

**FROM SOLILOQUY TO PUBLIC DEBATE:
THE DIALECTICS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN
SUBALTERN WRITING
IN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SUSAN THOMAS

**CENTRE OF LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI -110 067
INDIA
2000**



CENTRE OF LINGUISTICS & ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE & CULTURE STUDIES
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067 INDIA


28 July, 2000

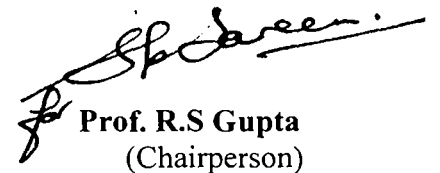
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled "**From Soliloquy to Public Debate: The Dialectics of Identity Construction in Subaltern Writing in India and Australia**" which is being submitted by **Susan Thomas** for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is her original work, and it has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.


Susan Thomas


Prof. S.K. Sareen
(Supervisor)


Prof. R.S. Gupta
(Chairperson)
Acting Chairperson
CL&E/SLL&CS

*Its not just I,
but the people who pass through my life
and through whose life I pass*

***TO
EVERYONE
WHO TOUCHED MY LIFE WITH THEIR PRESENCE***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel deeply indebted to Prof. S.K. Sareen for his patience, support and encouragement not only for this dissertation, but also for everything else I became involved in during the course of its conception and completion. Without a supervisor who took me as I came and accepted my mode of functioning, this work would never have become the reality it is today.

Without Suchismita. Debjani and Goldie who opened up their homes to me and gave liberally of their time, energy and resources when they had research deadlines of their own to meet, I would never have been able to access material on the Aborigines of Australia. I owe Protima, Madhavi and Ranjana an equal debt of gratitude for helping me access material on the Dalits of India. I am thankful to Aparna, whose suggestions gave direction to my search for material on subalternity.

In attempting to place my gratitude on record, the names and faces of so many individuals come to mind, without whose presence in my life, this dissertation would either not have been possible or would have turned out very different.

Every moment of my life, I am thankful for my parents who, by their unconditional acceptance and support, have given me the space to be me on my terms and the sense of responsibility never to be complacent about that. To God and them I owe my being.

Susan Thomas

CONTENTS

	Page No:
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II DEBATES AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE	13
CHAPTER III DALIT SUBALTERN DIALECTICS IN INDIA	43
CHAPTER IV ABORIGINAL SUBALTERN DIALECTICS IN AUSTRALIA	64
CHAPTER V INTERROGATING POSTCOLONIALITIES	76
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	82

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every social formation functions and perpetuates itself through discourses that implicitly or explicitly assign values to its constituents and what it interacts with. The values so assigned are historically specific social constructs marked by contingency, mainly because of their discursive nature. However, within a historically contingent social formation, there are discourses which privilege certain epistemes and constituents, while deprivileging certain others. Such a social formation, framed by the multivalent spatio-temporal discursive formations of culture and history, thus manifests the play of a contingent hierarchy of discourses. The range within which discourses within this contingent hierarchy can or have been able to disseminate their epistemological premises and socio-historical paradigms as being normative, often evinces the way the lines of power and discursive control run within that social formation.

Very often, the premises and paradigms of the putatively normative discourses posit their hegemony within a social formation through discursive practices that strive to ensure that inimical or subversive elements, entities and discursive formations are accommodated, contained, excluded or silenced. The construction of the Other or the marginal, thus, becomes integral to the construction of the norm and the perpetuation of existing power structures and hierarchies. As language is relational and constitutive, it cannot transcribe reality in a value-free or neutral way. It is often employed in the construction of realities that reinforce these structures by textualizing hegemonic power. Truth, meaning, value and identity are realized not as absolutes but as conditioned by hegemonic social power dissembling as natural law. Historically specific social constructs are posited as essential and incontrovertible by discourses that are themselves contingently hegemonic. However, as Richard Terdiman notes, ‘... no discourse

is ever a monologue, nor could it ever be analyzed intrinsically ... everything that constitutes it, always presupposes a horizon of competing contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies' (Quoted in Barker et al 172)

These contingently hegemonic discourses may posit what does not conform to their normative standards as a 'marginal' or 'unauthentic' Other, to simultaneously designate and denigrate its alterity. However, in doing so, they inadvertently acknowledge the subversive potential of that very alterity. This alterity creates a discursive space in which resistance to hegemony can be articulated by interrogating the lacunae, incongruities and contradictions within the putatively hegemonic discourses, thereby effecting the disruption of their normative claims.

On one hand, putatively marginal discourses reveal how, within a social formation, contingently hegemonic culture has become an automatized agency implicitly underpinning the status quo, and how the sophistry involved in positing its premises and paradigms as putatively essential and immutable can be controverted. An analysis of how alterity is posited thus reveals some of the determinants of hegemony at the discursive level and eventually facilitates the alteration of power configurations. This may also expose how the premises and paradigms of hegemonic power structures are insidiously internalized by those they seek to disempower. On the other hand, the continuing process of interrogating the automatized and the putatively normative has no easy closure, for social formations rarely exist in simplistic dyads in binary opposition that just have to be reversed. Within a hierarchical discursive continuum, centrality and marginality, are far from being monolithic entities and positions within the hierarchy are continuously being negotiated and contested. According to Terdiman, 'From this dialectic of discursive struggle, truths about the social formation - its characteristic modes of reproduction and its previously hidden vulnerabilities inevitably emerge.' (Quoted in Barker et al 177)

Herein lies the significance of the potentially positive use of the term 'subaltern' as a substitute for the rubric 'marginal' with all its negative connotations vis-à-vis centres, which are contingent to start with. Etymologically, 'subaltern' is a conflation of the Latin prefix 'sub' denoting 'under' or 'below' and 'alternus' denoting 'alternate'. In any given discursive hierarchy, subaltern discourses may be temporarily subordinated through processes of accommodation, exclusion or total elision with reference to putatively normative discourses. These subaltern discourses however, have the potential to dialectically provide alternatives to the central discourses' epistemological premises and socio-historical paradigms. However, they also have the potential to manifest hegemonic and normative tendencies in relation to other discourses and therefore are equally open to interrogation and subversion. Subaltern, thus, is used here not a static rubric but one that connotes an interrogative perspective within a contingent discursive hierarchy.

Dalit writing in India and Aboriginal writing in Australia have begun to emerge discursively as powerful visible forms of protest against a chequered history of exploitation, both in the socio-politically materialist and discursive realms. These subaltern discourses have thus become sites for the contestation and negotiation of identities at several levels and in several ways. This dissertation seeks to touch upon some of the processes whereby this is happening and examine some of the problematics involved therein.

The construction of 'Dalit' in India and 'Aboriginal' in Australia as identity categories evoking a sense of homogenized collective communities has evinced a problematic relationship within the social, historical, political and discursive frameworks of conceptualizing national identity. This is largely because the socio-political and discursive marginality historically assigned to these rubrics has been concomitant with the epistemological otherization of these subaltern identities within their respective national frameworks.

The Gandhi-Ambedkar polemic over the need to provide for constitutionally guaranteed reservations (for education, employment in public sector institutions and politics) for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, can be read as being symptomatic of the problematic construction of an undifferentiated national identity on the eve of India's independence. The Ambedkarite proposals to institutionalize restitutive/affirmative action were, in many ways, a contestation of the Gandhian-Nehruvian vision of a monolithic India which had uniformly been oppressed during colonial rule. The Ambedkarite discourse, thus, attempted to contest and negotiate with what was manifestly a simplistic unnuanced conceptualization of what 'independence' would mean for those about to be constituted as citizens of India in 1947. Its demands foregrounded the experiential socio-political reality that the caste elite in the Hindu community - from which many of the leaders at the forefront of the national movement were drawn - had exercised and might seek to perpetuate institutionalized hegemonic dominance over sections of the community hereafter to be unproblematically designated as the 'Indian' population. This hegemony along the axis of caste was a form of internal colonization that allowed for material exploitation within a social framework that almost negated the very humanity of the Sudras (those Hindus that did not fall under the categories of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisyas) and Ati-Sudras (the so-called Untouchables) (Ilaiah vii). Ambedkar realized an unnegotiated transfer of political/legal power from the British to an upper caste Hindu elite in India would fail to generate an ambience in which the latter's particular type of colonization could be eliminated allowing Dalits to assume full citizenship.

As India moves from its midnight tryst with destiny into the new millennium, citizenship remains an elite oriented rubric within the project of the discursive constitution of national identity. This orientation manifests itself variously and has drawn comment and been documented. It is evinced, for

example, in the neglect of the North-Eastern tribal belt¹ - its peoples and its interests - to such a degree that Indian citizenship remains a legal and pragmatic necessity as opposed to a felt affiliation. Similarly, it is cognizable in the erasure of the rights of the poor, tribal or dalit denizens on the banks of the Narmada River, where work on the Sardar Sarovar Dam project is ongoing. Big hydro-electric dams which were, to Nehru, the temples of modern India - even when their viability has been challenged by experts on the grounds that the human / environmental / monetary cost-benefit ratio makes them unadvisable - are advocated as being in the 'national' interest. Who is it that occupies this 'nation' space - affluent uppercaste landowning farmers, contractors, real estate developers, the urban middle class: people with socio-economic and political clout?² The Chalapathi-Vijayavardhan case³ too, significantly generated controversy and debates about vested interests in meting out social justice and a national legal system that seems most often to work in the interests of the moneyed and powerful. The questions raised by these and many other instances problematize the specious constitution of an undifferentiated 'post-colonial' nation space in India.

In Australia too, post-colonial identity, far from being a tie that binds and covers over a multitude of differences, has thrown up some deeply contentious and widely debated issues. Once again the query is 'post-colonial' nation for whom? The initial following of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party; the November 7, 1999 referendum to decide whether the nation should become a

¹ Refer to S. Bhaumik, 'North-East India: The Evolution of a Post-Colonial Region'. *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State*. Ed. P. Chatterjee. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. pp.310-327.

² Refer to Arundhati Roy. 'The Greater Common Good'. *Frontline*. Vol. 16, No.11, 1999. p.4-29. and 'The Cost of Living'. *Frontline*. Vol.17, No.3, Feb 18, 2000. pp.64-75.

