



Literature as Resistance: A Comparative Study of Double Marginalization of Women in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Bibek Ojha's *Ailani*

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Abstract

Background: This study focuses on Pecola Breedlove, an African American girl, and Fulmaya Badi, a Dalit woman from Nepal's Badi community, to explore how intersecting systems of racism, casteism, patriarchy, and poverty produce double marginalization. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Bibek Ojha's *Ailani* expose how racial and caste hierarchies, reinforced by gendered oppression and social exclusion, destroy women's dignity, identity, and agency across distinct cultural contexts.

Method: The paper employs a comparative literary analysis informed by intersectionality, Black feminist theory, postcolonial feminism, and Dalit feminist thought. Through these frameworks, it analyzes how internalized racism in Pecola and caste-based patriarchy in Fulmaya represent structural violence that silences and subjugates women.

Findings: The study reveals that both novels depict oppression not as isolated experiences but as systemic and institutionalized practices that deny women autonomy and self-worth. Despite geographical and cultural differences, Pecola and Fulmaya experience similar mechanisms of dehumanization and exclusion embedded within their societies.

Conclusion: Understanding the lives of doubly marginalized women requires an intersectional lens that connects race, caste, gender, and class as interlocking systems of domination. The study underscores the necessity of inclusive feminist literary criticism that amplifies subaltern voices and challenges hierarchies of power across cultures.



Novelty: By bridging African American and Dalit feminist discourses, this research offers a transnational perspective on intersectional oppression, demonstrating how literature functions as a form of resistance that reclaims silenced narratives and envisions transformative justice.

Keywords: Doubly marginalization, intersectionality, race and caste, Black and Dalit feminism, structural violence, feminist literary criticism.

Introduction

Literature provides a critical lens for examining systemic inequalities, revealing how race, caste, gender, and class intersect to marginalize certain groups (Saleem, 2023). Double marginalization describes the compounded oppression women face due to gender combined with other social identities such as race, caste, or class (Muthukumar, 2023; Spivak 1988; Crenshaw 1989). These overlapping systems reinforce one another, producing unique forms of exclusion.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to explain how overlapping structures of race and gender create oppression “greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (p.124). Black feminist scholars such as bell hooks (1981), Lorde (1984), and Collins (2000) further illustrate how patriarchy, racism, and capitalism jointly oppress Black women. Similarly, Dalit feminist thinkers such as Rege (2006) and Guru (2005) foreground caste as a critical axis of oppression, emphasizing that Dalit women face exclusion from both mainstream feminist and caste-based movements.

This study analyzes Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Bibek Ojha’s *Ailani* (2019). Morrison’s novel is about Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl growing up in a racially divided America, and Ojha’s *Ailani* centers on Fulmaya, a Dalit woman from rural Nepal. Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl in 1940s America, internalizes white beauty ideals while enduring racial and gender oppression, resulting in profound psychological trauma. Fulmaya Badi, a Dalit woman from rural Nepal, confronts caste-based discrimination, economic deprivation, and sexual exploitation within a patriarchal society. Despite distinct historical and cultural contexts, both novels illuminate how intersecting systems of oppression constrain identity, agency, and social mobility.

Narayan (2021) notes that “women at the intersection of caste and gender are doubly marginalized, excluded from mainstream women’s movements and from caste-based movements led by men”. These narratives demonstrate literature’s power to resist erasure by amplifying the voices of those silenced by societal hierarchies, addressing Spivak’s question: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988).

A comparative study of *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani* is important because it shows how race and caste, though specific to different cultures, work in similar ways to exclude people. It also shows that women’s oppression is shaped by the historical, political, and social context of each society. This cross-cultural study shows that women’s marginalization is a global issue and supports the call for feminist solidarity across countries, as Mohanty (2003) explains, by recognizing both differences and shared connections in women’s struggles.



