REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: EXPLORING THE SUBALTERN STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **'Representation of Women in Postcolonial Literature: Exploring the Subaltern Studies Perspective'**, submitted by **Ms. Debarati Guha** in partial fulfilment for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University, is her original. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for award for any other Degree of this University or any other University.

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For my 'ma'

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Debarati Guha,

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INTRODUCTION

> With the increasing opportunities that modern production (and the development of ideas based upon it) gives women, a new type of woman arises. She is called a career woman. The name is stupid but very revealing. A man is never a career man. That is his privilege. He can have his career, and the finest fruit of his successful career is wife and children. But the women is called career women because her 'career' in modern society demands she place herself in a subordinate position or even renounce normal life. The social dice are loaded against her; and the plain fact of the matter is that they are loaded, not only in the economic opportunities, but in the minds of men.[1]

The problematic position of women vis-à-vis men are at once specific to feminist concerns, such as the possibility of finding an international, cross-cultural sisterhood between 'First World' and 'Third World' women, as well as more general problems concerning who has the right to speak for whom, and the relationship between the critic and their object of analysis.[2] But the conundrum that afflicts women's lives is arguably greatly aggravated in the 'Third World', where women's existence is strung between traditionalism and modernity in ways that make it extremely difficult for them to attain personal freedom(s) without severe sacrifice(s) or compromise(s).

This thesis aims to understand the representation of women in Postcolonial Literature, focussing mainly on the Subaltern Studies school of thought. Here I would like to look into the literature of the 'Subaltern Studies' series among the vast literature of post-colonial discourse. Thus, in the following chapters my first and foremost task is to situate Subaltern Studies as a part of Postcolonial Literature. In the first chapter, I shall attempt to discuss the same in a two-fold

[1] C. L. R. James writes to Constance Webb in 1944 in James, C.L.R and Anna Grimshaw (eds.) (1992), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 144.
[2] See John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 173.

analysis. In the first part, I would try to give my understanding of what Postcolonial Literature is. This will lead me to a discussion where I shall try to establish the link between postcolonialism and postmodernism on one hand and that with feminism on the other. In the second part, which will be the main body of the chapter, I would move on to the discussion as to how Subaltern Studies is a part of the said discourse when we talk about the representation of women.

Historians like Partha Chatterjee engage themselves in positioning women in the scheme of the nationalist movement in the Indian subcontinent. Subaltern Studies criticises the nationalist discourse and thus my search in the second chapter would lead me to the critique of the nationalist representation of women. The starting point of the argument is why the 'Women's question' lapses into the relatively unimportant issue for nationalist discourse by the end of the 19th century? Chatterjee's answer will help us to determine the way Subaltern Studies criticises the colonial discourse and also how it is related to women.

After situating Subaltern Studies in the context of Postcolonial Literature, I shall try to demonstrate how the authors of the Subaltern Studies series have dealt with the representation of women. Thus in chapters III to V, I shall discuss all the essays involving the women's question. The concluding chapter will give a summary of my observations by showing a definite shift arising on the issue of women from the initial stage of the series to the last volume.

CHAPTER - I

SUBALTERN STUDIES AS POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Postcolonial Studies is generally accepted as a field of interdisciplinary studies encompassing a variety of subjects, with a particularly strong base in the literary and cultural studies. The term 'Postcolonial Literature' still remains an evasive and contested term as the words 'postcolonial' and 'literature' both suggest a multiplicity of things and there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty as to just what the terms denote. Nevertheless, understanding of the term 'Postcolonial Literature' is not possible without a prior understanding of the term 'postcolonial' as Postcolonial Literature effectively mean 'literature that deals with postcolonialism'. The term 'postcolonial' can be understood, firstly, as referring to the historical events following colonialism. Secondly, it can be understood as denoting a historiography which is basically an alternative way or method to write a history which values cultural difference, marginality and individual space by using 'orature' and literature. Finally, 'postcolonialism' can also be defined as a critique of colonialisation which studies and questions the consequences of colonialisation. Thus, 'postcolonialism' designates at one and the same time a period of history, a political movement, and an intellectual activity, and it is this multiple status that makes exact definition difficult. I would therefore, in the following, try to define the meaning of 'Postcolonial Literature' by first understanding the term 'postcolonialism'.

Part I

The term 'colonial' is inherent in the term 'postcolonial' and links it to colonial rule or colonisation. Taken literally, the term 'Postcolonial Literature' would seem to label literature (fiction and non-fiction) written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. As such it incorporates political science, history, and related fields, where people who call themselves postcolonial scholars, generally see themselves as part of a large movement to expose and struggle against the influence of large, rich nations (mostly European and the North-American) on poorer nations (mostly in the southern hemisphere). Fiction is used as an additional source of information when other sources are not available. This is true especially for the historiography of peasant movements in India, where orally transmitted literature or written accounts thereof may be the only sources available.

Now the question is whether the link between 'colonialism' and 'postcolonialism' includes all production of colonised (formerly) people or only of those that have emerged after colonisation came to an end? Is it literature written after political independence, which starts from the very beginning of colonialism and ends with independence, or, is it history written with the beginning of colonialisation?

Though the origin and development of colonialism is very different in countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Jamaica and Ireland, the literature from these countries has been called 'postcolonial'.[3] Thus, Postcolonial Studies developed as a way of addressing the cultural

[3] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2.

production of those societies that were affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism.

If we present history in a linear format, there will be a fixed starting point as well as a fixed end-point for colonialisation and therefore 'postcolonialism' would simply mean 'after colonialism'[4]. Hence, postcolonialism would start at the end point of colonialism, i.e. with the beginning of political independence of the erstwhile colonies. Thus, literature written after political independence of a formerly colonised country would be called postcolonial. But here lies the confusion. The literature that is typically studied in this field was not written after *colonialism* ended, but after *colonisation* started.[5] Therefore, 'postcolonialism' starts not after colonialism is over, but with the starting of the colonialisation process.

Now, the next question is when does 'postcolonialism' end? Before, answering this question I would like to mention the debate regarding the representation of the term 'postcolonialism', which is sometimes written with a hyphen (as in 'post-colonialism') and sometimes without. I shall not use the hyphen and shall spell it as a single word: 'postcolonialism'. My choice is based on the different meanings that 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' denote. The hyphenated term 'post-colonial' seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch, like those suggested by phrases such as 'after colonialism', 'after independence' or 'after the end of Empire'.[6] Also, it appears to imply that the field (postcolonialism) begins where colonialism ends. But, in practice, the field is largely defined by the colonialisation process itself and by the continuing

[4] As here I regard the prefix 'post' as 'past' or 'after' in meaning.
[5] Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, xix. (emphasis in original)
[6] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2.

effects of colonialism after political independence. In fact, some critics argue that the term 'post-colonialism' misleadingly implies that colonialism is over when in fact most of the nations involved are still culturally and economically subordinated to the rich industrial nations through various forms of neo-colonialism even though they are technically independent. Thus Saswat Das defines Postcolonialism in the following way:

> ...it does not mean 'post-independence', or 'after colonialism', for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being. In this sense, post-colonial writing has a very long history.[7]

The above view, which implies that postcolonialism, continues till the recent times in opposition to neo-colonialisation, can be problematic. This way of defining a whole era can be called Eurocentric, as it may single out the colonial experience as the most important fact about the countries involved. Colonial experience has left many powerful influences on the respective countries, but to make it the only determining factor in the histories of these countries would give it too much importance.

Another puzzle about the term postcolonial is that on one hand the prefix 'post' aligns 'postcolonialism' with a series of terms like 'post-war', 'post-cold-war', 'post-independence', 'post-revolution' – all of which underline a passage into a new period and a closure of a certain event or age, officially stamped with dates, on the other hand, it aligns with another genre of terms like 'post-modern', 'post-structural', 'post-Marxist', 'post-feminist', 'post-deconstructionist' – all sharing the notion of a movement beyond classical modernity and referring

[7] Saswat Das, *The Postcolonial Empire*, 125.

largely to the supercession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic and political theories.[8] As Leela Gandhi writes,

> in the last decade postcolonialism has taken its place with theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism as a major critical discourse in the humanities. As a consequence of its diverse and interdisciplinary usage, this body of thought has generated an enormous corpus of specialised academic writing.[9]

This vastness created both discord and conflict within the field, to the extend that there seems no one critical procedure that we might identify as typically 'postcolonial'. Hence, postcolonialism descends from a mere historical vantage point to a critical theory which can also be used to provide alternative understandings of cultural production. In the preface of *Colonial and Post-colonial Encounters*, Niaz Zaman, Firdous Azim and Shawkat Hussain write,

> Literature has been radically transformed since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 and is veering towards what is becoming better known as cultural studies. Said's seminal work led to a heightened consciousness about the need to re-examine texts from colonial archives and the importance of situating ourselves in a post-colonial world still struggling to dispel traces of colonialism.[10]

The hyphen which is used in 'post-colonialism', which we have discussed earlier, also puts an emphasis on the discursive and material effects of the historical 'fact' of colonialism, while the term 'postcolonialism' has come to represent an increasingly indiscriminate attention to cultural difference and marginality of all kinds, whether a consequence of the historical experience of colonialism or not. Thus, for some the term 'postcolonisation' is more apt. I shall like to consider postcolonialism not just in terms of strict historical

[8] Alfred J. López, *Posts and Pasts*, 10.
[9] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, viii.
[10] Niaz Zaman et al. (eds.), *Colonial and Post-colonial Encounters*, preface.

periodisation, but as referring to forms of representations, readings practices and values linked to colonisation. In my view, both the pre-colonial, colonial and also the after-colonial are important in postcolonial writing.

This theoretical aspect of postcolonialism and its interest in cultural difference and marginality gave postcolonialism a new turn from which it spoke about creating a new kind of history which is written from a new perspective. The postcolonial writer now attempts to write an alternative history about the consequence of colonialism, using texts and narratives, fictions and oral-histories. As Gellner says,

> For not only are the questions of truth and fiction, of narrativity and indeterminacy, time and space, of pressing importance because the material ground, the political dimension of post-colonial life impresses itself so urgently, but the historical narrativity is that which structures the forms of reality itself.[11]

The postcolonial task therefore is not simply to contest the message of history, but also to engage the medium of narrativity itself. It is to inscribe the 'rhetoric' on the heterogeneity of historical representation. Thus postcolonialism is a historically situated form of representation which ranges across the past and the present.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of postcolonialism can be defined as a critique of colonialism, a discourse that sustains the constructed image of the colonised that the latter absorbed. This approach is in some way similar to the nationalist critique of colonial discourse. The nationalist self-perception is based on the critique of colonisation and the opposition to colonial rule[12]. The

[11] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 27.
[12] Here colonialism is not meant only literally as literal colonisation is not the exclusive object of postcolonial study. Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' which distinguishes between

conception of the 'self' and the 'other' is important in this respect. In 'Orientalism', Edward Said deals with how intellectual traditions are created and transmitted. According to Said the Orient (and specifically the Muslim Orient) is defined as being other than the 'Occident', that is, being mysterious, unchanging and ultimately inferior.[13] As nationalism reversed orientalist thought, and attributed agency and history to the subjugated nations, it staked a claim to the order of 'reason' and 'progress' instituted by colonialism. The West produced knowledge about other peoples in order to prove the 'truth' of their (the other people's) 'inferiority' in the backdrop of colonialism and thus postcolonial scholars have an interest in the experience of the people who are being colonised. They have an interest in the discourse and in the rhetoric which is being used while seeking freedom from the colonial rule and in the identity of the colonised people. For me, postcolonialism can not only be critiquing the colonial discourse. It should also reflect and possibly provide an alternative to this discourse.

Like the description of any other field the term 'postcolonialism' has come to mean many things as it has been indicated through the selection of extracts in the Postcolonial Studies Reader[14]. However, we would argue that Postcolonial Studies is grounded in the 'historical fact' of European colonialism, and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise. We need to keep this fact of colonisation firmly in mind because the increasingly unfocused use

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literal political dominance and dominance through ideas and culture has influenced postcolonial studies immensely.

[13] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2-8.

[14] The chapter groupings in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* shows universality and difference; representation and resistance; postmodernism and post-colonialism; nationalism; hybridity; ethnicity and indigeniety; feminism and post-colonialism; language; the body and performance; history; place; education; production and consumption. To this list you may add issues of migration and border crossings of all kinds, race, governmental control, and so forth.

of the term 'postcolonial' over the last ten years to describe an astonishing variety of cultural, economic and political practices has meant that there is a danger of its losing its effective meaning altogether. Indeed the diffusion of the term is now so extreme that it is used to refer to not only vastly different but even opposite activities. In particular the tendency to employ the term 'postcolonial' to refer to any kind of marginality runs the risk of denying its basis in the historical process of colonialism[15]. Thus the link between the actual colonialisation process and the theory of postcolonialism should always be related. For me then, 'postcolonial' implies both going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles.

Again, it should be also acknowledged that Postcolonial Theory functions as a subdivision within the even more misleadingly named field of 'cultural studies': the whole body of generally leftist radical literary theory and criticism which includes Marxist, Gramscian, Foucaultdian, and various feminist schools of thought, among others. What all these schools of thought have in common is a determination to analyse unjust power relation as manifested in cultural products like literature, film, art, etc. Similarly, the relationship between postcolonialism (having all the above stated meanings) and postmodernism is based on experiences of marginality and questioning the dominant discourse. The intensification of theoretical interest in Postcolonial Studies has almost coincided with the rise of postmodernism in western societies which has led to both confusion and overlap between the two. In Saswat Das' words:

[15] Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 2.

> The confusion is caused partly by the fact that the major project of post-modernism – the deconstruction of the centralised, logocentric master narratives of European culture, is very similar to the post-colonial project of dismantling the centre / margin binarism of imperial discourse. 'The decentring of discourse, the focus on the significance of language and writing in the construction of experience, the use of subversive strategies of mimicry, parody and irony – all these concerns overlap those of post-modernism and so a conflation of the two discourses has often occurred one way of comparing these two discourses...[16]

But in Ashcroft's words:

> The term 'postcolonialism' and 'postmodernism' are both extremely elusive to classify and the attempt to bring them together might be thought only to compound the difficulties further. For some critics, any attempt to fuse the two in a common theoretical inquiry is bound to occlude serious problems of the degree to which the unfinished business of late capitalism differently affects postmodern and postcolonial conditions. The problem with the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism lies in the fact that they are both, in their very different and culturally located ways, discursive elaboration of postmodernity. Just as imperialism and Enlightenment philosophy were discursive elaborations of modernity.[17]

I shall not go into the details of this controversy as, even though postmodernism hints at pluralism and seems to favour an attack on hegemonic discourses, it is ultimately a-political and does not feed into larger projects of emancipation. To collocate the two, then, is somehow to disempower the postcolonial, which is conceived to be more concerned with pressing economic, political and cultural inequalities.[18]

'Feminism' is also of crucial interest to the postcolonial discourse, as firstly, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of

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[16] Saswat Das, *The Postcolonial Empire*, 125.
[17] Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, 12.
[18] Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism*, 132.

women in patriarchy and those of colonised subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminists and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance. Secondly, there are various debates in a number of colonised societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives. This led to a division between western feminists and political activists from impoverished and oppressed countries. Feminism, like postcolonialism, has often been concerned with the ways and extent to which representation and language are crucial to identity formation and to construction of subjectivity. For both groups language has been a vehicle for subverting patriarchal and imperial power. Both feminists and colonised peoples, like other subordinate groups, have also used appropriation of theories to subvert and adapt dominant languages and signifying practices. The texts of feminist theory and those of postcolonialism concur on many aspects of the theory of identity, of difference and of the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls.

Feminism has been concerned not only when categories like gender been ignored within the larger formation of the colonial, but also when postcolonial theory has tended to ignore gender differences in constructing a single category of the colonised. Critics argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and that 'double colonialisation' has resulted when women were colonised – by colonialist realities and representations and by patriarchal modes of power[19]. Even post-independence practices of anti-

[19] I would deal more with the nation of 'double colonialisation' later in my second chapter as presently my foremost task is to bring Subaltern Studies into the discussion.

colonial nationalism are not free from this kind of gender bias, and constructions of the traditional or pre-colonial are often heavily inflected by a contemporary masculinist bias that falsely represents 'native' women as subordinate. Thus, both, postmodernism and feminism, like postcolonialism, criticise and question the dominant discourse, which overwhelmingly shares the characteristics of the nation state. Deconstructing the dominant discourse was the main framework for analysing the experience of the marginal to all of these theories.

So, 'Postcolonial Literature' is not only an unique way to criticise colonialism but also it provides an alternative way to look at history, not only written but also oral, depicting experiences of marginality, which started with the colonialisation and is still continuing.

Part II

I would like to show that *Subaltern Studies: Writing on Indian History and Society* which began in 1982 can also be defined as Postcolonial Literature because it deals with the postcolonial as understood in the way defined in the earlier section: first, a historical phenomenon coinciding (and not succeeding) with colonialism. Second, like 'other' kind of Postcolonial Literature, Subaltern Studies emphasises on an alternative way to write history and third, Subaltern Studies also critiques colonialisation. In the foreword to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Edward Said defines Ranajit Guha and his colleagues as,

> part of the vast post-colonial culture and critical effort that would also include novelists like Salman Rushdie, Garcia Marquez, George Lamming, Sergio Ramirez, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo, poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mahmud Darwish, Aimé Cesaire, theoreticians and political philosophers like Fanon,

Cabral, Syed Hussein Alatas, C.L.R. James, Ali Shariati, Eqbal Ahmad, Abdullah Larouni, etc.[20]

In the sense that the group's work is, like theirs, a 'hybrid partaking jointly of European and Western streams and of native Asians, Caribbean, Latin American, or African strands', a hybrid which foreshadows the shape of a new, postcolonial humanism.[21] But saying this much is not enough to prove that Subaltern Studies is a part of Postcolonial Literature.

The trinity of postcolonialism namely Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha who worked mainly with the poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan particularly enquire into the representation of colonised subjects in a variety of colonial texts, not just literary ones. Said is famous for his 'Orientalism', Spivak for her deconstruction theory and Bhabha for his analysis of colonial discourse, all of which have influenced Subaltern Studies. Spivak's and Bhaba's work is best understood, like that of the Subaltern Studies group, in relation to the problematic of Indian intellectual culture and its political history. Also, Said has been one of the leading advocates of 'subaltern' historiography as witnessed by his eloquent introduction to the selections from Subaltern Studies made by Gayatri Spivak and published in America in 1988. That is why Said stresses the existence of alternative discourses such as those of African-American and women writing even in the high-tide of colonialism, and, that too, is why he privileges counter-narratives in his later writings.[22]

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[20] Ranajit Guha, 'foreword' in *Selected Subaltern Studies.*
[21] John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation*, 16-18.
[22] Fakrul Alam, *Edward Said and the Counter-Discourse*, 23.

As the first point is beyond any doubt, I would like to discuss Subaltern Studies as an alternative history and as a critique of colonialism in detail. My discussion here would be based on mainly three readings: Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'A Small History of Subaltern Studies', 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial' by Gyan Prakash and Vinayak Chaturvedi's edited book *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial.*

But let me first define the word subaltern. The term 'subaltern' is taken from an essay by Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937), an Italian writer who viewed political and cultural issues from a Marxist perspective. Gramsci uses the term 'subaltern' interchangeably with 'subordinate' and 'instrumental' in his class analysis. Its sense of 'inferior rank' means that it is particularly well suited to describe the diversity of dominated and exploited groups who do not possess a general 'class consciousness'. Thus the term 'subaltern' refers to subordination in terms race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, language and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant / dominated relationship in history. However, in the first issue of the Subaltern Studies series, Guha extends this term to characterize subalternity as 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way'[23]. Later, subaltern groups are defined as representing 'the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as 'the elite' '[24]. Perhaps, the main difference between the way Gramsci used 'subaltern' and the way in which subalternists often do can be understood in

[23] Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' in *Subaltern Studies I*, vii.
[24] Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in *Subaltern Studies I*, 8.

this context. For Gramsci, subaltern groups were by definition always subject to the authority of ruling groups, even when they rose in rebellion. However, for Ranajit Guha subaltern politics in colonial India constituted an 'autonomous domain'[25] which did not originate in or depend on the domain of ruling groups. The fact that Guha and most subalternists are writing against the backdrop of colonisation helps understand the compulsion behind this difference. Guha uses the term 'people' and 'subaltern classes' synonymously, although in practice the focus of the articles in Subaltern Studies itself is very much at the bottom of the social scale on different groups within the underclass. Notwithstanding Guha's definition above, Spivak found it necessary to insist on the extension of subalternity to women and gender issues.

Postcolonialism as alternative history have challenged the theoretical and political restrictions operating only within the Indian academic Marxism. As Young said:

> By introducing the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks on the left, drawing on the tricontinental critiques of eurocentrism and the later theoretical forms of their emergence as 'poststructuralism', they have also contested the legacies of imperialism, one aspect of which is the Indocentrism of Indian intellectual life which continues to focus narrowly on India...Though the insistent intellectual framework, and political perspective of Indian postcolonialism remains that of Marxism, but it is a Marxism now infiltrated not only with emphasis on the peasantry, low casts, tribals, and what more concern respecting questions of agency, gender and psychology than it was formerly accustomed to bear.[26]

[25] See a reflection of this belief in Guha's argument in 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in *Subaltern Studies I* (3-4), that subalterns had acted in history 'on their own, that is, independent of the elite'; their politics constituted 'an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the later.' (emphasis in original)
[26] Robert Young, 'India III: Hybridity and Subaltern Agency' in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 350-351.