³ The two Dalit boys were given the death sentence because, in 1995 at Chilakaluripet in coastal Andhra Pradesh, they had set a bus aflame after an aborted attempt to rob the passengers, burning all those inside. After sustained campaigning by civil rights activists, including Mahasweta Devi, in 1998 K. R. Narayanan - India's first and to date only Dalit President - commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. This was read by some as a partisan ruling and by others as an exoneration of Chelapathi and Vijayvardhan on the basis of their social background. Both ways, the outcome was seen to be inflected by caste considerations.

republic with a president taking the place of the British monarch; the debate surrounding who will inaugurate the 2000 Sydney Olympics – the premier or the Queen; and the granting of Australia's request to the International Olympic Committee to fly the Aboriginal flag alongside the Australian flag⁴ at the Games mark shifts and fissures in that nation's construction of its post-colonial identity. At the same time, questions still remain as to the definition of 'post'-colonial in the Australian scenario in the light of the limits of the policy of reconciliation towards the Aboriginal community. The *terra nullius* premise that openly underpinned white Australian historiography and the legal system prior to the Mabo ruling of 1992⁵ continues to do so in more subtle ways after the Wik case⁶. Similarly, the government's active campaigning against the inclusion of Kakadu National Park in the UN's 'World Heritage in Danger' list in July, 1999 left few in doubt about its position when the conflict of interest was between preserving the sacred sites of the Mirrar peoples and proceeding with the lucrative construction of Jabiluka uranium mine. That Australia Day and the bicentennial 'celebrations' have had totally different connotations for Aborigines, who celebrated their survival, and main stream white 'Australians' who commemorated their immigration, is also symptomatic of the problems involved in resolving the tensions between the dominant construction of national identity and the subaltern construction of identity within the same nation-space. The latter by exploring what is silenced by the former and by the very nature of its posited alterity can be a subversive contestation of the putatively normative premises of the former's ostensibly all-inclusive national discourse.

⁴ The Olympic Charter permits only the national flag and Olympic flag to be hoisted. 'Aboriginal flag', *The Sunday Times of India*. [New Delhi] 3 October, 1999. p.20.

⁵ Refer to B. Attwood. 'Mabo. Australia and the end of history'. *The Age of Mabo*. Ed. B. Attwood. St.Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995. pp.100-116.

⁶ Rejecting the fallacy that Australian land belonged to no one before European settlement, the Mabo decision paved the way for the Native Title Act of 1993. The parliament recognized that native title might exist in all areas of Australia, except where it had been clearly extinguished. However, the Wik case in 1996 where the High Court decided that native title rights of the Wik and Thayorre peoples could coexist with a Queensland pastoral lease, reintroduced a element of doubt into native title claims.

This takes interesting dimensions at the level of literary discourse. Subaltern literature/discourse, often, in both countries is not recognized as full-fledged marketable 'national' literature. While 'Dalit' literature has been recognized as a field of rich academic possibilities by the Indian academia, it's interesting to note that most often even within the higher academic echelons 'Dalit' literature has been unproblematically equated with Maharashtrian Dalit literature. especially that which is available in easily consumable translated anthologies. This situation is changing slowly as English translations of Telegu, Tamil and Kannada Dalit literatures are becoming available. However, it has not changed sufficiently for Dalit literature to be considered nationally or internationally marketable as mainstream 'Indian' literature nor has the average postgraduate student of 'English' literature moved beyond the Dalit literature - Marathi Dalit literature of the 1970s - Dangle's *Poisoned Bread* equation. The premise seems to be that unless this discourse and its texts are made 'accessible' to the dominant Indian literature in English discourse/market through translation and commodification, its protest and substance will not easily leave the domain of an ethnic soliloquy by the subaltern constituency, of the subaltern constituency and for it. Similarly, the Australian studies project begins to take root in India, the emphasis in terms of course structuring in literature programs, the availability of texts at universities' and the High Commission libraries and focus in translation programs remains, by and large, on the canonized white Australian male writers - Patrick White, Thomas Keneally and, David Malouf. Judith Wright and say, an Aboriginal writer like Ruby Langford or Sally Morgan are added on occasionally as token representatives of the gender and Aborigine erasures of what is exported as a 'national' literary canon.

One finds that as 'new literatures' are opened up for academic research and study in the postcolonial framework of both countries, the subaltern voice is variously mediated, appropriated, co-opted, accommodated and commodified. *Viramma: life of an untouchable*, is the result of a tortuous pathway of mediation. It is the outcome of ten years of ethnomusicological research by Josiane Racine

who spoke to Viramma in Tamil, worked with taped oral material to structure a written [auto]biography in French which was then translated into English by Will Hobson under UNESCO sponsorship. In the text, made available by this complicated process of mediation, translation and possible transcreation, among the many things admitted to have been lost is the texture of an oral culture and the nuanced but socially very significant use of 'incorrect' Tamil dialect, often stigmatized as a 'half-language'. The dalit or tribal or Aboriginal 'predicament' too finds greater publicity when mediated represented or incorporated in the texts of mainstream writers - be they Mahasweta Devi, Gail Omvedt, Arundhati Roy, Thomas Keneally or David Malouf. As subaltern constituencies begin to make themselves heard, being spoken for - appropriation of voice - however sympathetic/empathetic fails to be unproblematic. Sasi Nirmala, a Telegu dalit woman poet speaks of the lack of visibility accorded to movements led by Dalit women in 'Muttugudda Kappatunna':

You peacocks of high caste
Preening your plumes
In the Narmada Valley
Your call echoes and rouses
Each corner of the world
But my sisters struggle
To dam the swollen streams of arrack
Choking them
Their hoarse voices
Will lie buried in
Telugu earth (Quoted in Rani, WS-23)

Institutional objectification and homogenization of the subaltern voice/agenda too is marked. As subaltern literature acquires a market value, commodification presupposes the erasure of subtleties of political debate particular to constituencies of highly differentiated subaltern communities - even if they are categorized under a single rubric. The Pondicherry group of 'dalit' writers - Raj Gowthaman, A. Marx, and Ravikumar - for example, are attempting to recover Dalit history lost in the interstices of, or silenced by the Dravidian movement, which itself is an anti-Brahminical/Aryan movement contesting the

nation space as it is constructed today⁷. Also as subaltern literature is increasingly translated or written in English the compulsions of niche marketing take over. In her forward to *The Dawn is at Hand*, Kath Walker admits to being accommodated by the dominant readership's preferences, admits to knowing that a portion of her success is due to curiosity value even as she feels satisfaction in having been one of the many forces stimulating the dominant discourses 'sudden and heartening new awareness ... of the plight of the Aborigines and the growing demand that something be done about it' (3). The double bind seems to be that without some sort of institutional mediation or support the subaltern voice will remain a soliloquy addressed to the subaltern community concerned, unheard by the other players on the discursive stage. However, the moment it makes itself heard, processes of co-optation begin which dull its subversive edge, even as it offers alternative perspectives to the dominant discourse. This process often results with it slowly but perceptibly beginning to replicate the very paradigms its contesting only in different configurations.

This brings us to intra-subaltern-identity dialectics. There is the politics involved in naming a subaltern constituency - untouchable, scheduled castes and tribes, harijans, dalits, dalitbahujans or Aboriginal / Black Australia. There is also the politics of who will be included under a rubric when one is chosen. Kancha Ilaiah, even while arguing that he/Dalits are not Hindus, excludes tribals from the dalitbahujan rubric because they do not come under the 'Hindu' caste system. For political mileage however, the Bahujan Samaj Party includes the tribals under that very same rubric (Ilaiah vii-ix). Questions of what constitutes an authentic Aboriginal identity have dogged writers like Mudrooroo and became decisive where such identity becomes the basis for making claims to authenticity. Alterity in terms of 'genuineness' or 'authenticity' claims is part of the dialectical struggle for access to power and visibility and initiates the setting up of hierarchies within

⁷ M.S.S. Pandian. 'Stepping Outside History? Dalit Writings from Tamil Nadu'. *Wages Of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State*. Ed. P.Chatterjee. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. pp.292-309.

subaltern communities. This raises the whole question of whether shared-cause politics is preferable over identity politics especially in the context of 'identity' itself being theoreticized as a contingent construct.

This study intends to explore some of these aspects of the dialectics of identity construction in subaltern writing in India and Australia. For the purpose of this study, I choose to demarcate subaltern discourses etymologically in terms of discourses which are posited as 'sub'- below the central discourses in a contingent discursive hierarchy- and yet 'alternus'- having the potential to dialectically engage with and provide alternative epistemologies to that of the central discourses.

The focus of this study will be Dalit writing in India and Aboriginal writing in Australia as sites of epistemological contestation. Attention will be devoted to how these discourses engage within their own constituencies with issues of 'identity' and 'authenticity' as they increasingly emerge as loci of public debate. The study will also attempt to trace moments of negotiation that these discourses engage in with both central discourses and other subaltern discourses in their respective countries. The dialectics of contestation and negotiation during the fluid processes of identity construction will be analyzed with special reference to what has come to be institutionalized as 'literary' discourses and their relationship with other subaltern discourses. Yet another objective of this study is to analyse the dynamics of these negotiations in relation to the 'post-colonial' frameworks within which India and Australia are attempting to construct a 'national' identity.

Rather than attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of the dialectics involved, it is envisaged that this study will analyse the significance of certain sites of contestation and negotiation of received identities. Non-monolithic frameworks which problematize the reification of the rubrics 'dalit' and 'aboriginal' as homogeneous constituencies will be employed. The Pondicherry

Group's contestation of the historiography of pan-Indian nationalism as well as of Dravidian nationalism with its putative anti-brahminical positions, the politics of translation and mediation evinced in texts like *Viramma: life of an untouchable* and the mechanisms of canonisation, that have framed certain texts as 'Dalit' literature to the exclusion of others, will be some of the sites under study with reference to India. The Mudrooroo controversy, the positing of prescriptive conceptualisation of voice, poetics and genre choice as markers of 'authentic' aboriginality and the interrogative potential of the liminality of identity when it is used by publishers, the academia and award-giving institutions will be some of the sites under consideration with reference to Australia. It is hoped that this mode of analysing the relationship between specific texts and the larger debates on identity, representation and appropriation of voice in the realms of theory and praxis will throw light on how subalternity works in specific instances as well as in general.

