

**GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK: A CRITICAL STUDY**

**THESIS**

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**BY**

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: A Critical Study**, submitted by Ms. Lucy James for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, has been completed under my guidance. The thesis is a record of the research work conducted by the candidate during the period of her study and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other University.

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Prof. K.S. Bhat,  
Research Guide,  
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## **DECLARATION**

I, Ms. Lucy James, hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak : A Critical Study**, is the outcome of my own research, undertaken under the guidance of Prof. K.S.Bhat, Professor, Department of English, Goa University. All the sources used have been duly acknowledged in the thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this or any other university.

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Lucy James

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## **Chapter I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Plan of the thesis**

This thesis examines Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical interventions into feminism, Marxism, deconstruction, subaltern studies and post-colonialism, and attempts to identify the factors that make Spivak's body of work significant, relevant and unique amidst the clamour of literary theories and theorists.

**Chapter I (Introduction)** comprises of the plan of the thesis, sections on the contemporary critical scenario, a brief biography of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a review of her major works, a critical review of works on Spivak,

#### **Chapter II (Spivak and Feminism)**

Spivak, in her essays: "French Feminism in an International Frame" (Spivak, *In Other Worlds*) and "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (Spivak, "Race, Writing and Difference", 1988, pp. 243-261), argues that

because of Western Feminism's involvement in the broader history of European colonialism, contemporary western feminism is likely to have the same 19<sup>th</sup> Century bourgeois colonial attitude towards Third World women. In order to avoid this, Spivak thinks that it is necessary to challenge the universal humanist assumption in Western Feminism that all women lead the same kind of lives and have similar histories. Spivak's proposal to use strategic essentialism in order to review and rethink feminist thought from an entirely different perspective, i.e. that of the non-western women.

### **Chapter III (Spivak and Marxism)**

This chapter deals with Spivak's reading of Marx through the lens of deconstruction wherein she redefines the political task of the Marxist critique as an ethical call for us to re-read Marx patiently and carefully and underlining the importance of the economic aspect in contemporary cultural analysis. She draws on Marx's idea of the ghostly presence of human labour and links it to "...the labour of 'Third World' women in particular which is exploited the contemporary global capitalist economy. In doing so, Spivak demonstrates the direct relevance of Marx's Labour Theory of Value to the contemporary International Division of Labour." (Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 2003, p.102)

#### **Chapter IV (Spivak and Deconstruction)**

This chapter examines Spivak's critical engagement with deconstruction. Spivak's postcolonial thought has been influenced and developed by Derrida's deconstruction of the western philosophical truth and also the western humanist subject. Spivak's focus is on the ethical dimensions of deconstruction. The relevance and importance of her deconstructionist thought throw the spotlight on the ethical dimensions of her postcolonial reading practices and her activism that is counter-global.

#### **Chapter V (Spivak and Subaltern Studies)**

The left-wing, anti-colonial writings of the Subaltern Studies collective have a history of challenging the caste and class system in India. This chapter deals with Spivak's critique of the Subaltern Studies collective. In "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives" (Spivak. *History and Theory*, 24 (3) pp.247-72) and, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 1988, pp.271-313), Spivak investigates subaltern women's stories. These writings have radically challenged the ideas of political representation, identity and struggle of the woman/subaltern woman.

## **Chapter VI (Spivak and Post-colonialism)**

This chapter examines Spivak's argument that the works of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century English literary texts, and the institution of English literary studies, spread, encouraged and justified the idea of English imperialism. Spivak's critical engagement and textual commentaries on postcolonial fiction like that of Mahasweta Devi's short stories, Jean Rhys' *Wide Saragasso Sea* and J.M.Coetzee's *Foe*, project them as a counter-discourse in order to challenge the colonial master narratives like Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

**Chapter VII** which is the **concluding chapter**, apart from bringing all the loose threads together, makes an attempt to bring out the relevance of Spivak's critical practice which is unique due to the fact that she has both incorporated and transcended some of the dominant contemporary critical theories like Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction.

### **1.2 The Contemporary Critical Scenario**

There was a time when the interpretation of literary texts and literary theory seemed two different and almost unrelated things. However, in

recent times, interpretation and theory have moved closer and closer to each other. When we interpret a text we always do so from a theoretical perspective, whether we are aware of it or not. The English educator and poet Matthew Arnold's views, which enhanced the prestige of literature, propagated the central idea that, apart from its aesthetic and pleasing qualities, literature also had important things to teach us. Writing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arnold saw English culture as seriously threatened by a process of secularization that had its origins in the growing persuasiveness of scientific thinking, and by a 'Philistinism' that was loosened upon the world by the social rise of a self-important, money-oriented, and utterly conventional middle class. With the spiritual comforts of religion increasingly questionable, now that the sciences-in particular Darwin's theory of evolution- had thoroughly undermined the authority of the Bible and Church, Arnold foresaw a crucial, semi-religious role for poetry. Arnold puts forward "Poetry" as the major embodiment of 'culture', which he defines in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) as "the best that has been thought and said in the world". This culture can be found in Hellenism-the Greek culture of antiquity, with its "aerial ease clearness and radiancy"; the complex of intellectual and emotional attitudes expressed in the civilization of ancient Greece. Like all University educated people of his time, Arnold

was so thoroughly familiar with classical history and literature that he sees Greek epics and plays that are more than 2000 years old as contemporary texts. The classics and the ideal of culture that they embody are timeless for Arnold and are the best for every age and every place. He is of course aware that culture will always, to some extent reflect its time and place of origin. But with regard to what it really has to tell us, it stands apart from time and place, that is, from history. With regard to its essence, culture transcends history. We must assume then, that its creators – the poet supreme among them – also transcend time and place- at least as long as the act of creation lasts. A timeless culture must be the creation of timeless minds that can at least temporarily disregard the world around them. The poet gets his insight/finds insights from themselves/their own mind. This view of the individual-or ‘subject’ is central to ‘liberal humanism’- a philosophical/political cluster of ideas in which the ultimate autonomy and self-sufficiency of the subject are taken for granted. As liberal subjects, we are not the sum of our experiences but can stand outside experience, with our “Self” remaining inviolate and stable.

One might also argue that literature as such, contributes to the a historical perspective that we find in liberal humanism in so far as it makes us forget about our immediate environment. Both the ‘eternal’ truths that we

may find in a work of art, and its aesthetic dimension – its beauty, which according to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) promotes disinterested contemplation – invite us to disregard the here and now. In so doing, they collude to give us the impression that what is most essential to us – our ‘self’ – also transcends time and place.

For many present-day critics and theorists, this is a deeply problematic view. One of the problems is that Arnold’s ‘best’ depends on education which implicitly means that the uneducated are barbarians. Even if we grant Arnold’s claim and accept that his idea of culture does indeed represent the most humane, most tolerant, most morally sensitive perspectives that human civilization has come up with, we would still have a problem, i.e. would we have the right to impose that culture on people who couldn’t care less. In short, there are serious problems with Arnold’s humanist conception of culture and poetry.

In the early 1920's, Eliot did what Arnold had largely avoided. He set out to define the criteria that ‘the best that had been thought and said in world’ would have to meet and he undertook the mission actually to identify them in so far as they had been expressed in literary form. In other words, after drawing up the admission requirements, he used them to establish which texts met his criteria and which failed to do so. The canon – the list of good

and even great literary works – that he set out to construe in the 1920's would dominate virtually all English and American discussions of literature until the 1970's and is still a powerful influence.

In the 1930s, the work of Eliot, Richards and Leavis found a warm welcome on the other side of the Atlantic among a group of poets, including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks. These 'New Critics' saw poetry as a means of resisting commodification and superficiality. In his 1937 essay "Criticism Inc.", John Crowe Ransom tells us that criticism 'might be seriously taken in hand by professionals'. The New Critics and their English colleagues constituted a defensive line against the world of vulgar commerce and amoral capitalist entrepreneurialism that they held responsible for the moral decline of western culture. But who was to decide which works of literature among the plenitude that the past has left us, actually contain 'the best that has been thought and said in the world'? If literature takes the place of religion, as Arnold had prophesied, then poets and critics, in their mutual dependency, are the priests who spread the new gospel. For a period of fifty years, the large majority of literary academics on both sides of the Atlantic, saw themselves as an intellectual and moral elite that had at its central task to safeguard 'life', the fullness of human experience. What was essentially an early twentieth century view of

literature formed under the influence of specific historical circumstances, became a prescription for all ages. Literary history was reshaped in the image of the early twentieth century. Among other aspects, the required standard was heavily gendered. Eliot's 'wit', the 'irony' of Richards and the New Critics, and the 'maturity' of Leavis all serve to underline a shared masculinist perspective. Self-discipline, with, a controlling irony, and related qualities are all seen as typically male, whereas overt emotions and a refusal to intellectualize experience are seen as typically female. The female writers elected for inclusion in the literary pantheon were admitted because they met a male standard. Hence basically, English and American literary studies traditionally focus on the 'meaning' of literary texts. Practical criticism provides interpretations, with the New Critics paying particular attention to the formal aspects of literature, which for them contribute directly to its meaning. Within this Anglo-American tradition, literature is thought to be of great importance because in it we find 'the best that has been thought and said'. Literary criticism which seeks out and preserves the very best of what millenia of writing have to offer, functions simultaneously as social critique. In this traditional form, literary studies takes 'liberal humanism' and its assumptions for granted. It sees the individual-the subject, as not determined and defined by social and

economic circumstances, but as fundamentally free. We create ourselves, and our destiny, through the choices we make.

In spite of the enormous influence of Eliot, Leavis and the New Critics, our current perspectives on the study of literature owe perhaps more to continental Europe than to England and the United States. The continental European Tradition of literary studies that is responsible for this begins in Russia, in the second decade of the twentieth century in Moscow and St. Petersburg. It finds a new home in Prague in the late 1920s and travels to France after World War II where it comes into full bloom in the 1960s and draws widespread international attention.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Russian and Czech literary theorists worked to develop a theory of 'literariness' where they focused on the 'formal' aspects of literature. The Russian Formalists suggested that literature distinguishes itself from non-literary language because it employs a whole range of 'devices' that have a 'defamiliarizing' effect. Central to the function of these devices is the idea of 'difference'. The successors to the Formalists, the Prague Structuralists, build on this and begin to see the literary text as a structure of differences.

Taking its clue from linguistics and –its analyses of culture and its institutions – from structuralist anthropology, structuralism focuses on the conditions that make meaning possible, rather than on meaning itself. What the major approaches mentioned so far have in common is that they focus strongly on literature itself. Conspicuously absent is a serious interest in what many literary academics would now consider very important issues such as the ‘historical situatedness’, or historical embedment, and the ‘politics’ of literary texts. To what extent are literary texts the product of the historical period in which they were written? The world has gone through enormous socio-economic and political changes in the last millennium and these changes are bound to turn up in our literature which in turn affect the way we experience things. Can the human condition have remained essentially the same? And what sort of view of the prevailing socio-economic and political condition do we find in a given text? Does the text support the status quo or does it take an openly or more implicitly critical stance? Before the late 1960s, such questions were by the large majority of English and American literary academics thought to be irrelevant or even detrimental to reading and to interpretation. With only a few exceptions, critics had not much use for historical context and even less for politics. However, some of the major modes of political criticism that became a

forceful presence in Anglo-American literary studies in the course of the 1970s are Marxism, Feminism and Criticism that concerns itself with racial relations. In Marxist criticism 'social class' and 'class-relations' function as central instruments of analysis; in feminist criticism, the concept of 'gender' is the crucial critical and political instrument; while in criticism concerned with racial relations, the fundamental category is 'race'. Later, Literary Theory and criticism went through great changes under the impact of the literary-theoretical upheavals of the later 1970s and the 1980s and the spectacular rise of poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism is a continuation and simultaneous rejection of structuralism, both literary and the Levi-Strauss anthropological ones. In France, where it originates, poststructuralism is generally subsumed under structuralism with both being broadly anti-humanist and linguistically oriented. The poststructuralism of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930) or 'Deconstruction', as it is often called, was the first version of poststructuralism to reach the United States. Spreading from there, it had enormous impact on English and American literary studies in general. By the late 1970s, other poststructuralist thinkers, notably, the French historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984), had caught the attention of literary academics.

Poststructuralism continues Structuralism's strongly anti-humanist perspective and it closely follows Structuralism in its belief that language is the key to our understanding of ourselves and the world. Poststructuralism, however, simultaneously undermines Structuralism by thoroughly questioning –“deconstructing”- some of its major assumptions and the methods that derive from those assumptions. It questions the Structuralists' faith in language and in objective analysis it seriously undermines Structuralism's achievements. In its deconstructionist form, primarily associated with Jacques Derrida, it focuses on language and argues that language, even if we have no alternative, is a fundamentally unstable and unreliable medium of communication. Because we rely on language in articulating our perception of reality and in formulating our knowledge of that reality, human perception and knowledge are fundamentally flawed. In a related move, post-structuralism argues that we have no genuine knowledge of our 'self', and that our identity, too, is prey to the indeterminacy of language. The deconstructionist criticism that bases itself upon these and other arguments shows how the instability of language always undoes the apparent coherence of literary texts. The postmodern stories and novels that begin to appear in the 1960s and continue to be written in the 1970s and 1980s have already dispensed with that coherence.

Through the techniques and strategies that they employ, they too raise issues of language, identity, and so on. The postmodern criticism that responds to this mode of writing accepts its premises and links it to poststructuralist theory.

In the course of the 1970s and the 1980s, literary studies began to incorporate the thought of the poststructuralist historian Michel Foucault and the poststructuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Foucault's work calls our attention to the role of language in the exercise and preservation of power. According to Foucault, the modern western world is in the grip of so-called 'discourses' that regulate our behaviour because we have internalised them and for all practical purposes police ourselves. Foucauldian criticism focuses on the role of literary and other texts in the circulation and maintenance of social power. Lacan's psychoanalytic theories serve to explain why we would internalize discourses that effectively imprison us. Lacanian criticism has been especially illuminating with regard to the relationship that readers enter into with the texts they read.

After assimilation of poststructuralist theory, literary criticism increasingly begins to see literature as an integral part of a much wider cultural context. Initially in the field of Renaissance studies, but later on in literary studies in general, critics start from the assumption that literary texts

are inevitably situated within the sort of discourses that, according to Foucault, carry and maintain social power. The American new historicists and the British Cultural materialists read literary texts for their role in the circulation of power, with the British critics having an additional interest in signs of genuine dissidence and in the usually conservative roles that cultural icons such as Shakespeare have been made to play in later times. In order to bring to light the political dimension of literary texts, new historicists and cultural materialists often read them in connection with non-literary texts and with reference to the dominant discourse or discourses of a given period.

In the 1920s and 1930s, during the Harlem Renaissance, and with the introduction of the concept of negritude, 'race' began to be a factor of importance in literary studies. Refusing to be defined on the basis of race, by the dominant white culture, African-American and French-speaking writers from Africa and the Caribbean began to define themselves and their culture in their own terms. The desire for cultural self-determination, that is, for cultural independence, is one of the moving forces behind the literatures, that in the 1960s and 1970s, spring up in the former colonies. The desire to draw directly on one's own culture is defended vigorously in an essay called 'Colonialist Criticism' (1974) in which Chinua Achebe argued that the 'universal' qualities that western criticism expects from literature are not so

much 'universal' as 'European' in a universal disguise. He attacks the idea that literary art should transcend its time and place. When, in the later 1960s it first became clear that the former colonies were busy producing literatures of their own, the idea that 'English literature' was mutating into 'literatures in English' of which the literary production of England was only one – although important, was still unthinkable. Instead, English critics interested in the writings that came out of the former colonies developed the idea of a 'Commonwealth literature': the English-language literature of the dependencies and former colonies that, with Great Britain as its centre, formed the so-called Commonwealth of Nations, or British Commonwealth. With hindsight, it can be seen that the idea of a Commonwealth literature followed the hierarchy of the political Commonwealth in that it placed the literature of Great Britain at the centre of this otherwise rather loose configuration. Thus, English literature and English criticism set the norm. In its early stages, the study of Commonwealth literature was traditionally humanistic. The liberal humanist approach to English literature believed that it had universal validity because it drew on an unchanging, universal human condition, and was therefore, without much further thought, applied to the work of writers ranging from Jamaica to Nigeria and from India to New Zealand. Moreover, the perspective of this liberal humanism was

specifically English. No matter how different writers from say, New Zealand and Trinidad might be, what they were supposed to have in common was the heritage of English Literature. At that time, admission to the ranks of English Literature might for writers from former colonies like Australia or Canada still have counted as an official stamp of approval. However, African, Asian and Caribbean Commonwealth writers were on the whole not happy with the Western or “Eurocentric” perspective of Commonwealth criticism, not in the least because their memories of British colonial rule had not invariably convinced them of European civilization’s humanistic superiority. In the course of the 1970s, their objections - voiced in Achebe’s ‘colonialist Criticism and other critiques – began to find a serious echo in the writings of a number of British literary academics who had themselves begun to question the supposedly universal validity of humanist values. These critics argued that, first of all, overseas writers must be seen within the specific context of the culture they were part of and which informed their writing, and that secondly, that culture was not necessarily inferior to, but only different from, the cultures of the mother country. Some critics even argued that the relationship between the former colonial powers and their colonies could most rewardingly be analysed with the help of Marxist concepts (with the colonized as the oppressed class) and that the

role of literature should therefore also be considered from a Marxist perspective, that it is the vehicle of ideology. Looked at from this perspective, not only the literatures of other Commonwealth nations but also English literature itself, begin to appear in a new light. English literature was, in the course of the nineteenth century, introduced in colonial India in order to 'civilize' the colonized elite. It is not implausible to suppose that the literature of the colonisers had indeed played a substantial ideological role in the process of colonization. From this perspective the work of commonwealth writers will be read as either involved in an ideological struggle with (neo)colonial forces or else ideologically complicit with them (V.S. Naipaul & Salman Rushdie).

Commonwealth literary studies made little difference between English literature and the new literature from overseas. The same holds true for the Marxist approach that developed in the course of the 1970's. From the perspective of the Nigerian or Pakistani writers, Marxism, although fundamentally at odds with liberal humanism, is also alien to their own culture. The emphasis on class in Marxist Commonwealth studies has been a valuable contribution, but in its focus on class, Marxism too was not much interested in the specific cultural context from which a given literary text

emerged. With hindsight, it is easy to see to what extent the field of Commonwealth literary studies was still marked by “Eurocentricism”.

In the course of the 1980s, Commonwealth literary studies became part of the then emerging and now vast field of literary, cultural, political, and historical enquiry that we call postcolonial studies. In the process, it was radically transformed. Whereas Commonwealth studies tacitly assumed common ground between the cultural products of the former colonies and the culture of the metropolis, postcolonial theory and criticism emphasizes the tension between the metropolis and the (former) colonies, between what within the colonial framework were the metropolitan, imperial centre and its colonial satellites. It focuses on the cultural displacement – and its consequences for personal and communal identities – that inevitably followed colonial conquest and rule and it does so from a non-Eurocentric perspective. Postcolonial theory and criticism radically questions the aggressively expansionist imperialism of the colonizing powers and in particular the system of values that supported imperialism and that it sees as still dominant within the western world. It studies the process and the effects of cultural displacement and the ways in which the displaced have culturally defended themselves. Postcolonial theory, in particular, sees such displacements, and the ambivalences and hybrid cultural forms to which

they lead, as vantage points that allow us to expose the internal doubts and the instances of resistance that the West has suppressed in its steamrolling globalizing course and to deconstruct the seamless façade that the combination of imperialism and capitalism has traditionally striven to present. The postcolonial perspective, just like that of “the marginal” in general, is a ‘substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity-progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past – that rationalize the authoritarian, “normalizing” tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest’ (Homi Bhabha 1990: 4). For Bhabha, one of the most prominent postcolonial theorists, the postcolonial perspective has that disruptive potential because the effects of colonialism have in a curious way foreshadowed current post-structuralist views and concerns.

