When Silenced Voices Meet Homi. K. Bhabha’s “Megaphone”

Linjing Liu

Francoise Monnoyer-Broitman
Copyright

The publishers will keep this document online on the Internet – or its possible replacement – for a period of 25 years starting from the date of publication barring exceptional circumstances.

The online availability of the document implies permanent permission for anyone to read, to download, or to print out single copies for his/hers own use and to use it unchanged for non-commercial research and educational purpose. Subsequent transfers of copyright cannot revoke this permission. All other uses of the document are conditional upon the consent of the copyright owner. The publisher has taken technical and administrative measures to assure authenticity, security and accessibility.

According to intellectual property law the author has the right to be mentioned when his/her work is accessed as described above and to be protected against infringement.

For additional information about the Linköping University Electronic Press and its procedures for publication and for assurance of document integrity, please refer to its www home page: http://www.ep.liu.se/.

© Linjing Liu
Abstract

The thesis owns its existence to Homi. K. Bhabha's essay *A Personal Response* and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can The Subaltern Speak?*. Drawing upon these two articles, I initiated my research. The focal point of this paper aims at identifying and questioning the limitations of Bhabha's theories while highlighting Spivak's insightful perspectives.

In conducting this project, the motif of my paper is derived, which is to question male scholars’ gender-blindness under the feminist lens in the field of post-colonial studies. Issues, such as identity, hybridity and representation are under discussion; meanwhile by citing the example of and debate on *sati*, the gender issue and the special contributions of postcolonial feminism are, in particular, well developed.

Key words: postcolonial, subaltern studies, identity, hybridity, *sati*
Acknowledgement

I have devoted a lot of efforts to my 15-credit master thesis *When Silenced Voices Meet Homi. K. Bhabha’s “Megaphone”*. Gratefully speaking, my efforts have been generously supported. A number of people have supported and aided me in concrete ways when I was working on this paper. Without their kind assistance, it would not be possible for me to accomplish the work.

Constructive criticism and heartfelt words of encouragement are invaluable along the way. I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor Francoise Monnoyer-Broitman for her assistance and guidance during the entire research and writing process. My warm thanks to my examiner, Professor Jan Paul Strid, who gave me a lot of constructive feedback and suggestions in the final thesis defence seminar and afterwards as well.

Special acknowledgement is here made to my dear friends from the United States, David and Marla Pierce, who gave me vital help in proofreading my paper and polishing my language. David, in particular, offered generous support and valuable comments, for which I am deeply grateful.

Linköping in February 2012

Linjing Liu
Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 8
Chapter 1: The Whole World is Postcolonial ................................................................. 13
Chapter 2: The Search for Identity ...................................................................................... 19
Chapter 3: More Than a Hybridity ...................................................................................... 22
Chapter 4: A Transparent Intellectual ........................................................................... 25
Chapter 5: What Does the Woman Want? ...................................................................... 30
Chapter 6: The Silenced Woman Tells No Story .............................................................. 34
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 37
Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 39
Introduction

No name is yours until you speak it; somebody returns your call and, suddenly, the circuit of sighs, gestures, gesticulations is established and you enter the territory of the right to narrate. You are part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or heralded — you may be ignored — but your personhood cannot be denied. In another's country that is also your own, your person divides, and in following that forked path, you encounter yourself in a double movement... Once as a stranger, and then as a friend.

Homi. K. Bhabha, *A Personal Response*

The excerpt above is derived from Homi. K. Bhabha’s essay *A Personal Response*. Emphasizing the right to narrate, Bhabha presents to postcolonial subjects a way to regain self-recognition. In *A Personal Response*, Bhabha casts his memories back into his childhood in Mumbai, India, his college days in Oxford, England, and reflects on his whole life as a hybrid product of two cultures.

Deeply touched and fully convinced by his personal response, I believed, at the very beginning, that Bhabha had shown a way for people like him in postcolonial societies to make themselves heard by the whole world, which would be to “speak your name”. Then, it occurred to me that this compelling appeal drafted by Bhabha can be labelled as a “megaphone proposal”, encouraging the once-colonized to voice their names and regain “the right to narrate”.

However, after having read Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?*, I realized that Bhabha’s “megaphone proposal” is in no way an elixir to cure the century-long obscured silence. Moreover, his theories are so problematic that they will not work wonders when meeting Spivak’s mute subaltern women. Primarily drawing upon the two articles, I will launch my own research project, *When Silenced Voices Meet Homi. K. Bhabha’s “Megaphone”* to investigate how and to what extent Bhabha’s “megaphone proposal” fails to function, when it is given to Spivak’s third world subaltern women.
To begin with, concise background information will set the tone for my paper. As indicated by the major sources, this paper will be placed in the postcolonial context. It is apparent to all that with large-scale movements of national liberation sweeping over the whole world in our time, many countries have eventually attained national independence and thrown off the yoke of feudalism and imperialism posed by European domination once and for all. Not only did they strive for emancipation from political oppression, victims of colonization but also craved freedom from the barrier of cultural repression. As a consequence, one of the cultural upshots of de-colonization is to provide fundamental basis for the research of postcolonial criticism, and hence, the advent of postcolonial studies.

Alongside this boom of postcolonial studies, a host of name-brand critics have attracted more and more attention. Meanwhile, a so-called “race for theory”, as Barbara Christian (1990) names it, has been put on this postcolonial stage, adding to the momentum of this study. However, on the other hand, it poses great difficulties for readers, like me, to grasp the core importance of the study from the profusion of theories. Immersing myself into the sea of theories and busily associating with the brilliant minds, I have to say my encounter with Homi. K. Bhabha, one of the most prestigious and prolific postcolonial scholars, is no mere coincidence.

Cited at the beginning of this paper are the resounding remarks offered by Bhabha. At the end of his autobiographic essay, A Personal Response (Bhabha, 2002), a “seems-to-be-the-best” solution is envisaged to build “a bridge of diverse times and places” and “an arch of affiliation” for those once-colonized that still feel lost “in-between” cultural differences, and yet wish ardently for their national identity. Bhabha holds a firm belief in “the spirit of the right to narrate in a global world”. In this essay, he declares clearly that “the walls of silence” cannot be built and there is no return to the “silent killing fields” of colonization, if you have the desire and the right to speak.

Written in such an eloquent manner, Bhabha’s personal response seems to be earnest and convincing, and his path to regain identity shown to those lost in-between cultures via speaking or narration looks promising and encouraging as well. If my encounter with Bhabha was inevitable (at least I thought so at the very beginning), then my encounter with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak put an end to the illusion constructed by Bhabha’s “megaphone proposal”.