The first chapter will be an introduction. The second chapter will analyse the epistemological frameworks and debates within which this study is situated. It will attempt to examine the nuances of the use of terms like 'subaltern', 'dialectics' and 'identity' with reference to theoretical positions on the same. The third chapter will deal with these paradigms and issues with specific reference to Dalit literature in India. An attempt will be made to explore the hybrid and unstable dimensions of the rubric 'Dalit' and examine the politics of its use. The dynamics of canon construction, mediation and translation too will be dealt with using certain textual reference points. The fourth chapter will analyse these paradigms and issues with reference to Aboriginal literature in Australia. Questions of 'authenticity', 'identity', the politics of naming and renaming, as well as the commodification and institutionalisation of the 'aboriginal discourse' will be discussed with reference to how they have evolved in recent debates in Australia. The fifth chapter will analyse the relationships between subaltern discourses and the discourses employed in constructing a 'post-colonial' 'national' identity in both countries. No rigid comparative framework is

envisaged for this, though it is hoped the juxtaposition of these two subaltern discourses will engage with the dynamics of a continued potential for altering reifications. This chapter will conclude the study by also drawing together the issues and debates in the foregoing chapters and exploring the implications they have for research in this field.

CHAPTER II

DEBATES AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE

[O]ne can see how the terminology is conventional but not without importance in making for errors and deviations as soon as one forgets that it is always necessary to return to the cultural sources in order to identify the exact value of concepts, since there may be different heads under the same hat.

- Gramsci
Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci

Every piece of discursive production is epistemologically underpinned and draws with varying degrees of explicitness on existing discourses, debates and frames of reference. Though it is debatable if we can ever really arrive at what Gramsci refers to as 'the exact value of concepts' (456), it is important to be aware, as is contingently possible, of the ideological continuum within which terms and their attendant conceptual frames are situated. Especially so, if one wishes to employ those terms to slightly deviational discursive effect.

Since this study attempts to analyze the dialectics of identity construction in subaltern writing in India and Australia, one of the main conceptual continuums that must be delved into, is with respect to the term 'subaltern' and its implications for this particular study. Theorists and thinkers ranging from Gramsci through the Subaltern Studies group to individuals dealing with specific contextualized issues have employed the rubric 'subaltern' with varied discursive nuances and in multivalent epistemological configurations. *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* very briefly traces some of the epistemological shifts the term has witnessed in being employed by Gramsci, in the 1930's, to analyze facets of Italian history from a Marxist perspective and then being applied to groupings, ideological commitments and political effectiveness within the realm of postcolonial studies by theorists like Spivak, who have drawn on poststructuralist and deconstructivist thought as well (Hawthorn 339-340).

Since my access to Gramsci is through the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (hereafter referred to in this text as the *Prison Notebooks*), my understanding of how Gramsci articulated and theorized the ‘subaltern’ is both facilitated and conditioned by the fragmented and translated nature of the *Prison Notebooks* itself. In the Preface, an editorial gloss on terminology gives, perhaps, the first instance of some of the limitations imposed by this mediation⁸. Having clearly specified earlier that, for Gramsci, there ‘is a crucial conceptual distinction, between power based on “domination” and the exercise of “direction” or “hegemony”’(xiv), the editors explain

Nonhegemonic groups or classes are also called by Gramsci “subordinate”, “subaltern” or sometimes “instrumental”. Here again we have preserved Gramsci’s original terminology despite the strangeness that some of these words have in English and despite the fact that it is difficult to discern any systematic difference in Gramsci’s usage between, for instance, subaltern and subordinate.
(xiv)

The implication seems to be that Gramsci made nuanced analyses of the dissemination and mediation of power, but theorized or conceptualized the subaltern with less particularity or differentiation. The subaltern seems to have been defined in terms of not having primary or unmediated access to power, be it hegemonic or dominant. As a corollary, it also seems to be theorized in terms that deny it non-derivative agency. The subaltern seems to be conceptualized as being merely ‘subordinate’ within a power-structured hierarchy and hence ‘instrumental’ in agency. If ‘subaltern’, ‘subordinate’ and ‘instrumental’ are used interchangeably, the connotations of the term subaltern are negative with respect to a rather linear, uni-directional conceptualization of the flow of power, its effects and hence the potential for agency with any degree of autonomy.

⁸ The point discussed is later reiterated as a footnote, this time leaving the responsibility of determining shifts in meaning to the reader: ‘*Classi strumentali* is a term used by Gramsci interchangeably with the terms *classi subalterne* and *classi subordinate*, and there seems no alternative to a literal translation of each which leaves the reader free to decide whether there is any different nuance of stress between them’ (26)

The opening section of Gramsci's 'Notes on Italian History', subtitled 'History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria' and dated between 1934 and 1935, deals at some length with his conceptualization of the subaltern and its implications for a historiography of the subaltern. An indication of the paradigmatic framework this is done within is given in the subtitle's reference to 'subaltern *classes*' (italics added). This is reinforced when Gramsci avers

The subaltern classes, by definition are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of the States and groups of States. (52)

The reference to 'classes' indicates the economic frame of reference within which Gramsci was theorizing the historiography of the subaltern in the context of the Italian socio-economic milieu. Once again, lack of discursive control over history is linked to a lack of primary access to 'State' power⁹. Since these are some of the premises on which Gramsci's formulations on subaltern historiography rest, the points that he outlines as requiring study, too, focus on the axes of economic influence and political power with reference to subaltern social groups. First on his list is

.1. the objective formation of the subaltern social groups by the developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production; their quantitative diffusion and their origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology and aims they conserve for a time

⁹ The editors state that Gramsci himself did not 'succeed in finding a single, wholly satisfactory conception of 'civil society' or the 'State' (207) and his attempts to formulate his position on them have had diverse, sometimes opposite, results. However, as a prelude to discussing subaltern historiography, Gramsci avers that 'the fundamental historical unity [of the ruling classes], concretely, results from the organic relations between State or political society and "civil society"' (52). Hence, it seems that in this context he was equating State and political society. He seems to have felt that one of the primary concerns in subaltern historiography should be with the 'access of the subaltern classes to political power.

There is a pronounced economistic bias to Gramsci's analysis of subalternity. On one hand, this broadbases the ambit of the rubric as it has been used more recently to sometimes define subalternity in largely essentialist terms - as a given, in terms of say, ethnicity or community. On the other, when applied to social frameworks like that of India and Australia, where the economic axis is only one resulting in the construction of the dalits or aborigines as marginalized social groups, this purely economistic conceptualization of the subaltern fails to address many questions about the cultural forces at work in the discursive construction or contestation of social subordination. The subaltern for Gramsci, speaking from within the social framework of Italy and the epistemological paradigms of Marx, referred to peasants and the working classes. There is no question of the subaltern constructed ethnographically or along intersections of axes such as gender, race, caste, sexual preferences and age. It may be interesting to note, at this stage, that when Gramsci does write of caste with reference to the social shifts in France after the French Revolution, it seen as a category that largely precludes a predominant economic dimension so that class and caste become almost opposite in signification.

The old feudal classes are demoted from their dominant position to a "governing" one, but are not eliminated, nor is there any attempt to liquidate them as an organic whole; *instead of a class they become a "caste" with specific cultural and psychological characteristics, but no longer with predominant economic functions.* (115)(italics added)

The framework within which Gramsci worked also allowed him to conceptualize the ruling classes and the subordinate classes as two groups in almost complete binary opposition with reference to access to power. As a result, almost all attempts to alter subalternity, to whatever degree, are marked by unilinearly derivative or dependent agency. Thus, the permutations and combinations of these associations between the subaltern classes and the ruling classes constitute the rest of his list:

2. their active and passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation and neo-formation; 3. the birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the consent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them; 4. the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce in order to press claims of a limited and partial character; 5. those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework; 6. those formations which assert the integral autonomy,...etc. (52)

There are several things that are I found worth noting here. First, the editorial footnote that claims, 'The last three categories refer presumably to trade unions, reformist parties, and communist parties respectively' (52) without specifying on what basis such a presumption is made. Assuming that the presumption is right, it once again points to the party-centered framework within which these observations were made. Second, that the text does not elaborate on what Gramsci saw as 'integral autonomy', but instead exasperatingly employs ellipses and 'etc' at this potentially defining juncture. These two once again demarcate the limitations and enforced dependencies of the mediated nature of this text. Third, that Gramsci goes on to describe the points he enumerated as 'phases' in 'the line of development towards integral autonomy, starting from the most primitive phase' (52), indicates the teleological nature of his perspective of the history under consideration. Moreover, we find that what started out in the subtitle as the 'History of Subaltern Classes' becomes after the enumeration the more limited, but still complex, scope of the 'history of the parties of the subaltern groups' (52).

According to Gramsci, the historian 'must note every manifestation of the

Sorelian “spirit of cleavage” (52)¹⁰. Such a history must include ‘repercussions of party activity, throughout the area of the subaltern groups themselves taken globally, and also upon the attitudes of the dominant group’ and the ‘repercussions of the far more effective actions (effective because backed by the State) of the dominant groups upon the subaltern groups and their parties’ (52-3). Gramsci posits ‘Among the subaltern groups, one will exercise or tend to exercise a certain hegemony through the mediation of a party; this must be established by studying the development of all the other parties too, in so far as they include elements of the hegemonic group or of the other subaltern groups which undergo such hegemony.’ (53) With reference to a study of how the ‘innovatory forces which led the national Risorgimento in Italy’ ‘developed from subaltern groups to hegemonic and dominant groups’, Gramsci lays down ‘two yardsticks’ for this historiography of how they acquired ‘1. autonomy *vis-à-vis* the enemies they had to defeat, and 2. support from the groups which actively or passively assist them’ (53). He reiterates that it is very crucial to this analysis of the changing levels of ‘historical and political consciousness’ that affiliative relations of ‘the innovatory forces’ be given as much weightage as ‘the yardstick of their separation from the formerly dominant forces’ (53) lest ‘a unilateral history’ be generated. This is particularly pertinent in the light of the focus shifting primarily and almost exclusively to the first yardstick of autonomy, especially in the initial volumes produced by the Subaltern Studies group. Attention to the interactive dialectic that helps the subaltern groups become innovatory forces and eventually come to power, is the corrective to unilateral historiography, which he seeks to point to. It is also interesting that he seems to employ the alternative term ‘innovatory forces’

¹⁰ This is annotated in a footnote as Georges Sorel’s ‘equivalent of class consciousness, of the class-for-itself’. The editors quote a passage from Sorel that shows how politics requires that unreconcilable constituencies are constructed and the antagonistic cleavage between them maintained: ‘When the governing classes, no longer daring to govern, are ashamed of their privileged situation, are eager to make advances to their enemies, and proclaim their horror of all cleavage in society, it becomes much more difficult to maintain in the minds of the proletariat this idea of cleavage without which Socialism cannot fulfill its historical role.’ (126) This cleavage and the binaries applied in relation to subaltern groups are constructs generated for specific political ends. Moreover, once created it is often felt these divisions have to be consciously maintained to achieve the desired objective, which is often a simplistically conceptualized reversal of the binary.

to designate subaltern groups in the process of rising above their socio-political subordination.