Subaltern Studies also exceeds the Marxist barrier. Dipesh Chakrabarty, while discussing on how Subaltern Studies could be seen as a 'postcolonial' project of writing history, focuses on ways in which one can read the original historiography agenda of Subaltern Studies as not simply yet another version of Marxist / radical history but as possessing a necessarily postcolonial outlook. As Subaltern Studies was a part of an attempt to align historical reasoning with larger movements of democracy in India, it opposed the then prevailing academic practice in historiography for its failure to acknowledge the subaltern as the maker of their own destiny. The subaltern project was to come to an understanding of a historiography that never happened, the 'historic failure of the nation to come into its own'. As Vinayak Chaturvedi notes:

> ...at the end of the 1970s, Ranajit Guha - the founding editor of Subaltern Studies – and a group of young historians based in Britain embarked on a series of discussions about the contemporary state of South Asian historiography. From the onset, the underlying principle which united the group – Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman and Gyanendra Pandey – was a general dissatisfaction with the historical interpretations of the 'Freedom Movement' in India which celebrated elite contributions in the making of the Indian nation while denying the 'politics of the people'. At one level, the idea of Subaltern Studies was conceived as a 'negation' of both a rigidly formulaic 'orthodox' Marxism and the 'Namierism' of the Cambridge School in Britain, both of which failed to account for the dynamic and improvisational mode of peasant political agency.[27]

Chakrabarty asks, 'How did a project which began as a specific and focused intervention in the academic discipline of (Indian) history come to be associated with postcolonialism, an area of studies whose principle home has been in

[27] Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, vii-viii.

literature departments?'[28] Chakrabarty answers this question by concentrating on the relationship between postcolonialism and historiography. He begins by sketching out some of the principal debates in the 'modern Indian history' in which early Subaltern Studies intervened. It was nationalism and colonialism which emerged as the two major areas of research and debate defining the above field. On the one hand there were the Cambridge historians like Anil Seal for whom the history of Indian nationalism, 'was the rivalry between Indian and Indian, its relationship with imperialism that of the mutual clinging of two unsteady men of straw'.[29] On the other hand, historians like Bipin Chandra who saw the Indian history of the colonial period as an epic battle between the forces of nationalism and colonialism. Chandra argued that, as a regressive force, colonialism distorted all developments in India's society and polity. He saw nationalism as a regenerative force, as the antithesis of colonialism. But from the point of view of a younger generation of historians whom Guha, following Salman Rushdie, has called the 'midnight children', neither the Cambridge thesis propounding a sceptical view of Indian nationalism nor the nationalist-Marxist thesis glossing over – or assimilating to a nationalist historiographic agenda – real conflicts of ideas and interests between the elite nationalists and their socially-subordinate followers – was an adequate response to the problems of post-colonial[30] history-writing in India.[31] Subaltern Studies intervened here as a critique of two contending schools of history. It looked for an anti-elitist approach which made it similar to the 'history from

[28] Dipesh Chakravarty, 'A Small History of Subaltern Studies' in Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz (eds.), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, 467. Also see his *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies.*
[29] Anil Seal, *Imperialism and Nationalism in India*, 2.
[30] Meaning 'after-independence' as defined before.
[31] See Ranajit Guha, 'Introduction' in *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, ix-xv.

below' approach of Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson and E. J. Hobsbawm among others. But as Chakrabarty shows that both of these owed a certain intellectual debt to Gramsci, subaltern historiography necessarily differs from the English Marxist historiography.[32] This new kind of alternative history in which the subaltern was the maker of his own destiny, brought into focus the question of the relationship between texts and power. Guha argues that historical archives are usually collections of different kinds from which recuperating peasant experiences need the 'hermeneutics strategy'.[33] Here there is a 'discernible sympathy with early Foucault in the way that Guha's writing posed the knowledge-power question by asking, 'what are the archives and how are they produced?'[34] The alternative here, as Rosalind O'Hanlon pointed out, was the notion of 'recovery of the subject'[35] by which the scholars of Subaltern Studies have sought to uncover the subaltern's myths, cults, ideologies, and revolts that colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate. Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* is a powerful example of scholarship that seeks to recover the peasant from elite projects and positivist historiography.[36] Thus as Gyan Prakash elucidates, Subaltern Studies plunged into this historical contest over the representation of

[32] That is the 'history from below' group. There are three differences between subaltern historiography and 'the history from below'. Subaltern historiography necessarily entailed (a) a relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital, (b) a critique of the nation-form, and (c) an interrogation of the relationship between power and knowledge.
[33] Guha emphasises the need to develop a conscious strategy for reading the archives not simply for the biases of the elite but for the textual properties of these documents in order to get at the various ways in which elite modes of thought represented the refractory figure of the subaltern and their practices without which, Guha says, the historians tended to reproduce the same logic of representation as that used by the elite classes in dominating the subaltern. Without this 'reading' the 'voice' of the subaltern could not be retrieved.
[34] Dipesh Chakravarty, 'A Small History of Subaltern Studies' in Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz (eds.), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, 479.
[35] See Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject', 189-224 from Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.) *Mapping Subaltern Studies*.
[36] Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism' in *American Historical Review*, 1479.

the culture and politics of the people. It accused colonialist, nationalist, and Marxist interpretations of robbing the common people of their agency and announced a new approach to restore history to the subordinated.[37]

This challenge which Subaltern Studies poses to the existing historical scholarship has been felt not only in South Asian studies but also in the historiography of other regions and in disciplines besides history. Also, while the focus on subordination has remained central to Subaltern Studies, the conception of subalternity has witnessed shifts and varied uses. In postcolonial studies generally, 'subaltern' has become a synonym for any marginalized or disempowered minority group, particularly on the grounds of gender and ethnicity, which again is why I have chosen Subaltern Studies to see the representation of women.

Subaltern Studies criticises the nation-state and the postcolonial nation-state in particular. It opposes the narratives of nationalist histories which portrayed nationalist leaders as ushering India and her people out of some kind of 'pre-capitalist' stage into a world-historical phase of 'bourgeois modernity', replete with the artefacts of democracy. There is no doubt that the Indian political elite internalised the use of this kind of language of political modernity, but this existed alongside and was interlarded with undemocratic relations of domination and subordination. These two domains of politics were the index of an important historical truth namely, 'the failure of the bourgeoisie to speak for the nation'.[38] There was in fact no unitary 'nation' to speak for and the search of

[37] Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism' in *American Historical Review*, 1477.
[38] Dipesh Chakravarty, 'A Small History of Subaltern Studies' in Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz (eds.), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, 477.

Subaltern Studies was to find practices through which an official nationalism emerged. Thus the Subaltern Studies project originally emerged as a result of dissatisfaction among scholars with the ways in which traditional historiography erased histories of subordinated groups in South Asian society. Much of the current global interest in Subaltern Studies comes from the ways the project intersects with, and contributes to, a larger 'postcolonial' critique. The 'postcolonial' turn in Subaltern Studies, while contributing to its immense popularity within the realms of western academia, has also generated its share of critiques and disagreements. A number of scholars have questioned the premises, implications, as well as the results which the 'postcolonial' turn has produced in 'subalternists' historical writings. These critiques of the Subaltern Studies parallel though are not identical to, the sorts of questions being raised about postcolonial writing in the humanities, liberal arts and social sciences more generally. As an academic subject, Postcolonial Studies stands at the intersection of debates about race, colonialism, gender, politics, and language where it is 'connected with different histories of oppression'.[39]

Guha used the concept of the subaltern to rewrite the history of the Indian freedom movement so that the primary history of resistance to colonial power could be found in movements of peasant insurgency which were operating long before elite leaders such as Gandhi imposed their leadership upon them.[40] From the more Marxist perspective, pioneered by Sumit Sarkar, the history of Indian independence, conventionally written as the biography of a popular nation-state, in fact involved an essentially passive revolution, in Gramsci's

[39] Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 13-17.
[40] Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in *Subaltern Studies II*,

terms, revolution of the feudal and bourgeois elite, who managed to absorb and control the revolutionary, transformative energies of the people that had been primarily directed against their own power. Traditional histories thus tend to begin with India in a kind of semi-feudal state, then go on to tell how it was colonized by the British, how it was politicised, and how it eventually earned its independence. The heroes of these narratives are the Indian elites: the elites usually presented as the first Indians to gain any sort of political consciousness. They are said to provide the inspiration, the ideas and the values, for resistance and rebellion against the British.

The Subaltern Studies Group rejects those narratives. It looks past the elites to the non-elites, i.e. the subalterns, writing them into history, and presenting them as the agents of political and social change. And that's not all. In writing the histories of Indian 'insurgencies', and in detailing episodes of resistance and rebellion, scholars associated with the group are concerned not only with political acts (such as rallies, demonstrations, and uprisings), but also with political rhetorics and discourses. As Ranajit Guha writes, the historiography of peasant insurgency in India has hitherto been a record of the colonial administration's effort to deal with insurgency. The result has been a failure to understand the insurgent. The colonialist has commonly seen insurgency as crime, seldom understanding it as a fight for social justice.[41]

Subaltern Studies focuses on the status of postcolonial subjectivity in the aftermath of the colonial experience. The primary question here regards the relation of the colonised subject to colonial power and to the efficacy of

[41] Ibid., 1-21.

individual and collective resistance. In this context 'agency' or the 'human agent' is understood in the broadest terms as the will of a unified subjectivity, the desire of a coherent entity to act with or against the forces that act upon her; the term 'subaltern' is used to define all subordinated populations oppressed by hegemonic regimes, colonial and otherwise.[42] In its use of terms like 'the oppressed', 'the colonized people', and 'the indigenous' to describe postcolonial societies, postcolonial theory suppresses internal hierarchies and divisions in these societies. It rises to do a disservice to the minorities in these societies by deflecting attention away from their oppression by using a unitary vocabulary which confers the 'subaltern' status on the entire postcolonial world, disregarding the fact that it is ridden with hierarchies. In Homi Bhaba's words,

> a range of contemporary critical theories suggests that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, Diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.[43]

In her influential essays 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' [44]and 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'[45], Spivak explored the problem of whether or not it was possible to recover the voices of those who had been made subjects of colonial representations (particularly women) and read them as potentially disruptive and subversive. Thus the notion of subaltern became an issue in postcolonial theory when Spivak criticised the assumptions of the Subaltern Studies group in the essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' This question, she says, is an important one, which the group must ask. Spivak criticises the Gramscian

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[42] Donna Landry and Gerald McLean (eds.), *The Spivak Reader*, 203.
[43] Meenakshi Mukherjee and Harish Trivedi (eds.), *Interrogating Post-colonialism*, 4.
[44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IV*, 330-363.
[45] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Larry Grossberg and Carry Nelson (eds.), *Marxist Interpretations of Literature and Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries*, 271-308.

claim for the autonomy for the subaltern group, which in her view has a fundamentally essentialist premise.[46] According to Spivak, Guha's attempt to guard against essentialist views of subalternity, by specifying the range of subaltern groups, a further distinction between the subaltern and the dominant indigenous groups at the regional and at the local levels, only problematise the idea of the subaltern itself still further. The task of research, she says,

> is to investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature of the degree of deviation of [the dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local level] from the ideal [the subaltern] and situate it historically[47].

She says that for the true subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no subaltern subject that can speak itself. Thus the postcolonial project is about their re-appropriating capacities to represent themselves.

Spivak goes on to elaborate on the problems of the category of the subaltern by looking at the situations of gendered subjects and of Indian women in particular. But, her main target is the concept of an unproblematically constituted subaltern identity, rather than the subaltern subject ability to give voice to political concerns. Her point is that no dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essentially subaltern subject entirely separated from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks. Clearly, the existence of post-colonial discourse itself is an example of such speaking, and in most cases the dominant language or mode of representation is appropriated so that the marginal voice can be heard.[48]

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[46] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 218.
[47] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Subaltern Studies IV*, 27.
[48] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 219.

Many theoretical and historical questions have been raised with respect to the Subaltern Studies project, particularly relating to issues of subaltern consciousness, agency and hegemony, differences of gender and locality and also questions of identity through a play of comparisons, contrasts, and identifications. The Subaltern Studies project, after all involves the analysis of a failure in writing history. The historians, in other words, were prepared to reconsider all aspects involved in the history of the Indian independence movement, and to develop a new historiography of the left that took into account those people which the rigidity of nationalist orthodoxy had hitherto been excluded from its political calculations. Even here, however, the question of gender and the role of subaltern women were overlooked until Spivak's intervention in the fourth volume. Only in volume nine, Kamala Visweswaran noted that 'while the praxis of Subaltern Studies has originated in the central assumption of subaltern agency, it has been less successful in demonstrating how such agency is constituted by gender'.[49] Given the strength of the women's movement in India from the late nineteenth century onwards, this was a surprising omission. Feminist's critiques of the Subaltern historians prompted the question of how far colonialism and the adverse strategy of anti-colonialism were themselves gendered, and to what degree they were challenged and transformed by alternative practices and differently gendered historians. I would like to try, to see the role and representation of women in Subaltern Studies as part of the postcolonial discourse[50] after discussing the critique of the nationalist discourse on women in the second chapter.

[49] Kamala Visweswaran, *Subaltern Studies IX*, 85.
[50] See in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER II

SUBALTERN CRITIQUE OF THE NATIONALIST DISCOURSE ON WOMEN

Literature on nation and nationalism rarely addresses the question of gender, despite a general interest in the differential participation of various social groups in nationalist projects. Nationalists have engaged but little with the differential integration of women and men into the national project.[51] Here, in this chapter, I shall give a critique of the nationalist discourse on women going back to the colonial period in the first part. My understanding of the nationalist discourse on women will be heavily borrowed from Partha Chatterjee's understanding of the same theme. For doing this, I shall mainly rely upon the two much cited essays of Chatterjee in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* and 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid edited *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. In the second part, I will give a conclusion of the above discussion.

Part I

The colonial period has been seen as a watershed in gender relations. Gender relations in contemporary India are historically defined and structured, firstly, by the use and the organisation of land and labour under new market compulsions, secondly, with the coming up of new sites of production like

[51] Sylvia Walby, 'Women and Nation' in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed) *Maping the Nation*, 235.

factories, mines, plantations etc., and thirdly, by the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism in the nineteenth century. For women's movement which began to gather strength in the late 1970s and early 1980s, recovery of the past became a decisive part. As this past spoke copiously on public institutions, political activity, social and economic structures, which were entirely for men and by men, writing 'Her-story' was a crucial agenda for the movement.[52] Many argued that the alliance between the women's movement and the nationalist movement had been mutually beneficial. They argue that the moral framework of the nationalist movement allowed women to break through patriarchal barriers into the public world of political activity—onto the streets, assemblies and councils resulting in guaranteeing of equal rights in the new Republic's constitution.

The notion of harmonious alliance against colonial the power was first challenged by Marxist scholars who argued on the class composition and character of the nationalist movement that within the umbrella of the anti-colonial struggle, nationalist leadership, mainly the Congress aimed at laying the basis of a bourgeois state in the yet-to-be-independent India. As a result, peasants' and worker' struggle were misdirected, contained and restricted, so that the dominant relations of property remained entrenched. A similar kind of critique can be seen among the first feminist historians. The first entry point to this was Bengal renaissance and social reform movement which marked the emergence of 'new' women who were significant beneficiaries of colonial modernity and the benevolence of elite Indian male reformers. This liberal

[52] Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 260.

ideology, however, was abandoned with the emergence of nationalism in the nineteenth century as many scholars have seen. Nationalist turn thus became socially conservative and detrimental to women's progress. Chatterjee's thesis of the 'Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' challenges such a notion. Before I go to the discussion in detail, let me outline the other two entry point briefly. The second major entry point for women's history follows from the questions of nationalism and the issues of women's participation in the nationalist movement. With the vanishing of the euphoria of freedom, the vote and constitutional rights, feminists are beginning to question the nationalist leadership's attitude to gender issues, its failure to confront patriarchal institutions and its role in perpetuating male dominance. We shall see how Chatterjee's essay deals with this 'history of betrayal' a little later. The third entry point looks into the question of economic development of women, demanding a more long-term examination of women's relationship to economic and social resources, land, labour and capital.

As historians like Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty engaged themselves in positioning women in the scheme of the nationalist movement in the Indian subcontinent, the way of symbolisation of women became evident. The starting point of the argument is why the 'women's question' becomes a relatively unimportant issue within the nationalist discourse by the end of the 19th century. Chatterjee answers this question as follows: The women's question was central in the controversial debates in early and mid-nineteenth century Bengal. In this period of so called 'renaissance', reformers like Rammohon Roy and Vidyasagar took up several campaigns against the age old traditional practices regarding women. The reformers were benevolent men

influenced by liberal and enlightened philosophies of the West, while their opponents were obscurantist men upholding outmoded customs. Luckily for women (read elite women) these opponents were mostly unsuccessful and thus women became beneficiaries and they were taken across the threshold of domestic confinement to enter public world through education and in few cases employment.[53] However, a sudden disappearance of those issues from the public debate towards the end of the century perplexed the historians. The overwhelming issue then became the politics of nationalism. Chatterjee searches for the reason behind this change and at first cites Ghulam Murshid. For Murshid, the penetration of western ideas in mid-nineteenth century Bengal at first has the effect of 'modernising' the condition of women.[54] However, in the later phase this modernisation approach declined as the popular attitude towards the reform movements hardened. For him, the reform movements, as in the west, were the full articulation of liberal values in social institutions and practices. These liberal-western values were then criticised within the new politics of nationalism which glorified India's past and fostered a conservative attitude towards social belief and practices. However, Chatterjee writes that this critique was linear and similar to that of the colonial historians who argued that Indian nationalism was nothing but a scramble of sharing political power with the colonial ruler.

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[53] The scene in Satyajit Ray's film Ghare Baire (based on a novel by Rabindranath Tagore of the same title and translated in English as The Home and the World) in which Bimala and Nikhilesh traverse a long corridor separating the andar (inner apartments) from the portion of the house open to 'public', the bahir (outer space), dwells on this crossing of the threshold with telling visual effect with slow-motion.
For a case study of professional employment of women see Geraldine Forbes, 'Medical Careers and Health Care for Indian Women: Patterns of Control', *Women's History Review*, vol. 3, 4.

[54] Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, 1849-1905.

Before I continue further with Chatterjee, I would like to mention Lata Mani's argument here, who takes the issue ahead to challenge the possibility of writing 'women's history' from the reform debates. For her, since women were neither the subjects nor objects of reform but merely the 'site' on which the debates were conducted, the 'condition of women' question was not, she argues, about women at all but of clash between tradition and modernity.[55]

Now, Chatterjee then cites Sumit Sarkar[56] who argues that the limitations of nationalist ideology in pushing forward a campaign for liberal and egalitarian social change cannot be seen as retrogression from the earlier reformist phase. Sarkar has further argued, says Chatterjee, that even the reformists were highly selective in their acceptance of liberal ideas from Europe. Fundamental elements of social conservatism such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the family etc. were clearly retained in the reform movements.

Though the base for such a selection remains unanswered, Chatterjee anticipates that nationalism gives an answer to the new social and cultural problems concerning women in 'modern' society. So, Chatterjee argues that the relative unimportance of the women's question is to be explained not by the fact that it has been censored out of the reform movements or it has been suppressed by the political struggle, but in the nationalism's effort in situating

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[55] Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 265. Mani's writings on sati debate acquire special contemporary relevance with Roop Kanwar's sati at Deorala in 1987. Ashis Nandy in his 'Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest' had earlier written about sati as a colonial phenomenon, arguing that colonial policies gave a fillip to the practise by marking it as high-caste and thus encouraging its adoption as a means of caste mobility.

[56] Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial Reason*, 71-76.

the women's question in an inner domain of society by refusing any negotiation on the women's question with the colonial state. From this, it is obvious that there 'was' a selection process headed by the nationalists, based on a culture which is different from the west and which situate women in the inner domain and by which the whole question of reformation came to a halt.

The 'feminisation of the orient' was complemented by the representation of the western ruling race as 'masculine'. As such the British asserted their 'natural' authority to rule and protect weaker sections of Indian society like 'women'.[57] The response of the indigenous elite men was to carve out a 'domestic' domain of family, religion and caste over which to assert their authority. Such an arrangement, it has been argued by Rosalind O'Hanlon, was put in place by an agreement between colonial rulers and their collaborators who were indigenous elite men.[58] It was also legacy from the colonial construction of the 'public'. A systematic contestation between coloniser and colonised for control of this public domain came with the rise of nationalism. The 'self-image of frailty' that afflicted the Bengali babu led them to produce multiple icons in order to 'reclaim their history', regain their manhood, propagate nationalism and spawn a homogenized modern Indian identity'.[59] This nationalism reversed the logic of reformism. The colonial state was not to be allowed to undertake legislation

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[57] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* as cited in Samita Sen, Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 267.

