Stylistic Hurdles in Critical Thought: Bhabha and Spivak

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Both Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have been criticised for their incomprehensible use of language. Their style is often a deviation from the established contemporary usage, which, as a result, makes it difficult for readers to decipher their statements. "What makes them write in a language which is not reader-friendly?" is the question that baffles many a mind in the academic sphere. This paper seeks to delve deeper on the issue of obscurity in their style of writing. This paper aims to present an analysis of their often strange and peculiar style of prose. It also seeks to find out why they take resort to such style. Does the style itself serve a purpose? Is style sometimes more important than content? Should or should not there be parameters of literary style that must be adhered to? These can be interesting questions which this paper seeks to discuss.

Bhabha's dense formulations lead to much that is far from reader-friendly. It has often been claimed that it is difficult to say, or pin down, what exactly Bhabha is trying to convey. Bhabha has invited heavy flak for his addiction of jargons, his muddy thinking, and his intellectual confusion. Marjorie Perloff's reaction on Bhabha's appointment at Harvard was that of "dismay" and surprise, as she is convinced that Bhabha "doesn't have anything to say." While Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of media studies at New York University remarked on the meaning of Bhabha's writing in an interview which appeared on 17 November 2001 in The New York Times, "One could finally argue that there is nothing there, beyond the neologisms and Latinate buzzwords. Most of the time I don't know what he's talking about." But the same Miller confessed that Bhabha has a spellbinding effect on student audience. He records about a lecture by Bhabha that Bhabha spoke "in sentences of such protracted and pretentious emptiness that you might have thought that he was kidding, although not a single titter ever broke the churchlike silence of his auditors, the youthful hundreds rapt and scribbling reverently, and the man himself showed no trace of irony."

Bhabha's indecipherable jargon and dense prose has earned him a certain kind of notoriety in the academic world. The journal *Philosophy and Literature* conferred Bhabha with second prize in its "Bad Writing Competition" which considers bad writing from the most stylistically lamentable prose found in scholarly books and articles. The sentence, from his major work *The Location of Culture*, that won prize for Bhabha reads:

> If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to "normalize" formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality. (91)

Noticeably such kind of style has often been embraced by many of the illustrious theorists of the recent times. It is often believed in the academic world, where things are usually complicated, that those who write clearly, do not say anything noticeable. They are labelled as shallow and do not warrant any attention. Such style in theory has turned out to be an efficient scheme. It often wins a celebrity status for theorists who adopt such style. Incomprehensibility in one's writing is often taken as

insightfulness, a feature that has a superiority over the average minds of the uneducated mass. Besides, the readers who have put in all the endeavours required to decode such impenetrable writing very often get transformed, somewhat as a result of their investment in the form of ample time already devoted, and somewhat because they are confident they have, in that way, earned a tag to be in the elite group. Obscurity is thus an unfailing tactic to generate a cultish following. One can conclude from the kind of language many postcolonial theorists use that they are convinced with the idea that a certain kind of language provides validity to the theories they are postulating. Christian Barbara points out that the language of their theory mystifies the meaning rather than it clarifies (p. 55). Barbara's aversion to such kind of language is so evident in her claim, "It is the kind of writing for which composition teachers would give a freshman a resounding F" (56).

Judith Butler, who bagged the first prize in the same competition in which Homi K Bhabha was the second-prize winner, and other postmodernist theorists have defended these obscure sentences as they claim that they are dealing with difficult and subtle concepts, so they are hard to understand. Edward Said, who himself has been accused of difficult writing, said in an interview, ''I moved away from that kind of thing many years ago, because I feel myself that it's terribly important as an intellectual to communicate as immediately and forcefully as possible." But at times he too has conceded that difficult writing was occasionally necessary in scholarly work. His support for Bhabha reinforces his concession for such incomprehensible writing, he says in an interview, ''Writers like Bhabha are looking for the occasion to work out ideas. There's something unfinished about it.'' It can be inferred that the fretwork elaborations of syntax and vocabulary that go with the style of modern theories are loaded with complex concepts. Michael Bérubé's remarks about Bhabha is an education in understanding Bhabha, "Even if Bhabha's work is forbiddingly opaque, we should make no mistake that he is describing actual social phenomena in the colonial and postcolonial world."