‘The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic.’ is a claim however that cannot go uncontested, for isn’t all history necessarily fragmented until discursively given a teleological and totalized semblance of unity and direction? What Gramsci seems to be saying is that until power relations are inverted, subaltern classes cannot achieve the discursive unity in their self-definition or historiography that characterizes the dominant groups. He doesn’t seem to be contesting the overall discursive paradigm or its constructedness, but seems keen on analyzing an inversion of binary oppositions within the paradigm with special reference to hegemonic or dominant influences that aid the transformation of the subaltern groups into innovatory forces and then into dominant groups.

There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when a historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups. even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves. (55)

Having spent so much space on arguing the need to supplement a unilateral historiography that focuses on the autonomy of the subaltern/innovatory forces, and averring the virtual impossibility of unmediated, non-derivative agency, Gramsci concludes valorizing traces of ‘independent initiative’ of subaltern groups and advocating the methodology of monographs.

Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should therefore be of incalculable value

for the integral historian. Consequently, this kind of history can only be dealt with monographically, and each monograph requires an immense quantity of material which is often hard to collect. (55)

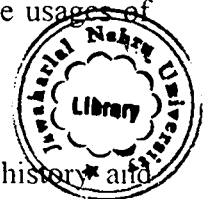
Gramsci's treatise does manifest an economic bias¹¹ in defining the subaltern classes and a teleological perspective to history without questioning the constructedness of either. Furthermore, the focus of the historiography itself is oriented towards the history of the parties of subaltern groups. However, these perspectives are conditioned by Gramsci's specific project to study specific aspects of Italian history. Gramsci was not purporting to define or universalize about subalternity, but his notes do give valuable pointers to making other studies of subalternity. That is the perspective I wish to bring to Gramsci. To quote him:

To judge the whole past philosophy as delirium and folly is not only an anti-historical error in that it makes the anachronistic claim that people in the past should have thought as we do today; it is also a real hang-over from metaphysics in that it presumes a dogmatic form of thought, valid at all times and in all countries, in the light of which the past can be judged. (449)

Gramsci employed the term 'subaltern' within specific socio-historical-discursive contexts. Furthermore, subalternity, as employed by him, was conceptually equated with subordination and instrumentality with reference to social class and access to State power because of economic reasons related to the sphere of production (52). Thus subalternity was articulated in terms of social subordination, instrumentality within the sphere of economic production, lack of access to control of State power or hegemony. Although Gramsci says the

¹¹ There are statements like the one given below that evince this bias more explicitly even as they temper its degree: 'Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for *though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic – must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.*' (161) (italics added)

subaltern classes are also not unified because of their lack of State power, he doesn't spell out the link between power and discursive control either in the case of the construction of unified identity or history. The latter, however, does seem to be implied when Gramsci avers that subaltern history is discursively subordinated to or intertwined with that of the State - read 'ruling classes' (52). In Gramsci's epistemological schema, the subaltern is not an essentialized constituency but one that is formed as a result of changes in the sphere of economic production (52). As a result some of the ways of emerging out of this subordinate position are by recourse to technical development (202) or political affiliations with hegemonic groups or elements (53). 'Integral autonomy' seems to be envisioned as a reversal of the binary opposition on Marxist lines. Hawthorn indicates that as Gramsci's work was written in prison, many things in it are coded to bypass the censors. 'Subaltern', according to him was one such code (Hawthorn, 339). More recently the term has been appropriated and reified by various discourses in various contexts. While it is important to not overlook this semiotic lineage, it is also important not to forget to contextualize the usage of the term and abstain from seeing any one as definitive and final.



The Subaltern Studies project in the study of South Asian history and society employed this rubric to underscore the shifts in historiographical focus this project was trying to effect. Ranajit Guha, one of the founder members of the project and the editor of the first volume of collected work they published in 1982, outlines the 'aim' of the Subaltern Studies project as being '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' (vii). He adds, 'The word 'subaltern' in the title stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, 'of inferior rank.' It will be used in these pages as a name for 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' (vii). To this Guha adds, 'The words 'history and society' in the subtitle are meant to

serve as a shorthand for all that is involved in the subaltern condition...the material and spiritual aspects of that condition, past or present...the history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity as well as to the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems – in short, the culture informing that condition.’ In spite of this ambitious framework however, Guha feels, that it would be idle for Subaltern Studies to hope to ‘match the six-point project envisaged by Antonio Gramsci in his ‘Notes on Italian History’’(vii). Guha adds in the preface that since

subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance; for ‘subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up’. 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. ...our 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.(vii)

This is indeed a very broad program in conception. Ironically so, in spite of Guha’s disclaimer that the ‘range of contributions’ (vii) may not be able to match Gramsci’s six-point program. The latter dealing primarily with the phases of subaltern politics with reference to Italian history seems more limited focussed in scope. Subalternity is thus defined, by the Subaltern Studies project, basically as the deprivileged factor in binary opposition with dominance of various shades. But even as the project sets out to attempt an ‘objective’ assessment and/or critique of elite roles and/elitist interpretations, it fails to address issues of appropriation of voice which are becoming important to any project of subaltern re-‘vision’. Can any assessment be ‘objective’, except by eliding the politics of the position one is speaking from and articulating who one is purporting to speak for?

Token allusions are made to Gramsci, basically to reaffirm the binary opposition paradigm of subalternity. There is a slight shift in terminological

emphasis, however, in this binary from the Gramscian emphasis on ruling classes or dominant classes to what Guha refers to as the 'elite'¹². Another point of departure is from taking the economic factor as the primary axis of domination/hegemony to a framework that is more inclusive of other axes of domination that have been and are being discursively problematized – caste, age, gender and office are supposed to be included besides the Gramscian category of class. In addition, what is significantly being problematized, in addition to social/cultural primacy, is more explicitly the discursive primacy accorded to 'elitist interpretations'.

Ranjit Guha in 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in the same volume reveals some of the minutiae of the points at which the project, as posited by him, draws on and departs from the Gramscian use of the rubric 'subaltern'. Perhaps it is better, for our purpose, to approach this text from its end where there is 'A note on the terms 'elite', 'people', 'subaltern', etc.'(8). 'The term 'elite' has been used to signify dominant groups, foreign as well as indigenous.' The present scope of Guha's discursive domain – historiography of colonial India – includes under this rubric

British officials...foreign industrialists, merchants, financiers, planters, landlords and missionaries.... At the *all-India level*...the biggest feudal magnates, ...representatives of the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie and native recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy.... At the *regional and local levels*...members of the dominant all-India groups...*or* if belonging to social strata hierarchically inferior to those of the dominant all-India groups still *acted in the interests of the latter and not in conformity to interests corresponding truly to their own social being.* (8)

For Guha while the '*dominant foreign groups*' and the '*dominant indigenous groups* [a]t the *all-India level*' are conceptualized as relatively undifferentiated in

¹² Which according to Suneet Chopra had a positive connotation for Gramsci who used it to refer to the intellectual vanguard (57).

their dominant position, the third category is conceptually more nuanced.

Taken as a whole and in the abstract this last category of the elite was *heterogeneous* in its composition and thanks to the uneven character of economic and social developments, *differed from area to area*. The same class or element which was dominant in one area according to the definition given above, could be among the dominated in another. This could and did create many ambiguities and contradictions in attitudes and alliances, especially among the lowest strata of the rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants all of whom belonged, *ideally speaking*, to the category of 'people' or 'subaltern classes'.... It is the task of research to investigate, identify and measure the *specific* nature and degree of the *deviation* of these elements from the ideal and situate it historically.(8)

Furthermore. 'The terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes' have been used as synonymous....The social groups and elements included in this category represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'*".(8) Thus, in Guha's binary opposition paradigm, each category is defined against and in terms of the other. The positing of 'ideal' positions for the subaltern, valorized even further by equating it with the value-laden reification of 'people'¹³ and references to deviation from the ideal is problematic in its purist import. Who reifies what is 'ideal', and would not a conceptualization of such an 'ideal' play right into prescriptive formulations of the putatively 'authentic' subaltern? The idiom of prescriptive evaluation evinced in phrases like 'acted...not in conformity to interests corresponding truly to their social being' (8) is fraught with problems in the light of postmodernist thought and from the perspective of the dynamicity of

¹³ Rosalind O'Hanlon elaborates on this point when she draws attention to the way the Subaltern Studies project evinces the proclivity to tap into 'the overwhelming normative value which the identification with 'the majority', 'the people', has assumed in the political and sociological discourses of the twentieth century (of which, of course, the discourse of democracy is only one) and hence in the legitimation of all our cultural and ideological projects'(195)

socio-political relations. Some of these problems find more elaborate manifestation in the main body of the article.

Critiquing 'elitist historiography', Guha argues that while 'it helps us understand the ideological character of historiography', it cannot 'explain Indian nationalism....it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism.' He explains,

This inadequacy of elitist historiography follows directly from the narrow and partial view of politics to which it is committed by virtue of its class outlook.... What is clearly left out of this unhistorical historiography is the *politics of the people*. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principle actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter.(4)

This position is rather interesting because it runs at a tangent to Gramsci's own perception of a highly derivative politics of the subaltern, one that Guha quotes in the Preface – 'subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups'(vii). In the context of social interdependencies, would not the notion of complete autonomy be an epistemological fallacy? However, from this point on, Guha launches out into an enumeration of features of subaltern politics that come back repeatedly to variations on this purist position.

Guha maintains autonomy is one of the distinguishing features of subaltern politics and valorizes it as having had the resilience to not be tainted by colonialism to the same extent as the vilified 'elite politics'.