[58] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India', in Dauglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (eds.), *Contesting Power, Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* as cited in Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 268.

[59] Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* as cited in Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 268.

which would impact on the 'domestic' domain, and this of course constituted a restriction on its self-appointed 'public' role.[60]

According to Chatterjee, the nationalists were against the civilising mission of the British and their sympathy for the oppressed. This mission included conversion by missionaries, legislative and administrative actions to spread enlightened western knowledge among Indians, which resulted in moral condemnation of tradition. Thus for the nationalists the reform agenda was mainly a product of the political encounter between a colonial state and the supposed 'tradition' of the conquered people. Indian nationalism opposing colonial rule according to Chatterjee separated the domain of culture into two spheres – material and the spiritual. One aspect of the nationalist project in reforming the traditional culture is to learn what comes into the material sphere by which the European countries have subjugated the east. This does not mean simply imitating the west as this can threaten the identity of the national culture. Chatterjee says that, in fact, the nationalists thought that the east is superior when the spiritual sphere is concerned. Therefore, the nationalist project was to retain the spiritual essence of the nation, which is the 'ideological' base for the selective process in appropriating western modernity.

The material / spiritual distinction was condensed into an outer / inner dichotomy. Chatterjee says, that applying this framework to the day-to-day reality in the ghar / bahir, home / world dichotomy, results in the traditional, patriarchal conception of gender. The material / spiritual dichotomy corresponds to a new and significant distinction in the nationalist mind. For the

[60] Samita Sen, 'Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal', *Gender and History*, vol. 5, 2, 231-43.

nationalist the world is the place, which has been conquered by virtue of material superiority, which lies outside one's inner self. However, the spiritual is sovereign and the master of its own fate. This spiritual self is represented by the home, which was the domain of the women. Thus, the nationalist paradigm has supplied an ideological principle of selecting from the set of modernisation principles from the west, giving a new framework, where the burden of difference goes to the women.[61]

This process of formation of the private sphere as an indigenous alternative to western materialism, as pointed out by Sangari and Vaid, establishes a series of oppositions between male vs. female, inner vs. outer, public vs. private[62], material vs. spiritual. The woman was then considered to be the 'keeper' of the sanctity of home. 'And so we get an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into ghar and bahir'.[63] This was understood by the nationalists as a proof that, even though European power had subjugated India because of its 'superior material culture', it had not succeeded in penetrating the essential identity of the spiritual East. [64]

Thus, the imagery of the woman is an important aspect of the construction of an imagined community such as a nation. Within India, it is the 'Indian woman'

[61] Here it is interesting to note that, a selection process has always continued, from proving 'dresscode' to providing 'a suitable marriage partner'. By the changing selection process, tradition also got redefined.

[62] This public / private dichotomy is very different from the public / private dichotomy in the liberal theories which involves family and civil society. Feminists have critiqued this division. Some have even said that there is no such distinction. But the main disagreement is concerning the boundary line between the two. Where is the boundary and why? I would say that this 'where' and 'why' has varied in different times and phases. Here, the dichotomy should be understood as per the aspirations of the nationalists. To avoid confusion, we can call it a public / domestic dichotomy which also flows from the initial distinction.

[63] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) 'Recasting Women: An Introduction', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 239.

[64] Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 233-253. Chatterjee never said that there is no such 'essential identity' nor did he explained the said.

who is being constructed in the image of the historical 'Hindu-Aryan woman'[65], who is seen as carrying the true Indian culture forward into future generations. She is 'a metaphor for the purity, the chastity, and the sanctity of the Ancient spirit that is India'. This image of the true Indian woman is grounded on the 'myth of the Vedic golden age'.[66]

The bourgeoisie[67] that rose into power after independence continued to develop these ideologies of 'Hindu' and 'Indian' womanhood.[68] Uma Chakravarty, in her article *Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?*[69], discusses the 'invention' of 'Indian tradition'[70], which began in the 19th century, a particular kind of past, which became the basis for the construction of a particular kind of 'Indian womanhood'. Chakravarty writes that,

> from the days of Raja Rammohon Roy onwards, there was a limited focus on only the upper sections of society portraying the 'Aryan' Indian woman as the ideal. During this period, the past itself was a creation of the present and these compulsions determined which elements were highlighted and which receded from the conscious object of concern in historical and semi-historical writings.[71]

According to Orientalist discourses, it is the Western woman who aims for 'emancipation' and the genuine 'Bharatiya Nari' (Indian woman); the bastion of Hindu culture is seen as the submissive 'worshipper of the husband'. Thus,

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[65] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) 'Recasting Women: An Introduction', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 9-16.
[66] Sangari and Vaid (eds.) 'Recasting Women: An Introduction', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 7. Ironically, this myth, which was revived mostly during the period of India's independence struggle, is based on Orientalist revivals and translations of the Vedic texts.
[67] Read men.
[68] I should say that it is still continuing in some sense.
[69] Uma Chakravarty, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 27-87.
[70] I equate 'Indian tradition' with 'culture' or in other words 'symbol'.
[71] Uma Chakravarty, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 27-87.

Spirituality and Womanhood became a crucial part of the formation of a nationalist bourgeoisie.

Partha Chatterjee shows how the separation of social space into inner / outer, ghar / bahir, the home / world, was used by the Indian Nationalist movement in its 'resolution' of not only the 'women's question', but also as a solution which could accommodate Western discourses of material 'progress' while maintaining the inner as 'essential' Indianness through the domain of 'home' where the 'superior' Indian spirituality would be guarded by the womenfolk. The problem for Indian nationalism was to attain material 'progress' through the use of modern Western civilisation's techniques while staking claim to some essential 'Indianness' that would set Indians apart from the colonisers. Nationalism linked political independence with 'virtually every aspect of the material and spiritual life of the people'.[72] Therefore the domestic sphere had to be protected from 'Western' influences.

Chatterjee thus argues that 'national' identity was invested in the domestic domain which was to be the repository of the 'spirit' (or tradition) of the nation. Hence, the cultural values of the nation remained protected from the contaminating influence of western polity and culture. While such a public / domestic redefinition became the source of a 'new patriarchy', the political context of nationalism also gives it a radical turn. The troublesome 'women's question' of the reform era was thus 'resolved'. Tanika Sarkar shows that this 'resolution' was effectuated by transforming women from an index of social malady (as in reformation) to a symbol of national greatness. This

[72] Sangari and Vaid (eds.) 'Recasting Women: An Introduction', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 238.

transformation pivoted round the mythical image of an empowered woman. The 'modern' or 'emancipated' woman was designated as corrupt and impure, and accused of collusion with the colonial rulers. Against her was counterpoised the figure of the *sati-lakshmi*, the ethnicised image of the pure Hindu woman embodying the virtues of chastity, nurture, and prosperity. She became the symbol of the health of the community and, by extension, of the nation—the chaste married wife / mother, empowered by spiritual strength, became the iconic representation of the nation. From serving as metaphors of actual social evil, women's subordination became a 'willed' subjugation signalling social and national superiority. This iconic stature involved great costs for women, since it rendered irrelevant any criticism of, or inquiry into, their actual social condition. 'Tradition' served from social reality found fulfilment in aesthetic iconography of the heroic goddess-mother. Josodhara Bagchi points out that this iconography drew on the cult of the mother goddess which pervaded the texture of quotidian social interaction in Bengal. At the same time, the deified woman, the mother, attained her greatest heights as the Motherland.[73] Another focus was trained on the 'other' of nationalist womanhood—the prostitute. Sumanta Banerjee's attempt to collect and analyse 'popular' material as a source for women's experiences is a notable exception. His *The parlour and the Street* has drawn attention to the gender implications of the middle class bhadralok culture that sought to distance itself from the more amorphous urban popular culture of the early nineteenth century.

[73] Josodhara Bagchi, 'Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, October, 65-71.

Women continue to bear the weight of 'tradition' and the mark of national identity while issues of their social, economic and political entitlements remain secondary. Yet, nationalism is also of close political relevance to the women's movement. It is from this political platform, and on the basis of cultural 'difference', that third world women mount their challenge to the universalising pretensions of western feminism dominated by elite white women. There were symbols and images of empowerment in representations of female power as in *shakti* and other images of mother goddesses.[74] Many of these had been harnessed, reconstructed and popularised by early nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though, the subversive potential of these images acquired new resonances in the women's movement, their deployment was not entirely unproblematic. These images carried with them the baggage of the nationalist construction of the chaste, pure and virtuous wife-mother-nation, where they tended to reinforce values of both old (pre-colonial) and new (colonial and post-colonial) patriarchies. Interestingly, as Joya Chatterji claims the nationalist construction of womanhood was founded on an ethnicised Hindu image. She confirms Gyan Pandey's proposition that the use of religion and religious imagery in the nationalist discourse does not necessarily make it the 'other' of communalism. She says that nationalism only deploys religious images to mobilise popular sentiment against colonial rule.[75]

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[74] On Shakti, Rabindranath said that, 'Creative expressions attain their perfect form through emotions modulated. Women has that expression natural to her-a cadence of restraint in her behaviour, producing poetry of life. She has been an inspiration to man, guiding, most often unconsciously, his restless energy into an immense variety of creations in literature, art, music and religion. This is why, in India, woman has been described as the symbol of shakti, the creative power....True womanliness is regarded in our country as the saintliness of love. It is not merely praised there, but literally worshiped; and she who is gifted with it is called Devi, as one revealing in herself woman, the Divine'. 'Woman and the Home', *Creative Unity*, p.157.

[75] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* and Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* as cited in

This material / spiritual difference is evident in the literature of that period and Chatterjee was struck by the amount of literature concerning the threatened westernisation of Bengali women who were trying to become 'memsahib'. He thus gave several examples to show that these 'new women' were placed into a new patriarchy, different from the western patriarchy and/or that of the indigenous tradition. Thus, the nationalist construction of women gave rise to a new genre of educated middle class women under the name of 'Bhadramahila' who were educated, refined and thinking individuals, differing from their predecessors but retaining their traditional place in the home.[76] Though they were allowed to attend school and public programs, their eating habits, dress codes etc. depended on the nationalists' portrayal of 'normal' women in the role of wife, sister or daughter. The colonialist deployment of 'feminist criteria' to bolster the appeal of the 'civilising mission' helped to create this 'new woman'. This woman is a cultural symbol, preserving the spiritual essence of Indianness. Moreover, the colonisers cannot be allowed to encroach on the 'inner sanctum' symbolised by the woman. As Partha Chatterjee points out, Indian Nationalist ideology made a place for the 'new woman' who was subjected to a patriarchy which was different from 'traditional', indigenous

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Samita Sen, 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' in Sekhar Bandyopadhaya (ed.) *Bengal: Rethinking History: Essays in Historiography*, 260.

[76] Meredith Borthwick was the first to focus on women in particular. She traced the emergence of a class of elite women analogous to the bhadrolok, the bhadramahila. Though few in number, these group of women gained access in education and could write their own experiences. Though there were a dominant male who sought to speak on their behalf, there was a significant outpour of journals, autobiographies and novels where these women speak for themselves. This no doubt has enabled important discussions on women's own agency. This constitution of new women has drawn historians to examine a variety of discourses within which modernity was being produced. For example, Tanika Sarkar emphasises on the role of marriage and new notions of domesticity and conjugality. Himani Banerjee's essays on education and dress code draw more on gender and class perspective. Here, is needs mentioning that these preoccupation with women's agency through their 'own voices' and the historian's dependence on written sources has kept the spotlight on the literate middle classes at the cost of other groups of women.

patriarchy (a form of patriarchy which was seen as possible only in the 'backward' families of the villagers and labourers etc.). When Indian Nationalists endorsed the reform of 'degenerate' conditions of women, they meant that women would be allowed 'modern school education' only to the extent that it would make the woman socially acceptable within 'modern' social circles and to the extent that it made her a 'better' housewife and mother and so on. In addition, even when it was necessary for the middle-class woman to step into the public sphere for financial or other reasons, her superior 'spiritual' signs of femininity would protect her from the evils of the 'outside'. The woman was placed on a pedestal and worshipped as a Goddess[77], and this image 'served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home'.[78]

According to this description, then, for Indian men, adapting to a life-style, which allows women to enter the public sphere, is a survival tactic.[79] Sumit Sarkar points out, with regard to nationalist ideology in India, that the concern for women's conditions at that time was motivated through a fear of

> social ostracism and isolation rather than a genuinely felt need to change the condition of women. Men allowed for a limited and controlled emancipation of wives, since this was seen as 'a personal necessity for survival in a hostile social world.[80]

The same words can be used to describe the attitude of Indian men to the social and material need to adapt to their wives joining the work force. The Indian men 'don't mind' that their wives work, study or dress in Western clothes

[77] Several instances of this can be founds in history as in myths and tradition. Examples of Rani Padmini, Sati and Sita are few among them. The concept of 'Bharat Mata' and Satyajit Ray's film 'Devi' is also one of these manifestations.
[78] Partha Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 233-253.
[79] As mentioned before this is involving a selection process.
[80] Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial Reason*, 71-76.

as long as, within the 'inner sanctum' of the home, the wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, or mother recognises 'her place' and stays there, without allowing 'Western' ideas like feminism to encroach onto the 'inner sanctum' of her spiritual and essentially Indian mind. Thus, the position of 'Westernised' South Asian women remains problematic.

Thus, Chatterjee examined the gendered construction of colonial and nationalist discourses by arguing that elaborated overlapping binaries coeval with the division of the private and public sphere. The nation, he argues, was located in the inner domain of the spirit which became the site of early nationalist resistance. Since the inner domain was symbolised by women, a 'new patriarchy' drew the contours of this primarily cultural resistance against colonialism with ideas about womanhood as it chief vehicle. However, Chatterjee's judgement that nationalism 'radicalises' the gendered binaries follows from an acceptance of the rhetoric of nationalism on its own terms—that is to say, an explicit privileging of the politics of anti-imperialism over that of gender.

In many societies, women, like colonised subjects, have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonised' by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with the colonised an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression. Peterson and Rutherford[81] in the 'Foreword' to their edited collection *A Double Colonisation*[82], argue that colonialism celebrates male achievement in a series of male-oriented myths such as 'mateship, the

[81] Kristen Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford have used the phrase 'a double colonialisation' to refer to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy.
[82] Kristen Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, *A Double Colonisation*, 9.

mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries', while women are subject to representations, in colonial discourses in ways which collude with patriarchal values. Thus the phrase 'a double colonisation' refers to the fact that women are twice colonised – by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too, where the term 'patriarchy' refers to those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men and marginalize women.

In the nationalist context of the decolonisation struggles in particular, the conflation manifested itself as a radical opposition, thus beclouding the fact that women were the sites of debates in which they had little voice or representation. The 'lack' or the 'mistake' in this discourse as Dipesh Chakrabarty describes it seemed to grow around the question of whether the educated Indian women in the imagination of the Indian nationalists were going to be a citizen or a subject.[83] As Quayson says,

> There was no doubt that the elite men contesting Western hegemony were in fact clamouring to be citizens in their own right. It was when it came to women and the domestic sphere that the matter became less clear. The loss of clarity could be said to be directly related to the fact that women were located / situated within the series of polarities that Chatterjee speaks of (materiality / spirituality, outside / inside, modernity / tradition) that were implicitly hierarchical and that were ultimately geared to subserving elite male interests.[84]

Chatterjee says, nationalism succeeds in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the area of political contest with the colonial state. His argument is based on the above-said dichotomy of spiritual / material, feminine / masculine, and home / world. Middle class

[83] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Introduction', in *Provincializing Europe*, 3-23.
[84] Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism*,118.

women were regarded as the embodiment of spiritual values, which were the essence of the Indian nation. Their homes were regarded as sanctuaries to be protected by any means from vicious influences of the material outside world. Nationalist ideology on women worked on the principle of exclusion, demarcating sharply between the 'new women' and 'common women' who lived in the subaltern domain. Referring to the biographical details of a few women, he examined how women who did not belong to the middle class were excluded from the nationalist value system. His main idea was to show that by this selection only the middle class women came under the nationalist's project and that the subaltern women were missing. The purpose of his study lies in an attempt to find a way for overcoming the subjugated condition of common / subaltern women. But by doing so he has somewhat justified the initial distinction of men and women and the so-called selection process, which merely portrays women as retainers of 'national culture', where her existence depends upon the 'the changing idealisation by men'. Chatterjee fails to criticise the base of such division as material / spiritual which situate women in an inner domain, ties her in a 'national culture' and symbolises her as a 'national or cultural identity'. Nevertheless, the omission of subaltern women from nationalist historiography is extremely important for me, as later I would like to see how Subaltern Studies include the Subaltern women in the writing of history and if they do indeed become the mouth-piece of the subjected womanhood. I would thus examine all the eleven volumes of Subaltern Studies by splitting the volumes into three following chapters. The first five volumes will fall into Chapter III, while volume VI, VII and VIII will come in Chapter IV. Till volume VI, the Subaltern Studies collection is being edited by Ranajit Guha.

So, by discussing VI, VII and VIII Volumes together, I hope to capture a period of transition in the discussion of subaltern women. Moreover, both volumes, VI and VII, discuss 'Chandra's Death', one of the first articles on the life of a subaltern woman by Guha. The fifth and the last Chapter will have discussion of volumes IX to XII.

CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BY THE SUBALTERN STUDIES (VOL. I-V)

I have dealt with the meaning of the word 'Subaltern' in Chapter I. The definition which I gave for 'Subaltern' following Guha was, 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way'[85]. This definition of Subaltern Studies though includes gender, the women question, even the word 'woman' (in fact, I had also gone through the index), is surprisingly missing in the first three volumes of Subaltern Studies.

The first volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, which came out in 1982, was an intellectual child of Ranajit Guha, the founding editor. The preface of the said volume mentions the aim of the 'collection', i.e. the first of Subaltern studies series, as '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'. Guha here clarifies the word 'Subaltern'[86] and its use in the present series. Guha emphasises the words 'history' and 'society' used in the subtitle, which meant to serve as shorthand for all that is involved in the subaltern condition. In Guha's words, 'as such there is nothing in the material and spiritual aspects of that condition, past or present, which

[85] Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' in *Subaltern Studies I*, vii.
[86] See in Chapter I.

does not interest us.'[87] However, Guha adds that the present series expect to publish 'well-written essays on subaltern themes from scholars working in the humanities and social sciences'. Guha promises that there will be much in these pages which will relate to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as to the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems.

The main quest of course was to understand 'that subordination' as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance. For as Guha says, 'subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up'. Thus, Guha's conclusion was that 'the dominant groups will therefore receive in these volumes the consideration they deserve without, however, being endowed with that spurious primacy assigned to them by the long-standing tradition of elitism in South Asian studies'. Indeed, he adds that it will be very much a part of their endeavour to make sure that their emphasis on the subaltern functions both as a measure of objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role.

In the final paragraph of the preface, Guha writes that the 'Subaltern Studies Group' is not alone in their concern about such elitism and Guha believes that others who are equally unhappy with the distortion will join, publishing on their own or with the group, their researches on 'subaltern themes', 'their critique of elitism' in their respective discipline and 'generally by helping us with their advice on the contents' of the present and the subsequent volumes. It is almost evident here that at the initial stage of Subaltern Studies, the foremost aim of

[87] Here Guha states that the range of contributions to this series may even remotely match the six-point project envisaged by Antonio Gramsci in his 'Notes on Italian History'.

the group was to produce a historical and significant critique of 'elitism', as oppose to a concrete focus on the attributes of subordination such as, class, caste, age and gender. The first volume at a glance dealt with aspects of Historiography of Colonial India, Agrarian Relations and Communism in Bengal, Small Peasant Commodity Production, Peasant Revolt and its relation with Nationalism etc.

The second volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* came out in the year 1983 with a cover picture by Sanjeev Saith, which again (as in the first volume) shows women as a 'subaltern' theme. Content-wise though, women were absent from the significant writings on Uprisings and Revolts, Agrarian Change and Agricultural Workers, 'Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions' and on 'Modes of Power and the Peasantry'. Commenting on the contributions to the volume, Guha writes that the range of topic extends the 'time from the Mughal period to the nineteen-seventies, in theme from communalism to industrial labour, and in the manner from the descriptive to the conceptual. Taken together, they are witness to our concern to enlarge the scope of our project into all aspects of the subaltern condition, material as well as spiritual, past as well as present', as with all their varieties, these writings are 'held together' by a common emphasis on the primacy of the subaltern as the subject of historical and sociological enquiry.

However, Guha frees the authors from any 'cast-iron identity of thinking on every detail of fact and approach'. The claim of Subaltern Studies was 'no more than to speak for a new orientation within which many different styles, interests and discursive modes may find it possible to unite in their rejection of academic

elitism and in their acknowledgement of the subaltern as the maker of his/her own history and the architect of his own destiny' Thus, Subaltern Studies came as a possible site where intellectual practices opposing elitism can come together and engage in a 'mutually non-antagonistic' at the same time 'mutually critical' debate from which both the 'self' and the 'other' can enrich themselves.

