

**Introduction to World Literature**  
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**Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty The politics of translation**

Hello and welcome to today's section of NPTEL course entitled introduction to literature. Today we are looking at one of the important essays on translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak its title the politics of translation. The significance of looking at this essay as part of a course on world literature as also lies in the multiple layers of politics and the translations which are the part of the process of framing something we now term as the world literature.

As we begin to notice most of the most of the text that we deal with they have a text which has been translated and which are getting circulated in different parts of the world outside the original place where it was published, the original location where it began to get circulated the original culture which received it. This translation and establishing would be within the same timeframe.

It could be across decades, it could be across centuries and in certain cases it could date back to even the earlier periods such as the first century AD. So given that when Spivak is talking about the politics of translation it also places in to a context the many things that we need to engage with and the many things that one needs to factor in while one is talking about the act of translation especially within a postcolonial context.

In this sense I also want to draw your attention to some of the observations in the contemporary where postcolonial literature as seen as always already world literature because there is a way in which postcolonial writings they begin to get translated and they begin to get visibility once they are translated to English once they get more visibly across their countries and places of origin.

And post-colonialism also has been seen as one of the ways in which the literary world begins to have dialogue with each other, how there is more and better communication across cultures and more importantly post-colonialism and the literature produced from the postcolonial works it has been seen as a very powerful non-Eurocentric production of literature of culture. It has been seen as the kind of output which is coming out from developing countries, which is coming out from non-Western perspectives.

Coming out from nonwhite perspective and that is something that contemporary world literature the canonization of contemporary world literature the framing of contemporary world literature that is something that the theorist are also looking forward to. While talking about Spivak she is a postcolonial theorist and she is also best known for her work which translated of dermatology by Davita from French into English.

And in this work politics of translation she is looking at the personal experience of having translated 2 important works, one there is as of dermatology from French to English and the other one Mahashweta Devi's works from an Indian language to Bengal into English., So she is looking at both of these processes and trying to look at the politics (3:32)and trying to analyze the frameworks within which she operates and the position that she adopts as that of a postcolonial feminist critic.

The politics of translation is an essay which was written in 1993, that she considers translation as an important approach pursuing the feminist agenda as well. And she is talking about translation and not is entirely about the technical aspects of translation, she is also (3:57) the subject position that she is inhabiting, she is also taking into account the various political positions.

The various ideological vivid system within which her work is also situated in. So apart from being a postcolonial theorist there are certain very pertinent belief systems within which rather the ideological systems within which Spivak tries to position her work which is feminist as well as Marxist. And there is also a very prominent post structure less approach which one can begin to see and having mentioned the association that she had with it (4:31) is also very very deconstructive in nature.

And in this work politics of translation, she is largely pursuing there is large grand agenda of achieving women Solidarity and she is trying to bring into question, is she was related to gender? Is she was related to feminist politics and she's trying to position it in a larger context of translation which is also an important factor when one begins to talk about literature.

So there are 3 approaches which we find coming together in this particular essay. First one feminist than postcolonialist and post structure list and there is of course language and the ways in which text move across languages which is also could be seen as the heart of this entire work.

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translator, is impractical. Yet, when I hear Derrida, quite justifiably, point out the difficulties between French and English, even when he agrees to speak in English—"I must speak in a language that is not my own because that will be more just"—I want to claim the right to the same dignified complaint for a woman's text in Arabic or Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>

It is more just to give access to the largest number of feminists. Therefore these texts must be made to speak English. It is more just to speak the language of the majority when through hospitality a large number of feminists give the foreign feminist the right to speak, in English. In the case of the third world foreigner, is the law of the majority that of democracy, the equitable law of democracy, or the "law" of the strongest? We might focus on this confusion. There is nothing necessarily incoercive about the Western feminist gaze. (The "naturalizing" of Jacques Lacan's sketching out of the psychic structure of the gaze in terms of group political behavior has always seemed to me a bit shaky.) On the other hand, there is nothing essentially noble about the law of the majority either. It is merely the easiest way of being "democratic" with minorities. In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of wish-it-translates, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoric of Chinese and Israeli. The cultural politics of high growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference inscribed and inscribing in these differences!

For the student, this tedious translation cannot compete with the spectacular stylistic experiment of a Monique Wittig or an Alice Walker.

