

## Can the Subaltern Speak?

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### Abstract

*In the present paper a research has been done on the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak' by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It has been explained into much simpler language about what the author conveys for better understanding and further references. Also the criticism has been done by various critiques from various sources which is helpful from examination point of view. The paper has been divided into various contexts with an introduction and the conclusions. Also the references has been written that depicts the sources of criticism.*

### Keywords

Epistemic Violence, Socialized Capital, Identity-in-Differential, Political Interests.

### 1 Introduction

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is one of the key theoretical texts in the field of postcolonial studies, by one of its most famous figures. It was first published in the journal *Wedge* in 1985, as "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice"; reprinted in 1988 as "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Considered "one of the most influential postcolonial intellectuals", Spivak is best known for her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and for her translation of and introduction to Jacques Derrida's *De la Grammatologie*. Spivak was born in Calcutta, India. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak discusses the lack of an account of the Sati practice, leading her to reflect on whether the subaltern can even speak. Spivak recounts how Sati appears in colonial archives. Spivak demonstrates that the Western academy has obscured subaltern

experiences by assuming the transparency of its scholarship. Spivak writes about the process, the focus on the Eurocentric Subject as they disclaim the problem of representation; and by invoking the Subject of Europe, these intellectuals constitute the subaltern Other of Europe as anonymous and mute. She has often referred to herself as a "practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist." In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak highlights how Gilles Deleuze and Michael Foucault confine the subject to the West, which problematizes the non-western other as real and knowable. In concluding her essay, she refuses Deleuze and Foucault for making it impossible to conduce with the subaltern in a discursive practice, and suggests the possibilities Jacques Derrida offers for thinking about the subaltern insofar as he relate to a classically philosophical interpretation of the subject, rather than a socio-political, cultural or historical interpretation, which might assume that the subject is always already the subject of the West.

### 2 Epistemic Violence

"It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at end of European eighteenth century"

Subaltern in here Spivak explains it in term's nuances. Subalterns are the never who never adopt the dominant point of view or vocabulary. Subaltern in India's context are the ones who did not consist of elite class or rich landlords or the peasants. Here Foucault expresses or locates epistemic violence that is the violence of knowledge where he redefines the sanity of Europe in eighteenth century. According to Spivak, episteme occurred through the marginalization of

the certain voices that are within Western discourses. These voices are of the "subaltern." Spivak then talk about the subtext of the narrative document that has been removed due to forcefully extending nation's authority to be recognized as forcibly imposed obedience of knowledge. The whole set of knowledge has been disqualified for being inadequate or insufficiently elaborated which was beneath the level of cognition. It is not to explain how the things were but rather how the narrative of reality was established or built as to prescribe a norm.

### Critic

Her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (which exists in several forms - I'll be examining the longest version, which appears in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*) displays a dazzling array of tactical devices designed to ward off or preemptively neutralize the attacks of critics. We might say of Spivak what Althusser said of Lacan - that the legendary difficulty of the essay is less a consequence of the profundity of its subject matter than its tactical objectives: "to forestall the blows of critics to feign a response to them before they are delivered" and above all, to resort to philosophies apparently foreign to the endeavor "as so many intimidating witnesses thrown in the faces of the audience to retain the respect." To acknowledge this does not automatically imply a criticism of Spivak (which is precisely why I cited the case of Lacan the importance of whose work for me at least is unquestionable after all, tactics are dictated by the features of the concrete situation.

### 3 Socialized Capital

"According to Foucault and Deleuze the oppressed, if given the chance, and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics can speak and know their conditions"

