

Voice, Body, And Constrained Agency: Gendered Subalternity and Everyday Resistance in Homen Borgohain's *Subala*

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Abstract—Homen Borgohain's *Subala* occupies an important place in modern Assamese fiction because it joins social realism with an intense exploration of a woman's inner life. Centered on a poor woman who is drawn into prostitution and later trapped by the false promises of marriage, the novel is often read as a tragic narrative of patriarchy, sexual exploitation, and social victimhood. This paper argues that such a reading, though necessary, remains incomplete unless it also recognizes the forms of constrained agency through which *Subala* speaks, refuses, moves, remembers, and judges the world that degrades her. Through a qualitative close reading of the novel, supported by feminist, subaltern, objectification, and every day-resistance theory, the paper examines how Borgohain represents poverty, bodily commodification, first-person confession, suicide, marriage, and return. The analysis shows that *Subala*'s resistance is not heroic or emancipatory in a simple sense. Her choices are often narrow, costly, and reabsorbed by the same structures she contests. Yet her self-narration, her refusal to accept the names imposed on her, her rejection of Kanti's violence, and her final withdrawal from an abusive marriage disturb the social order that attempts to reduce her to a body without voice. The paper concludes that *Subala* is best understood as a novel of gendered subalternity in which resistance survives not as full liberation, but as an ethical claim to personhood under conditions designed to deny it.

Index Terms—Homen Borgohain; *Subala*; Assamese novel; gender; subalternity; prostitution; resistance

I. INTRODUCTION

Homen Borgohain is one of the major figures of modern Assamese literature, remembered not only as

a novelist but also as a journalist, editor, public intellectual, and critic of social life. His fiction repeatedly turns toward characters placed under pressure by poverty, social hypocrisy, moral loneliness, and psychological conflict. In this sense, Borgohain's literary world is both social and inward: it observes institutions such as family, marriage, class, and respectability, while also entering the unstable inner world of people wounded by those institutions. *Subala*, first published in 1963 and later issued in a second edition in 1976, is among the clearest examples of this double movement. The novel presents the life of *Subala*, a woman whose poverty, gender, and sexual exploitation push her toward the margins of society, yet whose first-person narrative refuses to let that marginality become silence.

The attached handwritten notes identify many of the central concerns of the novel: Borgohain's social realism, his concern for the oppressed and degraded, the use of confession and interior monologue, the connection between poverty and prostitution, the protagonist's repeated humiliation, and her attempt to preserve moral value even when society brands her as "fallen." These concerns form the basis of the present paper. However, this study develops the topic further by asking how *Subala* should be read if *Subala* is neither treated merely as a helpless victim nor romanticized as a fully liberated rebel. The novel's power lies precisely in the uncomfortable space between these two readings. *Subala* resists, but her resistance is repeatedly limited. She speaks, but her voice is mediated by a male author and by the language of a society that stigmatizes women like her. She moves from one place to another, but movement does

not necessarily produce freedom. She enters marriage hoping for dignity, but marriage reproduces the marketplace in another form. She returns to prostitution, not because it is liberation, but because it becomes the lesser violence when compared with conjugal abuse.

The central argument of this paper is that *Subala* represents constrained agency. Subala's agency exists, but it operates inside severe limits created by class deprivation, patriarchal authority, sexual commodification, and moral stigma. Her agency is therefore fragmented, defensive, and often painful. Yet it is still significant. Her acts of self-naming, narration, refusal, withdrawal, and moral judgment show that she is not simply an object of pity. She becomes a subject who describes the world that has injured her and, by doing so, indicts it.

This argument matters because literary criticism of women in prostitution sometimes falls into two simplified positions. One position sees the woman only as a victim of male violence and social corruption. Another position, in reaction, stresses choice or resistance in ways that risk overlooking structural coercion. *Subala* demands a more careful vocabulary. The novel does not present prostitution as free choice, nor does it erase the protagonist's attempts to act within oppressive conditions. Its realism lies in showing how a woman may resist without becoming free, and how survival itself may carry both dignity and defeat.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship on Borgohain often emphasizes his social awareness and psychological realism. Saikia (2019), writing on *Pitaputra*, argues that Borgohain's fiction is deeply concerned with society and the psychological conflicts produced within it. Although the essay does not focus on *Subala*, it is useful for understanding Borgohain's broader fictional method: characters are not isolated individuals, but beings shaped by family pressure, social contradictions, and inner turmoil.