Postcolonial studies in its current theoretically oriented form starts with the publication, in 1978, of the Palestinian-American critic Edward Said’s book *Orientalism*. Drawing on Foucault and, to a lesser extent, Gramsci, Said’s study completely changed the agenda of the study of non-western cultures and their literatures and pushed it in the direction of what we now call postcolonial theory. *Orientalism* is a devastating critique of how through the ages, but particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the heyday of imperialist expansion – which is Said’s book’s focus, Western texts have

represented the East, and more specifically the Islamic Middle East. Using British and French 'Scholarly' works...works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies; Said examines how these texts 'construct' the Orient through imaginative representations, through seemingly factual descriptions, and through claims to knowledge about Oriental history and culture. Together, all these forms of western writing form a Foucauldian discourse – a loose system of statements and claims that constitutes a field of supposed knowledge and through which that “knowledge” is constructed. Such discourses, although seemingly interested in knowledge, always establish relationships of power. In Foucault's work, power is first of all a force that serves itself. We may think we use it for our own purposes in our capacity as free agents, but in reality it works first of all 'through' us and not 'for' us. From Foucault's anti-humanistic perspective we are functions within networks of power. For Said, however, the West's representations of the East ultimately work within the framework of a conscious and determined effort at subordination. For Said, Orientalism – this discourse about the Orient – has traditionally served hegemonic purposes. As is seen, Gramsci thought of 'hegemony' as domination by consent – the way the ruling class succeeds in oppressing other classes with their apparent approval. In Gramsci's analysis it does so

through culture: the ruling class makes its own values and interests central in what it presents as a common, neutral, culture. Accepting that ‘common’ culture, the other classes become complicit in their own oppression and the result is a kind of velvet domination. Thus, Orientalism has traditionally served two purposes. It has legitimized western expansionism and imperialism in the eyes of Western governments and their electorates and it has insidiously worked to convince the ‘natives’ that western culture represented universal civilization. Accepting that culture could only benefit them – it would, for instance, elevate them from the ‘backward’ or ‘superstitious’ conditions in which they still lived – and would make them participants in the most advanced civilization the world had ever seen. For Said, Western representations of the Orient, no matter how well intentioned, have always been part of this damaging discourse and have been complicit with the workings of western power. “Orientalism” revolutionised the way western scholars and critics looked at representations of non-western subjects and cultures. Said’s book also drew attention to the way in which the discourse of Orientalism serves to create the West as well as it creates the East. “Orientalism” offered a challenging theoretical framework and a new perspective on the interpretation of western writing about the East (and other non-Western cultures) and of writing produced under colonial rule. It

put the role of the West's cultural institutions (the University, literary writing, newspapers, etc.) in its military, economic, and cultural domination of non-western nations and peoples firmly on the agenda and asked questions that we still ask concerning literature's role in past and present racial, ethnic, and cultural encounters.

One of the questions that Said does not address but that is central to the work of Homi Bhabha is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between colonizer and colonized. For Bhabha, the encounter affects both. The most influential of Bhabha's contributions to postcolonial theory is his notion of 'hybridity'. Shifting his focus from 'the noisy command of colonial authority' and 'the silent repression of native traditions', to 'the colonial hybrid', Bhabha argues that the cultural interaction of colonizer and colonized leads to a fusion of cultural forms that from one perspective, because it signals its 'productivity', confirms the power of the colonial presence, but that as a form of mimicry simultaneously 'unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power' (Bhabha, H. *The Location of Culture* 1994, p. 112). Hybridity 'intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence'. Whereas Said prompts us to question western representations of the East, Bhabha asks us to submit the

actual encounter between West and East – in his case India – to the closest scrutiny. Postcolonial Marxists such as Aijaz Ahmad have suggested that Bhabha and other “Westernized” non-Europeans are hardly in the best position to speak for the colonized and neo-colonized masses.

Amidst these diverse points of view and schools of thought, stands the towering figure of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a literary theorist and critic, and one of the few academics who can claim to have influenced intellectual production on a truly global scale. Spivak, unlike the others mentioned in the previous paragraph, has no trouble admitting that her position as an academic working in the West separates her from the masses of India, her country of origin. At the same time, she has drawn our attention to that large majority of the colonised that has left no mark upon history because it could not, or was not allowed to, make itself heard. Millions and millions have come and gone under the colonial dispensation without leaving a trace: men, but even more so women. Since colonised women went unheard within their own patriarchal culture, they were doubly unheard under a colonial regime. Spivak can be said to be the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda that includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism. ‘It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British fiction without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was

a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English', Spivak tells us in her 1985 essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (Spivak. 1995, p. 269). Noting that the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored', she goes on to analyse Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the way in which it presents the Creole Bertha Mason- Rochester's mad wife – in terms of cultural representation. Spivak's insistence on the importance of feminist perspectives is part of a larger role that she has perhaps unintentionally played over the last two decades: that of the theoretical conscience of the postcolonial studies. Spivak represents the voice of difference among the major postcolonial theorists. Said and Bhabha virtually ignore the question of difference. Both are gender blind and also largely ignore cultural difference. They make no difference between the various European cultures- Protestant or Catholic, liberal or authoritarian. Spivak, however, tries to be attentive to difference or heterogeneity, even within feminism itself she has taken to task Western Feminism for operating within a horizon determined by white, middle-class, and heterosexual preoccupations. Spivak also focuses on social class as an analytical category. Of all postcolonial theorists, Spivak has most consistently focused on the subaltern (the category of those who are lower in position or rank). Spivak employs the

term (which derives from Gramsci) to describe the lower layers of colonial and postcolonial/neo-colonial society: the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day-labourers, etc. She is aware, however, that categorizations by way of class, too, tend to make difference invisible: “one must nevertheless insist that the colonised subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous” (Spivak. “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”, *Critical Inquiry* 12(1) pp. 243-61 ). One result of this attentiveness to difference is Spivak’s focus on the female subaltern, a very large and differentiated category among the colonised that, she argues, has traditionally been doubly marginalized: “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak. “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” *Critical Inquiry* 12(1) pp. 243-61). This focus does not mean that she speaks for – or has the intention of speaking for the female subaltern. Rather, she is motivated by the desire to save the female subaltern from misrepresentation. In her famous essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak, in the wider context of a critique of what she sees as poststructuralist appropriations of the colonial subject, examines the nineteenth-century controversy between the colonized Indians and their British colonizers over what she calls ‘Widow-sacrifice’: the burning of

widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands (Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds), Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg , 1988, pp. 271-313), Spivak concludes that neither party allowed women-the potential victims of this practice-to speak. The British texts construct a position for the woman in which she is made to represent western individualism and, by implication, a superior western civilization that emphasizes freedom, while the Indian ones present her as choosing for duty and tradition. Although both parties claim that they have them on their side, the women themselves remain unheard.

Spivak combines a Marxist perspective – the emphasis on class as a differentiating factor – with a deconstructionist approach to texts and to identity. In dealing with colonialist texts she tries to demonstrate how they attain their coherence by setting up false oppositions between a supposed centre and an equally fictive margin and how their language invariably deconstructs the coherence they try to establish. Given this deconstructionist perspective, Spivak cannot very well escape the conclusion that our identity is without a fixed centre and inherently unstable. In one way such a decentred identity serves Spivak’s purpose well since it radically undermines all essentialist pretensions on the part of the colonizer and neo-colonizer and it equally undermines the postcolonial fundamentalism that she has little

political patience with. In her analyses of, and attack on, forms of nascent essentialism, she also acts as postcolonial theory's theoretical conscience. On the other hand, decolonized nations and cultures, just like the political movements of the decolonised, arguably need some sort of identity that does not immediately deconstruct itself and announce to the world that it is ungrounded and decentred. Spivak's solution to this dilemma is what she calls a 'strategic use of positivist essentialism' that clearly signals its political agenda. In other words, it is all right to project a stable political or cultural identity as long as we are aware that it is a construction that is always under deconstructionist erasure. Currently, postcolonial studies (theory and criticism), generally emphasizes plurality, differentiality, and hybridity without the exaggerated totalizing claims that marked its earlier phase.

### **1.3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: life and context**

Like the work of other leading 'postcolonial intellectuals', including Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, Spivak's thought is self-consciously marked by her diasporic location and cultural background. Her work often draws on autobiographical information to illustrate and clarify her arguments and at times also stands in for an engagement with the more urgent political concerns she frequently invokes, such as the plight of disenfranchised,

‘subaltern’ groups living in the global South. Yet such an argument overlooks the significance of Spivak’s intellectual biography to an understanding of her own writing and theoretical affiliations.

Gayatri Chakravorty was born in Calcutta on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1942, the year of the artificial famine in India and five years before India gained independence from British colonial rule. The artificial famine was created by the British military in India as a ruse to feed the allied forces in the Pacific during the Second World War. Although it was illegal to protest against the famine, a group of Indian radicals had found a way to actively demonstrate against the British rule through performance and street theatre. By forming a group known as the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), these non-professional actors and directors used theatre as a medium through which to promote nationalist sentiment. It was this political context in pre-independence Calcutta that shaped Spivak’s earliest childhood experience: as she states in an interview with Alfred Arteaga, her earliest childhood memories are of the songs and plays performed by the IPTA (The Spivak Reader,16). Spivak came from a middle-class Hindu family and attended a missionary school in Calcutta, where she was taught by tribal Christians, who were ‘lower than middle class by origin, neither Hindus nor Muslims, not even Hindu untouchable, but tribals – so called aboriginals –

who had been converted by missionaries' (The Spivak Reader,17). This early experience of being taught by women 'who were absolutely underprivileged, but who had dehegemonized Christianity in order to occupy a social space where they could teach their social superiors' (The Spivak Reader,16) has continued to mark the trajectory of Spivak's work.

Spivak graduated from Presidency College of the University of Calcutta in 1959 with a first-class Honours degree in English, including gold medals for English and Bengali literature. The teaching of the English literary canon in Indian universities could be seen to continue the ideological legacy of British colonial education policies which were intended to instruct and enlighten the Indian middle class in the morally and politically superior culture of the British. Indeed, during the 1950's, degree requirements at the University of Calcutta 'amounted to a comprehensive first-hand reading knowledge of all literature in "English" from just before Chaucer up to the mid-twentieth century, with a special focus on Shakespeare' (*The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean(eds), pp.1-2). Yet, although Presidency College was well known for its academic excellence and traditional curriculum, the social demography of its students was mixed. The influence of the college's politically active intellectual Left can be seen

to mark the trajectory of Spivak's published work from the early 1980's to the present.

After taking a Master's degree in English at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York State, and a year's fellowship at Girton College, Cambridge, Spivak took up an instructor's position at the University of Iowa. While at Iowa she completed her doctoral dissertation on the work of William Butler Yeats, which was supervised by the literary critic Paul de Man at Cornell. This was subsequently developed into a book entitled *Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (1974). At first glance, this book offers a fairly conventional reading of the Irish writer's life, poetry and his reinvention of Celtic mythology. Yet it also situates Yeats' work in terms of the history of British colonialism in Ireland. In this respect, Spivak's early text could be seen to anticipate the rise of postcolonial literary criticism, and the influence of Yeats' work on other anti-colonial writers such as the Nigerian Chinua Achebe and the West Indian Derek Walcott.

She married and divorced an American, Talbot Spivak, but has kept his surname, under which her work first appeared in print. She currently holds the Avalon Foundation Professorship of the Humanities at Columbia University. Today, Spivak is among the foremost feminist critics who have

achieved international eminence and one of the few who can claim to have influenced intellectual production on a truly global scale. In addition to the groundbreaking translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak has published four books, a volume of interviews, and numerous theoretical and critical articles.

Particularly in the United States, where Spivak has made her academic career, there has been within the various women's movements a strong populist impulse that has encouraged feminist critics and intellectuals to keep their work accessible to general audiences. In spite of this pressure, and the anti-intellectual tendencies of U.S. culture generally, Spivak has relentlessly challenged the high ground of established philosophical discourse. She has done so in difficult theoretical language, and on grounds recognizable to philosophers, especially those trained in the traditions of continental philosophy. Although her own primary training was in literary criticism, Spivak has a command of philosophy and ethics, as well as political economy and social theory. Thus she has been able to challenge the practitioners of the academic disciplines of philosophy and history in the United States, Britain, India, and elsewhere in terms that, if not exactly their own, are nevertheless recognizable; terms that specifically explore the margins at which disciplinary discourses break down and enter the world of

political agency. The range of this challenge has made her work seem remote and difficult to some readers, and she has been controversially received by academic philosophers, historians, literary scholars, and elite Indianists, especially those antagonistic to deconstruction, post-structuralism, subaltern studies, and post-1968 French thinking with which her work often engages.

However, one must not assume that Spivak's work is so esoteric that she has no audience outside the academy. Her career has followed a complex intellectual trajectory through a deeply feminist perspective on deconstruction, the Marxist critique of capital and the international division of labor, the critique of imperialism and colonial discourse, and the critique of race in relation to nationality, ethnicity, the status of the migrant, and what it might mean to identify a nation or a cultural form as postcolonial in a neocolonial world. This intellectual trajectory has gained for Spivak a relatively heterogeneous international audience.

Despite the difficulties that some readers have experienced with her ideas and writings, Spivak's contributions to the critical investigation of literary and cultural theory have been widely recognized within the U.S. academy. Since the late 1970s her reputation has become increasingly international as well. Spivak has held visiting university appointments in

France, India, and Saudi Arabia, and has lectured extensively throughout the U.K., U.S., Australia, Canada, the Indian subcontinent, Belgium, Eire, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, the former Yugoslavia, and before the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Her sustained critical engagement with the intellectual tradition represented by the writings of Freud, Lacan, Marx, Derrida, and Foucault has been instrumental in transforming and politicizing the reception of the feminist and poststructuralist critiques of psychoanalytic and Marxist thought. Moreover, her wide-ranging critical and theoretical challenges continue to influence the development of multicultural studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist theory not only in the U.S., but also internationally.

#### **1.4. A review of Spivak's major works.**

In 1976 *Of Grammatology*, an English translation of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's *de la grammatologie* (1967) was published. Besides introducing this influential thinker to English-speaking audiences, Spivak's "Translator's Preface" set a new standard for self-reflexivity in prefaces and introductions. It addressed, from every conceivable angle, the "question of the preface" and what it meant to translate and explicate the work of Derrida, who developed the form of a philosophical critique known as

deconstruction. In her “Preface,” Spivak briefly introduced Derrida, the man or biographical subject, and Derrida, the collection of published writings, before turning to the question of the preface as a form ‘of’ writing and an occasion or event ‘in’ writing, with particular protocols to be observed. This attention to the particular protocols of specific occasions is one of the characteristic gestures of deconstruction. It is this translation with a critical introduction of Derrida’s *de la grammatologie* that launched Spivak’s reputation as a theorist of deconstruction.

“Can The Subaltern Speak? : Speculations on Widow Sacrifice” (Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds), Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg , 1988, pp. 271-313), is the essay that is perhaps most widely known, read and cited. Here, Spivak describes the circumstances surrounding the suicide of a young Bengali woman that indicate a failed attempt at self-representation. Because her attempt at “speaking” outside normal patriarchal channels was not understood or supported, Spivak concluded that “the subaltern cannot speak.” (Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds), Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg , 1988, pp. 271-313) . Her extremely nuanced argument, admittedly confounded by her sometimes opaque style, led some incautious readers to accuse her of

phallogocentric complicity, of not recognizing or even not letting the subaltern speak. Some critics, missing the point, buttressed their arguments with anecdotal evidence of messages cried out by burning widows. Her point was not that the subaltern does not cry out in various ways, but that speaking is “a transaction between speaker and listener” (“Subaltern Talk”, *The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean(eds), pp.287-308). Subaltern talk, in other words, does not achieve the dialogic level of utterance. Beyond this specific misunderstanding, Spivak in an interview with Leon De Kock, objects to the frivolous use of the term ‘subaltern’ and its appropriation by other groups who may be marginalized, but are not specifically “subaltern”. “Everybody thinks the ‘subaltern’ is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie” (Spivak, New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa,1992). She points out that in Gramsci’s original covert usage (being obliged to encrypt his writing to get it past prison censors), it signified “proletarian”, whose voice could not be heard, being structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. In postcolonial terms, “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It is not subaltern”. (Spivak, New Nation Writers

Conference in South Africa, 1992). Another misreading of the concept is that, since the subaltern cannot speak, she needs an advocate to speak for her, a Horton to its Who – affirmative action or special regulatory protection. Spivak objects, “Who the hell wants to protect subalternity? Only extremely reactionary, dubious anthropologic museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference...You don’t give the subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity” (Spivak, New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa, 1992). She cites the work of the Subaltern Studies group as an example of how this critical work can be practiced, not to give the subaltern voice, but to clear the space to allow it to speak.

Spivak is particularly leery of the misappropriation of the term by those who simply want to claim disenfranchisement within the system of hegemonic discourse, i.e. those who can speak, but feel they are not being given their turn. “Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, they don’t need the word ‘subaltern’...They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should

not call themselves subaltern.” (Spivak, New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa, 1992).

The essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” is Spivak’s critique of western models of class-consciousness and subjectivity where she juxtaposes the radical claims of twentieth-century French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the disenfranchised and the self-righteous claims of British colonialism to rescue native women from the practice of Hindu widow sacrifice in nineteenth-century India. The point of this juxtaposition is to emphasise how the benevolent, radical western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way that the benevolent colonialist silenced the voice of the widow, who ‘chooses’ to die on her husband’s funeral pyre. In both these examples, the benevolent impulse to represent subaltern groups effectively appropriates the voice of the subaltern and thereby silences them.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak foregrounds the aesthetic and political dimensions of representation to mark the difference between her own role as postcolonial intellectual and the concrete, material lives of the subaltern. In doing so , Spivak has produced a better reading strategy

that responds to the voices and unwritten histories of subaltern women, without speaking for them.

Spivak's account of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's suicide in the re-worked version of 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' published in chapter 3 of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, exemplifies how some armed anticolonial nationalist struggles were predicated on the foreclosure of the subaltern woman. In Spivak's account, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri 'hanged herself in her father's modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926' but attempted to cover up her involvement with an armed resistance movement through an elaborate suicide ritual that *resembled* the ancient practice of Hindu widow sacrifice. "Nearly a decade later it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence" (Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak"). Significantly, Spivak has emphasized that the action of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri was inscribed in her body, but 'even that incredible effort to speak did not fulfill itself in a speech act' (*The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean(eds), p. 289). By retroactively framing Bhubaneswari's suicide as an embodied act, Spivak clarifies her frequently misunderstood argument that the subaltern cannot speak. Moreover, such a statement exemplifies

how the sovereign political acts of women are often not intelligible within the patriarchal logic of the state.

*In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics'* (1987) is another of Spivak's well known and widely distributed book. Here, she "analyzes the relationship between language, women and culture in both Western and non-Western contexts. She develops an original integration of the methodologies of deconstruction, Marxism and feminism which becomes a valuable tool for studying our own and other worlds". Much of the force of Spivak's work comes from its reiterated demonstration that the three fields/methodologies, namely, Marxism, feminism and deconstruction, can only be understood and used in a constant attention to their interpenetration and re-articulation. The texts included in this work are of importance to anyone concerned with the relation of both culture and its interpretation to the other practices that shape our lives.

