Chapter 2

GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY-SPIVAK

2.0 INTRODUCTION:

Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak was born in Calcutta (India) in 1942 in a middle class family. She received an undergraduate degree in English at the University of Calcutta (1959). After this she completed her Master’s in English from Cornell University, and then pursued her Ph. D. while teaching at University of Iowa. Her dissertation was on W. B. Yeats directed by Paul de Man titled “Myself I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W. B. Yeats”. She is a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University in New York. She has also taught at Brown, Texas at Austin, UC Santa Cruze, Universite Paul Valery, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Stanford, University of British Columbia, Goethe Universitat in Frankfurt, Riydha University and Emory. Before coming to Columbia in 1991, she was the Andrew W. Mellon professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh. She has been a Fellow of the National Humanities Institute, the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan, the Humanities Research Center at the Australian National University, the Center for Historical Studies (Princeton), the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio. She has been a Kent Fellow and a Guggenheim Fellow. Among her distinguished Faculty Fellowships is the Tagore Fellowship at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India). She has been a member of the Subaltern Studies Collective.

Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak is one of the most influential figures in contemporary critical theory. She is perhaps the best known for her overtly political use of contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the legacy of colonialism on the way we read and think about literature and culture. She has challenged disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic
philosophy by focusing on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalized by dominant Western culture: the new immigrant, the working class, women and postcolonial subject. By championing the voices and texts of such minority groups, she has also challenged some of the dominant ideas of the contemporary era. Her lecture in 1992, Davie Memorial Lecture at Cape Town is a noteworthy one. She is on editorial board of many journals, among them Cultural Critique, Boundary 2, New Formations, Diaspora, ARIEL, Rethinking Marxism, Public Culture, Parallax, Interventions. She is active in rural literary teacher training on the grassroots level in Aboriginal India and Bangladesh. Her name is primarily associated with the concept of postcolonial Studies and along with Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. She is regarded to be one of the most important representatives of this Anglo-American theoretical field.

Gayatri Spivak is a literary critic and theorist. She is best known for the article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which is considered a founding text of postcolonialism. She is also known for her translation of Jacques Derrida’s ‘Of Grammatology’. This translation brought her to prominence. After this she carried out a series of historical studies and literary critiques of imperialism and feminism. She has often referred to herself as a “Marxist, Feminist and Deconstructionist.” Her ordering ethic-political concern has been the tendency of institutional and cultural discourses/practices to exclude and marginalize the subaltern, especially subaltern women.

I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary but I can break rules. (Spivak, 1990:27)

Breaking rules of the academy and trespassing disciplinary boundaries have been central to the intellectual projects of Gayatri Spivak, one of the leading literary theorist and cultural critic. She is known not only as a scholar of deconstructive textual analysis of verbal, visual and social texts but also as a global feminist
Marxist. She is widely acknowledged as the conscience of the metropolitan politics of identity. While she is best known as a postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak describes herself as a “Para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher”.

“My position is generally a reactive one. I am versed by Marxists as too codec, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western Theory. I am uneasily pleased about this” (1990:67).

Despite her outsider status, Spivak is widely cited in a range of disciplines. Her work is nearly evenly split between dense theoretical writing peppered with flashes of compelling insight and published interviews in which she wrestles with many of the same issues in a more personable and immediate manner. Her literary analysis and theoretical writings have invariably dealt with the deconstruction of neocolonial discourses and a feminist-Marxist approach to postcolonialism, particularly to the schematized forms of representing women in the Third World. She combines Marxism and deconstruction in the name of postcolonial feminism, and at the crossroads of literary studies and philosophy.

Known for her ample erudition and opaque theoretical texts, Spivak combines abstract philosophical speculation and personal reflection, creating a discourse that is both intimate and obtuse. Far from unconsciously absorbing the influences of other thinkers, she engages herself in a perpetual dialogue with the authors that inform her, reflecting on the inner conflicts and paradoxes inherent in her own theoretical position. Approaching discourses and institutions from the margins is more than a preference for Spivak, as she is often cast as an outsider or marginal figure herself. Spivak being an elite intellectual, the "Third-World woman", a "hyphenated American", and a Bengali exile living in the West, inhabits an identity that is nothing if not heterogeneous. She brings this personal eclecticism into her work. Due to drawing from Post-Colonial theory, philosophy, literary criticism, and economic theory, her texts are intellectual hybrids. The
course of a single essay shifts among disparate disciplines, simultaneously playing texts off of one another and weaving them together. She does not only analyze Post-Colonial entanglements of discursive power; but her texts exemplify and enact these same entanglements.

Gayatri Spivak’s reputation initially stemmed from her translation of Jacques Derrida's Deconstructive monograph “de la grammatologie”. Her introduction (Translator’s Preface) for the book enjoys a reputation as one of the few texts that rivals the opacity of Derrida's own writing. Being highly abstract and decidedly oblique, she brings an intensely personal, ethical perspective to her work. She is fascinated by human relations: encounters with otherness, intimacies created in the midst of differences, the responsibility implicit in every act of communication. She works to articulate a relation to others that is always singular, never preceded by socially produced categories. According to Spivak, the ideal relation to the other is "an embrace, an act of love".

Gayatri Spivak is a leading postcolonial critic who closely follows the lessons of deconstruction in addition to defiantly unassimilated ethics of deconstruction; she draws too, on Marxism and Feminism. She sometimes regarded as the ‘Third-World Woman’, convenient marginal or awkward special guest, the eminent but ‘visiting’ American professor, the Bengali middle-class exile, a success story in the star system of American academic life. She can not be simply singly positioned, or ‘centred’, biographically, profession or theoretically but her thought and writings regarding the process, conditions and her rational ways could title her as an ‘other’. Like Derrida she is interested in ‘how truth is constructed rather than in exposing error’. She confirms: ‘Deconstruction can only speak in the language of the thing it criticizes……. The only things one really deconstructs are things into which one is intimately mired’. This approach makes it very different from ideology critique. She also states in another occasion as: deconstructive investigation allows us to look at the ways in which we are
complicit with what we are so carefully and cleanly opposing. Postcolonial criticism draws attention to question of identity in relation to broader national histories and destinies. Spivak’s work is of special interest as she has made the unsynchronized and contradictory factors of ethnicity, class, and gender that compose such identities her own subject. She traces this ‘predicament of the postcolonial intellectual’ in a neo-colonized world in her own case as well as in the texts of the Western or Indian traditions she examines.

Her literary and critical contribution can be called as a milestone in the literary critical tradition of India. Her works include:

1. *Of Grammatology* (translation with critical introduction of Derrida’s text.)

2. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*

3 *Outside the Teaching Machine*

4. *A critic of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*

5. *Death of the Discipline*

6. *Other Asias*

Spivak’s literary criticism has worked to criticize the ideological function of English literature in the colonial context. Spivak’s intellectual work has been shaped by the experience of post-colonial migration from India to U.S.A., where she currently teaches. The intellectual tradition of left-wing, anti-colonial thought that was prevalent in India since the early twentieth century continued to tacitly influence Spivak’s work. *Of Grammatology* is a translation work. It is a translation of the leading French philosopher, Jacques Derrida’s *de la grammatologie*. She ordered Jacques Derrida’s book out of a catalogue in 1967
and began working on the translation some time after that. This book is a detailed discussion of the evolution of Derrida’s ideas concerning language. There are seven major topics in this book divided into two parts. The first part includes three and the second four topics respectively. Her translator’s introduction to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* has been variously described as “setting a new standard for self-reflexivity in prefaces.” Her introduction helped readers to make Derrida much more enjoyable. Here Spivak seems to be highly abstract and decidedly oblique as she brings an intensely personal, ethical perspective to her work. Spivak is fascinated by human relations. She works to articulate a relation to others that is always singular, never preceded by socially produced categories. Here she strongly states that the ideal relation to the other is “an embrace, an act of love”.

