



(c)

## Gayatri Spivak

### India

# « Babel est notre refuge » : Entretien avec Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

## The author

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** is an Indian literary theorist, philosopher and University Professor at Columbia University, where she is a founding member of the school's Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. She is best known for the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* considered as a founding text of postcolonialism; and for her translation of and introduction to Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*. In 2012 she was awarded the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy for being « a critical theorist and educator speaking for the humanities against intellectual colonialism in relation to the globalized world ». She received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Republic of India, in 2013.

Spivak is best known for her contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the « legacy of colonialism » and the way readers engage with literature and culture. She often focuses on the cultural texts of those who are marginalized by dominant western culture : the new immigrant, the working class, women, and other positions of the subaltern.

## Bibliography

***Nationalism and the imagination*** (Seagull Books, 2010) (92 p.)

***Who sings the Nation-State*** (Seagull Books, 2007) (128 p.)

***Other Asias*** (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005) (376 p.)

***Death of a Discipline*** (Columbia University Press, 2003) (136 p.)

***A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*** (Harvard UP, 1999) (464 p.)

***The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues. Ed. Sarah Harasym.*** (Routledge, 1990) (176 p.)

***Selected Subaltern Studies. Ed. with Ranajit Guha*** (Oxford University Press, 1988) (448 p.)

***Can the Subaltern Speak? in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds. Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*** (1988, traduction en français 2006) (110 p.)

***In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*** (Routledge, 1987) (440 p.) (PAYOT, 2009) (512 p.)

## Keywords

Philosophie  
Théorie littéraire  
Postcolonialisme

Littérature  
Féminisme  
Littérature postcoloniale

## Zoom

**Nationalisme et imagination** (Payot, 2010) (160 p.)



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has distinguished herself as one of the foremost scholars of contemporary literary and postcolonial theory and feminist thought. Known for her translation of Derrida's *On Grammatology* and her groundbreaking essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Spivak has often focused on subaltern, marginalized women and the role of essentialism in feminist thought to unite women from divergent cultural backgrounds. In *Nationalism and the Imagination*, Spivak expands upon her previous postcolonial scholarship, employing a cultural lens to examine the rhetorical underpinnings of the idea of the nation-state.

In this gripping and intellectually rigorous work, Spivak specifically analyzes the creation of Indian sovereignty in 1947 and the tone of Indian nationalism, bound up with class and religion, that arose in its wake. Spivak was five years old when independence was declared, and she vividly writes: "These are my earliest memories: Famine and blood on the streets." As well, she recollects the songs and folklore stories that were prevalent at the time in order to examine the role of the mother tongue and the relationship between language and feelings of national identity. She concludes that nationalism colludes with the private sphere of the imagination in order to command the public sphere.

Originally given as an address at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria, *Nationalism and the Imagination* provides powerful insight into the historical narrative of India as well as compelling ideas that speak to nationalist concerns around the world. Also included in this book is the discussion with Spivak that followed the speech, making this an essential and informative work for scholars of post-colonialism.

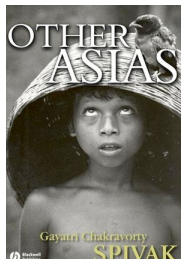
**Who sings the Nation-State** (Seagull Books, 2007) (128 p.) **Other Asias** (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005) (



Who Sings the Nation-State brings together two of America's foremost critics and two of the most influential theorists of the last decade. Together, they explore the past, present and future of the state in a time of globalization.

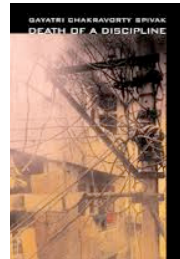
What is contained in a state has become ever more plural whilst the boundaries of a state have become ever more fluid. No longer does a state naturally come with a nation. In a world of migration and shifting allegiances - caused by cultural, economic, military and climatic change - the state is a more provisional place and its inhabitants more stateless.

This spirited and engaging conversation ranges widely across Palestine, what Enlightenment and key contemporary philosophers have to say about the state, who exercises power in today's world, whether we can have a right to rights, and even what the singing of the Star Spangled Banner in Spanish says about the complex world we live in today.



In this major intervention into the 'Asian Century', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak challenges the reader to re-think Asia, in its political and cultural complexity, in the global South and in the metropole.

