

Speaking Beyond Universal Sisterhood: Gayatri Spivak's Critique of Western Feminist Representation in Elif Shafak's *Black Milk*

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Abstract

This study examines Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of universal sisterhood through a postcolonial reading of *Black Milk*. Employing qualitative textual analysis, the study investigates how Spivak's theoretical perspective exposes the limitations of Western feminist claims that seek to represent women as a homogeneous group. The analysis demonstrates that although *Black Milk* presents shared experiences of womanhood, Spivak's critique questions the assumption that women across different cultural and historical contexts can be represented through a single feminist discourse. The findings reveal that the concept of universal sisterhood overlooks the socio-cultural specificities of Third World women and reinforces representational practices that marginalize non-Western voices. The study concludes that Spivak's postcolonial feminist framework challenges universalizing narratives by emphasizing the importance of cultural difference and the need to recognize the diverse realities of women's experiences beyond Western feminist assumptions.

Keywords: *Black Milk*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Subaltern, Postcolonial Feminism, Western Feminist Representation, Third World Women

Introduction

The concept of universal sisterhood has occupied a significant position in feminist discourse by promoting the idea that women share common experiences of oppression regardless of their cultural, historical, or geographical backgrounds. While this notion has been influential in fostering solidarity among women, postcolonial feminist scholars have questioned its tendency to overlook the diversity of women's lived realities. They argue that treating women as a

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homogeneous category often silences the voices of those whose experiences are shaped by colonial histories, cultural traditions, and unequal power relations.

Among the most influential critics of this universalizing tendency is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose postcolonial feminist theory challenges Western feminist assumptions about representation and voice. Spivak contends that dominant feminist discourses frequently speak on behalf of marginalized women without adequately acknowledging their distinct social, cultural, and historical circumstances. Her critique emphasizes the importance of recognizing difference rather than subsuming diverse experiences under a single, universal narrative of womanhood.

Black Milk presents the experiences of women writers from various cultural backgrounds, highlighting shared concerns related to writing, motherhood, and female identity. While the memoir foregrounds similarities in women's struggles, it also provides a valuable site for examining the implications of universalizing these experiences through a postcolonial feminist lens. This study employs qualitative textual analysis informed by Spivak's theoretical perspective to investigate how her critique exposes the limitations of universal sisterhood in the representation of women. By examining selected narratives in *Black Milk*, the paper explores the significance of cultural specificity and the necessity of recognizing diverse female experiences within feminist discourse. Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern is considered extremely important in theorizing the subordination of women. Instead of only focusing on the contemporary postcolonial paradigm, it also includes the concept of marginalized subject positions belonging to any cultural background including women, labors and other marginalized social class.

Antonio Gramsci talks about the concept of Subaltern in his *Prison Notebooks*, referring to the hegemonic dominant ruling class who do not let the individual or individuals of 'low rank' participate in making the people of the nation same regardless of local history and cultural. How the subaltern class suffers due to the ranking system created by the elites in a particular society (Louai, 2012).

Gayatri Spivak (1991) came forward with a reviving idea on subaltern in 1985 which talks about globalized world order, it led to the development of politics in capitalism which divided the labors (Louai, 2012). Postcolonial Feminism was introduced by Gayatri Spivak where she highlights another subaltern, suppressed and

marginalized category, focusing on extension of the novel idea about feminism which is new and full of potential.

In the ruling hegemony of imperialism Spivak has discussed the scope of sub-alternate for all those who are suppressed and oppressed under their rule. Western feminism is quite different from Postcolonial and Third World feminist writers such as Toni Morrison talks in the favour of black or brown skinned women who are not white. The connection between hegemonic power can be clearly taken into consideration when it comes to their discourse (pp. 246-248).

Spivak's popular works on the subaltern women brought different insights into the regime of feminism (Morton, 2003). Spivak insists to focus on the actual life matters of women, which focuses on various issues faced by the subaltern women which includes difficulties and suppression faced by women of the 'Third World'.

Review of the Literature

Said's orientalism is a study that goes deeper into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of Western colonial powers of Britain and France. Briefly, it refers to the orient from the Western theory. The orient is shown in a submissive one whereas the West in a dominant, superior position. Orientalism is a highly appreciated work, as a notion relied upon rational and justified variation made in between the Occident and the Orient. The emphasis is on the importance of orientalism that one defined West as its contrasting perception of notion, idea, views, experience. It further works as a reflection to the developed world in the sense that it should coequal Orient to answer its sense of dominancy and supremacy. Similarly, the advanced west is only powerful because the orient is unaware. The presentation of mixed backgrounds shows the ignorance of the self, individuals who are kept underrated are out-shined by the observer (p.289).

Somehow the West and the other are divided by the binary division of orientalism, which makes the other to exist as opposition. The Orient has somehow released itself from being everything that is not white, as the ego of Western world stands firmly. This somehow portrays as both the parties are not equal. The orient in various texts and discourses is presented with a manipulated and false image portraying a series of negative terms which gives the west sense of supremacy. As if west is the seat of new inventions and inhabits the emerging knowledge in the world

portraying orient as ignorant and guile. Eastern and Western worlds cannot go through the same road as of an equal contrast. White world portrays superiority while the orient represents subservient position, therefore the relations between them cannot be mutual in understanding and thinking in the same way.

Beauvoir talks about issues related to female sexuality. Her interest in psychoanalysis deals with Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud shaped the major principles of the twentieth century through his works. Psychoanalysis consists of four basic concepts such as 'the unconscious', 'dream interpretation', 'repression' and 'progression'. It subjectively delves into sexuality and gender. Psychoanalysis deals with 'the talking cure' where a patient is laid down in comfortable position then the patient is encouraged to tell the tale same goes for feminism. Tales of oppression, gender discrimination is coming on the forefront from the feminist activists.