Moreover, these stories do more than show suffering; they also reveal subtle acts of resistance. Following Spivak's (1988) question, "Is it possible for the oppressed to have a genuine voice within systems of power that constantly silence them?", both Morrison and Ojha use literature to give voice to silenced women and show their political strength. Through Pecola and Fulmaya, the novels challenge dominant systems and stress the importance of voice and representation in the fight for justice.

While Morrison's work has been extensively analyzed within African American feminist discourse, and Nepali literature has explored Dalit women's oppression, there remains a critical gap in comparative transnational analyses that bridge these two cultural contexts. This study fills that void by juxtaposing Morrison's and Ojha's works to uncover shared patterns of intersectional subjugation and resistance across racial and caste-based hierarchies.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that brings together intersectionality, Black feminist theory, Dalit feminist theory, and postcolonial feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981; Collins, 2000; Rege, 2006; Guru, 2005; Spivak, 1988; Mohanty, 2003). Bringing these frameworks into conversation highlights how overlapping systems of race, caste, gender, and class sustain double marginalization across both African American and South Asian contexts.

Intersectionality and Structural Oppression

Intersectionality, as stated by Crenshaw (1989), provides the foundation of this analysis. It demonstrates that oppression is not a sum of isolated identities such as race or gender but the product of their intersection, producing distinct and compounded forms of discrimination. In *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani*, both Pecola and Fulmaya inhabit identities shaped simultaneously by gender and racial or caste-based subjugation. Their marginalization, therefore, is systemic rather than accidental, reflecting how institutional and cultural forces intertwine to limit women's agency and self-definition.

Black Feminist Thought and Caste Patriarchy

Black feminist theory, articulated by scholars like hooks (1981) and Collins (2000), critiques both mainstream feminism and antiracist movements for neglecting Black women's experiences. Collins's *matrix of domination* reveals how race, class, and gender intersect to sustain oppression, paralleling Rege's (2006) concept of *caste patriarchy* in South Asia, where caste and gender jointly uphold social hierarchies. Ambedkar (1936) underscores that caste is not merely a division of labor but a system that dehumanizes Dalit women, as seen in Fulmaya's experience in Ojha's *Ailani*. As Narayan (2021) notes, "The experience of Dalit women cannot be understood simply as the sum of caste discrimination and patriarchy," a truth that echoes Crenshaw's and hooks's arguments about African American women like Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, who, like Fulmaya, face unique oppression at the intersection of race or caste and gender.

Postcolonial Feminism and Subalternity

Postcolonial feminist theorists, particularly Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (2003), provide a crucial lens for examining silenced voices within marginalized communities.



Spivak's (1988) seminal question "*Can the subaltern speak?*" underscores how women from colonized or oppressed groups are often denied subjectivity within dominant narratives. Mohanty (2003) critiques the homogenization of "Third World women," urging scholars to recognize both diversity and solidarity among oppressed women globally. Within this framework, Pecola's mental disintegration and Fulmaya's coerced silence are read as symptoms of structural erasure; both characters reveal how women at the margins struggle to "speak" within systems that define them as voiceless.

Together, these perspectives form an analytical foundation for this comparative study. Intersectionality identifies the interlocking nature of oppression; Black and Dalit feminist theories ground this intersection within the lived realities of race and caste, and postcolonial feminism explains the global power dynamics that silence marginalized voices. This integrated framework enables a transnational reading of *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani*, one that recognizes both the cultural specificity of racism and casteism and their shared logic of exclusion. Ultimately, this framework guides the analysis of how Morrison and Ojha transform narratives of suffering into acts of resistance, enabling silenced subjects like Pecola and Fulmaya to reclaim voice, presence, and agency within their respective cultural contexts.

Silenced Selves: Character Analysis of Pecola and Fulmaya

Both Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Bibek Ojha's *Ailani* (2019) portray the intersectional experience of women marginalized by the system of race, cast, and gender. Both characters of these two novels illustrate how oppressive social structure shapes identity and silences the agency of women.