One of the great virtues of these essays is the commitment to teaching and education that runs through them. Spivak is rare in combining an understanding of many of the most crucial problems facing the globe and the species with an interest in considering the detailed questions of specific educational situations. From the lofty heights of the development of imperialism, the study of sexuality, and the impossibility of representing

Being to discussing the mundane merits of differing composition courses may seem like a fall from the sublime to the ridiculous. It is one of the delights of this book that it shirks from neither: “I think less easily of ‘changing the world’ than in the past. I teach a small number of the holders of the can(n)on male or female, feminist or masculist, how to read their own texts, as best I can.” Any reader of these texts of Spivak will be better able to construe and construct the contradictory texts that constitute their own lives. (Foreword to *In Other Worlds*)

*The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, (1990), is a collection of 12 interviews with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak published and/or broadcast in Australia, Canada, India, the United States and Britain, between 1984 and 1988. The collection brings together discussions of some of the most compelling politico-theoretical issues broached in Spivak’s work and confronting political thinkers today. The questions deliberated include the problem of representation, self-representation and representing others; the politicization of deconstruction; post-colonialism and the politics of multi-culturalism; the situations of post-colonial critics; speech-act and critical theory; pedagogical responsibility; and political strategies, as well as many other timely issues.

Yet, these interviews between Gayatri Spivak and her interlocutors do not merely record objective dialogues, nor do they simply delineate politico-theoretical positions. Indeed, the idea of a “neutral dialogue,” as Gayatri Spivak points out in her interview with Rashmi Bhatnagar, Lola Chatterjee, and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, “denies history, denies structure, denies the positioning of subjects;” One must learn to read how desire for neutrality and/or desire for the Other articulates itself. One must learn to read the text—the narrative, historical and institutional structures—in which desire is written. Spivak not only responds to questions posed by commenting upon and situating the question in relation to her work (a significant offering in itself); she, at the same time, attempts to render visible the historical and institutional structures of the representative space from which she is called to speak, be it as a spokeswoman for deconstruction, Marxism, feminism or the “Third World” point of view. By using the interview questions to come to terms with and to accentuate the problem of representation and constitution of the subject, Spivak turns her responses into lessons in critical reading. Each interview is both a lesson to be read and a lesson in reading as we learn the slow and careful labor of unlearning our privileges as our loss.

*The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym(ed), 1990, comprises of the following interviews:

1. “Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution”.

In June, 1984, Gayatri Spivak visited Australia as one of the guest speakers of the Future Fall Conference, a conference on Post-Modernity held in Sydney. This interview with Elizabeth Grosz was recorded in Sydney on August 17, 1984 and was first published in *Thesis Eleven*, No. 10/11, 1984/85.

2. “The Post-modern Condition: The End of Politics?”

This interview is a transcript of a discussion between Geoffrey Hawthor, host for the 1984 Channel 4 Voices series, Knowledge in Crisis, Gayatri Spivak, Ron Aronson and John Dunn.

3. “Strategy, Identity, Writing”

This is an edited transcript of a three-hour interview conducted in Canberra, Australia, on August 17, 1986. The participants were John Hutnyk, Scott McQuire, Nikos Papastergiadis, and Gayatri Spivak. It was first published in *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, Vol. 18, 1986/87.

4. “The Problem of Cultural Self-representation”

This interview between Gayatri Spivak and Walter Adamson was recorded in 1986 and was first published in *Thesis Eleven*, No.15, 1986.

5. “Questions of Multi-culturalism”

This discussion between Sneja Gunew and Gayatri Spivak concerning the post-colonialism, anti-imperialism and multi-cultural politics in Australia was first published in *Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, Vol. 12, No. 1/2, 1986. This interview was originally broadcast on ABC Radio National on Saturday, August 30, 1986, in “The Minders” series, produced by Penny O’Donnell and Ed Brunetti.

6. “The Post-colonial Critic”

In 1987, Gayatri Spivak held a visiting professorship at the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she offered a course entitled “Texts and Contexts: Theories of Interpretation,” which focused on recent post-structuralist European theories, chiefly those of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Habermas and Lacan. She also delivered several lectures at various centres in Delhi University. Rashmi Bhatnagar, Lola Chatterjee and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan focused their interview with Gayatri Spivak on four broad areas: the situation of the post-colonial intellectual, first world theory, the women’s movement and the study of English

literature. It was first published in *The Book Review*, Vol 11, No.3, 1987.

7. “Postmarked Calcutta, India”

This discussion concerning the problems of representation, self-representation and representing others, and the situation of the post-colonial subject between Angela Ingram and Gayatri Spivak was recorded in November, 1987, upon Gayatri Spivak’s return from her visiting professorship at the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It was first published in *Women’s writing in Exile*, edited by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989)

8. “Practical Politics of The Open End”

This interview was recorded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Gayatri Spivak was an Andrew Mellon Professor of English, on October 31/November 1, 1987 First published in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale*, Vol.12, No. 1-2, 1988.

9. “The *Intervention* Interview”

This was first published in the *Southern Humanities Review*, Fall 1988, the following interview with Gayatri Spivak was secured by Terry Threadgold, Department of English, and Peter Hutchings of the Intervention Collective, both of the University of Sydney, Australia. The occasion was the 1985 Cultural Construction of Race Conference in Sydney, which Professor Spivak attended as a guest speaker. The questions posed in the interview, though inspired by the conference, were delivered in writing after the conference and read, in the interests of recreating the situation of an interview, by Frances Bartkowski of Wesleyan University.

10. “Interview with Radical Philosophy”

In November 1988, Gayatri Spivak visited England to participate in the Radical Philosophy Conference, “Politics, Reason and Hope” An edited version of the interview between Peter Osborne, Jonathan Ree and Gayatri Spivak appeared in *Radical Philosophy* 54 (Spring 1990).

11. “Negotiating the Structures of Violence”

This interview was conducted on September 26, 1987, in Durham, N.C., where Gayatri Spivak was participant at the Convergence in Crisis: Narratives of the History of Theory conference at the Duke Center for Critical Theory, September 24-27, 1987. A substantially

edited version of this interview was published in *Polygraph* 2 and 3, Spring 1989.

12. “The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic”

This interview between Harold Veesser and Gayatri Spivak was first published in *The New Historicism*, ed. Harold Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989).

*Outside in the Teaching Machine*, was published in 1993, and contains some of Spivak’s highly engaging essays on literary works such as Salman Rushdie’s controversial “*Satanic Verses*”, and twentieth-century thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Karl Marx. Spivak relentlessly “questions and deconstructs power structures wherever they operate. In doing so, she provides a voice for those who cannot speak, proving that the true work of resistance takes place in the margins – outside in the teaching machine”. This book serves as a valuable guide to responsible reading and teaching. Whether it is literary texts, philosophy, or films, Spivak is indefatigable in her questioning of contemporary pieties and in insisting that it is the study of culture that can help us chart the production of versions of reality.

While the trajectory of Spivak's early critical work was partly concerned with the relationship between literary and cultural studies and European colonialism, her later work on translation, transnational literacy and subaltern rights signals a shift in emphasis. Spivak's proposal in her lecture series in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), originally presented in 2000 as part of the Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory at the University of California, Irvine – that comparative literary studies should engage with the languages of the global South, which she also names 'subaltern languages' – defines a radical political task for a discipline which is conventionally concerned with reading literary texts written in different languages.

Spivak defends and promotes comparative literary studies as a training of the imagination. What she perhaps means by the training of the imagination in *Death of a Discipline* is consistent with her ethical commitment to a singular pedagogical approach underpinning much of her thought and practice: to learn to learn from the subaltern.

No doubt, Spivak's emphasis on pedagogy does not offer a rational political blueprint to empower or emancipate the subaltern. Yet the emphasis on pedagogy does provide a space for what she calls 'one-on-one epistemic change'. As Spivak explains in an interview with

Tani E. Barlow about her pedagogical work in rural schools in India and Bangladesh, this change is “like training athletes one by one in the hope that when others mobilize them, they will be mobilized more successfully, critically. They will not just be led, or they will not think that they are making choices, when the terms of the choice have been taught them by those who mobilize” (Morton. *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason* p.161). This analogy between ‘one-on-one epistemic change’ and training athletes certainly helps to elucidate the way in which Spivak’s teaching practice in Indian and Bangladeshi schools seeks to educate her students to a point where they are able to identify and question the dominant systems of political representation, which silence and exclude them because of their class position.

Spivak calls the languages of the Southern Hemisphere subaltern languages presumably because the official languages of national and global political institutions tend to privilege elite national or European languages, and in so doing effectively marginalize the languages of the Southern Hemisphere and restrict the expansion of their literacy.

Spivak’s proposal to learn the languages of the global South in order to interrupt and overwrite the global hegemony of European

languages may, as Judith Butler has suggested, offer a “radically ethical framework for the approach to subaltern writing” (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline: Lectures in Critical Theory*, jacket blurb).

The task of close reading in a non-European language that Spivak proposes for scholars and students of comparative literature, as well as global justice activists, is one that she also attempts to put into practice in *Death of a Discipline*. The first lecture in the series, entitled “Crossing Borders”, for instance, offers a close reading of an extract from a novel by the Guadeloupean writer Maryse Conde, *Heremakhonon* (1976): ‘an undisclosed West African subaltern speaker’ (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline: Lectures in Critical Theory*, p.16) draws attention to the shifting linguistic and ethnic groups in different West African societies, such as the Fulani and the Toucouleur. In Spivak’s reading of this passage, the proper names of these languages ‘carry the sedimentation of the history of the movement of peoples’ in West Africa (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline: Lectures in Critical Theory*). Furthermore, Spivak argues that the ‘movement of peoples and languages’ is historically sedimented ‘in the translation of this passage from *French to English*’ (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline: Lectures in Critical Theory*, 18). This historical

sedimentation is significant for Spivak because it exemplifies what she calls the restricted permeability of subaltern languages in an era of globalization.

What Spivak means by 'restricted permeability' is clarified in an interview with Meyda Yegenoglu and Mahmut Mutman, which was published in the journal *New Formations* (2002). Against the older definition of subalternity, in which 'the subaltern is precisely outside the circuit of mobility', Spivak argues that the subaltern 'is altogether permeable from above'. In other words, the subaltern has access to the policies of Non-Governmental Organizations and global commodity culture. Yet the influence of subaltern languages and culture on policy making and political reform at the level of the state or the Non-Governmental Organization is restricted. What is crucial about the concept of 'restricted permeability', however, is that it conveys the subordinate status of subaltern languages, which are spoken by socially marginalized linguistic communities. In contrast to hegemonic European languages such as English, which have become the international language of power, Spivak argues that subaltern languages do not cross or permeate national and cultural boundaries in the same way, and when they do, they are often ignored.

To counter this problem, Spivak contends that the task of the comparative literature specialist is to learn to read these languages as they become historically sedimented in literary texts.

In “Righting Wrongs” (2003), an article that was originally presented at the Oxford Amnesty lectures in 2001, she argues that “the rural poor and [ ... ] all species of the sub-proletariat” will remain an “object of benevolence in human rights discourse’ without the recovering and training of the ethical imagination of such subaltern groups” (Spivak, "Righting Wrongs", pp. 206-7). To counter this problem, Spivak proposes a re-thinking of the subject of human rights from the standpoint of the rural poor and the sub-proletariat in South Asia. Such a re-thinking demands a new pedagogy that is capable of suturing what Spivak calls the torn fabric of the subaltern episteme. Although Spivak does not specify what it is that has done the tearing, she implies that the divide was caused by centuries of class and caste oppression, as well as the transition from colonial modernity to globalization. What is crucial, however, is Spivak’s attempt to suture this tear through a pedagogy that strives to “learn well one of the languages of the rural poor of the South” (Spivak, "Righting Wrongs" p. 208). As Spivak explains: “for access to the subaltern episteme to

devise a suturing pedagogy, you must take into account the multiplicity of subaltern languages” (Spivak, "Righting Wrongs" p. 208). While this may be a sound ethical principle, Spivak does not really elaborate on how exactly a basic knowledge of subaltern languages would help to alter the class apartheid that perpetuates the disenfranchisement of subaltern groups in rural India. Yet if this call to ‘take into account the multiplicity of subaltern languages’ is situated in relation to Spivak’s discussion of their ‘restricted permeability’, it becomes clear that promoting the transnational literacy of a subaltern language may provide one strategy for countering the silencing and exclusion of subaltern groups from political representation at a local, national or global level.

Spivak’s “*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*” (1999) was primarily a critique of postcolonial studies and its relationship to the systematic inequalities of globalization in the 1990s. As a result of this focus, and because the book was published before the terrorist attacks on America on 11 September 2001, the ‘vanishing present’ of which “*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*” promises to offer a ‘history’ does not explicitly address the critical relationship between postcolonial studies and the contemporary discourse of global political

insecurity, also known as terrorism. Spivak has addressed the discourse of terrorism in an essay titled "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" (2004), in which she observes an 'intense resurgence of nationalism' in the United States after those attacks, epitomized by the Patriot Act (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 84). For Spivak, the Patriot Act exemplifies how nationalism did not disappear with the global financial restructuring of the economy that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990's. Rather, as Spivak suggests, the contemporary world economic system was always driven by the economic and geopolitical interests of the United States. Like other intellectual commentators on the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and on the subsequent 'war on terror' – including Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Terry Eagleton and Giorgio Agamben – Spivak addresses the question of whether the terrorist attacks could be understood as a response to globalization and US foreign policy, as well as the ambivalent legal status of the terrorist suspects who were held in a state of indefinite detention in a prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Yet Spivak is crucially concerned to articulate an appropriate ethical response to the attacks and to the war on terror. Spivak clarifies what she means by an 'ethical' response by distinguishing it from an 'epistemological construction of the other as an object of knowledge' (Spivak, "Terror: A

Speech after 9-11" p. 83). While 'epistemological constructions belong to the domain of the law, which seeks to construct the other as an object of knowledge [...] in order to punish or acquit rationally', Spivak argues, the "ethical interrupts the epistemological in order to listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit" (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 83). Spivak does not actually name the other as a terrorist at this point in her essay; however, this is certainly implicit in what she goes on to say about the ways in which the discourse of terrorism constitutes its object of knowledge. Spivak observes how terrorism is a name for social movements involving physical violence as well as the effect of terror produced by the use of such physical violence (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 91). In the dominant discourse of terrorism, Spivak contends that these meanings have been conflated so that the word is no more than an antonym for war (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 92). In this slippage between terror and terrorism, Spivak implies that the other who is constructed as an object of knowledge or a 'terrorist' forecloses an appropriate political and legal response to terrorism. Spivak emphasizes that she is not condoning violence or terrorism: 'I cannot and do not condone violence, practiced by the state or otherwise' (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 93). Instead, she suggests that an ethical response to terrorism

necessitates ‘an imaginative exercise in experiencing the impossible [and] stepping into the space of the other’ (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" ,p.94).

Spivak attempts to imagine the ‘space of the other’ by way of an analogy with Kant’s theory of the sublime. In her view Kant’s theory posits that the human subject’s cognitive faculties are unable to understand the magnitude of the sublime object, and the subject is rendered ‘stupid’ or ‘mindless’ as a result of this experience (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p.94). In a similar way, Spivak claims that ‘single coerced yet willed suicide “terror” is ‘informed by the stupidity of belief taken to extreme’ (Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9-11" p. 94). The coercive training of suicide bombers to carry out their deadly missions in the name of a religious belief may seem analogous to the suspension of rational judgement associated with the Kantian sublime. Yet, this analogy cannot account for the way in which that religious belief provides a structure for training human beings to become martyrs. After all, Kant’s theory of the sublime was concerned with the faculty of aesthetic judgement, not with suicide bombing.

*Other Asias* (2007), is an eloquent plea for a pedagogy of continental scope that does not evade or erode the singular, ‘textured’ life, thought and work of

geographical regions and political minorities. According to Homi Bhabha, the exemplary courage and extraordinary imagination that have distinguished Spivak's work are now engaged in rich reflections on the political art of humanistic education.”

In this major intervention into the 'Asian Century', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak challenges the reader to re-think Asia, in its political and cultural complexity, in the global South and in the metropole. The featured essays include ,

1. “Righting Wrongs – 2002: Accessing Democracy among the Aboriginals”.
2. “ Responsibility – 1992: Testing Theory in the Plains”.
3. “1994: Will Postcolonialism Travel?”.
4. “1996: Foucault and Najibullah”.
5. “Megacity – 1997: Testing Theory in Cities”.
6. “Moving Devi – 1997: The Non-Resident and the Expatriate”.
7. “Our Asias – 2001: How to Be a Continentalist”.

8. “Position without Identity –2004”: An Interview with

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak by Yan Hairong.

This deeply passionate, ethical, and political book tells us that we must pluralize Asia because it is only in a pluralized world that we can imagine a more just one.

In the recent past, Spivak has experienced a radical reorientation in her thinking. Finding the neat polarities of tradition and modernity, colonial and postcolonial, no longer sufficient for interpreting the globalized present, she turns elsewhere to make her central argument, that aesthetic education is the last available instrument for implementing global justice and democracy. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (2012) shows Spivak’s unwillingness to sacrifice the ethical in the name of the aesthetic or to sacrifice the aesthetic in grappling with the political, thus making her task formidable. As she wrestles with these fraught relationships, she rewrites Friedrich Schiller’s concept of play as double bind, reading Gregory Bateson with Gramsci as she negotiates Immanuel Kant, while in dialogue with her teacher Paul de Man. Spivak’s crucial question is, “Are we ready to forfeit the wealth of the world’s languages in the name of global communication?”... “Even a good globalization (the failed dream of

socialism) requires the uniformity which the diversity of mother-tongues must challenge,” Spivak writes. “The tower of Babel is our refuge.” (Spivak. “An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation”). The essays on theory, translation, Marxism, gender, and world literature, and on writers such as Assia Djebar, J. M. Coetzee, and Rabindranath Tagore, Spivak argues for the social urgency of the humanities and renews the case for literary studies, imprisoned in the corporate university. “Perhaps,” she writes, “the literary can still do something.” (Spivak. “An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation”.)

In *Nationalism and the Imagination* (2009), Spivak expands upon her previous postcolonial scholarship, employing a cultural lens to examine the rhetorical underpinnings of the idea of the nation-state. In this intellectually rigorous work, Spivak specifically analyzes the creation of Indian sovereignty in 1947 and the tone of Indian nationalism, bound up with class and religion, that arose in its wake. Spivak was five years old when independence was declared, and she vividly writes: “These are my earliest memories: Famine and blood on the streets.” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*) She recollects the songs and folklore that were prevalent at the time in order to examine the role of the mother tongue and the relationship between language and feelings of national identity.

Originally given as an address at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria, *Nationalism and the Imagination* provides powerful insight into the historical narrative of India as well as compelling ideas that speak to nationalist concerns around the world. Spivak explores the persistence of nationalism in postcolonial cultural imaginaries and moves beyond critique by offering the region as a name for a utopian unit of political collectivity irreducible to genealogical fantasy. The regionality Spivak has in mind, however, is not simply a material or institutional concretion; it is an imaginative and ethical disposition dependent on the unlearning of the nation's imagined uniqueness.

“When and how does the love of mother tongue, the love of my little corner of ground become the nation thing?” Spivak asks (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* p.13). The “nation thing” is not a product of a nationalist public sphere, nor is its articulation to the structure of the state a historical inevitability. It is instead a “rock-bottom comfort in one’s language and one’s home,” which, she asserts, “is not a positive affect” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, p.15). Nationalism works by “recoding . . . this underived private as the antonym of the public sphere” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* p.18). The recoding of the private as the antonym of the public does not deactivate this underived comfort; rather,

nationalisms “are secured by the private conviction of special birth and hop right from the underived private comfort” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* p.19). As she suggests, the disavowed supplementation of public reason with private conviction of special birth conflicts with the public sphere’s foundational positing of a unified reason that is indifferent to the “unique” origins of subjects (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* ,p.19). The “hop” from the private to the public is thus not a transcendence of the private but a disavowed process whereby the comfort derived from an intimate relation to language and home is hypostatized as the public sphere’s basis. Spivak’s text concerns itself with elaborating a literary pedagogy that could interrupt this “hop.”