In the *Second Sex* Beauvoir talks about the concept of penis lack in a girl. The girl imagines herself as a mutilated boy, it gives birth to various insecurities in the young female child. According to Freud a girl feels the lack of penis, when she realizes that the lack could not be filled by the mother, the girl distances herself from the mother and feels the attraction towards the father as the father can fill the lack and can provide babies. Whereas the male baby gets attached to his mother and sees his father as a rival. Beauvoir refutes this concept of lack in the girl. She clearly rejects the universally accepted view by Freud which describes women's sexuality depending on the lack and importance of the penis in a girl's life. A girl living in patriarchal society clearly feels the subordinate position of inferiority. She instead envies the privileges enjoyed by the other sex. A father is a dominant figure in patriarchal society, a girl looks up to him for all the possible facilities and importance given to the masculine gender. The past plays a vital role where the man used to make weapons, went into the wild for hunt. The man protected the family from the odds of the nature and wild life, whereas a woman used to stay home, she was given the passive role in taking care of the children, cooking food etc. We live in the present where we talk about our rights and freedom of speech but the past is embedded in our minds. We are still intertwined with the concept of past roles. The unconscious mind still holds a greater part in our present lives.

Identity is a social construct. One is not born a woman but is constructed into the approved gender role by the society. It identifies how to behave, what to wear and

how to use language linguistically. Women have been fighting for their rights since centuries. She further states women as glass ceiling in the job market which is making hard for women to reach for the top roof good jobs. Many jobs such as law, teaching and medicine are becoming feminized. Women faced the issues of discrimination when it came to salaries, women were not given equal salaries as men were expected to run homes forgetting about widows or divorced women bringing up children all alone. Political powers should be widely used to eliminate patriarchal rule. In Beauvoir's view over the last twenty-five years, changes came into foreplay only due to feminism rather than socialism. Back then women were only used for their sexuality and reproduction, abortion was seen as something unethical but due to feminist movements women have liberated from their chains. They united themselves and moved forward in the name of feminism. Beauvoir struggled till her last breath for the support of feminist struggle. Beauvoir's struggles brought many changes and is known to be the leading stone in the support and uprising of feminism.

During the 'second wave' French feminism worked on the issues such as abortion and domestic violence faced by women. Women kept silent for years but one voice after another led to foundation of feminism. She argues in *The Second Sex*, about feminist revolution taking place in the society. She recognized that socialism alone would not have been enough in revolutionizing women empowerment. She also acknowledges that political power could add a great significance in the importance of women's sexuality. She soon recognized importance of theoretical work over political praxis. In all the political struggles, works such as *The Second Sex* was no longer valid. Political struggles are now a great part in revolutionizing the thoughts and values of the society.

Virginia Woolf (1912) wrote this classical essay, *A Room of One's Own* which revolves around the struggles with education which a woman faces. It is the lack of financial independence which has stopped women in producing great literature. She used hypothetical example of Shakespeare's sister who commits suicide as she was not given the same opportunities as were given to his brother by the family and society. She knew that her talents were being wasted, so she chose suicide over it. According to Woolf woman's financial independence and her privacy, a room of her own is an essential part in producing great literature. She talks about the importance of equal rights for both the genders, as equal rights will give equal opportunities which will end up in producing creative, magnificent literature. Many hidden,

talented artists, poets, novelists will come forward. In the last chapter she explores the relationship that exists between creativity and androgyny. This essay was written to answer why female writers lack behind as compared to men writers. A room in itself is a symbol and reality to material freedom for women in order to write creatively. A woman is chained and generally belongs to her husband and children. Though with many movements and efforts females have got their rights to get job of their choice and the right to vote still they do not enjoy the equal status and opportunities in the society as is enjoyed by men in general. The social conditions for a woman is not favourable which never lets them bloom in their unique feminine ways of writings. Statistically women are fewer in major professions. A constant struggle goes on in a woman's life managing the divided selves, balancing between work-life and household activities. This constant stress makes women less committed to work environment. A recent survey shows that a woman's success is seen as a threat by their partner. This clearly answers why women are usually left behind when it comes to career life. Women are usually discouraged when it comes to creative writing. Women have struggled with financial and social obstacles which prevented them in becoming great names in the world of art and literature (Woolf, 1929, pp.797-814). Early feminist social and political struggles, during the twentieth century Europe and North America had fought for the freedom of basic rights of women in different areas of life, but it started in the western philosophical tradition of the liberal humanism. The basic idea of humanism revolves around the concept that all human beings living on this Earth are the same; the original matter, emotions, struggles, values in theory share the same basic human rights. Somehow according to Simon de Beauvoir (1908) a famous french feminist thinker suggests that in the universal humanist subject or 'Man', women generally are defined as the 'Other', or inferior. Previously goals like the women's reproductive rights, equal wages, and equality in the workplace were focused as the political task. Men and women are different which is a common fact, defined by the tradition of universal humanist thought which further defined a grounded biological foundation prior to social and cultural influences. The famous line by Simone de Beauvoir presented, widened the picture that "a woman is not born a woman infact she becomes one". Identity is rather determined as a category in which gender is a social construct rather one's biological sex, which could be opposed through political and social struggle. Beauvoir had failed in answering the differences between female and male gender initially which she used in order to justify oppression faced by women in the patriarchal world. By leaving the scientific category of sex unsearched, her theory does not justify. Judith Butler argues about gender troubles, understanding sex as a

biological category. Dominant discourses of medicine and the church including family and educational institutions are shaping the roles prior to one's sex/gender. What Butler wants to highlight is how discourse holds power of language in the determination of human identity and the restricted roles offered by the dominant social institutions of the society. For example, immediate names are defined, the moment a girl is born according to the norms and values of the society. According to Butler, many feminist thinkers agree with de Beauvoir's concept of gender identity theory which gets mold by the society. This however leads us to the question of gender identity which simply cannot be avoided at any cost. The gender identity is constructed and generated by different law-making institutions such as the Media, in shaping minds. Spivak recognizes and appreciates the works of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva for their effortless and effective ways of redefining the western thought of feminism. In the name of Feminism and Third world women Spivak further argues, that the very definition and the concept of a woman depends perpetually on the word 'man', it gives meaning to the word 'woman', this gives birth to the foundation for the literary criticism. This might seem a reactionary answer." Could I as a woman can carve a definition of a woman for my own self?" (Spivak 1987). Luce Irigaray's argument in this regard is very similar to Spivak's definition that The word man is essential in order to complete and elaborate the theory of a woman. Spivak reciprocates that the very definition of a female in one's culture always fall as a prey to the opposite gender that shows women's submissiveness and marginalization in the society. Spivak suggests a critical scheme against this dual system of thinking, it mimes the minority groups or the working class marginalized as the subaltern, such as the negative representation of women. This tactical approach used by Spivak is known as strategic essentialism. Many thinkers certainly been informed to contemporary feminist contribution by Spivak. In order to focus on the regional differences between women in the developing countries and women in the developed countries, Spivak shifted her focus of the debate from sexual differences to cultural and historical differences that is shared amongst individuals belonging to different countries and states.