Here Spivak talks of the margins that draw out the silenced center which is marked out by the violence of knowledge, illiterate men and women, the tribal's and the urban lower working class. Marx here speaks for the feminists, proletariats, the

oppressed and the third world people. According to Foucault and Deleuze if the oppressed are given a chance through uniting politics they can speak and become aware of their conditions. Spivak criticizes Foucault and Deleuze as they ignore the fact that power produces ideology and instead filling its place with the notion of culture. In this, she means an identification of the subaltern with the colonial subject who then functions as an agent of change. She remains critical of the subaltern historiographical projects in so far as it attempts to retrieve un-differential subaltern consciousness, which, according to her, is problematized by notions of class and gender. There are two important areas where Spivak demonstrates the operation in the conceptions about the "Third World" and the "Third World Woman". It is impossible to recover the "authentic" voice of the subaltern. Spivak's well-known argument is that the subaltern cannot speak for him or herself because the very structure of colonialism prevents the speaking. For the colonized woman, this is even more impossible because the double bind of colonialism represses her completely. She simply cannot represent herself, For example, in the case of dowry, which, we cannot refuse to give or deny. However, Spivak argues that the intellectual project must try to make visible the position of the marginalized. The subaltern must be spoken for, but not romanticized. Subaltern is that identity that has no possibility at social mobility.

### Critic

Spivak doesn't hold back in criticizing Foucault and Deleuze, and turns to especially insulting allegations, accusing them in cooperating with capitalism and imperialism, in essentialism, positivism, in false claims to objectivity and transparency, institutionalism and chauvinism. Spivak uses Marx and through rereading him criticizes those that to a large extent work within the tradition founded by him. Spivak employed a deconstructionist tactic which reads the objects of her criticism "against themselves". Finally, to add insult to injury, she appeals to their eccentric "black sheep" of the family, Jacques Derrida, whose method she favors over that of Foucault and Deleuze. And all through her offensive Spivak

makes sure to raise the shield of subject position that is supposed to neutralize the meaning of the words at the bottom of "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

#### 4 Identity-in-Differential

"Against possible charge that his approach is essentialist, Guha constructs a definition of the people that can be only an identity-in-differential"

Guha says that there are most of Indian elites who are at their best interested in the voices of the other but never to insist that colonized subaltern subject is irrecoverably diverse in kind or nature. A dependence upon western intellectuals to "speak for" the subaltern condition is woman as a subject. Brown woman oppressed as structural necessity. Saving brown woman is also a structural necessity. Gayatri Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak' show the connection with the colonized people who are not made to speak for themselves rather the colonizers speak on their behalf. It presents the point that woman is not able to speak. Marx breaks the classes in Society on the basis of the economic conditions. There is isolation of classes. It is working on the structural principle of a dispersed and dislocated class subject. The classification falls into dominant foreign group and dominant indigenous groups-the subaltern classes. Western feminist opinion is a battle over the right to individualism between women and men. Our effort is to give the Subaltern a voice in history. The white profess to save the brown women from the inhumanity of brown men. Bhubaneswari who committed suicide because as a freedom fighter she couldn't perform the work entrusted to her. In fact the Subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. That is why Spivak is concerned with the basic questions 'Can the Subaltern speak?'

#### Critic

It seems that Spivak's (and Said) answer to this question is a definite no, at least not without having their ethnocentrism and economical interests effecting the way they speak and eventually being a

repressive act. The inability, or invalidity, of westerners to speak about the other is derived, so is implied by Spivak, from their inability to listen to the other and understand him without enforcing their own western consciousness and values upon him. In the circle drawn by Spivak the colonial oppressor cannot speak about the Subaltern that he cannot hear since the subaltern cannot speak since the oppressor cannot listen to him. With everybody interlocked in this deaf-dumb cycle, it seems that Spivak leaves room for only one voice to speak – her own ,the female hybrid researcher that now poses the same claim for transparency and objectivity for which she criticized Foucault and Deleuze.

#### 5 Conclusion

Spivak then turns to Sigmund Freud in an effort to develop an appropriate model of intellectual work. Freud furthers the analysis of colonialism by helping us see how the very identity of whiteness itself is created in part through the self proclaimed benevolence of colonial action. Neither Freud nor Spivak is silent. They each make various determinate claims and Spivak says, reveal their \$political interests in those claims. The subaltern is not similarly privileged and does not speak in a vocabulary that will get a hearing in institutional locations of power. The subaltern enters social and intellectual discourse only rarely and usually through the mediating commentary of someone more at home in those discourses. If the problematic is understood this way, it is hard to see how the subaltern can be capable of speaking.

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