Gohain (2021), in a study of psychological naturalism in *Astarag*, similarly stresses Borgohain's interest in the inner life of characters and his ability to present social reality through psychological experience. These

studies help situate *Subala* within a larger Borgohain tradition in which social realism and psychological depth are not separate but mutually reinforcing.

More directly, Devi and Tamuly (2023) read *Subala* as a text about women's position under patriarchy. Their essay highlights prostitution, male dominance, and the ways in which Subala is exploited by both family and society. This reading is important because it correctly foregrounds the gendered violence of the novel. Subala's body is used as an economic resource by others; her vulnerability is created not by individual weakness but by the combined force of poverty and patriarchy. The study also rightly observes that male figures such as Naren and Kanti participate in her exploitation and that social institutions fail to protect her.

However, the existing discussion leaves room for a more integrated reading of narrative voice, social structure, and resistance. A purely victim-centered reading risks flattening Subala into an emblem of suffering. At the same time, a purely celebratory reading of resistance would be equally misleading because the novel refuses any easy triumph. The research gap, therefore, lies in examining how *Subala* represents agency under constraint: how the protagonist acts, speaks, refuses, and survives when every available option is already compromised. This paper addresses that gap by combining feminist and subaltern theory with close attention to Borgohain's first-person narrative technique.

The paper also extends the discussion by treating the novel's form as politically meaningful. Subala's confession is not just a device for storytelling; it is itself part of the novel's ethical structure. Through the first-person voice, the woman whom society names as impure becomes the interpreter of society's impurity. Her narration turns stigma back toward the social order that produced it.

Yet this voice must also be read critically, because it is constructed by a male author and by a literary tradition that sometimes represents marginalized women through suffering, shame, and bodily vulnerability. The aim of this study is therefore not to declare Borgohain a feminist writer in a simple sense, but to examine how *Subala* opens a space for feminist reading while also retaining the tensions of male-authored representation.

III. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this paper is to analyse *Subala* as a novel of gendered subalternity and constrained resistance.

More specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. To examine how poverty, gender, and sexual stigma combine to produce Subala's marginal position;
2. To analyse the role of first-person narration, confession, and interiority in giving Subala a voice;
3. To identify the forms of everyday resistance present in the novel;
4. To evaluate the limits of Subala's agency within patriarchal and capitalist structures; and
5. To consider the ethical complexity of Borgohain's representation of a marginalized woman.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does *Subala* connect poverty with the sexual commodification of women?
2. In what ways does Subala's first-person narration challenge her social objectification?
3. What kinds of resistance does Subala perform, and why do these acts fail to produce full liberation?
4. How does the novel represent marriage, prostitution, and respectability as related forms of control?
5. What are the possibilities and limits of reading *Subala* as a feminist or subaltern text?

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a qualitative interpretive method based on close reading. The primary text is Homen Borgohain's *Subala*, with reference to the verified 1976 second edition and its publication history as a novel first published in 1963. Since the novel is in Assamese, the analysis attends to translated meanings rather than claiming final authority over every linguistic nuance. All translations and paraphrases used in the discussion are treated as interpretive renderings by the researcher.

The method is textual rather than empirical. It does not study prostitution as a sociological field through interviews or data collection; instead, it examines how prostitution, poverty, and gendered suffering are represented in a literary text. Key scenes and motifs were selected for analysis because they recur across

the novel and because they reveal the relationship between social structure and personal agency. These include Subala's self-naming, her childhood hunger, her movement away from the village, her entry into prostitution, her attempts at suicide, her relationship with Kanti, her refusal of a customer inside marriage, and her final return to the brothel.

The analysis uses thematic coding in a literary sense. The major codes are material deprivation, sexual and economic coercion, naming and misnaming, speech and silence, spatial movement, refusal, aspiration, and failure. These codes make it possible to connect individual episodes to the larger argument of constrained agency. The paper uses the term "sex work" when referring to contemporary analytical debates, while using "prostitution" when reflecting the historical and stigmatizing vocabulary of the novel and its critical context.

The study has three main limitations. First, it focuses on one novel and therefore does not make broad claims about all of Borgohain's fiction. Second, the paper is written in English while the primary text is Assamese, so translation inevitably shapes interpretation. Third, because *Subala* is a male-authored novel about a marginalized woman, the paper cannot treat the protagonist's voice as a transparent record of lived female experience. It analyses that voice as a literary construction that is both powerful and ethically complex.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this paper brings together feminist theory, subaltern studies, objectification theory, and the concept of everyday resistance.