Spivak’s *In other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* is a collection of essays on various topics. It consists with fourteen essays divided into three parts. The first part entitled as *Literature* includes five essays. The second part entitled as *Into the World* includes next five essays. The final part, *Entering the Third World* includes four essays. This book proved her to be the leading literary theorist and cultural critic. This book indicates her interest in finding new ways to Marxism and Feminism to literary texts. Her essays focus on the growing need for academic departments to become increasingly integrated in order to better understand the world’s political, social and economic issues that hegemonically maintain the cultural and economic hierarchy. Spivak, coming from a Feminist, Marxist and Deconstructionist framework, shows how categories can help to place people, but should not be used as absolute boundaries of discourse. This book takes us to the very heart of Feminist Deconstructionist epistemology. Here she analyzed the relationship between language, women and culture in both Western and non-Western context. *In Other Worlds* has proved to be an invaluable tool for studying culture both our ‘own’ and ‘other’. As per National Review, *In Other Worlds* is admirably intellectually honest. The New York Times states Spivak, a
celebrity in academia, creates a stir wherever she goes. The Journal of Modern Literature asserts that always challenged and brilliantly argued these essays deserve careful thought. Here she highlights the urgent increased need of a deconstructionist theory of discourse for all texts. In conclusion, this text is an important collection of essays to widen our thinking and appreciation quality.

**Outside the Teaching Machine** is a very good book that deals with the Feminist literary criticism. Here she addresses the issues of multiculturalism, international feminism and postcolonial criticism. This book proved to be an exciting new collection of these issues. The contents of this book include six important topics- Interview, More on Power Knowledge, Marginality in the Teaching Machine, Woman in Difference, Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida and Negotiations. In this book Spivak defines deconstruction as the act of critiquing a conceptual structure that one cannot inhabit.

Spivak expresses her views about imperialism and orientalism in her book **Outside the Teaching Machine** as: postcoloniality- the heritage of imperialism in the rest of the globe- is a deconstructive case. Those of us from formerly colonized countries are able to communicate with each other and with the metropolis, to exchange and establish socially and transnationality, because we have had access to the culture of imperialism.

**A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present** is neatly divided into four topics. It also includes one short but brilliant appendix on deconstruction. The topics are titled as Philosophy, Literature, History and Culture. The most of the different sections of the chapters were published in piece work. She has reedited all topics in terms of the general argument of the book as a continuous thread of analysis. She has provided the longer and narrative footnotes which get progressively pushing into the text. The four chapters seem to bleed into one another. Philosophy and Culture open on to
Literature and History without clear disciplinary limitations. Spivak has followed the ‘impossible model’ as like Derrida and Bennington that puts in play a structure of invagination between footnote and text which threatens the stability of both. Spivak proved her ability in charting the foreclosure of the native informant in works of Kant and Hegel. She marks the limitations of native informant in literary representation. Her famous article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ opens the ‘text-tile’ of history and considers the possibility of a haunting that enables her to tell the epistemic story of imperialism as one of a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured. Finally reweaving the social text of globalization as our “Vanishing Present” she graphs the violence that link the contemporary high fashion textile industry to the exploitation of child labour in the South. This book is significant for many reasons, as it contains a revised version of ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ an ingenious reading of the German philosophers-Kant, Hegel and Marx and a sustained critique of the cultural and economic effects of globalization.

The post-colonial Critic brings together a selection of interviews and discussions in which she has taken part over the past five years; together they articulate some of the most compelling politico-theoretical issues of the present. In all her works, the students of Spivak will identify her unmistakable voice as she speaks on questions of representation, the politicization of deconstruction, the situations of post-colonial critics, pedagogical responsibility and political strategies. In this book, she identifies herself as a postcolonial intellectual caught between the socialist ideals of the national independence movement in India and the legacy of a colonial edification system.

Spivak’s Death of a Discipline is the collection of her remarkable series of lectures on the topic Comparative Literature as a Discipline. The contents include three important chapters: Crossing Borders, Collectivities and Planetarity. This book does not tell us that comparative literature is at an end but it charts a
demanding and urgent future for the field. Here Spivak strongly opposes the migrant intellectual approach to the study of alterity. She maps a new way of reading not only the future of literary studies but its past as well. This book is not a lament but a promise. In this remarkable series of lectures Spivak outlines the genealogy of comparative literature as a discipline, its successive intellectual affiliations and the potentialities that an association with area and cultural studies opens. In this work, she traces the outlines of a fascinating intellectual project grounded in a ‘planetary’ vision as opposed to ‘globalization’. This visionary work reflects the possibility of a reformed discipline that opens itself to learning from many quarters and also identifies emergent collectivities. This text disorients and reconstellates dynamic, lucid and brilliant in its scope and vision.

For almost three decades, Spivak has been ignoring the standardized rules of the academy and trespassing across disciplinary boundaries. In *Death of the Discipline*, she declares the death of comparative literature as we know it and sounds an urgent call for a ‘new comparative literature’ in which the discipline is given a new life, ‘one’ that is not appropriated and determined by the market.

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. Spivak's postcolonial perspective here offers an incomparable understanding of Asia in its multiplicity of differences, a tour-de-force from one of our era's the most brilliant critical thinkers.

Her critical theories are divided as:

i) Deconstruction Theory

ii) Marxism.

iii) Feminism.

iv) Subaltern Theory

Spivak’s chief concern can be summarized as a wariness of the limitations of cultural studies. Her critical work indicates the thought that postcolonial predicament is the uneasy marriage of Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction.

**2.1 DECONSTRUCTION THEORY:**

According to deconstruction, no work of literature, whatsoever, has been able to express exactly what it wanted to say and thus the critic’s business is to deconstruct and recreate them, taking their words as not the outward form of their meaning but only the “trace of a quest”. At the outset deconstruction is a departure from structuralism, more precisely the oppositional logic of structuralism. The deconstructionists have made a division of criticism into two types: ‘Metaphysical’ and ‘Deconstructive’. The ‘metaphysical’ criticism presupposes that the text has a fixed meaning which the critic is supposed to explain, whereas the ‘deconstructive’ criticism believes in the determinacy of
meaning. Deconstruction presumes that an author at once affirms and ‘unaffirms’, says and ‘unsays’ his meaning. Thus the business of deconstructionist is not to deconstruct the text but to show how the text has deconstructed itself. According to Rajnath:

one can safely argue that deconstruction is ‘a dismantling of the structure of a text. (1984:17-18)

Deconstruction is not a ‘method’ in the sense of a systematic pursuit of the text, but a “vigilant practice” to explore a ‘textual division’. Gayatri Spivak outlines the meaning and method of Deconstruction in her translator’s introduction to Of Grammatology in the following words:

Deconstruction seems to offer a way out the closure of knowledge by inaugurating the open-ended indefiniteness of texuality– thus placing it in the abyss. It shows us the allure of the abyss as freedom. The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom. (1976:IXXXVI)

Deconstruction rejects all earlier methods of criticism and supplies no single method. However, it helped us to see the critic not as a mere interpreter of the text but as a co-creator. When stretched too far, it enables the critic to overtake the author. That is what makes it controversial.