Spivak turns to literature because she believes that “the literary imagination can impact on detranscendentalizing nationalism” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, pp. 20-21). The turn to literature involves a risk, insofar as literature has been complicit with the production of the nationalism that she seeks to contest. However, it is not literature as such but a particular kind of “readerly imagination” that holds the promise of “de-transcendentalizing nationalism” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, p.21). Spivak explores the oral-formulaic literature of the women of an Indian subaltern community to derive a model for this readerly imagination. Describing the

oral-formulaic as working according to a principle of “equivalence,” she suggests that “it is the inventiveness of equivalence that makes something happen” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* p. 22). The formulaic repetitions of this oral literature establish a framework in which divergent places and histories can be “put in a space of apposition” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, p.26). “Here, then,” she comments, “is a thinking without nation...” (Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* p.26). Spivak claims nationalism to be ‘reproductive heteronormativity’. This normative of nationalism, sustained by imagination, is reproduced time and again in our public sphere. In fact, Spivak evinces that nationalism colludes with the private sphere of our imagination to command the public sphere. To resist this, Spivak opines that it is imperative to translate our subject-position which can be achieved by reading diverse works in translation. When we see our mother-tongue is being translated and we read texts which are written in someone else’s mother-tongue, we are resisting the importance given to our ‘underived private’. Comparative study of texts is instrumental to get acquainted with and later, get acclimatized with language.

### **1.5 A review of some selected writings on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the most influential figures in contemporary critical theory. However, her theoretical work can sometimes be difficult to understand. Stephen Morton's book titled *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003) under the Routledge Critical Thinkers Series, provides a stepping stone and guide to Spivak's early writings. This book focuses on her key theoretical concepts, intellectual context and critical reception, and provides an accessible introduction to Spivak. Stephen Morton introduces Spivak's work through an analysis of such issues as : methodology and Spivak's 'difficult' style; deconstructive strategies; third world women; the concept of the 'subaltern' and the critique of western feminism; re-reading Marx for the global capitalist era; Spivak's contribution to colonial discourse studies and postcolonial theory. Having examined the ways in which Spivak has transformed contemporary cultural theory, and in particular feminist and postcolonial thought, Morton concludes with a guide to reading Spivak's work and that of her critics.

Another book that introduces and discusses the works of Spivak is Sangeeta Ray's *Gayatri Chakravorty: In Other Words*. This book explores the key concepts and themes that emerge from them, such as ethics, literature, feminism, pedagogy, postcoloniality, violence, and war. It also assesses Spivak's often contentious relationship with feminist and postcolonial

studies, and considers the significance of her work for other fields such as ethnography, history, cultural studies and philosophy.

The experience of colonialization and the challenge of the post-colonial world have produced an explosion of new writing in English. This diverse and powerful body of literature has established a specific practice of post-colonial writing in cultures as various as India, Australia, the West Indies, Africa, and Canada, and challenges the existing canon and dominant ideas of literature and culture. Bill Ashcroft, Alan Lawson, and Helen Tiffin's 1989 book *The Empire Writes Back*, is one of the first introductory guides to postcolonial literary criticism in English. The book opens up debates about the interrelationships of these literatures, investigates the powerful forces acting on language in the post-colonial texts, and shows how these texts constitute a radical critique of the assumptions under-lying Eurocentric notions of literature and language. It is the first major theoretical account of a wide range of post-colonial texts and their relation to the larger issues of post-colonial culture. It contains a short discussion of Spivak's contribution to postcolonial and feminist reading practices and is also a useful introduction to postcolonial criticism and theory.

In the introduction to her collection of essays, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory – Culture – Ethnicity - Reading*, (1998), Rey Chow describes a particularly

angry and telling response she encountered to her argument in this book that contemporary multiculturalism risks fascism in its positive imagining of ethnic others: “Only she could write something like this, ‘some readers charged, meaning, I suppose, that only a ‘woman of color’ and therefore a double minority, could possibly mount a criticism of multiculturalism as such without getting into trouble, without being labelled ‘racist’.” It is a charge that Chow, rather than shying away from, understands as the ethical impetus for her own book. That is, she sets out to conduct an investigation into the conditions that give this response its relevance. If, as Chow suggests, idealism has been the primary mode through which cultural studies has attempted to establish a form of resistance theory, it is also this idealism by which “the ‘other’ can say or do anything in the current climate without being considered wrong.” Rey Chow’s response to this critique, however, is not the reactionary call for recognition of a liberal, abstract version of equality that dispenses with the “special interests” of race, gender, sexuality, and so forth. Rather, Chow explores the possibility of an interpretive politics that speak to non-Western cultural forms in order to draw out their “unconscious, irrational and violent nuances.” This analytic is perhaps most thoroughly addressed in the chapter from which the book takes its title, chapter three, “Ethics after Idealism.” Here she offers careful, close

readings of the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Slavoj Zizek in order to understand how “two of our most energetic post-Marxist thinkers” have inquired and theorized the asymmetries through which social conditions and exploitation are reproduced. While Spivak and Zizek arrive at two different explanatory models, Chow contends that both offer a conceptualization of the social that allows for an ethics without positing an idealized other that serves as its center. Rey Chow compares Spivak’s deconstructive rereading of Marx to Slavoj Zizek’s re-thinking of ideology criticism through Lacanian psychoanalysis.

*Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998) by Leela Gandhi, maps out the field of postcolonial studies in terms of its wider philosophical and intellectual context, drawing important connections between postcolonial theory and poststructuralism, postmodernism, Marxism and feminism. Gandhi assesses the contribution of major theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, and also points to postcolonialism’s relationship to earlier thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi. The book contains a chapter on feminism that places Spivak’s work in relation to Third World feminist criticism. Leela Gandhi analyses postcolonialism’s troubled relationship with postcolonial feminism. While both discourses draw on poststructuralist theory and aim at inverting

the “prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race,” postcolonial feminists such as Spivak and Sara Suleri contend that too much “focus on racial politics...elides the double colonization of women under imperial conditions”- in this case, “the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideology and native and foreign patriarchies”. They have repeatedly cautioned critics not to let the racial issues override gender issues because, as they argue, subalterns are always gendered.

As a theorist, a feminist and a cultural critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has rigorously expanded our understanding of some of the key issues of contemporary thought. *The Spivak Reader* (1996) edited by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, both introduces many of her most important writings, while also making it possible for students of Spivak’s work to view her project as a whole. In selecting from among the range of possible options presented by Spivak’s list of publications, talks, and interviews, the editors have attempted to assemble an exemplary series of places to start reading Spivak. There is an attempt to trace what Spivak calls the “itinerary” of her thinking over the last fifteen years. The power of this specific metaphor arises from its illustration of how Spivak’s thinking proceeds: it is not fixed and finite in the form of thought as a “product”, but active – thinking – a journey that involves moving back and forth over both familiar and less

familiar intellectual terrains while constantly interrogating its own premises. Here the strong connection between Spivak's research and writing and her *teaching* can be observed, since most of her published writings have arisen from attempting to work through the critical problems that crop up in pedagogical situations. In a certain way, Spivak's reception has been a curiously silent or oblique one. Perhaps her achievements seemed too formidable or complicated to be commented upon according to the usual forms. Indeed, while citations to her work can be found thickly scattered across various fields of scholarly publication, the true range and importance of her intellectual influence cannot be measured in the number of scholarly articles, chapters, or books dedicated to "explaining" Spivak. For that one would somehow have to assess not only the conversations and ideas that her lectures and writings continue to stimulate directly, but also the immeasurable differences that her work has made to the thinking of feminists, cultural critics, and political activists across the globe. The essays collected in *The Spivak Reader* range across Spivak's contributions to many different aspects of intellectual and political life subsequent to her introduction of Derrida to English-speaking audiences. The editors, rather than adopting a chronological sequence for the essays have used a thematic and developmental arrangement. The nine essays are bracketed by two

interviews, “Bonding in difference,” with Alfred Arteaga, and “Subaltern Talk.” The first five essays in *The Spivak Reader* represent key moments in Spivak’s deconstructive critique, especially the ways it has both challenged and transformed the development of feminism, Marxist analysis, and cultural theory. The next four essays sharpen, extend, and broaden that project by examining the politics of translation and multiculturalism in a variety of textual, historical, and political arenas. This order indicates how the itinerary of Spivak’s critical thinking is not a settled achievement by a continuing process, a constant challenge to reread Freud, Marx, Derrida, and Foucault, bringing their provisional certainties to crisis as we attempt to negotiate with the daily events that constitute our political lives in both the local and the global sense. Spivak pays considerable attention to the management of the subaltern in the southern hemisphere, the developing world of the New World Order, so that by a “setting to work” of theory in these locations she can gauge the limits of the theory that influences her.

*Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000) by John McLeod provides a clear overview of postcolonial literature and theory, and includes some discussion of Spivak’s thought. It also gives a range of examples showing how postcolonial theory can be applied in the practice of reading literary texts. Similarly, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, by Gilbert-

Moore, provides a rigorous historical study of postcolonial theory and criticism from Chinua Achebe to Homi Bhabha. The book includes a detailed chapter on Spivak's work that focuses on her work on the subaltern and criticism of western feminism.

The essay "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", by Benita Parry criticises Spivak for silencing the voice of subaltern resistance in her use of western critical theory, while Shetty and Bellamy's 2000 essay "Postcolonialism's Archive Fever" in *Diacritics* 30 (1) pp.25-48, provides a detailed reading of "Can the Subaltern Speak", focusing specifically on the colonial archives discussed in Spivak's essay. Asha Varadharajan's *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (1995) contains a chapter on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak which tries to redeem Spivak's thinking from, what Varadharajan suggests, is the abyss of deconstruction via the critical theory of Theodor W. Adorno. Robert Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and The West* (1990), also contains an insightful chapter on Spivak's early thought. Young's 2001 book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* which is a detailed historical study of anti and postcolonial thought, contains a short, but insightful discussion of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, which situates their work in

relation to the history of anti-colonial thought, Third World national liberation movements, and the postcolonial revision of Marxism.

Stephen Morton's book *Gayatri Spivak* (2007) presents her seminal contribution to contemporary thought that defies disciplinary boundaries. According to Morton, "from her early translations of Derrida to her subsequent engagement with Marxism, feminism and postcolonial studies and her recent work on human rights, the war on terror and globalization, she has proved to be one of the most vital of present-day thinkers". In this book Stephen Morton offers an advanced introduction to and a critique of Spivak's work. He examines her engagements with philosophers and other thinkers from Kant to Paul de Man, feminists from Cixous to Helie-Lucas and literary texts by Charlotte Bronte, J.M.Coetzee, Mahasweta Devi and Jean Rhys. Spivak's thought is also situated in relation to subaltern studies. Throughout the book, Morton interrogates the materialist basis of Spivak's thought and demonstrates the ethical and political commitment which lies at the heart of her work. Donna Landry, in speaking of this book says, "Gayatri Spivak's refusal to settle for the quick fix, the empty piety, the mere abstract calculus, or the language of expediency has never appeared more salutary than it does today. As violence counters violence in the name of moral righteousness, this lucid book, like Spivak's own critique of

postcolonial studies, is a timely reminder of the complicity between imagined liberal benevolence and the ruthless pursuit of global hegemony at any cost. If one slogan emerges from Stephen Morton's analysis it is the ever more pressing need to "learn to learn from the subaltern".

*Conversations with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2006) is a collection of three conversations between Spivak and Swapan Chakravorty, Suzana Milevska, Tani E. Barlow. These interviews reflect the international character of her intellectual engagement as, in her criss-crossings of the globe, she engages with activists, scholars and writers located in different cultural contexts, from America to India to Macedonia and China.

"Strategies of Vigilance" is an interview of Spivak which is one of the eleven essays by Angela McRobbie in her book *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. These essays deal with the issues which have dominated cultural studies in recent years. A key theme is the notion of postmodernity as a space for social change and political potential. McRobbie explores everyday life as a site of immense social and psychic complexity to which she argues that cultural studies scholars must return through ethnic and empirical work; the sound of living voices and spoken language. She also argues for feminists working in the field to continue to question the place and meaning of feminist theory in a postmodern society.

Although deconstruction has become a popular catchword, as an intellectual movement it has never entirely caught on within the university. For some in the academy, deconstruction, and Jacques Derrida in particular, are responsible for the demise of accountability in the study of literature. Countering these facile dismissals of Derrida and deconstruction, Herman Rapoport in his book *The Theory Mess*, explores the incoherence that has plagued critical theory since the 1960s and the resulting legitimacy crisis in the humanities. The book contains a chapter titled, “Deconstructing Otherwise: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak”. Against the backdrop of a rich, informed discussion of Derrida’s writings – and how they have been misconstrued by critics and admirers alike – *The Theory Mess* investigates the vicissitudes of Anglo-American criticism and proposes some possibilities for reform.

“In our era, criticism is not merely a library of secondary aids to the understanding and appreciation of literary texts, but also a rapidly expanding body of knowledge in its own right”, writes David Lodge in the book *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. The new edition of David Lodge and Nigel Wood’s *Modern Criticism and Theory*, which is fully revised and expanded to take account of the developments in theoretical contemporary literary criticism and introduces the reader to the guiding concepts of present

literary and cultural debate by presenting substantial extracts from the most seminal thinkers, as well as important and representative work from the major schools in contemporary criticism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Feminism and Critical Theory* is one of the essays in this book.

Laura Chrisman's *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, was published in 1993. Chrisman provides important new paradigms for understanding imperial literature, Englishness, and black transnationalism. Her concerns range from the metropolitan centre of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to fatherhood in Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*; from the marketing of south African literature to cosmopolitanism in Chinua Achebe; from utopian discourse in Benita Parry to Fredric Jameson's theorisation of empire. Chrisman also critically engages with the postcolonial intellectuals Paul Gilroy, David Lloyd, Anne McClintock, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Robert Young, uncovering conservatism within unexpected quarters. This book joins a growing chorus of materialist voices within postcolonial studies, and addresses an urgent need for greater attention to the political, historical and socio-economic elements of cultural production.

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## Chapter II

### Spivak and Feminism

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interventions in feminist theory have radically transformed the way in which feminism is viewed today. In her writings, she has challenged the western feminists who claim to represent all women. She counters the assumption that all women are the same, and draws our attention to the fact that each culture and the women in that particular culture or country are different and unique. Spivak strongly emphasizes the need for feminist theory to seriously consider the material lives and histories of Third World women.

Spivak began her writings on feminism in the 1980's at a time when the English speaking world was just being introduced to French feminist theory. Her essays, "French Feminism in an International Frame" (1981), and "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), came on the scene almost at the same time as the writings of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. Spivak, in her writings on feminism, deals with contemporary French feminist theory, Marxist feminism, and feminist critiques of political economy. However, the most important and controversial of her ideas are her objections to French feminism in its

universal claims to speak for all women. Spivak has collaborated with postcolonial feminist thinkers like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Nawal El Saadawi and Kumari Jayawardena in challenging the assumption that all women are the same. She also exhorting the European feminists to respect the individuality of women of different cultures and guard against subsuming the identity of the Third World woman into that of the First World woman.

The pioneering work done by the early feminist movement through the social and political struggles led by women in Europe and North America had succeeded in securing several democratic rights and freedoms for women. These movements were guided by the principles of liberal humanism which was based on the idea that all human beings are the same and share the same values. From this, it is presumed that all human beings should have the same basic rights. It was on the basis of this presumption that women fought for and gained rights and freedoms such as women's franchise, equal pay and reproductive rights.

As per universal humanist thought, the primary difference between men and women is biological, while the cultural and social difference comes at a later stage. Simone de Beauvoir however, challenges this notion with her famous statement: "One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman".

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) speaks of how it is possible to understand 'sex' as a biological category through the dominant discourses of medicine, family, educational institutions and, the Church. She concludes that it is the power of language which is in the hands of these dominant social institutions that construct and determine human identity, and the woman's identity as well. Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva broadly agree that feminine identity is a social rather than a biological construct. However, because this identity is 'constructed' by the dominant and powerful patriarchal institutions such as the Law, Media, Family, State, Education, it cannot be resisted or rejected at will.

Spivak's gives her own definition of a woman in her essay "Feminism and Critical Theory" (1987). She writes:

"My own definition of a woman is very simple: it rests on the work 'man' as used in texts that provide the foundation for the corner of the literary criticism establishment that I inhabit. You might say that this is a reactionary position. Should I not carve out an independent definition for myself as a woman?" . (Spivak, 1987, p.77)

This definition, which is a reactionary one, is similar to Luce Irigaray's argument in "This Sex which is Not One":

"For the elaboration of a theory of woman, men I think suffice"  
(Irigaray 1985, 123).

Yet, both Irigaray and Spivak are of the opinion that any independent definition of a woman cannot stand in a culture and society that is governed by binary oppositions that promote and perpetuate the subordination of women.

Keeping aside this binary system and the concern with the difference between men and women, Spivak shifts the focus from the negative or marginal representation of "women" by a male-dominated society, to focus on categories of women that have been ignored and marginalised despite western feminism's advances in securing rights and privileges for women. These categories include the subaltern women, colonised women, and the working class women. Spivak's focus is on the cultural differences between Third World women and First women, an aspect that she feels has been ignored by the First World/French feminists.

One of the issues dealt with in Spivak's essay "French Feminism in an International Frame" is the tendency of some French feminists to narrate and describe the experiences of Third World women from their own (First World) point of view, and more importantly, from their own experience of

being 'female' in a First World country. This approach, according to Spivak is likely to either ignore important differences of race, culture, language, social class; or, runs the risk of creating/reinforcing stereotypes of 'Third World' women. Spivak elaborates on this in her essay with the help of Mahasweta Devi's short story "Breast Giver" which she uses to counter the assumption that is prevalent in Western feminism that childbirth is unwaged domestic labour. In the story, Jashoda is the wife of Kangali who works for the rich, upper-caste Haldar family. A crisis strikes when Kangali is crippled for life as a consequence of being accidentally hit by a car being driven rashly by one of the Haldar sons. Since he is no longer fit to work, the family has no income. It is at this point that Jashoda, who is at that time a nursing mother, is hired as a wet nurse for the Haldar family children. As compensation for this work, she and her family, including her husband Kangali, are well looked after. In order to meet the requirements of her job as a wet nurse she has to go through repeated pregnancies so that there is a regular supply of breast milk for the Haldar family. The continuous cycle of abuse to her maternal body through impregnation, gestation, delivery, and lactation, takes a serious toll on her health. Jashoda develops breast cancer that remains untreated and she finally dies a terrible, painful and lonely death.

Spivak's materialist approach in reading Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Giver" demonstrates that Jashoda's reproductive body and breast milk has exchange value which Jashoda uses to earn an income to support her husband and children. The abuse and exploitation of her body, which happens as part of her job as a wet nurse, finally leads to her death. Thus, the experiences of Jashoda as a professional mother, challenges the universal claims of Western Marxist feminism to speak for all women. To quote Spivak:

"The fictional character Jashoda calls into question that aspect of Western Marxist feminism which, from the point of view of work, trivializes the theory of value and, from the point of view of mothering as work, ignores the mother as subject" (Spivak, 1987, 258).

This female character Jashoda from a short story written by a Third World fiction writer Mahasweta Devi may seem distant and far removed from the First World academic circles and textual reading in Western universities; a kind of "privileged distance". Spivak however feels that this privileged distance cannot and should not be a reason for First World feminists to forget about, or ignore the marginalized, oppressed, subaltern women. For Spivak, any act of reading, more so if it is in a Western University classroom, can have very far-reaching social and political

consequences. In her essay "Practical Politics of an Open End" , Spivak argues that:

"The manipulation of Third World Labour sustains the continued resources of the U.S. academy" (Spivak. 1990, 97) .

