

Postmodernism in Literature
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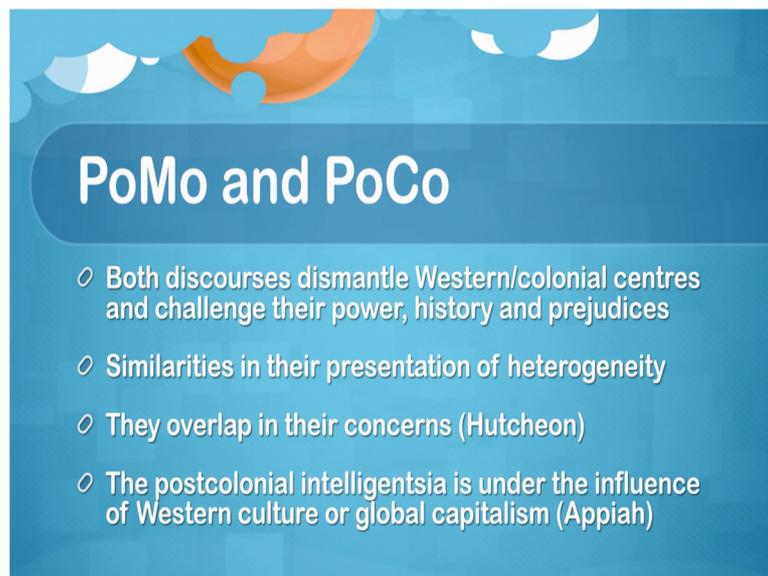
Week – 06

Lecture – 18

“Can the Subaltern Speak?”: Deconstructing the Postcolonial

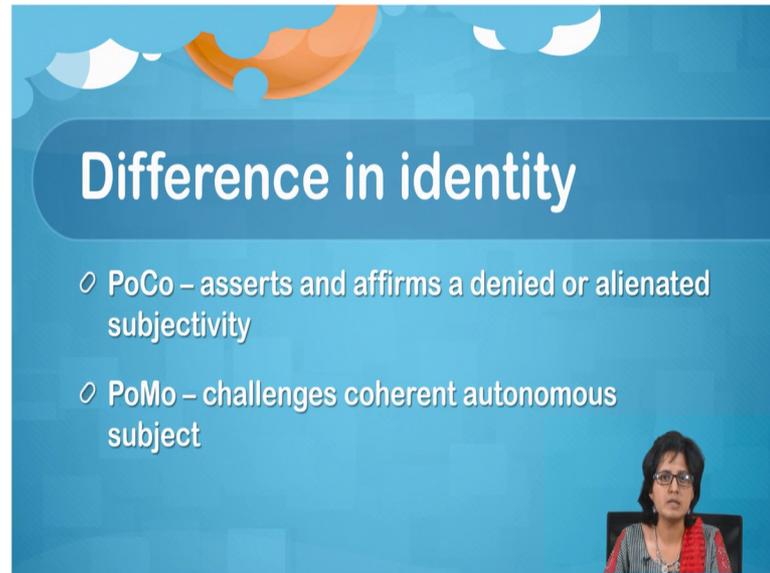
Hello and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. And today’s lecture we take a look at the celebrated essay can the subaltern speak written by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, And we also discuss how this essay has been seminal in deconstructing the postcolonial. In last couple of session we have been looking at the intersection of postmodernism and post colonialism.

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We have already taken a look at how both the courses dismantle western and colonial centres and also challenged their power history and prejudices. We have noticed some similarities in the presentation of heterogeneity and we also noted that they do have certain overlapping concerns. And particularly in that previous session we discussed a Appiah essay by high lights certain crisis in the postcolonality of the west, where the postcolonial intelligence is under the influence of western culture global capitalism.

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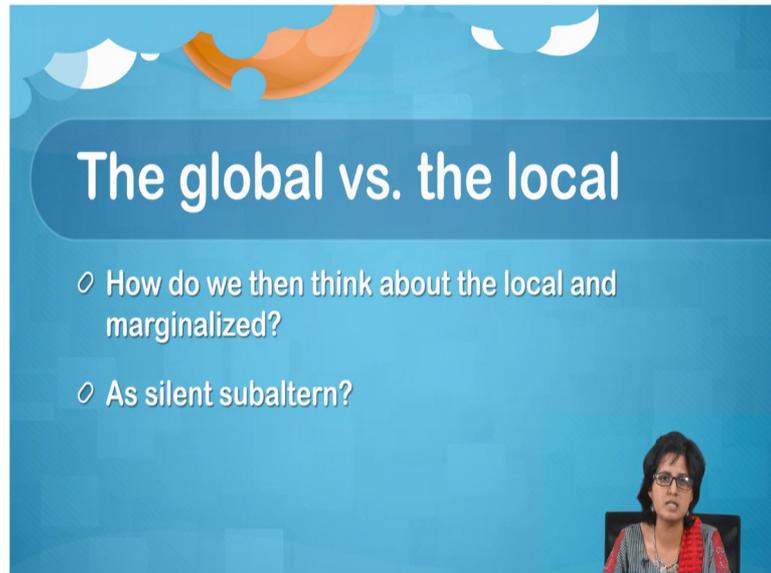
Difference in identity

- PoCo – asserts and affirms a denied or alienated subjectivity
- PoMo – challenges coherent autonomous subject

While there are number of similarities between postcolonialism postmodernism; there are also certain references which needs to be dehydrate in this discussion a particularly in the way in which alienated is main conceived and being for grounded; why postcolonialism asserts and affirms a denied or a alienated subjectivity postmodernism on the other hand challenge is coherent autonomous subject.

So, in this essay which is also again changing essay in the discussions of postcoloniality; we find that is Spivak is talking about certain constructions of identity which are crucial in the postcolonial are subjectivity. And how through the framework of postmodernism one could one could critic the various context which are available particularly in the form of subaltern consciousness.

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The global vs. the local

- How do we then think about the local and marginalized?
- As silent subaltern?

And this also brings us to the question; if we talk about the global and the local and the context postcolonialism and as well as postmodernism. How do we then think about the local and the marginalized is there any way of talking about the marginalized other than foregrounding them as silent subaltern.

This essay can subaltern speak has been and the heart of controversial for a long time. And this essay as a number of question related to the a war the agency and power which are part of a subaltern subjectivities.