9
Staying on top of the list of postcolonial name-brand critics, Spivak is well-renowned for her book-length essay entitled *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Difficult to read yet repeatedly interpreted, this landmark essay, twenty-three years after its public debut at the conference on *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, remains an inspiration for feminists, as well as a heated debate among post-colonialists. After a complex examination of power, desire and interest, Spivak arrives at a conclusion which sounds as if responding to Bhabha’s solution:

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.

Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

“No name is yours until you speak it,” claims Bhabha. On the contrary, “The subaltern cannot speak,” Spivak’s work responds.

From this Bhabha-Spillvak dialogue my paper derives its focus, where the question of voice is at issue. Apparently, for the two post-colonialists, the theoretical divide is vast, and the intellectual positions diverse; and thus the opposing perceptions on the very issue of voice are worth serious consideration and strenuous efforts to investigate. All my arguments will set out to consider such a hypothesis: When silenced voices meet a megaphone, it is time to contemplate when the premise is denied, whether the conclusion that is drawn from it can still hold its ground.

To be more specific, the focal point of my paper seeks to identify and question the limitations of Bhabha’s theories while highlighting Spivak’s insightful perspectives. Emphasis will fall on different facets of this controversy revealed through Bhabha’s *A Personal Response* and Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. To support my argument, one of the core issues in postcolonial studies will be revisited. Among all the postcolonial themes, such as issues of agency, identity, nationhood, otherness, cultural difference, exile and homecoming, Bhabha’s theorizing in the unsettled identities, especially in his notable coinage of hybridity proves not as well-developed as it is claimed to, as revealed from his “megaphone proposal”. In
order to make a thorough exploration, some parts of my paper will devote to re-examining the question of identity through the lens of gender.

What comes next is the layout of my paper. Divided into six chapters, the paper deals with a single question in each section. The first chapter, *The Whole World Is Postcolonial*, aims at providing some basic guidelines regarding postcolonial studies. Moreover, the Subaltern Studies, a subfield of postcolonial studies, will be investigated as it is the main field where Bhabha and Spivak’s divergence is spotted.

The second chapter, *The Search for Identity* will explore the issue of identity, one of the most prominent themes in postcolonial discourses. Manifested in *A Personal Response*, Bhabha proves himself to be an activist in re-establishing a national or community identity. Nevertheless, Spivak’s subaltern woman has been expelled from the search of identity by some postcolonial scholars led by Bhabha.

*More Than a Hybridity* opens up the third chapter, which extends the notion of identity and develops it into the direction of hybridity. Being another frequently repeated term, “hybridity” sets out to describe the mentality of those who are caught in between of two different cultures and ideologies existing in current postcolonial societies. Unfortunately, seen from a subaltern viewpoint, “hybridity” falls short of representing the subaltern class.

The fourth chapter deals with *A Transparent Intellectual*. The heading of this chapter is inspired by Spivak, who, in her article "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" argues that some scholars mistakenly assume that the subaltern class can speak for themselves, thus there is no need to represent them. Abstaining from representation, these intellectuals make themselves transparent. In addition, the dominant elitism of Indian nationalism will be questioned. The transparency of intellectuals and the dominance of elitism have worked collectively to cast a blind eye toward subaltern women and so deprive them of their right to speak. Worse still, this collaboration also begets gender blindness in Bhabha's work; therefore, Bhabha himself is the representative of the "transparent intellectual" to a larger extent.

The fifth chapter centres on the feminist postcolonial theories. Freud’s question “what does a woman want?” takes up the issue of gender. In answer to this question, two targets of postcolonial feminists will be analyzed, namely the western feminism and the Indian fundamentalism.
The last chapter, *The Silenced Woman Tells No Story*, will centre upon the subaltern women and the practice of *sati* to give a detailed account of why female subalterns are silenced and how they lose their ability to speak.
The Whole World is Postcolonial

*The central point...is that human history is made by human beings, and since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from the other, but to connect them...*

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Defined with words such as expansion, invasion, conquer, and conquest, *colonialism* engulfed the native inhabitants and the intruders in a complex and traumatic abyss, seemingly without bottom. Colonialism, recurrent and widespread, has been experienced in human history along with another often interchangeably used term, *imperialism*. In light of this, human history can be seen, to a large degree, as a history of colonial penetration.

While on the other side of this story of colonial and imperialist oppression is the tenaciously persistent struggle and large-scale movements of anti-colonization and decolonization.

The history of decolonization has spanned almost three centuries from the early cases in the seventeenth and eighteenth of struggles in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa until more recent ones in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in India, Angola and Mozambique which continued into the last half of the twentieth century.

In a conservative estimate, the effects of colonialism and its aftermath spill over into the whole world and at least three-quarters of the world’s population has been affected. In a revealing book on colonialism and postcolonialism, Ania Loomba (2005) makes the following statements, from which I draw some inspiration to entitle the first chapter. Loomba announces that:

*It might seem that because the age of colonialism is over, and because the descendants of once-colonized peoples live everywhere, the whole world is postcolonial.*
Staying with Loomba, I plan to initiate an exploration of colonialism and postcolonialism and to provide the basic frameworks for the postcolonial studies and its subfield study of the subalterns as indicated in *Introduction*. In relation to this topic, there are three points that I would like to make.

In order to position postcolonial studies, the often interchangeably replaced terms, colonialism and imperialism will be analyzed.

Simultaneously, misunderstandings about the two terms have to be straightened out as they lay the groundwork for this study. In his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Robert Young raises a thought-provoking question, “If the postcolonial represents a critical relation to colonialism in any epoch, how does that relate to imperialism?” (Young, 2001, 15).

According to Young, in attempts to grasp the true meaning of postcolonialism, it is detrimental and misleading to treat colonialism and imperialism indiscriminately “as if they were homogeneous practices.” Colonialism, in its plain terms, can be understood as a seizure of other people’s possessions such as land and goods, by means of invasion, conquest and control. Imperialism, on the other hand, requires colonial domination in the first place, and then exerts a political control on the colonized countries to sustain the empire’s own growth. Gradually, imperialism develops a larger scale, going beyond the colonized territories and wielding tremendous economic, political, cultural, and military power across the globe. Young informs us that the differences between colonialism and imperialism are as follows:

Colonialism is analyzed as a practice functioning in the colonies, with the economic pursuit as its driving force; and imperialism is taken as a concept referring to the imperial ruling class, carrying out the central policy of state and exercising power “either through direct conquest or latterly through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of dominance” (Young, 2001, 27).