In the year 1984, the third volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* came out with yet another woman on the cover, this time photographed by Mukul Mangalik. By that time this series has been noticed largely and questioned, as the pages of the volume were still not specialized on a theme or limited to any particular phase of the South Asian experience. 'The contributions have ranged widely in topic and period, yet what binds them together is a critical idiom common to all of them – an idiom self-consciously and systematically critical of elitism in the field of South Asian studies.'[88] Subaltern Studies, in Guha's words, is indeed opposed to much of the prevailing academic practice in historiography and the social sciences for its failure to acknowledge the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny'. This critique lies at the very heart of the project. Further, Guha adds that, 'there is no way in which it can express itself other than as an adversary of that elitist paradigm which is so well entrenched in South Asian studies. Negativity is therefore the very raison d'être as well as the constitutive principle' of the said project. It is this negativity, which marks the difference between Subaltern Studies and the established scholarship. It prompts its scholar to doubt 'orthodoxies' and to question 'final truths' as well as the 'sealed meanings of the hallowed texts'.

[88] Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' in *Subaltern Studies III*, vii.

'orthodoxies' and to question 'final truths' as well as the 'sealed meanings of the hallowed texts'.

It is in this volume that an article on women first came about. Though it was not on any women issue, so to say, but it dealt with women in a disguise. David Hardiman penned the article. The title was 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat: The Devi Movement of 1922-3'. As the title suggests, the article was primarily about an adivasi assertion, an assertion that was socio-spiritual in nature and took place in early November 1922. Hardiman writes,

> Large number of adivasi—or tribal—peasants began to gather together in south Gujarat to listen to the teachings of a goddess (mata or devi) known as Salahbai. The Devi, who was not generally represented by any image, was supposed to have come out of the mountains to the east and expressed her demands through spirit mediums. The adivasis of several villages met together at a central place and listened while a number of them went into a state of trance. These men would shake their heads violently and begin to utter what were believed to be the Devi's commands. The principal commands were to abstain from eating flesh or drinking liquor or toddy, to take bath daily, to use water rather than a leaf to clean up after defecation, to keep houses clean, to release or sell goats and chickens (which are kept for eating or sacrifice), and to boycott Parsi liquor dealers and landlords. It was believed that those who failed to obey these divine orders would suffer misfortune at the very least, and perhaps even go mad or die. The meetings normally went on for several days, after which the Devi moved on to another group of villages where the process was repeated.[89]

Interestingly, Salahbai was telling the adivasis to take vows in Gandhi's name, to wear khadi cloth and to attend nationalist schools. It was said and believed that Gandhi had fled from jail and could be seen sitting in a well beside Salahbai, spinning the *charkha*.[90] Whether or not there was any relation between the Devi movement and the Gandhian movement, the former, which

[89] David Hardiman, 'Adivasi assertion in South Gujarat' in *Subaltern Studies III*, 196.
[90] Ibid., 198, fn. 2

had many features in common with tribal movements in other parts of India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was primarily a collection of reform programmes adopted by the adivasis These adivasis lived mostly in a region known as the Ranimahals, or forest tract, of south Gujarat. As an example of an adivasi village, Hardiman took Sathvav in Mandvi Taluka having a population of 588, divided into 114 families of which 106 were of the Chodhri tribe, 4 were Bhils, 2 Dhed untouchables and 2 Parsis. The economic distribution among these tribes shows vast inequalities where 88 (77%) of the families were either landless or held farms below acreage. Besides inequalities, there was exploitation. High caste moneylenders and Parsi liquor dealers carried out the worst of them. Parsis, who generally lived in a larger village, had an exclusive right to sell liquor. The colonial liquor law strengthened the position of the Parsis considerably. For example, prior to Bombay Akbari Act of 1878, the tax on liquor (or *daru*) was low. Earlier liquor was distilled in the villages, using the sugary flower of the mhowra tree as a base. Toddy, which was similar to beer, was fermented palm juice, taxed through a small levy on toddy-bearing palm trees. The Act of 1878 banned all local manufacture of liquor, permitting only the operation of a central distillery at the headquarter town of a district. Men who paid an annual license fee to the government sold this centrally-taxed liquor in the villages. Under this new system, the excise revenue rose enormously and the burden of this increase in Surat district fell on the lower castes and more particularly on the adivasis.[91] The Parsi liquor sellers did very well in the new system. Though, they lost the right to distil liquor, they had a monopoly of selling factory made alcohol in extensive clusters of villages.

[91] Ibid., 203, tables.

Profits were made on the high-priced factory products by applying short measures, like by watering it down, or by advancing amounts of it on credit against usurious rates of interest. The profits made from money lending and liquor selling was invested to a large extent in lands.

The Devi movement faced a number of challenges (from the landlords, from the British etc.), but the people have replied that the god's command is greater than the state's and have continued to abstain. The movement was not merely a strike against the high price of liquor, but is entirely a moral and religious one.[92] The movement started not in the Ranimahals of south Gujarat, but in the coastal villages of Bassein. Early in the year 1922, the Mangela Koli fisher folk were hit by an epidemic of smallpox. They believed that this epidemic to have been caused by the goddess, who had therefore to be propitiated. Ceremonies were held at which Mangela Koli women became possessed by the deity. Through these mediums she made it known to the community that she would be satisfied only if they gave up meat, liquor and toddy for a limited period. The women who were possessed were known as 'salahbai', meaning 'women (*bai*) who gave advice (*salah*). The movement spread fast up the coast northwards to other fishing villages in Thana, Daman and Surat district. From there it spread to Dhodiya adivasi villages in the interior. By this time, the goddess herself had come to be known as 'Salahbai' and, as per the custom with adivasis, both men and women were becoming possessed. The movement was relayed from village to village, either by those who were already been possessed by the Devi, or by those who wanted to bring Devi to their neighbourhood. Many of them were ordinary peasants and had no personal

[92] Ibid., 208.

history of possession and were never to be possessed in a similar manner again. A meeting used to be convened—normally by the leading men of the village, where large numbers would gather from the surrounding hamlets and once assembled, any man or women could become possessed speak the command of the Devi.

Hardiman gives a detailed account of this fast spreading adivasi assertion, which was not only economical but an ethical-political movement. Numerous cases were cited of unreformed individuals secretly persisting in 'impure' habits and then being detected miraculously by the Devi mediums and forced to make a public confession of their guilt[93]. Several observers at the time saw this as a movement for the 'purification' of the adivasis. The Gandhian leader Sumant Mehta described it as *atmashuddhi*, or self-purification, by the adivasis.[94] What lacks in Hardiman's essay is an analysis of the choice of the 'medium'. Though the men and women mediums showed the typically adivasi character of the movement, the personal side of those mediums were missing. The interrogations, anxieties and complexities through which a medium goes through (basically, a female medium) were left out. In my opinion, the particularly tribal characteristic of the medium could have been a different and extremely interesting study.[95]

Writing about India, Richard Lannoy has argued that 'possession is not a mere chaotic hysteria but a structured, and in some cases a highly formalized phenomenon, which can be culture-creating and enrich the consciousness of

[93] Ibid., 210.
[94] Ibid., 212.
[95] We can see all these presuppositions from a high class perspective in Satyajit Ray's film 'Devi'.

the individual and the group.'[96] Thus, the Salahbai phenomenon of 1922-23 needs to be understood in such terms. The wave of possession helped to articulate the deep-seated sense of wrong and the aspirations shared by the mass of the adivasis of south Gujarat.

'If we look at the commands of the Devi, we find that the adivasi's programme combined adoption of certain high caste values with a boycott of the dominant Parsi landlords and liquor dealers. The theory of Sanskritisation in emphasising only the aspect of 'purification' fails to take account of the sharp challenge to the existing social structure which forms a necessary part of such movement'.[97] But, this purification which was certainly not a claim of a higher rank in the class hierarchy is the most signifying aspect of the movement. Thus, though the Devi movement, which can be seen as a landmark in the struggle between the adivasis of south Gujarat and their exploiters, repeatedly chose women as mouthpiece, it hardly gave a direct authority to those women or the multiple Salahbais hardly gained any agency.

It was in year 1985 by the time the fourth volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* came about. It was the first time without a woman in the cover, but first time ever questioning the absence of the women issue. The article (a discussion in actuality) was called 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', written by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Here, Spivak re-asserts the goal of Subaltern Studies as to rethink and rewrite the history of India. Traditional histories, as Spivak explains in her opening paragraphs, are often influenced by Marxism. Thus, they tend to begin with

[96] Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, 198-199.
[97] David Hardiman, 'Adivasi assertion in South Gujarat' in *Subaltern Studies III*, 214

India in a kind of semi-feudal state, then go on to tell how it was colonized by the British, how it was politicised, and how it eventually earned its independence. The heroes of these narratives are the Indian elites: the elites, usually presented as the first Indians to gain any sort of political consciousness, are said to provide the inspiration, the ideas and the values, for resistance and rebellion against the British.

The Subaltern Studies Group rejects those narratives. It looks past the elites to the non-elites, the subalterns, writing them into history, and presenting them as the agents of political and social change. In writing the histories of Indian 'insurgencies', and in detailing episodes of resistance and rebellion, scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies Group are concerned not only with political acts (such as rallies, demonstrations, and uprisings), but also with political rhetoric and discourses. They want to know how support for an insurgency was mobilized. Through what kinds of writing, and what kinds of images or metaphors, they might ask, did insurgents claim the authority to do and say what they were doing and saying?

All of this is quite all right with Spivak. She is a Derridaian, after all, so she likes the idea of shifting from the centre (the elites) to the margins (the subalterns), and from action to discourse. She also admires and applauds the Subaltern Studies Group's emphasis on locality and historical particularity, noting that instead of spinning grand narratives about 'India' or 'insurgency', the Subaltern Studies Group tends to construct more limited and specific accounts of particular events and incidents. Thus, the Subaltern Studies Group reminds us

that insurgency played itself out in different ways in different places and at different times.

In exploring the reasons why insurgencies fail, as Spivak notes, scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies Group sometimes speak about a 'failure of consciousness' on the part of the subalterns themselves. Here, as in the traditional narratives rejected by the Subaltern Studies Group, the influence of Marxism is obvious: the subalterns failed, just as workers in the nineteenth century always failed, because they hadn't yet realized that they were not 'subjects', but 'Indians', 'workers' and 'men', entitled to certain political and economic rights. Thus, this line of argument tends to assume that there is an 'Indian' or 'proletarian' or 'masculine' identity out there, waiting to be discovered, realized, and brought to consciousness.

Now, for a deconstructor like Spivak, that makes no sense at all. And so, at this point, she departs from the Subaltern Studies Group, asking how any identity can exist prior to its enactment in discourse. Indeed, she rejects the Subaltern Studies Group's tendency to speak of a 'subaltern consciousness' or a 'subaltern identity', insisting that such terms inevitably 'objectify' the subalterns. Her concerns are expressed succinctly therefore, for example, where she questions the desire to find the consciousness of the subaltern in 'a positive and pure state'. Spivak is both excited and distressed by what she sees in the work of the Subaltern Studies Group.

In the article, Spivak talks about 'The Problem of Subaltern Consciousness', where she says:

> To investigate, discover, and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project—a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some *thing* that can be disclosed. This is all the more significant in the case of recovering a consciousness because, within the post-Enlightenment tradition that the collective participates in as interventionist historians, consciousness is *the* ground that makes all disclosures possible.[98]

She adds that consciousness here is not consciousness-in-general, but a historicized political species. Subaltern consciousness, as it implicitly operates, is a metaphysical methodological presupposition in the general sense. 'There is always a counterpointing suggestion in the work of the group that subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always asked from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive. It is, for example, chiefly a matter of 'negative consciousnesses in the more theoretical of these essays'.[99] In other hand, the counterpoint deconstructing the metaphysics of consciousness in these texts is provided by the reiterated fact that it is only the texts of counter-insurgency or elite documentation that give us the news of the consciousness of the subaltern.

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[98] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‚Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IV*, 338.

[99] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‚Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IV*, 339. Although 'negative consciousness' is conceived of here as an historical stage peculiar to the subaltern, there is no logical reason why, given that the argument is inevitably historicized, this 'negative', rather than the grounding positive view of consciousness, should not be generalized as the group's methodological presupposition. One view of 'negative consciousness', for instance, sees it as the consciousness not of the being of the subaltern, but of that of the oppressors.

Spivak says that the subaltern's view, will and presence can be no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading, where the peasants view of the struggle will probably never be recovered and whatever one say about it at a particular stage must be very tentative[100]. She writes:

> Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain, I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern. I would read it, then, as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest. This would put them in line with the Marx who locates fetishization, the ideological determination of the 'concrete', and spins the narrative of the development of the money-form; with the Nietzsche who offers us genealogy in place of historiography, the Foucault who plots the construction of a 'counter-memory', the Barthes of semiotropy and the Derrida of 'affirmative deconstruction'. This would allow them to use the critical force of anti-humanism, in other words, even as they share its constitutive paradox: that the essentializing moment, the object of their criticism is irreducible[101]

The strategy becomes most useful when consciousness is used as 'self consciousness'. Here, she differentiates between class-consciousness and consciousness in general. She says that class-consciousness on the *descriptive* level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the *transformative* level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed. Further, she manifests,

> that it is within the framework of a strategic interest in the self-alienating displacing move of and by a consciousness of collectivity, then, that self-determination and an unalienated self-consciousness can be broached. In the definitions of 'consciousness' offered by the Subaltern Studies group there are plenty of indications that they are in fact concerned with consciousness not in

[100] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‚Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IV*, 340.
[101] Ibid., 341-342.

> the general, but in this crucial narrow sense. Subaltern consciousness as self-consciousness of a sort is what inhabits 'the whole area of independent thought and conjecture and speculation . . . on the part of the peasant . . . Subaltern consciousness as emergent collective consciousness is one of the main themes of these books.[102]

For Spivak, even if the discursivity of history is seen as a *fortgesetzte Zeichenkette*, a restorative genealogy cannot be undertaken without the strategic blindness that will entangle the genealogist in the chain. It is in this spirit that Spivak read Subaltern Studies against its grain and suggest that its own subalternity in claiming a positive subject-position for the subaltern might be reinscribed as a strategy for our times. Thus the discourse of the unified consciousness of the subaltern must inhabit the strategy of these historians, even as the discourse of the micrologised or 'situated' subject must mark that of antihumanists on the other side of the international division of labour.

Spivak gives two criticisms of the Subaltern Studies. The first one was concerning rumour, which is 'spoken utterance par excellence'. But my main interest lies in the criticism on *Woman*. Spivak starts this section by saying:

> The group is scrupulous in its consideration towards women. They record moments when men and women are joined in struggle, when their conditions of work or education suffer from gender or class discrimination. But I think they overlook how important the concept-metaphor woman is to the functioning of their discourse[103]

Again, in her words, 'In a certain reading, the figure of women is pervasively instrumental in the shifting of the function of discursive systems, as in insurgent mobilization.' 'Femininity' as a discursive field for the predominantly male insurgents, is as important as 'religion'. For example, when cow-protection

[102] Ibid. 343.
[103] Ibid. 356.

becomes a volatile signified in the re-inscription of the social position of various kinds of subaltern, semi-subaltern, and indigenous elite groups, the cow is turned into a female figure of one kind or another.[104] She says,

> Considering that in the British nineteenth century the female access to 'possessive individualism' is one of the most important social forces, what does it mean to imply that 'femininity' has the same discursive sense and force for all the heterogeneous groups meticulously documented by Pandey? Analogous research into the figure of the 'worker' is performed by Chakrabarty. No such luck for the 'female'.[105]

Where, on other hand, on the most 'ancient and indigenous' religious level, all the deities are man-eating goddesses. 'As this pre-insurgent level of collectivity begins to graduate into revolt, the sacrifices continue to be made to goddesses rather than gods.' Even, when this level of subaltern-led revolt is constructed to the 'elite struggles of the earlier period', it is noticed that in that earlier period the struggles began on two occasions because men would not accept female leadership.[106]

She questions, 'In terms of social semiosis, the difference between man-eating goddesses, objects of reverence and generators of solidarity on the one hand, and secular daughters and widows, unacceptable as leaders, on the other? She then takes up the issue of 'culture of sugarcane' on which Shahid Amin speaks of the deliberate non-coincidence created between natural inscription of

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[104] Ibid. 356
[105] Ibid. 357
[106] Ibid. 357. With the deposition in 1836 of Ananta Bhupati, the 17th Zamindar of Golgonda, the Collector of Vishakhapatnam installed Jamma Devamma, widow of the 15th Zamindar, in his place. This was an affront to the muttadars and mokhasadars of Gudam who were not consulted ... and who protested that they had never before been ruled by a woman ... In Rampa, the death of the Mansabdar Ram Bhupati Dev in March 1835 was followed by a revolt of muttadars against the daughter who had been appointed as the successor.

the harvest calendar and the artificial inscription of the circuit of colonial monopoly capital. Spivak says,

> It is of course of great interest to wonder in what ways the composition of the peasantry and landownership would have developed had the two been allowed to coincide. Yet I think it should also be noticed that it is dowry that is the invariably mentioned *social* demand that allowed the demands of nature to devastate the peasant via the demands of empire.[107]

She further questions, 'Should one trouble about the constitution of the subaltern as (sexed) subject when the exploitation of sexual difference seems to have so crucial a role on so many fronts?' As for her, male subaltern and historian are in this case united in the common assumption that the procreative sex is a species apart, scarcely if at all to be considered a part of civil society. Throughout this section, Spivak tries to show the complicity between subject and object of investigation—the Subaltern Studies group and subalternity. Here also, the historians try to re-name the semiosis of sexual difference 'class' or 'caste-solidarity'. 'As in the case of the brutal marriage customs of the Patidars, the historian mentions, but does not pause to reflect upon, the significance of the simple exclusion of the subaltern as female (sexed) subject.' It seemed to Spivak that, if the question of female subaltern consciousness, whose instrumentality is so often seen to be critical, is a red herring, the question of subaltern consciousness as such must be judged a red herring as well. For Spivak, the subject-constitution of the subaltern female should gains importance.

Spivak then discusses Partha Chatterjee's 'More on Modes of Power and Peasantry' where sexuality is seen only as one element among the many that

[107] Ibid. 357.

subaltern must raise the question of women as a structural rather than marginal issue in each of the many different types and cultures that Chatterjee invokes. The clash between kinship and politics is one of Chatterjee's main points. Spivak asks, 'What role does the figure of women play here?' In the dispersal of the field of power, the sexual division of labour is progressively defined from above as power-sharing.[108] Her main point therefore is,

> That through all of these heterogeneous examples of territoriality and the communal mode of power, the figure of the woman, moving from clan to clan, and family to family as daughter/sister and wife/mother, syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity. In this particular area, the continuity of community or history, for subaltern and historian alike, is produced on the dissimulation of her discontinuity, on the repeated emptying of her meaning as instrument.[109]

The fifth volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* came about in the year 1987. It was more or less a product of the second Subaltern Studies Conference held in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in January 1986. Though again without a female picture on the cover, yet it is for the first time ever, really, that the issue of the second sex became a major concern in Subaltern Studies. Beside the much acclaimed article of Spivak 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini',' Guha also wrote an interesting article on the life of a subaltern woman, namely, 'Chandra's Death'.[110]

It was Spivak who wrote the first article on women for Subaltern Studies. She translated a Bengali short story written by Mahasweta Devi and contributed an

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[108] Ibid. 361.
[109] Ibid. 362.
[110] Chandra's Death will be discussed in the next chapter in detail while Veena Das's essay 'Subaltern as Perspective' Upendra Baxi's essay 'The State's Emissary: The Place of Law in Subaltern Studies' essay will also focus on the said article.

article analysing it for Volume V. Spivak's deconstructive reading paved the way for multifarious possibilities relating to the women's question. Roughly speaking, her consideration is related to nationalism (in her criticism of the author's explanation), analysis of labour and capital (in her discussion on Marxist feminism), feminism in international situation (in her comment on liberal feminism), psychoanalysis (in her consideration of a theory of woman's body) and religion (in her discussion on gendering). It is, of course, simplification to sum up her elaborate discourse in this manner. Yet, by the wide coverage of her discussion, we may understand that the scope of women's studies was expanded. Used as a text, 'Stanadayini' calls into question that aspect of western Marxist feminism which, from the point of the work, trivialises the theory of value and, from the view point of mothering as work, ignores the mother as subject. It calls into question that western liberal feminism which privileges the indigenous or Diasporic elite from the Third World and identifies Woman with the reproductive or copulative body.

After Spivak's intervention, arguments about gender appear to have taken two different courses. One is the endeavour to understand the changing front of the contemporary women's question within the frame-work of the nationalist movement. The other stance has a close relation with the contemporary situation. The nation-wide patriarchal mobilization of the 'Hindu Divine Mother and Holy Child' is a negative legacy inherited from the nationalist movement. As a Derridaian, Spivak likes the idea of shifting from the centre (the elites) to the margins (the subalterns), and from action to discourse.

For instance, the women who are burnt on their husband's pyres as satis are absent as subjects. Spivak reads this absence as emblematic of the difficulty to recovering the voice of the oppressed subject and prove that 'there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak'. She thus challenges a simple division between colonizers and colonized by inserting the 'brown woman' as a category oppressed by both. Elite native men may find a way to 'speak', but, she suggests, for those further down the hierarchy, self-representation was not a possibility. While there may be little doubt that the gendered subaltern does not have a space to speak from, she says that even the sexed non-subaltern does not have an unambiguous and non-problematic space to speak from. But then what, for example, is the role that feminism plays within Indian society?

