

EXPLORING SPIVAK'S POWER DYNAMICS IN UZMA ASLAM KHAN'S *THINNER THAN SKIN*

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Abstract

This study explores the Spivak's concept of the subaltern, its interpretation with reference to power dynamics and its representation in Uzma Aslam Khan's Thinner than Skin. Moreover, it delves into the question of whether marginalized voices can truly be heard and understood within the dominant discourse or not. Through a detailed analysis of Khan's work, this study aims to shed light on the struggles, experiences, and agency of the subaltern characters in the novel. This research is framed within the theoretical framework of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Can The Subaltern Speak. The methodology employed in this study is textual analysis, focusing on the examination of Khan's novel Thinner than Skin. In addition to the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory and the methodology of textual analysis, this research also explores the theme of voice and agency in Khan's novel through a subaltern perspective. This research contributes to the broader understanding of subaltern literature. It elucidates the potential of these narratives to challenge the prevailing power structures and amplify the voices that have long been silenced. Moreover, the research seeks to amplify the narratives of the subaltern, allowing them to be heard and understood within the larger societal framework.

KEYWORDS: Subaltern, Agency, Experiences, Post colonialism, Thinner than Skin.

Introduction

Uzma Aslam Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin*, delves into the complexities of power dynamics, identity formation, and voicelessness (Irum, 2020). As the novel navigates the journey of Farhana and Nadir, it raises questions about the ability of the subaltern to articulate their perspectives and claim agency within a larger sociopolitical context. In her novel, Khan illustrates how the subaltern's voice is often stifled or distorted by the dominant forces that shape society, such as patriarchy, globalization, or the legacy of colonialism. Khan also portrays the limitations and complexities of language itself, emphasizing how linguistic barriers and the dominance of the English language can further marginalize non-Western voices. Language becomes a site of struggle and a reflection of power dynamics, inhibiting the subaltern's ability to effectively communicate their experiences and articulate their demands (Mole, 2018).

Thinner than Skin is a fascinating novel about belonging and identity. The novel is a love tale of a Pakistani young man, Nadir, who is trying to make his way as a photographer in America, and Farhana, the daughter of German mother and Pakistani father, brought up in United States of America, who wants to go back to the country she never perceived. Farhana and Nadir came to Pakistan on a trip, where

they get a chance to meet a young nomad which changes their lives, and the lives of those around them, forever.

Additionally, Khan offers many dynamic examples of strong Pakistani women, and the fact that a male narrator's voice provides the evidence that the novel is dealing with gender issues (Tolle, 2013). Like Nadir grew up in Pakistan before he moved to United States and for both Khan's fiction and Nadir's photography, Pakistan continues to provide a wealth of inspiration.

However, *Thinner than Skin* is not a novel that solely highlights voicelessness and powerlessness. It also suggests that the subaltern can find alternative ways to express their identities and challenge oppressive systems. Likewise, Khan explores avenues where marginalized voices can emerge, such as through non-verbal communication, shared memories, connections to nature, and communal support systems. These moments of resistance and defiance disrupt the dominance of the oppressor's narrative and offer glimpses of empowerment and agency.

Primary to Spivak's concern is 'subaltern' and in her works explore the representation of the third world women, tribal people and orient. Spivak attempts to focus on the struggle of the silenced subalterns and gives them a voice. By championing the voices, she challenges some dominant idea that the western world is more civilized and developed than the non-western world. It can be noticed how the subalterns have been represented by British writers since long back.

In her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, she questions the voice of the subaltern groups; women, tribal people, third world countries, and otherness. *Can a Subaltern Speak*, exposes the approach that the subalterns have awakened to a consciousness of their own rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality, by developing it an irony. In addition Spivak exposes the irony that the subalterns have awakened to a consciousness of their rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality. She criticizes the harm done to Women/Third World women and non Europeans.

According to Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak. She opines that the subaltern does not have a voice. Spivak, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* writes: "The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with women a pious. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual has a circumscribe task that she must not disown with a flourish" (1988). She denounces the harm done to the women of third world regions and non-Europeans and wants to give voice to the subalterns who cannot speak or who are silent. Moreover, Spivak focuses on speculations made on widow sacrifice and attempts to restore the presence of the women writers who have been submerged by their male peers. Spivak investigates of Women's Double-Colonization (Dalit/Black women) and attacks the Eurocentric attitudes of the West.