Spivak is deeply concerned about the fact that the feminist anthology ignores the important issue of gendering in neo-colonial societies. She shifts the focus on women who work from their homes, women workers in export based foreign investment factories, women who have been subcontracted by large multinational firms, etc.

Unlike the western feminists, not only does Spivak refuse to ignore the political oppression of Third World disempowered groups, she also questions and challenges what she calls the "sanctioned ignorance" of western academic programs. According to Spivak, anyone who is able to read her works, or the writings of Western feminist theory, will definitely be a part of the "privileged" lot. Being in this privileged category renders one incapable of understanding the lives of those who do not belong to this category (the Other). This inability/incapacity, Spivak considers as a "loss". From this notion stems one of Spivak's popular statements and projects; that of "Unlearning one's privilege as one's loss" (Spivak, *The Post colonial*

Critic,1990, p.9). This unlearning can help in recognizing how the lives and experiences of disempowered groups have been ignored by the dominant representations of the world in the areas of literature, history or media.

In "French Feminism in an International Frame", Spivak takes up another example of how some Western feminists make the universal claim of speaking for all women, wherein women of diverse cultures, race, social background, etc, are all placed under the common umbrella of the "universal woman". The particular example that Spivak dwells upon in this essay is Julia Kristeva's representation of the lives and histories of Chinese women. Spivak arrives at this point of her critique of the limitations of Western feminism, by first examining her own position and choices that motivated her decision to commit to feminism.

"The 'choice' of English Honours by an upper-class young woman in the Calcutta of the fifties was itself highly overdetermined. Becoming a professor of English in the US fitted in with the 'brain drain'. In due course, a commitment to feminism was the best of a collection of accessible scenarios" (Spivak 1987).

Spivak was a "First Class First" English honours student of Calcutta University who studied a conservative English Literature course. Therefore,

her choice of committing to the feminist cause was in a way, a challenge to the conservatism of English literary studies. Her critique of Western feminism is also the result of her own introspection and critical examination of the conclusions she had drawn about some washerwomen whom she overheard conversing about ownership of the land during a visit to her rural ancestral home in Bengal. This was immediately after India's independence from British rule . The conversation between these women revealed that they were not even aware of the fact that the ownership of the land had passed from the East India Company to the British Raj, and from there to the independent Republic of India. At that time she considered with impatience their ignorance and poor knowledge of the historical facts about India. It was only later, through a more mature approach and a careful process of unlearning that she realized that her "precocious" judgment of these women was due largely to the 'privileged distance' between her and these women. She was unable to understand that for these poor women, all these cataclysmic changes had absolutely no significance or meaning since it did not affect their everyday material lives. Their lives remained unchanged from the time of the rule of the East India Company, the British Raj, and then the Indian government. This personal anecdote that was a revelation to Spivak about how these poor women's lives had not changed, and were not

emancipated despite decolonization. This is what prompts her to critique western feminism which like her own response to the washerwomen, tends to ignore the non-western women from third world countries.

In "French Feminism in an International Frame" Spivak challenges western feminists who make the universal claim of speaking for all women, where women of diverse cultures, race, social background, etc., are all placed under the common umbrella of the "universal woman". Spivak, in her essay exposes the narcissistic tendency in French feminist Julia Kristeva that is revealed in her book *About Chinese Women* (1977). In it, Kristeva represents the lives and histories of Chinese women by fitting them into the framework of a western female subject. The book describes her first encounter in the village square, with a group of Chinese women peasants whom she terms 'an enormous crowd'.

“an enormous crowd is sitting in the sun: they wait for us wordlessly, perfectly still. Calm eyes, not even curious, but slightly amused or anxious: in any case, piercing, and certain of belonging to a community which we will never have anything to do” (Kristeva 1977, p.11).

Although it initially seems that Kristeva wishes to engage with these Chinese women in order to learn from their historical and cultural

experiences, what she is really concerned about, according to Spivak, is her own identity as a Western woman being questioned by the silent gaze of Chinese women. Spivak terms this as the tendency of some western poststructuralist intellectuals to challenge the authority of western knowledge and subjectivity by invoking other non-western cultures. Kristeva's narration of her encounter with the Chinese women and Chinese culture exemplifies this. Although Kristeva wishes to distance herself from discourses that label non-western cultures as primitive and backward, she ends up distancing herself too from the women since they are not really the subjects of her inquiry. She is self-conscious about her typical middle-class French education and her background that she feels creates a distance and an unbreachable gap between herself and the Chinese women who view her as an outsider and a foreigner. Kristeva then shifts her focus to the ancient matriarchal origins of China in order to contrast it with the patriarchal monotheism of western thought. She argues that "monotheistic unity in the West is sustained by a radical separation of the sexes", and the Judaeo-Christian West is supported by the Fall of Adam and Even in the Book of Genesis. Once again, Spivak points out that Kristeva's aim in focusing on the matriarchal origins of China is firstly to use it to provide a feminist utopia that is a contrast and an alternative to the patriarchal monotheism of

the West; and secondly, to use the ancient Chinese matriarch to challenge the psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in which describe women's bodies as repressed. Spivak therefore concludes that Kristeva is not really interested in the real, material, present-day lives of the Chinese women.

Spivak is also critical of Kristeva's utopian prediction for the sexual freedom of Chinese women. This she feels can do further harm than good for women in the Third World for who changes against sexism in the First World countries mean absolutely nothing. The liberties that First World feminists fight for may be considered as luxuries and may run the risk of being identified with "free sex".

Spivak attributes these flaws or deficiencies in Kristeva's thought to the fact that she ignores the important aspect of class and cultural differences between women. To remedy this, Spivak proposes a more sophisticated map that embraces diverse cultures, societies, races, ideologies, etc., while at the same time retaining their distinct differences and identities. She calls for what she terms as "an alternative geography of female sexuality".

In her writings on the issue of female sexuality, Spivak is critical of the valorization of non-reproductive sexual pleasure. She feels that this

may have significance as an effective political goal in the Western First World countries but may not be as significant for Third World women. She also counters the presumption that clitoridectomy (repression of female sexuality) is a ritual imposed on Third World women, by suggesting that symbolic clitoridectomy has always been practiced in all societies under the name of “motherhood”. Therefore, clitoridectomy, or repression of female sexual pleasure has been a problem for women in all societies. In her reading of Devi’s short story “Breast Giver”, Spivak gives us a clear account of the geography of female sexuality. Jashoda as the wet nurse and a baby and milk producing ‘machine’ is afflicted by breast cancer and the ugly, putrefying sores, rather than orgasm, become the excess of the woman’s body. This picture is in total contrast to the French feminist theorists who valorize women’s non-reproductive sexual pleasure as a universal strategy for women’s political resistance.

Spivak’s essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (1985) also focuses on this issue of the geography of female sexuality. Spivak’s reading of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* foregrounds the imperialist sub-text in the narrative. In this essay, Spivak challenges the feminist readings of the Anglo-American critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, as well as Nancy Armstrong, who celebrate the female individualism and

heroism of Jane, but conspicuously exclude the other female character Bertha Mason's colonial genealogy. Spivak's re-reading of these three texts under the influence of the thought of Foucault and Said is an example of colonial discourse where there is no boundary between fictional discourse and the discourse of institutional or political power.

Spivak's argument in this essay is that while Anglo – American feminist literary criticism represents Jane Eyre as a liberated woman, the other woman (Bertha Mason) is not even considered human, and ignored. She is the strange, foreign, unknowable “Other”, very similar to the Chinese peasant women in Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*. Both Bertha Mason and Chinese peasant women are presented as denuded of any culture or history of their own. They are mere foils to establish the stability of the Western subject, Jane. Strangely, the individual rights and freedoms that Jane, the white-western-woman is given in the novel, are in the very same novel denied to Bertha Mason – the white Jamaican creole woman. Jane's struggle and quest for individual autonomy that is restricted to the domestic sphere of Victorian Britain is commended by the critics, but Bertha's attempts to secure her rights are ignored. Jean Rhys' postcolonial novel “Wide Sargasso Sea” make manifest the character of Bertha Mason who is, in this novel, a fully fleshed out character with a distinct culture and history;

the 'good wife' of Rochester, who is locked up in the attic. Bertha is not innately monstrous as is made out to be by Bronte's novel, but behaves in a monstrous way after her basic rights are taken away. She attacks Richard Mason her brother in anger, when he reminds her about the legal contract of marriage because of which she is now the private "property" of Rochester.

Spivak does not undermine or negate the work done by the Western feminists. However, she is critical of the fact that they tell only one side of the story, for example, Jane's story in *Jane Eyre*. Spivak's reading of *Jane Eyre* focuses, not on the patriarchal system, or the unequal relationship between Men and Women, but rather on the character who has been ignored and marginalized, i.e. Bertha Mason, and the inequalities between the two women characters arising largely because they belong to two different cultures.

Another important issue that comes up in the essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", is that of justifying British Imperialism as a social mission. With reference to the novel *Jane Eyre*, Spivak argues that the manner in which Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre are presented, persuades the reader to believe that the white European female individual is socially and culturally superior to the non-western woman. Jane is a paragon of feminine virtue, while Bertha is a man, bestial,

monstrous Other who's soul needs to be saved and who needs to be made into a proper human being. The propagation of this stereotype of the western woman as culturally and socially superior in contrast to the stereotypical non-western woman who is wild and filled with sexualized passion, not only gave the impetus, but also justified the colonizing and subjugation of non-western peoples through the project of Imperialism.

Through these arguments in her essays "French Feminism in an International Frame" and, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", Spivak concludes that by ignoring the separate and distinct cultures and lives of non-western women, western feminism has claimed to speak for all women which in turn has resulted in very limited benefits of "feminism" as such to the third world women. Also, by creating stereotypes of non-western women who are either passive, wild, and denuded of history and culture, the history of Western feminism becomes complicit in the project of imperialist expansion. For Feminism to become more meaningful and significant, and overcome these limitations, Spivak suggests that, "The academic feminist must learn to learn from them rather than simply correcting the historical experiences of disempowered women with our superior theory and enlightened compassion" (Spivak 1987).

## Chapter III

### Spivak and Marxism

Spivak's publications on the writings of Marx have had a great deal of influence in academic circles, and are yet another instance of her sustained critical engagement with important thinkers of the intellectual tradition. Political speech-making and left-wing organizational work have been part of her intellectual formation from her student days in Calcutta, and her continued interest in Marx is visible in the many essays that she has published on the subject. Despite the disintegration and collapse of the Soviet bloc which caused many in the Capitalist West to triumphantly proclaim the death of Socialism, Spivak continues to vouch for the relevance of Marx's thinking to contemporary politics and economics because, "What Marxism really has to offer is global systems and, especially in the Third World, 'Crisis Theory' " (Spivak, *The Post Colonial Critic*). Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, in their introductory note published in *The Spivak Reader* while attempting to explain Spivak's continued interest in Marx state that, "Marx gives us a way of conceptualizing capitalist logic on a global scale; and while the continued development of capitalism depends upon this, it is something that has become increasingly difficult for people to

comprehend in their everyday existence. The interconnectedness between events happening on Wall Street, in European or U.S. universities and shopping malls, and in the factories and villages of the Third World has become difficult to grasp. This knowledge gap allows various forms of complicity between Western prosperity, including education systems, and the spectacular dynamics of exploitation to continue. This complicity through nonknowledge of the international division of labour is something Spivak frequently takes pains to point out, particularly emphasizing the importance of women's labour to these international calculations." (The Spivak Reader).

Spivak's readings of Marx's texts draw attention to their textuality, to their refusals of economic reductionism as scientific law, their indeterminacies, and the leverage offered by Marx's materialist predication of the subject as labor power, for posing the question of value in literary and cultural studies, in a way not entirely ignorant of the international division of labour. For Spivak, the writings of Marx are even more relevant today when, as a result of the International Division of Labour, one witnesses the pathetic conditions of women workers and child labourers in Third World countries.

Spivak, along with other postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said, are critical of the fact that though Marx wrote in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was aware of European colonialism in Asia and Africa, he does not include this aspect in his writings but focuses only on the white male worker. Despite this drawback, Marx is still relevant to postcolonial theorists who find his writings useful to define and negotiate various forms of domination and resistance in the Third World. As Robert Young in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* contends: “Anti- and postcolonial thought has always been engaged in a process of reformulating, translating and transforming Marxism for its own purposes, and this has operated as a critical dynamic tradition within Marxism itself. If postcolonial theory is the cultural product of decolonization, it is also the historical product of Marxism in the anti-colonial arena. For many of the first generation of postcolonial theorists, Marxist theory was so much their starting point, so fundamental to what they were doing, so dominant in contemporary intellectual culture, that it was assumed as a base line prior to all further work.” ( Young, 2001, 168)

Spivak’s reading of Marx through the deconstructive approach which developed into an ongoing dialogue between the philosophical discourses of Marxism and deconstruction, can be read in the following essays: “Scattered

Speculations on the Question of Value”, “Speculations on Reading Marx: After Reading Derrida”, “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida”, “Supplementing Marxism” and, “Ghostwriting”. The deconstructive method of reading Marx imposes a rigour that she likens to “a literary reading of a philosophical text”.

More than his earlier writings, which Spivak finds too narrow and inflexible to account for the diverse social movement of the twentieth century, she is interested in Marx’s later writings which she relates to the contemporary exploitation of women’s reproductive bodies in the Third World. As she states in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, “Marx’s prescience is fulfilled in postfordism and the explosion of global homeworking. The subaltern woman is now to a large extent the support of production”. (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, 1999, 67). However, this should not be misread as Spivak’s support for the exploitation of women’s labour in the Third World, but should be seen as an attempt to correct the Euro-centric and male-centric focus of Marx’s thought.

The conditions of economic exploitation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Marx writes about were very different as compared to the conditions that exist

today. For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century workers were all males, all whites, and all working in one place. Hence, their protests against low wages or bad working conditions could be organised easily. In contrast, in the present circumstances, with the international division of labour, the multinationals have sub-contracted their manufacturing units to third world countries where the major work force comprises of third world women, scattered over different countries, small units, and home workers too. In such circumstances, organising any kind of protest seems difficult, if not impossible. Spivak gives us an example of a failed protest attempt by women workers in her essay “Feminism and Critical Theory” (1982). “A group of women workers in a factory based in Seoul, South Korea, but owned by Control Data, a U.S. based multi-national, went on strike for a wage increase in 1982. The union leaders were subsequently dismissed and imprisoned; in retaliation, the women workers took hostage two visiting U.S. vice-presidents, demanding reinstatement of the union leaders. The dispute was ended when the Korean male workers at the factory beat up the female workers” (Spivak, *Feminism and Critical Theory*, 1982). This instance reveals how in the global capitalist economy, women workers are doubly exploited – by the powerful Corporations, and also by the patriarchal structures which govern them. Spivak’s comment in “Scattered Speculations

on the Question of Value”, further underline the vulnerability of women-workers in third world countries: “It is a well-known fact that the worst victims of the recent exacerbation of the international division of labour are women. They are the true surplus army of labour in the current conjuncture. In their case, patriarchal social relations contribute to their production as the new focus of super-exploitation.” (Spivak, “ Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value”, 1987, 167).

Spivak uses Mahasweta Devi’s Short Story, “Doulouti the Bountiful” to highlight the plight of the subaltern woman. In the story, Doulouti is forcibly made into a bonded labourer and later pushed into prostitution. Though the nationalist movement made several democratic promises for the emancipation of Indians, after independence, the subaltern women did not get any benefit. Some, like Douloti, were not even aware of the meaning of independence, and from whom they were being granted independence. Their lives remain unchanged. Spivak’s reading of this story focuses on the proper name “Douloti”, which in Bengali means “traffic in wealth”. The last sentence of the story in Bengali is “Bharat jhora hoye Dolouti” which means, “the traffic in wealth is all over India”. By substituting the word “Jagat” for “Bharat”, Spivak created a phonetically similar phrase, through which a different interpretation can be accessed, i.e. “The traffic in wealth is

all over the globe” (Jagat jhora hoye Dolouti). The global capitalist economy and the international division of labour has resulted in the woman’s body becoming a site of exploitation, both in pre- as well as post-independent India.

Spivak asserts that, “it is the working class women of Third World countries who are the worst victims of the international division of labour” (Spivak, *Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value*). To support this she compares the profits of a large multinational corporation with the income of a woman in Sri Lanka:

“Whereas Lehman Brothers, thanks to computers, earned about \$2 million for fifteen minutes of work, the entire economic text would not be what it is it could not write itself as a palimpsest upon another text where a woman in Sri Lanka has to work 2,287 minutes to buy a T-shirt. The ‘post-modern’ and ‘pre-modern’ are inscribed together.” (Spivak, *Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value*, 1987,171)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the integration of the erstwhile Socialist states into the global capitalist economy, many critics and commentators felt that Marx’s analysis of Capitalism was incorrect and that Marx had become irrelevant. Spivak however, shows us the relevance of

Marx in her essay “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” in which she includes an analysis of the ideas of Hegel and Marx. While Hegel believed that Reality was a historical process, continuously changing through dialectics, and that these processes were happening through the ‘geist’/Spirit/Mind; Marx was a materialist and believed that change, through dialectics, takes place through something material. Marx was critical of Hegel’s model of dialectical thinking which mystified the social and economic relations. Unlike Hegel who believed that alienation could be resolved through idealism, Marx believed that alienation, which was a product of the conflict between the ruling and subordinate classes, tried to show that the structural contradictions in capitalism would eventually lead to its destruction and thus emancipate all human subjects.

This prediction of Marx did not come true, and the communist bloc collapsed. Spivak, however, is of the opinion that Marx’s writings on Value have great significance in the contemporary world. Spivak, “The Postcolonial Critic”, while commenting on Marx’s Theory of Value as stated in *Capital* volume I, says, “There is a possibility of suggesting to the worker that the worker produces capital because the worker, the container of labour power, is the source of value”. By the same logic, Spivak argues that it is now possible to suggest to the Third World worker that it produces capital

because it is the source of labour power, and is therefore a source of value, and most significantly, that this third world worker is the possibility of the cultural representation of the first world. However, since, as Marx noted, the value of a commodity is not based on its use or any inherent property, but rather by its exchange value alone; and since capitalism is only interested in the exchange value/profit, the actual human labour that is necessary to produce a commodity is effaced when the product is being exchanged. An example of this process of abstraction is the production of Nike shoes, where the difference between the use value and exchange value is huge. The production/manufacturing units of these shoes are located in Third World countries like China and Indonesia, and the labour force is mostly made up of poor women who work in these sweaty units. In contrast, the finished product, when branded, appears as a magical object, glorified through mass media advertisements, completely disembodied and abstracted from the actual sweated labour conditions in which they are produced.

In the process of this abstraction, there is a residue which Marx describes as phantom-like because it goes beyond our rational understanding. It is this aspect of the phantom-like, or ghostly presence of human labour that Spivak foregrounds in her critique of Marx's historical narrative of progress. According to Marx, the conflict between the worker

and the capitalist will be resolved when Socialism overthrows Capitalism at some point in the future. Spivak is critical of this logic of conflict/contradiction between Capitalism and Socialism which Marx considers as a stable opposition. By using deconstruction, Spivak emphasises that, “the ghostly presence of human labour operates as the possibility of an indeterminacy” (Spivak, *Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value*, 161), Spivak tears down the opposition between ‘use value’ that is described as a pure, unalienated expression of the worker’s labour power; and, ‘exchange value’ that is labelled as a corrupt alienating representation of capitalist exploitation. Spivak suggests that ‘use value’ is an inextricable part of ‘exchange value’, and that this sphere of exchange and capital circulation is haunted by the ghost of labour and the productive body of the worker. Also, through in her close and careful reading of Marx’s labour theory of Value, Spivak brings out its relevance in contemporary times when global capitalism attempts to efface the use value of the third World woman’s labour power. She reminds us that, “it is the Third World which produces the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the First World” (Spivak, *The Post Colonial Critic*, 1990,96).