Methodology

The methodology, used in this study is marked as inductive and qualitative in nature. Inductive reasoning starts with the theories proposed towards the end of the research (Bernard, 2011). It is based on learning from patterns, resemblances and regularities. Here qualitative research starts with the novel which constitutes main

data in order to reach conclusions. The research method employed in this research is qualitative in approach which includes interpretation of selected passages from the novel. The source used for data analysis relies on the text passages of *Black Milk* (2007). Various informative articles and research papers related to feminism, Third World society and hidden agendas behind the concept of Universal Sisterhood have been studied to explain the novel. The results of the study support how artistically suffering of women characters is presented as same with by keeping in mind the Eastern and White culture.

The Textual analysis regards the interpretations of selected passages about different female characters from the feministic view. Such as, characters that of Sylvia Plath, Marry Ann Evans, Elif Shafak herself and many other writers are analyzed to show how they all suffer the same, in fact which is not the case. This research is focused on unearthing the western feminism which claims women all over the world are facing same issues. Hence, the novel is studied for textual analysis by contextualizing the novel. The study explores the role of western imperialism in subjugating the Third World women in thirst of power and personal political benefits. The complex techniques used by the Western feminists are analyzed in detail in forth chapter of the thesis which is a detailed analysis of the novel. This study focuses on the Western dogmatism of the writer's view point of exemplifying female characters suffering the same, not in keeping the idea about differences. Therefore, the study contextualizes the role played by the author in favoring the Western world.

Theoretical Framework

Mohanty (1984) shows that the cultural discourse about the “third world” is produced and denoted from the ranging exploitative economic exchange of the term ‘colonization’. Third world women are treated in an essentialist way through this discourse, women instead are seen as a separate entity from the mankind which views them abstractly rather than as real living humans belonging to their collective history in the existence of mankind (Mohanty, 1991). Spivak's account of ‘neo-colonialism’ aligns well with the broad definition of ‘colonialism’ presented by Mohanty which relies on the alignment of suppression and supreme authority of the superiority of the in questions in subject (Mohanty, 1991). Mohanty discussed some western white feminist writings which show their guilt on the colonial attitude which represents less amalgamation of the subjects related to ‘developing world

women', instead of focusing on the similarities highlight differences such as different goals, needs, interests, ethnicity, class differences. Black women are seen under-privileged mass-oppressed, passive, submissive meek and exploited by the South white middle class 'liberal' women to whom they want to guide through their dialogues and expertise ideas and thoughts. The outgrowing Supremacy of White women over Black women is becoming a lethal-some attitude, favoring ever growing hate in the long run of emerging new world. According to Spivak, Third world people's heterogeneity is overlooked in a superficial way, which understands foreign cultures, 'neo-colonialism' is one of the expression which exemplifies openness to diversity, ethnic inclusiveness, cross-culturalism, and multicultural acceptance (Spivak, 1991). Gayatri Spivak tries to investigate and rages against history concerning with the third world people, which rather than complaining and speaking for their rights, silenced the voices due to skin colour, gender differences, social class status. Spivak talks about a white man in one who narrates: "I belong to middle class family, to which I cannot speak for myself" (Spivak, 1990).

Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter analyzes the claim of universal sisterhood depicted in the novel *Black Milk* by Shafak (2007). Spivak's works are used in exposing the hidden agendas behind this claim. This chapter focuses on the second question of the thesis which covers agendas and hidden benefits of the white world by using the term Universal sisterhood to unite women together without knowing their problems. It also covers how Spivak's work enlighten and open the eyes of women in proving that white feminists are using the third world. This chapter also covers the various works of Spivak as a subaltern woman talking to the white world that the term feminism is not the cure/ solution to their problems.

Third World Women in Postmodern Society

According to Spivak an "exotic other" (1990) has been called by these diasporic writers as native informants who consciously depict subaltern as a term for otherization. Shafak (2007) mentions various Japanese and Chinese feminists in her novel *Black Milk* (2007), where they talk about the struggles as women they had to face. In one of Yuko Tsushima's book *Child of Fortunate*, she talks about the mental stress through which the protagonist goes through as a woman, a struggle between the societal values and her will (Shafak, 2007, p.116). These writers claimed that the

third world is filled with power that “silences others” means the subalterns (1990) with the “disinterested knowledge” presented about the third world. Western customer choices provide the regalement to the publishing industry about the artistic abilities of their feed to these native informants (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Shafak (2007) mentions black writers highlighting their struggles as being black and then being women. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker talk about the horrific stories through their works, speaking out to the world about the horrors of slavery (Shafak, 2007, p.244). According to Spivak, first world prerogative essentialize the tendency that it is clear, first world women cannot be colonized by the Third world women as they belong to a powerless position. White women are seen as uniformly condescending, exploitative and objectification of black women; dependent on their husbands for their pampered life-styles; oppressed and economically dependent.

Shafak (2007) argues about the existence in the theory of woman, opposite gender is needed (Shafak, 2007, p.114). Spivak (1998) suggests just like Irigaray, that a woman’s definition always depends on the opposite gender in order to define women as gender, due to the cultural and societal norms in general. Spivak (1998) does not support the dual system of long-term essentialism where different groups are targeted that are inferior to the dominant class and give a negative reflection, specifically women, underprivileged or the blue colored working-class people. Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, French feminist thinkers are the focal interest of Spivak (Shafak, 2007, p.266).

Spivak (1998) mainly talks about the minority groups, she focuses on the problems faced by the marginalized class. She talks against the contemporary feminist thought informed by French Feminist thinkers. Shafak (2007) mentions works of Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous in her novel *Black Milk* (2007). Yet the debate has shifted between the sexual differences between women of ‘First World’ and in the women of ‘Third World’.