Even Bhabha is troubled by the question of "indeterminacy *of* meaning", "Is the specialized, 'textualized', often academic language of theory merely another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that sutures its own power-knowledge equation?" (Commitment to Theory 7). Barbara exposes the hidden agenda of postcolonial critics who, she believes, "are pursuing their own agenda by changing the language of critical writing, and it further leads to giving a new meaning to theory (51). In an interview by Sachidananda Mohanty, on being accused of his impermeable language Bhabha tries to explain his handicap, "I make all theoretical framework my own even if I may be drawing upon Foucault, Lacan, and Mahatma Gandhi. The attempt at making new connections, articulating new meanings, always takes the risk of being not immediately comprehensible to readers." In the same interview he counters the view that the language of the theory should be simple. Furthermore, he announces that he finds it frustrating "that people talk about easy access to a work and a notion of transparency without thinking of what is really involved." But it shall never be understood that that he is not ready to rework on his language. If you point out something really difficult, he assures that he is ready to rewrite and also confesses that he actually has done the same many a time.

He tries to defend his style when he claims that that one has to be considerate in analysing a concept, for the kind of subject it is dealing with. He raises this issue for the better understanding of this problem, "What tensions and ambivalences mark this enigmatic place from which theory 'speaks'?" (Commitment to Theory 8). It is a significant point to note what constitutes these literary theories. The theorists tread on a thorny path full of amalgamation of difficult ideas. This can be one reason why the language of critical theories have turned out to be so puzzling. Barbara claims that the Western philosophy inevitably indulges in the split between the abstract and the emotional (56). In that case it is too demanding to expect from theorists to postulate their theories that are too abstract in a concrete language.

Bhabha maintains that, "It is a sign of political maturity to accept that there are many forms of political writing whose different effects are obscured when they are divided between the 'theoretical' and the 'activist'" (Commitment to Theory 7). His idea finds an endorsement from Boon's claims that the aim of critical theory is not only to interpret the world but to transform it (80)." The obscurity of Bhabha's ideas can be attributed to the activism of politics of representation with which postcolonial theories are very closely related, as Hardin has observed that Bhabha "stages" his theories. In the opinion of Boon, the primary concern of critical theory is to overcome oppression through processes of liberation and emancipation (79).

Bhabha stresses that his work should not be ignored just because of its challenging language, as he is hitting on some complex ideas. He asserts, "In this complicated formulation I have tried to indicate something of the complex boundary and location of the event of theoretical critique which does not *contain* the truth (in polar opposition to totalitarianism, 'bourgeois liberalism' or whatever is supposed to repress it)" (Commitment to Theory 8). Bhabha's mind is always working on complex ideas, and in fact on so many concepts at the same time; it is only natural that his language turns out to be complex. Byrne's observation substantiates this claim that Bhabha's thoughts do not move in a linear direction, "Where Bhabha is more consistent, however, is in his always challenging, and sometimes provoking, methodological and critical eclecticism. This is not, I would argue, an unconsidered eclecticism or the act of a postmodern dilettante: rather, it represents Bhabha's unceasing attempts to think in interdisciplinary and transnational ways" (1).

Bhabha, however, makes no apologies for his prose or for the scope and nature of his ideas. For instance, after hearing that a colleague found one of his papers "of forbidding difficulty", Bhabha responded in his essay "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt":

> I can't apologize for the fact that you found my paper completely impenetrable. I did it quite consciously, I had a problem, I worked it out. And if a few people got what I was saying or some of what I am saying, I'm happy. If not, obviously it's a disaster. (67)

According to Joe Marshall Hardin, Bhabha's writing by no means can be termed as a disaster. He attributes Bhabha's dense and metaphor-rich writing style to his literary training, as he got to learn that Bhabha would often organise himself for writing session by reading poetry. Bhabha has acknowledged that South Asian and Continental traditions tend to be more metaphoric and symbolic in their use of language. The

reason of Bhabha's choice for a literary language in his critical theories can been seen in Lorde's observation. Lorde believes that literature is bestowed with a language that has power to communicate better, he suggests, "We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared. And where that does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it" (37-38). Hardin thinks that Bhabha's writing are a direct expression of his theories about how literacy and writing function; it is, in particular, an expression of his idea that literacy works outside the level of the sentence, "where the pauses occur in the sententiousness, where there is a hesitation within it." He further believes that that Bhabha's work characterises the enactment of his theory— a theory that hopes to move language past its sententiousness and to enact its potential to "open up" discourse (137).