According to her, "knowledge is never innocent; it is always operated by western economical interest and power". For Spivak, knowledge is like any other commodity or product that is exported from the west to the Third world. The western scholars have always presented themselves and their knowledge about the Eastern cultures as objective. The knowledge about the third world is always constructed with the political and economic interest of the west (Ambesange, 2021).

The question of whether the subaltern can speak or not has become the central concern in postcolonial studies, Provoking discussions on the representation and agency of marginalized voices. This concept, initially proposed by Spivak in her essay, *Can a Subaltern Speak?* challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies

and seeks to amplify the voices of those historically silenced by hegemonic discourses.

In her novel, *Thinner than Skin*, Khan represents and portrays the limitations faced by subaltern voices, as well as the potential for alternative modes of expression and resistance, through the portrayal of Nadir, the protagonist's experiences, and it offers insights into the complexities of cultural and social power dynamics, shedding light on the struggles, resilience, and possibilities for agency among marginalized communities. Marginalized communities are group of people who are excluded from mainstream society and often subject to discrimination, prejudice and unequal treatment these communities may include who experience poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other form of oppression (Drummond & Bradman, 2014).

The Complexities of culture refers to the diver range of costume, belief, values, norms and tradition that shape the way people live or interest with each other within a society which is multifaceted and intricate that is often difficult to fully understand and comprehend (Craig J. Thompson, 1999). Social power dynamics explore the ways in which power is distributed and exercised within a society and group. It involves the relationship and intersections between individuals and group based on their relative position of power, privilege and influence (Liu, 2020).

Moreover, the term 'Subaltern' refers to the individual or groups who are socially, politically, economically marginalized within a society. These groups are often excluded from position of powers and lack excess to the resources and opportunities, and making it difficult for them to challenge or resist dominant power structures (Spivak, 1988). This study contributes to the broader discourse surrounding the representation and empowerment of subaltern voices and provides a nuanced understanding of how literature can be a tool for amplifying marginalized perspectives

Literature Review

The essay *Can a Subaltern Speak* examines the issue of subaltern individuals' ability to speak in a social and academic setting. Subaltern subjects are people who are marginalized and subjugated by dominant institutions of authority (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988). Since the publication of Spivak's essay, there has the concept of the subaltern has extensively been analyzed within the field of postcolonial studies (Raich, 2017). The subaltern refers to individuals or groups, who lack power, are marginalized, and who are unable to represent themselves within dominant discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 2014).

The essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* poses a fundamental question about subalternity and agency, asking whether it is possible for the subaltern to speak, or if their voice is always already suppressed or appropriated by dominant discourse (Raich, 2017). Spivak highlights the difficulties of representing the subaltern subject, and the challenges facing postcolonial scholars who seek to amplify subaltern voices.

Western representations and interpretations of the subaltern distort their experiences, rendering their voices inauthentic and powerless. Thus, subaltern subjects are denied self-representation and agency, and their experiences are appropriated and re-described by the dominant discourse. Spivak critiques Marxist and nationalist discourses for failing to recognize the complexities of subaltern realities and the challenges involved in allowing them to speak. She argues that the subaltern is not only silenced by oppressive systems, but also by the very language of

those systems. In other words, the subaltern cannot find a voice within the linguistic and cultural parameters of colonizers (Spivak, 1988).

Spivak draws on the example of British colonialism in India to illustrate her argument. She demonstrates how the British colonizers misrepresented the subaltern voice in their attempts to control and govern Indian society. The British discourse, she argues, is characterized by a self-perpetuating system of representation, in which the subaltern is used to support the colonizer's claims of superiority. The subaltern is thus never truly liberated, and their voice is never truly heard or understood (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988). Spivak's essay has been the subject of extensive debate and critique in postcolonial studies. Her analysis is too deterministic, and that it underestimates the potential for subaltern subjects to resist and challenge dominant discourses. Moreover, she emphasizes on the scholarly representation of the subaltern, rather than on actual subaltern voices and experiences (Mohanty, 1988).