When we go back to consider Young’s question about how the postcolonial is related to colonialism and imperialism respectively, the answer is conspicuous in that it appears obvious that the postcolonial originated from the historical resistance against colonial control (colonialism) and imperial power (imperialism). As Young summarizes, the postcolonial is “a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical
facts of decolonization...but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination” (Young, 2001, 57).

To put it simply, the postcolonial can be regarded as the product of colonialism and imperialism, which not only fights against the domination of colonialism, but also raises a cry to condemn the global and hegemonic power of imperialism.

Additionally, the following part of my paper is devoted to a brief review of the term postcolonialism and postcolonial studies. Initially, I will explain the term postcolonialism.

Generally speaking, as the prefix “post” literally indicates, a traditional opinion holds that postcolonialism merely comes after colonialism and declares its termination. To transcend this traditional thinking, Loomba proposes a better way to treat postcolonialism in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. As Loomba points out, it is beneficial to think of postcolonialism flexibly “as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba, 2005, 16). Combining Young’s interpretation of colonialism and postcolonialism with Loomba’s flexible view, we are led to an interpretation of postcolonialism.

Postcolonialism is both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice. It attacks the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism, and the history of colonialism and imperialism, but also signals an activist engagement with positive political positions and new forms of political identity.

(Young, 2001, 58)

As Young proclaims, postcolonialism attacks the byproducts of the history of colonialism and imperialism…the unjust political and social order. Following Loomba and Young, we have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the notion postcolonialism, which is of great help to position these postcolonial studies.

Next, as key terms in the postcolonial domain such as colonialism, imperialism and postcolonialism have been clarified, postcolonial studies and its theories will be addressed.
Regardless of the long history of colonialism, the current and readily available material under classification as postcolonial studies, theories or criticism starts from the eighteenth century, as Walter D. Mignolo specifies in his work, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

To begin with, a critical review of postcolonial studies will be offered. Presented in various forms, postcolonial studies often come into public view as fictions and critiques. Take postcolonial critique as an example.

It is concerned with the colonial history in the exploration of social realities and shows “a common political and moral consensus towards the history and legacy of western colonialism” (Young, 2001, 5). In view of history, postcolonial studies emphasize a rethinking and re-examining of the history of slavery, enforced migration, diaspora, institutionalized racism, and fractured native cultures. Connected to the preceding illustrations of key terms, we are well aware that postcolonial studies also consider how our contemporary world has been moulded and determined geographically, politically, economically, socially, and culturally...as well as psychologically and ideologically.

However, there is an important issue at stake with regard to the historical viewpoint applied to conduct this study.

One common practice is to trace back indigenous ideologies and cultures in postcolonial critiques. Obviously, there is nothing new in reviving pre-colonial cultures, and it is easy to recover the pre-colonial through reworking the colonial history. However, there is no benefit in doing so. Critics have repeatedly expressed their concerns over this matter. Spivak, for instance, has cautioned against this idea and warned that “a nostalgia for the lost origins can be detrimental...within the critique of imperialism”, since colonialism or imperialism cannot account for everything existing in postcolonial societies (Spivak, 1988, 271-313). In a word, postcolonial studies investigate forces of oppression imposed on once-colonized countries and re-examine the coercive domination that still manipulates the world we live in today. Meanwhile, postcolonial studies cover a broad landscape of issues, ranging from gender, class, and race to ethnicities, politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism.

In terms of postcolonial theory, since it operates according to the legacy of Marxist analysis, it always involves an analytical political critique, and so we realize how remarkable and paramount the role of Marxism remains. However, distinct from
orthodox European Marxism, postcolonial theory provides detailed accounts of the subjective effects generated by objective material conditions.

Another major difference between postcolonial, or to be more specific, feminist postcolonial theory and Marxist theory centres on the issue of class and gender. Loomba acknowledges that though Marxists have paid attention to the oppression of women, they fail to properly address the specificity of gender oppression. For Marxists, women’s oppression was regarded as a matter of culture and as taking place within the family.

Accordingly, the exploitation of women’s labour power was obscured by a gender-blind economic analysis which could not integrate class with other forms of social division. As a result, women’s oppression was seriously ignored not only within Marxism, but also in a wider intellectual sphere. The theme of gender did not receive much attention until feminists began to interrelate the economic and the ideological aspects of women’s oppression (Loomba, 2005, 26).

Therefore, we can conclude that it is vital to take class and gender into account for both feminists and critics and commentators as a whole.

Unfortunately, like Marx, some intellectuals, in a wider intellectual sphere, (i.e., in the post-structuralism and postcolonialism field) make themselves transparent in face of gender and class. Their gender-blindness and class-ignorance render them either prone to minor pitfalls like Marx’s incomplete specification, or susceptible to a utopian scheme like Bhabha’s “megaphone proposal”.

To address the leitmotif of my paper and apply this to a specific context, in the final portion of this chapter, I will concentrate my attention to a subfield of postcolonial studies – Subaltern Studies.

In the postcolonial field, the dominance of Indian intellectuals is highlighted by new Indian theoretical work. A large number of scholars reconsider the postcolonial world in a new light and present special perspectives as perceived through an international lens. This postcolonial studies’ “Hall of Fame” includes well-knowns such as Ahmad, Bhabha, Chakrabarty, Guha, Spivak, and Sunder Rajan and others.

The provenance of Subaltern Studies should first be determined.

As we know, India has experienced a unique struggle for freedom in its efforts to gain independence. In simplest terms, this “unique struggle for freedom” refers to the absence of an organized or centralized national liberation movement.
Correspondingly, this begs the question as to how to interpret this historic anomaly. Out of this springs the Subaltern Studies group.

In this respect, the focus of Subaltern Studies historians “specially address a local problematic in relation to Indian”, and the project of Subaltern Studies is to “come to an understanding of a history that never happened” (Young, 2001, 352). To put it more clearly and descriptively, this “never happened history” in Young’s words is particularized as a “historic failure of the nation to come into its own”, according to Guha (1997).

One of Guha’s contributions is to define the subaltern groups as “the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as ‘the elite’” (Guha, 1982b, 8).

Young stresses that “in practice the focus of the articles in Subaltern Studies itself is very much at the bottom of the social scale on different groups within the underclass” (Young, 2001, 354). Interestingly yet incompletely and unsatisfactorily falling into the same pitfall, Subaltern Studies lost sight of the role of the subaltern women and failed to address the issue of gender from its beginning until Spivak brought it into the limelight.

