

## Women's Subalternity and Subjugation in Postcolonial Literature: A Feminist Analysis of the Novel "All My Rage"

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### Abstract

*This article entitled "Subalternity in All My Rage by Sabaa Tahir: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis" raises the issue of women's subalternity, suppression, and marginalization. The research study aims to investigate women as subaltern objects that have been marginalized, double colonized and suppressed through physical and mental torture in social and political contexts in All My Rage (2022). It shows the power of patriarchy and its impacts on women's lives. It demonstrates the struggle of Noor, the female protagonist in the novel, who is suffering physical violence and marginalization but still chasing her dream. It shows the impacts of marginalization and subalternity on women's lives in the novel. The research article relies on the theoretical framework of Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subalterns Speak" (1988) as Spivak has presented this theory that focuses on the suppression and marginalization of an inferior class in society who have no access to power control and specifically she has used the term subaltern for the oppressed and subjugated women in Indian society. It uses the qualitative method for the textual analysis of the novel under the Can the Subalterns Speak (1988) paradigm. This research study will be beneficial to give a voice to subaltern and marginalized women in society, and it will also depict a realistic image of a society that considers women as an object of victimization, marginalization, and inferiority. This research study focuses on the understanding of All My Rage (2022) from a postcolonial feminist perspective with the lens of Can the Subalterns Speak (1988) to fulfill the knowledge gap.*

**Keywords:** Subaltern, Suppression, Marginalization, Postcolonial, Feminist, Patriarchy.

### Introduction

This research article aims to analyze *All My Rage* (2022) from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Colonialism and its impacts on the colonized countries are the main concerns of the postcolonial study. Many former colonies gained independence, but the powerful nations continued to rule over these weak countries directly or indirectly by operating a comprador class. The postcolonial feminist critic Spivak (1988) has combined postcolonial study with Feminism to emphasize women's subalternity, marginalization, suppression, violence, double colonization, and patriarchy. In both circumstances, women have been seen as third-world women, suppressed and marginalized. This research article aims to answer the research question: How far does Tahir portray the subalternity of women and its impacts on women's lives in her novel *All My Rage*.

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### The Novelist

Sabaa Tahir (1983 to present) is a Pakistani American English young adult novelist who wrote *All My Rage* in 2022. Her parents moved from Pakistan to the United Kingdom. Later on, they shifted to the USA. Sabaa Tahir's childhood was spent in the Mojave Desert in Ridgecrest, California. It also serves as the setting for her recent novel *All My Rage*. She attended UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). She had been the internet of "The Washington Post". After graduation, she joined "The Washington Post" as a copy editor. She became famous for her novel *An Ember in the Ashes* (2015) and its sequels, *All My Rage*. Her novel, *All My Rage*, got the Boston Globe-horn book award, the National Book Award for Young People Literature, and the Micheal L. Printz Award.

### The Novel

*All My Rage*, published in 2022, is a Boston Globe-horn book award and Micheal L Printz award-winning third novel by Pakistani American novelist Sabaa Tahir. The novel is set in Juniper, California, and Lahore, Pakistan, presenting the story of Noor and Salahudin, who are trying to build their future and identity as respected citizens there. Noor, the female protagonist, is an orphan whose parents have been killed in an earthquake in Pakistan. Her uncle took her with him to the USA. Noor is an ambitious girl who wants to be admitted to college to pursue her higher education but needs help applying as her uncle does not allow her to pursue higher education. She has been the victim of her uncle's constant physical violence, but she cannot tell anyone as she is helpless and financially constrained. The novel depicts women as oppressed and marginalized objects. Due to societal and cultural expectations, the female characters face difficulties throughout their lives in the novel.

Similarly, Misbah, the mother of the male protagonist, Salahuddin, tolerates all the ills of her husband's personality. Her husband, Taufiq, is a drunkard and irresponsible. She often feels nostalgic about Pakistan and her father and the days of childhood. She enjoys listening to Pakistani music, preparing food, and speaking Punjabi. She has struggled to maintain their motel and be a respected citizen there. She struggles to support her husband and her family financially.