Not every reader is trained to receive Bhabha's writings adroitly. Bhabha considers the reader an active participant in his theory. The reader is expected to shed his passive role and be there, actively seeing the evolution of Bhabha's arguments. Bhabha emphasises, "One cannot passively follow the line of argument running through the logic of the opposing ideology" (Commitment to Theory 9). One has to actively participate in the evolution of Bhabha's ideas. Bhabha endeavours to make the reader witness, what he tries to demonstrate, rather than merely comprehend his statements. Both Bhabha and Spivak use language as a performance. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J L Austin argues that there are statements that are best understood as performative or illocutionary, linguistic acts. Thus Bhabha seems to do what is ideal for the literary author rather than the critic or theorist; he tries to show rather than state his theoretical contentions. Joe Marshall Hardin's observation about Bhabha's language explains Bhabha's stance, he stresses: "While his facility with language can make him a challenge to read, it is always interesting to watch how he "stages" his theory" (135). This, in plain terms, is a great merit in a poet or fiction writer but whether it is also a boon for the theorist is yet to be seen. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states:

> There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West. (28)

The conspicuous fact is that Bhabha himself— possibly more than any other leading postcolonial theorist— has faced the charges of elitism, Eurocentrism, bourgeois academic privilege, and has also been accused of drawing upon the principles of European modes of discourse that brackets him with the "neo-imperial" or "neo-colonial" attitude that dominates the colonised Third World (Benjamin Graves, Homi K. Bhabha: an Overview). Byrne, however, claims that "his very early journalistic work, more recent informal articles in the journal *Art forum* and his radio broadcasting all suggest a measured, lucid and carefully (in conventional terms) argued polemical narrative approach is no way anathema to Bhabha (1). He further adds that, "Early in his career, in an article for the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) in February 1978 entitled ' Indo-Anglian Attitudes', Bhabha's prose showed few signs of thickening or indeed curdling" (2).

If Bhabha's work remains confined to a select few, who are trained readers of theory, then Bhabha's work would probably never become as meaningful as it should be. But it is possible that other theorists would pick up the cue from Bhabha and write theory almost like literature itself is written and then Bhabha would emerge as a master— a leader of a particular kind of theory and criticism; one which is full of literariness. Joe Marshall Hardin considers Bhabha's language a language of possibility and he also finds it so hopeful. He asserts:

> For me, Bhabha's writing is a lesson in the way that style can serve as an expression of theme and an example of one of his most important points— that
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> theory writing is a form of political action. If we are, as Bhabha believes, to reject the idea of a transparent language, then we ought to become more open to the possibility of metaphor and non-senteniousness in our theory. This is writing as "mediation, not medium." Although we may find Bhabha daunting at first, I think his growing popularity as a scholar is a hopeful sign for academic writing. These are values that I would like to see spread. (138)

It seems to me that Bhabha, in his style of writing follows the New Historicist point of view that regards the literary content very highly in any form of writing.[1] For the New Historicist, the truth of history is contained in literature rather than in history itself (Colebrook 2). When Bhabha uses literariness in his critical and theoretical writing he seems to honour the stance of New Historicism. After all, there have been so many statements on authors like Shakespeare and his contemporaries that have come from critics and scholars of New Historicism, who tell us things previously unknown. But the significant difference between the New Historicist and Bhabha is that while the former uses literature to dig out historical truth, Bhabha uses it to convey his own realisations and conceptions about literature and colonialism.