Paralleled with Spivak’s standpoint, Kamala Visweswaran expressed a similar concern in her article, Small Speech, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and its Historiography, that “while the praxis of Subaltern Studies has originated in the central assumption of subaltern agency, it has been less successful in demonstrating how such agency is constituted by gender” (Visweswaran, 1996, 85).

As a result, arising from the dereference of the question of gender (in later postcolonial studies generally), the term “subaltern” refers to “any marginalized or disempowered minority group, particularly on the grounds of gender and ethnicity” (Young, 2001, 354). Nevertheless, falling short of expectations, it seems that the tendency to overlook gender still remains to be a “surprising omission” (Young, 2001, 338) even in the works of those prominent postcolonial intellectuals, such as the case of Bhabha’s A Personal Response quoted in my paper.
The Search for Identity

My childhood was filled with accounts of India's struggle for independence. Its complicated histories of subcontinental cultures caught in that deadly embrace of Imperial power and domination...and in a small way, my own life was caught on the cross roads that marked the end of Empire...

The colonized peoples of the past, the migrants (or multicultural populations) of the present, all of these, have no option but to live in a world that lies "in-between" cultures, creating our identities from contradictory and conflicting traditions. We are, quite simply, both "one thing and an-other" caught in a process of cultural translation. We are figures in a doubling myth of postcolonial origination that has been beautifully crafted by the Caribbean Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, into a strange fruit of historic knowledge.”

Homi. K. Bhabha, A Personal Response

It is noteworthy that the issue of identity and belonging has been avidly debated and crucially tied to postcolonial scholars’ “emotive” judgment. The earnest search for self is so evident that it prevails over the works of those identity-seekers. In this second chapter, I will move on to investigate the postcolonial identity.

First and foremost, binary conceptual oppositions like north and south, first world and third world, colonizers and the colonized, past and the present, self and the other, and centre and periphery often require delicate consideration and consequently, have received more attention in the colonial encounter.

Rising amid a variety of contradictions, the descendants of the once-colonized find themselves trapped in the tension of two antagonistic races, fractured by two wounded worlds, and worse still, lost in the confusion of binary representations of cultural values and ideologies, just as Bhabha’s cross-road experience cited at the very beginning of this chapter.
It is therefore not surprising at all that the whole realm of postcolonial studies has been preoccupied with these questions.

Among those critics, the most notable one is Bhabha, who is known for his agile mind and incisive comments. Recounting his split childhood, reflecting on his fascinated but strangely unmoved literary experience and seeing from an Indian-Parsi minority perspective, Bhabha comes to a conclusion. Therein he explains that the colonial regimes failed to produce stable and fixed identities, and thereby, he stresses the urgency of seeking a subject of one’s own. In addition, he also envisions a pathway to initiate the search of identity, which is to go beyond those existing binary representations and regain the right to produce a narrative.

Following Bhabha’s personal response combined with two other articles written by him, entitled Interrogating Identity: Frante Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative and The Other Question: stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism, we can see that the search for a subject of one's own or the question of identity in a broader sense, has always been a central exploration for him.

Primarily drawing on Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks, Bhabha focuses his broad search for identity on his “race”, which as Loomba mentions, “has functioned as one of the most powerful and yet the most fragile markers of human identity, hard to explain and identify and even harder to maintain”(Loomba, 2005, 105).

In view of skin colour, the most noticeable signifier of race, Bhabha notes that “a doubling of identity” is revealed through Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks. According to Bhabha, the doubled identity includes “the difference between personal identity as an intimation of reality, or an intuition of being, and the psychoanalytic problem of identification” (Bhabha, 1994, 51).

Likewise, Loomba points out that “colonial identities are always oscillating, never perfectly achieved” (Loomba, 2005, 125). This kind of psychoanalytical category of identity, however, has apparent genetic defects. Without considering the issue of gender and class, neither Bhabha nor Fanon is capable of establishing this split colonial subject as a paradigmatic model.

Loomba makes a compelling remark in this aspect. She says:

The psychic dislocations Fanon discusses are more likely to be felt by native elites or those colonized individuals who were educated within, and to some extent invited to be mobile within, the colonial
system than by those who existed on its margins... When we examine the place of gender in Fanon's schema, we will see how his subject is also resolutely male, and reinforces existing gender hierarchies even as it challenges racial ones.

(Loomba, 2005, 126)

In a word, to discuss colonial identity without addressing the question of gender leads to a dead end and to a discarding of Spivak’s subaltern women in the search of identity.
More Than a Hybridity

Increasingly, we live “in-between” cultural differences where our aesthetic judgment and ethical values are derived from those boundaries between languages, territories, and communities that, strictly speaking, belong to no one cultural or national tradition — they are social values that are continually being translated and transformed in the process of global contact and communication and have no pure origin outside of it.

Homi. K. Bhabha, A Personal Response

When Bhabha emphasized the colonial authorities’ failure to produce the stable and fixed identity mentioned earlier, he also proposed another term, this being “hybridity” and used to describe the in-betweenness, diasporas, displacements, and quotidian contradictions.

If Bhabha’s usage of the hybridity of identities can be generalized and furthermore be universalized to describe the dynamics of the colonial encounter, then, unsurprisingly and inevitably, the global culture will be portrayed as a hybridization, the inter-national world as a hyphenation, and every colonial subject projected with a homogeneous, antagonistic ambivalence.

To rethink the use of hybridity critically, this third portion of my paper serves to examine this influential and controversial issue.

First of all, obsessed with concerns about hybridity, the postcolonial school of thought highlights it as a form of anticolonial strategy.

Bhabha, apparently, is the most earnest one to propagate the concept of “hybridity”. Nevertheless, he is not the very first one to employ it as a strategy, for which, Gandhi, the most widely renowned anticolonial leader of all time gets the credit.

As Nandy recognizes, Gandhi’s political style consisted in the “showman’s touch of mixing incompatible genres, cultures, castes and classes.” Along with this, take note of Young’s comments that, “this performative, hybrid mode was the secret of his popularity, of how he achieved the active and enthusiastic support” (2001, 346).
Additionally, at a theoretical level, this hybrid method, recognized as a characteristic strategy based on cultural purity, is often used to describe the colonial conditions and is often applied by critics to reproach the colonial regimes.

Bhabha expanded Fanon’s conclusion about the colonial subjects’ psychic trauma, suggesting that “colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony”.

Furthermore, he encouraged critics and writers to take on the cause as translators of cultures to “search for an active understanding of the living relationship, the unceasing contrapuntal movement, ‘in-between’ colony and metropole, ‘in-between’ the powerful and the powerless” (2002, 198).