De Man’s deconstructive criticism has certainly influenced Spivak’s early readings of British colonial archives and official Indian historiography. She has increasingly sought to challenge the dominant ideas (like, circulation of people, money and information.) about contemporary globalization. She states that the idea that the new speed and flexibility of technology enables the effective transnational circulation of people, money and information is profitably regulated by rich, industrial the ‘First World’ nations, while the vast majority of the world’s population are living in a state of poverty and repression. By highlighting the
political and economic interests which are served by the economic text of globalization, Spivak exposes how the world is represented from the dominant perspective and geopolitical location of the ‘First World’ to the exclusion of other disenfranchised groups. Such a radical challenge to the truth claims of Western democracy and globalization has expanded the focus of deconstruction from textual analysis of literature or philosophy to include the contemporary economic and political text.

Spivak’s translation of and preface to Derrida’s book, ‘de la grammatologie’ has certainly played a vital role in presenting his thought to an English-speaking audience. Here she expands Derrida’s deconstructive thinking beyond the framework of Western philosophy, and sets it to work in diverse fields ranging from ‘Third World’ women’s political movements to postcolonial literary studies and development studies. Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak became a well-known figure in the academy after translating Jacques Derrida’s de la grammatologie (1967) into English which helped to cast a limelight on deconstructionist theory in the American Academy. Of Grammatology was published in 1976. She is a scholar of deconstructive approaches to verbal, visual and social texts. Her translation of Jacques Derrida initiated a debate on deconstruction in the Anglo-American Academy.

Derrida’s deconstructive strategies have been particularly generative for postcolonial intellectuals such as Homi Bhabha, Robert Young and Gayatri Spivak because they provide a theoretical vocabulary and conceptual framework to question the very philosophical tradition that has also explained and justified the subjection, depression and exploitation of non-Western societies. Spivak has stressed the potential usefulness of Derrida’s thought for making effective critical interventions in the discourse of colonialism, the contemporary global economy, and the international division of labour between the ‘First World’ and the ‘Third World’.
Deconstruction, a critical practice introduced by French philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida, strongly serves to introduce the assumption of Western thought by reversing or displacing the hierarchical “binary oppositions” that provide its foundation. She challenges the metaphysical premises that shape Western science and philosophy. She argues that the “structure” determining these discourses always presuppose a “centre” that ensures a point of origin, meaning, being or presence. According to her, the centre (unique) constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurally. Logocentrism, she says, establishes the metaphysical imperatives of truth, consciousness and essences that underwrite Western literature, theology and science. As per her views, any attempt to interrogate or to destroy the centre invariably causes the production of another centre. In other words, the entire history of the concept of structure must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre.

Gayatri Spivak’s ‘Translator’s Preface’ to Of Grammatology was written at a time when Jacques Derrida’s work was not widely known or understood, in the English-speaking world of philosophy and literary criticism. Here she offers a comprehensive account of the key philosophical debates that influenced Derrida’s early work as well as providing an intellectual context for Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy. Here she challenges the conventions and expectations of a ‘Translator’s Preface’ to produce a scholarly and critical introduction to Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy that is equal to many of the subsequent philosophical commentaries that have been published about Derrida’s thought. Spivak has mobilized Derrida’s deconstruction of Western philosophy to expand and develop debates among the ‘Third World’ intellectuals about the cultural legacy of colonialism, the ability of Western Marxism to describe the continued exploitation of the ‘Third World’ workers by the ‘First World’ multinational corporations; and the question of whether Western feminism is
appropriate to describe the histories, lives and struggles of women in the ‘Third World’.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses deconstruction to problematize the privileged academic postcolonial critic’s unknown participation in the exploitation of the Third World. She points towards deconstruction’s limitations in conceptualizing and sustaining an engagement of hierarchical binary oppositions, the postcolonial critic aiming at substantive social transformation or revolution finds herself with inadequate power to revise dominant power structures. Spivak has persistently and persuasively demonstrated that deconstruction is a powerful political and theoretical tool. To plead the political value of deconstruction, she focused on the rhetorical blind spots or grounding mistakes which stabilize conventional notions of truth and reality. She has foregrounded the textual elements that shape our understanding of the social world, and thereby questioned the binary opposition between philosophical or literary texts and the so-called real world. According to Spivak, deconstruction in the narrow sense domesticates deconstruction in the general sense. She states further as:

Deconstruction in the general sense, seeing in the self perhaps only a (dis)figuring effect of a radical heterogeneity, puts into question the grounds of the critic’s power. Deconstruction in the narrow sense, no more than a chosen literary-critical methodology, locates this signifying or figuring effect in the text’s performance and allows the critic authority to disclose the economy of figure and performance. (1998:22)

The above opinion indicates that there are two meanings of the Deconstruction: meaning with narrow sense and with the general sense. It challenges the critic’s power and can be called as a literary-critical methodology. She used the concept ‘deconstruction’ with a specific intellectual and political purpose to focus the reality of the dominant culture and to escape its stereotyped identifications.
Deconstruction came simply to name the last privileged defense of the canon being reduced to a powerful method which would reveal the sameness and the greatness of the major literary texts.

Spivak’s interest in Derrida’s intellectual project is not merely philosophical, but is also partly motivated by a desire to ‘dismantle’ the very tradition of Western thought that had provided the justification for European Colonialism. Her refusal to simply represent non-Western subjects comes from a profound recognition of how the lives of many disempowered groups have already been damaged by dominant systems of knowledge and representation. The deconstruction provides her to articulate this recognition with a critical strategy. According to Spivak, deconstructive reading practice guards against the universal claims of Marxism, national liberation movements or Western feminism, means to all the oppressed. She pointed out that the language of universal political have injurious and harmful effects on disempowered groups such as: the colonized, women or the workers. Spivak states that the binary opposition is problematic because it presents deconstruction as abstract philosophical method which is divorced from the material conditions of concrete political events. Spivak appreciates the greatest gift of deconstruction that questions the authenticity of the investigating subject without paralyzing the asker.

The concept, ‘deconstruction’, for Spivak, is neither a conservative aesthetic nor a radical politics but an intellectual ethic which enjoins a constant attention to the multiplicity of determination. She is absolutely committed to pinpointing and arresting that multiplicity at the moment in which an enabling analysis becomes possible. The difference between Spivak and Derrida is seen in their respective attitudes toward the pathos of deconstruction. Derrida writes: ‘the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work’. According to Spivak, the abiding question is a limit which cannot obscure the value, however provisional, of the rigorous analyses that deconstruction enables.
So, to grasp the interest of Spivak’s work necessitates going beyond the binary opposition between the First World intellectual production and the Third World physical exploitation.

Applying the strategies of Deconstruction to post-colonialism, Gayatri Spivak seeks to undermine the power of centralized discourses in the interest of cleaning a space for marginalized voices. For her, Deconstruction is not simply the practice of breaking things down. She states that it (Deconstruction) is not the exposure of error but constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced. It means that Spivak does not challenge truths head on, but descends to the level of the cultural and political formations that produce them. From the margins of central discourses, she interrogates the operations that engender them and hold them in place.

Spivak applies the concept Deconstruction to analyze the public-private hierarchy. She tries to explain it in relation with feminist activity. In the interest of the effectiveness of the women’s movement, emphasis is placed upon a reversal of the public-private hierarchy. Here she states:

Because in ordinary sexist households, educational institutions or workplaces, the sustaining explanation still remains that the public sector is more important, at once more rational and mysterious, and, generally, more masculine, that the private, the feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact, so much more important and threatening that a masculinist sexual politics is obliged, repressively to sustain all public activity. (1998:140)

The above discussion highlights the sex discrimination tradition. Here she applies the term deconstruction to wipe out this fixed construction or structure and bring forth the women to acquire the public sector reversing them. As per above thinking, Spivak seems to be feminist-deconstructionist. The opposition is thus not
merely reversed; it is displaced. So she states further that this practical structure of
deconstruction of the opposition between private and the public is implicit in all,
and explicit in some, feminist activity. And then feminist activity would articulate
or strive toward that fulfilled displacement of public (male) and private (female):
an ideal society and a sex-transcendent society. It means that deconstruction
teaches one to question all transcendental idealisms.