Far from being destroyed or rendered virtually ineffective, as was elite politics of the traditional type by the intrusion of colonialism, it continued to operate vigorously in spite of the latter, adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in both form and content.(4)

The next point of difference is the mode and nature of mobilization. According to Guha, mobilization in the domain of elite politics was achieved vertically, tended to be relatively more legalistic and constitutionalist in orientation and was on the whole, more cautious and controlled. In contrast, mobilization in the realm of subaltern politics was achieved horizontally, tended to be relatively more violent, as well as, more spontaneous(4-5). He cites 'the paradigm of peasant insurgency'(5) as realizing in the most comprehensive form, popular mobilization in the colonial period. It may be worthwhile to juxtapose with this Gramsci's position on the constructedness of spontaneous leadership, especially with respect to subaltern politics:

The term "spontaneity" can be variously defined, for the phenomenon to which it refers is many-sided. Meanwhile it must be stressed that "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history: it would come to the same thing as "pure" mechanicity. In the "most spontaneous" movement it is simply the case that the elements of "conscious leadership" cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the "history of the subaltern classes", and indeed of their most marginal and peripheral elements; these have not achieved any consciousness of the class "for itself", and consequently it never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it.

Hence in such movements there exists multiple elements of "conscious leadership", but no one of them is predominant or transcends the level of a given social stratum's "popular science" – its "common sense" or traditional conception of the world. (196-197)

Guha has conceded that the subaltern is not a monolithic unified constituency. As a result the 'ideology operative in this domain, taken as a whole, reflected the diversity of its social composition.... However, in spite of such diversity one of its invariant features was a notion of resistance to elite domination.' Guha argues that this 'followed from the subalternity common to all the social constituents of this domain and as such distinguishes it sharply from that of elite politics. This ideological element was of course not uniform in quality or density in all instances.... there were occasions when its emphasis on sectional interests disequibrated popular movements'(5). This aspect, however, is not often focalized in the project as it would problematize the binary opposition on which the project is premised. Social hierarchies are rarely binaries, but usually have layers of stratification. Each 'elite' is often simultaneously a subaltern with respect to those above it in the social hierarchy. The 'indigenous elite' too resisted the 'elite domination' of the 'dominant foreign groups'¹⁴. Subalternity is constructed and relational, often within multilayered hierarchies and along several axes within a particular social paradigm.

'Yet another set of distinctive features of this politics derived from the conditions of exploitation to which the subaltern classes are subjected to in varying degrees.... The experience of exploitation and labour endowed this politics with many idioms, norms and values which put it in a category apart from elite politics.'(5) These are of course not elaborated upon, as the main aim seems

¹⁴ Suneet Chopra's review of *Subaltern Studies I* throws a different light on this point when he raises the question of 'autonomy' of the subaltern as well as the project's departure from a rigid Gramscian or Marxian class-based framework. He sees this as resulting in a 'confusion of categories' (58) and arising 'from a failure to realise that the Indian bourgeoisie too was a subaltern class, albeit with links with the dominant groups, by means of which it developed a certain hegemony through the mediation of its party, the Indian National Congress.' He opines that 'only a study of the development of this party during the national movement, as well as of others, both of the group attempting to achieve hegemony among the subaltern groups as well as those of other subaltern groups, can elucidate correctly the level of integration achieved by the Indian state and the level of disintegration resulting from the hegemonic tendencies of the subaltern group turned ruling group in the new state. This is the perspective Gramsci mapped out; but this is the perspective the 'subaltern historians' have excluded from the purview of their inquiry by definition.' (63)

to be to reiterate that the elite and subaltern, at least in the realm of politics, are essentially different, if not in opposition. The most Guha makes is a partial concession that these 'distinctive features of the politics of the people did not of course appear always in the pure state' as the 'impact of living contradictions modified them in the course of their actualization in history. However, with all such modifications they still helped to demarcate the domain of subaltern politics from that of elite politics.'(5) All this adds up, according to Guha, to 'an important historical truth, that is, the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*.'(5) He sees arising out of this situation a 'structural dichotomy'(6) even though that did not mean that 'these two domains were hermetically sealed off from each other'(6). Guha also admits 'the initiatives which originated from the domain of subaltern politics were not, on their part, powerful enough to develop the nationalist movement into a full-fledged struggle for national liberation'(6). When he says, 'this *historic failure of the nation to come to its own... constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India*' one wonders whether one reason for this could be that 'the nation' itself is an 'elite' construct/reality? Guha advocates that 'elitist historiography should be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse based on the rejection of the spurious and unhistorical monism characteristic of its view of Indian nationalism and on the recognition of the co-existence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domains of politics.'(7)

As far as the Subaltern Studies project is concerned, Gramsci does seem to have just been a take-off point, especially with respect to the term 'subaltern'. It has to be agreed that the project as a whole never tried to adhere to or formulate a rigorous Gramscian framework of analysis. Even the focus on subaltern 'autonomy' shifts within the project. For example, the preface to *Subaltern Studies X* states, 'we have always conceived the presence and pressure of subalternity to extend beyond subaltern groups; nothing – not elite practices, state policies, academic disciplines, literary texts, archival sources, language – was exempt from effects of subalternity'(Bhadra et al v-vi). As do the groups which

are included within the rubric 'subaltern'. For example, the rubric is extended to include Dalits and Palestinian women in Volumes IX and X respectively, of the series. Nor can the claim that the Indian bourgeoisie was subaltern vis-à-vis the colonial powers be dismissed, because subalternity is, in my opinion, a state in a contingent hierarchy, not a stable fixed binary. It is a part of dialectical process, not a static product.

Furthermore, as, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya points out in 'History from Below', 'The study of the elite is not necessarily elitist' (15). Though this article, which appeared in the *Social Scientist* in 1983, makes no direct reference to the subaltern or the Subaltern Studies group, it has some valuable insights into the concept of 'history from below' and places this discourse within the framework of decolonization. First, it situates the trend of this kind of history or historiographical perspective within a less discussed Third World international frame that includes Puerto Rican historians in the 1970s, the Dares Salaam school of history during that same period, Rodolfo Stavenhagen in Mexico and the work of the French Sinologist Chesneaux. Among the aims of these groups were to address the problem of 'the history of the 'historyless''¹⁵ and to initiate a 'process of intellectual decolonisation'¹⁶. (3) This provides a corrective to the use of only intellectuals belonging to the Euro-American academia as reference points and also reinscribes the postcolonial framework within which such a study can be undertaken. 'Behind the initiative for 'history from below' there is an effort to bring the people in, to humanise history.', according to Bhattacharya. 'It was not just a question of enlarging the scope of history. ... This was also because a major paradigm change was on the way in the wake of political decolonisation, a reassessment of the 'nationalist' interpretative framework in history and other social sciences'(4). In India, however, the concept largely draws on Marxist

¹⁵ Angel Quientero Rivera. *Worker's Struggle in Puerto Rico: a documentary study*. New York: 1976. pp.6-7. According to Bhattacharya's endnote (15) this is a publication of a group of radical historians and social scientists called Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puertoriqueno.

¹⁶ Rodolfo Stavenhagen. *Between underdevelopment and revolution: a Latin American perspective*. Delhi: 1981. pp. 184-186.

oriented historiography in England: the work of people like E.P.Thompson, Hobsbawm and Raphael Samuel (4-5). He avers that, 'It is, however, important not to forget that 'people's history' means different things to different people' (6). The same applies to the rubric 'subaltern,' as also does his observation that, 'The strength of the methods of 'history from below' lies in micro-level in-depth investigation. ... One hopes that this will not cost a loss of perspective. ...Unless specifically designed to correct that tendency, micro-level research tends to take for granted the structure as a whole' (14). He continues, 'This is the reason why there is a need for an awareness of the 'incompleteness' of micro-level studies. ... Perhaps sizing up the system as a whole is as much necessary as the study of the exploited; sizing up the 'elite' is a part of the study of those down below' (15).

Many of the reviews and critical appraisals¹⁷ of the volumes of the Subaltern Studies project return time and again to a few central issues. The main points of critique of the subaltern project and its methodology, which are relevant to my own attempts at conceptualizing the subaltern and subalternity, problematize the valorization of autonomy, spontaneity and the subaltern experience as characteristics of subaltern resistance. This is seen as a 'neopositivism', the basic premise of which is that 'all knowledge is to be derived from the experience of the subject' (Singh et al 5). Most of the critics and reviewers opine that the notion of autonomy is not clearly theorized and is problematic as it leaves out many dimensions of interaction. 'By trying to abstract the 'subaltern' from the 'elite', one cannot really explore the ways in which these two levels interact' (Singh et al 19). The gaps that come out of the inversion of

¹⁷ Refer to Javeed Alam. 'Peasantry, Politics and Historiography: Critique of New Trend in Relation to Marxism'. *Social Scientist*. Vol.11, No.117, February,1983. pp.43-54. Sangeeta Singh et al. 'Subaltern Studies II: A Review Article'. *Social Scientist*. Vol.12, No.10. October 1984. pp.3 - 41. Anand A. Yang. 'Book Review: *Subaltern Studies II*'. *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol.XLX, No.1 November,1985. pp. 177-178. Majid Hayat Siddiqi. 'Book review of *Subaltern Studies III*'. *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. Vol.22, No.1, January-March, 1985. pp.2-95.

discursive focus from the so-called elite to the subaltern, are seen as a problematic aspect of the methodology of micro-study adopted by the project as interactive, dialectical linkages are left out. To turn academic/research attention to subaltern culture, religion and popular traditions would not erase the problem of a methodological impasse that renders the kind of purism envisaged by the group epistemologically impossible. According to Siddiqi, 'Even if such a history is to be attempted it will still remain within the many-layered accretions of 'elite' history as all the synthesis of past and contemporary scholarship would remain heavily influenced by 'elitist' bias. Excavating the subject's viewpoint will therefore become still more difficult as the historians object will recede still further.' (95) The same applies to literature and related discourses, for subaltern discourses do not exist in isolation or in simplistic dichotomous relationships. The failure to acknowledge how differentiation of the subaltern group and entities within it reveal further layers of subalternity too has drawn flak (Singh et al 15 ; Yang 178). The construction of subaltern unity and autonomy has been deemed specious and has been pointed out as showing up a 'potential for myth-making inherent in the concept of the 'subaltern'' within the project (Singh et al 18).