It follows then that, I should explain how this cultural strategy works in practice.

Anticolonial individuals challenge colonial rule by means of combining western and indigenous ideas, which is called a process of hybridization. In Gandhi’s practice of hybridization (to form his famous non-violence notion) he drew upon Western ideas such as those of Emerson, Thoreau and Tolstoy while reinterpreted them through his Hindu perspective. He then used it to insist on a kind of cultural otherness and to spotlight the social inequalities generated by colonialism. Generally speaking, the hybrid strategy in a hybridized world has indeed made a difference when seen in correct focus.

However, the issue of hybridity remains a controversial field where divergent thoughts collide with one another and heated debates are often encountered.

Young reminds us that a hybrid is technically a cross between two different species and that therefore the term “hybridization” evokes both the botanical notion of inter-species grafting and the “vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right” which regarded different races as difference species (1995,10).

On the contrary, Loomba replies that in postcolonial theory, hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined.

Ella Shoha argues in a similar vein that we need to “discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-operation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (1993, 110).

Since different colonial subjects have different experiences of the differing colonial regimes, their personal responses cannot be identical and any universal resonance of hybridity must be varied from person to person accordingly.
Moreover, if the colonial subjects happen to be women, especially those subaltern women brown in colour, mute in voice and lying at the bottom of social hierarchy, the variations, without any doubt, will be more dramatic.

Loomba observes (2005, 138) that the analogy between the subordination of women in general and colonial subjects runs the risk of erasing the specificity of colonialist and patriarchal ideologies, besides tending to homogenize both “women” and “non-Europeans”. Similarly, the “colonial subjects” tends to be conceptualized as male and the “female subjects” as white. When parallels are drawn between them, the colonized women’s situation is glossed over, not to mention the racial and gendered forms of oppression they have suffered from.

In this sense, the presumption quoted earlier regarding the Bhabha’s notion of universal colonial hybridity proves to be a fallacy and ironically presents Bhabha as an internally split male hybridity with a presuming indifference to the other gender.

In the midst of any argument, it is of vital significance not to lose sight and maintain objectivity.

Thereby, in all fairness we have to admit that Bhabha’s hybridity is indeed useful in addressing the traumatic aftermath left behind by colonialism. However, to a large extent, it does erase or cover over the impacts to every individual. Seeing from a binary point of view, Bhabha underestimates the severity of the trauma, especially as it relates to those subaltern women. He fails to consider that the subaltern women are oppressed from many sides, and due to their triple- or even quadruple oppression, they are more than just a hybridity.
A Transparent Intellectual

Foucault articulates another corollary of the disavowal of the role of ideology in reproducing the social relations of production: an unquestioned valorization of the oppressed as subject, the “object being”, as Deleuze admiringly remarks, “to establish conditions where the prisoners themselves would be able to speak”. Foucault adds that “the masses know perfectly well, clearly” — once again the thematic of being undeceived — “they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well” (FD, pp. 206, 207).

Spivak, G. C. Can the Subaltern Speak?

By examining the text Intellectuals and Power: a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze Spivak starts her article, Can the Subaltern Speak?. Unlike Foucault and Deleuze, Spivak expresses her dissent on the historical role of intellectuals. Spivak criticizes a common practice of intellectuals to “valorize the concrete experience of the oppressed” (1988, 69).

This fourth chapter of my paper derives its heading from Spivak’s critical comments on the role of intellectuals and their deliberate absence when representing the oppressed subaltern women. Therefore, the primary concern of this chapter is to uncover the transparent intellectual.

Continuing with the quotation from Spivak’s work, the following passage will reveal a blatant subterfuge used by Foucault and Deleuze as regards the networks of power/desire/interest in poststructuralist theory.

Spivak (1988, 68) informs us that Deleuze’s failure to consider the relations between desire, power and subjectivity renders him incapable of articulating a theory of interests. The lack of a proper understanding of interests will result in a tragic consequence, i.e. negating the role of ideology.

Further, Deleuze's indifference to ideology together with Foucault's resistance to mere ideological critique prevents them from admitting that a developed theory of ideology can recognize reality, the material production of ideology.
For another, their disavowal leads them to produce a mechanical relation, or in other words, a mechanically schematic opposition between desire and interest. As in Spivak’s conclusion, “An undifferentiated desire is the agent, and power slips in to create the effects of desire” (1988, 69).

To fill the place of ideology, Foucault and Deleuze “align themselves with bourgeois sociologists”, producing “a continuistic unconscious or a parasubjective culture”. Spivak comments that “this parasubjective matrix, cross-hatched with heterogeneity, ushers in the unnamed Subject” (1988, 68-9).

This “unnamed subject” is crucial in understanding the transparency of the intellectual. Both Spivak and Edward Said agree that this “non-represented subject” exemplifies clearly that these intellectuals refuse to represent the oppressed under the illusion that the oppressed can represent and speak for themselves (1988, 74). The basic reason accounting for this misunderstanding lies in their incomplete analysis of power and desire in the absence of interest.

What comes next is another corollary of the disavowal of ideology quoted in the opening passage, claiming that the oppressed can speak and represent themselves, which underlines the transparency of the intellectual.

Deleuze once announced that: “A theory is like a box of tools. Nothing to do with the signifier” (FD, 208). Moreover, he declared, “There is no more representation; there’s nothing but action” — “action of theory and action of practice which relate to each other as relays and form networks” (FD, 206-7).

If we were required to explain what Deleuze has said in this respect, the analogy would be like: theory is only “action” so the practice of theory is nothing but the mechanical use of a box of tools; similarly, since theory cannot signify anything, the practitioners of theory as intellectuals cannot represent anyone, not to mention the oppressed group.

Spivak presents us a proper interpretation, concluding that “in the Foucault — Deleuze conversation, the issue seems to be that there is no representation, no signifier...; theory is a relay of practice...and the oppressed can know and speak for themselves...” (1988, 74). Questioning Foucault’s conclusion (FD, 206) that no “theorizing intellectual... [or] party or...union” can represent “those who act and struggle” because “the person who speaks and acts is always a multiplicity”, Spivak (1988, 70) cross-examined him: “Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak?” And then, Spivak sums up:
The banality of leftist intellectuals’ lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent.

(1988, 70)

In a word, Spivak sets us a noticeable example of the transparent intellectual in her article. She admonishes that intellectuals and scholars working in the postcolonial studies should try to reveal the circumstances of the subalterns and speak for them. This group of intellectuals deliberately make themselves invisible in representing the subaltern class.