Moreover, Noor faces racism in school from different white students, but she is unable to retaliate in response as she is a Pakistani woman and 'other' in that society. Jamie is one of the students whose racist behavior is the source of agony and psychological disintegration and keeps Noor in constant worry. As a woman, she is being considered the object of oppression by her uncle instead of being an orphaned child. On the other hand, she has been marginalized by white students in her school by not giving any opportunity to her to participate in activities. Sabaa Tahir has successfully portrayed the image of subaltern women in the society where Shaukat Riaz, Noor's uncle, whose physical violence, harassment, and marginalization create difficulties for the female protagonist. Women are treated as subalterns in the novel. Their existence has no meaning for others. They are marginalized and humiliated.

The researcher analyzes *All My Rage* (2022) in the context of *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) paradigm, which Spivak presents. Spivak has taken the concept of *Subaltern* from Antonio Gramsci as referring to the lower class people or considered inferior. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) define subalterns as people who are represented by the elite class as *others* and colonized. As a postcolonial Feminist Critic, Spivak (1988)'s primary focus is on women's subordination and marginalization. Therefore, concerning *Can the Subalterns Speak* (1988), the researcher's focus is to find the socio-political and gender subalternity of women in society and will also find out the impacts of marginalization on women's lives throughout the novel.

## Literature Review

Subaltern studies is the study of the socially and politically inferior under the hegemonic structure of colonial power. The concept of 'History from Below' was a new approach in English tradition, emphasizing the issues of ordinary people of society. The emergence of subaltern studies as a new discipline was in the early 1980s. Eric J. Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, and E. P. Thompson are a few significant writers in this discipline. This discipline of Subaltern studies aims to give personal space and place and primarily to give a 'voice' to the inferior class. Critical theorists like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak have contributed significantly. Dirlik (1994) stated in the article "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" that a subaltern study is merely an application of approaches by the Marxist historians, although modified by "Third World Sensibilities" (Dirlik 340). The contributions made by famous theorists like Ranajit Guha, Edward Said, Arif Dirlik, Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, and many others are tremendously significant in the development of the discipline of subaltern studies.

### Gramsci's Subaltern: Resistance against Social Classes

The Italian communist Antonio Gramsci (1891 - 1937) was the first philosopher to coin the term 'subaltern' in the civil sense for the inferior classes with no recognition and authority in social and political paradigms. Editor and translator Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971), in the book "*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*," deals with the term subaltern as one half of the binary relationship. Gramsci considered the other half the elite class and the dominant class of society. The State is solely responsible for the unification of ruling or hegemonic social classes, so the group left behind as a minority group is considered a 'subaltern' group (Gramsci et al., 2021, p. 52). The doors for the subaltern group in Politics and power corridors remain closed for active participation. Few members of the Subaltern group get the opportunity to exercise a sort of hegemony. Still, this hegemony is not the same as the hegemony of the ruling or elite class. Political parties of one sort include the elements of the hegemonic group alone, while a few other parties with a new bent of ideology consider the 'subaltern' groups (Gramsci et al., 2021, p. 53). In the context of Gramsci, it encouraged such inferior groups to participate and show their strength in politics and governmental affairs. This will enhance the ability of leadership in such groups. This will provide them with political hegemony through which the representation of this group is made authentic in the social and political context. On the contrary, if they allowed the powerful elite to lead them as before, the Subalterns would never rise to any substantial power (Gramsci et al., 2021, p. 57).

### Spivak and Subalternity

Gayatri Spivak, in her famous essay '*Can the Subaltern Speak*' (1988), stated the concept of 'Subaltern' as the inferior group of the society. She used this term for third-world women, especially Indian women. She deals with this term in the context of the suppression, marginalization, subjugation, and double colonization of Indian women. She also deals with the concept of Sati. She writes about the subjugation of women in the postcolonial context. She elucidates that women have been doubly colonized.