According to Shafak (2007) some very important key factors such as the importance of differences in history, language, culture and social class are ignored by feminists by objectifying women belonging to developing countries. Media encourages people to forget about the dis-empowered and unprivileged groups of the society such as the blacks and brown Asians (Shafak, 2007, p.248). It shows oppression and power of one class over the other. In order to clarify this point Shafak (2007) mentions many female characters from different cultural backgrounds to show struggles of

women writers in her novel *Black Milk*. Spivak (1998) Further Spivak (1998) has challenged all these norms of the mystification of western narrative towards women of developing world. Rather than ignoring these crucial matters she talks about the political oppression exercised over the marginalized groups. 'White guilt' and 'White solipsism' has caused a rivalry between the white women and black women, their life long anger cannot vanish quickly (Shafak, 2007, p.248). This shows the importance of building a women's movement. It should revolve around the solidarity among the women of all races and colors despite any homogeneity conflicts or differences. It will create an informed feminism which will go beyond the differences then towards unity and solidarity.

Motherist Movements

Shafak (2007) talks about Feminists fighting for their rights are clearly fighting for their own personal rights whereas in Motherist movements, women have long been fighting for their rights as mothers (1991). Clearly oppression in the past gave rise to feminism. In Julia Wells paper she discusses that motherism is separate from Feminism and both cannot merge together into one. Shafak mentions struggles of women as writers, Dorothy Parker, a well-known writer committed suicides several times as she was unable to balance motherhood with writing (Shafak, 2007, p.205). Shafak (2007) puts the question if feminists by definition fighting for their own personal benefits which defines it as a term which could be named as, Liberal feminism. Motherism on the other hand instead of fighting patriarchal oppression demands for equality. It is to inspire feminism which is more effective than the liberal feminism, as it talks as whole about women, which can connect the women of 'Third World'. Many lesbian writers such as Rita Mae Brown suffered a great deal for her famous work *Ruby fruit Jungle*, as she expressed her views about lesbianism openly (Shafak, 2007, p.160). Spivak (1998) elaborates the concept of women as general, the definition of women clearly depends on the other gender for its meaning confirmation. Women and many other working classes are becoming a prey in the hands of the colonized class. Media and literature due to their excessive powers over the world of technology does not talk about the rights of minorities by presenting a negative image and keeping them marginalized and powerless in running the states altogether. Shafak (2007) mentions the power of writing in her novel *Black Milk*, today people read and get awareness regarding many current issues (Shafak, 2007, p.22). Shafak (2007) talks about the contributions of various women writers to this particular thought. Cixous knew about the Freudian approach

which is about the penis lack, this lack is usually mentioned by many writers. Therefore, she mentioned many other lacks in her writings such as miscarriages, pre-menstrual depression and many other neglected terms related to feminine issues (Shafak, 2007, p.266). Spivak (1998) focused on deep rooted issues, her debate does not focus on sexual/gender differences with men rather than she focuses on the cultural, geographical and individual differences that the women of 'Third World' have to face in the modern era. Strategic essentialism deals with essentialist categories of human identity. In the Political and social world, it should be criticized but one should emphasize on avoiding categories of human identities to make sense. Spivak (1988) contributed to feminist and postcolonial theory, In the place of an uncritical theory (during the 1980's). She proposed a 'strategic use of essentialism' for minority groups such as the subaltern women. Identity should not be fixed by a dominant group. Political identity in essentialism should be a short-term strategy to make it effective. Shafak (2007) For example mentions, about urban spaces during Gay Pride marches, the affirmation of queerness should be shown in positive terms of identification. These marches should play a vital role in Political strategy for prohibiting homophobia in public. Many lesbian writers such as Sarah Walters faced harsh criticism for her novel *Tripping the Velvet*, on addressing lesbianism openly (Shafak, 2007, p.160) 'Black British' minority groups used the identification of various groups as affirmation of ethnicity in a positive way. This strategy could be used effectively for reaffirming the definition and understanding of white culture from the point of views of marginalized groups. Shafak (2007) describes about solidarity of working-class sisters in her novel *Black Milk*, during Iranian revolution women covered themselves in veils. This latter, context-specific represents patriarchal Islamic Laws which clearly challenges veil as a sign of women's oppression (Shafak, 2007, p.73). Spivak (1998) emphasizes on the importance of essentialism, in order to end oppression and exploitation long-term political solution can be strategic essentialism, thus it can be the most effective as a context-specific strategy.

The Geography of Female Sexuality

Spivak (1988) argues about the phenomena as if questioning of the removal of women's non-reproductive sexual pleasure an effective goal for 'Third World' women. Shafak (2007) in her novel *Black Milk* talks about clitoridectomy as a traditional practice in some parts of the Eastern countries (Shafak, 2007, p.116), Spivak (1988) questions about the concept of female genital mutilation practiced as

a common practice implemented on the women in rural and developing countries. Somehow 'symbolic clitoridectomy', has become a term of repression in female sexuality, Spivak emphasizes how it got normalized in the unrecognized name of womanhood. Symbolic repression of all female sexual pleasure is being re-defined by clitoridectomy. Spivak (1988) suggests that clitoridectomy has recently become an expression of social and economic oppression over women. According to Spivak's discussion women's social and sexual status is considered as metonymy over the discussion of clitoridectomy and clitoris (Spivak 1988). Put more simply, a woman's body is treated as reproductive vessel for pleasure and reproduction. Somehow dominance and patriarchy depend in owning women as private property of men. Shafak (2007) talks about Clitoridectomy shows the patriarchal dominance over a woman's non-reproductive sexual desire. This shows how it is being practiced as a common norm or custom in various developing and rural countries. Clitoridectomy is a metonym for women's definition in the patriarchal world used as a legal property and limited as a subject for reproduction. It would persistently de-normalize uterine organization (Spivak 1988). Spivak (1988) by investigation shows 'effacement of the clitoris' being used by men as a tool to control and objectify women's reproductive bodies as private property. Yet in this struggle Spivak's works can be identified with western movements of feminism which does not recognize issues and problems faced by the women of 'Third World' countries. Spivak somehow tries to develop a framework which views different angles in which bodies of women are being used for modern social and economic benefits. In the First World, 'the entire advanced capitalist economy' is supported by 'the uterine norm of womanhood' which is attached to home buying and the progression of a family unit in society (Spivak 1988). Spivak argues that the remote extraction of profit operates suppression of women, they are treated like cheap labour corporate by multinational employers. It all revolves around suppression and deprivation of women's rights in speaking for themselves (Spivak 1988).