However, in my view there is another collective of intellectuals we should take into account when talking about this issue. The following portion of this chapter is going to unveil this second collective of intellectuals.

As mentioned earlier, what has been discussed is the first group of transparent intellectuals, intentionally escaping the responsibility of representing the subalterns.

Then, the group under discussion here is made up of those who fail in their attempts to recover the voice of the oppressed.

If the first group is the “absent one”, then for the second group I would like to name it as the “feeble one”. Whatever their labels are, they are in every sense transparent either out of ignorance or failure.

Before dealing with the second group of transparent intellectuals, we need to be somewhat familiar with the formation of Indian social class.

In recent years, Indian historians of the subaltern group have made great effort to uncover the histories and perspectives of the marginalized people.

In constructing the definition of “people”, Ranajit Guha gives an appropriate answer in his book On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India. Challenging the existing dominant historiography of India, Guha (1982) includes “the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country, i.e., the people”. Also, he defines the term “subaltern” as the “demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those we have defined as elite”.
The elite are composed of “dominant groups, foreign as well as indigenous”. The highest class in Guha’s social hierarchy is the dominant foreign groups; then comes the dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level; the third layer is the dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels; at the bottom of this stratification is the people and subaltern classes (1982, 8).

As Loomba notices, “such a definition asks us to re-view colonial dichotomies; it shifts the central division from that between colonial and anticolonial to that between elite and subaltern” (2005, 166).

Forged as an elite male-dominated world, India has been a battlefield where feminist intellectuals fire at both colonial regimes and patriarchal authorities.

In Can the Subaltern Speak? Spivak contends that the subaltern cannot speak, and to recover the voice of the subalterns is a mission impossible. Spivak uses the widow immolation (sati) in India as an instance to illustrate her points. Placed in the lowest of the low, the Indian widow or the to-be-widow is, as a matter of fact, cast out of the social category and the debate over sati. When the subject of sati is alive, she is “nowhere”, without rights. Only when she is consumed on the pyre of her dead husband can she be honoured as an ideal wife.

Lata Mani (1989) expressed as well in Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India. During colonial days, when the social contradiction was mainly between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonial debate on sati had already begun. The two sides on this debate were British colonial authorities and the social elites at that time, the native patriarchies.

Oddly enough, what was argued was not women but tradition and the debate turned to be a discussion about re-defining tradition and modernity. Women became objects on which various versions of scripture/tradition/law were elaborated and contested. Thus, Mani states, nowhere is the sati victim herself a subject of the debate, and nowhere is her subjectivity represented (Mani, 1989, 115-118).

Nowadays, without colonial interference, Indian women have not yet become the subject of the discussion on sati. Part of the reason is that some male elites participating in the discussion are incapable of bringing her into the discussion. A pertinent example indicating the failed attempts of the feeble group to reposition the subaltern women is Nandy’s analysis on this topic. Just as Loomba argued, Nandy’s “conflation of ‘respect’ for an ideal sati with rural India, native authenticity and the canny cultural instincts of the average Indian clearly positions him as a sophisticated
example of the nativism which Gayatri Spivak has repeatedly targeted as a major pitfall for the postcolonial intellectual” (Loomba, 1993, 248).

It manifests that, intellectuals like Nandy resemble their counterparts of colonial days in essence, for both of them base themselves on “a posited notion of an ideal woman or femininity” (Loomba, 1993, 248).

Above all, one of the consequences of the intellectual’s transparency (be they absent or feeble) is to silence the Indian subaltern women once and for all. But there is no trace of Bhabha in either of these groups. We cannot help but ask: Where is Bhabha in this heated argument? It is clear that he does not stand on the side of Foucault, who naively believes that the oppressed can act and speak for themselves; nor does he stand with those who intend to recover the muted voice but are doomed to fall into the pit of losing their object. Bhabha does not involve himself in this dispute, and yet, his “megaphone” proposal suggests his indifference to the real circumstances of the subaltern women.

Being an eminent member of Indian elites, Bhabha’s resolution to regain self-identification through voicing and speaking can only apply to the other members of the elite class. On the other hand, the subaltern class cannot make the best of the megaphone because it has been silenced. Curiously but undeniably, Bhabha’s unusual doing-nothing stance on this matter attests that he is the most transparent intellectual, never exposing himself on this particularly important battlefield.
What Does The Woman Want?

Nature intended women to be our slaves ... they are our property: we are not theirs. They belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women! [...] Women are nothing but machines for producing children.

Napoleon

The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is "What does a woman want?"

Ernest Jones, 1953, Sigmund Freud: Life and Work

Nearly two centuries after Freud, we are still looking for a possible answer to the long-standing question, “What does a woman want?” Until now, the question keeps its charm though varied interpretations are regularly and widely proffered.

Freud once wrote down such words according to his biased and radical understanding on women. He said, “Women oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own” (Freud, 1925). Even so, the question remained to a puzzle and perplexed him for his whole life.

Before any attempt to answer what a woman wants, we have to ascertain what a woman is.

It is not surprising that Freud would make such a derogatory and insulting judgment about women. Biased and radical as it may sound, Freud’s judgment echoes the long-standing, widely held and incorrect belief of his time which was created and supported by the male elite dominated churches of Christendom. This was of a negative image of women portrayed in Genesis, the initial chapter of the Holy Bible. This belief depicts the first woman on earth as a victim of demonic seduction engendering the Original Sin. Additionally, that it was the first woman, Eve to blame for inducing her innocent husband into betraying their Holy Father and losing their land of paradise. Heirs of Eve, women of later times, have been forced by Christendom to accept this mythical accusation without any dissent.
And if Freud’s prejudice against women only shows his conception of female inferiority to male, then, Napoleon’s views on women shows his attitude of crass male dominance over the female.

Rethinking Napoleon’s statements and rephrasing Freud’s bewilderment, I will present some feminist opinions and place these ideas in the context of the postcolonial.

From Freud’s “what does a woman want?” to my “what does the woman want?” I initially want to make it clear that I am not trying to explore a universal psyche of women as a collective. What I am attempting here is to specify the term woman. The woman refers to those, not only as descendants of Eve, “meekly accepting the double aggression of being both deprived and accused” (Rafael, 2009, 2), but also fatalistically unfortunate to be born in the Third World.

Therefore, the woman I’m going to talk about is the Third World subaltern woman. Mentioned in the third chapter, subaltern women constitute a special kind of colonial subjects: brown or black in colour, mute in voice and lying at the bottom of social hierarchy. It is necessary to ask “what does the subaltern woman want?”