Bhabha also mentions another intellectual in the "Acknowledgments" of his major work *The Location of Culture*, Gyan Prakash, whom he finds significant for another reason. Bhabha says that he is indebted to "Prakash for insisting that scholarship must be leavened with style" (ix). This shows that for Bhabha style is necessary even in critical and theoretical writing. He could perhaps realise that style is to be paid special attention to if one wants one's scholarship be noticed. Thus literariness for Bhabha could be said to lead to truth as well as a kind of communicative skill that is missing wherever literariness itself is missing. Even Derrida believed that if at all it was possible to arrive at the meaning of meaning, it was only to an extent so in literature. For Derrida, if anyone can communicate more effectively than others, it is the literary author, because this author is armed with the best use of language. Thus for Derrida and for the New Historicists, effective communication comes through literariness. Bhabha seems to enact this poststructuralist idea by using critical language creatively.

Moreover obscurity has often been the ladder on which the successful theorists have climbed towards their goals. The simplified and simple sentences of theorists have rarely led to immediate fame in the academic world. Since modernist writers such as Eliot, Joyce, Beckett, and others made obscurity into a virtue, the literary theorists in the West have tended to use it as a tool of their writing. Bhabha has only furthered that use of obscurity perhaps towards its logical conclusion. Benita Parry has called this tendency in Bhabha, "exorbitation of discourse". She asserts:

> The significant differences in the critical practices of Spivak and Bhabha are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis. (43)

Thus, as is probably expected in the world of theory and intellectual writing, Bhabha's use of amorphous and mind-teasing language and vocabulary has led to a certain kind of respectability. According to Keya Ganguly:

> Bhabha's deconstructive translation of more materialist configurations of ideas about non-synchronism has acquired the patina not only of respectability but indeed of novelty – through the elegance and skill with which historical problematics are by him reduced to wordplays about time and narrative. (173)

David Huddart's observation about Bhabha is an education and contains the key to the understanding of Bhabha. They are indeed very significant words because they encompass a rather logical justification for why we must read Bhabha and why we must respect his theories. It is so easy to either condemn Bhabha for his difficult writings or ignore him for his esoteric style because he does not seem to make enough sense to us. But Bhabha's work has its own distinct significance that emerges aptly in Huddart's remark. Huddart notes that Bhabha's writing shows that colonialism should never be considered an entity sealed in the past, the history of colonialism and cultures slip through to the present and they are in constant interaction; and they stand for the resetting of equations of cross-cultural relations, as the identity of colonisers is never complete, it is afflicted by an anxiety that enables the colonised to rebuild its identity (1).

Thus for Bhabha history and culture come together in a significant way. They interact and lead to the present. David Huddart shows how Bhabha's work brings forth certain "challenging concepts" that have always been at the centre of postcolonial theory. These concepts may be broadly divided into the following categories: (i) hybridity, (ii) mimicry, (iii) difference, and (iv) ambivalence. Huddart observes that these four, according to Bhabha, "describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer, a power that is never as secure as it seems to be" (1).

Bhabha's work provides a conceptual vocabulary for the reading of colonial and post-colonial texts. And through this vocabulary it shows that the West is troubled by its "doubles", the colonised that it has created, particularly in the East (Huddart 2). Bhabha goes much beyond, in an opposite direction to, Edward Said because Said had given a rather different picture of the process of colonisation in his theory of Orientalism. Whereas Said had believed that the West establishes its superior status over the East, and forces its own understanding of the world on the East, Bhabha suggests that the West is equally troubled, or even more disturbed, by the East and probably learns as much from it as it forces it to learn from itself. Thus according to Huddart:

> These doubles [the colonized, mainly Eastern nations] force the West to explain its own identity and to justify its rational self-image. Western civilization is not unique, nor simply Western and its "superiority" is not something that can be

> confidently asserted when other civilizations are so similar. So, on the one hand, Bhabha examines colonial history; on the other, he rethinks the present moment, when colonialism seems a thing of the past. (2)

However, not only literature, but also language occupies Bhabha's thought because language, as we know after Derrida, is not a medium that conveys meaning in a straightforward manner. Further, the transferring of cultural meaning, through language is in no way a simple process. The colonised subject can freely transform the coloniser's meaning. Like every other text, its authors cannot control the meaning of the colonial text as Huddart clarifies, "When colonizer and colonized come together, there is an element of *negotiation* of cultural meaning" (2).

