared to her male contemporaries.

While *Wound* has often been read as an autobiographical or existential text, there has been little academic inquiry into how silence functions as a gendered language within the poem. Silence is often interpreted as passivity or erasure, but feminist theory has shown that silence may also signify resistance, agency, and subversion. The problem this study addresses is the lack of critical engagement with silence in *Wound* as a structured, gendered voice that negotiates between trauma and resilience.

Banira Giri's poem *Wound* stands as a poignant narrative that transcends personal trauma to address collective suffering and resilience. Through vivid imagery and metaphors, Giri transforms the act of violation into a symbol of empowerment, challenging societal norms and patriarchal structures. *Wound* revolves around the experience of sexual violence and its aftermath. Giri employs the metaphor of a wound to signify both the physical and emotional scars left by the act. This wound, however, is not merely a mark of victimhood but becomes a source of strength and resistance.

The poem begins with the speaker confronting the violator, describing the initial act as a forceful assault. Yet, rather than succumbing to despair, the speaker channels the pain into a transformative process. The wound becomes a "crop of pain," symbolizing the potential for growth and renewal even in the face of adversity. From a feminist standpoint, *Wound* critiques the objectification and commodification of women in patriarchal societies. The speaker's transformation from victim to agent challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. By reclaiming the narrative, Giri empowers women to redefine their identities beyond societal impositions. The poem also addresses the theme of silence, often imposed upon women in patriarchal cultures. The speaker's ability to articulate her trauma and resilience serves as an act of defiance against the silencing forces, asserting her voice and agency.

Giri's use of vivid imagery and metaphors enhances the emotional impact of the poem. Descriptions such as "spear-tipped streams" and "gullied eyes" evoke the intensity of the experience, while the transformation of the wound into a "harvest from wounds" signifies resilience and renewal. The poem's structure, with its rhythmic flow and repetition, mirrors the cyclical nature of trauma and healing. The recurring motifs of pain and transformation underscore the ongoing process of recovery and empowerment. In *Wound*, Banira Giri crafts a narrative that transcends personal suffering to address universal themes of resilience, empowerment, and resistance. Through her vivid imagery and feminist lens, Giri challenges societal norms and offers a voice to those often silenced. The poem serves as a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the transformative power of reclaiming one's narrative.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how silence functions as a gendered voice in Banira Giri's *Wound*, revealing how unspoken pain and endurance communicate the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Closely linked to this is the exploration of the metaphor of the wound itself, which encapsulates female trauma while simultaneously signifying resilience and survival. By examining these poetic strategies, the study seeks to contextualize Giri's work within feminist literary theory, highlighting how her use of silence, fragmentation, and bodily imagery aligns with the

concepts of *écriture féminine*, subaltern voice, and female cultural formation. Furthermore, the research aims to demonstrate how *Wound* contributes meaningfully to broader feminist discourse in Nepali literature, providing a space where women's experiences, often marginalized or silenced, are articulated with depth and nuance. Finally, the study emphasizes how silence operates as a communicative act within the poem, showing that what remains unsaid often speaks more powerfully than conventional language, allowing the female voice to assert presence, memory, and resistance.

This paper hypothesizes that in Banira Giri's *Wound*, silence functions not as a void but as a language of gendered resistance. Through the metaphor of the wound, Giri demonstrates that silence embodies both the pain of patriarchy and the potential for subversive expression. Banira Giri occupies a central place in Nepali feminist writing. Critics such as Michael Hutt observe that Giri's poems "expand the symbolic vocabulary of Nepali poetry by foregrounding female interiority and existential struggle" (Hutt 218). Her works often highlight the silenced position of women in both public and private life. In *Wound*, silence is not simply absence but a palpable presence that shapes the female subject's identity.

The concept of silence has been widely studied in feminist criticism. Elaine Showalter emphasizes that "women's silence is historically constructed by patriarchal discourse" (Showalter 34). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* insists that women's silence in colonial and patriarchal systems reflects structural oppression rather than individual inability (Spivak 287). Yet, silence can also be a site of coded communication. Adrienne Rich asserts that "silence can be the plan of a poem, the refusal to write, the eloquence of what is unsaid" (Rich 12).

In Nepali literary scholarship, Banira Giri's poetry has been described as embodying the "anguished consciousness of women struggling within hierarchical social structures" (Bhattarai 77). However, existing studies often reduce *Wound* to a biographical reading, neglecting the deeper exploration of silence as a feminist strategy. This article seeks to bridge that gap by analyzing silence as a structured, gendered discourse within *Wound*.