Added to this, the politico-ethical implications of the premises that underpin the project have to be considered as well. A supra-historical conceptualization of subaltern consciousness and a positivism that makes the subaltern 'the subject of rebellion' can be construed to absolve the elite (colonial or indigenous) of oppression/hegemony by stressing autonomy over interconnectedness (Singh et al 11-12). There is also a lack of acknowledgement of how the subaltern project is as much an act of appropriation of the subaltern as all other discourses of knowledge by dominant institutional or academic structures. The 'historian's own historicity' is not adequately treated or problematized. (Singh et al 13)

The articles by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty under the 'DISCUSSION' rubric in *Subaltern Studies IV* address these issues from two

perspectives. On one hand, Chakrabarty's main line of defense is to critique the Marxist frame of reference of the attacks on the project. He, however, admits that the question of how the category of 'experience' will be incorporated into the Subaltern Studies project, without compromising on theoretical issues, is an unresolved methodological problem, especially 'given that 'experience' is itself a constructed and re-constructed phenomenon.'(375) He opines that the subaltern-elite dyad can be defended as a means to an end: 'At an abstract level, of course, one could make the point that a binary system represents a conscious collapsing of more differentiated systems – trinary, quaternary, etc. – for the purpose of a particular analysis'(375). The focus, however, is on 'Subalternity' – the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy' as it manifests itself in the social realm where 'notions of hierarchy, domination and subordination work themselves out as do the traditions of resistance to domination and deference towards the dominant' (376). On the other hand, Spivak, adopts a deconstructivist defense. She avers that

the work of the Subaltern Studies group repeatedly makes it possible for us to grasp that the concept-metaphor of the 'social text' is not the reduction of real life to the page of a book. ...It can be advanced that their work presupposes that the entire socius, at least in so far as it is the object of their study, is ... a 'continuous sign-chain'. The possibility of action lies in the dynamics of the disruption of this object, the breaking and relinking of the chain. This line of argument does not set consciousness over against the socius, but sees it as itself also constituted as and on a semiotic chain.(332)

Using this as a basis, Spivak underscores the links between history - reading social texts in terms of discursive displacements - and literary analysis - reading literary texts in terms of shifting social and literary sign systems. She argues that that in both these discourses - in fact in all discourses - cognitive failure is irreducible: it is discursively impossible to arrive at complete and unmediated understanding, perception or representation. She reads against the grain of the project pointing out that if the members of the Subaltern Studies

group were to refuse to acknowledge the implications of their work, 'because that would be politically incorrect, they would, willy-nilly, 'insidiously objectify' the subaltern:..., control him through knowledge even as they restore versions of causality and self-determination to him ...[and thereby] become complicit, in their desire for totality (and therefore totalization)'(336-337) She reads the tension between the group's deployment of anti-humanist propositions to undermine elite historiography, while simultaneously employing essentialist notions of subaltern consciousness and culturalism, as a strategy for intervention which problematizes all theoretical production and transforms conditions of epistemological impossibility into those of possibility.

If in translating bits and pieces of discourse theory and the critique of humanism back into an essentialist historiography the historian of subalternity aligns himself to the pattern of conduct of the subaltern himself, it is only a progressivist view, that diagnoses the subaltern as necessarily inferior, that will see such an alignment to be without interventionist value. ... If on the other hand, the restoration of the subaltern's subject-position in history is seen by the historian as the establishment of an inalienable and final truth of things, then any emphasis on sovereignty, consistency and logic will, as I have suggested above, inevitably objectify the subaltern and be caught in the game of knowledge as power. ...It is in this spirit that I 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.

What good does such a re-inscription do? It acknowledges that the arena of the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in *his* efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic. It is a hard lesson to learn, but not to learn it is merely to nominate elegant solutions to be correct theoretical practice. ... It is not only '*bad*' theory but *all* theory that is susceptible to this open-endedness.

Theoretical descriptions cannot produce universals. They can only ever produce provisional generalizations,

even as the theorist realizes the crucial importance of their persistent production. (345-346)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes several points in the course of her intervention at the Second Subaltern Studies Conference and two essays¹⁸ that develop on these points with respect to the conceptualization and study of subalternity. In 'Stanadayini' the subaltern is a poor *Brahmin* woman – a subaltern along the axes of colonial economy and gender, but an 'elite' along the social axes of caste. However, many would query whether including an uppercaste woman or subordinated colonial employees¹⁹ under the rubric dilutes its meaningfulness. This brings into focus, once again, the need to incorporate an understanding that instead of a binary, a more inflected complicated hierarchy is in force, lest the argument continually lapse into rhetorical queries about who the 'real' subaltern is. Furthermore, extrapolations made about one subaltern group cannot be universalized as the subaltern as an object/subject of study is irreducibly heterogeneous. A point well remembered, considering, the socio-cultural and geographical terrain across which the term 'subaltern' has been extended: Gramsci's Italy, the South Asia of many in the Subaltern Studies Group, the Irelands of David Lloyd and Colin Graham, the women of Sayigh's Palestine - and Aboriginal Australia over which I intend to extend it. It is a range that raises the question of 'Who is a subaltern?' and 'What criteria are applied to designate a constituency as subaltern?' It is a dynamic term that has been used with a certain degree of flexibility to designate socio-historical subordination as well as interrogative potential. Part of this review of literature is to see the recurring parameters across which this rubric has been extended in discursive theory and practice. So far, for Gramsci the main criteria were economic and in

¹⁸ Refer to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 'A Literary Representation of a Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini''. *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Edited by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: OUP, 1987. pp. 91-134 and 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 66 –111.

¹⁹ Refer to Atlury Murali's critique of David Arnold's presentation of the subordinated Madras constabulary as analogous with other subaltern groups in Kapil Kumar et al. 'Subaltern Studies III & IV: A Review Article' *Social Scientist*. Vol.16, No:3, March 1988. p.25.

terms of access to political power. While Guha started out with a broad bandwidth of subalternity, encompassing the general attribute of subordination expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way, he soon narrowed the purview down to more socio-economic terms to focus on the peasant and working classes, excluded from colonial historiographic focus in India. The articles in the Subaltern Studies series extend that focus a little to mostly discuss subalternity in terms of tribal, dalit and gender issues in India. Spivak's own primary focus is on theoretical issues concerning the postcolonial and/or gendered subaltern, with special reference to India.

Spivak opines that "Subaltern Studies" does not deal only with subaltern consciousness and action; it is just as important to see how the subaltern are fixed in their subalternity by their elites' (Hardiman 289). As Spivak points out, most often, the people at the forefront of producing and consuming literature and history about subalterns have limited claims to subaltern status (1987: 95). To them the subaltern is an object of study. As such, studies that purport to discursively construct subject positions for the subaltern, from which they will putatively be able to speak for themselves, are open to critique for they elide the intellectual mediation of 'experience' and 'speaking voice'. In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak is at pains to point out the 'unrecognized contradiction within a position that valorizes the experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual' (1994: 69). This demands that the ones undertaking such a study must recognize and acknowledge 'its own material production in institutionality' (1994: 68) as 'the production of theory is also a practice' (1994: 70) and intellectual mediation can not be deemed transparent.

At the same time, the question of methodology employed in the study of the subaltern is pertinent, especially in the wake of both a marked tendency towards institutional appropriation of and a proclivity for self-marginalized purism by subaltern constituencies. Spivak opines:

'Resisting 'elite' methodology for 'subaltern' material involves an epistemological/ontological confusion. The confusion is held in an unacknowledged analogy: just as the subaltern is not elite (ontology), so must the historian not *know* through elite method. (epistemology).

This is part of a much larger confusion: can men theorize feminism, can whites theorize racism, can the bourgeois theorize revolution, and so on. It is when *only* the former groups theorize that the situation is politically intolerable. Therefore it is crucial that members of these groups are kept vigilant about their assigned subject-positions. It is disingenuous, however, to forget that as the collectivities implied by the second group of nouns start participating in the production of knowledge about themselves, they must have a share in some of the structures of privilege that contaminate the first group. ...Therefore, did Gramsci speak of the subaltern's rise into hegemony.... This is also the reason behind one of the assumptions of subalternist work: that the subaltern's own idiom did not allow him to *know* his struggle so that he could articulate himself as its subject....

(The position that only the subaltern can know the subaltern, only women can know women, and so on, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for it predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity. Whatever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability of attempting to 'identify' (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity. What is known is always in excess of knowledge. ... Here the relationship between the practical – need for claiming subaltern identity – and the theoretical – no programme of knowledge production can presuppose identity as origin – is, once again of an 'interruption', that persistently brings each term to crisis.' (1987: 111-112)

P.K. Dutta is of the opinion that 'The treatment of the subalterns as a vantagepoint, a necessary political bias rather than a self-enclosed world, gives a fresh flexibility and added critical strength to the 'subaltern' viewpoint.' (Kumar 22) Equally so, readings that can switch between reading 'from above' and 'from below', according to Indrani Chatterjee, make 'for multiplicity of perspectives, but then one cannot treat 'above' as a dirty word' (Kumar 33). She quotes Tanika

Sarkar's observation that there is a lacunae in the study of subaltern attitudes towards other similarly placed groups or members within their own group:

The "other" that defines the subaltern's self-consciousness need not ...only be the elite groups exerting dominance; it may equally be classes and groups that lie even lower in the hierarchy, and the striving to maintain a distance from them may be the most important content of his self-image and self-respect. (34)

Some pertinent observations which Spivak employs in the 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' which would serve as caveats for this kind of study include that the intellectual must relearn privilege as loss vis-à-vis the subaltern discourses as their disciplinary training and social circumstances continually displace those discourses (82). Constructing a homogeneous Other is an act of elision, while to confront the heterogeneity of the Other is as much to re-learn to represent ourselves as it is to represent them (84). In such a mapping, a study of the collective ideological refusal of a discourse and the silences or erasures it has hitherto manifested initiates a multidisciplinary reinscription of that discursive terrain. In the course of such study one cannot afford to forget that one axis of subalternity often occludes several other axes. As a result, the loci of subalternity keep shifting. To illustrate this, Spivak demonstrates how the ideological construction of gender further keeps the male dominant within subaltern discourses.