The analysis of Spivak's hypothetical experiences can be done from the viewpoints of Rosalind Morris, a professor of humanities at Columbia College, and Ilan Kapoor, a basic advancement learning instructor at York College. They both offer substantial new perspectives on her work while speaking more directly about the global compassionate guide (Ortquist, 2017). In his essay, *Hyper-Self-Reflexive Turn of Events? Spivak on Addressing the Third World "Other"*, Kapoor addresses Spivak's basic questions of depiction in development and her justification for the need for self-reflection in the Helpful guide discourse (Kapoor, 2018). Morris thus improves Spivak's translation in *Can the Inferior Talk? Reflections on a Thought are Historical Setting*. She raises the issue of the entertainers' perception of basic liberties, which is a crucial component of Spivak's fictitious knowledge (Ortquist, 2017).

Spivak has emphasized the importance of recognizing the diversity and complexity of subaltern experiences and identities. She has also argued that her focus on scholarly representation is crucial to interrogating the ways in which dominant structures of power operate in academic and cultural spheres. Spivak's work continues to be a touchstone for discussions on voice, agency, and representation in postcolonial studies. Some scholars have argued that the concept of the subaltern assumes a homogeneous subaltern experience, ignoring the diverse experiences of different groups and individuals. Scholars have also drawn attention to the gendered aspects of Spivak's position, highlighting that her argument assumes a masculine and heterosexual model of resistance. Others have suggested that the idea of the subaltern has been co-opted by neoliberal discourses, becoming a trope used to justify colonization and development. This criticism follows from Spivak's rejection of nationalist discourses and her argument that the postcolonial state is simply a continuation of colonial power structures (Spivak, 1988).

In addition, Spivak's work highlights the significance of the voice of the marginalized in the shaping of postcolonial thought. Spivak rejects the idea that philosophers and postcolonial historians might use the voices and perspectives of the oppressed. She argues that these intellectuals combine their commitment to political marginalization with their philosophical skepticism in order to reclaim subaltern agency. Besides she successfully warns postcolonial writers against idealizing and appropriating the subaltern subject. In her critique of Spivak's adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, Benita Parry referred to Spivak's obsession with subaltern "silence" as "deliberate deafness to the native voice, where it can be heard." Repel claims that Spivak's description of faulty silence provides "complete."

The work *Reflections on the History of an Idea* and *The 'Subaltern' Is Talking* by Dipesh Chakrabarty examines Spivak's well-known work as well as the various uses of the subaltern in postcolonial discourse. At Columbia University in February, a conference commemorating Spivak's intellectual accomplishments as a valued employee was organized to mark the 20th anniversary of the significant essay *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* was the opening title chosen for this event by Rosalind Morris and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. The original work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* by Spivak revolutionized the study of colonialism with a compelling and uncompromising argument (Morris, 2010).

Ranajit Guha is a critique of Spivak's, contends that significant change is required if the underclass is to be heard within the confines of the political systems that already exist. The emergence of subaltern studies was a reaction to nationalist Marxist history and reductionist materialist readings of historical events like peasant uprisings. On a discursive level, it also contested the notion of a world history of capitalism. In a previous essay, Ranajit Guha referred to the law as the agent of the state. "The will of the state could be made to penetrate, reorganize piece by piece, and ultimately control the will of a subject population through the law," he said, "in much the same way that Providence is brought to impose itself" (Guha, 2012).

After numerous reprints, the author started to grow increasingly concerned about how "Might the Inferior at Any Point Talk?" was being read and used. At this moment, the grim tale of a hidden Asian womanliness was in danger of being reused once more in a mind-boggling analysis of force, want, and intrigue. In order to outline a key section of her new book, *Towards an Investigate of Post-pioneer Reason*, Spivak expanded and revised it. As opposed to the formal question of "could the inferior ever speak?" the fundamental question in the two variations is "can the dominant ear hear anything? With this expanding commitment, several researchers connected Spivak's theory to the significant, observable uniqueness of colonization (O'Brien, 2019).

Overall, the question of whether or not the inferior can speak is still a complex and evolving one. While Spivak's essay generated a lot of controversy regarding the suppression of small gatherings, assessments of her theories and hypotheses emphasize the complexity of small gatherings and the need for many perspectives to be heard. In the end, the concept of the inferior raises more significant difficulties related to authority, depiction, and the legal aspects of knowledge. The investigation into female collaboration in rebellion or the rules of the division of labor, for which there is "proof," is not contained within the agenda of the inferior subject that has been annihilated. The intellectual evolution of orientation is, in some ways, both the topic of imperialist historiography and the target of rebellion.... (Spivak, 1988). Spivak assumes that because it is challenging to recover and rewrite history under the Western system, Inferior is speechless.