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The challenges

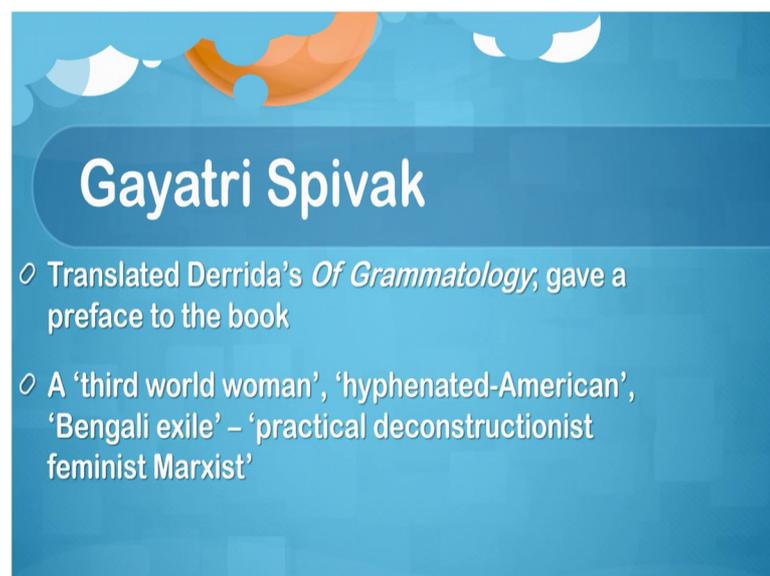
- "Postmodernism is politically ambivalent"
- The postcolonial is as implicated in that which it challenges as is the postmodern
- The metanarratives of European enlightenment – colonialism and modernity

Any discussion which tries to bring to get the postcolonialism, postmodernism is also float with the number of challenges. And one of them being the precision that postmodernism aspolitically ambivalent and in addition to this it is also important to notice the fact that the postcolonial is as implicated in that which challenges as is the post model.

For example, both of them they question, they tell into the negate and reject the metanarratives of European enlightenment colonialism and modernity. And we also find that the definitions of postcolonialism and the definition of the postmodernism are also inherent in the ways in which we define colonialism and modernity.

And this is something that we were discussing right from the beginning of this course; how there could be various postmodernism depending on the kind of modernism that one subscribe to in the same way there could be different versions of postcolonialities depending on how we tend to approach colonialism.

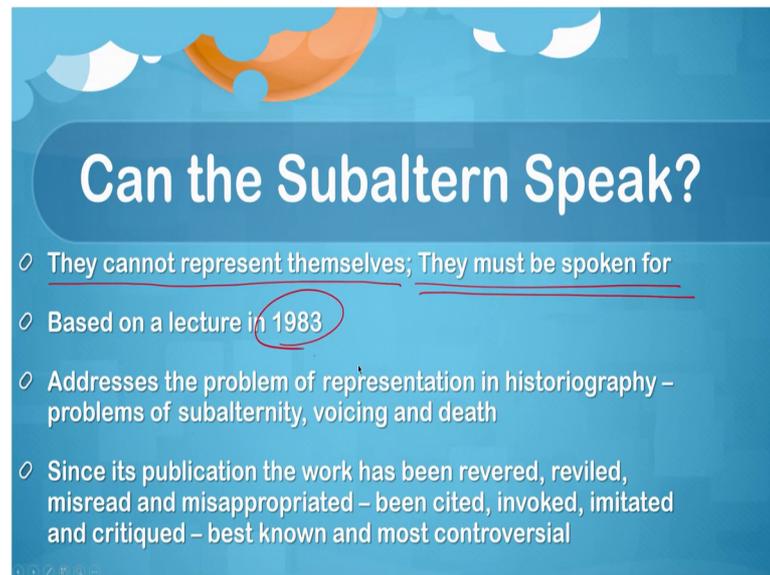
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This brings us to more focused discussion of Spivak essay can the subaltern speak; Spivak is celebrated figure in postcolonial studies, she also a rostr of fame with the translation of Derridas of grammatology, she also had written a wonder full profess to the book. She is been describe as a third world women hyphenated American as a Bengali exile and she also talks about herself as a practical deconstruction is feminist Marxist.

So, she perhaps a right kind of person to approach postcoloniality from various points of you and for the same reason it is only appropriate that we include Spivak's essay in this in this discussion where we locate the intersections between postcolonialism and postmodernism.

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Whereas the central thesis of the essay second subaltern speak is that the subaltern cannot represent themselves they must be spoken for.

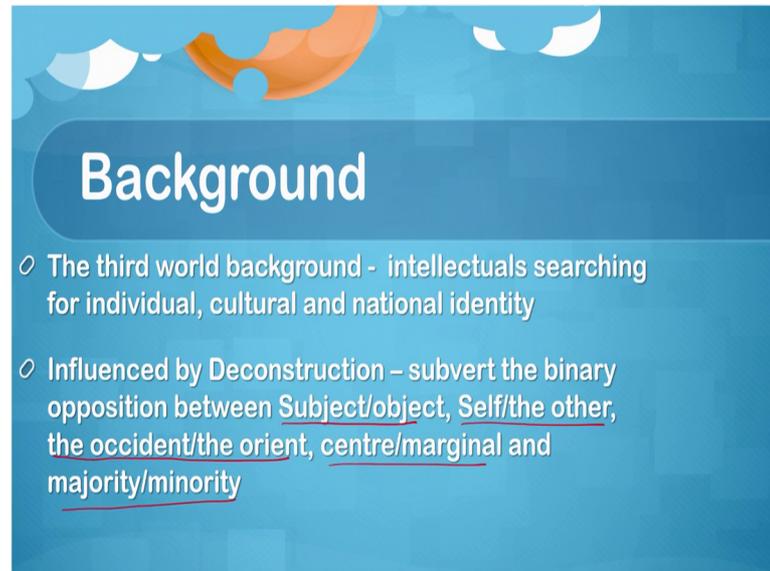
And through a series of formulations, through a series of case study, through a series of discussions which are part of postcolonial studies.

Spivak is the leading is to the conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak for themselves; this essay though established in 1988 is based on a lecture which Spivak gave in 1983; it also address that problems of representation in historiography in that sense it could be also seen as part of the lot of work which was published by subaltern study historians. And is also talks about the various problems of the subalternity voicing and death; and these are also certain a ways in which she accesses this the problems which are at the heart of the subaltern subjectivities.