In her essay “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida”, Spivak writes: “There is no philosophical injustice in the capital relation. Capital is only the supplement of the natural and rational teleology of the body, of its irreducible capacity for superadequation, which it uses as its use value.” What she means is that the capitalist simply makes use of the worker’s natural surplus energy to make a profit for himself, since the worker always works more than the compensation that he gets for it. Besides, the worker is not being forced to work, but goes there to sell her surplus labour power out of her own free will. All Spivak is trying to prove by stating this is that Marxism cannot account for the social injustice of capitalism in terms of its own philosophical system. It is for this reason that Spivak uses the deconstructive approach for her reading of Marx, because deconstruction is concerned with the impossible concepts like ‘justice’, ‘ethics’ and ‘value’. Spivak thus disrupts the secure and stable opposition Socialism and Capitalism arguing that, “Socialism is not in opposition to the form of the capitalist mode of production. It is rather a constant pushing away – a differing and a deferral – of the capitalist harnessing of the social productivity of capital.” (Spivak, *Supplementing Marxism*, 1995, 119).

Spivak's own position as a Third World woman living and writing from the First World on the subject of Marx's labour theory of value in relation to the contemporary global economic system, is of greater political importance than a First World writer doing this, since they would be writing from the First World perspective whereas Spivak is able to write from both these standpoints. Even when Western thinkers write about non-western economies, they view them only as primitive conceptual objects that are used for theorising. What is ignored is the fact that these Third World economies, because of globalisation and the international division of labour, have now become a part of the First World.

In her essay "Ghostwriting" (1995), Spivak urges the Third World to think of an alternative to Capitalism/Socialism, especially since the ideals of a New International since the Bandung Conference, have proved useless for the Third World, and have in some ways legalised the economic exploitation of lower-class women through GATT and WTO. Spivak's reading of Marx is not merely a corrective to his thinking but is also loud reminder of the oppression and exploitation of the Third World woman-worker.

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## Chapter IV

### Spivak and Deconstruction

Spivak was catapulted to international fame with her translation of Jacques Derrida's *de la Grammatologie* in the year 1976. Besides introducing Derrida to an English speaking audience, Spivak, with her "Translator's Preface", set a new standard for Prefaces and Introductions. Spivak's thought and writings have been strongly influenced by deconstruction. She makes a careful reading of the concepts in Derrida's thought and uses the theoretical vocabulary and conceptual framework that it provides to question some of the philosophical traditions that we take for granted.

Spivak explains her affinity to Derrida's deconstruction strategies in an interview with Elizabeth Grosz where she says, "Where I was brought up – when I first read Derrida, I didn't know who he was. I was very interested to see that he was actually dismantling the philosophical tradition from inside rather than outside, because of course we were brought up in an education system in India where the name of the hero of that philosophical system was the universal human being, and we were taught that if we could begin to approach an internalisation of that human being, then we would be

human. When I saw in France someone was actually trying to dismantle the tradition which had told us what would make us human, that seemed interesting too.” (Spivak. “Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution”,1990,7).

The Algerian war of independence (1954-62) did have a great deal of influence on the development of many French poststructuralist theories including that of Jacques Derrida who was a Sephardic Jew, originally from Algiers. This war was a revelation of sorts for many French intellectuals about the freedom and sovereignty of the human subject in western liberal democracies like France which they saw was made possible through colonialist exploitation and capitalist expansion. The clear conclusion from this premise was that the freedom and sovereignty of the First World human subject depended on the exploitation and oppression of the Third World people who were colonised by them. This struck at the very foundations of the philosophy that considered the possibility of universal human rights, freedom and equality as political goals. This aspect of Derrida’s thinking that undid the basis for European colonialism is what attracted Spivak to deconstruction and could have been a major influence on the process of decolonisation and anti-colonial resistance.

In order to understand Spivak's arguments and her readings of Derrida, it is essential to come to grips with the terms of deconstruction used by Derrida despite even though, by its very nature, deconstruction does not lend itself easily to strict definitions. Derrida, through many of his works, and particularly his *Letter to a Japanese Friend* tries to provide an explanation of what deconstruction is. From these writings emerge three key features of deconstruction: (1) "Logocentrism", which refers to our desire to have a centre, or focal point, to structure our understanding; (2) "Nothing beyond the Text", which implies the reduction of meaning to set definitions that are committed to writing; and (3) "*differance*", where reduction of meaning to writing captures opposition within that concept itself.

According to Derrida, Western philosophical tradition uses terms like "logocentrism" meaning emphasis or privileging of Speech; "phallogocentrism" meaning privileging men over women (patriarchy); and "metaphysics of presence" in which that which 'is'/that which appears, is privileged, while the conditions for making this presence possible are ignored. Derrida brings together all these denigrating terms under the rubric of the term "metaphysics" which he defines in the Afterword to "Limited Inc" as: "The enterprise of returning 'strategically', 'ideally', to an origin or to a priority thought to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-

identical, in order then to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just one metaphysical gesture among others, it is the metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent”(Derrida. *Limited Inc*). What can be understood from this is that metaphysics has been involved in establishing hierarchies in the dualisms that it considers. For example, it prioritises Presence and Purity while subordinating the contingent and the complicated, thus resulting in the subordinate being considered as a mere aberration that does not deserve philosophical analysis. Thus metaphysical thought can be seen as privileging one side of a dualism while ignoring or marginalising the alternative term. Derrida stresses the fact that in these dualisms, the opposition of metaphysical concepts is never face-to-face; rather, it is hierarchical. Deconstruction therefore does not immediately neutralise these oppositions but very gradually works towards a general displacement of the system and attempts to invert these hierarchies by

researching and understanding the conditions due to which they were established.

Some of the key terms from Derrida's work which are needed for a better understanding of Spivak's writings are as follows:

- 1) **Speech/Writing:** The written word has always been denigrated by thinkers like Plato, Rousseau, Saussure and Levi-Strauss while privileging the spoken word. They considered speech to be a pure conduit of meaning and writing to be a mere representation of speech. Using deconstruction, Derrida reverses this opposition in "Of Grammatology" by showing that "all that can be claimed of writing – eg. That it is derivative and merely refers to other signs – is equally true of speech".
- 2) **Arche** – writing which is generalised notion of writing points to the breach that the written introduces between what the writer intends to convey and what he/she actually conveys. This, according to Derrida is typical of an originary breach that afflicts everything, including self-presence or speech. In case of writing, this breach reveals two claims: spatial differing, where writing must be able to function even when the empirically determined addressee is absent; and temporal deferring, where the meaning of the text is never present but is

constantly subject to the whims of the future. When the future becomes the present, it becomes subject to yet another future. In other words, signification always refers to other signs, and is a process of infinite referral. The written always defers its meaning.

- 3) Differance, plays upon the distinction between the audible and written in the terms used in arche – writing, i.e. “differing” and “deferring” thus refuting Saussure’s claim that writing is an unnecessary addition to speech.
- 4) Trace refers to the idea that deconstruction’s reversals are always partly captured by the structure they attempt to overthrow. Mere reversal is not enough. The governing framework and presuppositions for the reversal should also be interrogated and challenged. Deconstruction cannot just stop at inverting the dualism/hierarchy; it must also corrupt and contaminate the basis of this opposition.
- 5) Supplement, which is an important aspect of *Of Grammatology* is that which serves as an aid to something ‘original’. Writing as a supplement to speech; the contraceptive pill/condom as a supplement to the natural method; masturbation as a supplement to sex with a person. However, it is “undecidable” whether these supplements are

substitutes or whether they are a plenitude enriching another plenitude.

- 6) Responsibility to the Other. For Derrida. The paradox of responsible behaviour lay in the fact that on the one hand we are to be responsible before a singular other (eg. A loved one, God, etc.), while at the same time we are also always referred to a responsibility towards others generally. Derrida's intention is to release us from the assumption that "responsibility" is linked only to behaviour that is possible to be justified in the public realm (i.e. liberalism). As against this, Derrida emphasises that the "radical singularity" of demands placed on us by our loved ones, are also to be termed as "responsible". Therefore the "Ethics" that depends entirely on generality will constantly be sacrificed in our responsibility to the "singular other". The paradox lies in the implication that responsibility to a particular individual is only possible at the expense of irresponsibility to the other people.

In her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak brings out a "geographical pattern" in the book pointing out that the first part which deals with the deconstruction of western philosophy is related to his deconstruction of western anthropology in the second part

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* is shown to have a "geographical pattern" in Spivak's Preface which she draws from the fact that the first part which deals with the deconstruction of Western philosophy is related to his deconstruction of western anthropology in the second half. It is in the section titled "The Violence of the Letter" that Derrida points out the ethnocentric blind spots in Levi Strauss' essay "A Writing Lesson" which deals with Levi Strauss' anthropological fieldwork among the oral-based, South American tribal society – the Nambikwara. From his study, he concludes that the Nambikwara society represented an innocent people because they were untouched by civilization and most importantly, without writing. For Derrida, this was an instance of privileging Speech over Writing to produce stereotypes of indigenous people as 'noble savages'. Derrida's critique points out that the Nambikwara society, though unfamiliar with the practice of writing, did use other complex and situated textual practices which Levi Strauss' study had completely ignored. It is on the basis of such studies that non-western subjects are portrayed as petrified, mute objects denuded of culture, language and history. Spivak uses Derrida's critique of Levi Strauss to emphasise the complicity of western intellectuals in suppressing and ignoring the voices of the oppressed and the subalterns. In the case of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri that Spivak discusses in

“Can the Subaltern Speak”, Spivak points out that Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri who had been entrusted with a political assassination which she could not carry out, committed suicide by hanging herself in her father’s apartment. Yet, despite being a freedom-fighter, her name does not figure in the official male-centred historical records. Spivak contends that it is only through deconstructive reading that the voices of such disenfranchised persons can be brought to the fore. It is in keeping with Derrida’s idea of being ethically responsible to the Other that Spivak discusses the singular experiences and histories of disenfranchised people.

Spivak uses Derrida’s deconstruction of the proper/improper dichotomy in Western philosophical discourse to critique the vocabularies of political movements like feminism, Marxism and anti-colonial national liberation. In her view, masterwords such as ‘the worker’, ‘the woman’ or, ‘the colonised’ are catachreses or improper words since they claim to represent ‘all’ those belonging to that group, and do not have any ‘true’ examples of a ‘true worker’, a ‘true proletarian’ or a ‘true woman’ who could actually represent the ideals that the movement stood for. Such masterwords, she feels, can also have an abusive effect since they represent these groups as a coherent political identity, when in fact they were comprised of people belonging to a different subgroups of caste, class, race

or colour. The value of a deconstructive reading practice for Spivak is that it guards against the universal claims of Marxism, national liberation, and Western feminism as speaking for all the oppressed.

Spivak, in her essay, “Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida”, reprinted in her book *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, states that Derrida, in his early work was concerned with the major philosophical questions about the founding conditions of possibility for truth, Being (ontology) and Knowledge (epistemology). In his later work however, Derrida’s thought shifts towards ethical and social considerations about violence, justice, friendship and hospitality.

Although Derrida’s preoccupation with ethics had been implicit right from the beginning, his version/idea of ethics is not the conventional ethics that belongs to the realms of moral philosophy. He bases his understanding of Ethics on the thought of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas who redefines ethics in terms of the Other. This concept of ‘otherness’ in Levinas has been summarized by Stephen Morton in his book *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* as follows:

“Throughout the history of western culture and thought, there are certain people, concepts, and ideas that are defined as ‘Other’: as monsters, aliens or

savages who threaten the values of civilised society, or the stability of the rational human self. Such 'Others' have included death, the unconscious and madness, as well as the Oriental, non-western 'Other', the foreigner, the homosexual, and the feminine. In the structure of western thought, the 'Other' is relegated to a place outside of or exterior to the normal, civilised values of western culture; yet it is in this founding moment of relegation that the sovereignty of the Self or the same is constituted. The challenge that otherness or alterity poses to western thought and culture has been further developed by Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, western philosophy has traditionally defined the Other as an object of consciousness for the western subject. This reductive definition has effectively destroyed the singular alterity of the Other. Against this reduction, Levinas has asserted that the Other always escapes the consciousness and control of the western self. For Levinas, the challenge that the alterity of the Other poses to the certainty of the Self in the face-to-face encounter between the Self and the Other, opens the question of ethics". (Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 37)

However, according to Derrida, it cannot be guaranteed that, when the self encounters the Other, a necessarily ethical relation will take place. It can so happen that the self injures, or even kills the Other; or, that this encounter might result in the destruction of the singular voice and

experience of the Other. But deconstruction takes this risk in the hope that such an experience will transform the structure of discourse itself by shifting the focus from the Self to the Other.

Spivak endorses view that in order to locate and define the conditions that allowed the appearance of philosophical truths, it is necessary to inhabit the very structures of these philosophical texts so that it becomes possible to trace from within, those figures, histories and people who have been excluded from the foundation of western philosophical discourse. Her essay, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” suggests, on similar lines, that Derrida’s strategy of reading with literary and historical discourse rather than taking an objective position, thought it can be misread as theory being complicit with its object of critique, is in fact the greatest gift of deconstruction because it “questions the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him” (Spivak. “Speculations on reading Marx after Derrida”,1987,201 ).

Examples of this can be seen in Spivak’s essay “A Literary representation of the Subaltern” in which, through the character of Jashoda from Mahasweta Devi’s story “Breast Giver”, she shows how women, particularly subaltern women, were short-changed by the leaders of the anti-colonial resistance movement who despite wholeheartedly participating in

the freedom struggle did not benefit in terms of their emancipation since the leaders prioritised the independence struggle against the British over the women's struggle against patriarchy. After independence, their contribution was forgotten /ignored and they were pushed back into the domestic sphere. The mythology of Mother India that was used to create a sense of coherence and nationalism, completely ignored the plight of subaltern women as can be seen in Spivak's analysis of Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Giver". Jashoda's exploited and diseased and neglected maternal body stands in sharp contrast to the lofty democratic promises made by the nationalist movement. Using the deconstructive approach, Spivak emphasises how Jashoda's exclusion from the foundations of national independence, goes on to demonstrate how decolonisation replicated the same colonial structures of class and gender oppression that it had set out to oppose. Spivak makes a similar argument in her essay "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" where she is critical of the Western feminists who ignore the specific and peculiar problems and experiences of Third World Women. Her argument is that Western feminism has focussed on the exclusion of women from the masculist truth-claims to universality. This implied that women all over the world suffer from the same kind of oppression simply because they were women. Spivak's deconstructive approach reveals that Western feminism repeats the

oppression towards non-western women by excluding and ignoring them. These examples demonstrate the risk of dominant political and social movements becoming complicit with the very same political structures it seems to oppose. It is in these situations that the value of deconstructive reading is recognised.

In her Translator's Preface to *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak states that since there is no precedent or prior example to demonstrate the ethical approach, the effort to establish ethical singularity can be extremely painstaking. She uses Mahasweta Devi's short story "Pterodactly, Pirtha and Puran" as an allegory of such an ethical relation where the journalist Puran becomes a part of the tribe's ongoing historical record and responds ethically by recognising the condition of rural tribal societies in India, and how "the alibis of Development are used to exploit and destroy their life system" (Spivak. *Imaginary Maps*). Similarly, in "A Note on the New International", Spivak writes about her own work in the poorest and most neglected sections of West Bengal and Bangladesh where wretchedness is considered normal. In communities that have been damaged by centuries of epistemic violence, real mind-changing work that will be lasting, is a slow and painstaking process. Despite being aware of the political urgency, she

advocates slow reading, and makes an earnest plea for learning to learn from the subaltern rather than opting for the easier way of speaking for them.

Derrida's notion of undecidability puts deconstruction in danger of becoming a formal abstraction. Spivak however, as she states in "Strategy, Identity, Writing", employs "the affirmative mode of deconstruction that obliges you to say yes to that which interrupts your project, to the political that interrupts theory" (Spivak. "Strategy, Identity, Writing", 1990,47).

## Chapter V

### Spivak and Subaltern Studies

The word subaltern was first used in a non-military sense by Marxist Antonio Gramsci who used it under duress and censorship when he was in prison. In his prison diaries, he called Marxism “monism” and the proletarian, was referred to as “subaltern”. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is deeply involved in an attempt to devise a critical vocabulary that can appropriately describe people who do not fall under the terms of “strict class analysis”, finds this term extremely useful in descriptions of the lives and histories of the category of persons who have been ignored, forgotten or dispossessed, either by European colonialism or by the anti-colonial national independence movements. Spivak’s struggle to find a new vocabulary is motivated by her dissatisfaction with master words such as “the colonised”, “woman” or “the worker”, since she feels that such words are not flexible enough to accommodate social identities and struggles of marginalised groups.

Gramsci’s account of the subaltern is significant since he draws a parallel between the division of labour in Mussolini’s Italy and the colonial division of labour in India. He was convinced that the peasants would

subvert their oppression by striking an alliance with the urban working class or by developing a sense of their own class consciousness. This notion is similar to that of Marx who stated that the industrial working class carried within themselves the potential for social and political change. However the difference was in Marx's industrial working class being unified and coherent, whereas, Gramsci's rural peasantry lacked such a unified and coherent identity. It is this description of the 'subaltern' as lacking a coherent political identity that defines Spivak's discussion of the subaltern.

Antonio Gramsci's account of the rural peasantry in Italian history, alongwith the work of the Subaltern Studies collective in India provides the two main resources for Spivak's discussion of subalternity with the former providing the theoretical resource and the latter providing the historical resources.

The objective of the Subaltern Studies Historians: Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Ranajit Guha and Gyanendra Pandey, was to try and recover a history of subaltern agency and resistance from the perspective of the common man. This differed from the earlier histories of the rural peasants that had traditionally been recorded by the colonial administrations, (as found in their archives), and later documentations were made by the educated Indian middle class elite.

Ranajit Guha states in his *On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*:

“The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and have been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively” (Guha, 37).

The problem with such histories was that they were written from the perspective of either the coloniser or the elite urban to suit the interests of the ruling power. The lives and political agencies of the rural peasantry lost their complex identity as localised resistance movements and became a small subordinate, negligible part of the larger project of decolonisation. What spurred the Subaltern Studies historians to rethink the narrative of the Indian national independence movement from the subaltern point of view was the success of the Naxalbari rural peasant rebellion in 1967. This motivated the Subaltern Studies historians to try and reconstruct the history of subaltern insurgency as different and independent of the bourgeois nationalist freedom movement. However, the biggest difficulty for them was the lack of any reliable historical record that told about the subaltern’s

social conditions and practices in their own terms. When confronted with this difficulty, the Subaltern Studies historians inverted the reading and search process and tried to recuperate the political will, agency and voice of the subaltern by critiquing representations of the subaltern in the histories written by the elite. This approach used by the Subaltern Studies historians, Spivak suggests, has a clear political agenda: just as the voice of the subaltern could not be traced or recovered from the archives of elite nationalist histories because it was left out; the kind of reading that was undertaken by the Subaltern Studies Historians could succeed in reinscribing these subaltern histories into the dominant historical representation.

Acknowledging that a classic Marxist notion of history forms the theoretical basis of the Subaltern Studies historians' work on the history of subaltern insurgency, Spivak questions their use of Marxist methodology in this project since, in her opinion, the categories of Marxist thought are too narrow. However, instead of outrightly rejecting the Marxist methodology and the work of the Subaltern Studies Historians, she expands the scope of the study to include other forms of liberation struggles like the women's movement, peasant rebellions and, fights for the rights of tribals/indigenous minorities. For Spivak, the historical research of the Subaltern Studies collective will be able to reflect, in a better way, the complexities of Indian

social history, if it traces a series of “political confrontations between dominant and exploited groups rather than simply noting the transition from ‘semi-feudalism into capitalist subjection” ( Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 197).