On the other hand, they have been colonized by males of their society, especially by patriarchy. Women have no space and place in the society. Women have been considered as an inferior class. They have been treated as 'subaltern' objects, having no voice of their own. Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage* (2022) highlights women's suppression and marginalization, where women are the victims of society. The women are bound to cultural and societal norms. They cannot raise their voice to

speak for themselves. The women are struggling with their subaltern identities by facing racism, physical violence, and harassment. Women are socially and politically ignored and victimized in the novel. The said novel and its concerned themes have been connected and verified by the concept of subalternity, which Spivak used in her famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) in the Indian cultural context to focus on women's suppression, marginalization, and violence as Spivak (1988) states that woman has no social space which allows her to speak for herself. As subalterns, women are subjected to patriarchy and socio-cultural norms and traditions in society.

### **Research Methodology**

The research question used in this study is: How far does Tahir portray the subalternity of women and its impacts on women's lives in her novel *All My Rage*? This paper used the textual analysis approach (McKee, 2001). A close reading has been carried out to identify the issues of subalternity, violence, marginalization, suppression, and double colonization of women through a postcolonial feminist perspective. After identification of these issues in the relevant text, they were presented and critically discussed in the data analysis section.

The selected text of *All My Rage* (2022) is relevant in the context of the postcolonial feminist perspective as it depicts the struggle of a women who has been marginalized, suppressed, and physically tortured by her society, restricting her from fundamental rights like higher education and considered her as an 'other.' This text deals with the subalternity of women whose voices have no impact and are voiceless.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is based on the postcolonial Feminist Analysis of *All My Rage* (2022). This novel has been studied and analyzed through the *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) paradigm, where Spivak specifically emphasized the victimization and subordination of women as women are unable to secure a dignified place in society.

As Spivak (1988) faced the challenges of defining the scope of subalternity, she switched to re-evaluating the concerns of the subaltern communities by addressing the issues of gender, notably those affecting Indian women during colonial times. She used her examination of a case involving Sati women during colonial control to reflect the status of Indian women. Women are given a marginal position in the conflicts of imperialism, patriarchy, and tradition. The woman's identity has been changed into nothingness. Subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988). Spivak claims that a woman is a real subaltern whose voice is not heard by others.

Subalterns have no voice to be heard. Moreover, Guha (1982) states that subaltern studies aim to extract out subordination and suppression of any marginalized group caused by gender, caste, and culture. These issues affect the subalterns and change their existence to nothingness.

Similarly, *All My Rage* (2022) by Sabaa Tahir has been examined through the theoretical framework of *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) which highlights women's subalternity in socio-political and racial contexts.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Women as Subaltern Object**

The female protagonist, Noor, has a strong passion for college but cannot apply for admission because her uncle does not allow it. She is an orphan whose parents have been killed in an earthquake in Pakistan. Her uncle brought her to the USA, and now she is living with her uncle. She wants to pursue her higher education to get recognition in society but needs help to apply as

she is not allowed to and is forced to work in her uncle's liquor house. Her Chachu is fond of theorems, and he has devised a theorem for Noor and her future in chapter 3 of the novel, as Noor and going to college will never happen.

To pursue her endeavors, she secretly tries to give an online interview, hiding in the washroom and gets support from Salahuddin. She goes to the washroom on the pretext of stomach ache. She cannot raise her voice for her fundamental right to higher education as she knows that her voice has no impact on her uncle, making her a subaltern object in society. The online secret interview was in progress, and she answered the interviewer's questions in a low voice to prevent her uncle from knowing the secret. Salahuddin, her best friend, was at the door of the main building to learn about the uncle's arrival. Suddenly, their uncle appears, and Salahudin informs her about the arrival of her uncle. This scene is described in chapter 12 of the novel, which is heart-wrenching and shows how a woman could be helpless. She drops her phone in fear and stops her online interview. She is unable to raise her voice against the violence of her uncle and cannot tell about the violence of her uncle to anyone. She cannot speak against him. She depends on her uncle as she has no place to live besides her uncle's house, as she is an orphan. She has no voice of her own. When Jamie, her white classmate, told her that she knew her secret, Noor thought that perhaps Jamie was aware of her uncle's violence, but it was not the case. In chapter 29 of the novel, Noor wants to tell the people about her uncle's violence, but she cannot tell it to the people as her voice has no importance. No one considers her voice significant, and she has no shelter.