And since the publications this essay 1988; this has been revered, reviled, misread and misappropriated in different context and work has also been cited invoked imitated and

critique and this could be easily considered as the best known and the most controversial of a Spivak's works.

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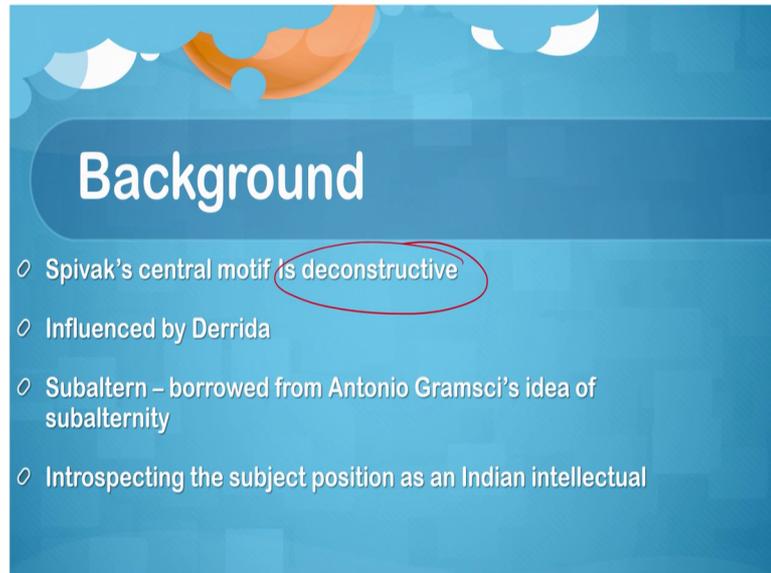


And this is a background to the writing of this essay she place is this essay in the context of the third world background; where in intellectuals are searching for individual cultural national identity.

In that sense I also encourage you to see the connections between Appiah and Spivak where Appiah is also extremely critical of the certain ways in which African postcolonialism had been engaging with idea of postcoloniality the concept of postcoloniality from a predominantly western a west centric view. What makes Spivak's very different and closer to the post modern approach? Is her being heavily influenced by the construction again let me remind you she was the one who translated Derridas who had put for the ideas of the constructions.

And she in her most of her works particularly in this work and the subaltern speak she is seeks. So, someone the binary opposition between are subjects and object, self and the other the occident and the orient; the centre and the marginal and the majority and the minority. And this version of the binary opposites and this rejection of this binary opposites is also at the heart of most of postmodernist poststructuralist depends.

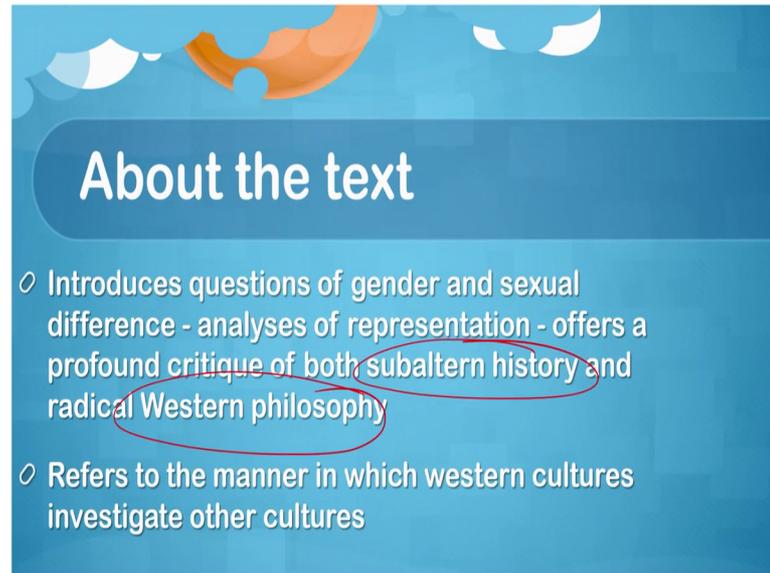
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If you analyse the second subaltern speak in detail we also notice that Spivak's central motif is deconstructive her being heavily influenced by Derrida and Subaltern is also what she borrowed from Antonio Gramsci is idea of subalternity. And in that sense we also see a very power full influence of the Marxist historians, she also uses this essay to introspect her own subject position as an Indian intellectual.

Does in multiple way this essay could be seen as an extremely critical intervention which a questions and I change the paradigms of all kinds of discussion related to postcoloniality as well as postmodernism.

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About the text

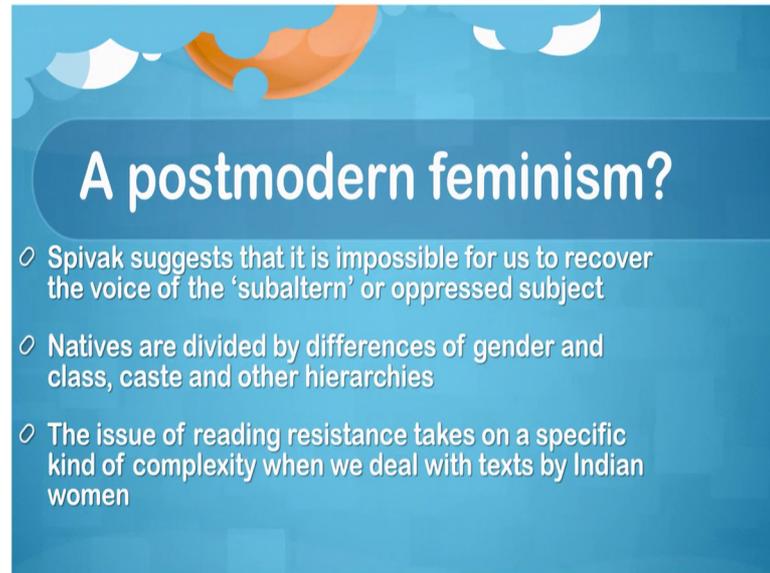
- Introduces questions of gender and sexual difference - analyses of representation - offers a profound critique of both subaltern history and radical Western philosophy
- Refers to the manner in which western cultures investigate other cultures

It will be hard task to offer a summary of the text can the subaltern speak ah; it would have sufficed to say that the text introduces questions of gender and sexual difference, it analysis various forms of presentation and also offers a profound critique of both subaltern history and radical western philosophy.