Bhabha's two essays in *Nation and Narration* namely "Introduction: narrating the nation" and "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation", like the chapters of *The Location of Culture* are written in a distinctive style. Bhabha's paragraphs are charged with a literariness that is born of his use of alliteration, assonance, half rhyme and the prose rhythms which arise out of measured phrases and almost regular pauses. Here is an example:

> If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of "nationness": the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the straight insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people. (*Nation and Narration* 2)

Vivienne Boon claims that, "critical theory entails a philosophical *critique* that advances a new philosophical *language* in order to transform not only philosophy itself, but also concrete social, economic and political practices of domination and reification" (81). The concept of the stereotype is linked with Bhabha's general concern with the use of language. It is the use of language, which contains these stereotypes, and it is through this use that the West has been able to maintain its hegemony over the rest of the world. It worries Bhabha whether even the language of theory would be used to advance the West's designs— the designs of colonialising and bringing under their intellectual sway those that have not used this language in this way. It is one of the many anxieties that make up Bhabha's sensibility. Bhabha who has emerged from poststructuralist ideologies and vocabularies now begins to suspect these, the very sources that make him what he is:

> What does demand further discussion is whether the "new" languages of theoretical critique (semiotic, poststructuralist, deconstructionist and the rest) simply reflect those geopolitical divisions and their spheres of influence. Are the interests of "Western" theory necessarily collusive with the hegemonic role of the West as a power bloc? Is the language of theory merely another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation? (*The Location of Culture* 20-21)

In an interview with WJT Mitchell, Bhabha explains the process through which theorists undergo while theorising:

> You must put yourself elsewhere, or be pushed into another space or time from which to revise or review the problem. This idea that theorists sit and think of first principles in a state of equanimity, and then sort of build their models I simply disagree with that. I think you're first brought up short, in shock. The act of theorizing comes out of a struggle with a certain description of certain conditions, a description that you inherit, and out of the feeling that you have to propose another construction of those conditions in order to be able to envisage "emergent" moments of social identification or cultural enunciation. (82)

Bhabha believes that the theorists are in constant struggle with themselves. Hence it is only natural that the language is likely to be laboured one. In the same interview Bhabha says that he takes the question of accessibility very seriously. He believes that for anybody who is involved in the serious business of academic writing it would be grave charge against him if his work is blighted by a lack of clarity, because of which people finding it difficult to react to it, reflect on it and use it . But he also reveals that the more difficult portions of his work are in many case those bits of his writing where he is trying to think hardest, and in a futuristic kind of way— not always, he is afraid, there may be many examples of simple stylistic failure, but generally he realises that the segments pointed out to him as problematic are places where he is trying to fight a battle with himself (80). He explains that that point of obscurity enunciates, in some inexplicable way, the maximum his mind could think, it also validates that there is still a lot of possibility. But even this moment of obscurity makes a promising stride in the development of a concept that must be marked, even if it cannot be elegantly or adequately realised.

The other postcolonial critic in discussion of this research is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak whose theories are also sometimes considered notoriously obscure. The problem of obscurity is a feature that must be considered seriously when evaluating the contribution of Spivak because part of what she says is intrinsically obscure and cannot be reduced to simple statements. Some critics and scholars have therefore made a note of this trait of Spivak and these views are being discussed here: "Her translator's introduction to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* has been variously described as "setting a new standard for self-reflexivity in prefaces" (editor's introduction to *The Spivak Reader*) and "absolutely unreadable, its only virtue being that it makes Derrida that much more enjoyable."[2]

According to Barbara, "theory has become a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions— worse, whether we are heard at all"(51-52). Spivak has confessed in an interview by Bulan Lahiri that she is an intellectually insecure person and she wanted to be taken seriously by people. Through her theories Spivak makes her voice heard and makes it heard with all the deafening sound. Many critics have resisted her language, nevertheless in the same interview she tries to defend her style and finds an explanation for the necessity of such kind of language in theory. Spivak justifies her style with her remark, "The trouble is that when you write it in simple language people think they understand but it's a great trouble because what they understand is so far from what I was thinking".