Identity and Internalized Oppression

Pecola Breedlove's fragile identity in *The Bluest Eye* is constructed through the racist beauty ideology of mid-twentieth-century America, which idealizes whiteness as the standard of human value. Her longing for blue eyes is not a childish fantasy but an act of self-erasure, reflecting the internalization of white supremacy. Morrison writes, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison, 1970, p. 46). Through this symbolic desire, Morrison illustrates how the Black female subject becomes alienated from her own body and consciousness.

bell hooks (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) identify this process as the effect of *controlling images* cultural stereotypes that define Black women as inferior and undesirable. Pecola's self-hatred, shaped by both racial and gender hierarchies, thus represents a psychic manifestation of systemic oppression. The absence of nurturing relationships within her family and community amplifies this internalized racism, demonstrating what Collins terms the *matrix of domination*: the interlocking social forces that maintain Black women's subordination. Morrison's fragmented narrative mirrors this disintegration of self, positioning Pecola as both the victim and the living testimony of racialized patriarchy's violence.

Similarly, in *Ailani*, Fulmaya Badi's identity is determined by her caste location and gendered vulnerability. As a Dalit woman from the Badi community, her social existence is marked by inherited stigma and exclusion. Ojha writes, "Fulmaya walked past the wells where



others drew water, but no one offered her a turn” (Ojha, 2019, p. 18). The imagery of the well, a symbol of purity and access, underscores her exclusion from both physical and symbolic sources of life. Rege’s (2006) concept of *caste patriarchy* explains this intersection: Dalit women suffer not merely as women or as Dalits but as subjects whose oppression is intensified by both categories. Fulmaya’s social invisibility mirrors Pecola’s racial erasure, revealing how caste and race operate as parallel systems of dehumanization.

Family, Community, and Structural Violence

In Morrison’s narrative, the Breedlove family functions as a microcosm of internalized racism. Cholly Breedlove’s violence toward Pecola and Pauline’s devotion to white families’ children reproduce the racial hierarchies that oppress them. When Morrison writes that “the Breedloves lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly” (Morrison, 1970, p. 39), she exposes the internalization of societal narratives that transform structural inequality into self-blame. This aligns with hooks’s observation that racism teaches Black women to seek validation through assimilation to white norms, erasing their authentic selves.

Fulmaya’s community in *Ailani* reflects a similar mechanism of inherited subjugation. The Badi community’s silence about its own exploitation perpetuates a collective acceptance of social inferiority. Fulmaya recalls, “We had to surrender our bodies for the sake of food... we were made into prostitutes, into fallen women” (Ojha, 2019, p. 42). Guru’s notion of a “differentiated system of domination” explains this dynamic: Dalit women’s oppression is sustained by both caste hierarchy and patriarchal control of women’s labor and sexuality (Guru, 2005). The social order that should protect them instead normalizes their commodification, turning survival itself into a form of coerced submission.

Voice, Agency, and Resistance

Both Morrison and Ojha dramatize the tension between silence and speech as central to women’s resistance. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola’s voice disintegrates as the narrative progresses; her eventual psychological collapse signifies the complete colonization of her consciousness. Spivak’s (1988) question “*Can the subaltern speak?*” finds a tragic echo here: Pecola cannot articulate her suffering within a discourse that renders Black female pain unspeakable. Her silence becomes the text’s political statement, compelling readers to confront the structures that silence her.

In contrast, Fulmaya retains moments of articulation and self-awareness, which constitute acts of resistance. Even within systemic exploitation, she narrates her story in her own words, asserting the humanity denied to her by caste and patriarchy. When she says, “We were not professionals; we were made into prostitutes,” her use of the collective “we” transforms personal trauma into social testimony. This aligns with Rege’s (2006) argument that Dalit women’s speech represents *counter-narrative agency* a challenge to the dominant scripts that define them as voiceless. Fulmaya’s narration therefore performs what Morrison’s Claudia attempts for Pecola: to recover meaning from silence and restore dignity through storytelling.