To sum up, Spivak’s thought has been greatly shaped by Derrida’s
critical strategies of deconstruction. Her use of deconstruction has often been
invoked to demonstrate a perceived contradiction between Spivak’s ‘materialist
commitment’ to engage with disempowered subaltern groups in the ‘Third World’
and the difficult theoretical language and methodologies she employs to achieve
this goal. We can easily observe the influence of Derrida’s deconstruction of
Western philosophical truth and the Western humanist subject as her postcolonial
thought.

2.2 MARXISM:

German philosopher, Karl Marx’s (1818-83) Das Capital (1867) laid
foundation of Marxist theory. The German Marxist critic, Gyorgy Lukacs
expressed his conception of totality in art. He lays emphasis on realism. Other
Marxist critics like Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin contest
Lukacs’ anti-modernism because they feel that a truly revolutionary art must
radically break with traditional forms. Gradually, Marxist criticism moved away
from Marxism as a system and became interdisciplinary in 1960’s. Raymond
Williams (1921-88) is a significant Marxist critic who relates literature to the lives
of people. Williams felt that the Marxist critics unduly separated economics from
culture and overlooked individualism. So he moved away from them by preferring
culture to ideology. Terry Eagleton asserts that literary text is the production of an
ideology but not an expression of it. He argues that the relation of the literary text to ideology should be viewed in terms of ‘overdetermination’.

Marxist critics have criticized deconstruction for ignoring the social and historical dimension of texts. Apart from deconstruction, Marxism is also linked with post-colonialism. Aijaz Ahmad’s *In Theory* (1992) is a systematic study of post-colonialism from Marxist’s perspective. Marxist criticism is an international discipline further cut into other schools of criticism such as: deconstruction, cultural studies and post-colonialism. The early Marxist critics were appealed by ‘ideology’ whereas neo-Marxist by ‘cultural materialism’. The Anglo-American Marxist critics have studied Marxist criticism from the angle of deconstruction and cultural studies. Marxist criticism has now adopted an interdisciplinary approach to literary studies.

Marxism is an urgent concern as it is crucially grounded in the Third World experience and concentrates on imperialism and exploitation. In the developed world today, the recent Marxist cultural criticism has revised the crude economistic models of base and superstructure. It has also forgotten the necessity of locating those cultural analyses within the organization of production and its appropriation of surplus. Marxism today, means nothing more than a commitment to a radical or socialist politics and the adoption of the classic mode of production narrative: the transitions from slave to feudal, to capitalist orders. The contemporary developed countries are difficult to be analyzed in the terms of elaborated in capital: the problems posed by the analysis of the enormous middle class; the decline in factory production; and, the growth of computerized production in the last ten years. In this context, it becomes plausible that only labour power cannot be the major productive element within the developed economies.
After the collapse of Soviet Communist bloc, the writing of Karl Marx has been widely perceived as irrelevant and outmoded by many political thinkers and economic theorists because Marx’s ideas no longer seem to have any obvious direct relationship to contemporary social and economic life in the Western world. Many contemporary intellectuals including Gayatri Spivak revisited Marx’s key ideas in the 21st century. Observing the brutal labour conditions under which many women workers and child labourers are employed in the postcolonial world stand as painful, they proved that Marx’s critique of capitalism is relevant to the contemporary economic world. Karl Marx restricted his thought to analyze the capitalism of Europe only. In spite of this, he has provided a central intellectual and political framework for many postcolonial theorists and the ‘Third World’ activists to negotiate and define particular forms of domination and resistance in the postcolonial world (Morton, 2003:93).

In the essay, “Scattered Speculations on the Theory of Value”, Spivak argues thoroughly focusing Marx’s account of exploitation grounded in the theory of surplus value. She expects the understanding of the labour theory of value to understand the theory of surplus value that Marx had adopted from classical economics. She plainly denies the labour theory of value that represents or transforms the labour to value to money to capital. According to her, we have to understand Marx’s account of value not as indicating the possibility of labour representing itself in value but as an analysis of the ability of capital to consume the use value of labour power. She breaks the chain of value-determinations, highlighting the general account of value particularly around feminism which makes labour endlessly variable both in relation to technological change and to political struggle. While arguing the concept value in literary criticism she states:

I will set forth a practical deconstructive-feminist-Marxist positon on the question of value in a narrow disciplinary context. The issue of value surfaces in literary criticism with reference to canon-formation. From this
narrowed perspective, the first move is a counter question: Why a canon? What is the ethico-politico agenda that operates the canon? (1998:213).

Here she denies the canon-formation idea that is based on narrowed perspective. This pattern of canon-formation indicates the concept of domination of Western on the Third World countries or of upper class on lower class, male on female. So she suggests the decentering the desire for the canon. But here she also accepts that a desire for alternative canon-formations also work with varieties of and variations upon the old standards. Spivak accepts Marx’s scheme of value and tells further that use-value is in play when a human being produces and uses up the product (or uses up the unproduced) immediately. Exchange-value emerges when one thing is substituted for another. Surplus-value is created when some value is produced for nothing. In other words value is the representation of objectified labour.

Being aware of the problem of Euro-centrism in Marx’s thought, Spivak criticizes Marx’s writing on India for trying to insert non-Europe into a ‘Eurocentric normative narrative’. (1999:72) She returns to Marx’s later writing on value and political economy in order to demonstrate the continuing importance of Marx’s thought to discussions of contemporary culture, politics and economics in a postcolonial world. Spivak approaches Marx’s writing through the lens of Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy. Spivak states that to go via Derrida toward Marx can be called a ‘Literary’ or ‘Rhetorical’ reading of a ‘Philosophical’ text. (1998:30) Spivak’s engagement with Marx after Derrida can be read as challenging Marx’s early thought on philosophical and ethical grounds: on philosophical ground because the early ‘humanist’ Marx suggested that the working-class struggle for economic equality and political emancipation in the 19th century Europe represented the political interests of all humanity, in all places, and at all times; on ethical grounds because the universal claims that were made in name of the industrial working class in Europe, excluded other disempowered
groups, including women, the colonized and the subaltern. So spivak’s rethinking of Marx’s later writing may seem to contribute to an ongoing theatrical debate about the politics of deconstruction, or the relationship between Marxism and deconstruction. Her rereading of Marx’s later economic writing is also importantly grounded in the concrete gesture to the contemporary exploitation of women’s (re)production bodies in the ‘Third-World’. In short, Spivak’s rethinking of Marxist thought is precisely a response to the changing gendered and geographical dynamics of contemporary capitalism itself.

Spivak also points out how global capitalism operates by employing working class women in developing postcolonial countries. It is not only as these women workers have no effective union representation, or protection against economic exploitation, but their gendered bodies are also disciplined in and through patriarchal social relations. According to Spivak, geographical dispersed conditions of contemporary capitalism are responsible for this situation. Spivak attracts our attention by emphasizing the thought how women’s productive bodies are site of exploitation under contemporary transnational capitalism.

Spivak, referring to Marx’s concept of value, states that the worker produces capital, because the worker, the container of labour power, is the source of value. She proceeds ahead and points out that ‘by the same token it is possible to suggest to the so-called the ‘Third-World’ that it produces the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the ‘First-World’. (1990:96) She also insists to apply Marx’s labour theory of value to contemporary readings of culture and politics. Spivak reasserts the importance of the economical in critical and cultural theory by emphasizing how the exploitation of women workers in the ‘Third-World’ provides the wealth and resources for intellectual culture in the ‘First-World’. Spivak further points out that the working-class women in the ‘Third-World’ are the worst victims of the international division of labour. (1998:167)
Gayatri Spivak portrays imperialism as a ‘worlding’ process that attempts to disguise its own workings so as to naturalize and legitimate Western dominance. According to her, to consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted and curricularized in English translation. It fosters the emergence of ‘the ‘Third World’ as a signifier that allows us to forget that ‘worlding’ even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline. Spivak suggests that the Third World, like the commodity fetish, becomes a sign that obscures its mode of production, thus making Western dominance appear somehow given or natural.