Simone de Beauvoir's argument that woman is historically constructed as "Other" is relevant to *Subala* because the protagonist is judged through social categories created by men and by patriarchal respectability. Subala is not allowed to define herself freely. She is defined as daughter, burden, sexual object, prostitute, wife, and finally as an ageing body losing exchange value. De Beauvoir's insight helps explain why gender oppression is not merely individual mistreatment but a social process of making woman secondary and dependent.

Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is equally important. Subala does speak in the novel, but

the question is whether her speech is fully heard and under what conditions it becomes legible. Her narrative emerges from a position of marginality: poverty, prostitution, lack of social honour, and gendered vulnerability. The novel gives her a first-person voice, but that voice is also mediated by a male author and by a society that understands women in prostitution through shame. A subaltern reading therefore asks not simply whether Subala speaks, but how her speech is framed, constrained, and received. Nussbaum's theory of objectification is useful for analysing the repeated reduction of Subala to a body. Objectification includes treating a person as a tool, as interchangeable, as violable, as lacking autonomy, or as something owned by others. These forms appear throughout *Subala*. Subala is renamed by customers, valued through her sexual availability, and economically measured through the body. Yet objectification does not entirely erase subjectivity. The painful force of the novel comes from the fact that Subala knows she is being objectified and narrates that knowledge.

Foucault's account of sexuality and power helps move the analysis beyond the idea that sexual control operates only through prohibition. In *Subala*, power works through family need, hunger, social shame, male desire, police naming, brothel economy, and marriage. Sexuality is regulated by a network of institutions and discourses rather than by a single oppressor. The novel shows that a woman's body becomes the point where poverty, desire, law, market, and morality meet.

James C. Scott's idea of "hidden transcripts" and everyday resistance provides a way to read Subala's small acts without exaggerating them into revolution. Resistance may include silence, evasion, refusal, self-description, and the preservation of inner judgment. Subala's resistance is often private, defensive, and partial. She does not overthrow the system; rather, she creates moments in which the system's claim over her is interrupted. Harlow's concept of resistance literature also helps situate the novel as a narrative that gives political meaning to suffering and refusal, even when the protagonist remains materially defeated.

Finally, intersectionality, as developed by Crenshaw and extended in transnational feminist criticism by Mohanty, is necessary because Subala's oppression cannot be explained by gender alone. She is poor, socially vulnerable, sexually stigmatized, and

structurally abandoned. Her suffering is produced at the intersection of class, gender, sexuality, and social respectability. A feminist reading that ignores poverty would miss the novel's material foundation; a class reading that ignores sexual stigma would miss the specifically gendered form of her degradation.

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Hunger, Class, and Gendered Dispossession

Subala begins from deprivation. The protagonist's life is shaped not by abstract moral weakness but by hunger, death, debt, and lack of property. Her father's absence and the sale or loss of land leave the family exposed to scarcity. Her mother's labour is not enough to protect the children from hunger. This background is crucial because the novel refuses to isolate prostitution from material conditions. Subala's later sexual exploitation is rooted in an earlier economic dispossession.

The novel therefore challenges the moral habit of judging the marginalized individual while ignoring the social order that creates marginality. Subala is not born "fallen." She is pushed toward vulnerability by a world in which poor women have few resources and few recognized rights over their own bodies. Hunger is not merely a physical condition in the novel; it is a social force that narrows the imagination of the future. When survival itself is uncertain, moral choice becomes severely constrained. This does not mean that the novel removes responsibility from every individual who harms Subala. On the contrary, Borgohain shows the cruelty of those who exploit her weakness. But he also shows that exploitation becomes possible because social structures have already made her available to it. Poverty prepares the ground for patriarchy. The family, which is supposed to protect, becomes a site where a girl's body can be viewed as an economic solution. Society then condemns the woman for the very degradation it helped produce.

Subala's gender makes her poverty more dangerous. A poor male character may face hunger, humiliation, or labour exploitation, but Subala's poverty is sexualized. Her body becomes the most visible resource in a world where she lacks land, money, education, and social power. The novel's realism lies in showing this transformation: the poor female body becomes a site of exchange because other forms of property have been denied.