It is ironic that those who talk about the subaltern (oppressed class) write in a language that categorically serves a privileged class. Barbara's major concern is to get an answer of the question from the theorists, "*for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?*" (61). Robert J. C. Young has taken up this problem in a big way. He has examined the nature of the obscurity in Spivak's writing at length. He comes up with some explanations that also help in studying the nature of her theory. Young points out; first, that Spivak's work can be described as "heterogeneous" (157). The range and the diversity of her interests go beyond Marxism, deconstruction, feminism, psychoanalysis, critiques of colonialism, practices of pedagogy, an extraordinary intellectual ambition as well as the ability to sustain political and theoretical engagements simultaneously on multiple fronts (Young p. 157). Then Young further describes the problem of reading Spivak's work, "To read her work is not so much to confront a system as to encounter a series of events" (157).

Young's efforts at describing the nature of Spivak's work help the reader to find justification for her obscurity and realise why she ought to be valued in spite of her obscurity. Quoting Colin MacCabe's assessment of her work that makes it an outgrowth from feminism, Marxism, and deconstruction; Young points out that rather than reconciling the differences between the three, "her task is to preserve their discontinuities" (157). To be able to preserve the discontinuities of three diverse theories and yet make them her own without reconciling them is indeed a difficult task. This makes her writing difficult to understand but it also opens up a new category of consciousness that is rare indeed. Spivak's is an intellectual consciousness that may scarcely have a parallel in this respect.

Obscurity in Spivak has been found to be a necessity. Stephen Morton, in his extremely helpful work on Spivak, has given a small account on "The Question of Style" in Spivak. In the section that follows, a summary of Morton's ideas on the style and obscurity of Spivak have been given:

> Spivak's attempt to map the effects of different colonial legacies to the way we think about contemporary cultural objects and everyday life is presented in a complex language and style that may at first appear difficult, and can be off-putting to some readers, approaching her work for the first time. What is more, this difficult prose style may seem to contradict the overt political aim of Spivak's work: to articulate the voice and political agency of oppressed subjects in the 'Third World'. (5)

Morton goes on to inform us that Spivak momentously confronts the rational idea that proclaims that clear, transparent language is the most effective approach to represent the oppressed. Spivak's opinion is rather opposite. For, according to Morton, "the transparent systems of representation through which things are known and understood are also the systems which control and dominate people. For this reason, Spivak's thought emphasises the limitations of linguistic and philosophical representation, and their potential to mask real social and political inequalities in the contemporary world" (Morton 5). John Martin Ellis in his book *The Theory of Criticism: A Logical Analysis*, has made some observations which are important to note while discussing Spivak's impenetrable language:

> The search for the property to which as assertion of aesthetic value refers either leads to the identification of properties of such vagueness that only their grandiose phraseology defends them against the immediate recognition that they are valueless as solutions to a problem, or, in the case of the really consistent reference theory adherent, the logical positivist, to the view that such judgements refer to no properties at all and are hence devoid of meaning. (84)

The problem with Spivak, and with other postcolonial theorists, seems to be that their ideas are so impressive that the applicability of the ideas acquires lesser importance. We are glamour-struck by the idea and forget that the idea is merely theoretical rather than actually practical. Spivak's view, which finds its origin in Derrida, has led to a certain category of scholars[3] who have done a lot of damage to the meaning of Shakespeare. They have tended to believe that Shakespeare was an ambassador of Britain, and that the colonisers used him to spread British culture in the colonies. They claim that the label of "Universality" has been conferred on Shakespeare's work and thus his plays have been used to strengthen the Empire. This claim seems quite inappropriate because Shakespeare has reached places where the British Empire never did. And when Ben Jonson described him as belonging to all ages[4] he surely did not have imperial motives. If Shakespeare was a genius that the world has recognised and used for various purposes, the postcolonial has also not lagged behind in using him for his own purpose. If he did not have the universal appeal that has been claimed as his forte, why would the colonial rulers use his works to influence the readers in the colonies? The Empire would better understand a more recent author of Britain than Shakespeare, and therefore someone like George Bernard Shaw or John Galsworthy would better serve the needs of a brand ambassador for Britain's culture. Yet so many established and other scholars have been spending their time and energy in merely trying to deduct the universality label from Shakespeare's growing importance.