Shafak (2007) mentions Simone de Beauvoir in her novel *Black Milk*, where she expresses her view about finding a striking critical vocabulary which would express various meanings of the marginalized subaltern world which were lost under patriarchal rule (Shafak, 2007, p.114). Spivak (1988) uses some master words such as "worker", "the colonized", "woman" could be used against oppressor, though justification is not possible as it cannot highlight their lives and histories. Shafak (2007) further argues about our society which has generalized definitions of words which do not account for any differences, chances are if these words are used by the

intellectuals for the marginalized class, they would look down upon differences between particular subaltern groups. The term subaltern is favored by Spivak (1988), Instead of using these master words to represent lower-class as 'subaltern' for social/cultural identities and struggles of the marginalized class and the term is not limited to a restricted class.

Imposition of old sacred customs over the subaltern women

In her work 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' views on subalternity by Spivak are presented in the form of an essay which was revised twice in 1988 and once in 1999 finally in the year 2010. In this famous essay presented by Spivak (1988). She talks about subalternity in her essay in which she claims how the constitutional laws have restricted the voices of subalterns and marginalized class (p.308). The work brought intense clashes and arguments along with its publication, in the domains of literature and history about the concept of subalternity and its cultural, societal concepts and impacts. Spivak's Subaltern theory speaks for all the unheard marginalized classes of society. Spivak (1998) argues on this subject as she knows the intensity of this subject. She argues about how the modern writers without awareness and interaction with the marginalized class could raise their voice for the other. She knew how less work is done on the subaltern subject as it is of no use to Western approach these days and is of no beneficial use to them. For Shafak (2007), Western approach of representation regards the subaltern, a victim or prey to patriarchy and colonialism, in which subalternity is presented as a superficial account. A subaltern is anyone who is not allowed to have a say in society or law-making institutes for example marginalized women of rural areas. In the essay, Spivak (1988) talks about the practice of 'sati' (self-immolation) as a common norm practiced in India, it comes from Hindu narratives which is a sacred ritual in which Indian women burn themselves alive voluntarily with the dead body of their husbands. They have the free will in this sacred ritual that cannot be considered as suicide. It is imposed and practiced by women having the free will, who "actually want to die" for their late husbands. Sati was never considered as a suicide, according to Hindu Nationalists, this ritual was sacred and it was a way back to get in union with the late husband. It was seen as a path towards spiritual heights and entering other hidden realms of the world. Spivak (1988) spoke against this ritual by stating that suicide is not the proper place for the woman as it's a path towards self-harm and destruction. (p. 300). As Indian society is ruled by the dominance of males, the very core of the country's culture supports this custom, the patriarchal Indian

society is favored by this practice as the woman's life revolves around her husband, with the death of her husband the woman loses her right to live. The woman who rejects the concept of self-immolation suffers from everlasting shame and judgmental comments from the society. An effort was made on the behalf of Britishers, in the form of "white men saving women from brown men" as when they ruled in the subcontinent they saw the tradition of 'sati' as cruel and inhumane so in order to save these women they outlaw the practice of 'sati'. (Spivak, 1988). Somehow this new law muted the voices of widows as they were buried under the pressure of native patriarchal and colonial masters. Spivak further argues, as it is impossible for women to raise their voice, the widow's will hang between colonial and native patriarch masters. One wants to save her life from barbarism while the other wants her to practice the ancient rituals of the old civilization, practiced as a common custom within the society. As a result, the widow loses her voice because the others, powerful in rank and position are willing to speak on her behalf. Spivak observes women as double colonized, as first under the western colonization and secondly under the rule of native patriarchs. The identity of a widow is lost under the voices of dominant classes of the society, due to these two dominant and oppressive voices women cannot be heard (Spivak, 2001). Women's consciousness is great importance to Spivak's narrative related to subaltern studies. Shafak (2007) mentions female writers like Bronte sisters and Marry Ann Evans who used pen names in order to hide their identities as women (Shafak, 2007, p.102). Women were previously muted, Spivak (1988) criticizes the intellectuals for ignoring 'female' in general trying to talk for themselves and for their rights. Spivak's theory revolves around the subaltern theory, where she struggles to find out if the silenced people could raise voice for their rights but she concludes with the answer that subaltern being a weak class cannot speak for themselves (Spivak, 1988). In order to answer this representation of double session, Shafak (2007) in her novel *Black Milk* intelligently made use of two Germanic words "vertreten" for representation and "darstellen" for depicting or replacing. Both these terms denote how silence of the subalternity in both these positions claims the influence of the dominance over the marginalized class (Shafak, 2007, p. 279). Spivak (1988) talks about the various discourses about the subalterns, taking birth in the society. Her biggest concern is who is the writer and who is raising the voice on behalf of the subaltern class, what are their hidden agendas or main concerns, this gives a worrisome insight about the discourses being produced in the society by the modern writers of this era. Spivak (1996), in an interview talks about the rising doubts of the subaltern's capability to speak for themselves as some downtrodden speakers raise their voice for them, that

they are not subalterns anymore. Shafak (2007) mentions Japanese and Chinese feminist movements, which shows how women had to actively take part in such movements, to be heard for their rights (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Keeping in mind the above statement, Spivak clearly vocalizes that subaltern class cannot speak for themselves so they are utterly in need of any other intellectual or writer that can become their voice and raise the issues and struggles faced by marginalized class. So their voices could be heard through a single representative in the society. These questions and arguments about the Subaltern studies are provoking new insights and thoughts in recovering the unheard, forgotten voices of the marginalized class, their presence and resistance in the historical narratives. She talks about the concept of 'subaltern subjectivity' that was shut down by the western theory, Spivak (1988) is looking for the answer if it is possible to recover all the forgotten, subaltern voices or not (Castle, 2013). Spivak in her words tries to explain how the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is long forgotten has no representative to offer an object of seduction or to speak about the subaltern subject by itself (Spivak, 1988).