Pecola and Fulmaya exist in different cultural worlds, yet their experiences illuminate the shared logic of intersecting oppressions. Both are shaped by internalized ideologies that



equate whiteness or upper-caste status with worth. While Pecola's resistance is absorbed into madness a tragic embodiment of Spivak's subaltern who cannot speak Fulmaya's fragmented voice signals a tentative reclamation of agency within oppression. By placing these figures side by side, Morrison and Ojha reveal that systems of race and caste not only marginalize but also construct femininity as a site of control. Their novels compel readers to witness how structural violence manifests in everyday life and how the act of narration itself can become resistance.

Intersectionality and Forms of Resistance

Intersectionality, as theorized by Crenshaw (1989), provides the conceptual bridge between the racialized experiences of Pecola Breedlove and the caste-based struggles of Fulmaya Badi. Both *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani* depict oppression as a structural condition rather than an individual fate, showing how systems of race or caste, gender, and poverty intertwine to constrain women's agency. These novels reveal that oppression operates not through single axes of discrimination but through overlapping mechanisms that reinforce one another.

Crenshaw's framework clarifies that marginalized women often fall through the cracks of both feminist and antiracist (or anti-caste) discourses. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's suffering is invisible to the white feminist narrative and unaddressed by Black male-centered resistance movements. Similarly, in *Ailani*, Fulmaya remains unacknowledged by both mainstream Nepali feminisms dominated by upper-caste women and caste reform movements led by men. Their shared invisibility demonstrates what Narayan (2021) calls the "*structural invisibility of intersectional subjects*", a condition that prevents doubly marginalized women from accessing solidarity within existing frameworks of liberation.

However, both Morrison and Ojha challenge this invisibility through narrative resistance. Morrison's fragmented structure alternating voices, non-linear chronology, and the child narrator Claudia creates a polyphonic text that speaks where Pecola cannot. Claudia's reflections transform Pecola's silence into collective memory, illustrating what bell hooks (1992) terms the "*oppositional gaze*": the power of looking back and narrating against the dominant image. Through this narrative intervention, Morrison turns the act of storytelling into a political gesture, reclaiming the dignity denied to Black women.

Ojha's *Ailani*, by contrast, articulates resistance through Fulmaya's speech. Although she exists within systems that commodify her body, her storytelling becomes an act of defiance. By voicing the suffering of her community, she exposes what Rege (2006) calls "*the epistemic privilege of the marginalized*" the unique standpoint from which Dalit women can critique both patriarchy and caste hierarchies. Fulmaya's resistance, though quiet and constrained, resides in her ability to name exploitation and transform silence into testimony. Her narrative suggests that even within oppressive structures, speech itself can be subversive.

These forms of resistance Pecola's remembered silence and Fulmaya's tentative speech reflect two dimensions of intersectional struggle. The former represents the tragic consequences of compounded oppression that erases identity; the latter signals the potential for reclaiming agency through articulation. In both cases, the authors use literary form as a mode of feminist praxis. As Spivak (1988) argues, the subaltern's silence is never absolute it gestures toward an ethical responsibility on the part of readers and critics to listen, interpret, and



amplify. Morrison and Ojha, therefore, transform their narratives into spaces where the doubly marginalized can be seen, heard, and remembered.

Ultimately, *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani* reveal that resistance within intersecting oppressions is multifaceted: it may manifest as open articulation, quiet endurance, or narrative remembrance. Literature itself becomes the terrain of rebellion where women denied social voice find expressive power through art. By juxtaposing the racialized and caste-based struggles of Pecola and Fulmaya, the novels illuminate a shared truth: that confronting systemic violence requires not only social reform but also the reimagining of narrative space as an instrument of justice.

Literary Technique and Narrative Modes

Both Toni Morrison and Bibek Ojha use distinct narrative techniques that mirror the social and psychological fragmentation of their protagonists. While Morrison employs a complex, symbolic, and multi-voiced structure, Ojha relies on stark realism and cultural specificity. These stylistic choices are not merely aesthetic but ideological: they determine how oppression is represented and how resistance becomes thinkable.