Let us consider an example where attending to the author's stylistic experiment can produce a different text. Mahasweta Devi's "Sundari" is available in two versions. Devi has expressed approval for the attention to her signature style in the version entitled "Krusu-Gru." The alternative translation gives the title as "The We-Nurse," and thus neutralizes the author's irony in constructing an uncanny word, enough like "we-nurse" to make that sense, and enough unlike to shock. It is as if the translator should decide to translate Dylan Thomas's famous title and opening line as "Do not go gently into that good night." The theme of treating the breast as organ of labor-power-as-commodity and the breast as metonymic part-object standing in for other as-object—the way

of "The We-Nurse" leaves them out. She decides not to try to translate these hard bits of earthy wisdom, contrasting with class-specific access to modernity, also represented in the story. In fact, if the two translations are read side by side, the loss of the rhetorical silences of the original can be felt from one to the other.

First, then, the translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wanders off, in its special manner. Some think this is just an ethereal way of talking about literature or philosophy. But so much of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text.

The presupposition that women have a natural or narrative historical solidarity, that there is something in a woman or an undifferentiated women's story that speaks to another woman without benefit of language-learning, might stand against the translator's task of surrender. Paradoxically, it is not possible for an ethical agent to imagine ethnocentrism or alienity maximally. We have to turn the other into something like the self in order to be ethical. To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical. In that situation the good-willing attitude "she is just like me" is not very helpful. In so far as Mikalé Barrett is out like Gayatri Spivak, their friendship is more effective as a translation. In order to care that right of friendship or surrender of identity, of knowing that the rhetoric of the text indicates the limits of language for you as long as you are with the text, you have to be in a different relationship with the language, not even only with the specific text.

Learning about translation on the job, I came to think that it would be a practical help if one's relationship with the language being translated was such that sometimes one preferred to speak in it about intimate things. This is no more than a practical suggestion, not a theoretical requirement, useful especially because a woman writer who is wittingly or unwittingly a "feminist"—and of course all women writers are not "feminist" even in this broad sense—will relate to the three part staging of (agency in) language in ways defined out as "private," since they might question the more public linguistic maneuvers.

Let us consider an example of lack of intimacy with the medium. In



So this is how she positions herself and this particular work as a feminist translator and this is very important for us to keep in mind that translation here is not seen as an a political event. Translation is not seen as an event which could be pretty much the same regardless of who engages with that, it's not really about language and she is bringing into discussion various things which are not directly associated with language but things which would frame the ways in which ideas and particular language gets articulated particularly within (5:59) literally and then cultural context.

And she is also pursuing and pushing this argument that ultimately it is about the politics that defines the active translation. Translation when it is undertaken by people with various subject positions with different ideologies is going to have a design out, altogether. There is no single linear way in which one text can be translated into the other. There are the underlying politics of ways ethnicity, caste, gender all of this comes into play when this is translated from a certain language to the other.

And this Spivak argues as all them are pertinent in the postcolonial context and that's a kind of comparison and foil that she tries to bring eventually as positioning (6:49) of grammatology on the one and Mahashweta devi's works on the other

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the British women/critics within the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, its other racist present, as well as its "made in Britain" history of male domination.

**Translation as Reading**

How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates? There is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity. If we emphasize the logical at the expense of these rhetorical interferences, we remain safe. "Safety" is the appropriate term here, because we are talking of risks, of violence to the translating medium.

I felt that I was taking these risks when I recently translated some eighteenth-century Bengali poetry. I quote a bit from my "Translator's Preface":

I must overcome what I was taught in school: the highest mark for the most accurate collection of synonyms, strung together in the most pompous syntax. I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetic prose and the forced simplicity of "plain English," that have imposed themselves as the norm. . . . Translation is the most intimate act of making. I surrender to the text when I translate. These songs, sung day after day in family chorus before clear memory began, have a peculiar intimacy for me. Reading and surrendering take on new meaning in such a case. The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other—before memory—in the closest places of the self.

Yet language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figurative language disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a dissemination cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning leaps into the space between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive rhetoric that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the salvages of the language-textile give way, fray into *fragments* or *facilitations*. Although every act of reading or communication is a bit of this risky *fraying* which scatters together

question.) The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits *fraying*, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. The politics of translation from a non-European woman's text too often suppresses this possibility because the translator cannot engage with, or care sufficiently for, the rhetoric of the original.