However, there is no clue for us to know what she wants because she either hides in the global “sisterhood” idealized by western feminists, or stays unwanted in the gender-blindness of Bhabha’s generalized hybridity, or remains emblematically stabilized by native patriarchal fundamentalists. Given all the factors contributing to the subaltern woman’s current situation, the priority of postcolonial feminists is to challenge both the colour prejudices and the gender indifference in order to facilitate feminist movements and finally discover the long-awaited answer to the question, “what does the woman want?”

Feminists of colour, be they black or brown, have criticized the theory and movements of their white counterparts. Undifferentiated by colour, Western feminists proposed the concept of “sisterhood” to characterize all women as a singular and homogeneous group despite class and cultural difference.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2006) declares that the idea of “we are all sisters in struggle” has been established as a category of analysis in Western feminist thought. This assumption emphasizing the homogeneity of women as a group is produced upon “sociological and anthropological universals” instead of their “biological essentials”.
To illustrate this point, in Western feminist discourses, women across the boundaries of class and culture suffer from “a shared oppression”, and are closely tied by the “sociological notion of the ‘sameness’ of their oppression”.

Similarly, Spivak (1985a) argues against the “articulate and entry of Western female subject into individualism.” She also urges feminist criticism to “reproduce the axioms of imperialism” to curb the detrimental spread of Western feminist thought of erasing the experience of the non-white and Third World women.

Additionally, another target of some non-white feminists’ critiques is their universal portrait of Third World women. Mohanty (2006) in her essay, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, criticizes the Western feminists for constructing a monolithic third world woman. Moreover, she explains six specific ways used by Western feminists to mistakenly create women as an already constituted “powerless” group regardless of ideological specificities and particular socioeconomic systems. Although coloured subaltern women have not expressed what they want, considering their white sisters’ incapability, at least we can understand that they do not want the white women to be their spokespersons.

Not only have they been exposed to the racial prejudice by their white sisters, subaltern women have also undergone a gendered form of oppression imposed by the patriarchal authority. Cast by Christendom as being biblically subordinate to men, women are predestined by this belief to endure male dominance. Further slandered by Napoleon’s announced opinion, women’s domestic position is confined to being men’s “slaves” “property” and “machines of producing children”.

Traditions, religions and patriarchies have already confirmed their own definition of women. In stratified postcolonial societies, the issue of class is crucial in analyzing how subaltern women have been shaped and constrained by the long-established social norms. Thus, one of the major concerns of postcolonial feminists is set to question the patriarchal authority in the domestic place. Among all feminist theorists and activists challenging patriarchy, a group of postcolonial feminists, named “Women Against Fundamentalism” stands out and exerts an influential impact. The final portion of this chapter will call attention to the uses of fundamentalism in the feminist postcolonial theory.

In the article entitled *The Uses of Fundamentalism*, Gita Sahal and Nira Yuval-Davis, members of Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF), provide a refined definition of fundamentalism. In their founding statement, they say (1994, 43):
By fundamentalism we are ... referring ... to modern political movements which use religion as a basis for their attempt to win or consolidate power and extend social control.

According to Sahal and Yuval-Davis (1994, 46), crafty fundamentalism, in its varied forms, sometimes presents itself as a form of orthodoxy, a maintenance of tradition, heavily relying on their interpretations of sacred religious texts. Most of the time, it can be wielded as a political tool, aligning itself with various political trends in different countries.

Focusing on Third World contexts, Uma Narayan (2000) shows us a concrete example in her Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism. The practice of sati, or widow immolation, taken as the core of Indian tradition, “is deployed in the political rhetoric of contemporary Hindu fundamentalists as an icon of the ‘Good Indian Women’”(Narayan, 2000, 87).

What has been called into question is how and why this particular, exceptional and obsolete practice can be regarded as a “Central Indian Tradition”. Lata Mani’s (1989) Contentious Traditions: The Debate on SATI in Colonial India tells us that the answer rests with the debate between British colonial authorities and Indian elites over the issue of sati. As a result, sati was constituted as a “central and authentic Indian tradition”, and an emblematic symbol of “ideal Indian womanhood”. Intensified by European colonialism and replicating the patriarchy representations, fundamentalism exacerbated the difficulties of subaltern women.

Engaging with key issues and debates in colonialism and postcolonialism, feminists working in the postcolonial field overwhelmingly inject feminist concerns into mainstream postcolonial theory and stretch its spectrum to a wider scope, covering issues like gender, economics, and politics.

As for the question, What does the woman want?, I believe that, along with the continued studies on the consciousness of subaltern women in the feminist postcolonial field, postcolonial feminist activists will eventually give us a satisfying answer.
Silenced Woman Tells No Story

[They are] indeed between the upper and nether milestone, helpless, voiceless, hopeless. Their helplessness appeals to the heart, in somewhat the same way in which the helplessness and suffering of a dumb animal does, under the knife of a vivisector. Somewhere, halfway between the Martyr Saints and the tortured "friend of man", the noble dog, stand, it seems to me, these pitiful Indian women, girls, children, as many of them are. They have not even the small power of resistance which the western woman may have...

Josephine Butler, 1898

What Butler commented in the short passage refers to the Indian women, who indeed could be seen as representatives of the subaltern female subjects in Spivak’s essay *Can the subaltern speak?*. The subaltern issue has been at centre-stage in postcolonial studies; and the feminist postcolonial realm in particular, takes a closer and deeper look.

As discussed in the previous chapter, postcolonial feminists have been enriching the mainstream postcolonial theories with a woman’s touch. Great vigour and vibrancy have displayed in this women’s terrain: An extensive variety of hot topics has been taken into consideration, and great works have been produced in a continuous stream. All their efforts guarantee the female scholars a vantage point from which to rethink some lasting and recurrent themes.

The discussion on silent subaltern women and the debate over *sati* fit the profile.

Starting my paper with Spivak’s question *Can the subaltern speak?*, I intend to reiterate this question in the final chapter and hinge my argument on the silenced female subaltern.

First and foremost, being the epicentre of debate, the silenced subaltern woman has generated a spate of writings and repetitions of arguments.

Besides concerns from female postcolonial theorists and activists led by Spivak, the discussion of silenced subaltern women as female subjects is of equal importance
to any other scholarship engaging in recovering the voice of the subaltern woman, as in the case Josephine Butler, a British feminist.

However, in the end of her essay, Spivak (1988) gives us an answer, explicitly stating that “the subaltern cannot speak”, and “there is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘women’ as a pious item.”

As Spivak contends, any existing endeavour to vocalize the mute women ends up in vain.