Too often the literature of critical pedagogy turns to issues of application, which only serves to draw a bolder line between theory and practice, between theory and writing. Barbara fears that, "when Theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, élitish" (58). Some of Spivak's theories have this problem; they do not seem to translate into good critical practice. But the same could be said of other postcolonial theorists like Edward Said. First of all Spivak's theoretical framework is not made of a critical method that could be said to have a sound consistency. Secondly, Spivak tends not to accept anything merely Western unless she has seen that the concept can be either applied, or not applied, to the Third World. For Spivak the Third World is as important a criterion as any in her scheme of things. In this respect, in her regard for the Eastern or other sections of thought she is in direct link with other Indian theorists like Sri Aurobindo, C. D. Narasimhaiah and Homi K Bhabha.[5] Stephen Morton mentions that Spivak's writing intends to underline the limitations and blind spots of the academic disciplinary discourse, instead of following the terms or concepts of any one theoretical concepts (20). He further adds that in an interview with Elizabeth Grosz, Spivak has declared that her aim is to preserve the discontinuities of Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction rather than either yearning to look for a nicely mapped coherence or producing a continuist discourse (20).

Stephen Morton points out Spivak's critical strategy rather aptly, calling it "critical interruption" (21) or "Critical Interruptions" (20) linking the problem of obscurity with her critical method. I present an extract from Morton to clarify Spivak's concept, namely "critical interruption":

> Spivak's resistance to the clarity of style associated with 'plain prose' is a conscious decision calculated to engage an implied reader in the self-conscious interrogation of how to make sense of literary, social and economic texts in the historical aftermath of colonialism. In Spivak's account, the style or presentation of theoretical ideas should reflect the contradictory and overdetermined character of social and geopolitical relations rather than obscuring them. For this reason, Spivak's 'difficult' style of composition should be considered as an inextricable part of her theoretical method. (20)

Thus some Western varied oppositional theories become the parts of that approach which makes up Spivak's critical strategy. These theories act as interruptions even as they combine in her work; the interruptions seem to converge into a continuity of sorts. Her approach suggests that there can be no essentialism. It also points to the fact that no theory in itself is complete and no approach ultimately final. This of course is in keeping with the spirit of Western post-structuralist theories. But it continually challenges the validity of these individual Western theories and forces into them her consciousness of a Thirdworldism. Morton further points out that "For Spivak, the need to rework these different methodologies in the contemporary 'Third World' context highlights the particular limitations of Marxism and feminism as conceptual blueprints for social change. In this respect Spivak's thought is torn between the demands of theoretical rigour and political commitment" (Morton 22). Thus like Derrida's ideas, Spivak's views tend to interrupt the basic conventions of Western critical thought to voice the perpetual "exploitation of subaltern groups in the 'Third World'" (Morton 23).

Much thought has gone into this problem of her writing. Perhaps there is no better introduction to this problem than the Foreword to *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, written by Colin MacCabe. He gives a fitting reason for the difficulty, that he believes is inescapable in any thoughtful effort to reflect and analyse the world within publicly available discourse, which the reader encounters in her texts:

> No matter how great the commitment to clarity, no matter how intense the desire to communicate, when we are trying ourselves to delineate and differentiate the practices and objects which are crucial to understanding our own functioning and for which we as yet lack an adequate vocabulary, there will be difficulty. (x)

Since Spivak's writing is riddled with a highly complex thought and a phenomenal reading of terse philosophies and ideas, it is only natural that what she writes is sometimes difficult to understand. In an interview by Bulan Lahiri, Spivak has claimed that her language has become much simpler but not, therefore, easier to understand. In the same interview she confessed that she believes that most of her writings are kind of a mish-mash of a whole lot of different things. One has to keep in mind that Spivak is dealing with constellation of ideas.