The simple possibility that something might not be meaningful is contained by the rhetorical system as the always possible presence of a space outside language. This is more eerie stage (and challenge) in the effort to communicate with other possible intelligent beings in space. (Absolute alterity or otherness is thus deferred—deferred into an other self who resembles us, however minimally, and with whom we can communicate.) But a more homely staging of it occurs across two earthly languages. The experience of contained alterity in an unknown language spoken in a different cultural milieu is uncanny.

Let us now think that, in that other language, rhetoric may be disrupting logic in the matter of the production of an agent, and indicating the founding violence of the silence at work within rhetoric. Logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated connectives. Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much. The juggle relationship between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing, is a relationship by which a world is made for the agent, so that the agent can act in an ethical way, a political way, a day-to-day way, so that the agent can be alive, in a human way, in the world. Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation.

Unfortunately it is only too easy to produce translations if this task is completely ignored. I myself see no choice between the quick and easy and hapdash way, and translating well and with difficulty. There is no reason why a responsible translation should take more time in the doing. The translator's preparation might take more time, and her love for the text might be a matter of a reading skill that takes patience. But the sheer material production of the text need not be slow.

Without a sense of the electricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction of the non-Western sense is afloat. No argument for convenience can be persuasive here. That is always the argument, it seems. This is where I travel from Barrett's enabling notion of the question of language in poststructuralism. Poststructuralism has shown some of us a

And something that she continued to emphasize throughout this work right from the beginning is the aspect of identity.

And shall I read out to you and it's from one of Spivak's own work which she also quotes in this particular essay where she is talking about the certain kind of risks that she takes while she engages in translation and this she refers particularly with respect to the translation that she undertook from 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengali poetry to English. And this is quote that she quotes from her own work from translators prefix.

I must overcome what I was taught in school the highest mark for the most accurate collection of synonyms strung together in the most approximate index I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetry pros and the force to simplicity of plain English that have forced themselves as the norm. Translation is our most intimate act of reading I surrender to the text when I translate these songs sang the day after day in family chorus before clear memory began, have a peculiar intimacy for me.

Reading and surrendering take on new meanings in such a case. The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other before memory in the closest places of the self. So here translation is seen as a wider act, a political act where one engages with self with questions of identity and it is also an act of reading and this is how she positions translations into not the technical superimposition from one language to the other.

On the other hand it itself is an act of reading that translated text thus becomes different text altogether. It becomes a text which is read in a different way and which is again presented to another set of audience in an entirely different way. So when language changes this essay and the many discussions around it, it also draws attention to this fact that when language changes there are multiple things which undergo change along with that.

It becomes a different text and its being received by a different set of audience who have a different cultural ethos who have different ethnic tradition. So it is not the same text which gets translated. It is a different text which gets received and circulated and this probably is one thing that we need to keep in mind even when we are engaging with the text which are in circulation.

The text which have been translated and even when the text is not translated for incentive we are looking at Shakespeare, if you're looking at one of the come to us informed of circulation travelling across a series travelling across spaces one needs to keep in mind that the text undergoes a radical change the moment the sense of audience changes. The text was undergoes a radical change the moment the location and the structures within which the text gets received undergoes a change and there is something that Spivak also tries to perceive further within a postcolonialist feminist and post structure less framework.

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translator, is impractical. Yet, when I hear Derrida, quite justifiably, point out the difficulties between French and English, even when he agrees to speak in English—"I must speak in a language that is not my own because that will be more just"—I want to claim the right to the same dignified complaint for a woman's text in Arabic or Vietnamese!

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of "The Wet-Nurse" leaves them out. She decides not to try to translate these hard bits of earthy wisdom, contrasting with class-specific access to modernity, also represented in the story. In fact, if the two translations are read side by side, the loss of the rhetorical silences of the original can be felt from one to the other.