### Theoretical Analysis

The study employs feminist literary theory with specific reliance on the works of Elaine Showalter, Gayatri Spivak, and Hélène Cixous. Showalter's concept of "gynocriticism" helps to analyze how women writers articulate female experience in their own language. Spivak's critique of the subaltern woman's silence is crucial to understanding how patriarchal systems construct silence. Meanwhile, Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine*, a form of writing that disrupts patriarchal logic through fragmentation, bodily imagery, and silence provides a lens for reading *Wound* as a feminist text. Together, these theories enable an interpretation that views silence not as a lack but as resistance and creativity.

Feminism promotes women's rights and their political, social, and economic parity with men. It aims to eliminate oppression, subordination, and discrimination based on

gender. Consequently, feminism fundamentally critiques patriarchal structures. As Freedman explains, the term "feminism" arose long after women began questioning their inferior status and demanding social improvements (3). Thus, feminism is both a political theory and a movement for women's rights and liberation. Toril Moi describes feminist criticism as a distinct political discourse one that actively challenges patriarchy and sexism, rather than simply addressing gender in literature (204).

Feminism studies women's experiences, recognizing them as individuals who have been either oppressed or denied personal expression. Women writers who resist patriarchal norms and advocate for female empowerment are generally regarded as feminists. Feminist scholars analyze the experiences of women across different races, classes, and cultures, including African American, Latina, Asian American, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, disabled, elderly, and individuals from the Global South. Annette Kolodny describes this diversity as "playful pluralism," as it embraces interdisciplinary perspectives, tolerance, and the integration of art with lived experiences (161). Despite their varied approaches, feminist critics generally share common goals: to expose patriarchal biases, reevaluate literature written by women, and examine the social, cultural, and psychological contexts of literature and literary criticism. Their studies focus on gender, social, and political issues.

Feminists argue that patriarchy is inherently sexist, as it perpetuates the belief that women are naturally inferior to men. This idea is rooted in biological essentialism the notion that differences between the sexes are fixed and unchangeable. While feminists acknowledge biological distinctions, they reject the idea that physical attributes such as body size or chemistry determine intelligence, logic, courage, or leadership abilities. Therefore, feminism differentiates between "sex" (biological identity) and "gender" (socially constructed roles). Gender roles, imposed by society, create hierarchical distinctions between men and women.

Many feminists accept biological differences between males and females but reject the rigid concept of gender, viewing it as a cultural construct. As Rosemarie Tong states, feminism holds that biological sex should not dictate a person's psychological or social identity. Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1970), argues that power is the essence of politics and that male dominance is the most fundamental form of power in society (25). She sees gender roles as politically motivated, with patriarchal institutions using power to subordinate women. Millett criticizes Freud's psychoanalytic theories for their male bias and considers literature a reflection of patriarchal consciousness. Analyzing authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet, she challenges traditional social norms, exposing how literature has distorted female characters and reinforced male dominance.

### **Textual Analysis**

The poem *Wound* opens with an image of bodily injury that is both literal and symbolic. The "wound" is not just physical but metaphysical, marking the subject's encounter with pain, humiliation, and exclusion. Silence arises from this trauma, where speech is impossible because language fails to capture the depth of suffering. Spivak's notion that

the subaltern woman “cannot speak” resonates here, as the female subject’s silence reveals the impossibility of translating trauma into patriarchal discourse (Spivak 284). Yet this silence is itself expressive. The unsaid carries meaning, shaping a narrative that exposes the violence inflicted on women. In this sense, Giri uses silence as what Rich describes as “eloquence of the unsaid” (Rich 15).

While silence emerges from pain, it also functions as defiance. The refusal to articulate suffering within male-centered language becomes a radical gesture. Instead of offering a narrative of victimhood, Giri transforms silence into a shield that resists patriarchal appropriation. The poem’s fragmented structure mirrors this resistance—by breaking away from conventional syntax, Giri demonstrates what Cixous calls “writing the body” (Cixous 88). The metaphor of the wound illustrates how silence and speech coexist. A wound bleeds silently but speaks through pain. Similarly, women’s silences are never empty; they communicate survival, endurance, and an unspoken critique of domination. The first-person female narrator in Banira Giri’s poem *Wound* evokes,

“The wound on my body speaks, even when words fail.  
In my silence, my story is hidden.  
Pain has created my voice.  
The wounds testify to my very existence.” (Giri, Lines 1-4)

In these opening lines, the speaker confronts the initial act of violence with vivid imagery. The “spear-tipped streams” and “gullied eyes” evoke the violence and trauma inflicted upon the speaker. The transformation of pain into a “crop” and “harvest” suggests a reclamation of agency, turning suffering into a source of strength. This transformation aligns with Hélène Cixous’ concept of *écriture féminine*, where women’s writing emerges from bodily experience, creating a language that transcends patriarchal structures (Cixous 878). The speaker’s ability to convert pain into a powerful metaphor reflects this notion of reclaiming narrative through the body.