Morrison's Fragmented Poetics

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's narrative form embodies the disintegration of Pecola's consciousness. The novel opens with the Dick-and-Jane primer, a parodic representation of white middle-class ideals, whose mechanical repetition and erasure of punctuation symbolize the homogenizing force of racial ideology. The fragmentation of this text is first legible, then distorted mirrors Pecola's psychological breakdown.

Morrison's use of multiple narrators, especially the partial child-narrator Claudia, constructs what Bakhtin would call a *polyphonic narrative*, where competing voices reveal the contradictions of Black life under racism. Through Claudia's retrospective voice, Morrison reclaims interpretive authority for Black girlhood, transforming observation into witness. The shifting perspectives, non-linear chronology, and symbolic imagery such as the marigolds that never bloom reflect what hooks (1992) terms the "*oppositional gaze*." By forcing readers to confront the violence of seeing and being seen, Morrison turns literary form into an act of political resistance. The aesthetic fragmentation of the novel thus mirrors the fractured identity produced by white supremacist patriarchy.

Ojha's Realist Testimony

In contrast, Ojha's *Ailani* adopts a restrained, realist style grounded in the oral traditions and dialects of rural Nepal. His third-person narration, infused with Nepali idioms and cultural references, produces what Rege (2006) describes as "*Dalit feminist testimony*," a language that derives authority from lived experience. Ojha's realism is not a passive representation; it is a deliberate strategy to confront the reader with the immediacy of caste and gender violence.

Symbols such as the *well* and the *dance* carry deep social significance. The well, from which Fulmaya is excluded, stands for purity, access, and belonging, while the enforced dance embodies the commodification of Dalit women's bodies under caste patriarchy. The sparseness of Ojha's prose accentuates the brutality of everyday discrimination. By embedding Fulmaya's story in local speech and community memory, Ojha enacts what Guru (2005) calls the "*politics*



of articulation,” the transformation of silence into speech that challenges structural marginalization. His realist mode allows the subaltern to speak in culturally resonant terms without mediation by elite language.

Although Morrison’s and Ojha’s techniques differ, poetic fragmentation versus documentary realism both aestheticize oppression to expose its systemic nature. Morrison internalizes violence within form; Ojha externalizes it through social realism. In both cases, narrative strategy becomes a means of resistance: Morrison reclaims the psychological interiority of Black girls denied visibility, and Ojha restores public testimony to Dalit women denied speech.

By comparing these modes, the study reveals how form and politics intersect. Morrison’s lyrical dissonance invites empathy through emotional rupture; Ojha’s clarity provokes indignation through moral confrontation. Together, they demonstrate that literary technique is inseparable from the ethics of representation: the choice of how to tell becomes an act of defiance against what dominant cultures refuse to hear.

Comparative Insights and Global Resonance

The Bluest Eye and *Ailani* converge across racial, caste, and cultural boundaries to expose the global structures that sustain women’s double marginalization. Although the novels emerge from different geographies, 1940s America and contemporary Nepal, they articulate parallel realities of exclusion, internalized inferiority, and muted defiance. Both Morrison and Ojha foreground how systems of power regulate women’s bodies and emotions, transforming them into sites of social control.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola’s tragic silence dramatizes the psychic consequences of internalized racism. Her belief that blue eyes could redeem her humanity reflects how colonial beauty standards infiltrate the self. Morrison writes, “Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes; fervently, for a year” (Morrison, 1970, p. 46). This repeated prayer becomes an act of both longing and annihilation, an emblem of how racialized desire destroys selfhood. Pecola’s inability to articulate her pain reveals the totalizing effect of intersecting oppression, where the combined forces of race, gender, and poverty leave no space for speech. Her silence is the measure of a world that refuses to listen.