Women are considered to be subaltern within the patriarchal frame of society. But in my opinion, this should be distinguished from subaltern women. Analysing women's behaviour in jail, Kamala Visweswaran reveals the distinction between women as subaltern and subaltern women as the jail became the site for the struggle over the definition of class and caste. Middle class women prisoners did their best to get treatment conformable to their social status. Naturally, lower-class women were deprived of jail privileges which middle class women received: 'In this way, elite nationalists and colonial administrators shared similar attitudes towards lower class, poor women'. Her other contention is that, contrary to what Spivak says, subaltern women can speak, though their voices are inevitably small and distorted.

In conclusion, in Lata Mani's words, 'the question 'Can the subaltern speak?' then, is perhaps better posed as a series of question: Which group constitute the subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be heard to be speaking or not speaking in any given set of materials? With what effects? Rephrasing the questions in this way enables us to retain Spivak's insight regarding the positioning of colonial discourse without conceding to colonial discourse what it, in fact did not achieve—the erasure of women'.[111]

For obvious reasons, Spivak became the first mouthpiece of the subaltern women. Thus, before we proceed any further, I would like to discuss an eminent article of hers namely, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'[112] which appeared in 1988 in Larry Grossberg and Carry Nelson edited *Marxist Interpretations of Literature and Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries* from University of Illinois Press, Urbana. The notion of the subaltern became an issue in feminist theory when Gayatri Spivak criticised the assumptions of the Subaltern Studies group by asking 'Can the subaltern speak?' This question, she claims is one that the group must ask. Her first criticism is directed at the Gramscian notion of autonomy as used by the subaltern group, which, she says, no amount of qualification by Guha—who concedes the diversity, heterogeneity and overlapping nature of subaltern groups—can save from its fundamentally essentialist premise. Secondly, no methodology for determining who or what might constitute this group can avoid this essentialism.

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[111] See Lata Mani, 'Cultural Theory, Colonial Texts: Reading Eyewitness Accounts of Widow Burning' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 403.
[112] Which though never appeared in the Subaltern Studies volumes, had influenced heavily on nature of the women subaltern.

In the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak objects to the notion that Subaltern Studies seeks to allow the previously ignored voice of the 'subaltern', finally to be heard and that its objective can be to 'establish true knowledge of the subaltern and its consciousness'. The notion that the subaltern is a kind of collective individual, conscious of itself, an author, an actor, in short, the classical subject, allowed the movement to differentiate between the subaltern and the representation of the subaltern by imperialism.

Taking women as an instance of the subaltern, Spivak criticises that in the first three volumes of Subaltern Studies, women were not taken up as the theme of any article. Spivak criticises the attitude of the Subaltern Studies group towards women, which is in her words 'scrupulous' and overlooks how important the 'concept-metaphor woman' is to the function of their discourse. Woman's subjugation is generally dissolved into the solidarity of the subaltern community. As a result, the subjectivity of the woman is placed outside the research agenda. There is the complicity between the subject and the object of the investigation, that is, the male historian and the patriarchal subaltern.

Spivak goes on to elaborate the problems connected with the category of the subaltern by looking at the situation of gendered subjects and of Indian women in particular, for 'both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant'. For if 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'. Spivak examines the position of Indian women through an analysis of a particular case, and concludes with the declaration that 'the subaltern cannot speak'. This

has sometimes been interpreted to mean that there is no way in which oppressed or politically marginalized groups can voice their resistance, or that the subaltern only has the language or voice of the dominator in which to be heard. But, her point is that no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of subaltern subject entirely separately from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks.

Spivak also seeks to lay to rest the 'received idea' that 'Foucault deals with real history, real politics and real social problems; Derrida is inaccessible, esoteric and textualistic'. 'Even a radical critic like Foucault, she says, who so thoroughly decentres the human subject, is prone to believing that oppressed subjects can speak for themselves, because he has no conception of the repressive power of colonialism, and especially of the way in which it historically intersected with patriarchy. Spivak turns to colonial debates on widow immolation in India to illustrate her point that the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy in fact make it extremely difficult for the subaltern (in this case the Indian widow burnt on her husband's pyre) to articulate her point of view'[113]. She shows, in contrast, that 'Derrida is less dangerous' than Foucault, who not only privileges 'the 'concrete' subject of oppression' but even more dangerously conceals the privilege he thus grants himself by 'masquerading as the absent non-represented who lets the oppressed speak for themselves'. What Foucault and Deleuze share with the subaltern studies group is a notion no less dangerous for being naive than that 'the oppressed can speak and know their conditions', which for Spivak is simply essentialist. It

[113] See Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism: the New Critical Idiom*, Routledge, 234.

is as if there exists a simple dilemma before us: either we argue that the subaltern can indeed speak, in which case we have either brought agency back in or, in contrast, lapsed into essentialism; or we argue with Spivak that the subaltern cannot speak, which means for some that we have silenced the oppressed, and for others that we have refused the myth of the original subject.

My objective, however, is to question the question itself, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', which even if we replace the subaltern with another noun of our choice (the working class [es], the people, the oppressed, etc.) rests on an obvious paradox. Of course the subaltern speak and write; the archives of the world are filled not only with the political tracts of their parties and organizations, but there are literary texts, newspapers, films, recordings, leaflets, songs, even the very chants that accompany spontaneous and organized protests all over the world. To all appearances, there is speaking and writing always and everywhere and even more where there is resistance to exploitation and oppression. But here we must be very careful; Spivak does not ask whether the subaltern does speak but she asks about the conditions that allow them to speak. Her question is a question of conditions of possibility which as such function as a transcendental question, akin to Immanuel Kant's famous question: what can I know? That is, what we take to be the subaltern speaking may in fact be determined to be only the appearance of their speaking, while in fact the conditions under which they voice their demands restrain them from speaking truly.

CHAPTER IV

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BY THE SUBALTERN STUDIES (VOL. VI-VII)

Volume VI of the Subaltern Studies: Writing on South Asian History and Society is quite important. With a cover page showing a village scene, probably from Rajasthan with male and female villagers, the volume hosts three absolutely subtle writings on women. Julie Stephens wrote on 'Feminist Fiction: A Critique of the Category 'Non-Western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India' while Susie Tharu wrote a response to Julie Stephens' article and Veena Das' article was called 'Subaltern as Perspective'.

Julie Stephens' article has three very interesting sections. The 'said', The 'Already said' and The 'Never said'.

> A distinguishing feature of contemporary feminist discourse is that it purports to speak about 'real' women. It claims to record 'the direct experiences of women', to understand 'the reality of being a women in an Indian village', and to examine how 'lower-class women in India really feel about being women'. This emphasis on the realness, this faith that the descriptions of Indian women it offers are unproblematic representations of the objective, separates feminism from other discourses dealing with the same subject. Feminist studies aim to present 'a vital and living portrait' of Indian women which supplants the mythic and idealized 'Indian women-hood' of the nationalists or the objectified 'women' of orthodox anthropology. Yet, in a discourse so concerned with challenging the very process by which traditional 'images' of women are produced, it is surprising to find feminist texts blind to their own image-making and laying claim to accurately portray 'real' Third World women.[114]

[114] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 92-93.

Stephens then gives an exploration of a textual body of knowledge on Indian women, the problem of the unmediated association between representation and reality that surfaces when non-Western women are the objects of feminism's gaze. What is basically discussed here is the overlap between Indian and Western feminist portraits of Indian women. The discussion being primarily textual, concerns a strain of feminism operating at the intersection of East and West, i.e. the Third and First Worlds. The purpose, Stephens points out 'is to examine this juncture as the point at which feminism collides and colludes with the discourse of Orientalism'. 'The field', as she called, is the institutional site from which feminism speaks of Indian women. It is more than simply an area for specialist academic research. It is stressed as the place where 'everyday' experiences occur, bypassing the theoretical framework in favour of the 'direct experience'[115]. Stephens takes several examples from writers like Perdita Huston, Gail Omvedt, Patricia Jeffery, and E. S. Kessler to show that the study has been non-academic, more in conversational mode without using formal questionnaire. The aim was to attempt to recapture the 'turmoil and exhilaration' of that period and fill the gap between an 'unashamedly critical' approach to the study of Indian women and 'dispassionate documentation' to overcome the split between theory and activism. Stephens observes that while fieldwork is not a device in itself which necessarily legitimates a narrative, the way it is invoked, in this type of feminist research assumes that it does. The discourse places great emphasis on the 'immediacy' and the 'directness' of the investigator's experience. The picture of the investigating subject is focussed as 'really being there' and written in the

[115] See Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*, 98.

present tense which endorses the text as credible, legitimate information. It also makes the image of Indian women conveyed appear more like a photograph than a portrait. Stephens suggests that the effectiveness of the 'I was there so it must be true' position rests on an assumed unfiltered identity fieldwork (as presented in feminist texts) and reality and the identity appears as taken for granted. The fieldwork experience not only legitimates feminist texts on Third World women, but it also structures all description and analysis.[116] Here the link between text and reality is forged by a category called 'direct experience'. Feminism paradoxically insists that the 'direct experience' is somehow more real than the indirect textual experience, thus denying that its own textual productions are implicated in another kind of image-making.[117]

Alongside this position is the position 'I am women, so it must be true'. Elshtain describes the position as the 'mask of questioned, inner authenticity based upon claims of the ontological superiority of female being-in-itself' can be recognized again and again in the texts under scrutiny.[118] However, the most frequently used claim to truth is the inclusion of and emphasis on the 'voice' of non-western women. The discourse prides itself of being unique in providing the opportunity for Third World women to 'speak for themselves'. But, Stephens asks, 'what does this speaking for themselves mean in this context? She argues, first, it certainly does not mean that these women actually speak. Feminism laments the silencing of 'our Third World sisters'[119] and chides itself

[116] A similar trend in experimental anthropology has been discussed by G. E. Marcus and D. Cushman, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 11, 29.
[117] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 95.
[118] Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'Feminist Discourse and its Discontents: Language, Power and Meaning', *Signs*, Vol.7, No.3, 605.
[119] Andre Lorde, 'Third World: The Politics of Being Other' in *Heresies*, vol. 2, no. 4.

for every trying to speak for them and then 'grants' them a voice in much the same way as women are 'given' equal rights. As she says, it 'allows', 'encourages', or 'lets' them speak, claiming not to speak for them. In 'Sexual Class in India', Mody and Mhatre simultaneously assert that 'the public voice [of the Indian woman] has long been stifled' by a 'male-dominated society' and see 'her present silence on the problems she faces' as connected to 'a self-image which is severely distorted and repressed'[120].

Stephens then mentions the 'field study' of three women living in Mumbai (Bombay) slums, where she shows that the written interviews reads one of the woman as 'Janabai gives her age as forty-five though she appears much older'. This, she says, is an interpretation of the author (in this case of Mody's and Mhatre's) and is not told by the subject herself. Here we are not invited to believe Janabai's knowledge of her own age but the initial impressions the interviewers have. Stephens asks, 'why not start with the statement Janabai is forty-five?' This interpretation, she adds, build a picture of 'the Other', the tiny but strong, overworked ('she appears much older') peasant woman trapped in an urban slum. This interpretation in a way, spout into a familiar and clichéd picture which hardly requires the 'two dozen green bangles' and 'decorative tattoos' as elaboration.[121] Like Janabai's, Lucy's and Shevanti's words are also stifled by those so desperate to hear them. Instead of interviews with questions and answers and direct speech, Stephens says, what is given are summaries, edited into neat and tidy manuscripts written from the point of view of the investigator. Nevertheless the appearance that 'Third World' women are

[120] S. Mody and S. Mhatre, 'Sexual Class in India', *B. C. A. S.*, vol. 7, no. 1.
[121] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 96.

'speaking for themselves' is maintained despite the constant interruptions and corrections made to their so-called speech. If anyone is actually 'speaking out', it is the interviewer, yet the discourse repeatedly insists that it 'does not speak for' the non-Western women. Stephens says that it attempts to resolve these contradictory contentions by the reluctant admission that some of these women are, as yet, incapable of speech, thereby strengthening the impression that feminism is a logical and coherent system.

The argument is that a woman such as Janabai has no voice because she speaks in the mode 'of social mechanism which represses women'. According to Mody and Mhatre, 'she has not the ability to think or act otherwise'.[122] Stephens again asks, 'what then constitutes a voice in the feminist discourse if it is not women actually speaking? How do these researchers, who choose 'the field' as the site legitimating their own speech, identify amongst the babble of tape recordings and sheets of notes, what is and is not a voice?' She further adds that voice and consciousness are linked in confusing and inconsistent ways. Some texts see lack of consciousness as the major reason which is preventing women 'from acting on her own behalf'.[123] Consciousness therefore comes from outside, when women 'are encouraged to voice their resentment, to identify their oppressors and to struggle to improve their condition'. The unresolved paradox here is that consciousness relies on voice to be recognized and generated, yet there can be no voice without consciousness.[124] Stephens further writes that various journalistic techniques are used to signal what is 'information' in contemporary texts on Third World women. They create the

[122] Perdita Huston, *Third World Women Speak Out*, 21.
[123] Ibid., 56.
[124] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 97.

'mood of involvement and style without commentary' of the deliberately anti-theoretical approach adopted by this branch of discourse.[125] Stephens then shows how the writings of Gail Omvedt, Patricia Jeffery and Perdita Huston, which use techniques of legitimation to highlight small details taking the reader through their 'first time' experiences, limit the options of the readers. She writes, 'the I is simultaneously emphasized and de-emphasized, functioning to both highlight the significance of the personal revelations of the investigator and hide the investigator's presence'.[126] For example, Gail Omvedt writes 'and finally I found myself there in Ahmednagar, talking in a tumultuous hall thronged with women'[127] or as Jeffery writes, 'this has been a book forced on me by the women themselves'[128]. Thus they make their presence appear right, natural and inevitable. Such comments in the 'speaking for themselves' category shows that what is interesting is not the fact of legitimation, as texts legitimate themselves, but the conflict between the techniques used and the feminist concerns in the discourse. 'It would seem that as feminism weaves its picture of non-Western women, so it undoes many of its own aims'.[129]

Stephens then goes on to her next section *The 'Already Said'* and starts off by saying:

> Feminism is validated by the existence of the sovereign female subject. The concept of a separate and identifiable feminists consciousness relies on the discourse's capacity to demonstrate that women are capable of being the creators of history; that they are active, autonomous subjects 'in their own

[125] Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash this Prison: Indian Women in Struggle*, 155.
[126] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 99.
[127] Gail Omvedt, *We Shall Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle*, 1.
[128] Patricia Jeffery, *Frogs in a Well: Indian Women in Purdah*, 30.
[129] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 100.

> right'. Yet it is in its search for the sovereign female subject and in its attempt to define the autonomy of the Third World woman that feminism gets entangled with nationalism and Orientalism. Ironically, the trajectories of feminism aim to distance itself from these discourses. It is at this point that the 'half silent murmur' of Orientalism becomes audible in feminism.[130]

Feminism saves itself from appearing imperialistic by celebrating cultural specificity or 'difference' in the lives of non-Western women. This abhorrence of 'sameness' in the Third World woman, however, raises interesting problems for the discourse's call for an international sisterhood. An examination of the complicated interplay between sameness and difference reveals that feminism has not cleaned itself of the Orientalist problematic. Stephens says that Subjecthood is not granted to all women. Certain women or groups of women qualify as the criteria vary according to the particular brand of feminism at work. There are two solutions for this problem: the feminist solution and nationalist-feminist (Indian) solution. The first is typified by the work of Gail Omvedt and the second by that of Madhu Kishwar and the writings in *Manushi*. Stephens' aim was to map the considerable overlap between these two kinds of feminism, in order to identify the points at which they diverge, and to look at what the solution of 'putting women back into history' does not solve.

Stephens' points out that in the contemporary studies of Third World women, the sovereign female subject cannot be Western or Westernized. This proposition is shared by both Kishwar and Omvedt for whom *erasing the west* is a prerequisite.[131] The label 'Western feminist' is derogatory and covers a whole range of negative association. However, its invocation reverses what Western signifies, and then it no longer operates as a sign of imperialism within

[130] Ibid., 100.
[131] Ibid., 101, my emphasis.

the feminist discourse. It then indicates the anti-imperialist intentions of feminism. Interestingly, when Madhu Kishwar describes herself as a Westernized modernist, completely alienated from her own culture and the people who hold it dear, it becomes clear that 'Westernized feminists' face a similar barrier to understanding their own culture as 'Western feminists' do in understanding the other. The barrier in this case is certainly their Westernization. As Kishwar writes,

> Those of us who wish to combat or reject these 'cultural ideals of womanhood' have, however, been largely ineffective because we tend to do so from a totally 'Western modernist' standpoint. The tendency is to make people feel that they are backward and stupid to hold values that need to be rejected outright. We must learn to begin with more respect for traditions which people hold dear.[132]

The 'we' in this statement, writes Stephens, would have to include the 'Western feminist'. However, she says that, there is a point at which she is excluded, and this is where feminism takes on a specifically nationalist character. The category of 'Western woman' has an additional meaning specific to Indian nationalist thought which complicates an Indian feminism strongly shaped by nationalism because the rejection of the 'West', including Western women, has been part of a nationalist tradition. While the nationalist construction of 'the Western woman' is a separate study, some comments made by Vivekananda in his lectures in America provide a useful illustration of the blueprint of Indian versus Western womanhood which later appears in feminist texts from India. Stephens gives a newspaper report:

> [Vivekananda] stated that in India the woman was the visible manifestation of God and that her whole life was given up to the thought that she was a mother,

[132] M. Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (eds.), *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi*, 47.

> and to be perfect mother she must be chaste. No mother in India ever abandoned her offspring, he said, and defied anyone to prove the contrary. The girls in India would die if they, like American girls, were obliged to expose their bodies to the vulgar gaze of young men.[133]

The opposition between 'the Indian woman' as chaste, spiritual, maternal and sensual and the unchaste, cold, sexual consumerist 'Western woman' is the same spiritual / material, East / West dichotomy generated by the Orientalist. As Partha Chatterjee has demonstrated, Indian nationalist thought has itself been shaped by the dominating frameworks of Orientalism.[134] It should not be surprising then that a self-consciously nationalistic Indian feminism is similarly influenced. Again, as Madhu Kishwar comments:

> For most modernists, Sita represents the hallmark of women's subservience. But Gandhi's Sita is not the self effacing, fire ordeal facing Sita. Gandhi's Sita is a woman who will not let her husband touch her if he approaches her in a disrespectful way, nor dared the mighty Ravana ravish Sita against her will even though she stayed captivated in his kingdom for many years. She also becomes the symbol of Swadeshi. She is the woman who will not dress up in the foreign finery in order to appear attractive and be a sex object.[135]

What is not Indian here is dressing up in foreign finery and behaving like a sex object as Indian womanhood is synonymous with chastity. However, it is possible to be Indian and not 'real Indian' by being a 'westernized modernist'. What is particular to nationalist-feminism in this case is that the liberation for women is that of nationalism. Stephens here quotes J. Matson Everett, showing that nationalism transforms the 'subservient, uneducated and secluded upper class woman of the nineteenth century' into the 'articulated,

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[133] Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Work of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, 506.
[134] Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 36-52.
[135] Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (eds.), *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi*, 47.

educated' woman of the mid twentieth century, active in professions and public life.[136] Accordingly, westernisation does not lead to this transformation but rather produces 'educated women in India, who are ready to sacrifice even the best of their culture and tradition, becoming Westernized butterflies in the name of modernity'[137]. So 'the nationalist-feminist project in India posits a paradoxical solution to the 'woman question': it is a search for a truly indigenous and in that sense particularistic, culture capable of achieving the 'universal' goals of feminism'.[138] As the search for a sovereign female subject in nationalist-feminism becomes an endeavour to find 'India', the classification was not find women subject 'in their own right' but to the extent they have rejected 'the West'. The central conflict of this discourse is that though women as subjects of their own history are studied throughout, 'in the final analysis the *bhadramahila* were not in a position to transform their lives according to their own needs and wishes'.[139] This contradiction, Stephens emphasises, is resolved through the adoption of a nationalist solution: by equating modernity (i.e. Westernisation) with this lack of sovereignty. The bhadramahila were acting out the history of male social reformers by embracing the 'modern' and representing new values of 'cleanliness, orderliness, thrift, responsibility, intelligence, and a moderate interest in and knowledge of the public world of men'.[140] A particular kind of subjecthood, however, is bestowed on them through emphasizing the way they 'harmonized' or 'synthesized' the modern and traditional. They become 'autonomous' by accepting nationalism and resisting 'the West'. According to

[136] J. Matson Everett, *Women and Social Change in India*, 1.
[137] P. Asthana, *Women's Movement in India*, 159.
[138] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 104.
[139] Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women In Bengal, 1894—1905*, 359.
[140] Ibid., 360.