While she is conscious about the ways in which western philosophy and western narratives; inform the construction of the subaltern history, she also allergic to the fact that there is a way in which the subaltern history and subaltern subjectivities have been subjugated under the post of the western philosophical and critical metanarratives.

And she also refers to the manner in which western cultures investigate other cultures she gross her attention particularly to be Sati to pay part of the colonial history. And she also highlight the various ways in which the debate by stage in particular ways. So, we should denied any sense of agency voice or a power to the subaltern.

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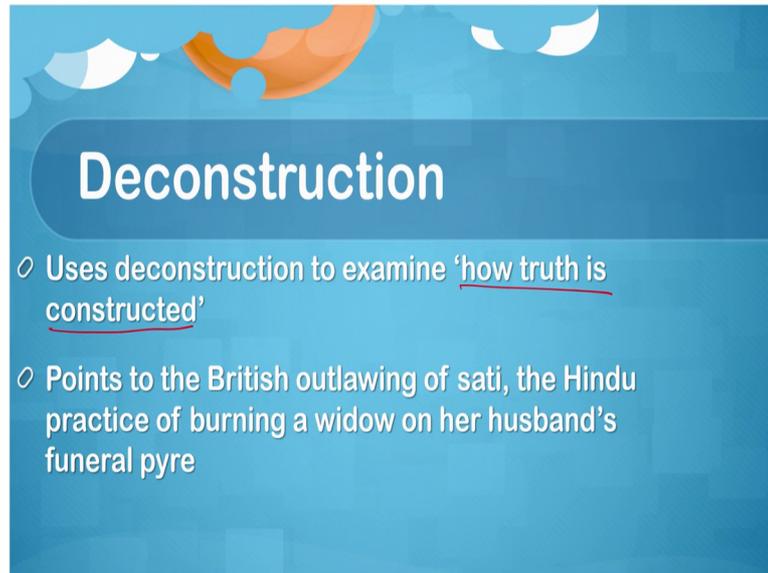


And it is a very much possible see Spivak is a postmodern feminist and can subaltern speak as a work of postmodern feminism. Spivaks suggest in this work that it is impossible for us to recover the voice of the subaltern or oppressed subject. And this she argues by way of the fact that natives are divided by differences of gender class caste and other hierarchies. And these set of hierarchies are also certain kind of hierarchy; so, which the western historical framework. So, the hell western sociological from works are not very familiar with.

So, it is just gap it is this absence of a certain dialogue that she tries to problems at that in her discussion during this essay. And she also take this issue of weeding resistance and she argues this is takes on a specific kind of complexity when you deal with text by Indian women. Here Spivak comes across as a feminist who is willing to critique not just the tenets of a postcolonialism and postmodernism, but also the tenets over tenets on which feminist historiography that has been built.

And she uses a certain entry points which is a Sati to pay or another private story that she uses towards the end of a receipt that of a young woman named Bhubaneswari Bhaduri and she uses these entry points to talk about these various metanarrative in a critical fashion.

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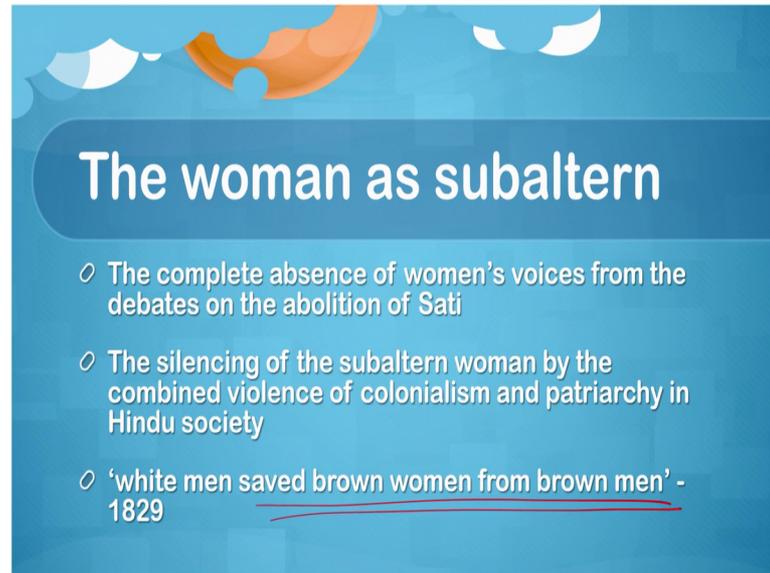


I just do not it is also interesting to look at how she uses deconstruction to make her arguments move fine an; she uses the construction to examine how truth is constructed.

And here we also see parallels between, Spivak's retrics and the Vasanise Phosphorian philosophies and theories has been built. And they also talked about how truth is a much niketan much contested notion and there is an impossibility to see the real to real or the truth of a true, when we are or when everything is being mediated by various other forces at work various other hierarchical forces.

And offerenstincs in this works she points to the British outline of the Sati which is the Hindu practice of burning a widow on a her husband's funeral pyre.

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The woman as subaltern

- The complete absence of women's voices from the debates on the abolition of Sati
- The silencing of the subaltern woman by the combined violence of colonialism and patriarchy in Hindu society
- 'white men saved brown women from brown men' - 1829

And she also close attention to how there is a complete absence of women voices from the debates on the abolition of Sati. And the debates which were related to the abolition of Sati was one of the major anti colonial rhetoric on which the history of the subaltern in the history of the nationalist movement itself has been written.

And would rather than focusing on that event of first say, rather than focusing on the debate were same Spivak's and courages us to look at the ways in which the subaltern women have been silent. She talks about how the silencing of the subaltern women by the combined violence of colonialism and patriarchy in Hindu society. And also leave the foundations of certain kinds of historiography is being produced.

And for example, she draws attention to the night 1829 abolished Sati British law abolish Sati and in 1829, she talks about how did even had been presented as white men saving brown women from brown men. This is a major entry point that she uses to talk about the voice the agency and the power which this subaltern had or the subaltern never had.