Colin MacCabe has tried to describe a very real reason for the obscurity in Spivak's writings:

> However pleasurable the style and however detailed the references, Spivak's texts radically transgress against the disciplines, both the official divisions of anthropology, history, philosophy, literary criticism, sociology and unofficial divisions between Marxism, feminism, deconstruction. There are few ready made categories or reading lists into which her arguments fall. (x)

Even the severest critics of Spivak, like Terry Eagleton, have praised her style of writing considering the kind of subject matter her writings contain. There are many critics who have put their weight behind Spivak in her support and have tried to defend her against the criticism against her style. They argue that those who involve in such kind of criticism actually show reluctance to practically engage with her work. Judith Butler has claimed that Spivak's allegedly impenetrable language has, in fact, echoed in, and has overwhelmingly transformed the thinking of, "tens of thousands of activists and scholars." And Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, who has called her writing "inaccessible," noted nevertheless in an article "In the Gaudy Supermarket" published in *London Review of Books*, that "there can thus be few more important critics of our age than the likes of Spivak.... She has probably done more long-term political good, in pioneering feminist 4).

One of the intended effects of Spivak's writing, quite obviously, was to make the West conscious of how lightly it was treating the Third World, almost ignoring it. That her writing has had the intended result on some intellectuals in the West is evident. There has been a steady reaction against her views and there have been attempts to show how she is not exactly right. An easy criticism against her has been regarding her unintelligible style. MacCabe and Eagleton are two good examples of the West's response to Spivak's work. MacCabe's concern for what Europe could stand to lose due to Spivak can be seen in the following lines:

> For Spivak the attempt to understand subaltern classes only in terms of their adequation to European models has been deeply destructive. The political project becomes one of letting the subaltern speak – allowing his or her consciousness to find an expression which will then inflect and produce the forms of political liberation which might bypass completely the European form of the nation. (xv)

John Clifford's contention advocates Spivak's case and offers a justification for her inaccessible style. He notes that Spivak's scholarship do not strongly either affirm or defend her ideas. They are not settled. They are kept in "productively undecidable" tension to be investigated from a variety of postmodern perspectives. He believes that there are indeed rhythms in her thought and style, but they are more likely to come from the dense entanglement of Cixous, Irigrary, Derrida, Foucault, and Gramsci (191-92). He suggests that, "Her thoughts are not instantly accessible; nor are they meant to be, since her prose enacts her meaning. Perhaps she also eschews the plain style out of a fear of being understood too quickly, too clearly, as if real insight could be conveyed crisply in commonsensical prose (192).

Since both of them, Bhabha and Spivak, are poststructuralists, they would not in any probability speak in a language of clarity. Their expression is bound to be full of constructions that entail several philosophies, world-views, theories and so on. If they used a language of simple and clear expression, they would not be able to convey

their highly complex thoughts. As mentioned earlier they used thick or dense expression full of literariness to convey the plurality of meanings. Some of the great masters such as Gautam Buddha, Shakespeare and Derrida have felt that language cannot convey exact meaning and therefore it must be understood as a system of awareness that is based on an intuitively grasped situation. Bhabha and Spivak seem to prove these earlier masters right when they use highly complex style.

Notes

1. This idea has come to me from my Ph. D supervisor, Prof. L. R. Sharma, who once told me that in his assessment Bhabha had contemplated a great deal on New Historicism and in the process had learned some of his lessons from the New Historicists.
2. See the Internet, Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Accessed on June 15, 2015 < http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html>.
3. I refer to scholarship such as Jyotsna G. Singh's, "Shakespeare and the 'Civilising Mission'", *Colonial Narratives/ cultural dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 120-152. Also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
4. This rather well-known view comes from Jonson's poem, "To the memory of my beloved", found in the First Folio of Shakespeare's works, published in 1623.
5. This view has been established by the author in an article "The Living Indian Critical Tradition" which appeared in the journal *Transnational Literature*, Vol 3, Issue 1, November 2010.

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