Spivak points out Marx’s Marxism which cannot account for the social injustices of capitalism in the terms of its own philosophical system. She traces incalculable moments in Marx’s discussion of value which are the conditions of possibility for a future social justice and political transformation. By emphasizing how socialism cannot manage without the capital relation, Spivak deconstructs the binary opposition between capitalism and socialism, which has traditionally grounded classic Marxist theories of emancipation. She also points out that the political independence has not led to the economic independence of many ‘Third-World’ countries due the huge national debt repayments to the ‘First-World’ banks and the gendered international division of labour. In Conclusion, Spivak’s persistent attempt to deconstruct capitalist system of value determinations is not simply a corrective theoretical reading of Marx, but an urgent call to articulate the cultural, political and economic conditions which silence the ‘Third-World’ woman in the hope that those oppressive conditions will eventually change.
2.3 FEMINISM:

Feminist literary criticism primarily responds to the way woman is presented in literature. It has two basic premises: one, ‘woman’ presented in literature by male writers from their viewpoint and two, ‘woman’ presented in the writings of female writers from their point of view. The first Premise gives rise to Phallocentrism criticism and the second leads us to Gynocentrism. Theoretical foundations of feminist criticism is said to be laid by Simone de Beauvoir’s book titled, *The Second Sex*. Three important books: i) Katherine M. Roger’s *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966), ii) Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking about Women* (1968), and iii) Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) gave this movement a turning point and also popularized this movement.

The feminist literary criticism has two dimensions: i) Woman as Reader and ii) Woman as Writer. The feminists believe that in order to understand woman’s position in the world, one has to understand the system of Patriarchy. Feminism is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but to change it to the advantage of women. The biological distinction between man and woman is an accepted fact, but the notion that woman is inferior to man is no longer acceptable to women in general and feminists in particular. The feminist movement aims at overthrowing social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women. Their quest is for self-knowledge and self-realization which can in turn lead to relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Feminist is generally thought of as a phenomenon of the 19th and 20th centuries. The most Anglo-American studies of women’s movement acknowledge some forerunners in the English and French Revolutions. Spivak, the literary critic, does not accept the necessarily revolutionary potential of the avant-garde, literary or philosophical. She finds that, even if one knows how to undo identities, one does not necessarily escape the historical determinations of sexism.
Feminist writers refuse to accept the ‘images of women’ as portrayed by male writers as they lack in authenticity. Feminists literary critics argue that if one studies stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history one would not learn what women have felt and experienced but what men have thought women ought to be. Gynocritics seek to formulate a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature ‘to develop new models’ based on the study of female experience rather than to adopt male models and theories. They take into account the feminist research done in the field of anthropology, history, psychology and sociology to formulate their critical principles. Women writers by way of challenging and recasting the male gaze in literature, rewrite and recreate the male created text from the feminist perspective. Liberal and Marxist feminisms postulate an identity for women in relationship to men that assumes a humanists essence for womanhood.

There are different types of feminist critics such as liberal, humanists and deconstructionists. Feminist literary criticism has given an opportunity to look at ‘women’ in literature from women’s point of view. In short, the feminist criticism is concerned with ‘women’ as the producer of textual meanings with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women.

Spivak’s feminism may well seem as initially unreadable as her deconstruction. This stems from her conjunction of any essentialism with an emphasis on the crucial importance of examining and reappropriating the experience of the female body. Here Spivak speaks about what she can do within literary criticism as a woman. She strongly denies the common definition of ‘woman’ which rests on the word ‘man’. She tries to provide a definition of woman with a deconstructive perspective. She also pleads the necessity of definition which allows to them going and take a stand. She refers Marx and Freud while formulating her assumptions regarding feminism. She opposes these two as they argue in terms of a mode of evidence and demonstration. According to her,
they seem to bring forth evidence from the world of man or man’s self. Here she comments that there is the idea of alienation in Marx and the idea of normality and health in Freud. She also refers the concepts of use-value, exchange-value and surplus-value of Marx for analyzing the woman. She strongly opposes the concept of “wages” (formed by men) only a mark of value-producing work. She also rejects the deliberation of men for tactfully rejecting women entry into the capitalist economy. Spivak argues the importance of woman’s product as:

In terms of the physical, emotional, legal, custodial and sentimental situation of the woman’s product, the child, this picture of the human relationship to production, labour and property is incomplete. The possession of a tangible place of production in the womb situates the woman as an agent in any theory of production. (1998:106)

According to Spivak, the idea of the womb as a place of production is avoided both in Marx and in Freud. She states that if this is taken into consideration, the notion of penis-envy will be replaced by womb-envy to challenge the male dominancy. She gives the reference of the present situation where woman’s entry into the age of computers and the modernization of women in development imposes us to confront the discontinuities and contradictions in our assumptions about women’s freedom to work outside the house and the sustaining virtues of the working class. Spivak refers the remark of Christine Delphy to focus the concept of the ‘new feminism’ as:

The ‘new feminism’ is currently developing the thesis that no society, socialist or capitalist is capable of favorably responding to the aspirations of women ...................... If we direct against men the action necessary for women’s progress, we condemn the great hopes of women to a dead end. (Amherst, 1980:128)
According to Spivak, here the lesson of a double approach---against sexism and for feminism --is suppressed.

Spivak has questioned the universal claims of some Western feminists to speak for all women regardless of cultural differences. She tells us her personal experience that situates her criticism of Western feminism in relation to the historical experiences and everyday life of disempowered women in the ‘Third World’. She highlights the limitations of Western feminism towards the ‘Third World’ women. Spivak states that the academic feminism must learn to learn from them rather than simply correcting the historical experiences of disempowered women with our superior theory and enlightened compulsion. Thus Spivak cautions against the universal claims of Western feminism, and emphasizes instead how the specific maternal conditions, histories and struggles of the ‘Third World’ women are often overlooked by Western feminism. According to Spivak, ‘the institutional changes against sexism (in U.S.A.) or in France may mean nothing or indirectly, further harm for women in the ‘Third World’ (1998:150).

Spivak expressed her views on the geography of female sexuality. In the essay, ‘French Feminism in an International Frame’, Spivak questions whether the valorization of women’s non-productive sexual pleasure in French feminist thought is an effective political goal for the ‘Third World’ women. We observe the same in her reading of Devi’s short story, ‘Breast-giver’. Spivak states that in the 19th century, the practice of ‘childbearing’ is framed within a domestic ideology that places women in a socially and economically disempowered position. This definition of woman as an object of private property was legitimated in the terms of English common law, as well as Hindu Law. Jane represents the women who struggle against this domestic ideology to determine her reproductive body. So Spivak’s reading of Jane Eyre (Charlotte Bronte’s) locates the narrative of ‘feminist individualism’ in the age of Imperialism. (1985:244)
According to Spivak, the discontinuity, heterogeneity and typology used for a sex analysis fails to obliterate the problems of race and class. It will not necessarily escape the inbuilt colonialism of the First World feminism toward the Third. The definition of woman, “legal object as subject of reproduction”, would persistently seek to de-normalize uterine social organization. Spivak wills to participate in feminist debate and avoids the sterile debates of deconstruction or comments on them only obliquely. According to Spivak, many feminists have wished to stress an essential feminine, an area repressed by male domination but within which it is possible to find the methods and values to build a different and better society. Spivak’s opposition to essentialism is deconstructive rather than psychoanalytical. Woman, like any other term, can only find its meaning in a complex series of differentiations, of which the most important, or at least the most immediate is man.