Spivak’s shifting of the focus of Subaltern Studies from the national liberation movement to the smaller social movements obviously necessitates a corresponding shift in the methodology to be used. The Marxist approach cannot be used in Subaltern Studies since subaltern groups, rather than being unified and cohesive, are complex and differentiated. It is for this reason that Spivak suggests deconstruction as a more appropriate approach. The introduction of the deconstructive approach for the Subaltern Studies project has been controversial, and Spivak has been accused of imposing an elite western academic language on to the history of subaltern insurgency. However, Spivak has defended her use of deconstruction which in her opinion goes to the very roots of the issue, i.e. the construction of the subaltern subject.

Spivak’s main objection is to the idea prevalent in the early Subaltern Studies methodology that the subaltern is a sovereign political subject who is fully in control of her own destiny. She accuses the Subaltern Studies historians of locating a ‘will’ as the sovereign cause of insurgency, when in actuality, the subaltern subject is an effect of the dominant discourse of the

elite. Although it seems that such an argument removes the ground for effective political struggle since the subaltern subject is merely a discursive effect, yet, deconstructive reading by Spivak succeeds in placing emphasis on the way in which the subaltern subject has been constructed through the dominant discourse of elite nationalism.. This reading by Spivak resists the claims of the elite group to represent India/the nation as a coherent, unified and objective structure, when what it is in reality is “a continuous sign chain” or a network of traces. (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 1987.198).

Although her use of deconstructive strategies may brand Spivak as somebody who is not really concerned or interested in native agency, yet, by invoking the fiction of Mahasweta Devi, she suggests that, “Literary texts can provide an alternative rhetorical site for articulating the histories of subaltern women.” (Spivak. “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman’s Text from the Third World”.) Spivak turns to literary texts for instances of subaltern women’s agency because she feels that official historical discourse privileges Men as major characters in the political scene in India. Female characters like Dopdi Mejhen (“Draupadi”) and Mary Oraon (“The Hunt”) are examples of the woman’s struggles within the revolution in a shifting historical moment.

The use of deconstruction as a strategy for locating and reading instances of subaltern insurgency puts the lives and struggles of the subaltern groups in danger of being reduced to pages in a book. However, these are not mere pages in book, but, to use Derrida's description – a text that is made meaningful by a system of signs or codes. Intellectuals are an important part of the larger social text that they describe. Using the Marxist methodology would compel Spivak to locate a subaltern consciousness in a pure and positive state and subsequently 'objectify' the subaltern by controlling him through knowledge after having restored versions of causality and self determination to him. Knowing this to be impossible and unattainable, Spivak prefers the deconstructive approach which she uses in order to expand and deepen the Marxist approach so that it can include women, rural peasants and the urban proletariat and tribals. This approach is more uplifting and hopeful since by including those who had never been included, it offers hope and optimism to the hopeless.

Spivak's 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" deals with the manner in which Western cultures investigate other cultures and the related ethical problems of investigating a different culture based on 'universal' concepts and frameworks. The basic claim that this essay makes is that Western academic thinking is produced in order to support Western economic

interests. Spivak contends that knowledge is never innocent, rather it always expresses the interests of its producers. To substantiate this argument, Spivak examines the claims of Foucault and Deleuze to speak for the disenfranchised, along with the self-righteous claims of the white colonial to rescue the brown woman from the barbaric act of self-immolation (sati). In both these cases, it is the Western man who is speaking for the subaltern woman while she herself is silenced. Spivak's most important concern being that of political representation of the subaltern, she is critical of the fact that Foucault and Deleuze, when discussing real, historical examples of social and political struggle, use the transparent model of representation in which, "oppressed subjects speak, act and know their own conditions" ("Spivak. Can the Subaltern Speak?") thus ignoring the epistemic violence of imperialism wherein the imperialist powers created structures of knowledge which silenced actual experience of the colonised peoples. The case of the Rani of Sirmur is another example of how the woman is written into history when required by the coloniser, and then vanishes when she is not longer important to their economic interests. Sirmur, in the North of India was of immense strategic and political importance to the East India Company. Karma Prakash was its Raja. During the 1840's, at the time when India was going through the phase of transition from the deregulated economic control

of the East India Company to the colonial rule of the British government, it became very important for the British to annex Sirmur in order to secure its trade routes against Nepal. So the king was branded “barbaric and dissolute” in order to make it easy for them to depose him. They crowned his minor son Fatteh Prakash as king and appointed the Rani of Sirmur as the young king’s guardian, ostensibly because there was no trustworthy male relative, but more because it would be easy for the British to manipulate the Rani. In her essay “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives”, Spivak concludes that, “The Rani emerges only when she is needed in the space of imperial production”.

“Can the Subaltern Speak” also analyses the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideological debate over sati as an example of a situation when two “male” visions were involved in a conflict where women remained silent subalterns. Spivak also analyses ‘jauhar’ as another phenomenon by which men reinforce their rule and possession of women, and objectify them. Patriotic stories of mass self-immolation serve to impose gender categories from early childhood which create a lasting imprint in the minds of women. Spivak’s detailed analysis of sati reveals that a woman who performed widow-sacrifice did it as part of the conduct of a ‘good wife’. Since sati was not prescribed by the Hindu religious code, a woman’s act of sati became an expression of free will to be

seen as a 'good wife'. In other words, sati was symbolic of good wifely conduct. Here Spivak quickly clarifies that she is not supporting sati or violence, but is merely demonstrating how the British colonials were unable to pick up this peculiar sense of the practice of sati. They only used it to highlight the abhorrent and inhuman characteristics of Hindu society. The abolition of sati was imposed in such terms and cultural categories that it didn't really liberate women, but simply changed modes and models of male domination. By representing India as barbaric and backward, and abolishing the practice of sati, the British were able to show themselves as possessing a superior and more humane moral culture thus giving impetus and justification to their claims of imperialism as an act of civilizing the barbarians.

In the third part of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak tells us about Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, a young Bengali upper middle class woman who one day hangs herself to death in her father's apartment. Several years later it was discovered that she was a member of an armed group that was part of the Indian independence struggle who committed suicide since she was unable to bring herself to carry out a violent assignment (killing) that was entrusted to her. Despite all the care she takes in timing her suicide to coincide with her menstrual cycle so that her act is

not misunderstood as a case of an illicit love affair gone wrong, yet, her message is not heard or understood. Even her believe her death to be the consequence of illicit love, and hence a source of shame for the family. Though Bhubaneshwari was a politically committed and brave participant in the struggle for Indian independence, yet, argues Spivak, “as a model of interventionist practice, Bhubaneshwari’s attempt to rewrite the text of sati-suicide is a tragic failure”. Much like a palimpsest, Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri’s voice and story is erased, and the supplementary narratives as given by others are written over it. In this context, Spivak states in an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean published in “The Spivak Reader”: “ ‘The subaltern cannot speak’ means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That’s what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot.” Therefore, the subalterns do speak. But since Spivak is concerned with the political representation of the subaltern, these speech acts are meaningless since they are not recognised as speech acts within the dominant political systems of representation.

Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” moves away from the Subaltern Studies project in its focus on the historical experiences of the subaltern woman as against the objective of the Subaltern Studies historians

whose focus was on the national independence narrative from the point of view of the subaltern. However, Spivak's engagement with the histories of disempowered subaltern women, while expanding the scope of the term, also alters and complicates its, since in Spivak's use, the term would also include upper middle class women, peasant women and also women from the sub-proletariat. Nevertheless, what seems most important for Spivak is the fact that the active involvement of women in the anti-colonial struggle has been excluded from the official history of national independence. To Spivak, this amounts to double effacement; as a subaltern, and also as a woman. As she writes in the essay: "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (Spivak. *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988,287)

In response to Neil Lazarus' allegation that although she commits to investigating the histories of subaltern women's insurgency, it is not

followed up by any concrete historical research, Spivak blames this on the ideological construction of gender in the colonial historical archives that keep the male dominant. She overcomes this with her readings of literary texts from the Third World, particularly those of Mahasweta Devi whose characters provide a counterpoint to the silencing and erasure of the subaltern characters, particularly women, in the colonial archives and elite nationalist history of India.

In the true spirit of deconstruction, Spivak does not offer a neat formula for the emancipation of subaltern women. What she offers is hope. By using deconstruction, Spivak creates a reading strategy that may perhaps enable us to hear, recognise and understand the voice of the subaltern.

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## Chapter VI

### Spivak and Postcolonialism

*Post-colonial Studies: Key concepts* defines Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) as “dealing with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as ‘the post-colonial state’, ‘post-colonial’ had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970’s the term has been used by literary critic to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization.”(Bill Ashcroft, et al. *Post-colonial Studies: Key concepts*)

Stephen Slemon in his essay “The Scramble for Post-colonialism” published in “The Post-colonial Studies Reader states, “Post-colonialism, as it is now used in its various fields, de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of ‘class’, as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism; as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the

inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of ‘reading practice’; and as the name for a category of ‘literary’ activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called ‘commonwealth’ literary studies.” ( Stephen Slemon. *The Scramble for Post-colonialism*).

The three major exponents of colonial discourse theory are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Unlike Said who focussed on dominant European literary texts, Spivak’s focus extends to postcolonial literary texts that question and challenge the colonial master narratives like Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, the works of Assia Djebar, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Mahasweta Devi, Jean Rhys and J.M. Coetzee. But Spivak joins Edward Said and Homi Bhabha in emphatically reiterating that there was a definite and close link between nineteenth century English Literature and the history of Imperialism.

Spivak, in the first paragraph of Chapter I of her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* writes: Colonial discourse studies, when they concentrate only on the representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies, can sometimes serve the production of current neo-colonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past, and/or by suggesting a

continuous line from that past to our present. This situation complicates the fact that postcolonial/colonial discourse studies is becoming a substantial subdisciplinary ghetto. In spite of the potential for cooptation, however, there can be no doubt that the apparently crystalline disciplinary mainstream runs muddy if these studies do not provide a persistent dredging operation. Because this dredging is counterproductive when it becomes a constant and self-righteous shaming of fully intending subjects, deconstruction can help here.” (Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*). Spivak therefore uses the deconstructive approach in her critique of colonial discourse.

The British managed to maintain their hold in India during the Nineteenth Century not just by threatening the natives with military force, but by using rhetoric to convince the upper middle class Indians that the British culture was better and superior than theirs. Once they succeeded in convincing the middle class elite about their superiority, they were able to govern India by consent rather than by force. Western Culture, in particular, Literature and Philosophy, provided the basis, not just for occupation, but for western colonial expansion. Using the deconstructive approach of Paul de Man, Spivak argues that, “the basis of a truth claim is no more than a trope” (Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*). In classical rhetoric, a trope is a figure of speech in which one thing is used to talk about another.

According to Paul de Man, the discovery that something that claims to be true is a mere trope is the first (tropological) step in what he calls deconstruction. The second (performative) step is to disclose how the corrective impulse within the tropological analysis is obliged to act out a lie in attempting to establish it as the corrected version of truth. For de Man, Philosophical truth claims are marked and constituted by the effacement of tropes. On the basis of this, Spivak suggests that the production of truth claims by the suppression of rhetoric can have extremely damaging consequences in a broader social and political field. In her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Spivak argues that since deconstruction is concerned with the constitution of truth in philosophical discourse, it can be usefully applied to the “axiomatrics of imperialism”. She then proceeds to use this strategy in her reading of the eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant. By placing the three Critiques in the broad historical and geographical context of imperial expansion, she carefully follows Kant’s rhetoric and focuses on the ideas, concepts and metaphors that are deployed as the truth. In keeping with Paul de Man’s argument that the rhetorical character of of all language (whether philosophical or literary) opens up the possibility of misunderstanding,

Spivak declares in advance, that her reading of Kant too will be a misreading.

Through her deconstructive reading strategy that was influenced by the thought of Paul de Man, Spivak concludes that the lie performed by Kant to define the rational human subject in his “Critique of Judgement”, involves the erasure of a racialised figure. The reading strategy and arguments that lead Spivak to draw this conclusion have been summarised by Stephen Morton as follows:

“Spivak begins her reading of Kant by summarising the key philosophical arguments of Kant’s three Critiques: Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* charts the operation of the reason that cognizes nature theoretically. *The Critique of Practical Reason* charts the operation of the rational will. The operations of the aesthetic judgement [in *The Critique of Judgement*] allow the play of concepts of nature with concepts of freedom (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*). Spivak suggests that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between *The Critique of Pure Reason* and, where the moral subject is bound to the determining structures of reason: ‘The human being is moral only insofar as he cannot cognize himself’ (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*,22). Kant attempted to

resolve this contradiction through the aesthetic category of the Sublime. In *The Critique of Practical Reason* Kant's philosophical schema, the Sublime refers to the feeling of pain that occurs when the individual human imagination encounters itself in relationship to the non-representable magnitude of the natural world, yet is able to conquer this feeling of pain through recourse to the rational faculties of the human mind. In other words, the sublime provides an aesthetic structure for rational and cultivated human subjects to conquer their fear of unrepresentable concepts such as the Infinite and Death. One of the fundamental rational faculties that Kant invokes in his discussion of the sublime is that of Culture. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that it is primarily cultivated and educated men who can make judgements about taste and sublimity. For Spivak, this moment in Kant's argument is particularly revealing because it raises questions about those groups and societies who do not have access to the culture that Kant is describing. For if the moral subject needed culture to define his cognitive limitations in the face of the infinite structure of the sublime, what happens to those subjects who do not have access to Kant's understanding of morality or culture? As Spivak argues, Kant's reading of the sublime presented itself differently to those people who were not represented as moral subjects within Kant's European philosophical system: 'Without

development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime presents itself to man in the raw [dem rohen Menschen] merely as terrible' (cited in Spivak 1999: 12–13) (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*). Spivak picks up on the German adjective 'roh' in Kant's text, noting that while it is normally translated as 'uneducated', the term 'uneducated' in Kant's work specifically refers to 'the child and the poor'; the 'naturally uneducable' refers to women; and 'dem rohen Menschen, man in the raw', connotes 'the savage and the primitive' (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*). Spivak further proceeds to argue that Kant's theory of the universal subject, or 'Man', does not refer to all humanity, but only refers to the educated, bourgeois, masculine subject of the European enlightenment. Citing a passage from Kant's discussion of the sublime in *The Critique of Judgement*, Spivak notes how Kant excluded the 'Australian aborigine or the man from Tierra del Fuego' from the category of human subjectivity in his analytic of the sublime. By so doing, Spivak links Kant's philosophical discussion of the 'raw man' in his account of the Sublime to the 'axiomatrics of imperialism': 'we find here the axiomatrics of imperialism as a natural argument to indicate the limits of the cognition of (cultural) man' (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a*

History of the Vanishing Present). For Spivak, the ‘axiomatics of imperialism’ refers to the self-evident truth, which western imperialism claims as its self-justifying basis. Spivak thus suggests that the narrow European-centred definition of the moral subject in the world of Kant’s three Critiques provides some of the rational principles for imperial expansion. Kant’s argument that only cultivated and educated European men have access to the sublime, while non-European subjects are stripped of culture or humanity and relegated to the place of an unrepresentable, irrational other, is an interesting case in point. For it is precisely because of this narrow, European-centred definition of the moral subject that Kant’s philosophical narrative could serve to justify the idea of western imperialism as a civilizing mission.” (Morton, 116)

Spivak’s essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” published in 1985, examines Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre”, Daniel Defoe’s “Robinson Crusoe” and Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein”. Very significantly, Spivak’s reading of Kant’s Critiques as the justification of the civilizing mission of Western imperialism is prefigured in this essay. This is especially borne out in Bronte’s “Jane Eyre”. At one level, the novel narrates the trajectory of the education and development of the white English bourgeois female protagonist Jane, who succeeds in retaining her strong female

individualism within the restricted space of nineteenth century domestic life. Spivak, in her reading of the novel argues that Jane's narrative of female individualism is achieved at the expense of another female character, Rochester's first wife Bertha Mason. Bertha is portrayed in the novel as a sub-human subject, denuded of any history or culture. She was married to Edward Rochester during his stay in Jamaica, and when they moved to England (Thornfield Hall), Bertha is locked up in the attic and denied full access to the category of the human subject. Spivak compels us to read carefully the imperialist sub-text of the novel that denies Bertha the status of a human being. She insists that Bertha is "a figure produced by the axiomatic of imperialism" (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"), where the civilizing mission of imperialism is a divine injunction rather than a human motive. Spivak links this ethical principle to Kant's account of the categorical imperative, i.e. "the universal moral law, given by pure reason" (Spivak, Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism). Spivak's analysis of *Jane Eyre* in her essay explicates how Kant's philosophical statement "In all creation everything one chooses and over which one has any power, may be used merely as means; man alone, and with him every rational creature, is an end in himself" is transformed to suit the purpose of imperialist expansion into "make the heathen into a

human so he can be treated as an end in himself” (Spivak, ”Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”). Spivak therefore claims that the European imperialists appropriated the moral imperatives of Western philosophy and justified colonisation as a divine right.

In *Jane Eyre*, this divine civilizing mission is presented in the last section where St. John Rivers, the Christian missionary proposes marriage to Jane and wants her to be his soulmate and partner in his “great work of bettering their race- of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance – of substituting peace for war – freedom for bondage – religion for superstition –the hope of heaven for the fear of hell” (Bronte cited in Spivak). In this monologue by St. John Rivers, Indian culture is described as “a realm of ignorance” where superstition and hell prevail thus justifying his work as a soul-making enterprise.

Viewing the narrative of *Jane Eyre* from a different perspective, is Jean Rhys’ novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1965). This novel is analysed by Spivak in her essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” as a postcolonial text, partly from the point of view of the character of Bertha Mason. Jean Rhys shifts the location of the story to Jamaica where the main events take place. We are introduced to a young Antoinette who is in complete contrast to the monstrous, inhuman figure of Bertha in “Jane

Eyre”. Rhys describes how Rochester robs Antoinette of an important part of her personal identity by renaming her as Bertha. Rhys’ biggest achievement is that although the storyline is similar to that in *Jane Eyre*, in her rewriting, she “keeps Bertha’s humanity, indeed her sanity as a critic of imperialism, intact” (Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”). Rhys shows how Antoinette’s cultural identity is not only denied with Rochester refusing to call her Antoinette, but she also experiences a cultural non-being when she arrives at Thornfield Hall: “What am I doing in this place and who am I?... They tell me I am in England, but I don’t believe them. We lost our way to England” ( Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*). The figures of Bertha and Antoinette are a study in contrast. Bertha, in Bronte’s novel is presented in the image of a demonic, monstrous fiend; a woman who is repressed and contained within the patriarchal confines of the home; while the Antoinette of Rhys’ novel; lovely with her scents and pretty clothes, is presented as a sympathetic figure, a victim of Rochester’s psychological abuse. For Spivak, Rhys’ novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* which rewrites Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, underlines her idea of the “epistemic violence of imperialism” – the Imperialism which was justified and glorified by defining the colonial subject as inhuman, heathen or primitive.

The second text that Spivak engages with in her essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” is Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). For postcolonial critics Defoe’s novel is one of original literary texts about English imperialism. Edward Said argues that it is no accident that Daniel Defoe’s “ prototypical modern realistic novel is about a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*). It is the colonizing mission, fully justified by Kant’s philosophical narrative that permits Robinson Crusoe “to create a new world of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific, and Atlantic wilderness” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*).

Spivak comments on Karl Marx’s discussion of *Robinson Crusoe* in his *Capital* Volume One, stating that his purpose was only to illustrate how the value of different forms of productive labour is calculated according to the time taken to complete a particular task. As Marx writes, “Necessity itself compels him to apportion his time accurately between his different kinds of work. Whether one kind occupies a greater space in his general activity than another depends upon the difficulties, greater or less as the case may be, to be overcome in attaining the useful effect aimed at. This Robinson soon learns by experience, and having rescued a watch, ledger, and pen and ink from the wreck, commences, like a true-born Briton, to keep

a set of books. His stock-book contains a list of the objects of utility that belong to him, of the operations necessary for their production; and lastly for the labour time that definite quantities of those objects have, on average, cost him” (Marx, *Capital, Volume One*). Though Spivak’s reading of Defoe via Marx seems unrelated, yet on closer scrutiny one finds that it is in keeping with her argument that Marx, despite knowing about the project of imperialism, in his discussion of *Robinson Crusoe*, subordinated questions about space and imperialism, and focussed solely on the historical narrative of European capitalism.