Moreover, the novel's subalternity at the religious level is also an essential issue. Noor is not allowed to offer her religious obligations. Her uncle is a secular person who thinks that God is a construct of weak-minded people. He does not believe in God and hates everything that is Pakistani and religious. For instance, she wants to offer Fajr prayer but cannot follow her religious obligation because she thinks her uncle will not like it. She is entirely dependent upon her uncle, so she cannot raise her voice against any ill-treatment of her. In chapter 3 of the novel, she narrates her condition as there is still time to do the Fajr prayer, and she wants to offer the prayer, but she does not offer the prayer because she knows that her uncle would not like the prayer as he is secular and does not believe in God. Her uncle religiously marginalizes her by not allowing her to offer religious obligations. Hence, it is shown as the element of subalternity in the novel for women characters. Religious subalternity is also identified in the novel as the uncle's remarks about Misbah. Misbah is also a marginalized woman. Her husband is a drunkard and irresponsible. She is keeping the relations intact and managing the house's finances. Uncle's remarks are very racial about Misbah and her religious perspective in chapter 10, as he thinks that religion is the sign of an inferior and oppressed creature. It is also the opium of people by Karl Marx. He says that Misbah was very stupid to encourage religion in all matters. Misbah, the mother of the male protagonist, Salahudin, is also suffering from subalternity at many levels.

### **Woman Has No Home / No Existence**

Noor, the female protagonist, is constantly worried about her survival. Her parents have been killed in an earthquake in Pakistan. She has no place of her own. Her only abode is her uncle's home, where she does not feel safe, as she has been constantly facing physical violence by her uncle. She feels nostalgic about Pakistan, but no one in Pakistan can take care of her. Salahuddin's best friend is a source of solace for her, but she is still worried about her future. She feels disillusioned and rootless. She can imagine that Pakistan is not her home, and Juniper is also not a home as she is not safe. In chapter 16, another crucial scene occurs where she feels rootless. She falls into the arms of Salahudin and cries as she feels rootless because she thinks that Pakistan is not her home

anymore. The USA is also not her home because she belongs basically to Pakistan and feels considered as 'other' in American society.

Jamie, a white student and Noor's classmate, does not accept Noor's existence. She passes racial remarks about Noor. She mispronounces Noor as nore, which sounds like a bore, etc. She constantly ignores her existence. She considers Noor to be an 'other.' She competes with Noor without any reason. She leaves no opportunity wasted to humiliate Noor. She tells her to go back to her country. She tells her that Noor is illegally living in this country. In chapter 3, Sabaa Tahir narrates the non-acceptance of Noor by a white student, Jamie. Jamie ignores Noor's existence as Noor narrates the situation. Jamie has known me since first grade but does not accept my identity. She refused to pronounce Noor's name correctly. Jamie intentionally mispronounces Noor's name and constantly ignores her existence.

Noor has no place for herself. She is rootless. She has no family. Her parents had already died in an earthquake. She has no shelter. She is homeless if her uncle does not allow her to his home. Her only family is her uncle's house. That house is not safe for her. She has been treated in a humiliating way, but it is her compulsion to live there. In chapter 39, she says that Chachu is the only family.