Literature review demonstrates that several studies have been conducted on Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern and its representation in literature in order to show an effective literary dimension against the resistance of hegemony. The influential essay from 1988, titled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* intricately examines the interactions between power, language, and representation within postcolonial contexts. The central query revolves around whether historically marginalized groups, collectively referred to as the "subaltern," possess the genuine agency to articulate their experiences within a societal framework where dominant voices hold sway. This

analysis focuses on Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin*, using Spivak's conceptual framework as a lens to scrutinize how the novel grapples with the intricate task of amplifying muted subaltern narratives. By closely scrutinizing the characters and their interactions within the narrative, this study reveals how Khan's work engages with the core question of whether the subaltern can truly find empowerment in their act of expression.

Qualitative research is used in this study. Moreover, the theoretical framework revolves around postcolonial theory. This research explore the concept of the subaltern and its relevance to Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin*. Postcolonial theories that examine power dynamics, representation, and the voices of marginalized individuals can provide a lens to analyze the novel's theme and characters. As for the method, textual analysis would be employed. This study involves closely examining the novel's content, such as its language, narrative structure, and character development.

This study explore how the novel engages with the subaltern subjectivity and addresses the question of whether the subaltern can truly speak. By combining the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory with the method of textual analysis, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin*, addresses the complexities of subaltern voices and their representation in postcolonial context. This analysis is to explore the interplay between Spivak's conceptual framework and Khan's narrative in *Thinner than Skin*, seeking to unveil how the novel addresses the intricate challenge of representing the voices of the subaltern.

Discussion and Analysis

Khan's novel enters into a dialogue with Spivak's theoretical constructs through its characters and their stories. The narrative grapples with the complexities of conveying experiences that have historically been suppressed or silenced. Within the storyline, characters navigate the complexities of migration, cultural dislocation, and the assertion of identity within a world marked by power imbalances and historical legacies. As the characters' narratives unfold, resonances of Spivak's concerns come to the fore, prompting contemplation on the boundaries and potentials of representation.

Spivak's theoretical foundations and Khan's fictional empire, this analysis seeks to uncover how *Thinner than Skin* navigates the intricate landscape of giving voice to the subaltern. The analysis investigates how the novel aligns with or diverges from Spivak's ideas, closely scrutinizing instances where characters' struggles parallel Spivak's concerns. By delving into the thematic and narrative complexities of *Thinner than Skin*, this analysis aims to illuminate the novel's contribution to the ongoing discourse concerning the agency and representation of marginalized voices within the sphere of postcolonial literature and theory.

A focused textual analysis emerges as essential for unraveling the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the narrative. Engaging in a close reading of the text allows for a comprehensive exploration of how subaltern voices intersect with power dynamics and negotiations of identity. By closely examining specific passages and their literary devices, this analysis aims to uncover the underlying thematic connections, shedding light on how *Thinner than Skin* navigates the intricate terrain of representation, agency, and the complexities of the postcolonial context. As in the

novel Khan states, “There was a limit to the extent to baggage any creature could hold”.

A nuanced exploration unfolds, delving into the intricate linguistic nuances and profound thematic complexities of the novel. Language serves as a conduit for unveiling muted perspectives and silenced subaltern voices, echoing Spivak's concerns about representation (Spivak, 1988). Through the characters' dialogues and inner reflections: "He said you can reproduce an image, but you can't reproduce a soul" (Khan, 2012), the narrative seamlessly weaves individual experiences into a broader discourse on postcolonial intricacies. Themes of identity, displacement, and resistance further enrich the narrative, resonating with Spivak's inquiry into the agency of subaltern voices within prevailing power structures.

Within the framework of *Thinner than Skin*, specific themes such as power dynamics, forcelessness, and identity rise to prominence. An expressive example of power dynamics is evident in the poignant interaction between Maryam and her daughter As in the novel Khan stated, “In later years, Kiran would Maryam if her skin was as thin as goat's. And Maryam would tell her the truth. It was thinner. Which meant, of course, that if a goat could be shred that easily, so could a woman” (2012). The act of instructing the daughter on how to disembowel a goat becomes a potent metaphor for the fragility of women's existence within a patriarchal framework.