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Let us consider an example of lack of intimacy with the medium. In

And very soon into the essay she draws her attention to the active translation as it happens within postcolonial situation. The Third World text and what happens when those texts are translated into English in her own words "It is more just to give access to the largest number

of feminist therefore these texts must be made to speak English. It is more just to speak the language of the majority when through hospitality a large number of feminist give the foreign feminist their right to speak in English”

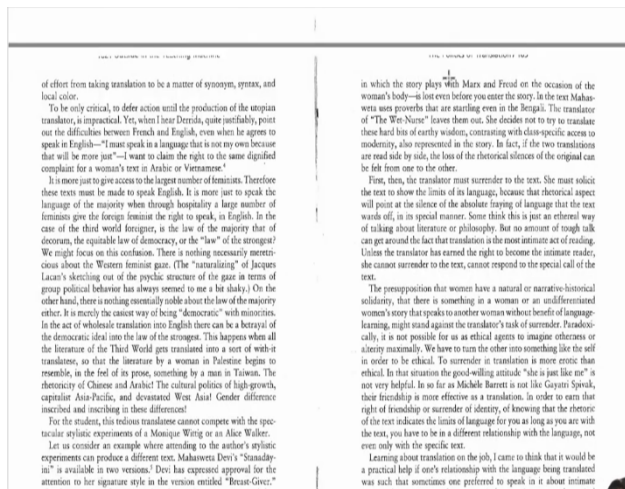
In the case of the Third World foreigner is a law of the majority that have decorum the credible law of democracy or the law of the strongest and further down she sees “in the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the Democratic ideal into the law of the strongest and this happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated in to a sort of with it translatese.

So that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble in the feel of it pros something by a man in Taiwan, the rhetoricity of Chinese and Arabic the cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific and the basket and West Asia gender difference inscribed and inscribing in these differences.

And she goes on to give a very real pertinent example of translating Mahashweta devi’s short stories Stanadayini. There are 2 different titles and translations which are available she says ‘the one version which is title “Breast Giver” the alternative title which have which gives the title The Wet Nurse” the first one of course she also points out that “breast giver” is the title approved by the original author herself.

And in the 2<sup>nd</sup> one what happens is, when Stanadayini is translated into “the wet nurse” it neutralizes the author’s irony in constructing an uncanny word enough like “the wet nurse” to make that sense and enough unlike to shock.

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And what are the implications here? When the same text is translated as “the wet nurse” and the “breast giver” what difference does it bring in?

Towards the end of that section she says “if the 2 translations are read side-by-side the laws of the rhetorical silences of the original can be felt from one to the other”. So what are the things that she is trying to tell us from from this point of time onwards about translation about identity and about certain things which are retained and more importantly about certain things which are entirely lost in this certain forms of translation”.

It’s then when she begins to argue, she begins to position her arguments in place. First when the translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off in a special manner. From this she moves on to the feminist approach from then she moves on to talk about what role gender plays.

How her own position as a feminist translator can be employed to engage in a dialogue with these otherwise predominantly post-colonialist as well as post structure less framework’s and how language itself becomes entirely different in the hands of feminist scholar. How is a tool to engage with identity? To engage with the self of the original writer the self of the author when it is being used by a feminist postcolonial scholars like Spivak.

She also uses a very predominantly sexual analogy to talk about the active translation. Arguing for the need to surrender to surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical. So there is an emotional element which is brought into it. There is a very abstract thing which happens at the level of gender, at the level of surrender, surrendering the self of the translator

and allowing the self of the translator to surrender to the text that is something that Spivak seems to highlight throughout this work.

So as a translator, as a feminist postcolonial translator Spivak is fully aware of the challenges that she is facing while translating and she also therefore understands why one tends to play safe. There are certain ways in which one would cite that logic over rhetorical influences but she also says that in doing so one also runs through risk of losing certain vital clues which are hidden in the text.

And there would be certain metaphors which would get lost and she wants the translator predominantly the feminist translator against these things and says that it is important to develop love an affinity for the text which is being translated. Unless there is a relation predominantly that it surrender that is established with the text that translation may use certain vital aspects giving the process and this is something that she begins to foreground from the beginning of the discussion that there should be a relation between a translator and the text.

And this relation as she puts it, it's more of an erotic nature, it's of the surrender than being more ethical or technical. And she also says that, that this is something that would hold audience of the translator and would also keep audience at bay. One of the key things in this essay is our concern with the politics of translations from our non-European women's text and she also quotes Derrida (1993)(16:01) context to say.