### **Violence Faced by Women**

Violence is one of the essential themes in the novel. There are many instances in the novel where physical violence against women has been depicted. Noor, the female protagonist, faces physical violence by her uncle. Tahir writes about the violence in chapter 36 when Noor's uncle beats Noor for some reason, and Sabaa Tahir tremendously narrates the scene of physical violence in a way that her uncle hits Noor to the wall, and her teeth rattle. There was blood everywhere on her forehead, face and nose. Her main concern is not her wounds but the wounds that are at the front of his body, which other people can see; in this way, the violence might be exposed to other people. She is helpless. On the one hand, she wants to expose the violence of her uncle, but she is unable to raise her voice. She is a subaltern object, having no voice of her own.

Moreover, she cannot say anything about this violence. She wants to tell all about the violence to Salahuddin but cannot. When Salahuddin asks her why she is crying? She does not tell the actual reason. Her body aches. She is hurt physically. She faces this violence in routine for no reason. She cannot express her feelings and emotional condition to her loved ones. When Salahuddin asks about crying, she wants to tell him that her back hurts and she has headaches, but she cannot tell him. In chapter 36, the scene of violence was also narrated by Sabaa Tahir as Noor was slammed by her uncle in the ribs. She feels helpless. She cries for help, but no one is there to help her.

### **Patriarchy and Its Influence**

Misbah is a typical Pakistani woman who obeys her husband through thick and thin. Her husband, Taufiq, is an irresponsible and drunkard man. He is not aware of his domestic responsibilities. The patriarchy has a profound influence on the characters in the novel, especially on Misbah. On her deathbed at the hospital, she still cares about her husband and asks about him from her son. At that crucial time, Taufiq is a drunkard and embarrasses them in the hospital by abusing the staff and making noise. When Misbah talks about her husband from her son, she says that Abu is embarrassing the hell out of himself by throwing up in the hallway of the hospital. He is a drunkard in this critical time of illness in the hospital. He drinks all day, avoiding all the responsibilities. Misbah also manages the house's finances, which is the actuated husband's responsibility, but he is irresponsible and drunk. She tries to manage the bills and daily expenses of the house and plays the role of her husband.

## Findings

The discussion on Sabaa Tahir's novel shows that the novel has represented and highlighted the issues of subalternity, violence, women's marginalization, suppression, subjugation, patriarchy, and double colonization. It has been argued that women have been the victims of violence, marginalization, patriarchy, and subjugation.

Further, the women in the novel are denied their fundamental rights like higher education, the power of self-decision, and the right to live a violence-free life. Tahir depicts Noor as a struggling woman who has no voice. She has been the victim of physical violence. She has no right to get a higher education and make her life respected. She cannot chase her dream. She is helpless. She has no voice.

Furthermore, Misbah is also a woman whose husband is irresponsible and always in a drunkard condition. She always tries to manage the finances of her home. She was on her deathbed at the hospital, worried about her husband. The patriarchy has influenced her. She is carrying out her husband's responsibilities. She has a nostalgic feeling about Pakistan. She thinks of herself as an 'other.'

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher argues that *All My Rage* is a novel full of issues related to women's subalternity, marginalization, subjugation, violence, patriarchy, racial discrimination, and double colonization. Considering the above analysis, I conclude that these various issues of subalternity, subjugation, violence, marginalization, and patriarchy have been narrated in the novel, which comes under *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) by Gayatri Spivak. In light of this study, it can be argued that the text of *All My Rage* can be used to explore similar themes through postcolonial feminist analysis. This research article provides new ways to view postcolonial feminist elements in *All My Rage* (2022). The researcher has analyzed the selected text in order to explore the themes of subalternity, violence, subjugation, marginalization, suppression, and patriarchy and its influence on postcolonial women. The researcher adopted the textual analysis method and applied Spivak's "*Can the Subaltern Speak*" theoretical framework to examine the suppression, marginalization, and their impacts on the subaltern woman. The text of *All My Rage* (2022) shows much evidence of patriarchy, suppression, marginalization, and subalternity of women. Further recommendations and future research endeavors can be made in the text of *All My Rage* through different lenses of postcolonial feminism and other elements of the related concepts.

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