Gayatri Spivak points out the significance of the female body pointing two radical different directions: one is she wishes to stress the clitoris as the site of a radical excess to the cycle of reproduction of production and two is to emphasize that the reproductive power of the womb is absent in any account of production in classical Marxist. Spivak tries to differentiate psychoanalytical feminism from Marxist feminism and states that:

With psychoanalytic feminism, then an invocation of history and politics leads us back to the place of psychoanalysis in colonialism with Marxist feminism, an invocation of the economic text foregrounds the operations of the New Imperialism. (1998:112)

Here Spivak points out that psychoanalytical feminism reminds history and politics whereas Marxist feminism economics. Gayatri Spivak reminds to the positivist feminist colleagues that are in charge of creating the discipline of women’s studies and anxious students that essentialism is a trap. It seems more
important to learn to understand that the world’s women do not all relate to the privileging of essence, especially through fiction or literature. The work written under the sign of woman generally becomes solipsistic and marginal as it is experienced by Derrida.

Spivak points out that the formation of gendered identity in the 19th century is re-worked by colonial discourse so that the white European female individual is defined as socially and culturally superior to the non-Western woman. In her two essays: ‘French Feminism in an International Frame’ and ‘Three Women’s Text and a Critique of Imperialism’, Spivak argues that the history of Western feminism is implicated in the larger history of European colonialism. Spivak’s argument, that Western feminism has been historically complicit in the project of imperialist expansion, is one of the most difficult and troubling aspect of Spivak’s contribution to feminist thought. Spivak emphasizes some important points to lead her thought. They are: the important political and intellectual transformations that Western feminism has achieved, the need to challenge the Western feminist thought that all women’s lives and histories are the same, the need of considering different non-Western women’s lives and histories to form universal feminist thought, 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. (Morton, 2003:90)

2.4 SUBALTERN THEORY:

The Subaltern study is one of the branches of postcolonial criticism. In India, Subaltern Studies is a new movement in political and cultural historiography. It is launched by a group of scholars of which the most of them were of Bangla. They collectively have produced a series of volumes entitled Subaltern Studies during the 1980s. In the last two decades of the 20th century,
Subaltern studies, post-colonial theory and criticism gained momentum due to the effects of globalization on the Third World Countries. Subaltern studies derive its force from Marxism, post-structuralism and becomes a part of post-colonial criticism. The term ‘subaltern’ owes its origin to Antonio Gramsci’s writings and underlines a subordinate place in terms of class, gender, caste, race and culture. The ideology of subaltern historiography is derived from Gramsci, who thinks of history in terms of “multiple elements of conscious leadership”. (Gramsci, 1973:27)

Antonio Gramsci’s account of the subaltern provides a key theoretical resource for understanding the conditions of poor, the lower class and peasantry in India. Spivak proposes the more nuanced, flexible, post-Marxist definition of the subaltern, informed by deconstruction, which takes women’s lives and histories into account. In the 19th century, Karl Marx proclaimed the situation of the industrial working class compared with other people. Arnold Gramsci focused the situation of the rural peasantry that lacks coherence with Marx’s traditional perception of the subaltern. Spivak goes one step ahead and discusses the situation of women as subaltern in the post-colonial world.

Spivak points out the historical shift from feudalism to capitalism in India which offers a historical account of middle-class colonized subjects as national subjects after colonialism. She asserts that the same account does not include the lives and struggles of other disempowered groups, including peasants, women and indigenous groups. So, she expected a shift from India’s national liberation movement to social movements of disempowered, subaltern group. Spivak objects Ranjit Guha’s a pure subaltern consciousness equal to Marx’s notion of class consciousness which may not have correct coherence with much more complex and differentiated struggle of particular subaltern groups. Spivak prefers Derrida’s methodology of deconstruction for subaltern studies. Her methodology also faced an opposition stating that Spivak is seen to impose yet
another elite Western academic on to the subaltern history. Spivak strongly oppose the idea that the subaltern is a sovereign political subject in control of her own destiny, on the grounds that the sovereign subaltern subject is an effect of the dominant discourse of the elite. She further states that the political will of the subaltern is constructed by the dominant discourse as an after effect of elite nationalism. She says that this discourse contains the subaltern within the grand narrative of bourgeois national liberation and totally ignores the different, local jute workers, Awadh peasant rebellion etc.

The term ‘subaltern’ is a creation of the British Colonial contact with India. In other words, subaltern means ‘Subordinate’ or ‘inferior’. It is by implication ‘inferior modes of knowledge’. The subaltern historiography seeks to establish the balance of knowledge by demonstrating that the ‘inferior’ is made so through discourses of power and politics. Spivak preferred to use the ‘subaltern’ to encompass a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses. She states that this term suits as it can accommodate social identities and struggles of women and colonized. According to her, the flexibility of this term is very important as it can include all types of subjects especially of neglected group to bring them into the main stream.

Spivak accepted the subaltern movement because she herself is committed to articulating the lives and histories of such groups in an appropriate and non-exploitive way. She observed the social and political oppressions in postcolonial societies that got place in her writings. Her writings, including translations and textual commentaries provide a powerful counterpoint to the erasure of women, peasants and tribals from the dominant historical and political discourses in India.
In her theoretical comments, Gayatri Spivak presented a systematic statement regarding the aims and the methods of the subaltern historiography. Here she states:

The work of the Subaltern Studies group offers a theory of change. The ‘theory’ of change relates to the functional changes in systems of social signs within the broader text of history. However, the change has to be defined in terms of a previously existent manner of perception of signs. Hence, Subaltern Studies perceive their task as making a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specifically a theory of change. (1985: 330)

The implication here is that subaltern historiography views history as a continuous chain of changing signs. This historiography differs from elite historiography, and from the bourgeois nationalist perspective, in that the parameter for the change for the subaltern historiography is the consciousness of relatively small groups having marginal social importance. The studies published by collective of scholars show an obsessive interest in the colonial period, giving the concept of ‘subaltern’ a specific historic grounding. Responding to the subaltern studies Gayatri Spivak States:

I am progressively inclined, then, to read the retrieval of subaltern consciousness as the charting of what in post-structuralist language would be called the subaltern subject-effect. A subject-effect can be briefly plotted as follows: that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network of strands of that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on. (Each of these strands, if they are isolated, can also be seen as woven of many strands.) Different knottings and configurations of these strands, dependent upon
myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject. (1998:341)

Now it seems to be clear that the subaltern historiography fights the tendency to essentialize India. In the subaltern system, India is a changing concept. It signifies the variety of social formations, power structures, linguistic histories to a variety of social and cultural groupings of consciousness. Commenting on this changed picture of Indian literary history Ganesh Devy states:

When extended to cover literary history, the subaltern strategy tends to deny a common identity, and a continuous diachronic self-cognition of all literatures in India, which then can be collapsed into the larger category of ‘Indian literature’. In fact, the subaltern perspective likes to look at all literature as parastical. (1998:118)

The term, ‘Subaltern’ was popularized by Spivak’s essay entitled, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1985) where she says:

The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundrylists 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. (Nelson and Grossberg, 1988:308)