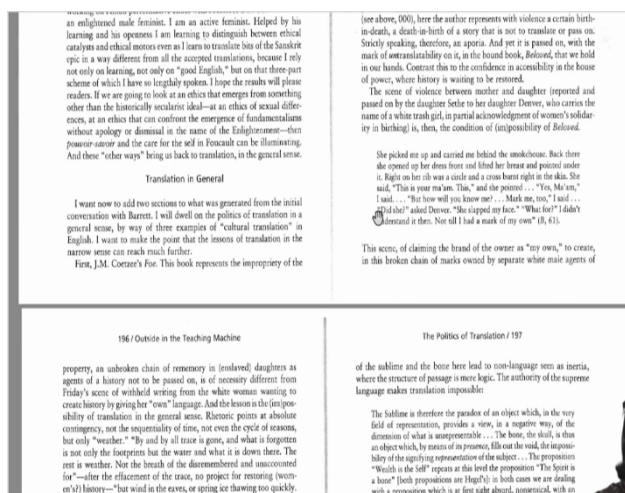
I must speak in a language that is not my own because that will be more just and she says I want to claim the right of the same dignified complaint for a woman's text in Arabic or Vietnamese and here what she is trying to do and its essence is to challenge the English language dominated feminist movements which are across the globe. And she's also trying to push this argument further and comment that there is a way in which the law of majority, silence is a minority language feminist within the Western world but it is also a certain west centric.

A certain Eurocentric kind of feminism is also being sold to the other developing Third World countries. In her own words in the act of wholesale translation into English as we have already shown that can be a betrayal of the Democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. So I want to now take you to the main discussion that I would also like to foreground in today's lecture which is her engagement with the north-western, non-European text.





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She gives as one of the examples. The examples from Tony Morrison's *Beloved* and this is the (( ))(17:22) that I bring to you. The scene of violence between mother and daughter reported and passed on by the daughter Sethe to her daughter Denver who carries the name of a white trash girl, in partial acknowledgements of women Solidarity in birthing is then the condition of impossibility of *Beloved*. So this is the excerpt from the model.

She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it, right on her rib was a circle and a cross burned right in the skin. She said this is your mam, guess and she pointed yes-ma, she said but how will you know me? Mark me too, I said. Did she? Ask Denver. She slapped my face, but for?

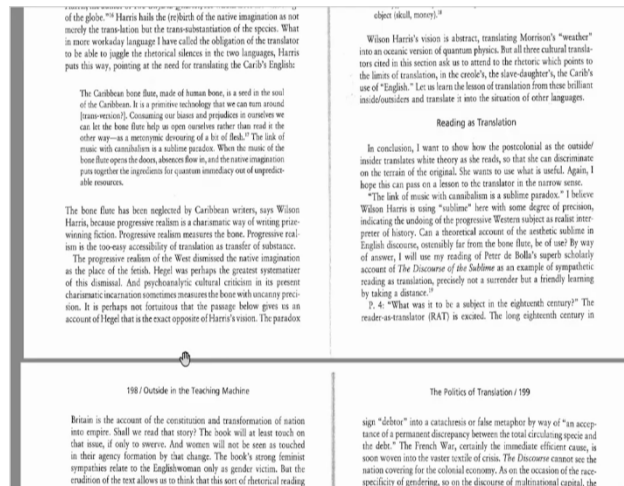
I didn't understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own. And this scene Spivak argues of claiming the brand of the own and that's my own to create in this broken scene of marks owned by separate white male agents of property and unbroken change of re-memory in enslaved daughters as agents of history not to be passed on is of necessity different from Friday scene of a withheld writing from the white woman wanting to create history by giving her own language and the lesson is the impossibility of translation in the general sense.

I want to draw your attention to this point that she is making the impossibility of translation. There are certain context, deep rooted cultural context and certain feminist ethos which she is particularly referring to over here which cannot be translated only if one relies entirely on the technical knowledge of language. It demands something more deep intimate and personal that

some of the terms that she used is a surrender an erotic relation a love relation between the translator and the text.

And she argues that, Spivak continues to argue that the translated text begins to resemble the original or the translated text begins to gain an identity of its own only when this relation exists in terms of identity in terms of selfhood between the translator and the translated work.

