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In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak offers the sentence 'White men are saving brown women from brown men' as one interpretation of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. How far does this sentence reflect the representations of British dealings with India in the texts you have studied?

Lynsie Thompson

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores the issue of widow self-immolation in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and discusses the extent to which the female voice is represented in various literatures. She ultimately argues that the female has no acknowledged voice and in response to the 1829 interdiction of sati by the British colonial powers in India comments: 'white men are saving brown women from brown men'.[1] The English men as colonisers are collectively represented as the protector, the saviour of Indian women from an oppressively patriarchal Hindu society. However Spivak then presents the other side to the sati abolition argument, whereby 'the women actually wanted to die'.[2] If this argument is rephrased to the more universally applicable: 'brown women do not need saving', then these two polemics may serve as posts against or between which the representations of British dealings with India can be positioned. Through an examination of various sati and mutiny texts, and R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs*, the extent to which Spivak's sentence truly represents the Anglo-Indian relationship may be determined by how far the coloniser is presented as the hero, or the intruder, on the colonised. Although dating from the colonial to the postcolonial (1827-1976) Spivak's sentence resonates in all of the texts, but to varying degrees according to the contexts and individual motives for writing, as Major comments: 'western discourse on sati was far from monolithic... it was also deeply affected by the circumstances in which it was produced. The political and ideological circumstances of the time affected the way in which sati was perceived and portrayed'.[3] Spivak herself states that she does not provide a 'clinching solution'[4] which, incorporating the mutiny and postcolonial texts, suggests that there are other facets of the coloniser-colonised relationship to discover.

In order to give authority to Spivak's sentence: 'white men are saving brown women from brown men', the portrayal of each participant and then their relationship in the texts may be analysed. Firstly, brown men are presented as a threat through their appearance in large crowds, for example in Sigourney's 'The Suttee' there is 'an astonished throng',[5] in Rossetti's 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi': 'a hundred, a thousand to one'.[6] The notion of strength in numbers renders the image of the crowd both intimidating and almost animalistic

[1] G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993), p. 93
[2] Ibid.
[3] Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500-1830* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 229
[4] Spivak, p. 92
[5] L. H. Sigourney, 'The Suttee', *Poems* (Boston, 1827)
[6] Christina Rossetti, 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi', in *Poems and Prose*, ed. Simon Humphries (Oxford University Press: 2008), p. 74

as they gather around the victim anticipating their death; which is emphasised through auditory imagery: 'the wild, demoniac shout'[7] and 'the swarming howling wretches below'.[8] Such primitive and uncivilised imagery also occurs in Havelock's March: 'the wild beasts bloody and obscene, mad drunk with gore and lust'.[9] Presenting the men as 'wild beasts' and ascribing animalistic verbs such as 'swarming' and 'howling' is dehumanising, and evokes predator-like connotations; thus conveying a notion of danger. The image of the predator is also apparent in *The Painter of Signs*; when Raman decides to rape Daisy he is likened to a tiger,[10] which his actions mimic: 'crawled' 'seize his prey'.[11] The recurring dehumanisation of the brown men, by allowing individual identity to be replaced either by large bloodthirsty crowds or animalistic qualities, creates the impression of a wild and dangerous populace.

Brown men also encompasses the notion of Hinduism and its domination over the population, for example: 'that Spirit malign who twined his serpent length mid Eden bowers / Frown'd on our parents' bliss... they tore his writhing form away'.[12] The Hindu crowd is likened to the devil as they ruthlessly snatch the baby in order to burn its mother. Here the power of religion can be inferred, its practices supersede the maternal bond and are thus something women and children need saving from. The motive for this representation is summarised by Morton: 'by representing sati as a barbaric practice, the British were thus able to justify imperialism as a civilising mission, in which white British colonial administrators believed that they were rescuing Indian women from the reprehensible practices of a traditional Hindu patriarchal society'.[13] This elaboration of Spivak's sentence demonstrates how the British dealings with India were vindicated by contrasting their benevolent intentions against the iniquitous behaviour of brown men. Questions may then arise as to the extent of truth in the portrayal of these events; whilst the reader may infer that white men were saving brown women from dangerous brown men, Donaldson and Kwok argue: 'under the pretext of saving brown women, colonial desire and imperialistic advances have been masked and collectively reconstituted in a blatant reversal as "social mission"'.[14] In this respect it may be interpreted that the hero-victim relationship between the coloniser and colonised is a disguise used to cover the coloniser's gradual assertion of western power and authority; therefore the white men are primarily saving themselves rather than brown women.