Spivak says, '[W]hat I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other.' (90) Though I agree with this position, I also am of the opinion that issues of 'authenticity' or 'voice' have a very important place in subaltern dialectics. Especially at a stage where particular constituencies are moving from soliloquy to public debate and articulating their 'right' to tell their own stories. To represent themselves as much, if not more than be represented. It is a bridge that has to be

crossed. Identity, subjectivity and agency may be constructs but they are also functional constructs within a social and discursive framework. They are often used to challenge and modify the terms and conditions predicating the very assimilation by recognition, appropriation or commodification of the subaltern discourse that Spivak herself talks about in the closing section of her essay (1994: 90).

Rosalind O'Hanlon, in 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and the Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia,' indicates three issues that have gained significance in the context of the epistemological constitution of the subaltern as objects/subjects of knowledge within discursive and disciplinary frameworks: discursive control, the generation of professional canons especially within academic and publishing circles and the ethical ambiguities of academics dealing with subaltern issues (189). For her 'subaltern' is not 'a substantive social category' but a statement about power relations (207). The essay examines in detail some of the epistemological limitations of the introduction of quantities such as 'the subject agent', 'identity' 'resisting presences' 'experience', 'autonomy' and 'authenticity of voice' as well as existing / possible alternatives to those quantities within the subaltern studies project. O'Hanlon's suggestions for alternatives include conceiving of presence and agency outside the approved categories of the conventional social sciences; emphasizing the ambiguous and constructed nature of even the most apparently fixed subject-positions; rejecting the insistence that the only valid form of resistance is the virile form of deliberate onslaught or rebellion; looking for different kinds of resistances in fields not conventionally associated with the political; contesting the tendency to classify and certify resistances in a manner that accommodates the range of heterodox practices in accordance with putatively universal values of the dominant discourse (222-223).

O' Hanlon discusses the politics of projects like Subaltern Studies itself, within academic and socio-cultural circles, as seen within the context of the

modern obsession with 'the people' as a legitimating factor and our need to continuously find 'a resistant presence which has not been completely emptied or extinguished by the hegemonic...in order to envisage a realm of freedom in which we ourselves might speak' (219).

Through the restoration of subjectivity and the focus on experience, the conceit is that a textual space has been opened up in which the subaltern groups may speak for themselves and present their hidden past in their own distinctive voices, whose authenticity in turn acts as a guarantee for the texts themselves. We recognize that this is a conceit, of course, but it is very powerful one, and we must ask ourselves whether we are in danger in using it to turn the silence of the subaltern into speech, but to make their words address our own concerns, and to render their figures in our own self image. For my contention here is not only that the recuperation of the subject-agent imposes real limitations on our ability to comprehend the workings of power upon its object, but that its unguarded pursuit produces a diminution in the only constant feature of the subaltern's 'nature' which we can identify with any certainty, which is its alienness from our own. It can become a drive just as Baudrillard says, 'to keep the masses *within reason*'²⁰ a joining in that common abhorrence, which marks our age, that they should remain mute before all our meanings and ideals. (210-211)

She also opines that the quality of reciprocity, simultaneity and dialectical struggle is an inadequately theorized or discussed quantity in subaltern relations and within the field of discourse analysis. She posits that contextualization allows for a more integrative treatment of multidirectional sites of simultaneous or at least concurrent control and contestation.

It is this sense of mutuality – not as common contribution, but as struggle and contestation – which is missing from much contemporary discussion of discourse, with its assumption that new fields of knowledge had only to be enunciated, for them to elicit mute obedience from those

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities...or the End of the Social and Other Essays*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and John Johnston. New York: Foreign Agents Series, 1983. p 9.

whom they purported to know. It is, indeed, this lack of any exploration of the theme of simultaneity and struggle which is responsible for the criticism most frequently levelled at Foucault's own conception: that it allows no room and no possibility for resistance to the fine meshes of knowledge's disciplinary and normalizing power. This is an absence, indeed, which is all the more surprising in view of his own stress on the mutuality, the ever present possibility of reversal, in the play of power itself between agents. (216-217)

It is perhaps interesting that by the late 1980s the work of the Subaltern Studies group itself begins to manifest the dialectical tensions of having carved a niche within the institutional framework. The work of the group had been found worthy not only of note by figures like Spivak and O'Hanlon, but had even been packaged for the Western academia in the form of the *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988) to be published in America replete with a forward by Edward Said. Said situates the work of the group as 'an alternative discourse ... an analogue of all those recent attempts in the West and throughout the rest of the world to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous groups – women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles, etc.'(vi). According to him, this discursive exercise provides, if nothing else, a 'demystifying exposure of what material interests are at stake, what ideology and method are employed, what parties advanced, which deferred, displaced, defeated'(vii). He opines the discourse therefore must evince theoretical self-reflexivity that is aware of the 'gaps, absences, lapses, ellipses'(vii) that belie the discursive nature of its production. In fact, this very self-consciousness of discursivity allows 'the subaltern alternative' to be a more 'integrative knowledge' (viii). The relationship between subaltern and putatively hegemonic discourses, thus, becomes one not of autonomy but of interrogation and self-reflexive intervention. However, to others like Sumit Sarkar, this acknowledgement by the 'Western academic postmodernistic counter-establishment which is interested in colonial and postcolonial matters'(85) is symptomatic of academically and politically debilitating cooptation.

The later volumes of the group's output do evince some marked shifts. They include under the rubric issues relating to Dalits and women. The altered editorial board of *Subaltern Studies IX* admits: 'The essay by Kancha Illiah represents a first for Subaltern Studies: it is the first time Subaltern Studies have engaged with contemporary discussions of Dalitbahujan politics in India' (Amin and Chakrabarty vii). Furthermore, the discursive space designated by the rubric is no longer limited by the initial frame envisaged by Guha. Thus Lloyd David speaks of the 'subalternity effect'. According to him 'the social space of the 'subaltern' designates not some sociological datum of an objective generalizable kind, but is an effect emerging in and between historiographical discourses...and enables a rearticulation of political possibilities.' Therefore, he continues, 'Both the terms 'post-colonial' and 'subaltern' designate in different but related ways the desire to elaborate social spaces that are that are recalcitrant to any straightforward absorption' (263).

Though the, "subaltern" in contemporary critical theorization usually functions as a description of 'oppressed groups within society' (364), according to Colin Graham, 'subalternities are best seen to be complexly affiliative rather than merely commonly oppressed' (370). He notes that there has been a shift in the term from the Marxian frame of Gramsci to the provenance of post-colonial theorization which has 'expanded the remit of the term 'subaltern' beyond the confines of a solely class-based Marxist critique' allowing 'the inclusion of, for example, feminist and ethnic critiques of the 'dominant', and thus by implication to have expanded the idea of the subaltern to include oppressed and marginal groups of many types within society' (365). In its postcolonial avatar, however, the term is also a critique of nationalism and the nation. 'This reverberates into post-colonial cultural studies in an increasing acknowledgement that the concept of the nation, while a necessary part of the colonial/post-colonial teleology, is in itself an overhomogenising, oppressive ideology which elides the multiplicity of subaltern classes and groups and acts to maintain their subaltern status' (365).

Warning against a proclivity to privilege 'a notion of the subaltern as a coherent site of insurgency made exigent by a need to find a place of political incorruption'(369), Colin Graham advises a use of 'subaltern' that is informed by the fact that the rubric is, as Spivak put it, 'a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading'(1985: 340).

The foregoing review of literature besides dealing with the changing and multivalent configurations of the conceptual continuum within which the term 'subaltern' is situated, has by implication also evinced how it interacts with concepts such as 'identity', 'dialectics' and 'postcoloniality'. None of these terms have been static and each is continually being reinscribed and reified within changing discursive schemes. All of them however, like 'subaltern', provisionally facilitate projects of reading and intervention, such as the one I hope to undertake.

CHAPTER III

DALIT SUBALTERN DIALECTICS IN INDIA

I cursed another good hot curse.
The university buildings shuddered and sank waist-deep.
All at once, scholars began doing research
into what makes people angry.

- Keshav Meshram
Virodhi kavita

The Hindus wanted the Vedas and they sent for Vyasa who
was not a caste Hindu.

The Hindus wanted an Epic and they sent for Valmiki who
was an Untouchable.

The Hindus wanted a Constitution, and they sent for me.

- Dr. B.R.Ambedkar
Marathi

It has been a traumatic but momentous journey, beset by internal and external contradictions, from the literally untouchable social outcaste to the socio-politically vibrant site of quite a few present-day Dalits in India. It remains a traumatic and seemingly unending journey for many who are yet to realize their position as one of strong interventionist potential, for whom oppression is a tangible continuing experiential reality against which they have little combative power. Continuing episodes of Dalit massacres and atrocities in various parts of the country as well as the persistence of glass ceilings, which facilitate the continued subtle ostracization of even the ostensibly relatively more upwardly-mobile members of the 'creamy layer', are symptomatic of deeply held social prejudices. The term 'Dalit' itself, has been employed to cover such a broad spectrum of identities and situational contexts within the country that are irreducibly heterogeneous and tend to evade even nuanced modes of classification. Ramesh Kamble in 'Dalit Interpretations of Society' opines:

With experiences of marginalization and an inability to transform the structures which reiterate the enslaving experience, dalits do not exhibit a common perception but

necessarily multiple complex reactions. Instead of creating a context for dissolving caste differences from within, the commonly experienced marginalization of dalits has prepared the ground for an intensification of caste consciousness among them. (23)

Like the putatively neutral homogenizing bureaucratic appellation 'Scheduled Castes', the rubric 'Dalit' too places under erasure the multiplicity of interests for whom achieving actual 'equal' citizenship or the recovery/generation of a positive 'identity' is a project waiting to be or being very problematically realized.