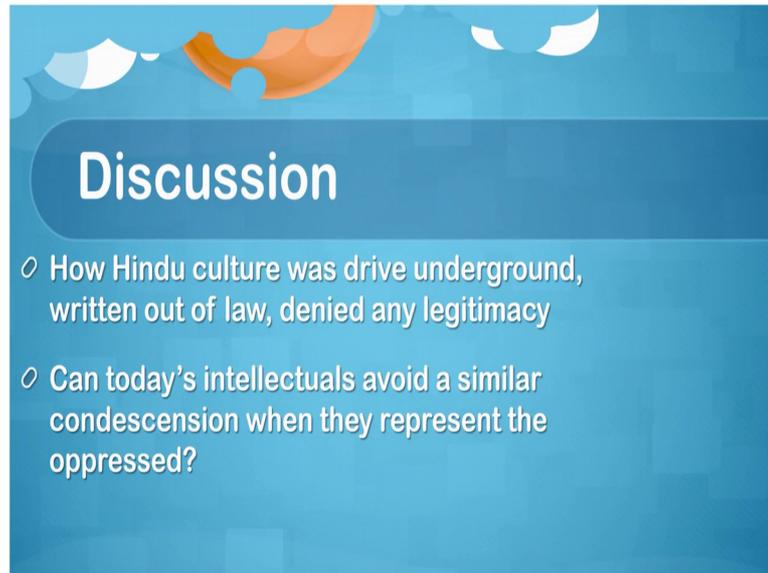
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So, what are the implications in talking about Sati in this work which also talks about the postcolonial presentation of the subaltern subjects. While this intervention of abolishing Sati saved some lives and may have given women a certain sensible modicum of free choice; though not into alienating an idea of free choice, it also served to secure British power in India and to underscore the asserted difference between British civilization and Indian barbarism.

So, whatever was presented as part of western modernity, whatever was presented as a product of western enlightenment eurocentric enlightenment where highlighted as part of good civilization. And whatever was part of Indian tradition quote unquote Indian traditional or Indian culture were also presented as barbarian practices. Spivak's also tells how this kind of story telling; this sort of a narrative had also led to a certain construction of the image of the subalterns as well as the subaltern stories and historiography in general.

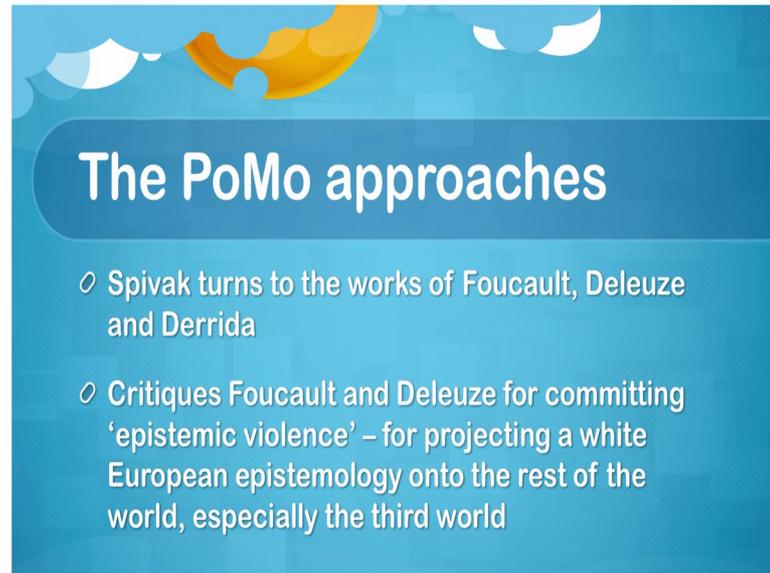
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As Spivak proceed further discussions; she illustrate how Hindu culture was driven underground, written outer flow and denied any legitimise see through this sort of a privilege hierarchical kind of a narrative and a retric which was in place. And she also ask this question, but it today's intellect weather the today's intellectuals can avoid a similar condescension when they represents the oppressed and this question remain the heart of the discussion in the essay can the subaltern speak.

And this question about how one can avoid the tone of condescension or how one can given agency to the subaltern; when we are talking about the subordinate continues to remain at the heart of discussion in a number of post colonial context.

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And how can this essay be cited as an example of post modern approaches been used.

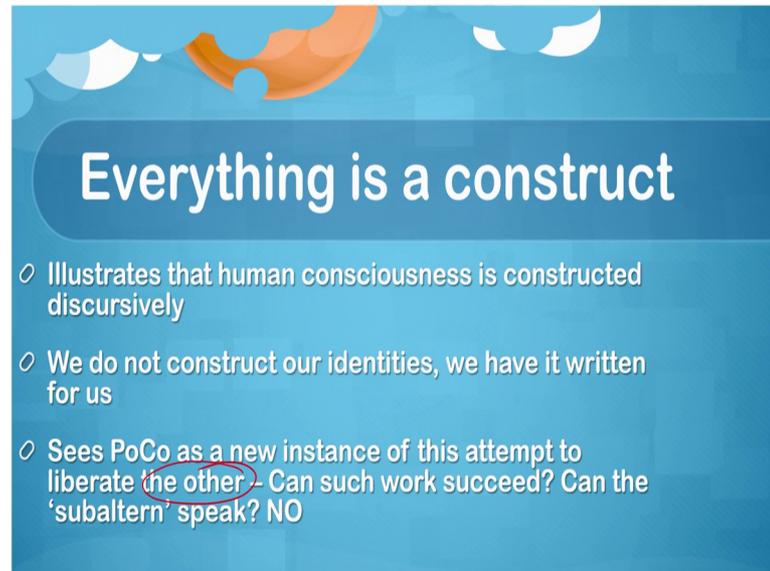
Spivak at some points and in this essay turns to the works of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida. And then these are also a theories and philosophers that we already taken a look at; one Spivake uses the number of post structuralism approaches and while she remains inducted to be Derridian philosophy and the deconstruction approaches.

She also critiques Foucault and Deleuze for committing epistemic violence; she is very conscious of the fact that though she herself belongs to a certain poststructuralism mode of criticism, though she herself passions and regulate her problematic within the post structural is irritatic she also acknowledges the ways in which in a certain epistemic violence had been committed by these predominantly eurocentric western thinkers. She also highlights the no ways in which a certain kind of a white a European etymology was projected through these pretty through the critiques of a Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida and how they also eventually ended up of forcing a certain kind of an epistemology on to the rest of the world; especially the third world.

So, in this context we find Spivak's turning the very tools used by the postmodern is against them. The postmodernism had them critiques in the predominant of certain metanarrative. And here we find Spivak as a postcolonial feminist critique critiquing the very ways in which the post modern theories had have also been imposing a certain kind

of a rhetoric a certain kind of a framework on to the rest of the world particularly the third world.