Further disguisement of colonial advances may be identified through comparing the violent imagery associated with brown men with the portrayal of brown women. The role and status of Indian women served as a further marker for Britain as India's lack of civilisation. In the sati texts brown women are the weaker, more vulnerable gender, which Rajan qualifies: 'by foregrounding Hindu women as passive and unresisting victims of Hindu patriarchy... it could be established beyond argument that the women were in need of saving'.[15] With the 'Hindu patriarchy' consisting of brown men, whether taken literally as Indian men or metaphorically as Hinduism, they are presented as stronger physically and numerically compared to the helpless widow in the poems. Despite futile resistance attempts the brown woman remains the victim: 'she bade them bring her son ... but the rough cord compressed her slender limbs'.[16] Verging on the Western idea of murder, the fact that the widow is physically made to commit sati removes the counter argument that 'the women

[7] Sigourney, 'The Suttee'
[8] Rossetti, 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi'
[9] Gerald Massey, *Havelock's March and Other Poems* (Oxford University: 1861), p. 13
[10] R. K. Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* (Penguin, 2006), p. 81
[11] Ibid., p. 78
[12] Sigourney, 'The Suttee'
[13] Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 63
[14] Laura Donaldson and Pui-Ian Kwok. *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 64
[15] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 1993), p. 45
[16] Sigourney, 'The Suttee'

actually wanted to die' and since her resistance attempts fail, there conveniently arises a need for a saviour from these seemingly barbaric foreign practices.

Furthermore, if brown men may be regarded as metaphorical for Hinduism and all that is wrong with India, it can be argued that 'brown women' is metaphorical for India itself. Feminising India through descriptions such as 'the city in her beauty lies with flowers about her feet'[17] enables the same vulnerability to be attached to the country as its women. Creating this contrast between the weak brown women/India and the barbaric brown men/Hinduism enables a space for the white men to intervene and fulfil their 'rescue fantasy'.[18] Therefore in the same way that the British actions may be justified through the protection of Indian women, their overall presence in India may similarly be justified as a protector of the land from these brown men. An interpretation of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised may thus render the colonised as the uncivilised, barbaric predators victimising the female whilst the coloniser is their heroic saviour; ergo 'white men' are represented as 'saving brown women from brown men'.

Although observations of truth can be made in Spivak's sentence, Major's argument that discourse was not 'monolithic' surfaces when considering the context for the texts, for example Donaldson and Kwok state: 'the abolition of sati was not aimed to save Indian women from suffering'.[19] Their assertion suggests that despite literary representations the brown women were merely incidental. It can be argued that the British had to present brown men as a threat to brown women because their initial policy was to not interfere with religion in India due to the threat it posed by sheer conformity.[20] They therefore had to provide justification and gain support to abolish sati. By portraying Indian customs and traditions as barbaric the British could attempt to turn natives towards the more civilised colonised way,[21] and thus avoid conflict. Written around the time of the abolition (1827), Sigourney's poem reflects these ideologies by presenting sati and brown men as victimising brown women. Although Spivak's sentence can be seen as one representation of British dealings with India, this legitimising of British actions to avoid resistance may also provoke a move towards the 'brown women do not need saving' post through another interpretation: white men are saving themselves from brown men.