Shattered Identities of Third World Women

According to Shafak (2007) the true women's identity could only be found in the differences, they have the voice to speak but it cannot be voiced as they stand on the margins of the society as 'elusive figures', making their representation merely impossible (Shafak, 2007, p.114). Representation of being a subaltern or an individual trying to present the marginalized class has turned into a condition which depends entirely on the elite class. For Spivak (1988), Certain individuals of the Indian elite class are interested in raising the voice of the other as native informants for the world intellectuals. The subject insists that the colonized subalterns are unlikely diverse in nature, so any Western individual trying to represent the voice of subaltern instead of recovering will turn it into obscurity. She challenges how a single account of the Western narrative presented from a single aspect can change the whole idea and struggles behind the subject of subaltern concept. She says that subalternity cannot be confined into one hegemonic idea that is what makes it subaltern (Spivak, 2005). She is concerned about the Western Eurocentric discourse which objectifies the aspect of culture and makes them others, who so ever are not Europeans, is silenced like the voice of subaltern who cannot talk freely in representing themselves. She thinks that the law-making systems are incapable, when it comes to represent the subalterns, as they cannot hear their voices due to the void that exists between the subalterns and the intellectuals presenting their

voices. At times we want to understand the subaltern but we cannot hear their voices as we are not fully aware of the circumstances in which they are living. Shafak (2007) in her novel *Black Milk* insists about the case of Japanese and Chinese feminist movements where women came out and actively participated in this movement in order to get heard, their voice is silenced by the dominant male patriarchy, in other words, they cannot even raise their voices or speak for their lives or rights that should be given by the society (Shafak, 2007, p.116). This forces Spivak (1988) to say, "The sexed subaltern, a widow in particular cannot speak". In one of her essays "The subaltern cannot speak", she concludes that there is no virtue for a pious woman in global laundry (Spivak, 1988).

Unlearning and the Critique of Western Feminism

Spivak (1988) argues on the importance of reading old literary texts such as texts written on Jashoda which is excluded from the university classroom. Such works should be included in class curriculum to show the lives and struggles of 'Third World' women. Shafak (2007) in *Black Milk* talks about the distance between the oppressed women in 'Third World' should talk about the dis-empowerment through these reading and connecting to these texts. Including these texts in western university classroom would have positive impacts on social and political world. Spivak argues that in practical politics, the manipulation and disorientation of Third World labour should be voiced in the U.S. academy (Spivak 1990). The materialist approach in reading was developed through intellectual conversations. It was about the exploitation such as harassment faced by women workers in homeworking economies and job places. This issue in the feminist anthology discusses various issues such as neo-colonialism: women in homeworking. The key idea revolves around the political oppression faced by the marginalized groups. Shafak (2007) highlights this issue, in *Black Milk* as the problems of Third World women are ignored in western academic institutes as a project of unlearning the losses of Third World women (Shafak, 2007, p.116). It is a project to recall the literature and history back into the world where it is discouraged by the people of media, to forget about the historical experiences of marginalized, disempowered and oppressed groups. Spivak's work and the concept of unlearning has a significant impact on feminist criticism. Mohanty refutes the white agenda in altering the historical realities and background stories of the lives of women of the developing world (Mohanty 1988). Mohanty further argues about universal assumptions of privileged and ethnocentrism in the name of 'Third World' dominated by the west, characterizes

the limited work done by western feminists for the women of 'Third World' (Mohanty 1988). In Mohanty's view, women could face damaging effects dwelling in the developing countries under the banner of 'ethnocentric universality'. Shafak (2007), which highlights the Taliban regime along with the position of women held in Afghanistan. It focuses on women's subjugation as an unequivocal sign in wearing a burka. The cinematic representation reinforces the stereotyped mentality of people, that they have towards the women of developing countries. These women are considered as passive creatures in the society. This representation would embed the idea of women who wear burka or veil as passive or oppressed in the eyes of western world. Mohanty (1988) further emphasizes that it is up to a woman to choose if she adheres to wear a burka or the veil. Women in some cultures wear burka or veil according to their wishes without any oppression, they take pride in it. Against French colonial administration in Algeria, women supplied weapons during the Algerian War of Independence. Such cases show how women used veils and burka to defend their countries in the name of solidarity. This exemplifies how women were not oppressed and participated equally in the anti-colonial movements.

French Feminism an International Frame

Shafak (2007) also mentions the western feminists about their claims of universal claims to speak for women all over the world regardless of cultural, geographical differences. Shafak (2007) mentions Julia Kristeva's thoughts where she narrates the stories of women in China used as a subject constitution. Spivak migrated to USA, stood in discussions of the limitations of western academic feminism discussed by Kristeva. According to Spivak, it was highly overdetermined in itself as the 'choice' of English Honors to be born in Calcutta. 'Brain drain' fitted within her as becoming a professor of English in the US. A commitment to feminism was the best as to the available scenarios in due course (Spivak 1987). Spivak as an educated woman went to teach English Literature in the USA with English honors degree from University of Calcutta. Spivak's committed herself in colonial studies both in the India and USA can be seen as a challenge to the conservatism of English literary studies. The conditions that led to her emigration to the USA included her self-analyzed examination of the social and historical emancipation. Spivak during childhood observed lives of women, she overheard a dialogue exchange between two women doing house hold chores about the possession of the land by the East India Company, since those days the lives of these women remained consistent, it

remained unnoticed as the land ownership got passed to the republic Independent state of India. During this duration it was summed up by Spivak that historically the details of land were wrong, it was governed by republic independent state of India. This reflected class-based assumptions of women's situated knowledge of the land. Spivak critiques white feminist movements for not knowing historical experiences of the Third World women. Shafak (2007) talks about the emancipation happened due to decolonization in Third world countries highlights the washerwomen's ignorance towards the changes happening around them, this highlights the limited knowledge of the white world about the women of other races (Shafak, 2007, p.38) . Spivak asserts, instead of correcting historical experiences of 'Third World' women with the superiority compassion one should rather learn from them (Spivak 1987). Shafak (2007) cautions against western modern feminism and its global claims, focusing instead on how western feminism typically overlooks the harsh realities and stories of women in the 'Developing World'. This dilemma, according to Shafak (2007), is best demonstrated in Julia Kristeva's views about Chinese Women in Black Milk (Shafak, 2007, p.116).