J.M.Coetzee’s *Foe*(1986) on the other hand, says Spivak, “is more about spacing and displacement than about timing of history and labour” (Spivak. “Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s *Foe* reading Defoe’s *Crusoe/Roxana*”. 1991). The novel *Foe* is woven around the existing plot of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and is written from the perspective of Susan Barton, a castaway who landed on the same island inhabited by “Cruso” and “Friday” as their adventures were already underway. The story unfolds as Barton’s narrative while in England attempting to convince the writer Daniel Foe to help transform her tale into popular fiction.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson performs the missionary task of the European imperialist by teaching Friday to speak English. In Coetzee’s *Foe*

however, Friday is tongueless (his tongue having been cut off by slave traders) and therefore cannot be taught to speak despite Susan Barton's best efforts. What is being foregrounded here is the violence of colonial education, which the earlier texts had effaced. Susan next tries to teach Friday to write. The first word that she chooses for him to learn is 'Africa' in the hope that this will help him assert national independence thus challenging Defoe's original colonial narrative in *Robinson Crusoe*. Spivak however considers the word 'Africa' a catachresis since it was only a time-bound naming by the colonisers, imposed onto the continent. Despite Susan's best efforts to teach Friday to write she does not succeed. Eventually Susan gives up and concludes that it is a futile task. Spivak considers this a highly instructive lesson for readers of postcolonial texts. She urges us to view Friday, not as a passive victim of colonial history but as "an agent of withholding in the text" (Spivak. "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*". 1991,172). Friday, in his refusal to write, is rejecting Susan's benevolent gesture of allowing him to experience emancipation. He also refuses her ideas of nationalism and identity. In other words, he refuses to be represented. This reading of *Foe* by Spivak bears out her claim regarding the limitations of political representation as an effective vehicle for political change. As she writes in A

*Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, “Colonial Discourse studies, when they concentrate only on the representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies, can sometimes serve the production of current neo-colonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past”. This is similar to Leela Gandhi’s statement that postcolonialism is, “a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past”. Spivak’s motive in her analysis of postcolonial texts is to locate subaltern agency and resistance thus challenging the totalising system of colonial discourse.

Spivak is also highly critical of political promises made in the name of nationalism and decolonisation in the Third World Countries. For the Subaltern women and the underclass, these mean nothing. Subaltern Studies scholars like Partha Chatterjee, argue that nationalism is a ‘derivative discourse’ influenced by European political ideas. Spivak who has been influenced by this argument states that on the one hand are the State political programmes devised and implemented by the ruling governmental elites; while on the other hand are the popular struggles of those groups who are totally ignored by these elite political programmes. Since Nationalism is the only discourse that is given validity and credit for achieving emancipation, the innumerable instances of resistance by the marginalised groups are

forcibly suppressed by the promoters of this idea of nationalism. This leaves no space for the disadvantaged groups. Spivak suggests, that it is only literature that can give voice and space to these subaltern groups whose histories have been suppressed and written out of the national liberation movements.

A very good example of this is the work of the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi whose works Spivak has translated. In her essay, "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern", Spivak presents an analysis of "Stanadayani" and "Douloti the Bountiful" as a narrative of national independence from the perspective of a subaltern woman that challenges the truth claims of the elite historical discourse. Mahasweta Devi in her authorial commentary on "Stanadayani" calls the story of Jashoda "a parable of decolonization where the maternal body of Jashoda stands as a metaphor of the Indian nation after decolonisation. Both Jashoda and India are mothers by hire, with all classes of people, who actually swore to protect her, now abuse her. During the resistance movements of the freedom struggle, powerful feminine figures from Hindu mythology like Kali, Sita, Draupadi and Savitri were invoked in order to help define a coherent sense of Indian nationhood. Gandhi extended the metaphor of Mother India to get the active support of women in his program of passive resistance against the

British. Sadly, however, though it was through a gendered discourse that women joined the anti-colonial resistance movement, after India achieved Independence in 1947, this did not lead to the political emancipation of women. Instead, the goal of the political emancipation of women was subordinated to the more immediate goal of national independence. After independence, women's rights were pushed aside and women were put into the traditional gender role of motherhood and domesticity. Spivak however, finds that this reading ignores the subaltern status of Jashoda. She uses the Marxist-feminist approach to show how Jashoda's reproductive body becomes a site of economic exploitation in the text. "The protagonist subaltern Jashoda, whose husband was crippled by the youngest son of a wealthy household, becomes a wet-nurse for them. Her repeated gestation and lactation support her husband and family. By the logic of the production of value, they are both means of production." (Spivak. *In Other Worlds*). In Jashoda's sale of her maternal body to support her family, we see a reversal of the sexual division of labour between men and women and also problematises the male-centred definition of the working-class subject that is central to classic European Marxism.

Though Spivak's translations and commentaries on Mahasweta Devi's fiction are brilliant and persuasive, she has been criticised for commodifying

Devi's work for an international market by inserting them into a Western theoretical discourse which has no connection or relationship to the people or culture depicted in it. Spivak acknowledges this difficulty and sets about alleviating it by developing an ethics of reading that is sensitive to the social location of subaltern woman, throwing up the possibility of an alliance between dominant readers and texts of subalternity. Spivak's statement in "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern" that, "knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity", is based on Derrida's notion of ethics as responsibility of the (Western) Self towards the (non-Western) Other. However, there is no guarantee that when confronted with the Other, there will necessarily be an ethical relation of singularity between the Self and the Other. The problem with this kind of reading is that it does not bring the subaltern any closer to political representation, and negates Mahasweta Devi's objective of inserting the tribal people into the mainstream. Spivak considers this a naive understanding which assumes that literary representation will necessarily lead to political representation.

No doubt, Mahasweta Devi's subaltern women characters, whether it is Jashoda or Douloti, presents to the reader the subaltern woman's body revolting against the postcolonial state, yet, these are not signs of intentional political struggle. The story "Draupadi" however, raises questions about

Draupadi's political agency through its rewriting of the vastraharan episode in the Mahabharata. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi's dignity and honour are preserved by the divine intervention of Krishna, but in Mahasweta Devi's story, Dopdi/Draupadi, "remains publicly naked at her own insistence" (Spivak. "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern"). Despite her violent torture, Draupadi is adamant in refusing to be clothed, threatening the authority of the patriarchal state. Indeed, this threat to patriarchal authority is emphasised when she reverses the interrogation protocol by questioning her torturers instead of they questioning her: "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (Spivak "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern")

The moving and powerful fiction of Mahasweta Devi may not lead to political representation for the subaltern, but according to Spivak, it serves a larger purpose in exposing and articulating the structural barriers of class, culture, language and literacy that have prevented, and continue to prevent the tribal from participating in the democratic process.

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## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

This critical study has attempted to examine Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical interventions into feminism, Marxism, deconstruction, post-colonialism and subaltern studies, and to identify the factors and reasons that make Spivak's body of work significant, relevant and unique amidst the clamour of literary theorists. Spivak's work draws from a range of different theoretical methodologies that are often incommensurate and mutually antagonistic. Though it is almost impossible to compartmentalise or neatly divide her work into categories or phases, for technical reasons, the study of Spivak's interventions into each of the five methodologies/strategies was placed under separate chapter heads. I submit below my findings/conclusions under each chapter which will be followed by the overall general comments and conclusions pertaining to this study.

The chapter titled "Spivak and Feminism" presents Spivak's argument that Western feminism has been historically complicit in the project of imperialist expansion, and that a real feminist movement would be one that is wary of colonial thinking in feminist scholarship.

She also proposes the important idea of learning to learn from the subaltern. As against the universal humanist assumption that is prevalent in some western feminist thought, she states that all women's lives and histories are not the same; the lives of non-western women being very different from those of western women. It is for this reason that she emphasises the importance of a 'global' political awareness of the 'local' conditions that structure women's oppression in different parts of the world.

The chapter "Spivak and Marxism" elucidates Spivak's reading of Marx through the lens of deconstruction wherein she redefines the political task of Marxist critique as an ethical call to read Marx patiently and carefully. Though at times, she reads Marx more as a philosopher than as an economist, her rethinking of Marx through deconstruction emphasises the need to retain a sense of the economic in contemporary cultural analysis. As a theorist whose concerns are with the subaltern, Spivak's re-articulation of Marx's writings forces us to acknowledge the fact that post-colonial/Third World nation states are fully integrated into the capitalist economic system since it is the workers, more specifically the female workers, of such Third World countries who produce the wealth and resources for the

powerful countries of the First World. Spivak reminds us that it is the labour of Third World women in particular, which is exploited in the contemporary global capitalist economy. Her objective in re-reading Marx is not merely as a corrective, but is focussed more towards articulating the oppressive cultural, political and economic conditions due to which the Third World woman worker is exploited and silenced.

Deconstruction has been the predominant influence that has shaped Spivak's thought. The chapter "Spivak and Deconstruction" reveals to us that Spivak's focus is more on Derrida's train of thought that moves away from major ontological and epistemological questions, towards ethical and social considerations about violence, justice, friendship, and hospitality. Derrida concentrates on the task of inhabiting the structures of philosophical texts to locate those histories and people who have been excluded from western philosophical discourse as its founding condition of possibility. Spivak uses Derrida's strategy of reading literature and history to trace the founding exclusions inherent in radical political programs such as Marxism, decolonization or feminism.

In the Chapter “Spivak and Subaltern Studies”, we observe that since Spivak’s continuous endeavour has been to find an appropriate methodology for articulating the histories and struggles of disempowered groups, she questions whether the Marxist methodology used by the subaltern studies historians is appropriate to describe the complexities of subaltern insurgency. Through her deconstructive reading of Indian society, Spivak throws light on the manner in which the subaltern subject is carefully constructed by the dominant discourse as an after-effect of elite nationalism. The subaltern is thus contained within the grand narrative of bourgeois national liberation which ignores local uprisings/struggles of particular subaltern groups. Spivak’s reading however, defines the particular struggles of women, peasants and tribals as separate from and supplementary to the dominant historical narrative of bourgeois national independence. Thus, Spivak succeeds in expanding and deepening the subaltern studies historian’s work by including groups such as women. Spivak’s reading of Mahasweta Devi’s female subaltern characters record moments of subaltern insurgency and resistance and is an attempt to give hope to the disenfranchised by

transforming conditions of impossibility into a condition of possibility.

Spivak's most important contribution to post-colonial studies has been to demonstrate how the institution of English Literary Studies disseminated the idea of English imperialism. The chapter titled "Spivak and Post-colonialism" discusses her critical engagement with post colonial literary texts such as 'Wide Sargasso Sea' by Jean Rhys, and, 'Foe' by Susan Barton as a counter-discourse to challenge the authority of colonial master narratives in classic English literary texts such as Charlotte Bronte's 'Jane Eyre', and Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' while at the same time reveals Spivak's scepticism of the ability of all post-colonial literature to articulate the condition of the subaltern. Spivak therefore turns to the works of Mahasweta Devi, In translating Devi's work and writing elaborate commentaries, Spivak strives to articulate the histories and struggles of the subaltern, especially that of subaltern women.

As can be seen from the above summaries and inferences, not only does Spivak draw on different methodologies, but she also insists on preserving these differences. She employs a rigorous rhetorical strategy of interruption and supplementation which questions the

authority and the truth claims of different theoretical methodologies. She uses this strategy to tackle the urgent political questions about disempowered individuals and groups such as the colonized, women in colonial and post-colonial societies, tribal groups and the rural peasantry in south Asia. Her commitment to give these subaltern groups a voice can be seen as disrupting the disciplinary codes and specialized vocabulary of western academic philosophy and critical theory.

Judith Butler, in her response to Terry Eagleton's scathing criticism of Spivak, states that Spivak's "... influence on Third World feminism, Continental feminist theory, Marxist theory, subaltern studies and the philosophy of alterity is unparalleled by any living scholar, ... she has changed the academic terrain of each of these fields by her acute and brilliant contributions...her critical interrogation of the political status quo in its global dimensions has reached tens of thousands of activists and scholars." (Eagleton). The reason for this popularity is that while other critics and literary theorists strive to retain a unidimensional approach, Spivak is unique and seems like an exception, comfortably straddling feminism, Marxism, deconstruction and post-colonialism. Not only is this an

indicator of the sheer brilliance and superior intellect of Spivak, but it is also a reminder of the “Indianness” of Spivak: that special Indian characteristic of living with differences in a multicultural country, of accommodating different points of view, being tolerant of different faiths and religious practices, being exposed to different cultures, languages, and yet, being able to steadfastly retain her own identity and voice.

The relevance and significance of Spivak and her work lies in the fact that rather than “recirculating received opinion” (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 1951), she indulges in forms of activist thinking and writing. She does not shirk from taking the risk of explicating and challenging some of the ideas and writings that were heretofore considered hallowed. Some instances of her bold critiquing are as follows:

- Her argument that Kant’s “Critiques” provided some of the rational principles for imperial expansion and justified the idea of Western imperialism as a civilizing mission;
- Her re-reading of Marx in an attempt to deconstruct the capitalist system of value determinations, as well as to

articulate the cultural, political and economic conditions which silence the ‘Third World’ woman;

- Her criticism of Western feminism and her argument that Western feminism has been historically complicit in the project of imperialist expansion since it had the dangerous tendency of repeating the colonial attitudes of nineteenth-century bourgeois female individualism towards ‘Third World’ women;
- Her commitment to set deconstruction to work outside the academic disciplinary framework of literary criticism and philosophy into the field of global economic and political relations which can be seen as a movement from ethics to politics;
- Her critique of the Subaltern Studies Collective and her writings on subaltern women’s histories which radically challenge the terms and categories of political identity and struggle in contemporary thought.

Spivak’s use of diverse theoretical methodologies, and her effortless movement from and between various disciplines, puts her in danger of being termed eclectic, something that Terry Eagleton and others accuse her of being. The grounds for this perceived eclecticism are

perhaps to be found in Spivak's own thinking and writing as she delves into areas as diverse as graphemics, the garment industry, migrant labour, discourse, language, identity, gender, transnationality, Hegelian philosophy, historical archives of colonial India, Post-Modern culture, international trade, etc., all the while using a complex combination of methodologies to intervene, interrogate, and explicate pertinent issues and ideas. Given below some instances that may tempt us to label Spivak as eclectic:

- The supposed contradiction between her “materialist commitment” to work with the disenfranchised groups of the ‘Third World’, while at the same time using a language that can be ‘difficult and theoretical’, and also her use of a complex methodology like deconstruction to achieve this goal;
- Her criticism of the Subaltern Studies historians’ practice of revisionist historical writing as being at odds with their methodology, and her own deconstructive and feminist reading of the Subaltern Studies historians’ Marxist methodology;
- Her reading of Marx through the lens of deconstruction; and,
- Her use of subaltern women’s histories to challenge the universal claims of European feminism

However, through a careful and patient reading of Spivak, this study contends and concludes that Spivak's body of writing is syncretic rather than eclectic. This contention is justified as follows:

- Spivak's use of deconstruction in her engagement with Third World disenfranchised/subaltern groups may seem like a contradiction, one cannot ignore the tremendous influence that Derrida's deconstruction of 'Western philosophical truth' and the 'Western humanist subject' and its ethical dimensions has had on the development of her postcolonialist thought, reading practices, and counter-global development activism.
- By critiquing the methodology of the subaltern Studies Collective, and by using deconstruction, Spivak has produced a more nuanced account of historiography that not only includes women but also produces a better reading strategy that responds to the voices and unwritten histories of subaltern women, without representing them.

- Spivak's deconstructive reading of Marx has helped articulate the cultural, political and economic conditions which silence and oppress the Third World women.
- Spivak's emphasis on the use of "Strategic Essentialism" for rethinking feminist thought from the perspective of different non-western women's lives and histories is perhaps one of the best examples of her syncreticism.

For Spivak, a strategy is something that suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory. She therefore uses deconstruction as a strategy in feminism to counter the sanctioned ignorance of western academic paradigms towards Third World women, and also by emphasizing the importance of a "global" political awareness of the "local" economic, political, social and cultural conditions that structure women's oppression in different parts of the world.

Much like Derrida, it is the ethical dimension that is most important in Spivak's work and manifests itself in her critique of Marxism, Feminism, Subaltern Studies and Post-colonialism as she describes the "painstaking labour" required "to establish ethical singularity with the subaltern" (Devi. "Imaginary Maps",1995).

Spivak is definitely not an armchair critic and her critical interventions are not conducted for the sake of disinterested theoretical speculation. She is propelled by the affirmative mode of deconstruction “to work outside the academic disciplinary framework of literary criticism and philosophy in a wider field of global economic and political relations”. Her personal 'field work' from the year 1986, in the remote rural districts of Birbhum in West Bengal, that includes funding and teacher training programs, is a testimony to this. As she states in "*A Note on the New International*", "Real, mind changing formations of collectivity, that will withstand and survive victory, is incredibly slow and time-consuming work, with no guarantees" ("*A Note on the New International*", parallax, 7, (3) (2001): 12-16). It is for this kind of work that Spivak was honoured with the prestigious Kyoto Prize in arts and Philosophy by the Inamori Foundation, in the field of thought and ethics, for speaking against 'intellectual colonialism'. As the Prize Committee stated, “She exemplifies what intellectuals today should be through her theoretical work for the humanities and her devotion to multifaceted educational activities. Her relentless efforts to elucidate the structure of oppression, which is rarely visualized in modern society, and to fulfil

her ethical responsibilities as an intellectual are attracting profound empathy and respect, both within academic circles and among a wider international audience.”

The significance and relevance of Spivak's work therefore is her political commitment to learn to learn from the subaltern and thus achieve a relation of ethical singularity with the subaltern. Whoever we are, if we are reading Spivak, we are likely to be a privileged lot in terms of educational opportunity, location, etc. "Unlearning one's privilege as one's loss" which is one of the most powerful tasks set about for readers by Spivak's writing and teaching, constitutes a recognition that our privileges in terms of race, class, nationality, or gender may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge (that which we are not equipped to understand because of our social position. "Unlearning" would also mean attempting to speak to those Others in such a manner that they take us seriously and are able to answer back. In her speech after being awarded the Kyoto Prize, Spivak spoke of the satisfaction she gets from gaining the trust of some of the poorest people in West Bengal, where illiteracy remains high. The land for a second school structure had been donated by a group of illiterate people from the community who had

no land to cultivate. “My kind – although my parents were anticasteists – has oppressed these people over thousands of years. It’s a small repayment of ancestral debt that I have earned their trust.” Spivak exhorts the 'privileged' to "develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you, that you are silenced". To unlearn our privilege means to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces mostly closed to our privileged view. Doing one's homework in the interests of unlearning one's privilege is what signifies the beginning of an ethical relation to the Other.

It is this strong and radiating ethical centre which is at the core of her work that upholds her well-earned popularity and her undisputed importance. For her, Ethics is not a problem of Knowledge but a call of relationship. Thinking of the ethical relation as an embrace, an act of love, in which each learns from the other, is not the same thing as wanting to speak 'for' an oppressed constituency. When she says that the subaltern cannot speak, what she means is that the subaltern cannot be heard by the privileged. If the subaltern were able to make herself heard, her status as a subaltern would be changed entirely and she would cease to be subaltern. That, according to

Spivak, is the goal of the ethical relation; that the subaltern, the most oppressed and invisible of constituencies might cease to exist.

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