In Khan's novel, language is a powerful tool that intricately weaves emotions and experiences into the narrative. Through her skillful prose and vivid imagery, Khan enables readers to delve into characters' inner realms. A poignant reflection by one character: “I was going to give you a choice but the dying have no choice,' captures this sentiment” (Khan, 2012). Language serves as a conduit, conveying both external landscapes and inner conflicts, allowing glimpses into characters' emotional landscapes. The narrative functions as a reflective surface, providing insights into their thoughts, longings, and dilemmas, creating a palpable connection between readers and characters' profound journeys.

In *Thinner than Skin*, Khan portrays vivid empowerment and agency within the subaltern sphere, unraveling resilience against power dynamics. In the same way, after Kiran's death, Irfan uttered, “If this had happened in America, you'd be in jail. If this had happened to the child of a landlord, you'd be in danger, and in dept” (Khan, 2012). Characters confront challenges, reclaim voices, disrupt oppression, and reshape narratives through resistance and communal support, defying expectations.

The subaltern identity emerges as a potent force, navigating adversity to reshape the narrative landscape. Just like, the Uzbek herders of Afghanistan faced significant challenges and hardships during both the Russian and Taliban periods, “No less pitiful was the condition of shepherds all over Pakistan. Look what was happening in the south, in Baluchistan, with Pakistan selling its coast to China, throwing people off their own land. Or giving it to America” (Khan, 2012). This exploration underscores the intricate dynamics of agency within the subaltern framework, emphasizing empowerment and resistance's profound interplay.

In *Thinner than Skin*, Khan's language serves a dual purpose, vividly portraying landscapes and characters' inner conflicts. The evocative language transports readers between settings and delves into protagonists' complexities, echoing Spivak's exploration of marginalized voices (Spivak, 1988). Language bridges external realities and internal struggles, reflecting multidimensional characters and emotions. Just as Spivak examines power dynamics in granting agency to silenced voices, Khan's linguistic choices mirror characters' challenges.

Language plays a crucial part in the novel's dense plot, acting as a vehicle for depicting the complex web of experiences and feelings. Khan skillfully uses language to give the abstract world of emotions and encounters concrete, understandable phrases. This literary device serves as a bridge, enabling readers to travel through the characters' perilous emotional landscapes. As Khan magnificently articulates: "There are always openings in the mountains. Always. You can find them. If you learn to track with sound" (Khan, 2012).

A variation of languages are linked within Khan's complex story, *Thinner than Skin*, to reflect the depth of the characters' experiences. While Urdu and regional idioms are purposefully incorporated, English still serves as the primary narrative medium, adding a further element of realism to the storyline. This language mingling captures the characters' complex relationship with their cultural identities and the challenges of everyday life.

The exploration of postcolonial narratives, as in Spivak's essay, delves into power dynamics and marginalized voices, with a focus on the "subaltern". Spivak's quote: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988), emphasizes colonialist attitudes and power imbalances. Khan's narrative intricately delves into themes of sensitivity and marginalized perspectives, necessitating a conscientious approach rooted in respect and empathy. Moreover, ethical deliberations play a pivotal role in navigating subjects like power dynamics, cultural representation, and subaltern voices.

Delving into the rich tapestry of the novel, Khan's storyline journey goes across themes that demand sensitivity, necessitating an ethical lens that honors the diverse voices conveyed. Ethical considerations come to the forefront as we grapple with topics that illuminate power dynamics, representation, and the voices of the marginalized. "She gazed at death with sadness as deep and liquid as the lake, a sadness from which, her dark eyes said, she was going to have to learn to surface" (Khan, 2012).

Additionally, the portrayal of Pakistani culture, harmoniously juxtaposed with other cultural contexts, enriches the narrative tapestry, amplifying subaltern voices and challenging one-dimensional perspectives. The study, conscious of its limitations, navigates ethical considerations thoughtfully while engaging with sensitive themes. Ultimately, it contributes substantively to scholarly discourse while empowering the voices of those on the margins. In the manner of Maryam exclaimed: "Forgiveness is thinner than skin" (Khan, 2012).

As navigate the intricate landscapes of *Thinner than Skin*, the analysis has illuminated a series of profound revelations. Our exploration into subaltern voices, empowerment, and the interplay of cultural intricacies has uncovered the multi-layered tapestry of the novel's narrative. Through this study, the moments of resistance, subtle triumphs, and the dynamic interactions among characters existing within the constraints of patriarchal societal structures and transcending cultural boundaries have unearthed. For instance, "There was no deeper hell than a pair of eyes without voice" (Khan, 2012).