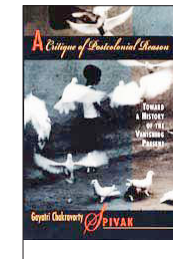
**Death of a Discipline** (Columbia University Press, 2003)



For almost three decades, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has been ignoring the standardized «rules» of the academy and trespassing across disciplinary boundaries. Today she remains one of the foremost figures in the study of world literature and its cultural consequences. In this new book she declares the death of comparative literature as we know it and sounds an urgent call for a «new comparative literature,» in which the discipline is given new life -- one that is not appropriated and determined by the market.

In the era of globalization, when mammoth projects of world literature in translation are being undertaken in the United States, how can we protect the multiplicity of languages and literatures at the university? Spivak demonstrates how critics interested in social justice should pay close attention to literary form and offers new interpretations of classics such as Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own. Through close readings of texts not only in English, French, and German but also in Arabic and Bengali, Spivak practices what she preaches.

**A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present** (Harvard UP, 1999)

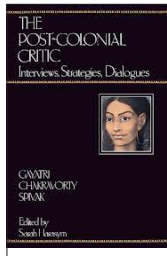


Are the "culture wars" over? When did they begin? What is their relationship to gender struggle and the dynamics of class? In her first full treatment of postcolonial studies, a field that she helped define, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the world's foremost literary theorists, poses these questions from within the postcolonial enclave.

"We cannot merely continue to act out the part of Caliban," Spivak writes; and her book is an attempt to understand and describe a more responsible role for the postcolonial critic. A Critique of Postcolonial Reason tracks the figure of the "native informant" through various cultural practices--philosophy, history, literature—to suggest that it emerges as the metropolitan hybrid. The book addresses feminists, philosophers, critics, and interventionist intellectuals, as they unite and divide. It ranges from Kant's analytic of the sublime to child labor in Bangladesh. Throughout, the notion of a Third World interloper as the pure victim of a colonialist oppressor emerges as sharply suspect: the mud we sling at certain seemingly overbearing ancestors such as Marx and Kant may be the very ground we stand on.

A major critical work, Spivak's book redefines and repositions the postcolonial critic, leading her through transnational cultural studies into considerations of globality.

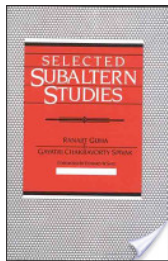
**The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues. Ed. Sarah Harasym.** (Routledge, 1990)



Gayatri Spivak, one of our best known cultural and literary theorists, addresses a vast range of political questions with both pen and voice in this unique book. The Post-Colonial Critic brings together a selection of interviews and discussions in which she has taken part over the past five years; together they articulate some of the most compelling politico-theoretical issues of the present.

In these lively texts, students of Spivak's work will identify her unmistakable voice as she speaks on questions of representation and self-representation, the politicization of deconstruction; the situations of post-colonial critics; pedagogical responsibility; and political strategies.

**Selected Subaltern Studies. Ed. with Ranajit Guha** (Oxford University Press, 1988)



This book collects ten essays from the five volumes of Subaltern Studies that have so far appeared. The aim of the studies is to 'promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies, and thus help to rectify the elitist bias

characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area. The contributors... focus attention on what Gramsci called the subaltern classes and their condition, and also re-examine well-known events and themes in the new, more rounded perspective. The contributors encompass history, politics, economics and sociology; attitudes, ideologies, and belief systems.' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' introduces the volume and Edward Said, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia has provided a foreword.

**Can the Subaltern Speak? in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds. Marxism and the interpretation of Culture** (1988, traduction en français 2006)



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**In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics** (Routledge, 1987) (440 p.) (Payot, 2009) (512 p.)



Ce livre culte, le plus célèbre de Spivak, propose au croisement de l'histoire, de la critique littéraire, de la sociologie et de la philosophie, plusieurs essais où, relisant Coleridge, Dante, Virginia Woolf ou Wordsworth, mais aussi Marx ou la militante Mahasweta Devi, elle offre sur la guerre des cultures, l'imagination, la dialectique du réel et de la fiction, le féminisme français, l'impérialisme et l'exploitation, ou encore la parole des subalternes, autant de contributions majeures dans les domaines de la théorie littéraire, des cultural studies, du féminisme et du postcolonialisme.