The subaltern studies collective thus announced a ‘new approach’ to restore history to the subordinated in order to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much academic work in South Asian (countries) studies. The subaltern’s agency was restored by theorizing that the elite in India played a dominant role and not simply hegemonic one. The subalterns in the colonial era have become intellectuals in the postcolonial period. Both the colonized and women have now spoken and the credit of it goes to the new writers who write in English today. These writers have also gained recognition and acceptance among the Anglo-American intellectuals today. It is in this sense subaltern studies have acquired a
new dimension. The subaltern can speak more effectively in his/her vernacular than in English. According to Bijay Kumar Das, Subaltern study is not a valid critical approach to the study of literary texts. It is more relevant to the studies of social sciences. Literature is not the branch of social sciences and therefore, cannot be evaluated according to the methods adopted by subaltern studies. (2002:352)

Spivak expands the original definition of subaltern developed by Ranjit Guha and asks to include the struggles and experiences of women from the ‘Third World’. The emphasis on the gendered location of subaltern women expands and complicates the established concept of the subaltern. Spivak objects Western female dominancy as like male dominancy in the social activities. Asking the question, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Spivak Challenges the gender blindness of earlier postcolonial theories from a feminist standpoint. It also demonstrates how Spivak expanded the definition of the term- Subaltern to include women (avoiding narrow class based definition). Spivak argues that there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak. She concludes further stating that the subaltern can not speak because the voice and the agency of subaltern women are so embedded in Hindu Patriarchal codes of moral conduct and the British Colonial representation of subaltern women as victims of a barbaric Hindu culture that they are impossible to recover. Spivak also states that subaltern as female cannot be heard or read in the male-centred terms of the national independence struggle. According to her, 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. In other words, their speech acts are not heard or recognized within dominant political systems of representation. Here Spivak would not want to deny the social agency and lived existence of disempowered subaltern women that receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinate systems of political and economic representation (Morton, 2003:67).
‘Subaltern’ means the colonized/oppressed subject whose voice has been silenced. According to Spivak, it is possible for us to recover the voice of the ‘subaltern’ and to establish her viewpoint. She speaks of widow immolation in India on the plea of performing ‘sati’ at the pyre of the husband. Colonialism and patriarchy both oppressed women and it is difficult for the subaltern to articulate her point of view and ‘there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak’. Spivak laid stress on ‘gendered subaltern’ those women, who are doubly oppressed both by colonialism and patriarchy in the Third World countries. She argues that there are contexts, “wherein contesting representational systems” violently displace/silence the figure of ‘gendered subaltern’. Here she writes:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world women’ caught between tradition and modernization. (1998:306)

Spivak’s silencing of the ‘subaltern’ refers to all women in India but we know that women in colonial India cannot be put in one category. Benita Parry criticizes Spivak’s notion of silent subaltern as:

> Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships, and positions as the product of different class, caste and culture and testimony of women’s voice on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak’s model of the silent subaltern. (1998:35)

Parry goes along with Homi K. Bhabha in asserting that the colonist’s text contains a native voice – though an ambivalent one. The colonial text’s hybridity in the words of Bhabha means that the subaltern has spoken. The Work of the subaltern group offers a theory of change. The insertion of India into
colonialism is generally defined as a change from semi-feudalism into capitalist subjection. According to Spivak, subaltern group proposes two things: 1) the moment(s) of change be pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition, 2) such changes are signaled or marked by a functional change in sign systems. And the most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the ‘subaltern’. Spivak points out that the deconstruction perspective offered us a gift that makes us able to ask the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing ‘him’ (gender-specific), persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility. She states the importance of subaltern consciousness in following words:

To investigate, discover and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project – a project which assumes that if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some thing that can be disclosed. This is all the more significant in the case of recovering a consciousness. (1998:278)

Here Spivak points out that subaltern consciousness recovers our own consciousness that can make us able to stand firmly and evaluate ourselves as well as others.

Spivak stresses the equal space for the histories of subaltern women in a literary representation of the subaltern and in the social text of postcolonial India. Her essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ published first in Wedge (1985) and reprinted in Marxism and Interpretation of Culture (essays, 1988) reveals the historical and structural conditions of political representation, do not guarantee that the interests of particular subaltern groups will be recognized or that their voices will be heard. So, Spivak states that European theories have limitations in applying them as representation to the lives and histories of disempowered women in the ‘Third World’. According to her, unless the Western intellectuals begin to
take the aesthetic dimension of political representation into account, they will continue to silence the voice of subaltern women. This essay combines her political reformulation of Western poststructuralist methodologies with a rereading of the 19th century colonial archives in India. Here she focuses the historical experiences of subaltern women, whose voices and social locations have generally been ignored by the Subaltern Studies Collective as well as by colonial and historical scholarship.

Spivak highlights the importance of subaltern because it provides the model for a general theory of consciousness. With her, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak contributes to politicize Derridean deconstruction in order to elaborate a method for emancipatory readings and cultural interventions. She defines her work as a project having following aims:

i) Problematize the Western subject and see how it is still operational in poststructuralist theory.

ii) Re-read Marx to find a more radical decentring of the subject that also more leaves room for the formation of class identifications that are non-essentialist.

iii) Argue that Western intellectual production reinforces the logic of Western economic expansion.

iv) Perform a close reading of Sati to analyze the discourses of the West and the possibilities for speech that the subaltern woman has within that framework.

Spivak says that coming to an understanding of subalternity is for the production of knowledge; this is the very Western rationalist position to take; one in which the oppressed are doing their oppressors a favour rather than challenging or dismantling their power. She also says that the subaltern can’t
speak because by having a single ‘voice’ you are being essentialist, reductionist, bipolar and not looking at class. Spivak’s essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ best demonstrates her concern for the processes whereby postcolonial studies ironically reinscribe, co-opt and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation and cultural erasure. In this essay, Spivak uncourageous but also criticizes the efforts of the subaltern studies group, a project led by Ranjit Guha that has reappropriated Gramsci’s term ‘subaltern’ (the economically dispossessed) in order to locate and reestablish a ‘voice’ or collective locus of agency in postcolonial India. (Guha: 1988) Spivak again argues that by speaking out and reclaiming a collective cultural identity, subalterns will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society.

The question of Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ is ambiguous. That is because; we don’t know who asks this question, the subaltern or the superior imperialist. Subaltern has not lost her voice for ever she has spoken. According to Benita Parry, Spivak’s use of poststructuralist methodologies to describe the historical and political oppression of disempowered women has further contributed to their silencing. (1998:39) Responding to Spivak’s work, Bart Moore-Gilbert states that there are clear historical examples where the resistance of subaltern women to the colonial world is recorded in dominant colonial discourse. (1997:107) In their article, ‘Can the Subaltern Vote?’, Medevoi, Shankar Raman and Benjamin Comment that Spivak does not offer any perfect political solutions or theoretical formulas for emancipating subaltern women, but rather exposes the limited and potentially harmful effects of speaking for such disempowered groups (Medevoi et. al, 1990:133). while locating Spivak’s historical investigating of Sati in relation to Jacques Derrida’s subsequent work on the archive in ‘Archive Fever’, Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy state that Derrida’s concept of the archive is ‘crucial’ for a more sympathetic understanding of Spivak’s new notorious “silencing” of subaltern women. (Shetty
and Bellamy, 2000:25) Publishing an article entitled ‘Can the Subaltern Hear?’ Colin Wright provoked angry response to Spivak’s question, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (Eagleton (ed), 2000:34) In conclusion, Spivak’s theory of the subaltern is a part of a longer history of left-wing anti-colonial thought that was concerned to challenge the class-caste system in India. Spivak could produce a better reading strategy that responds to the voices and unwritten histories of subaltern women, without speaking for them.