Brothwick, resistance to 'simple Westernization' makes the bhadramahila, subject of their own history. Thus, Stephens argues, that the current rendering of the 'Indian woman' by the nationalist feminists has the following features: Firstly, for women to be subjects in their own right, the non-West must be literally present. In Kishwar and Brothwick this presence can be found in both elite and non-elite women because it is represented by a nationalist resistance to the West. Secondly, the subject must be the active participant in the making of her own history, not the passive recipient of someone else's. Thus high profile is given to the women's *movement* in studies of Third World women. In the nationalist feminism, these movements do not have to be specifically feminist as involvement in the nationalist struggle can be then a suitable qualification for subjecthood.

Non-nationalist feminism, despite considerable overlap, constitutes the female subject in a different way. Within this perspective, elite or middle class women are denied any independent or autonomous role in history. Instead, non-elite women are the repositories for what are considered to be the necessary requirements for Subjecthood. They signify a complete absence of the West and embody activity, particularly tribal women who are consistently described as *vigorous*, *toiling*, *labouring*, *struggling* or *fighting*.[141] Omvedt's discussion separates itself from that of Kishwar not in its description of non-elite women but by representing elite women as somehow less 'authentic' Indian women, less than tribals, peasants, or women from urban slums. Proving this absence of the West, the discourse makes 'the West' and 'imperialist' interchangeable,

[141] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 107, my emphasis.

getting rid of one is viewed as a way of discarding the other. The West/non-West distinction therefore is placed at the very core of feminist studies of the Third World women. Despite the abhorrence of sameness reflected in Kishwar's *Sita* or Omvedt's tribals, feminism still maintains that there is a universal sisterhood where women, regardless of culture, have something in common. This is illustrated in Miranda Davies' Preface to *Third World, Second Sex*:

> This book is a compilation of interviews and articles by women from the Third World. The voices speaking here are very diverse. They belong to women from countries as different as Oman, Bolivia, India, Mauritius and Zimbabwe. These women share no one single approach to women's liberation, but together they all show the revolutionary emergence of a new feminist consciousness amongst women in the Third World . . . [142]

The differences and samenesses in women's struggle in the West and in the Third World have been discussed by Stephens at length. Firstly, she says, the difference is not situated in the women themselves but rather in the countries from which the women speak. It is, she says, the experience of culture that makes for the diversity in voices. But, this emphasis on differences between women and their different experiences do not produce contradictory feminism. Thus the end product of much feminist research into Third World women delivers 'universal sisterhood', though Western feminism is based on a concept of freedom that does not exist in the Third World. Whatever these cultural differences are, women remain same. In this juncture of Nature and Culture, the assertion of the same kind of *experience* (which is overwhelmingly biological) like motherhood, fear of rape and physical abuse etc. conditions

[142] Miranda Davies (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Third World, Second Sex: Women's Struggles and National Liberation*, i.

women. Stephens strongly disagrees with this view. She says, 'regardless of whether other cultures are classified along geographic, economic or ethnic lines as India, the East, the Third World, the non-Western world, they are consistently represented as essentially different from that to which they are constantly compared: the West'. This is the reason why feminism becomes Orientalist. 'Difference', in the otherizing process of feminism, is located in the exclusion of 'the West'.

In the next section *The 'Never said'* Stephens emphasises that what is not said earlier or what is never questioned is: what constitutes 'experience' in the discourse and how do some subjects of feminist research come to be unqualifiedly valorised? Stephens questions this 'private is political' vision of dealing with experiences of women where what constitutes experience is never asked. She continues that despite its apparent simplicity, 'experience' in studies of Third World women is not such a simple construct. There are, she says, three different types of experience interlocks to form what is designated as 'the experience of being a woman'. Firstly, there is the experience of the subjects under investigation; secondly, there is the experience of the investigating subject, i.e. the experience of the woman conducting the research or the narrator of the text and thirdly, there is the experience of the woman reader who is an integral part of the textual construction. Stephens takes the example of *Manushi*, the journal which gives utmost importance to the experiences of women. Stephens shows that there lies an acute discrimination even in selecting experiences in order to decide, which of the vast number of experiences will get priority.

In feminist studies of Third World women, the narrator appeals to the 'authority of experience' to establish her qualifications. While the experience may involve identifying with her subject, Indian women, what constitutes 'experience' for her is very different from what she sees 'experience' as being for them.'[143] What is 'not said' is that behind the unqualified commendation of any particular group lies a whole system of values which, in the final analysis, serves to divide women, thereby undercutting the discourse's claim for a universal sisterhood.

The following essay provides a criticism of Stephens' article. The said essay, 'Response to Julie Stephens' is penned by Susie Tharu. According to her several problems are evident in Julie Stephens' exercise, especially when it seeks to analyse a subaltern as against a hegemonic or dominant discourse. She says:

> 'Feminist Fictions' does make some useful observations and is harmless enough as an initial, if somewhat mechanical, exploration of new-found tools and concepts, but its theoretical formulations are prematurely applied and altogether inadequate. Set up, therefore, as an analysis and judgement of 'contemporary feminist discourse, it is politically irresponsible.[144]

In Tharu's perspective, Stephens' conclusion is inadequate and her methodology is 'particularly insensitive to the subversions, elaborations, hybridisations, transformations, realignments or reappropriations that take place within oppositional discourses and must be taken into account by any historically informed analysis'[145]. Tharu gives utmost importance to *context*.[146] For her it is not just the context of writing but also the context for the reader. A

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[143] Julie Stephens, 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category Non-Western Woman' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 115.
[144] Susie Tharu, 'Response to Julie Stephens' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 126.
[145] Ibid., 127.
[146] My emphasis.

reader here is not merely monotonically inscribed in a text but is also a subject in history, living in a specific socio-political context. Tharu criticises Stephens by pointing out the allegedly sweeping claims about 'feminism' and 'non-western' women. Though Stephens, at first, recognises the overlap between Indian and Western feminist portraits of Indian women, she covers only a section of the literature. Tharu is also not happy with the selection of the literature which Stephens calls to be significant. Tharu writes:

> I live in India and have some aspirations to feminism, but of the four main sources I had read only one....perhaps Huston and Co. are important...perhaps they are the texts that help open up the problem of representation...but to speak of these texts as though they constituted a timeless, universal 'feminism' and determined the limits of 'feminists' struggle the world over is ludicrous.[147]

For Tharu, the main problem with Stephens is that she 'appears to have no stakes in the game and no commitment anywhere'. This kind of criticism, I feel is an *ad hominem* attack, which is normally seen as illegitimate in academic discourse. It is true that there are problems in universalising any theory, any notion, but a 'universal' is sometimes needed and when it is not been sufficiently thought out, it creates problems for the development of a feminist theory. Thus Feminism's use of 'experience' can be criticised but it has to be also borne in mind that the slogan 'the personal is the political' is called a 'rebellious inversion'. Located in Melbourne, the *distance*[148] from which Stephens views and passes judgement 'on the muddy world' in which the sub-

[147] Susie Tharu, 'Response to Julie Stephens' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 130.
[148] My emphasis.

continental feminists live and fight, 'entangled' in nationalism and not 'purged' of the axioms of Imperialism and so on, quite takes one's breath away.[149]

The most interesting of the three articles is the last one where, Veena Das discusses the last five volumes of Subaltern Studies as a new way to looking at history. She starts by saying,

> The five volumes of Subaltern Studies represent a formidable achievement in historical scholarship. They are an invitation to think anew the relation between history and anthropology from a point of view that displaces the central position of the European anthropologist or historian as the subject of discourse and Indian society as its object. This does not mean a rejection of Western categories but signals the beginning of a new and autonomous relation to them.[150]

Das cites Gayatri Spivak by observing that to deny that we write as people whose consciousness has been formed as colonial subjects is to deny our history. Though, our consciousness being that of a colonial subject is itself modified or influenced by our own experience and also by our relation to the intellectual traditions. The endeavour of creating subaltern History is to interrogate some of the 'taken for granted' concerns in anthropology. Das opines, that as much as the theoretical arsenal of anthropology consists of terms of 'laws' and 'rules' and 'patterns of authority', the entire field of transgressions, disorder and violence remains outside the anthropologist's privileged domain of enquiry. Subaltern Studies makes an important point in establishing the centrality of the historical moment of rebellion in understanding the subalterns as subjects of their own histories. Das says that though there are some typological essays, like Chatterjee's essay on the typology of

[149] Susie Tharu, 'Response to Julie Stephens' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 131.
[150] Ibid., 310, my emphasis.

power[151], all the other essays are concerned with the historical moment of defiance. These are, 'precisely those moments in the life of Indian society when the representational order is in conflict with the emergence of a new order'.[152]

Thus, Das tries to identify the moments of rebellion. What was clear to Das, was that the historian is not engaged here in the understanding of the family, the kinship group or the tribe in its everyday life, but rather that the object of study is the 'contract'[153] which such groups have been compelled to establish with forms of domination belonging to the structures of modernity—Western law, Western medicine, bureaucracy, police. These can be found in the works of Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, David Hardiman and Sumit Sarkar, in which the traditional groups of the society are found to be engaged in a struggle with courts of law, with bureaucracy or the police—all signs of the new forms of domination that have been established over them.[154] In her words, 'the very choice of this moment for analysis, poses a serious challenge to some of the dominant conceptions about tribes or castes in anthropological theory'.

The first emancipatory act that the *Subaltern Studies* project performs in our understanding of tribes, caste or other such groups is to restore to them their historical being. Das further suggests,

> Once we acknowledge that traces of rebellion are embodied in the form of a record produced in the context of the exercise of bureaucratic and legal domination, we also have to accept that the speech of the subaltern, when it

[151] Partha Chatterjee, 'More on modes of power and the peasantry', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II*, 311-349.
[152] Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 312.
[153] Das writes, that the word 'contract' is used here in the semiotic sense of the intersubjective space between two characters in a narrative.
[154] Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 313.

> becomes available for study, has already been appropriated by these superior forms of authority.[155]

Das then takes Guha's example, in the case of 'Chandra's death', where the speech is literally wrenched from the person: 'I administered the medicine in the belief that it would terminate her pregnancy and did not realize that it would kill her' says Brinda, the sister of the dead Chandra. But she says this in the context of a trial in which, to use Guha's words, death is made a murder, a caring sister a murderess, and the participants within a tragedy defendants.[156]

The second example which Das gives is of Amin, who analyses the speech of Shikari, an approver in the Chauri Chaura case. Though the confession here is voluntarily made through a 'direct' speech, it is not the evidence of the greater nearness of the subject to his speech, but rather of the distance he (Shikari) is compelled to establish from all others who were participants in the same 'transgression' in order to implicate himself in the hope of being pardoned. Interestingly, in the case of the other approver (Ramrup Barai), who was convicted of murder and hanged subsequently, implication of the self in the hope for being pardoned did not help. For Das, Amin's achievement is 'in looking at an approver's testimony in the context of the distribution of roles[157] in a court is that he is able to show how the order of narration—the appearance of direct versus indirect speech as well as the relation between the production of penal truth and the forms of speech—creates a semiotic web within which

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[155] Ibid., 315.
[156] Ranajit Guha, 'Chandra's death' in *Subaltern Studies V*, 140.
[157] Role viewed as in theatre.

judicial discourse may be viewed'. Although, Das writes,

> The penal institutions figure so prominently in many essays, one wishes that the contributions had given more attention to the manner in which this legality is established as legitimate, in contradistinction to the alternative legalities of the people. This aspect is particularly important for the understanding of medical models of dominance and the legal models through which customary rights over nature were eroded. Despite the important contributions of Arnold and Guha to this issues, we are never really told how the Epidemic Diseases Act, for instance, which established new rights of the state over the bodies of the people, came to be formulated; or the form of the Forest Act through which rights of the people over their own forests were eliminated in favour of the interests of the new bourgeoisie. These acts are studied in terms of their consequences but not in terms of the forms through which their authority was established.[158]

The question of how to characterize and describe subaltern consciousness, Das says, is directly addressed by Sumit Sarkar, who argues that there is a coexistence and complex interaction between different types of consciousness—e.g. caste, class, regional and national. Sarkar starts from the methodological position of Gramsci and goes on to define subaltern consciousness as having positive and negative dimensions. Where participation in railway strike is seen as proof of positive consciousness, strike for cow protection is viewed negative. For Das, this distribution is not very useful. First, as she points out, it is important to recognize that the repertoire of collective action at any particular historical period is limited and can innovate only on the margins.[159] Second, it is not easy to characterize caste or ethnic consciousness as 'negative'. This will mean that it had an essence of its own and does not depend on the interaction within which the consciousness is

[158] Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 316-317.
[159] Ibid., 320.

being articulated. She adds that the volumes of Subaltern Studies show that, it is the nature of the conflict which characterizes the historical moment of rebellion. For her, to assume that we can know the mentalities of caste or community beforehand is to take an essentialist perspective which the evidence produced in the very volumes of *Subaltern Studies*[160] would not support.

Das continues to discuss Sarkar's work which suggests three moments in the emergence of a charismatic leader, whose importance has been seen in many of the volumes of Subaltern Studies. First, there is his acceptance as an avatar, or to say, a being with extraordinary power. Second, as Sarkar opines, the leader is seen to confer immunity to his followers. Third, there is a call for total transformation of the world. Gandhi, says Sarkar, was one such leader and then traces his success to the fact that religious faith provides a built-in explanation for failure. For Das, these propositions are disappointing as religious faith has nothing to do with it. Das also points out that the contributors of the Subaltern Studies series, while discussing extraordinary historic moments, have never examined the nature of the crowd, which seem to be very important as an instrument of protest.

The next section of Das' article is called 'Power and the body', where she is influenced by Foucault and deals with the relation between medicine science and modern forms of power. This includes a discussion of a paper by David Arnold on the colonial modes of handling the epidemic of plague. 'He shows how disease became a means of reorganizing the physical habitat, of

[160] Das' emphasis.

assaulting the body, and violating private spaces—especially the home.'[161] As per Das, Arnold is, however, not willing to see the objects on which this power is exercised as passive beings. He shows, 'how protest was organized around such imperatives as prescribing the modes of disposal of the dead, of removing patients from their families to hospitals, and especially against the seizure of women and their removal to hospitals. . . . The Epidemic Diseases Act is mentioned, but its language is not analysed to show how human nature was sought to be constituted. . . nor, . . . it is shown how various categories were called into existence, and what model of imperatives was used.' Though, Das adds, Arnold makes a fascinating suggestion that this opportunity was used to strike at the militancy of Tilak, and also to recognize municipal councils which proves a different loyalty from the descriptions of Foucault, she says that the relation between objects on whom power is exercised and the historical moment in which such models get formulated is perhaps still to come. In her opinion, the question of gender in the constitution of the subaltern has been largely absent. The only exception is Guha's paper on Chandra's death, which analyses a historical document about a case of abortion in 1849.[162]

The story in short goes like this: A widow (Chandra) develops a liaison with a man and becomes pregnant. But the man disowns all responsibility and threatens the women's mother that he would send Chandra away to a *Vaishnava bhek*.[163] The women of the family seeing no other way out, tries to

[161] Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 322, fn. 25.
[162] Ranajit Guha writes in footnote 1 that the document on which Chandra's Death is based was taken from Panchanan Mandal (ed.), *Chitthipatre Samajchitra*, vol.2 (Calcutta, 1953), pp. 277-8. It was taken from the archives of Viswabharati University dating 1255 of the Bengali year. Since the event of which it speaks occurred in the Bengali month of Choitra, the corresponding date, according to the Christian calendar should be AD 1849.
[163] The habit of a person belonging to the Boishnob sect.

arrange an abortion and Chandra dies in the process. Das discusses that the story is, by no means exceptional, but becomes the medium through which the nature of women's subordination within the patriarchal structures of family, religion and law are examined, and Guha is able to create a remarkable narrative around the speech of the witnesses. Judicial discourse, Das quotes Guha, is a reductive discourse which transforms the loving act of female relatives into crime, but does not have to take notice of the lover in the whole process of fixing responsibility for the crime. For instance, when the mother quotes the speech of the lover, we do not hear even a remote memory of the sexual desire that might have given the relationship life.[164] The lover, who takes the body of his beloved in passion, yet becomes the pronouncer of the law when there is a risk of social opprobrium. Das takes this further and argues that 'it is not the case of the illegitimate lover alone but the entire structure of patriarchy within which sexual desire is articulated. The lover of the night (whether husband or adulterous lover) becomes the law giver of the morning, and in this lies the oppressive nature of heterosexual desire.'

In the final part of the article, Das goes back to the question posed on the relationship between anthropological and historical, where she hopes that this history will relate the everyday life of the subaltern. She says,

> Subalterns are not in my opinion morphological categories, but represent a perspective in the sense in which Nietzsche used the word. The development of this perspective, I hope, will also mean a new relationship with the chronicles of the cultures under study. The kind of attempt that Pandey makes

[164] The quote is: 'Towards the end of last Phalgun, Magaram Chasha came to my village and said, 'I have been involved, for the last four or five months, in an illicit love affair (ashnai) with your daughter Chandra Chashani, as a result of which she has conceived. Bring her to your own house and arrange for some medicine to be administered to her. Or else, I shall put her into bhek.'

> in relating colonial history to locally-produced histories will expand the possibilities of the writing of history in Indian society. It is not that non-official sources are not abundant or not easily accessible, but rather that the legitimacy of those who are producing these materials needs to be recognized by official history.[165]

The volume VII of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* came out in 1992, for the first time edited by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey. None of the seven articles of the volume discusses women (also once again the very word 'women' was missing from the index). The only article which faintly dealt with the women's issue is the discussion piece by Upendra Baxi in *'The State's Emissary': The Place of Law in Subaltern Studies*. He goes through the Subaltern volumes searching for issues involving law and discusses mainly two pieces. One is *Chandra's Death* by Ranajit Guha; another is *Approver's Testimony* by Shahid Amin. I shall here take up only the first essay, as, firstly, I have dealt with the same in Chapter III and secondly, *Chandra's Death* directly deals with the women's issue, at least with one particular subaltern woman Chandra. Baxi writes:

> Chandra's Death combats the law—a 'residuum of a dismembered past'—both at the level of the 'logic of legal intervention' which makes 'death into murder, a caring sister into a murderess, all the actants in this tragedy into defendants, and what they said in a state of grief into *ekrars*'.[166]

He writes that there is an absence of an alternative conception of law in the said essay, which also shows the inability of a meditation by the colonial law. Chandra was killed in 1842, after the insertion of the East India Company into the political map of the Indian sub-continent. Baxi tries to understand Guha's

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[165] Veena Das, 'Subaltern as Perspective' in *Subaltern Studies VI*, 324.
[166] Upendra Baxi, 'The State's Emissary: The Place of Law in the Subaltern Studies' in *Subaltern Studies VII*, 250, original: Chandra's Death, pp-139-141.

lament on the failure of 'hegemonic judicature'. He asks—'did the late company and the early Raj laws indeed have a liberationist potential?' A potential, he quotes,

> To redeem the tragic institution of Hindu widowhood in rural Bengal, especially among its subaltern population, a relationship of male dominance mediated by religion...*Chandra's Death* presents its credentials to the people's law as an accomplice in a patriarchal domination. Its 'abstract legalism' only testifies to colonial law's distinctive ways of leaving subject women 'betrayed and bleeding', and 'soiled and humiliated.'[167]

Baxi then moves to the question, 'how does one understand the ways in which a relatively emancipatory people's law formation acquires the fully repressive visage of hegemonic formations?' He further opines that *Chandra's Death* raises a similar question: how is it that Boishnob *akhras*, 'limbos[s] for all the dead souls'[168] of 'Hindu society' ended up in a 'transfer from variation of patriarchal dominance to another?' He added that 'there is rich suggestiveness in the passage that traces the 'ironic twist' which makes the 'opiate of *bhakti*' into an 'engine of oppression', thriving on the 'tragic institution of Hindu widowhood in rural Bengal, especially among its subaltern population'. This, he claims, must mark only the beginning of an interpretative excursus in the said essay. It would seem that the *sebadasi* fate is the ultimate sanction of *bhek*. In other words, the Baishnob governance of the dead female souls of Hindu women is what reinforces compliance and conformity with the samaj law and jurisprudence. The decadence and deformation of Baishnob people's law is invoked as the ultimate sanction to sustain the samaj law. A self-destructing

[167] Ibid., 253.
[168] Within brackets he writes 'I should add female souls'!

innovative alternative legality here strengthens the 'hegemonic judicature' of the samaj.[169]

Most interesting is Baxi's last word. He says that 'Guha brings us live, as it were, the victim's resistance to victimage'. In choosing abortion, the Bagdi women preclude bhek. The manner of the death interrogates the legitimacy of the sanctions. As the sentence of living death is avoided in Chandra's case, the samaj loses its finite powers not just over Chandra but also over those who arranged her death. The twist lies in the last observation of Baxi, when he tries to make the reader imagine what would have happened if Chandra and her companions had, instead of killing the foetus and incidentally the mother, killed her paramour? Then Baxi writes, 'they would have defied both the samaj and the state law'. Further, if the colonial court would have sent the women for life imprisonment, then what would have been the subaltern's response? Thus the choice which lies before us is the choice between the 'soiled and humiliated' or between 'betrayed and bleeding', the choice between choosing abortion and becoming a sebadasi. The question here is whether the Bagdi women prefer encapsulation by the colonial state or by the community? But, the answer lies wholly in the imaginary whole as Chandra does not remain alive to speak to us. Baxi writes, 'the subaltern discourse in *Chandra's Death*, the elegiac lament of her 'absence' and 'silence', imposed by both the samaj law and the hegemonic judicature, ironically, silences Chandra just when she should speak to us'.[170]

The Eighth volume of *Subaltern Studies* came out in 1994 as a collection of *Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*. This selection of essays focuses on the

[169] Upendra Baxi, 'The State's Emissary: The Place of Law in the Subaltern Studies' in *Subaltern Studies VII*, 254.
[170] Ibid., 256.

Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal, Colonial Modernity, The Colonial Prison and a Bibliographical sketch of Ranajit Guha. I shall not discuss this volume as it does not address the women's question. Therefore, I shall move on to my next Chapter where women's voice will be again heard.

CHAPTER V

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BY THE SUBALTERN STUDIES (VOL. IX-XI)

Volume IX of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* brought about certain change in the whole perspective of looking and writing on women. There are two very important essays in this volume. One by Kamala Visweswaran titled *Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography* and the second by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana on *Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender*. Visweswaran divides her essay in several sections to cover a vast range of issues like Gender and Subalternity, Speech and Agency, Records, Women arrests, Jails and the Colonial construction of Gender. The first article rightly starts with the old question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak of course answered this question with an unequivocal 'No'. Visweswaran in her article takes her starting point from the problematic of retrieving speech and of constructing certain gendered subjects as subaltern. She is concerned here not with the meaning of women's speech, or the reasons and motivations for women's entry into the nationalist movement, but rather with their rendition as discursive subjects.[171] She is concerned with what women's speech, more precisely its suppression, might have signified for the development of nationalist ideology and its (counter-) historiography.

[171] Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 84.

Visweswaran starts by sighting recent studies of 'Women in the Indian Nationalist Movement', enumerating and naming the women involved in nationalist politics. She chooses her 'field' to be the Madras Presidency. It would, she says, not be unfair to say that while the praxis of Subaltern Studies has originated in the central assumption of subaltern agency, it has been less successful in demonstrating how such is constituted by gender. Taking the much cited essay of Partha Chatterjee, from which I have also started my thesis, she quotes from Chatterjee,

> The occasional Subaltern Studies theorist, when he ventured to comment on the role gender has played in nationalist ideology, has also been strangely content to point to the absence of women from nationalist registers[172]

Chatterjee begins with the puzzle of why the 'Women's Question' ceases to become an issue for nationalist discourse by the end of the nineteenth century and argues that it is in fact 'resolved' by a necessary kind of silence; a nationalist refusal to make the issue of women an item of negotiation with the colonial state.[173] The 'home' then, becomes the discursive site of nationalist victory when the 'world' has been ceded to the colonial state. The male nationalist turns inward, reifying the home, and the women's place within it, as a spiritualised 'inner place' that contests colonial hegemony. Visweswaran, here extends Chatterjee's argument and opines that, 'if the family or home is the site of nationalist silence, and women's subjectiveness is located in the

[172] Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of Women's Question' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* as cited in Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 85.
[173] For detail of Chatterjee's argument see Chapter III.

home, women's agency is itself subject to a kind of silencing'[174]. Such logic, she says, 'actually forecloses upon the question of women's agency, excluding it from nationalist discourse or its (counter-) historiography'[175]. Thus, the nationalist 'resolution' of the women's question must be seen not only as a strategy by which colonial hegemony can be contested but also as a strategy for the containment of women's agency by which the seeds of colonial assumption about gender can be carried. She writes, colonial attitudes toward nationalist women depicted them as beings dependent upon their husband's agency, and this idea of the 'dependent subject' was replicated in the way nationalist ideology rendered women as domesticated and not political subjects.[176] Visweswaran suggests that it is the failure of the Subaltern Studies historian to break from the discourse he analyses, which results in an inability to adequately theorize a gendered subaltern subject.

One of the possible strategies of the Subaltern Studies historian is to resist essentialism. The constitution of the subaltern in a series of relations of power, however, in Visweswaran's view, requires some revision when gender is concerned. To consider the gendering of subalternity, she writes, one must distinguish between the figure of 'Women' as subaltern and the question of subaltern women.[177] It is the former that Gayatri Spivak takes up in her essay 'Deconstructing Historiography'[178], but it is with regard to the latter that Visweswaran wants to address the (im) possibilities of feminist analysis. If

[174] This formulation, she says, does not alter even when women enter the nationalist public sphere.
[175] Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 86.
[176] Ibid,, 86. See also Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) 'Recasting Women: An Introduction' in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, 9.
[177] 'Women' here is the universalising term; 'women' is the non-essentialised one.
[178] See Chapter III.

subaltern and elite are opposite terms then this opposition automatically comes with a contradiction to the figure of 'Women', i.e. the subaltern and the elite men become men in relation to women and alsc in opposition to one another. Thus, women become women not only in relation to men but also in opposition to *other* women.[179] Therefore the subject position of the middle-class or elite nationalist women must be understood counterpoising the same to that of subaltern woman. [180] So the two distinct problems of theorization of gender by the Subaltern Studies group is that, either gender is subsumed under the categories of caste and class or it is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns. Even when Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty situate gender as a structuring principle of nationalist and colonial relations, skilfully accounting for how ideals of wifely domesticity mark the formation of (male) nationalist subjectivity, their own complicities in identifying the domesticisation of women, prevent them from seeing such as a strategy for the containment of women's agency, of asking what it is that makes women subaltern.[181] The question of subaltern women then, Visweswaran says, must be framed first by the recovery of a 'dependent' subject in the understanding of subaltern autonomy as relational and then must be understood by understanding how such subjects are rendered dependent by the gendering of nationalist ideology and its (counter-) historiography.

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[179] My emphasis

[180] Though the gendered relation of subalternity means that with regard to the nominal male subject of nationalist ideology, the figure of women is subaltern, but with regard to subaltern women, the recuperated middle-class woman as nationalist subject certainly is not. But, Visweswaran finds out that though there are discussions of 'women and the poor', 'women and lower castes' in nationalist and colonialist ideology, the term 'poor women' or 'lower-caste women' are somehow excluded. This, in a way, produces the idea that gender is a separate category equivalent, but ultimately marginal to caste and class rather a structuring principle of nationalism and its (counter-) historiography. Subaltern Studies historians in her view echo this discursive conflation when they speak of 'women and the subaltern'.

[181] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Who Speaks for Indian Pasts?: Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History', *Representation* 37.

Visweswaran was aware of the fact that middle-class woman's 'counter-subjectivity' displaces lower-class subjects in the same way that the masculinised male subjectivity displaces female subjects. That is why satyagrahis who were married were considered more respectable than others. She takes different cases of women prisoners, who were divided into three classes interestingly, depending upon their husband's social and economic status rather than her own position in the society or on their involvement in the freedom movement. Since, speech was often equated with agency; a second means of containing women's agency was to dismiss the power of their speech by arguing for the influence of male relatives.[182] Again, social status was important and if a women's husband was unimportant, then she and with that her speech was also labelled unimportant. Therefore, colonial records rarely tell us 'what women said', but how they spoke'. The discussed splitting of the lower-class woman's identity into two categories ('women' and 'poor') is part of the same process by which her subjectivity becomes an excluded term in colonial and/or in nationalist discourse. Here elite and middle class women were classified as 'women' and poor men were signified as 'poor'. Though there were no statistics available on the number of women participating in the nationalist movement, the *Who's Who* accounts of women prisoners, whose number was growing day by day from 1927 to the year of independence. The number of women prisoners was astonishingly low, but the fact which is more interesting than this sheer number is how the well-being of these prisoners became an important issue in the political agenda of the nationalists. First of all, women were arrested and given punishment only very rarely and that too, as

[182] Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 90.

compared to their male counterparts very less. Water-hoses were used in order to disperse women with using less external force and in many case a fine was lodged to avoid rigorous imprisonment. Supplying of proper dress (six yard bordered sari and blouse) with the sacred symbols of marriage such as *kumkum* became a national concern to prove the existence of the husbands *during the lifetime of their husbands*. It is possible to read nationalist debates about women's sartorial status in jail as expressive of ideas about how women should be treated in public life, or as an extension of the contest over women signifying nationalism's 'inner space'.[183] The signs of symbolic widowhood in jail, like white saris, lack of *kumkum* or glass bangles, also point to an active site of contestation, not merely over public representation of the inner space of Indian nationalism, but about the construction of the masculine subject of nationalism itself.

This was evident even while selecting the class of the women prisoners. Many a times, Visweswaran shows that even though the woman had enough money to prove her *well-being*, her caste and marital status become the determining factor. The 'inflammatory' and 'objectionable' speeches of women like Durgabai, Varahalu Ammal or Padmasani were seen as influenced either by her husband or by other relatives. Their work was defined as women's work (like spinning, selling khadi and organizing women) in the colonial jails which again gave them an inferior position in the nationalist struggle. Moreover, unlike the effects which middle-class women's speech produced, lower-class women were described as insignificant and illiterate 'street walkers' whose acts of

[183] This part of the argument could thus be seen as broadly in line with Chatterjee's arguments about gendering of nationalist ideology.

resistance are scorned as 'making small speeches'. 'The dismissal of agency coupled with exemplary punishment also demarcates the acts of lower-class women from their middle-class counterparts. For example, when a lower-class woman did not apologize, she faced more stringent sentences than those from the middle-class. This kind of humility can be observed in the Durgabai case, when she was transferred to an all-male prison. Mutthulakshmi Reddy's defence of the women satyagrahis[184] rests upon an exclusionary logic. Though she is well known for her campaigns against the *devadasi* system, yet devadasis and Harijans were seen as objects of reform, and not as subjects of their own histories. She does not argue at all for the equal treatment regardless of caste or class. Rather, she shows that a majority of women who were arrested in the Civil Disobedience campaigns were not 'Adi-Dravidas' and therefore not illiterate, but were 'patriotic women of the finest and best type, who have come out of happy and comfortable homes'.

Thus the discrimination shows that the lower-caste, poor women were not considered as appropriate representatives of the nationalist movement both by the nationalist and the colonial leaders. Visweswaran then questions the very existence of the agency that inflammatory and small speeches alike threaten to ignite. As subaltern agency, she says, it is registered not so much as speech, but in the effects on the 'crowds'[185]. These dual strategies of containment of women's agency (women must speak; women do not speak) can be read

[184] This was a response to the article 'Adi-Dravida Women Beaten and Molested; Innocent' is revealing, appeared in the 1931 issue of Stri Dharma.
[185] Hence the care with which records transcribe a woman's incitement or drawing of a crowd.

alternatively as moments of evocation (inflammatory speech) and repression (small speeches). Visweswaran says:

> If we agree that the point of retrieval marks the subaltern's silencing in history, and that it is at the point of erasure where the emergence of the subaltern is possible, then this analysis transits the lines of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, oscillating between nationalist agency and subaltern agency. It is in this tension, this moment of oscillation, I would argue, that we recognize the effect where the gendered 'subaltern' is felt. Women as subaltern; subaltern women.[186]

The second interesting essay by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana attempts to understand the new visibility of women and starts by saying, 'Suddenly women were everywhere.' They question the representation of gender and feminist practice in the present time. As in this visibility and invocation of gender, women seem to stand in for the subject as an agent, addressee or field of enquiry of feminism itself becoming an index of success of the women's movement. But both Tharu and Niranjana rightly view this success as problematic. The reason behind it is seen to be the problem of possible alliance with other subaltern forces, for instance, Dalits, who are coming up in the civil society only to face more problems. Feminists also find themselves drawn into disturbing configurations within the dominant culture. The authors here try to understand the implication of this phenomenon as they feel that the crisis in feminism is related to the crisis of democracy and secularism.

Feminist scholars have worked to recover gender and women's issues from being subsumed under class analysis and have sought to extend the Marxist understanding of labour to include domestic production. They have pointed out

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[186] Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 125.

the marginality and vulnerability of women in the workforce, in history and literature, discussing critically and thereby foregrounding alternative narratives for women. Tharu and Niranjana here compare gender analysis with class analysis which in a way legitimises bourgeois and patriarchal interests. The whole question is based on individual rights, creating the citizen, where gender, caste and community (initially also class) are articulated only in the realm of the social. They say,

> The shaping of the normative human-Indian subject involved, on the one hand, a dialectical relationship of inequality and opposition with the classical subject of Western liberalism and, on the other, its structuring as upper-caste, middle-class, Hindu male. The structuring was effected by processes of othering/differentiation such as, for example, the definition of upper-caste/class female respectability in counterpoint to lower-caste licentiousness, or Hindu tolerance towards Muslim fanaticism, and by a gradual and sustained transformation of the institutions that govern everyday life.[187]

Tharu and Niranjana examine certain events such as the Mandal and the rise of the Hindu rightwing politics with regard to contemporary feminist analysis. Though differently, yet in both Mandal and Chunduru, 'women' were foregrounded. As a feminist's subject, women came here as assertive, non-submissive and protesting against injustice done to women, as Chunduru or as citizens in the anti-Mandal agitation. Many young middle-class women began to show their discomfort with the reservation policies as these would make women 'soft', they said, reducing their ability to be strong and independent. Here they were portrayed not as sexed beings but as free individuals and citizens possessing equal rights. But thanks to the media, the photographs of the anti-Mandal women suggested that they were against lower-caste and Dalits and

[187] Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender' in *Subaltern Studies IX*, 236.

therefore against the humanist-feminist subject. As Sangari and Vaid have argued, 'the description and management of gender and female sexuality is involved in the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality'. The anti-Mandal women thus claim equality not as women but as citizens, which set them not only against middle-caste and Dalit men but also against lower-caste/class women.

Discrimination is evident in other cases also. While sexual abuse of Dalit women by upper-caste men appear under the sanction of 'custom', the alleged 'eve teasing' of upper-caste women by Dalit men invokes horrors and major punishments are prescribed. In the rape cases like that of Rameeza Bee and in the Birati rape-case, the women raped were 'Prostitutes' and therefore had no right to complain about sexual harassment. A women's right over her body and control over her sexuality has always been conflated with her virtue. Interestingly, only middle-caste women gained the right to purity. Thus, 'the category of 'women', and therefore in a very important sense the field of feminism as well as the female subject, emerge in this context by obscuring the Dalit women and marking the lower caste as the predatory male who becomes the legitimate target of 'feminist' rage.'[188] The issue of public health also becomes a major field of controversy concerning abortion and the use of contraceptives. It is only the upper and middle-class women who *perhaps* have the choice to decide abortion and take contraceptives. These became some of the very important agendas of contemporary feminism, which again failed to see the *other* side of the story.

[188] Ibid., 243.

The fifth section of this essay takes up 'Hindutva Women' showing a study of Rashtrasevika Samiti (the women's wing of the RSS), where women are considered as active political subjects not only in the Samiti but also more generally in the domain of communal politics.[189] So the women leaders of the BJP are no wives, mothers or daughters of deceased male leaders, but they seem to have their identities in their own right. The active participation of these leaders can be seen in Bhagalpur in 1989, in Ahmedabad in 1990, Surat in 1992 or in the recent election campaign after the Gujarat riot by once popular film star, 'dream girl' Hema Malini. The sizeable number of women in the 1992 Ayodhya *kar seva* and the increasing influence of ABVP (the youth-wing of the BJP) among the college and university students are threatening. Most interestingly, these new Hindu women nearly always belong to the upper-middle caste and class background. The focus of this rising Hindutva is on injustice and almost symbolic to the (Hindu) Indian nation. This self-respect hitched into women's aspiration and becomes equivalent to Hindu self-respect. In a political situation then the Muslims become the enemy[190], from whom the matrabhumi must be saved as by the RSS / VHP / BJP imaginary, the same being presented as a repeatedly raped women. Thus self-respect is gained by protecting the motherland from the well-made enemy in a country where L. K. Advani insists that he is the only 'secular'. Members of the Rashtrasevika Samiti hence distinguish their position from that of other women's organizations by saying that they do not always take the women's side. *Hum ghar torne-wale nahin hai.* BJP MP, Uma Bharati, praising the anti-arrack women, wants

[189] Tanika Sarkar, 'The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXVI, 2062.
[190] As for the Muslims, *aurat matrabhumi nahin hai, bhog bhumi hai.*

'women' also to campaign against dowry, the craze for foreign goods or against corruption, as she feels that this will help create national awakening (*swadeshi jagran*). Identifying women with goddesses like Shakti, Kali or Durga then stands for '*matra shakti*' (mother's strength or power). Mothers become more and more enduring in setting the family right and preserving the icon of purity and idealism. These *paativratya* women, when comes into the field of anti-arrack movement fails to take up the initiatives beyond their village, a domain which is demarcated, beyond which they can not exercise their control. Thus they remain engaged only in the 'politics of the possible'. Tharu and Niranjana here succeed at least to put forward the crucial first step in the shaping of a feminism capable of a counter-hegemonic politics adequate to the present times.

Subaltern Studies X, edited by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and for the first time a women writer, Susie Tharu, promises a new beginning. Indrani Chatterjee's essay, 'Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India', though, again goes back to the chapters of history. Nevertheless, like many other subjects, issues of ethnicity and gender have inflected the meanings of subordination and dominance in the purview of Subaltern Studies, simultaneously broadening the dialectic of subordination and power, as well as revealing the limits of a universal and permanent bipolarisation which pits the elite against the subaltern. Adding another fragmented history of slaves and slavery in the colonial India, Chatterjee insists that the price paid by the slaves for the physical proximity to masters and mistresses, normalized by masters as part of the extraction of labour, is rarely seen as the founding principle of intimacy and of 'the family'. The erasure of

violence from the foundation of the 'family' is echoed in those theoretical positions that presume upon the expulsion of slave from it. 'The *prior* separation of monogamous wives from slave-concubines in the patriarchal family influenced historians to represent the female slave specifically as 'outside' the lineage and household, and slavery in general as the embodiment of anti-kinship, of non-belonging, of permanent alienation, while the function of constituting the legitimate lineage was preserved to wives'.[191] This is troublesome for Chatterjee as the inherently gendered conceptualisation of 'productive' slave-labour erases the hard labour of childbirth and rearing performed by female and infant slaves for the lineage as labour. Chatterjee attempts to study the manipulation of 'family' by the East India Company and the intermeshing of the cultural and economic that underplay the reproduction of a particularly ambivalent community of coloured subalterns. The politics involving coloured slaves and white masters and their legitimate or illegitimate children gives rise to questions on the right ways of marriage, inheritance rights, and politics of naming the child as Christian or Indian etc. The unmatrimonial connections between European officers and native women, women who were obtained from either Hindu or Muslim races and often sold to their masters by their relatives, created distinction between married wife, female slave and prostitutes. Numerous cases in the courts of the East India Company in the mid-19th century bear testimony to the divergent status of *nikah*, *beah* or *shadi*. Buying and selling of girls gave rise to a parallel economy and resulted in unlimited numbers of orphans. Denied claims of social motherhood of women, upon the products of their sexual labours was a half-

[191] Indrani Chatterjee, 'Colouring Subalternity' in *Subaltern Studies X*, 51.

way house in the tense dialectic between cultural affiliation and economic marginalization associated with the Company's attitude towards this growing number of women and children. This attitude transformed the *sons* and *daughters* of colonial slave-holders as 'outsiders' and 'labourers'. As white became synonymous with power and non-white with denial, Christian names and master-tongue were paired with privileges and the consumption of material goods became the indicator of jural status and class. The status of these slave born children became worse with the passing generation as the 'white' touch became more and more remote.[192] As a result, the coloured subaltern agency saw contradictions and resistance. The attempt to reclaim British paternity left them vulnerable both to the humiliations of the free, white ex-patrons' government and society, as well as to the misery and rejection of other indigenous colonial subjects.

In Chatterjee's opinion, 'adding colour to subalternity, and gender, should not be a replication of the pedigree consciousness evinced by the free white members of the colonial state, but an attempt to understand the problems of a conflictual 'belonging', of the difficulties of achieving both 'homeland' and 'birthright'.[193]

Sundar Kali in his article 'Spatialising History: Subaltern Carnivalisations of Space in Tiruppuvanam, Tamil Nadu', takes up oral history of 'Tiruppuvanam'. He talks about the erotic connotations of flower and women, stories of temple-dancers, myths of God and Goddess of India. The representations of the sexual act in these works depict the woman as passive, a receptacle for male

[192] Like with the Anglo-Indian 'railway families'.
[193] Indrani Chatterjee, 'Colouring Subalternity' in *Subaltern Studies X*, 97.

passion. The women is relegated to the position of a recipient who is supposed to relish the man's act and, when he is absent physically, look at the marks that he has left on her body so as to remember and passionately wait for him. When women act the opposite way, as Ponnanaiyal, by marking and scarring the Lord's body, it interestingly signifies extreme *bhakti*. Kali also describes stories of different classes, mainly subalterns. In one story, a flower-girl denies to marry a king. The king pushes her and as a result she commits suicide. The girl's grandmother, knowing the predicament, also hangs herself, followed by the tormented king. On his demise, all his ministers and deputies kill themselves. A peasant, also after witnessing it, hangs himself to death. The peasant's wife who brings food for her husband sings[194] and makes sarcastic remarks which point to the gross indifference of the peasantry as a class of survivors.