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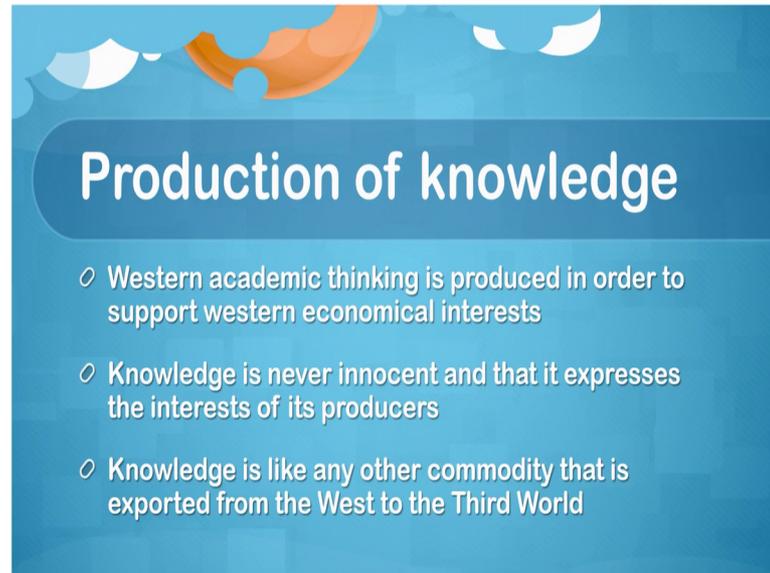


In the cause of the D S I V also we can see how the acetous the line of the deconstruction is a practice of everything being a construct through. The S S Spivak illustrates that human consciousness reconstruct discursively and she also uses the example of the subaltern subject for this. We do not constructed identities and we have written for this is especially true when it comes to the subaltern position of a person who is also located in the third world.

And she see postcolonialism as a new instance of this item to liberate the other; the other being one of the important ways in which postcolonial criticism talks about the subaltern. Spivak ask very important question whether such work in succeed or not can the subaltern speak as a title of B S I course and her answer is no. Though she is though she acknowledges the ways in which postcolonial studies in postcolonialism as a of framework; opens at certain avenues with discussion she is a very sceptical about the ways in which of the subaltern games a sense of agency or the subaltern games any kind of power or voice within this frameworks.

Because these frameworks are also predominantly western, they do not get any sense of agency, we do not get any sense of power to the ones who are the marginalised; the ones who are double marginalization in terms of where a allocation in terms of their status.

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Production of knowledge

- Western academic thinking is produced in order to support western economical interests
- Knowledge is never innocent and that it expresses the interests of its producers
- Knowledge is like any other commodity that is exported from the West to the Third World

And when this movie also begin to critique the production of knowledge in postcolonial postmodern society, she talks about how western academic thinking its produce in order to support western economical interest. And this is always something that we find in fabulous and discussions of a Spivak as well as Appiah.

And she also argues that knowledge is never innocent and that expresses interest of hits produces, this is there also find a very predominance a postmodern rhetoric at work and as a postcolonial protect. Spivak is also called conscious of the fact that knowledge is like any other commodity that is exported from the west to the third world.

Here we find a various ways in which one could identify parallels between the works of postcolonialis and work of postmodernist.

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Agency and power

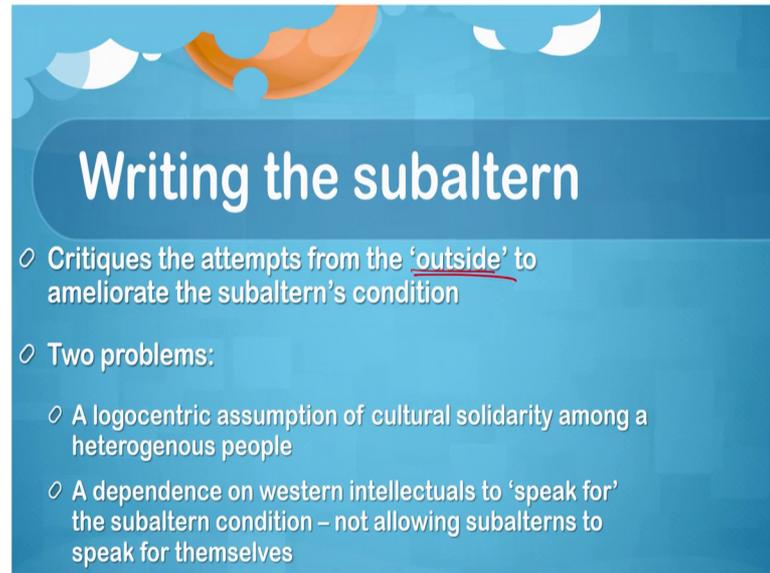
- Speaks against the tendency of political movements to romanticise the other
- The suggestion that all third world peoples stand in the same relation to global capitalism and should respond to it in the same way is 'essentialist'
- Leftist intellectuals essentialize the subaltern – replicate the colonialist discourses they attempt to critique

This brings us to the question of agency and power. In fact, if you could if we can identify two major things which are being critique in this essay can subalterns speak. We can easily identify the issues of agency and power in the context of a postcolonial feminism. Spivak speaks against the tendency of political movements to romanticize the other.

And she is also very critical of the suggestion that all third world people will stand in the same relation to global capitalism and respond to it in the same way. And this is a position that he identifies as being essentialist and it is this essentialism against which she primarily speaks. And she particularly target the left it intellectuals who tend to essentialist the subaltern. And here we also find she uses the Marxist framework to critique the Marxist critical practices itself; she also argues that the leftist intellectuals in their attempt to essentials subaltern, they eventually end up replicating the colonial discourses that the atom to critique.

So, here find here we find interesting ways in which Spivak invokes certain events from history, certain frameworks from history and also exposed them for what they fail to do.