In Shafak's Black Milk (2007), Julia Kristeva begins with her inner account of China's unification of new capital (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Kristeva recalls a meeting she had with a group of Chinese peasants in the village square in this early section of the book: A massive group had gathered in the sun, waiting for us in silence. From this first depiction of meeting with a Chinese population, it seems that she is curious about the villagers' historical and cultural experiences. However, as Spivak (1988) points out, Kristeva appears to be more curious with how her own feminine identity as white is called into doubt by Huxian's passive females. Kristeva's second query focuses on women in the Third Women, she questions on "Who is speaking, then, before the glare of the peasants at Huxian?" It emphasizes the attention on the crises through various interactions with the cultures that brings awareness to the western self.

According to Shafak (2007), she demonstrates a way to work and evoke other cultures to challenge the authority of western ideas, practices and subjectivity. Despite their usual interest regarding west, Spivak (1988) puts it to their constant query on historical account of What is our Identity? (Spivak 1988). 'Who is Speaking?' is a part in which it could be find out how Kristeva is keen to set her research apart from previous anthropological discourses that portray non-western cultures as primitive or backward. A reversal of the view of western anthropologists,

helps to achieve this detachment. She imagines how the locals saw her as an outsider at first. She professed devotion in reaching out to "the other of the West," She claims her goal is nevertheless 'evidently self-absorbing.' (Spivak 1987). Indeed, when Kristeva understands that her trying to narrate the view point of the locals is of no use (Shafak, 2007), she gives up her discourse related to the Huxian locals, and does nothing to transcend the "abyss of time and distance" (Shafak, 2007). She also discusses the universal humanism, proletarian brotherhood, and colonial civility has shaped her subjective perspective as a learned, middle-class French-educated woman (Shafak 2007). Such socioeconomic factors hinder potential of a diverse-cultural conversation with Huxian locals. However, by focusing on women's historical roles in early Chinese community, Kristeva argues that comprehending female position in Chinese history will provide some insight into the life of Huxian's female peasants. Kristeva is drawn to China's ancient matriarchal roots because they appear to offer a feminine utopia in comparison to modern thoughts and observations on patriarchal monotheism (Shafak, 2007, p.116).

However, as Spivak (1988) focuses on women who belonged to Chinese culture and their traditional matrilineal systems outline woman from a crucial traditional aspect of modern Chinese society. She turns this conversation far from the China's traditional distinct activities, interactions towards females in the West. According to Spivak, use of these statements about female's previous situation in China, exemplifies the self-centered discussion of Chinese women. Kristeva, for example, identifies a significant shift in China's "kinship rules" around 1000 BC. This rupture apparently reflected a progressive shift away from a matrilineal social system, in which the strongest woman in the community governed financial, political, and social interactions (Shafak, 2007, p.116).

As Kristeva discusses, the role of Fathers that replaces the role order of the Mothers, the significant role of the maternal male relatives could be considered transitory point toward Confucianism's subsequently to the male dominant cultures. She further focuses on the peculiar change from a social matrilineal hierarchy to a male dominance economy system was incomplete, previous components of this structure has lasted in China. Spivak focuses on old matrilineal family systems in China raised to support broad idea of the "feminine,". Freud evoked the counterbalance the repression faced by the females. Chinese females, is the theoretical repression of female's corporeal presence in European culture, woman is not seen as a living human with feelings which presents the harsh realities of peasant women living in

China (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Spivak further argues, that Kristeva is least interested of women's position in Chinese culture and society. Kristeva's idealized depiction of the early Chinese matriarch successfully ignores modern Chinese women's cultural norms, the developing world is revered as primitive, while "modern" world is considered as real political scorn" (Spivak 1987). Kristeva claims that in the Judeo-Christian west, "monotheistic oneness is perpetuated by a fundamental separation of the sexes. This early example of sexual distinction in western society, according to Kristeva, serves as the foundation for later conceptions of female suppression. The quick analysis, diverts that attention on Chinese females which provides an idealistic counterweight to White feminist beliefs. However, Spivak points out about Kristeva's views on Chinese Women, exemplifies a propensity in certain western feminist ideas to characterize the highly specific stories of developing world women when it comes to their voices in socio-political power in general. This response shows Kristeva's idealistic promise for Chinese women's 'sexual independence, Spivak dismisses the "China's prophesy" as "symptomatic of benevolent colonialism" (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Indeed, Spivak doubts that Kristeva's paradigm would help Chinese women's lives in the future, as long as the analytical attention is focused on the 'investigator as subject' (Spivak 1987).

Shafak (2007) talks about 'Institutional measures which considers women as mere sex objects, this creates more danger to the females of the developing states,' as Gayatri Spivak (1988) contends, in order to fight this suppression, she recommends a new focus to the problems which Kristeva addresses in Huxian Square. Without answers to these important concerns, Spivak believes that Kristeva's theory about "colonized woman" as subject would view "feminism", this makes it a stigma of fixed class and liberties which fight for the rights associated as "free sex" in some sort" (Shafak, 2007, p.116).

Otherness

Shafak (2007) talks about certain individuals, concepts, and ideas have been labeled as "Other", by the white world. They see them as monsters, extraterrestrials, or savages who pose a threat to modern society's values or the rational human's stability. Things such as Disease and insanity, the immigrant, the LGBTQI community and the females, have all been examples of such 'Others' (Shafak, 2007, p.160). Shafak in her novel *Black Milk* mentions the lesbian writers as the 'Other', downgraded as other in the civilized ideals of white world in the structure of western