2.5 COLONIALISM/POSTCOLONIALISM:

Gayatri Spivak has expressed her opinion about colonialism/postcolonialism in brief. Spivak’s literary criticism has greatly informed and influenced the practice of reading literary texts in relation to the history of colonialism. She repeatedly emphasizes that the production and reception of the 19th century English Literature was bound up with the history of imperialism. Spivak’s name is associated with post-colonial criticism for she has demonstrated the rhetorical and political agency of postcolonial literary texts to question and challenge the authority of colonial master narratives. Spivak tries to point out the British policy of defining the colonial subject as inhuman, heathen or primitive and proving their imperialism as a civilizing mission. Spivak’s engagement with postcolonial texts is motivated by a desire to challenge the totalizing system of colonial discourse by focusing on instances of subaltern agency or resistance.

Spivak employs the tools of deconstruction and resists the temptation to represent the fictional subaltern characters in Mahasweta Devi’s writing as transparent objects of knowledge for Western trained intellectuals. She also traces the linguistic and rhetorical nuances in Devi’s texts where tribal, subaltern women characters (like Jashoda, Draupadi or Douloti) articulate an
embodied knowledge that cannot accounted for in the dominant terms of Western knowledge and representation.

2.6 SUMMING UP:

In Indian critical tradition, Gayatri Spivak proved herself to be a great scholar and critic. Her vast and wide study reflected in her work. She has undertaken lot projects to present her position in Indian critical tradition. She is the best known as a postcolonial theorist. She describes herself as a “para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher”. It is observed that Spivak is strongly influenced by the Western scholars, theorists. Her work reflects the strong impact of French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. She expressed her views on ‘deconstruction’ being impressed by Derrida. She has proved to be a leading postcolonial critic who uses deconstruction to problematize the privileged, academic postcolonial critic’s unknowing participation in the exploitation of the Third World.

Spivak’s work reflects the influence of Jacques Derrida, Karl Marx, and Antonio Gramsci. Spivak plainly confessed that she gave more attention towards- Immanuel Kant, George Wilhelm, Fredrich Hegel and Karl Marx as her writing was copied from them. Spivak is the best cultural and literary theorist who addresses a vast range of political questions with both pen and voice. Her texts lively reflect her unmistakable voice as she speaks on questions of representation and self-representation, the politicization of deconstruction; the situation of postcolonial critics; pedagogical responsibility; and political strategies.

Spivak’s chief concern can be summarized as the wariness of the limitations of cultural studies. The most interesting about her engagement of the postcolonial predicament is the uneasy marriage of Marxism, feminism and deconstruction that underlies her critical work. Spivak combines Marxism and
deconstruction in the name of postcolonial feminism. This mixing style of Spivak seems to be very complicated for a common reader. Due to interlink of different theories in her critical work, it becomes very difficult to identify where ends one theory and begins another. This mixture of theories proves her a stalwart in critical tradition of India.

Her translation of Jacques Derrida’s *de la grammatologie* initiated a debate on deconstruction in the Anglo-American academy. By asking question-‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’ she took issue with Western intellectuals’ almost confessional account of their inability to mediate the historical experience of the working classes and the underprivileged of society. Here it is observed that she gives special respect for common and ordinary people. She expresses her sympathy for common working class, females and underprivileged people. She tries to provide them a kind of courage to challenge and dismantle the dominance of power (Western). Breaking rules of the academy and trespassing Disciplinary boundaries was her project.

Gayatri Spivak is not only known as a scholar of deconstructive textual analysis of verbal, visual and social texts but also as a global feminist Marxist. She is widely acknowledged as the conscience of the metro-politan politics of identity. She has often referred to herself as a “Marxist-Feminist-Deconstructionist”, seeing each of these fields as necessary but insufficient by themselves, yet productive together. Spivak coined the term “Strategic essentialism”, which refers to a sort of temporary solidarity for the purpose of social action. “Strategic essentialism” is about the need to temporarily accept an “essentialist” position in order to be able to act.

Spivak is biographically an Indian woman, living and working in U. S. and intellectually as a post-Marxist, a feminist and a deconstructionist all at once. Her catholicity of mind is mirrored by her migratory life. Terry Eagleton
says that Spivak’s dazzling, juggling act, in which three balls of Marxism, Poststructuralism and feminism are deftly and often productively manipulated- is at bottom a marketing ploy, nothing but the intellectual entrepreneur’s canny reluctance “to be left out of any theoretical game of town”. Here Terry Eagleton’s cynic attitude is seen, as he does not accept the superiority of Spivak.

Spivak’s ambitious project, (Critique of Postcolonial Critic) seems to involve exactly the opposite movement: a complexification and problematization of place. Her Theoretical Marxism enables her to remain sensitive to the stratified spaces of class and economic structuration, the vertical within the horizontal as it were. She muddies clean distinctions by for example, acknowledging the role of the Indian elite in shoring up British Imperialism. She displays a vigilant awareness of the differences between metropolitan politics and those of the rural provinces. She has demonstrated the structural “place” of the concept of the “Third World” in the discourses of the West. She has articulated the placing of the subaltern woman both in the “masculism” of imperialism, and in the broader phenomena of the advanced capitalism. Moreover, her deconstructive readings endow her with a more nuanced understanding of the shuttle-effect between margin and centre. She has a trouble with questions of identity or voice. She was interested in the questions of space. She says, every human being fights for identity and voice and try to challenge the space. But at the same time we cannot clear the space that generates our perspective.

In short, her critical work has contributed much to the study of literature as a colonial discourse. It also tries to challenge the authority of colonial master narratives in Classic English Literary Texts. Her translations and commentaries on Mahasweta Devi’s work emphasize the importance of Devi’s work to articulate the unwritten histories of tribal, subaltern women and to at least to begin to imagine an alternative to contemporary social, political and economic oppression. Her relentless ability to revise and rework earlier concepts and debates
about postcolonialism is her great contribution to contemporary critical theory and public intellectual culture. Spivak’s feminist critique of the links between socialism and capitalism helped for the intellectual development of African American women. Her thought has gained a wide international public audience. The restless process of Self-criticism and revision demonstrates the importance of Spivak’s earlier postcolonial thought and its continued relevance to the contemporary world.

Spivak has been more vocal in her criticism of global development policies which focus on women in the ‘Third World’. Her criticism of economic development policies which target women has highlighted the urgent need for a transnational perspective in feminist thought. Her critical endeavour to situate women’s social location in a transnational framework of political, economic and social relationships is one of the most important legacies of her thought. She has persistently challenges the conventions and boundaries of Western critical inquiry. With Marxist political economics, feminism and postcolonial criticism, European Literature, philosophy and critical theory, Spivak has questioned the division between the act of reading literary and cultural texts and economic texts of imperialism and global capitalism. Spivak’s constant rethinking about the historical exploitation and oppression of the disempowered reminds us that any act of reading has important social and political consequences.

Spivak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ has proved her a great theorist. It also raised many objections. The Scholars like Benita parry (Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse), Robert Young (White Mythologies), Asha Varadharajan (Exotic Parodies), Bart Moore-Gilbert (Postcolonial Theory), Lisa Lowe (Immigrant Acts), Rey Chow (Writing Diaspora and Ethics After Idealism), Amitava Kumar (Passport Photos), Saskia Sassen, Peter Hitchcock (Oscillate Wildly), Judith Butler (Bodies that Matter), Julia Emberley (Thresholds of Difference), Laura Donaldson (Decolonizing Feminism), Kamala Visweswaran
(Fictions of Feminist Ethonography), Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy (Postcolonilism’s Archive Fever) have studied Spivak’s work and recorded their views about it. They admired her contribution in literary, cultural and economic fields. To counter the global media’s destruction of an ethical relation to the Other, Spivak tried to rethink this geopolitical non-relationship based on the fear and terror of the ‘Other’ through a deconstructive discourse of ethics and responsibility.