The author explaining theories of Ulas gives details of seven categories of women, differentiating them by age from 5 to post-menopause. The Ulas themselves are not explicit in the matter of marking the boundaries between the private and the public domains and the erotic behaviours appropriate to each of them. They depicted their deity as the Celestial Man and all humans as women. The seven categories of women are in fact signs of the seven progressive stages in the process of maturation of *bhakti* in the Ula. The feminising of the masses in the Ula discourse, aimed at generating and sustaining desire on the part of the devotee by a strategy of keeping stance. The feminised subject is seen to address its demand to the Other, which is a position of wholeness and

[194] The pretty girl hanged herself/ So did her grandmother/ The ferocious elephant hanged himself/ And so did his deputy, Koruppanacami/ But why did the broom of my household hang itself?

plenitude. Thus, the intimate space of the female body is neatly coded, classified, and controlled for functioning as a sign of body politics. Again, the story of *Cellattamman*, a folk deity, who tries to meet her lover elite god Lord Shiva but was stopped at the entrance as she was a meat-eater (thus lower from the vegetarian Shiva), shows conflict-ridden relationship between higher and lower castes. Christopher Pinney's 'Indian Magical realism' depicts women figures as Sita, Draupadi, Kali as symbols of national awareness and freedom struggle or the *Bharat Mata*. Like in the play *Kichaka Vadh*, everybody knew that Kichaka is intended to be Lord Curzon, Draupadi is India, Yudhistira is the Moderate and Bhima the Extremist Party...[195] Again, as Draupadi's honour is threatened, she is the subaltern confronted by a political force.

The last essay of this volume by Rosemary Sayigh, 'Gendering the 'Nationalist Subject': Palestinian Camp Women's Life Stories', starts off with a discussion of Partha Chatterjee's seminal theory of rupture between the 'problematic' and 'thematic' in anti-colonial nationalism and the asymmetric relationship between nationalism and feminism. Changing connections between gender ideology and nationalist discourses, provided by nineteenth-century Bengali Indian nationalism created an inner/outer dichotomy, where 'inner', as discussed earlier defined as the impregnable sanctuary of a specifically Indian spirituality identified with home and women.[196] She says, women's positioning *vis-à-vis* nationalism's 'problematic' and 'thematic' is clearly different from men's, since the female subject though mobilised to take part in the anti-colonial struggle alongside men, are also symbolised as an unchanging 'inner domain'. This is

[195] Cited by Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, 338.
[196] Rosemary Sayigh, 'Gendering the Nationalist Subject' in *Subaltern Studies X*, 235.

the paradox of gender discourse in the nationalist struggle. When male nationalist subjects move freely between the 'outer' and 'inner' domains, female nationalist subjects are doubly constrained, both by obstacles to enter politics and by the obligation of eventual return to the home and resumption of the symbolic and reproductive roles associated with essentialised notions of 'women'. In her words:

> Women in anti-colonial nationalist movements are situated centrally *within* the contradiction between nationalist 'problematic' and 'thematic', and it is precisely this positioning that gives women's narrations their great theoretical interest...As a form of subaltern history, women's histories have the power to expose nationalism's impoverished essentialisms.[197]

Sayigh then narrates stories of Palestinian women to illuminate how particular nationalisms interact with class and gender relations at the level of locality, household and individual subjectivity. She insists that class and gender subalternity were part of the production of these women's stories in the Palestinian camp. Except for *Dalal*, which was a split between nationalist and feminist 'self', all the other stories limit women's political activism in a particular historical conjuncture, subordinating the personal and the gendered in their lives to national politics. Weakening of the national narratives of the Palestinian community in Lebanon made space for subaltern narratives, where the personal, the sexual is repressed by the public/private hierarchy.

The last volume of *Subaltern Studies* is where we seek to find our goal. This volume titled *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence* edited by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jaganathan, contribute hugely to the women's question and tries to provide a series of answers. The first article is by Aamir R.

[197] Ibid., 236.

Mufti on the writings of Saadat Hasan Manto, where he explores proliferation in Manto's fiction of a figure that has been at the centre of controversies surrounding his work: the subaltern figure of the prostitute. He argues that in Manto's stories the brothel and its inhabitants come to acquire a critical energy that makes visible the representational work of the nation. In a number of stories, mainly pre-Partition, Manto, Mufti discusses, develops a set of themes around the national-allegorical possibilities of 'women' as signifiers. In stories such as 'Khushiya', 'Hatak', 'Sharda', 'Mera nam Radha hai', 'Janaki', 'Mammi' and in 'Kali Shalvar', the figure of the prostitute emerges not simply in binary opposition to the virtuous wife and mother of the nationalist imagination, but as a means of exploring the complexities of the latter itself as signifier. The larger threat that the prostitute poses in Manto's story is the domesticated female sexuality which provides the idiom of national belonging. She somehow provides a kind of faithfulness and loyalty. Her environment, the brothel, hints at the possibility of another kind of 'love' for the nation which is more open to doubt and betrayal. The inhabitants of Manto's brothel are therefore significant figures in the contested field of significations that is national belonging.[198] These, Mufti thinks, allow us to see more fully the working of gender in the crisis of national identity. Exploited, abused and exhausted, 'they' continue to manufacture within their lives the signs of ordinary existence—religious or ritual observances, pangs of human attachment, love and even marriage. Her ambiguous status as seller of flesh and commodity makes visible the

[198] Amir R. Mufti, 'A Greater Story-writer than God' in *Subaltern Studies XI*, 31.

exploitation of domesticated female sexuality in the bourgeois home.[199] Mufti further adds:

> Once inscribed as gendered national belonging, she highlights the exploitation of women as metaphor and stands as a rebuke to the frank instrumentalism with which bourgeois nationalism mobilizes the image of mother...She exposes the claim of purity of the 'national family', of the 'chaste maternity' of the nation, and for this reason can become a site for opening up the question of identity precisely where nationalism would close it up.[200]

The next essay which I want to discuss is by Nivedita Menon, 'Embodying the Self: Feminism, Sexual Violence and the Law'. She begins by questioning the universal nature of sexual violence. She asks, 'what are the codes which enable such immediate recognition of 'sexuality' and 'sexual' violence? Are they indeed so universally recognized by all cultures? And is this recognition something that enables feminist politics, or does it paradoxically limit the possibilities of feminist transformation?' These questions, she insists, ought to become more critical as it comes to term with law. The last decade has seen the women's movement reacting to violence against women demanding legislative action. Though most of these campaigns have resulted in meaningful legislative changes, the feminist activists believe laws to be still partial and conservative. The more important issue that arises from here is the simple fact that 'law is not enough' as the binary logic of law cannot comprehend the complexity of the way sexual experience is constituted. For Menon, 'the body' and 'sex' are not 'natural' but produced by discourse and even when justice is seemed to be granted, the very demonstration of violence on women through legal discourse re-enacts and re-sediments dominant patriarchal and

[199] Ibid., 33.
[200] Ibid., 33.

misogynist values. As she takes up the case of *rape* and tries to elaborate on 'what constitutes rape?' she is left mesmerized. Menon discusses the three available feminist discourses[201] on rape and suggests that the word 'rape' has connotations and images which may not match the actual incident of sexual assault. Rape should be defined as 'criminal conduct of third degree', rather than as per Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code which states that 'Penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence rape' without the consent or will of the victim, when the victim is more than 16 years of age. The definition therefore does not take care of the wide range of violations besides actual penetration. All the other form of sexual assault like kissing, fondling, handling against your will, oral or anal intercourse when one of the partners is not interested and penetration with a foreign object is not considered. Moreover, it does not cover sexual assault against minors and children. As the rape cases fall under the domain of criminal offence, many rape victims do not get the protection of their own lawyer. In the case of police rape or custodial rape the police do not take any responsibility and the law deals with rape cases in a binary system. Menon shows different instances where this binary logic does not work. The ambiguity of women's experiences with sex and the patriarchal social values work underneath the whole problem. Again, though the legal age of marriage is 18, sexual intercourse between a man and a wife between the age of 15 and 18 becomes difficult to define. The doctrine of rape becomes more complex when it is judged in an essentialised perspective giving importance to chastity and virtue and thereby turning around

[201] Rape is violence, not sex; Rape is violence, but a unique form of violence because of its sexual character and Catherine Mackinnon's position that Rape is violence and violence precisely is sex.

the burden of proof. It is now the victim, whose chastity is called into question, has to prove that 'the case' or eventually 'she' is 'worthy' of justice.

Flavia Agnes in her article, 'Women, Marriage, and the Subordination of Rights' explores whether, historically, the concept of property and women's access to it was an integral part of the institution of marriage and to what extent the English notions of women's rights has influenced the Indian legal system. For doing this she gives account of women's rights to property under ancient legal system like Islamic, Hindu and Roman law and then goes to the colonial influence to the British family law in India. While women possess more economic rights when they are unmarried and in the phase of widowhood, the period of coverture remains the least protected. One of her significant findings is that monogamy has had a detrimental impact on women's property rights. She also discusses the problem of remarriage in our society, where the question of forming uniform civil code is still only a subject of debate. Agnes concludes by saying that unless property is being situated at the centre of the discourse and legal reform or the changing of the economic structure and the uneven development are kept in mind, no attempt of reform can protect the economic rights of women.

Tejaswini Niranjana's article 'Nationalism Refigured: Contemporary South Indian Cinema and the Subject of Feminism' deals with a new form of nationalism; a nationalism of romantic love. The central shift here is the figure of woman, while 'she' is produced in the conjuncture between Nation and Modernity. Niranjana shows that through popular cinema, identities have been publicly displayed, negotiated and narrativised. Through films like *Geetanjali*, *Roja* and *Bombay*, the post-independence feminist subject is imbricated in the fashioning of this new nationalism, though the vocabulary which is used talking

of the new nationalism is not very different from the older version of nationalism. She says, 'In spite of the considerable gains made by the women's movement over the last twenty years, the idiom in which feminist questions were raised is being mobilized today in very different kinds of initiatives, including the consolidation of the national-modern that feminists set out to criticize.'[202] Women were imaged as morally pure and thus entrusted with the task of saving the nation. The enthusiastic participation of 'women' in the anti-Mandal agitation along with her men is not as sexed subjects but as free and equal citizens, articulating and asserting themselves against lower caste. As middle-class, upper-caste 'women' they claim a space in, as she called, the 'post-national-modern', whereby both men as well as women of the lower class become invisible. In these films, new subjectivities and a new femininity are being fashioned, appealing successfully mostly to younger women. While in *Geetanjali*, the heroine's sexual aggressiveness is presented in the narrative merely as a manifestation of her high spirits and sense of humour, her boldness becomes possible only due to the absence of the mother figure. The philosophy behind this is profoundly the consumer attitude which is to live as though one will die tomorrow. As Niranjana says, there is no apparent *angst* in these characters. In *Roja*, the conjuncture between romantic love and nationalism does not provide the same kind of space for the women as it does for the man. For Roja, the conjugal space is configured very differently from the national space, and her love for her husband finds her saying, 'I don't care about the country, all I want is my husband back'. On the other hand, for Rishi, love for wife and love for nation converge, like in the song '*Roja jaaneman*' where romantic love comes to be figured as nationalism. Niranjana says the

[202] Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Nationalism Refigured' in *Subaltern Studies XI*, 141.

authentic subject of modernity in the post-national-modern is the one who can be both lover and citizen. In fact Rishi's repeated utterance 'Jai Hind' and embracing the burning Indian flag turns him a lover-as-citizen. In *Bombay*, the capacity for romantic love is not only a significant marker but it is also seen as the highest form of secularism. Here Shaila Banu, a Muslim marries a Brahmin Hindu Shekhar. While Shekhar has been shown without any mark of religious community, Shaila is shown in a burqa which tantalises the audience while the wind accidentally lifts up her veil or when it falls apart in another scene. In both the films, *Roja* and *Bombay*, where the question of the nation is posed through the Kashmir trouble or the Bombay riots, the burden is to create the contemporary convergence between the *human*, the *secular* and the *nationalist* and to dramatize the condensation of these characteristics in the Hindu male ho has discarded marks of caste and community[203], where the women characters remain stereotype, backward and engulfed in patriarchy.

The last essay of the volume is a discussion, titled, 'An after word on the New Subaltern' by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She here, speaks of 'the new subaltern', the somewhat monolithic woman-as-victim who is the constituted subject of justice under international capitalism. The 'new subaltern' is a global model of such a subject, yet it is always and necessarily tried out on local scenes.[204] This same new subject we have observed in Niranjana's article which Deshpande calls the 'loosening of the nation-space from its mooring in alternative ideologies in order to relocate it within the framework of Hindu hegemony. Globalising Menon's essay, one could see 'women' written into the laws with an implicit presupposition of the values of the internationalisation of

[203] Ibid., 164, emphasis original.
[204] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 'Discussion: An Afterword on the New Subaltern' in *Subaltern Studies XI*, 305.

capital, which may sometimes seem anti-patriarchal if sexual difference is confused with gender. Her essay, as per Spivak, which radically deconstructs this apparently universal, shared understanding of 'sexuality' to reveal the tenuousness of its foundations and to emancipate us by uncovering the very meaning of rape, fails to do the same satisfactory enough as the law always leans towards its transgression, if not in patriarchy, then in the general vulnerability in itself.

The aspect which comes out of Spivak's article is that, earlier, Subaltern Studies had not been informed or influenced by feminist theory as such. But this volume is immersed in the feminist mode from which the 'subaltern' has to be rethought today. S/he is no longer been cut from the direct access to the centre. The original position of subalternists theory, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* has come to full circle. The new location of subalternity is covered by the sanctioned ignorance of elite theory. In the case of women, there have been attempts to access her within it by defining, not her way of acting, but her ways of suffering other's actions, bringing the world's women under one rule of law and civil society. The new subaltern is also produced with relation to capitalist logic. Spivak goes back to her discussion in 'Deconstructing Historiography' and talks about subaltern consciousness, which is now displaced to the global political sphere. The said issue arises when globalisation and gender development come together. The earlier works of the Subaltern Studies collection had met the general challenge of nationalist history by trying to deduce subaltern consciousness from the texts of the elite which seemed to take a certain turn by trying to define women as subaltern in the change of the century.

CONCLUSION

After going through the eleven volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, now it is my task to summarize my observations. My objective was to show how women are being represented in the Subaltern Studies series. In my first chapter, I have tried to situate Subaltern Studies as part of the Postcolonial Literature and I discussed what I consider to be postcolonial in the context. In the second chapter I have shown the Subaltern Study's criticism of the colonialist discourse by discussing Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* and 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' in detail. Chatterjee's objection to the nationalist discourse was the absence of the 'subaltern' as such. With respect to 'women subaltern', he cites the well known material / spiritual division in order to explain the neglect of the women's question in the later half of the nationalist discourse. To a certain degree, nevertheless, Chatterjee subscribes to this distinction, though he was aware of the fact that it takes away some of the freedom of women to work and to make their own destiny. The material / spiritual division only succeeds in creating a 'bhadramahila' class. Chatterjee never provides any framework to study the missing 'subaltern women'. My main interest therefore was to see how other authors in the Subaltern Studies series have treated the women's question. I have tried to give a detailed analysis of the women's question by dividing the eleven volumes in three groups each of which I treat in one of three chapters of my thesis (chapter III-V). In the third chapter, I have discussed volume I to volume V, where changes in the pre and post-Spivak period became evident. In my fourth chapter, I have discussed volume VI to VIII,

following the transition from the times where Guha was still the editor to the beginning of a new era in the discussion of the 'subaltern women'. My fifth and final chapter deals with volumes IX, X and XI, where we see a pre-dominance of the women's issue in most of the discussions.

As Ranajit Guha, the founding editor of the Subaltern Studies series, mentions in the 'preface' of the first volume, the aim of the collective was:

> 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. [205]

Guha used the word 'subaltern' as a label for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, office or in any other way. Though the methodology of the group was anti-essentialist, we see specific groups coming into the discussions. It was the peasantry which obtained most of the attention from the 'subaltern' historians. Though there were articles on Adivasis, Workers and Dalits. The latter became a part of the series only after the eighth volume. The absence of the women's theme in Subaltern Studies was first identified by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in a discussion piece titled 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' published in *Subaltern Studies IV*. Women as an oppressed group eventually came in only as late as in the fifth volume through Spivak's 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern'. The other much cited essay of Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', never appeared in the Subaltern Studies volumes although it influenced the study of women in the Subaltern Studies series. By 1998, women have been a regular part of the

[205] Ranajit Guha, 'Preface' in *Subaltern Studies I*, vii.

discussion among the Subaltern Studies' group of authors. In the 'Subaltern Studies Reader: 1986-95', Chatterjee's 'The Nation and Its Women' secured a place for subaltern women taking up the women's issue more directly than ever.

Though Subaltern Studies succeeds in studying 'women subaltern' in general, very few articles actually study the 'subaltern women'. Women as dominated by the male automatically gained a subaltern position with respect to men. The 'subaltern women' however, i.e. the women who were in a subaltern position in respect to upper class / caste women were only dealt with in two essays. Besides Spivak's study of Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast Giver' and Guha's study of 'Chandra's Death', all the other articles on women deal with 'women as subaltern' and not with the 'subaltern women'. Articles such as 'Feminist Fiction: A Critique of the Category 'Non-Western Women' in Feminists Writings on India' by Julie Stephens, 'Subaltern as Perspective' by Veena Das, 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography' by Kamala Visweswaran and 'Problems of Contemporary Theory of Gender' by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana deal mainly with the more general and theoretical aspects of the women's question.

These attempts were made to give voice to women, including, but not exclusively focussing on the subaltern women, to free the subaltern women from their 'subaltern' position. In the attempt to emancipate them and to help them in speaking for themselves, the 'problem of speech' became evident. Importance was then given to the 'real' women and her first-hand 'experiences' as discussed by Julie Stephens, in order to make the, 'subaltern women' speak.

The problem that Stephens describes was with 'representation' and 'documentation' which involved the narrator, the interviewer, the writer or the reader in interpreting the 'voice' of the subaltern. The writer then has to interpret the voice of these women before the background of her own normative expectations. Mody and Mhatre, however, show a largely unreflected paternalism not taking into account their own distorted self images as superior, self-conscious, educated, middle class, upper caste academics. Most of the articles on women in the Subaltern Studies series are written by middle-class educated women, and their limitations and biases possibly account for the relative neglect of the 'subaltern woman' as opposed to the 'woman subaltern'.

The discussion of 'women as subaltern' became a part of the subaltern discourse with the intervention of feminists thought and gender discourse in the later volumes. Dipesh Chakrabarty said that the contentious 'women's question' was addressed not merely by a repeated reassertion of the value of tradition but by a redefinition of the content of 'tradition'—by elevating women's traditional role and status. This essentialist position serves the eastern males who have adopted it for the case of 'their' women, thereby, going hand-in-hand with the Orientalist conception of the 'feminine east' as opposed to the 'virile west'. On the one hand the nationalists were opposing the essentialist position of the Occident in identifying the Orient as weak, feminine and easy to dominate; on the other hand the same nationalists used similarly broad and essentialising concepts in their ascription of a traditional role for women in 'their' nation as expressed in the material / spiritual, inner / outer, public / private division. They thereby only pass the burden to the women and prove that the eastern male himself could not withstand the western onslaught.

Eventually, the women's issue became an integral part of the Subaltern Studies in its volumes. Tharu and Niranjana note this new visibility of women across the political and social spectrum, and attempt to understand the problems that have grown along with this phenomenon in the early 1990s. Articles like 'Embodying the Self: Feminism, Sexual Violence and the Law' by Nivedita Menon, 'Women, Marriage, and the Subordination of Rights' by Flavia Agnes or 'Nationalism Refigured: Contemporary South Indian Cinema and the Subject of Feminism' by Tejaswini Niranjana however once again focus on the 'women as subaltern' where the subject of 'subaltern women' remains to be included.

Guha demands a hearing for the despair and determination in woman's voice, the voice of a defiant subalternity committed to writing its own history. In considering 'The Small Voice of History' as an evaluation of where, and how, the 'small' voices could assume mythic proportions of authority, given a hearing, he names the ideology of nominating authority to certain events (as 'historic") *statism*. Guha instructs us on how to be a discerning student of history by making the extra effort to hear, and interact with, the small voices that are otherwise drowned in the cacophony of statist commands. For Spivak, of course, the speaking of the subaltern woman depended on the 'conditions' which allowed her to speak.

In 'Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography', Visweswaran takes as its point of departure the problem of retrieving the speech of subaltern women and of constituting certain gendered subjects as subaltern by asking Spivak's eternal question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' She asks how is it that subalternity is inflected by gender, which is

where she feels that the Subalternists have failed to provide adequate answers, because to them, either gender is subsumed under the categories of caste and class, or gender is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns (which is symptomatic of the formulation 'women and the subaltern').

In conclusion we can say that although the series fails to provide a common perspective in dealing the women's question, it has successfully broadened its scope and method which is no longer confined to the discipline of history and displays engagements with more contemporary theoretical formations. This expansion of critical and theoretical scope has indeed benefited the fast growing body of South Asian socio-cultural studies, promising to be different than the mainstream history, where the gendered subaltern is recognised – both as woman subaltern, and subaltern women.

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