thought; nonetheless, in the starting the supremacy of the Other and Self is established. Lesbian writers such as Rita Mae Brown was criticized harshly for her novel *Ruby fruit Jungle*, as she promoted Lesbianism in her works (Shafak, 2007, p.160) Spivak (1988) has expanded his thought on the issue about otherness or alterity by the western thought and culture. Western philosophy, according to Spivak, has always characterized the Other as a conscious object for the western subject. The single alterity of the Other has been successfully obliterated by this concept. In response to this reduction, Levinas claims that the Other is constantly considered as an outsider to the western self's consciousness and control. The challenge that the Other's alterity provides is the Self's assurance in the face-to-face contact which remains between the Self and the Other. Spivak (1988), raises the ethical question on the idea of Otherness, which has been a major focus in the postcolonial studies. Edward Said stated in the preface to *Orientalism* is one of the "innermost and most repeated notion of the Other". An attempt is made to shift the fixed defined Other definition in the support of the sufferings, conflicts faced by the marginalized groups in the developing World, as Said defines how white dominates the developing world by identifying it with the west. The ethics as an experience of the impossible as it is such a difficult and time-consuming intellectual endeavor (Spivak 1995). According to Shafak (2007), there is no certainty that an ethical relationship will emerge from the solitary interaction between the Self and the Other. Here the other identifies all those who are not accepted for what they are, such as the Lesbian writers mentioned in *Black Milk* (Shafak, 2007, p.160). Then what is to hinder the self from manipulating, harming, or even murdering the Other? The effort to identify a suitable manner to reply to the Other exacerbates this challenge. The effort to express a thought thematically is been neglected and deported from philosophical analysis, this implies the succumbed experiences wrecked by these thoughts,' as Spivak (1988) mentions potential of reacting towards the Other in a morally responsible manner, according to Shafak (2007), it endangers the matter of destroying Other's inner voice and identity. However, this sensitive act of describing such an experience has the potential to change the euro-centered discussion which acknowledges the Other. Shafak (2007) presents a westernized image of women. Shafak is trying to portray women through westernized lens by creating an image of women which supports and help western world. Shafak somehow through her writing shows women characters as suffering the same, forgetting different cultural and social backgrounds. Shafak (2007) takes various female characters who struggle in balancing between motherhood and womanhood, she portrays this image as the image of every woman across the globe. Shafak (2007)

ignores the third world women and focuses on the first world women, Spivak in her works presents the concept of Sati, which many western feminists are not aware of. It is an ancient custom where the subaltern Indian woman is expected to burn herself along with the dead body of her late husband. This custom is seen as a sacred duty to show her love and devotion towards her husband. Spivak questions the western world on how there could be one dialogue in representing women of the world where as a matter of fact, western world is not even aware of the problems, difficulties faced by the third world women, Sati ritual is one of the examples, Spivak used in her works to show western discrimination.

Conclusion

Many diaspora writers in the 'new found agency' want to persuade readers through their artistic writings that favors them by satisfying the tastes of Western world. In *Black Milk* (2007), a diaspora writer from Turkey, plays the same role. *Black Milk* (2007), is the latest memoir written with the background of struggles faced by females in accepting womanhood and motherhood. She wrote this memoir in the name of depression following the birth of her first child. It was first published in 2007. Some of its portions entails around the tales of various female characters who suffered in their unique ways. Spivak's works dives down, how every female is unique which cannot succumb under the agenda of Universal Sisterhood. Spivak's theory with Shafak's *Black Milk* (2007), in which passages from the novel are discussed in the light of Spivak's works. The subalternity concept claims that "the marginalized are not allowed to speak", Such as the black writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison discuss stories of struggle as blacks in their novels. The subaltern concept concerns about how subalternity was represented. The constraints of authors who profess to speak for the oppressed as to how they might give the other a voice. This creates suspicion of any conceptual schema that was based on a Western perspective on the subaltern subject. The Western World approaches strategic system in sub-altering the marginalized class of colonialism and patriarchal system in the name of subalternity. The true identity of subaltern is tied to their uniqueness, and the right of voice, but as "elusive figures" it is on the periphery of social structure, creating difficulties, and therefore they are unable to voice their thoughts out in public. Toni Morrison, had a voice to which the crowd would listen attentively, her words had pain and a sorrowful story to narrate, her courage and power to speak, broke the silence (Shafak, 2007, p.248). To be marginalized is a state which is beyond description; people who actually represents

them are in the hands of 'institutionalization' for straying from the oppressed group, and are doomed, they help the oppressed while attempting to showcase the narrative. "Specific variants of the Indian aristocracy are at best native informants for first world thinkers interested in the voice of the oppressed,". However, the marginalized subaltern individual is irreversibly helpless, implying that any help based on the White Representative authority will merely complicate rather than reclaim subalternity. The "dictatorial logic cannot generalize subalternity." It is because of this that they are considered as a second-class citizen". Western ideologies are very Eurocentric in origin, and their opinionated, generalized, and hegemonic cultural representations cast individuals who aren't Europeans as the mute subaltern who cannot speak or express themselves. This makes our current systems unsuitable of representing subalterns because they are unable to grasp or hear their voices due to a distance between the real other and the subaltern portrayed by theorists. Even when the other talks, we are unable to hear them since we are unaware of their situation. Elif Shafak in her novel *Black Milk* is constantly trying to portray women suffrage as same throughout the world, Spivak's argument refutes such opinions. This alludes the understanding of recipient and senders relation, which is absent in the situation of the marginalized, Even if the marginalized voice makes a last-ditch attempt to speak, the voice is not identified, because uttering, listening completes the discourse act. The Bronte sisters and Marry Ann Evans are a great example, who had to use pen names as in order to hide their identity as women (Shafak, 2007, p.102). In Indian customs the sati widow is unable to speak for her death as it is seen as something sacred and full of honor and respect, or to put it another way, her death is not even important enough for the influential to pay attention, her voice remains silent, this asserts that "there is no spot from which the sexed subaltern particularly women as a subject could speak".

"The subaltern is not allowed to speak,"

The importance of representation hasn't faded. The feminist thinkers have a limited role to play, which should not be distained. The regime is built by western feminists in saving the third world whereas this claim neglects to talk about Indian or Japanese customs and cultures along with difficulties faced by those women. Sevgi Soyal who turned out as a famous Japanese writer, talks about the role of patriarchy in shaping the society making women marginalized to specific roles (Shafak, 2007, p.116). Western women are unable to hear these stories as they cannot connect or relate

themselves with it. This is causing a barrier, instead of unification, the claim of Universal Sisterhood, in the long run has lost its value and importance.

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