6.2 From Person to Commodity

One of the most disturbing aspects of *Subala* is the gradual conversion of Subala from person to commodity. This conversion is marked by names, transactions, and bodily valuation. At the beginning of her narration, Subala distinguishes her real name from the many aliases imposed on her by customers, police, and the brothel world. The difference between “Subala” and her other names is not a minor detail. It is the difference between selfhood and social objectification.

Names have power in the novel. To rename Subala is to claim authority over her identity. Customers rename her for pleasure, convenience, or fantasy. Police and social authorities rename her through stigma. Each imposed name weakens the connection between the person and her own history. Yet the novel’s first-person narration begins by reclaiming that history: “my real name” becomes a declaration of personhood. Before Subala tells the story of her body, she insists on the truth of her name.

The brothel economy then intensifies the logic of objectification. Subala’s body becomes her “capital,” a word that reveals how the market enters intimacy. Her value depends on youth, sexual availability, novelty, and the desire of men. In such a world, a woman is not simply oppressed by lust; she is priced. The body becomes a commodity, and time becomes a threat because ageing reduces market value. This is why the ending of the novel, where Subala grows older and is rejected by clients, is so devastating. It shows that the market first consumes the woman and then abandons her when profit declines.

Nussbaum’s categories of objectification clarify this process. Subala is treated as instrumental because her body is used for others’ pleasure and income. She is treated as violable because male access to her body is assumed. She is treated as lacking autonomy because others decide where she should go and what she should do. She is treated as interchangeable because her individual history matters less than her function in the sexual market. However, Borgohain does not let objectification become total. Subala’s inner voice repeatedly interrupts the market’s definition of her. She observes, remembers, judges, and feels shame not because she accepts society’s judgment, but because she remains morally alive in a world that wants to treat her as a thing.

6.3 First-Person Voice and Interior Monologue as Counter-Discourse

The most important formal feature of *Subala* is its first-person narration. Subala tells her own story, and this act of telling alters the ethical relationship between reader and protagonist. If the same events were narrated from outside, Subala might appear primarily as an object of sympathy. Through first-person confession, she becomes the interpreter of her own suffering.

Confession is a complex form. On one hand, it may seem to accept guilt. The phrase “sinful life,” often associated with the novel’s reception, suggests a moral vocabulary shaped by social stigma. On the other hand, confession can also become accusation. When Subala narrates her life, she does not simply confess personal sin; she reveals the social sins hidden behind respectability. Her speech exposes hunger, male violence, hypocrisy, and the market logic that lies beneath moral judgment. The reader is therefore invited to ask not only what Subala has done, but what has been done to her.

Dorrit Cohn’s work on fictional consciousness helps explain why interior narration matters. The novel’s access to Subala’s mental world allows the reader to see the difference between social identity and inner life. Society sees a prostitute; the narrative reveals a thinking, remembering, desiring, wounded subject. This gap between external label and internal consciousness is politically important. It breaks the smooth surface of stigma.

At the same time, the novel must be read with caution. Subala’s voice is written by Borgohain, a male author. The text gives a marginalized woman speech, but that speech is not identical with direct testimony. It is a crafted literary voice. This does not invalidate the novel; rather, it requires an ethical reading. The question is not whether Borgohain perfectly represents female experience, but how the novel uses female voice to criticize social structures and where it may still reproduce the language of shame or suffering expected of “fallen women.”

The first-person form also creates intimacy without fully resolving distance. Readers are drawn close to Subala’s thoughts, yet they remain aware that she speaks from a position already marked by humiliation. This tension is central to the novel’s power. The narrative voice is both wounded and analytical. Subala

is not merely crying out; she is interpreting the society that has wounded her.

6.4 Everyday Resistance and Constrained Agency

Subala's resistance is not dramatic in the conventional heroic sense. She does not lead a revolt, defeat her

exploiters, or escape into a secure future. Her acts are smaller and more fragile. Yet they matter because they interrupt the idea that she is only passive. Scott's theory of everyday resistance helps identify these moments as meaningful even when they do not overturn power.