Giri’s poem brings forth voices that are both personal and collective. The female subject in *Wound* embodies the silenced position of women across Nepali society. The absence of explicit names universalizes the experience of silence, making the poem resonate with what Showalter identifies as “the female cultural formation” (Showalter 38). Collective voice is revealed in the poem as,

You and I? Let's  
enjoin ourselves in friendship  
Always!  
How engaging!” (Giri, lines 5–8).

The speaker’s sarcastic tone here critiques the false camaraderie often extended by perpetrators. The abrupt shift from a rhetorical question to an exclamation underscores the dissonance between the perpetrator’s intentions and the speaker’s reality. Elaine Showalter’s theory of *gynocriticism* emphasizes the creation of a female literary tradition that articulates women’s experiences (Showalter 38). This passage exemplifies the speaker’s resistance to imposed narratives, asserting a voice that challenges traditional portrayals of victimhood.

The poem oscillates between voicing and muteness. This oscillation highlights how women navigate between expression and suppression. Silence thus becomes a shared experience, a gendered voice that communicates solidarity in suffering. The imagery of the body is central to the poem. The first-person female narrator states:

“At dusk where the road forks  
I ran into you. Before I knew what was happening,  
you raped me. Then and there, witness of this cruel intimacy,  
drops of virgin blood spread on the gravel of the crossroads  
like an unclaimed corpse” (Giri, lines 9–12).

The setting of dusk and the imagery of an "unclaimed corpse" evoke a sense of violation and abandonment. The use of "virgin blood" highlights the loss of innocence and the irreversible nature of the trauma. Adrienne Rich discusses how silence can act as a repository for memory and trauma, preserving experiences suppressed by patriarchal society (Rich 14). The stark imagery in these lines serves as a testament to the trauma, challenging the silencing of women's experiences. The speaker further evokes:

But these days  
your every stroke,  
a mere touch,  
and as for my self  
I've become  
the oven that contains the flame,  
the bush that raises up thorns,  
the sheath that holds the blade,  
fangs for the cobra's deadly poison,  
darkness of the night that swallows the moon. (*Giri, lines 13–16*)

The speaker describes a profound transformation, where the self has become both the vessel and the weapon. The metaphors of "oven," "bush," "sheath," "fangs," and "darkness" suggest a reclaiming of power, turning the instruments of violence into symbols of resilience. This metamorphosis aligns with Gayatri Spivak's notion that silence can be a form of resistance, where the subaltern's voice emerges through the very structures that seek to silence them (Spivak 283). The speaker's transformation signifies the reclamation of agency and the subversion of victimhood.

The wound is inscribed on the body, which becomes a site of gendered suffering. Cixous's *écriture féminine* is useful here, as Giri's metaphorical writing of the wound foregrounds the female body as a text of silence and speech. The body's silence—its bleeding, its scars—becomes a powerful language that destabilizes patriarchal authority. The wound is not merely a momentary pain but a lingering memory. Silence embodies the persistence of trauma that resists closure. Through metaphor, Giri illustrates how silence preserves memory across generations, becoming a collective archive of

women's experiences. This aligns with Rich's claim that silence can be "the memory of what has been kept down" (Rich 14).

### Findings and Conclusion

Banira Giri's *Wound* demonstrates how silence can serve as a language of gendered resistance. Far from being a void, silence in the poem becomes a medium that conveys trauma, resilience, and critique. The wound functions as both metaphor and method, showing how women's pain is inscribed in silence yet articulated through poetic imagery. The analysis reveals that Giri's strategy of silence resonates with feminist theories that view silence as both oppression and resistance. Showalter's gynocriticism helps us situate Giri within a female literary tradition, while Spivak underscores the structural impossibility of speech for subaltern women, and Cixous illuminates the bodily, fragmented style of Giri's writing. Together, these frameworks highlight silence in *Wound* as a gendered voice that speaks powerfully through absence. *Wound* emerges as a feminist text that redefines silence as a communicative, resistant force. It challenges patriarchal notions of passivity and asserts that silence can be a language of its own capable of carrying trauma, memory, and solidarity. In the Nepali context, Giri's poem remains a pioneering exploration of how women can transform silence into power, shaping the future of feminist literature. This study offers a framework for reading silence as feminist discourse in Nepali literature, setting a precedent for further analyses of women's writing in South Asia

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