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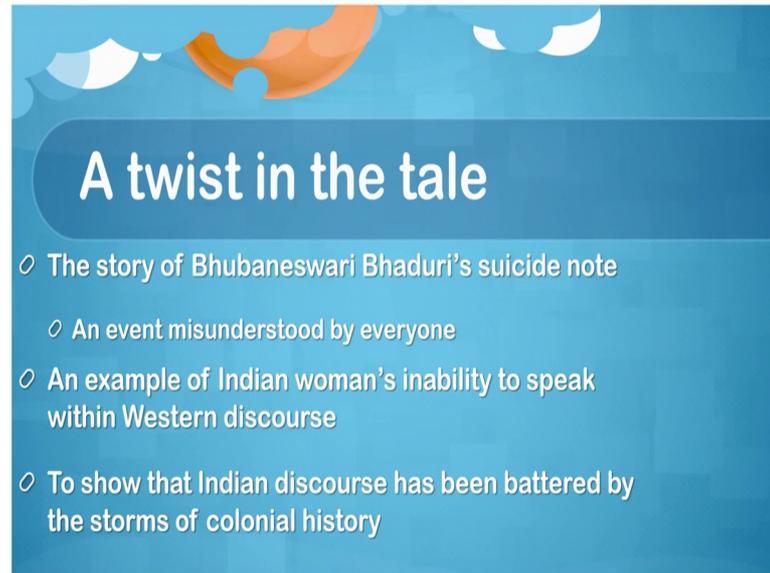
Writing the subaltern

- Critiques the attempts from the 'outside' to ameliorate the subaltern's condition
- Two problems:
 - A logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogenous people
 - A dependence on western intellectuals to 'speak for' the subaltern condition – not allowing subalterns to speak for themselves

Now, we come to the heart of Spivak's essay where she brings a speech of writing the subaltern. Spivak is very critical of the many attempts from the outside to ameliorate the subalterns condition. She identifies two major problems that could arise in trying to attempt to write the subaltern from the perspectives of outside; The first one being that logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people as a dangerous assumption.

And she is also extremely critical of any such assumption which is also inherently essentialist. And secondly, she argues that when will attempt to write the subaltern from the outside; there is a certain dependence on western intellectual to speak for the support and condition. And this condition does not allow the subaltern to speak for themselves; this remains at the heart of her essay, these issues are continuing to be discussed in the contemporary within postcolonial studies.

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And it is a said point 3 brings in a twist in the tale by talking about the story of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri who had left a suicide note behind her. Bhubaneswari Bhaduri is not a well known person, she is not celebrity, she is not a historical figure either and she uses this story this incident as a text to analyse the complete absence of the subalterns voice.

Bhubaneswari Bhaduri becomes a text over here and she is a young woman who was forced to hang herself because she did not want to participate in a certain assassination which she was assigned to commit. In fact, she committed suicide, but I just have protest against this assassination that she did not really agree with.

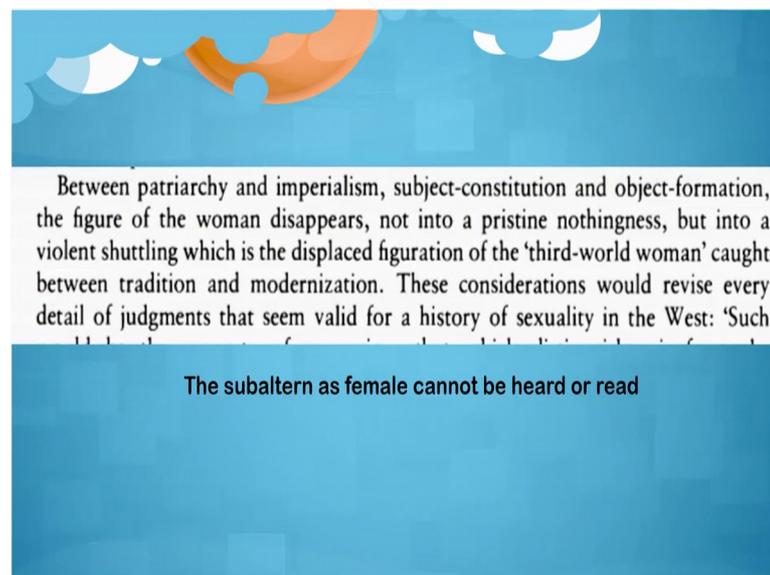
But the political act of a this protest was completely negated and the story was written by her family and by the society in totally different way. Bhubaneswari Bhaduri suicide is not seen as a protest on the contrary it was conveniently written of as an act of petty personal slide; it was seen as the outcome of a failed love affect. The political nature of the act which originally intended was totally negative and totally denied.

This eventually went down in history within the domestic history, within the societal history as an event on misunderstood by everyone. Spivak uses this event to talk about denial of agency the denial of voice within the subaltern and she you also uses this example to talk about Indian women's inability in general to speak within western discourse. When one is being asked to speak within a predominantly western discourse;

there is no way in which one could also claim agency. And this is the problem that she addresses, this is the problem which continues to be controversial within the discussions of the postcolonialism.

And she also uses the tale of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri to show how Indian discourse has been better by the storms of colonial history; how there is an impossibility to reclaim identity to reclaim agency and reclaim voice when one continues to write the story within a predominantly colonial framework within a predominantly colonial history.

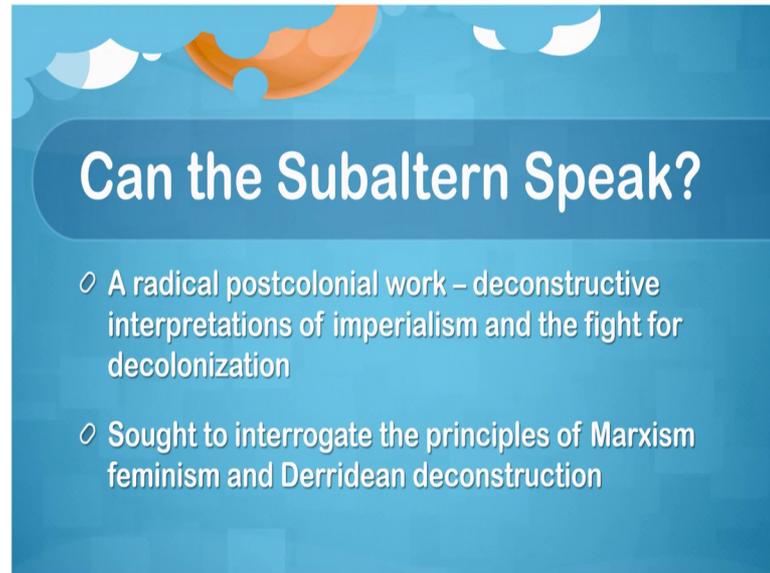
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And now I read out you a certain except from the essay can subaltern speak where is Spivak illustrates that the subaltern as female cannot be hear or read, but in patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation; the figure of the women disappear not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third world women caught between tradition and modernization.