Table 1: Subala's Everyday Resistance and Constrained Agency

Episode	Dominant force	Form of resistance	Limit of resistance
Subala asserts her real name against imposed aliases	Social stigma and sexual market naming	Self-naming; recovery of identity	Her social world continues to recognize the aliases and stigma
She leaves the village and abusive conditions	Poverty, family pressure, male threat	Spatial movement; refusal of immediate control	Movement leads into another structure of exploitation
She attempts suicide	Social abandonment and unbearable humiliation	Negative refusal of continued suffering	Suicide cannot create justice and is stopped or fails
She accepts Kanti's promise of marriage	Desire for dignity and respectability	Hope; attempt to re-enter social legitimacy	Marriage reproduces control and economic exploitation
She hides savings and questions Kanti's demands	Conjugal greed and male entitlement	Economic self-protection	Kanti's violence overpowers her limited control
She pushes away the customer brought by Kanti	Husband's attempt to sell her body	Direct bodily refusal	Kanti later uses force and betrayal
She leaves Kanti and returns to the brothel	Domestic abuse and false respectability	Withdrawal from marriage; choice of lesser violence	Return is not liberation but survival within stigma

This table shows that Subala's resistance is real but structurally limited. Each act creates a moment of self-assertion, yet each is absorbed by larger forces. Her flight does not produce freedom because the world outside the village is also organized by male desire and economic need. Her marriage does not produce dignity because Kanti treats her body and savings as resources.

Her return to the brothel is not a happy choice, but it is not simple defeat either. It is a grim decision to leave one form of violence for another that is at least familiar and less hypocritical.

The key point is that agency should not be measured only by successful escape. If agency means complete freedom, Subala has little of it. But if agency also includes judgment, refusal, self-protection, movement, and the preservation of inner dignity, then Subala's life contains repeated acts of agency. The novel asks readers to recognize these acts without exaggerating them. That balance is crucial.

6.5 Suicide as Indictment, Not Liberation

Subala's suicide attempts are among the most troubling moments in the novel. They should not be romanticized as noble resistance. Suicide is presented as a response to unbearable suffering, not as freedom in any celebratory sense. Yet the scenes also function as an indictment of society. Subala observes that society often ignores the living suffering of the poor and degraded but intervenes when a person tries to die. This contradiction exposes the hypocrisy of social morality.

The suicide attempt therefore reveals a cruel paradox. Society claims authority over Subala's life without guaranteeing conditions that make life bearable. It prevents death, but it does not protect dignity. It condemns self-destruction, but tolerates the slow destruction produced by hunger, sexual exploitation, and shame.

Subala's desire to die is thus not merely personal despair; it is a judgment against a world that leaves her no meaningful place.

In this sense, suicide becomes a negative form of agency. It is the refusal of a life organized entirely by others' power. But because it destroys the subject who resists, it cannot be treated as liberation. Borgohain's achievement is to hold both truths together. The suicide attempts reveal the depth of Subala's suffering and the failure of society, while also showing the tragic narrowness of the choices available to her.

6.6 Marriage, Respectability, and the Reproduction of the Market

The Kanti episode is central to the novel's critique of respectability. Marriage appears at first as a possible escape from prostitution. For Subala, it promises recognition, domestic belonging, and release from the brothel's open commodification. Yet the promise collapses because Kanti reproduces the same logic of ownership under the respectable name of husband.

This is one of the novel's sharpest social insights. Prostitution and marriage are not presented as identical, but the novel shows that both can become systems in which a woman's body and labour are controlled by men. In the brothel, Subala's body is openly exchanged for money. In marriage, Kanti attempts to control her savings, her sexuality, and her movement. When he brings a customer into the marital space, the distinction between brothel and home breaks down. The husband becomes pimp-like, and marriage loses its moral superiority.

Subala's refusal of the customer is therefore one of her most direct acts of resistance. She pushes him away and tries to close the door against the violation of her body. This moment matters because it occurs inside marriage, where patriarchal power often hides behind legitimacy. By refusing, Subala asserts that marriage does not give Kanti the right to sell her. Her body remains hers, even if society and husband deny that claim.

Kanti's violence then reveals the limits of her refusal. He can use force because patriarchy gives him physical and social advantage. Yet Subala's later decision to leave him is still meaningful. She recognizes that the respectable home has become another marketplace. Her return to the brothel is tragic, but it also unmask marriage as a false rescue. The novel thus refuses the sentimental idea that marriage automatically redeems a sexually stigmatized woman. Respectability without justice is only another form of control.

6.7 The Ethics and Limits of Male Representation

Any reading of *Subala* must address the ethical question of representation. Borgohain gives narrative centrality to a woman pushed to the margins, and this is a significant literary act. The novel criticizes the social production of the "fallen woman" and makes readers confront the humanity of someone whom respectable society would prefer to ignore. It also gives psychological depth to a character who might otherwise have been treated as a stock figure.