In contrast, Fulmaya in *Ailani* speaks, and in speaking, she resists. Her testimony, “We were not professionals; we were made into prostitutes” (Ojha, 2019, p. 42), transforms her suffering into a social critique. Unlike Pecola, who internalizes the gaze, Fulmaya redirects it outward, naming the structures that violate her. This articulation embodies what Rege (2006) calls “*Dalit feminist agency*,” the act of narrating from within oppression rather than despite it. While Fulmaya’s circumstances remain constrained by caste patriarchy, her narration itself becomes a political gesture, an assertion of selfhood and memory against erasure.

Through these contrasting portrayals, Morrison and Ojha demonstrate that resistance takes multiple forms. In Morrison’s text, resistance resides in the narrative reconstruction of the choice to tell Pecola’s story through Claudia’s reflective voice, thereby converting silence into collective remembrance. In Ojha’s work, resistance lies in the direct articulation of the



reclaiming of speech as testimony. Both strategies reveal literature's capacity to transform private trauma into shared understanding and solidarity.

At a broader level, the juxtaposition of Pecola and Fulmaya exposes the transnational patterns of systemic injustice that traverse race and caste. Intersectional model (Crenshaw, 1989) and theory of caste patriarchy (Rege, 2006) converge here: both characters exist at the intersections of social hierarchies that define womanhood through exclusion. Yet both novels also affirm the universality of hope, the possibility of reclaiming identity through narrative voice.

By bridging African American and Dalit feminist discourses, these works invite a rethinking of global feminism beyond Western frameworks. They reveal that the mechanisms of dehumanization, whether through race or caste, are structurally analogous, demanding cross-cultural solidarity in resistance. Morrison's poetic fragmentation and Ojha's realist testimony, though stylistically distinct, share an ethical purpose: to make visible the lives of women whom history has silenced. Together, *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani* speak to a global readership, urging recognition that the struggle for dignity, agency, and justice transcends national and cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

This comparative study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Bibek Ojha's *Ailani* has examined how intersecting systems of race, caste, gender, and class produce the double marginalization of women. Through Pecola Breedlove and Fulmaya Badi, both authors portray oppression not as isolated misfortune but as the outcome of historically embedded social hierarchies. Morrison's racialized America and Ojha's caste-bound Nepal, though worlds apart, reveal structurally similar mechanisms of control that silence, objectify, and dehumanize women at the margins.

The analysis shows that Morrison exposes internalized oppression through a fragmented, symbolic form that captures the psychological disintegration of Black girlhood, while Ojha employs realist narration to articulate the lived reality of caste patriarchy. Both writers transform literature into an act of resistance: Morrison reclaims the silenced consciousness of the Black subaltern through Claudia's narrative voice, and Ojha restores agency to Dalit women through Fulmaya's testimony. In these narratives, storytelling itself becomes a political act of survival, memory, and defiance.

Theoretically, the study demonstrates how intersectionality, Black feminist thought, and Dalit feminist theory can be read together to illuminate global forms of structural violence. Race and caste, though contextually distinct, operate as parallel hierarchies that reinforce gendered subordination. By juxtaposing these two contexts, the study contributes to transnational feminist scholarship by showing how intersectional oppression transcends geography and demands comparative, cross-cultural analysis.

Beyond its literary insights, this research holds broader implications for feminist and postcolonial studies. It calls for academic and pedagogical frameworks that include marginalized voices from the Global South and re-examine canonical traditions through



intersectional lenses. Comparative readings such as this one invite dialogue between communities divided by geography yet united by shared experiences of exclusion. They challenge scholars to reconsider whose stories are told, who tells them, and how literary form can participate in the struggle for justice.

Ultimately, *The Bluest Eye* and *Ailani* affirm that literature is not merely a reflection of suffering but a transformative medium of resistance. Both novels remind readers that reclaiming silenced narratives is itself a form of empowerment an assertion that the doubly marginalized are not invisible but vital agents in the continuing global pursuit of equality, dignity, and human freedom.

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