The novel emerges as a vibrant canvas that intricately paints the shades of subaltern voices. Characters like Farhana and Maryam embody nuanced expressions of resistance, courage to defy norms, and the persistence to carve out paths of empowerment. This study has illuminated these instances, highlighting how subaltern voices flourish amidst the constraints imposed by power dynamics and cultural norms.

The novel's portrayal of empowerment intricately weaves with its depiction of

cultural complexities, as exemplified in the words of Khan, "wasn't sunrise meant to be the hour of hope?' The season of creation' some poet or other had once called it. Fucking poet" (Khan, 2012). This study encapsulates the intricate dance of subaltern voices, empowerment, and cultural dynamics within *Thinner than Skin*, enhancing the comprehension of the novel's profound themes and their resonance within the broader scholarly discourse.

Can the Subaltern Speak? stands as a seminal essay authored by Spivak, critically examining the complexities inherent in representing and amplifying the voices of marginalized and oppressed groups. This work poses significant inquiries regarding the agency and visibility of the subaltern, individuals historically muted by prevailing power structures. Within the context of Khan's novel *Thinner than Skin*, an illuminating case study can be conducted that employs Spivak's concepts to dissect how the characters and themes within the narrative mirror and respond to the question of whether the subaltern can truly articulate their experiences.

In summation, *Thinner than Skin* uncovers instances of empowerment and agency within subaltern contexts, emphasizing that even in the face of adversity, silenced voices can be reclaimed and agency asserted. The characters' navigation through challenges serves as poignant examples of such empowering moments. The novel also highlights that modes of expression go beyond language, encompassing non-verbal channels and the solidarity nurtured within communities. These explorations ultimately celebrate the resilience of the subaltern spirit, its capacity for resistance, empowerment, and its remarkable ability to instigate transformation.⁴⁹

Adding to this discourse, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's perspective resonates: "Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within globalizing capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor by making one model of 'concrete experience' the model. We are witnessing this in our discipline daily as we see the postcolonial migrant become the norm, thus occluding the native once again" (Spivak, 1988). This line aligns with the exploration of subaltern agency and the challenges posed by mainstream frameworks, highlighting the relevance of marginalized voices within a globalizing context.

Khan's literary endeavors have not only succeeded but excelled in presenting a genuine portrayal of Pakistani culture and effectively representing subaltern voices in her works. It is important to acknowledge the achievements rather than label them as failures. Khan's characters embark on journeys of self-discovery, a quintessential feature of subaltern narratives. Their quests to understand their cultural heritage and establish their authentic identities are pivotal. This introspective exploration contributes to a deeper comprehension of their struggles and the intricate nuances of the subaltern perspective.

Conclusion

Thorough examination of Khan's novel *Thinner than Skin* through the lens of Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between femininity, post-colonialism, textual analysis, and the portrayal of Pakistani culture. Through a rigorous textual analysis that involves a close reading of the novel's narrative, themes, and characters, it becomes evident that Khan's attempt to present Pakistani culture and the subaltern experience falls short of its intended mark.

The great novel *Thinner than Skin* by Khan's investigates into various aspects of Pakistani society and culture, particularly through its portrayal of characters like

Nadir and Maryam. However, it is notable that Khan's depiction lacks the depth and authenticity needed to fully capture the intricacies of Pakistani culture. This deficiency can be attributed to a range of factors, including the author's perspective and her struggle to transcend her own subjectivity while representing a culture that is diverse and multifaceted. Khan's portrayal of the subaltern experience also raises questions about her ability to authentically voice the silenced narratives that Spivak's essay emphasizes.

Language emerges as a pivotal element in Khan's narrative strategy. The author's linguistic choices shape the readers' engagement with the story and characters, influencing their understanding of the subaltern experience. However, Khan's use of language can be perceived as problematic in terms of capturing the true essence of the subaltern. Author's language struggles reflect representing historically marginalized voices. This mirrors the subaltern's inability to express within oppressive structures.

Khan's exploration of subaltern agency and representation aligns with Spivak's arguments while adding depth to their complexities. The characters' struggles to articulate their experiences resonate with Spivak's insights into the limitations of conventional forms of representation. Khan's intricate portrayal underscores the challenges faced by both authors and characters in conveying the multifaceted reality of marginalized communities. Khan's exploration of representation, agency, and power dynamics prompts readers to delve into the intricate landscape of subaltern voices in postcolonial literature.

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