At the same time, the novel is not free from tension. Male-authored narratives of women in prostitution can sometimes reproduce the very stigma they criticize, especially when suffering, shame, and bodily degradation become the main means through which female experience is made visible. *Subala* occasionally relies on the tragic intensity of the suffering female body. The reader must therefore ask whether the novel fully escapes the gaze it condemns. The answer is complex. Borgohain does not present Subala as morally empty or merely sensual. He gives her memory, intelligence, shame, anger, hope, and judgment. The narrative repeatedly insists on her inner life. Yet the novel's ethical force depends on pain, and pain can become a familiar literary way of making marginalized women readable. A feminist reading should therefore value the novel's critique while remaining alert to the limits of its representational imagination.

This tension does not weaken the novel's importance. Rather, it makes *Subala* more significant as a text for critical analysis. It allows readers to see both the possibilities and limits of male social realism. Borgohain exposes patriarchy, poverty, and hypocrisy, but he does so through a tragic female body that remains vulnerable to aesthetic and moral framing. The novel is therefore not a simple feminist manifesto; it is a powerful, conflicted, and ethically demanding social novel.

VII. MAJOR FINDINGS

The analysis leads to the following major findings.

First, *Subala* presents prostitution as a social and economic outcome rather than an individual moral failure. Poverty, hunger, landlessness, family pressure, and gender vulnerability create the conditions in which Subala's body becomes available for exploitation. The novel therefore shifts responsibility from the

stigmatized woman to the society that produces her marginalization.

Second, Subala's first-person narration is a major form of resistance. By telling her own story and asserting her real name, she challenges the aliases and labels imposed by customers, police, and society. Her voice does not erase suffering, but it transforms suffering into testimony and judgment.

Third, the novel represents the body as a site where class, gender, sexuality, and market power intersect. Subala's body becomes capital in the sexual economy, but it also remains the location of pain, memory, refusal, and selfhood. Borgohain's realism depends on this contradiction.

Fourth, Subala's agency is constrained rather than absent. Her actions—flight, refusal, economic self-protection, rejection of Kanti's customer, and withdrawal from marriage—show that she is not passive. However, each act is limited by larger structures of patriarchy and poverty.

Fifth, the novel critiques marriage as an institution that can reproduce the logic of the market. Kanti's abuse shows that respectability does not guarantee dignity for women. Marriage becomes another form of control when it is based on male entitlement rather than mutual recognition.

Sixth, the suicide scenes reveal society's hypocrisy. Society claims the right to stop self-destruction while failing to prevent the social destruction caused by hunger, humiliation, and sexual violence. Suicide is therefore represented as tragic indictment, not liberation.

Finally, *Subala* is a valuable but ethically complex text for feminist reading. It gives voice and depth to a marginalized woman, yet it remains a male-authored narrative that sometimes depends on the spectacle of female suffering. Its significance lies in this very complexity.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Homen Borgohain's *Subala* is a powerful exploration of gendered subalternity in modern Assamese fiction.

The novel presents a woman whose life is shaped by poverty, sexual exploitation, social stigma, and patriarchal betrayal, but it does not reduce her to silent victimhood. Through first-person narration, Subala claims the right to name herself, remember her past, judge her oppressors, and narrate the society that has condemned her.

The central contribution of this paper has been to read Subala's agency as constrained rather than absent or complete. Her acts of resistance are real: she speaks, moves, refuses, protects money, rejects sexual coercion inside marriage, and leaves an abusive husband. Yet these acts do not produce liberation in any simple sense. They are repeatedly narrowed by poverty, male violence, sexual stigma, and social abandonment. The novel's realism lies in refusing a comforting ending. Subala survives, but survival is not redemption. She returns to the brothel, ages, and remains socially rejected. However, the narrative itself prevents her from disappearing into that rejection. Her voice remains.

In this way, *Subala* exposes the moral failure of a society that creates "fallen" women and then condemns them for falling. It also challenges readers to rethink resistance. Resistance is not always revolution, escape, or victory. Sometimes it is the insistence on one's name. Sometimes it is the refusal of a door being opened to violence. Sometimes it is leaving a false home for a harsher but more honest reality. Subala's life is tragic, but her narration turns tragedy into social accusation. That is the enduring force of Borgohain's novel.

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