Western feminists’ attempts to represent their dumb sisters either finalize a “sameness of sisterhood”, concealing their mute counterparts; or conclude with an imperialist legitimation of “Indian womanhood”, overriding their silenced subjects.

In Spivak’s landmark essay, even the radical critic, Foucault, is accused of claiming an innate auto-repair, or self-representation of the oppressed subalterns. In light of the social stratification in India, the practice of auto-repair for subaltern women is by no means a possibility, and Foucault’s self-representation remedy only works for those native elites.

Secondly, the practice of sati is a paradigmatic instance in the themes of violence and silencing. It is noticeable that Spivak chooses sati as emblematic of the subaltern group and widow immolation as a telling example of subaltern silence in her article. Sati, performed as a heroic ritual, requires the Hindu widow to immolate herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre.

After the negotiation between British colonial authorities and the native patriarchy, sati was established to symbolize the core of Indian culture. Deployed by Hindu fundamentalisms who are contesting to retain the pristine religion, sati, the “widow sacrifice” is manoeuvred to be a form of slaughter and a representative of barbarism, signifying the brutal patriarchal oppression.

The tricky part about sati rests with the problem of how to distinguish a glorified heroic death from a forced suicide, or as I would rather say, a plotted murder. Certainly, willingness (or the lack of it) is the key to clear any doubt. Consequently, a concept of subject should be called into question to take upon willingness or its absence; and moreover, according to common sense (or its absence), what should be under investigation is the widow herself.

Like any judicial procedure, to convict a criminal and make an impartial trial, we need statements confessed by both the accused aggressor and the victim.
However sadly, in fact, the widow has been barred from any discussions or interrogations so she cannot tell her story.

On the contrary, in the practice of *sati*, the accused, stirred up a cross-cultural argument and won its case at last. Ironically, the widow’s dead body makes a comeback and begins to be honoured and voiced, in accordance with that the burnt-to-death widow is eulogized as an “ideal woman”. Up to now no one knows whether or not the widow or to-be-widow is willing to ascend the pyre, and no one knows her story since she is silenced in her exile as if she never existed.

To conclude, the mute woman’s untold story still keeps us in suspense and encourages us to unravel the story behind her silence.

As Spivak suggests, one of the duties of postcolonial intellectuals is to represent the subaltern class. Loomba (2005) informs us that what binds us and the subalterns together is the influence of the past history which exerts on the world we are living in today.

Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the binary opposition of past and present, and reconfigure the dynamics of postcolonial encounters within which gender, caste, or even neo-colonialism function today.

Finally, my paper will end with Mani’s reformulation of the question “Can the subaltern speak?” to show the significance of the work on *sati* and the silenced subalterns from leading scholars around the world.

The question “Can the subaltern speak?” then is perhaps better posed as a series of questions: Which group constitutes the subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be heard to be speaking or not speaking in any given set of materials? With what effect?

…

Rephrasing the questions in this way enables us to retain Spivak’s insight regarding the positioning of women in colonial discourse without conceding to colonial discourse what it, in fact, did not achieve — the erasure of women.

(Mani, 1992, 403)
Conclusion

It is with Spivak’s question *Can the subaltern speak?* that I started writing my paper *When Silenced Voices Meet Homi. K. Bhabha’s ‘Megaphone’*. Reflecting on the classic discussion in postcolonial circles, I realized that one of the central points in contemporary feminist postcolonial theory has been the theme of voice.

Spivak details how and why the subaltern women lose their voice and what intellectuals ought to do to speak for them.

In opposition to Spivak, Bhabha assumes that everyone can speak in postcolonial nations and offers a utopian proposal of narrating, not only speaking your name, but also narrating your story. On the basis of stark conceptual divisions between the two theorists, I had a flash of inspiration and decided to make a comparison, and then came up with an idea to entitle my paper as *When Silenced Voices Meet Homi. K. Bhabha’s ‘Megaphone’*.

This explains from where my paper derives its subject and how it comes into being.

Right now, we are living in a postcolonial world infused with pluralistic cultures, contrasting ideologies and all forms of political forces as well as subtle and disguised expansions and hegemonies.

For once-colonized countries, they have been experiencing the full impact of the postcolonial world. People in those nations have immense difficulties in self-identification. Lodged in the middle of a series of binary conceptual oppositions, while suffering from a severe psychic trauma, they have no other option but to dismiss themselves as “hybridities”.

To illustrate this phenomenon, postcolonial studies, as a new school of thought, have arisen to explore all the issues in the globe of postcolonialism. In the midst of this study, the Subaltern Studies and the postcolonial feminist group have made quite special contributions. They adjust their focus on the least privileged, the most marginalized and those submerged at the bottom of social hierarchy. In this case, the subaltern women in the Third World become the centre of discussion.

Viewing the long history of ruthless disregard for the subaltern women and current backlashes on feminist movements, postcolonial feminists have been striving for their own rights and succeeded in bringing the unprivileged gender back to the
public attention. Not only do they survive in the male-dominated societies, but also thrive at the forefront of the postcolonial academic circles.

After outlining the general idea of my paper, I want to make clear that what I am trying to express is not just briefing the postcolonial studies and comparing Bhabha and Spivak, but pinpointing the drawbacks of Bhabha’s unrealistic proposal and his theoretical defects.

More importantly, by making a critical judgment on Bhabha’s taken-for-granted megaphone suggestion, I firmly believe that simply tossing a loudspeaker to those mute subaltern women avails them not at all. Notwithstanding, Spivak implies a remedy, demanding intellectuals to represent and speak for them. Subaltern women are none the less positioned as speechless, and their muteness can be overcome with the help of postcolonial intellectuals.

However inexplicably, in this final portion of my paper, I feel no relief from the completion of a nearly forty-page-long article, nor do I believe my paper should end up at this point.

It is no longer a puzzle for us why the subaltern women cannot speak, but what continues to perplex me is whether or not the silenced women themselves are aware of their oppression. We understand that they cannot tell their story. But, it seems that the problem is whether they realize they have a story to tell about their unfair treatment.

I have no wish to complicate the issue; however, I do believe that my misgivings on this matter may lead us to find out the deep cause of their muteness.

As far as I am concerned, subaltern women themselves should be allowed to hold responsibility for themselves. As long as the root cause is identified, effective, timely and pertinent measures will be raised and then can be put into effect. Subaltern women’s voice cannot be heard through Bhabha’s “megaphone”, but instead it can be vocalized from a self-consciousness coming from within.
Bibliography


Freud, Sigmund (1925). *The Psychical Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction Between the Sexes*.