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And this being an essay that we shall come back to at the later point at the end of the course again, I want you to pay attention to some of the important aspect that she is drawing attention. So we shall not be going into the many details of this essay, right now should definitely coming back to take a look at towards the end of this course and when she is talking about(19:56) as translation and when she's talking about this particularly towards the end of the essay in terms of its conclusion.

I will give you the excerpt to you. I want to show how are the postcolonial as the outside inside a translates wide theory as she reads, so that she can discriminate on the terrain of the original. She wants to use, what is used for and again I hope this can pass on a lesson to the translator in the narrowest sense. I like the way it is like structure there are some examples that she uses and she also tries to theorize on the basis of that.

And as pointed out at the outset this theorization happens through 3 major frameworks one is postcolonial list, post structuralist and feminist. One of the things that Spivak tries to do in this essay is to show how translation has been manipulated to disseminate and ideological you motivated image of postcolonial countries and is can be more succinctly observed when

we look at some of the other essays by Spivak like “can the subaltern speak” and her other observations on comparative literature and how that also gets positioned wherein the framework of world literature.

And having notice that Spivak has dismantled the preconceived notion of feminism and the thoughts about postcolonial literature and the society which can get visibility which can get circulation only through English, we also see how critical she is being about this active translation which eventually talks about translation in a very one-sided way in a very lopsided way about everything getting translated into English language and getting circulated across the globe wherever English is spoken, wherever English is a dominated and we also know that more and more it is becoming (( ))(21:38) language of (( ))(21:39) just as much it is also the language of politics and the language of global economy.

And one thing perhaps she hopes to be able to generate is this discussion which will also increase historical, social culture and ideological and political understanding about the society about which predominantly European Western feminist have been showing solidarity mostly from the outer periphery’s through hegemonic English psyche. So this is evidently an attack on the western feminist model where an articulation in favour of the postcolonial societies and regulation in favor of the gender situation in postcolonial is made possible only when that articulation happens in this language English.

Though the hegemony that English-language always already had and the kind of politics that it comes into contact with which tries to rescue the women from the postcolonial countries and Spivak began same as match over here. It’s for the same reason that Spivak mentions this about herself my position is generally a reactive one I’m viewed by Marxist to codec by feminist assist to male identified.

By indigenous theorist to committed to western theory I’m an easily pleased about this. So there is something about Spivak’s position which questions the very frameworks through which she engages a lot of text that she talks about like feminist post structuralist and postcolonialist. So in that sense I also find it useful to end it with Spivak because she also critiques the very terms on which world literature translation compared to literature and postcolonial literature are being based on.

And this is not to say that there is an easy equation between postcolonial literature and world literature but this tool this framework that Spivak is using would be very very handy and

analyzing some of the text and we also get to know that the text that we access, the text that we analyze, the text that lends itself to any kind of academic interpretation is also the text which has been refashioned and reoriented into English-language.

So this might be quite removed from the reality that it represents that might be quite removed from the original, our original circulation and the reception that the text had in the first place but nevertheless what's important to know is that you're also dealing with something inevitable over here, this politics of translation which privileges based on academics which privileges the hegemony of English-language that is also something that one should begin to deal with.

So the advantage of works such as Spivak's politics of translation is not to undermine the efforts being made to translate from different languages across the world into English but the danger lies in seeing this as the only kind of articulation possible. So one of the possible ways in which one can begin to respond these things is also by taking into account the native scholarship also by taking into account the frameworks which are non-Western.

Frameworks which are predominantly nativistic and this is something that Spivak also does not really provide us an alternative framework and that is also something that we need to be critically aware of that while Spivak, in Spivak's work began clearly see what is being undermined. We can clearly see what is being critique the alternative frameworks that she tentatively proposes they do not emerge sufficiently well.

So for the same reasons also important to look inward that one is dealing with world literature to know what the local scholarship, local interpretative frameworks deal with, how significantly possible it is to engage with the text without necessarily engaging with through the lens of Western or predominantly European into frameworks and the traditions.

With this I wrap up today's session and I would also encourage you to take a look at this essay in detail. So that when we come back to look at it at later point of time towards the end of the core there would be larger issues that we can engage with in a more critical way, in a more detailed way by also bringing into discussion the text that we have covered as part of this course. With this I wrap up today's lecture, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.