Supporting this interpretation, Paxton argues: 'mutiny novels which were organised around the rape of Englishwomen by Indian men thus worked to legitimise British coloniser's moral superiority by asserting the natural lawlessness of Indian men',[22] thus British dealings with India are presented as justified violence in order to impose civilisation and authority. Similarly to Sigourney's 'The Suttee' the image of the mother and child is used in the mutiny texts, however it is the white women who are the prey. Indian men were attacking British women and children; a fact used to British advantage to exemplify the image of the uncivilised brown man harming the innocent: 'they slew the Maiden as she slept; the Mother great with child; / The Babe, that smiled up in their face, they stabbed as it smiled'.[23] Such a horrific description almost dehumanises the brown men again through their sheer lack of compassion or human emotion. In keeping with the 'rescue fantasy', the white men attack the brown men: 'For hours and hours, they slew, and slew, the devils in their den; / "Ye wreaked your will on women weak, now try it with strong men"'.[24] With satanic images again referring to brown men as 'devils' they are characterised as ruthless murderers, and despite

[17] Massey, p. 31
[18] Major, p. 99
[19] Donaldson and Kwok, p. 65
[20] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 100
[21] Metcalf, p. 37
[22] Nancy L. Paxton, *Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947* (Rutgets University Press, 1999), p. 112
[23] Massey, p.14
[24] Ibid., p. 28

the violence committed by both sides the British are portrayed as acting in defence against the enemy. Similarly, in Rossetti's poem the white man actually kills the white woman, yet it is still seen as an act of heroism since the woman would rather die at the hands of her husband than the Indians. Therefore Spivak's sentence still stands but brown women are replaced by white women in the mutiny texts, as white men are represented as saving white women from brown men. Or, on the other hand, white men are again saving themselves by justifying their actions against the brown men, they are again the saviours of the weak from violent brown men.

Commenting on her travels to India, Mayo controversially states: 'The British Administration of India, be it good, bad or indifferent, has nothing whatever to do with the [condition of India]'.[25] Her observations bring us completely to the other polemic of 'brown women do not need saving', suggesting that the British dealings do not affect brown women or brown men. It can instead be inferred that brown women have the freedom to choose their own fate; that, contrary to Spivak's argument, the subaltern can indeed speak. Parry criticises Spivak in her: 'deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard',[26] suggesting that brown women are not always the victim or the oppressed that need saving; these instances of freedom are simply ignored. For example, in Sleeman's account the woman is determined to commit sati and eventually convinces the Official to allow her as an exception to the law.[27] This determination is similar to the aunt in *The Painter of Signs* who decides to go on a suicidal pilgrimage and convinces Raman to fund her trip. Morton states: 'sati emphasises an exemplary moment of woman's free will and moral conduct within Hindu culture',[28] from which it can therefore be inferred that in suppressing the right to commit sati through the 1827 abolition, the white men are suppressing the brown women's freedom rather than saving them. The relationship between the coloniser and colonised may in this instance be interpreted as oppressive rather than heroic; in attempting to save brown women, white men are achieving the reverse, 'the women actually wanted to die', ergo: brown women do not need saving.

The white men can therefore be interpreted as unwelcome intruders rather than heroes, and it may be further inferred that brown women do not need saving as they can in fact save themselves. In *The Painter of Signs*, Daisy is a prime example of a woman who does not need saving as she proves that she can save herself in preventing Raman's attempts at rape. She nullifies any claim that brown women were being saved by white men, which may even be taken as far as to render the white men and British dealings unnecessary, an unwelcome influence on brown women. This is emphasised when Raman declares 'I love you',[29] as Daisy criticises the phrase as a Western influence that does not fit in Indian society. It can be argued that Daisy rejects the coloniser's interference in the same way as the widow through her refusal to accept the British law in Sleeman's account, which thus conveys an unwanted relationship between the coloniser and colonised.

Daisy also saves herself from brown men/Hindu patriarchy as she describes her refusal to marry and conform to the stereotypical housewife; she says herself that she does not want or need a man, and even leaves Raman behind at the end of the novel to embark on her birth control mission. This independence is in stark contrast to the aunt who spends her time doting on Raman, and to Sigourney's poem where husband is referred to as 'lord'.[30] Daisy breaks all traditions of the man being the purpose for a woman's being, and

[25] Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & co, 1927), p. 16
[26] Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (USA: Routledge, 2004), p. 23
[27] William Henry Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official, Volume 1* (J. Hatchard, 1844), pp. 24-31
[28] Morton, p. 63
[29] Narayan, p. 104
[30] Sigourney, 'The Suttee'