It is the disappearance of the figure the women that is Spivak finds extremely disturbing. And it is this disappearance that she tries to question, that she tries to engage within the essay can the subaltern speak.

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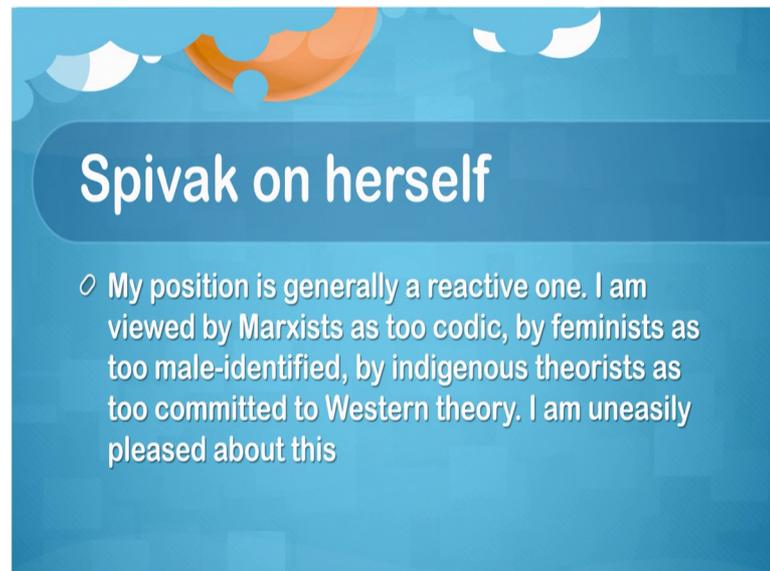


Can the Subaltern Speak?

- A radical postcolonial work – deconstructive interpretations of imperialism and the fight for decolonization
- Sought to interrogate the principles of Marxism feminism and Derridean deconstruction

So, can the subaltern speak in multiple ways can be seen as a radical postcolonial work it talks about the it engages with deconstructive interpretations of imperialism and also are the fight against the colonization. And she also a seeks to interrogate the principles of Marxism and feminism within a predominantly Derridean deconstruction.

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Spivak on herself

- My position is generally a reactive one. I am viewed by Marxists as too codic, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western theory. I am uneasily pleased about this

And this is what Spivak once told about herself the my position is generally a reactive one; I am viewed by Marxists as too codic, by feminists too male identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to western theory. I am uneasily pleased about

this; it is such an ambivalent position it is such a complicated position that also enables us to talk about Spivak within postmodernist framework as well.

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I have attempted to use and go beyond Derridean deconstruction, which I do not celebrate as feminism as such. However, in the context of the problematic I have addressed, I find his morphology much more painstaking and useful than Foucault's and Deleuze's immediate, substantive involvement with more 'political' issues – the latter's invitation to 'become woman' – which can make their influence more dangerous for the US academic as enthusiastic radical. Derrida marks radical critique with the danger of appropriating the other by assimilation. He reads catachresis at the origin. He calls for a rewriting of the utopian structural impulse as 'rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us'. I must here acknowledge a long-term usefulness in Jacques Derrida which I seem no longer to find in the authors of *The History of Sexuality* and *Mille Plateaux*.⁸⁹

The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.

However it is towards the end of the essay that Spivak begins to show predominantly postmodernist tendencies when she seeks to question even the postmodernist framework within which she begins to locate her work and the outset.

We even within her predominantly post structuralist position by way of her reuse of the deconstruction, we find that she finds improved into the critiques against postmodernism as well. And here I will extensively from the latter half of the essay towards the end of the essay.

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acknowledge a long term usefulness in jacques Derrida which I seem no longer to find in the authors of the history of sexuality and mille plateaux.

Here she is very clearly privileging the usefulness of Derridean deconstruction (Refer Time: 25:14) are the Foucaults and Foucaults and Deleuzes work. And this does not essentially mean that she is extremely uncritical of ways in which Derridas work is also predominantly within a western framework, but she also brings us certain political slant to the use of post modern theories over here.

And this how she is the subaltern cannot speak; there is no virtue global laundry lists with woman as a pious item representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish, we cannot entirely say that the essay ends on a an negative or an pessimistic node.

While she is conscious of the fact that subaltern cannot speak; she is also very positive and more optimistic about the role of the feminist intellectual which could emerge in a very different way perhaps in the coming decades.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:13)



To some of it would be possible to say that there is a certain postmodern effect that this postcolonial work has (Refer Time: 26:23) subaltern speak. Spivak has been able to

successfully politicize Derridean deconstruction with the aim of elaborating a technique for emancipator readings and cultural involvements.

This is also against the predominant criticism against postmodernism in general that postmodernism is politically ambivalent that we cannot be used for any kind of constructive political criticism. We find Spivak using deconstruction as a method and as a tool to engage with the subaltern consciousness and expose the absences and gaps within a nationalist as well as a colonialist historiography.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:59)

Deirdre McCloskey

I've been most things in my life: a positivist social engineer, a Joan Baez socialist, a man. Now I'm a free-market feminist, a quantitative postmodernist, a woman. I'm not ashamed of these changes of mind. As Keynes replied to the complaint that he had changed his mind on free trade, "When I get new information I change my mind. What do you do?"

My main point here is that it's possible to be postmodernist and procapitalist and feminist all at once. Of course I think it's not merely "possible": I think it's desirable and natural. The three hang together, I claim. Together they do good work in the

The postmodern conundrum and possibility!

As and when we why interrupt I will also leave you whether certain code from McCloskey. This is from her conversations with us Spivak and this is a passage with particularly exposes the postmodern conondromon possibility which is at the heart of a discussion from the beginning of this course.

McCloskey writes I feel most things in my life a positivist social engineer a Joan Baez socialist; a man. Now I am free market feminist a quantitative postmodernist a woman, I am not ashamed of these changes of mind as Keynes reply to the complaint that he has changed his mind on free trade; when I get new information I change my mind what do you do?.

My main point here is that it is possible to be postmodernist and procapitalist and feminist all it once. Of course, I think it is not merely possible; I think it is desirable and

natural the three hang together; I claim together they do good work in the world. So, on this positive encouraging note we wind up today's session, I look forward to seeing when the next session.

Thank you for listening.