Krishnaswamy states: 'it is enervating and sometimes unnerving to confront the rapid social changes that are ushered in by Daisy, changes that bring about a diminution of man's authority and a corresponding accretion of woman's authority'.[31] This idea of 'woman's authority' becomes further apparent as the brown women even save the brown men from white men. For example Raman's plans to rape Daisy are spurred from his readings of Western literature, that women like 'an aggressive lover',[32] but when she escapes, Raman thanks Daisy for saving him. If this episode is read in the same way as the sati and mutiny texts, then it could perhaps be interpreted as an instance of the brown men making the white men seem like the violent aggressors, and Raman uses them as an excuse to justify his actions. Nevertheless, Daisy subverts Sigourney's portrayal of the brown women as passive victims and brown men as the victimiser. Spivak's sentence becomes defunct and in its place is the interpretation: brown women are saving brown men (from themselves and white men).

Even further to the argument that women do not need saving, it may be inferred that sometimes brown men are the ones that need saving from brown women. Daisy is presented as the antithesis to a traditional patriarchal Indian woman, and 'seems to be heading inevitably toward an inverted form of sexism'.[33] Raman becomes the stereotypical female of the relationship; he arranges his house for Daisy and is prepared to forgo everything from his livelihood to the prospects of having children, in order to follow her in whatever she does. Nevertheless, Daisy rejects all his efforts and pleas, leaving him with an empty house and feeling bitter. This destruction of lives is also apparent as Daisy even takes on the brown men's role as persecutor through her birth control mission. In considering the context, Daisy may be likened to Indira Gandhi and her unpopular sterilisation campaigns,[34] as Puranik argues: 'Narayan implicitly criticizes the attitude of cultural extremism apparent in the government's domestic policies'.[35] Similarly to the characterisation of the men and women in the sati and mutiny texts, it can be argued that Daisy is used as a political device to provoke certain attitudes. As with the brown men in the sati and mutiny texts, Daisy is presented as a largely unemotional and ruthless character, particularly towards men and children, whilst Raman takes on the brown women's role as passive victim. Daisy, or perhaps implicitly Gandhi, is thus someone brown men need saving from.

Furthermore, regarding the coloniser-colonised relationship, it can be argued that Daisy embodies the negative interpretations of colonialism; Puranik describes her as 'an over-zealous missionary, carrying "civilized" values out of the town into the remote countryside ... she is intent on "civilizing" people who already live within a highly structured and unchangeable social framework'.[36] Daisy's character may therefore be interpreted as a metaphor for the colonisation of India by the British, she believes she is doing good, akin to the idea of white men as the hero, but she also interferes and destroys lives. In which case, when Krishnaswamy states that: 'Daisy's solution of being indifferent to the structure of male-female power relations does not provide a solution to the ordinary Indian woman's dilemma',[37] perhaps in indirectly viewing Daisy as a representation of colonialism, it may be inferred that the British interventions did not save brown women. After all, coming full circle, the brown women were arguably incidental in the British dealings with India, and so a more appropriate interpretation of the coloniser-colonised relationship would be: white men are not saving brown women from brown men.

[31] Shantha Krishnaswamy, 'Daisy Paints Her Signs Otherwise', in R. K. Narayan, *Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Geoffrey Kain (East Lansing, MI: Michigan UP, 1993), p. 116
[32] Narayan, p. 77
[33] Krishnaswamy, p. 119
[34] Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 304
[35] Sandhana Allison Puranik, 'The Painter of Signs: Breaking the Frontier', in R. K. Narayan, *Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, p. 129
[36] Puranik, p. 128
[37] Krishnaswamy, p. 121

In conclusion, Spivak's sentence does reflect the coloniser/colonised relationship to an extent, or certainly some of the mentality behind the colonial effort, however it is not a 'clinching solution'. In discovering other interpretations of the relationship it is clear that the sentence is only limitedly applicable, and that essentially the interpretations lie against the post that brown women do not need saving. The portrayal of British dealings in India is dependent on the motive and context: brown women need saving when the British are justifying their presence in India and trying to save themselves from native rebellion. White women need saving in India when the British need to justify the civilising mission, whilst other political motivations assert brown women more power and the ability to save themselves. Ultimately, brown women are not being saved by white men and the coloniser is represented as the intruder rather than the hero.

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