Dalit politics and discourses are often troubled reflections of this state of affairs. The hostility with which Dalit contestations and reconfigurations of identity as well as their attempts at social mobility are often met, evinces the pervasive nature of caste considerations woven into the social fabric of this nation. It also delineates the extent to which the struggle for social hegemony alienates those constituencies attempting to alter long-maintained configurations of oppression in their favour. An editorial statement prefacing the *Seminar* volume on Dalits, points out with perspicacity that

notwithstanding the wealth of anthropological detail – the different dalit castes and communities, their secular and religious condition – analysts continue to treat them, at least conceptually as an undifferentiated mass, as if they stand outside history. There is a tendency to reduce the complete repertoire of struggles – the assertion for identity (both individual and collective), for respect and social justice, for equality and power, for self-worth – to just the contingent primary objective. It is as if their struggle is merely for reservations, for jobs, or for ritual acceptance. (Singh 13)

This slippage in articulating the heterogeneity of the conditions and concerns coming under the 'Dalit' rubric stems largely from the ostensible liminality of Dalit positions vis-à-vis that of the putative mainstream. The desire for integration and acceptance by the institutions of the mainstream is continually

being offset by the need to ensure entry into those institutions by affirmative discrimination that acknowledges a history of past marginalization and oppression, the effects of which cannot be simply wished away. Thus, the use of affirmative legislation often proves discursively counterproductive and only serves to reinscribe, more deeply and more negatively, marginality. This negativity, however, is a discursive construct that becomes increasingly challenged only as the generalizations and stereotypes of the contingently hegemonic discourse are contested by subaltern alternatives. Take for example this short poem by Daya Pawar, which puts the Dalit condition into a frame that at once dislocates it and gives it new perspective that can touch a raw nerve or evoke empathy from many of the denizens of the so called hegemonic centre:

You Wrote from Los Angeles

“In the stores here, in hotels, about the streets,
Indians and curs are measured with the same yard-stick;
‘Niggers’ ‘Blacks’! This is the abuse they fling me
And deep in my heart a thousand scorpions sting me”.
Reading all this, I felt *so damn good!*
Now you’ve had a taste of what we’ve suffered
In this country from generation to generation...
(Zelliot 301)

THE POLITICS OF NAMING AND INCLUSION

In this arena of discursive negotiation, there is a difference between the voice of the troubled outsider articulating concern or a desire to provide some means of intervention and the voice of an enraged victim expressing the ambiguity of the social roles and limitations thrust from without and internalized over time. This is exemplified in the politics of assigning or adopting rubrics to designate social constituencies. Roughly speaking, at least three categories of rubrics have been employed to designate those subordinated primarily along the axes of caste. ‘Untouchables’ and ‘ex-untouchables’ are related terms employed primarily to refer to a pernicious social mode of caste subordination and the fact

that in independent India, that particular mode of subordination has been legally abolished. The connotation of essentiality that is concomitant with the former designation is a discursive construct that labels individuals and social subgroups *achuth* from a hierarchical perspective that looks down.

The most powerful count *against* this term is that almost no-one identifies him/herself by reference to it. Presumably a primary ground of this *non*-use is that the word encapsulates the subordinated condition that the people in question are seeking to escape from. Why would one identify oneself by reference to an odious condition imposed by others? (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 3)

However, it may also be worn by those so designated as a badge of defiance that unites under an umbrella term, which does not obfuscate about the shameful social practice, groups that had simply been 'called by their various local or regional caste names as though there was nothing in common between them' (Krishnan 122). 'Ex-untouchable' on the other hand, though legally correct, places under erasure the multiple explicit and implicit modes through which this subordination predicated on caste lines is perpetuated to this day. It simplistically equates legal erasure with social erasure of a deep-rooted historically specific cultural phenomena. Even in the case of Dalits whose class status has changed, their social experience continues to be predicated by their caste status. Neither state-initiated efforts nor Dalit mobilization has rendered traditional social customs, value systems or practices irrelevant; they have just facilitated slight modifications in the modes of perpetuating ostracization or subordination. This issue is thematically explored in Dalit writing, such as in the Telegu short stories 'Prisoner' by B.S. Ramulu and 'Makaramukham' by Singamaneni Narayana.

Yet another group of rubrics developed during the British colonial period to facilitate administrative purposes, such as taking the Census. The use of these state-constituted terms like 'Outcastes' 'Exterior Castes' and 'Depressed Castes' eventually culminated in the term 'Scheduled Castes', which remains to this day the rubric in official use. The term is used within the frame of reference of the

constitutional Schedule that enumerates the castes and tribes entitled to reservations for education, public sector employment and governmental representation. The legal and moral neutrality evoked by this generic term simply designates 'a special legal class of citizens for certain purposes of the state' (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 4).

A set of rubrics, which has been more keenly debated and contested, is connected more intricately with the emergence of these subaltern groups into the political and public sphere during the Independence struggle. Neeladri Bhattacharya's editorial preface to *Dalit Visions*, traces one stream of this development to the anti-caste and anti-Brahmin movements of the 1920s. These either 'asserted dalit identity within terms set by Brahminical Hinduism: fighting for Kshatriya status and the right to enter temples' or 'traced the history of their oppression to Aryan conquest' (Omvedt x) and claimed aboriginality for non-Brahmin denizens of particular areas. This latter group manifested itself variously as localized movements such as Adi-Dravida in South India, Adi-Karnataka in Karnataka, Adi-Hindu in Andhra Pradesh and Adi-Dharm in Punjab, which still have their offshoots today. In the 1930s, however, Gandhi introduced the rubric 'Harijan' as a part of his agenda of social reform within the existing framework of Hinduism. Though this rubric gained wide currency and was very much a part of the scheme of events that brought the Dalit question into the sphere of public debate, it was not long before that debate itself designated the rubric as a patronizing euphemism and part of a process of accommodating potentially radical Dalit politics.

'Dalit' which gained vogue with the rise of the Dalit Panthers and their literature in the 1970s was meant to counteract this accommodative impulse with a discourse that sought to invert the negative connotations of rubrics used so far and replace it with connotations of protest and pride in identity. Eleanor Zelliot opines, '*Dalit* implies those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial

of pollution, karma, and justified caste hierarchy' (267). The term is not without its own problems though. Dalits who belong to the urban middle class sometimes see the rubric as self-marginalizing by constantly imposing the burden of a historical past and reactionary stance on them. Others see it as a radical redefinition that 'promotes the use of dalit as a revolutionary category for its hermeneutic ability to recover the emancipatory potential of the historical past of dalit culture' (Guru 15).

Like 'Harijan' the term is intensely political, but the politics this time are more assertive, and self-directed, sometimes separatist. While use of the term might seem to express an appropriate solidarity with the contemporary face of Untouchable politics ...it still has deep roots in a tradition of political radicalism inspired by the figure of B.R. Ambedkar. Until it loses this association the term will wrongly tend to suggest that the huge Untouchable population of India has been swept up into a single radical politics. (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 4)

Rubrics, labels and categories, especially socio-political ones, are not usually static entities. Their meaning, connotations and the politics of their use are contingent and in a constant state of flux because they are conscious constructions encoding specific agendas. While they give a verbal umbrella to disparate or varying groups with similar or identical political agenda, they simultaneously also place differences and many other factors under erasure. The dynamism of a rubric is dependent upon it not being allowed to ossify. However, it has to be admitted that no one category can suit all purposes; then it becomes a matter of the degree of appropriateness and the use to which a rubric is put.

The current debate about categories, particularly one like dalit, undoubtedly signifies the suppressed and the exploited groups in various social formations. But it also hinges upon whether a given category represents a monolithic historical reality or whether it refers to the multiplicity, polycentric, polyphonic and dynamic relations of life. (Guru 14)

On account of this dialectic between differing positions and agendas, rubrics and categories seldom stay static. More significantly another dialectic comes into play of who is to be included under a given rubric, once one is adopted for a specific purpose. For example, the original manifesto of the Dalit Panthers, answered the query '*Who is a dalit?*' with the widely inclusive 'Members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless, and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion' (Quoted in Omvedt 72). Kancha Ilaiah however avers, 'Dalit' as it is usually understood encompasses only the so-called untouchable castes. Though recently some organizations like the Dalit Maha Sabha of Andhra Pradesh did attempt to use the word 'Dalit' to denote SCs, STs (Scheduled Tribes) and OBCs, the popular press and the masses themselves never took up the usage' (viii). He goes on to discuss how the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party around 1984 saw the political imperative to consolidate votebanks and led the then party president Kanshi Ram to discourage the use of 'Dalit' as it separated Scheduled Castes from the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes. As an alternative, he suggested 'Bahujan' meaning 'majority'. To formulate a term that also indicates the nature of this majority constituency, Ilaiah then coins 'Dalitbahujans'. However, under this rubric he does not include Scheduled Tribes 'as strictly speaking they do not figure in the caste system' (ix), which is a little ironic taking into consideration the eponymous argument of his book. P.S Krishnan has proposed other variants on the rubric 'Dalit' such as 'Vidrohi-Dalit' to convey the militancy of Scheduled Castes, 'Sah-Dalit' to refer to Other Backward Castes and 'Vishal Dalit' to include the oppressed in the wider sense of the term (123-124). None of these variations however, have widespread use or acceptance.

INTERROGATING THE NATION SPACE AND NEGOTIATING DISCURSIVE SPACES

Given these tensions within subaltern rubrics themselves, it is little wonder that subaltern literature manifests these tensions in the form of thematic preoccupations. However, these thematic strains deal more with the dialectic between the dalit community and the constructed non-dalit community – be it the immediately surrounding Hindu community or the national community at large. Perhaps this is because that is where the protest is most vociferously directed and that is where the public debate is sought to be initiated. At the centre of this dialectic is the Dalit disillusionment with their space in the nation and its discursive construction in history. Take for example the following poems:

Dream –Tale

I jumped into fight for freedom
so that the people should know
That the oppressed also have pride for Nation
But ‘they’ got pensions and I became patient,
I understood the secret of education
penetrated by social revolutionaries
And I obtained a degree
so that oppressed should be literate
But having double graduation I’m unemployed
They think ‘Dalit’ is a permanent degree
No reform was accepted as Dalit to Dalit
And they boasted they were real reformer
And ultimately uplift of Dalit became a tale mere
A tale to be told by grandmother
To little chins and lull them.

-Shambu Bandekar (Thag 25)

O History

O history
Perhaps you know
a country is not made of stones
not even made of dust
It is made of human beings
of their blood integrity
you did not note it on your last page

O history
of the country, of children, flowers
there is history available of cradlesong
but
where is the history
of the country of rape atrocities
O country of "Satya Meva Jayate"
O history
so far we behaved like a tortoise
having out legs inside
but henceforth
making our stomach and back
a tortoise shell
we are going to be iconoclasts
to hammer upon
the unjust religion
scriptures, beings, gods
to make history...afresh
O history
We are going to record
our own history
from your last page
upto our last page.

- Parshuram Gimekar (Thag 47)

Proclamations

After many a day
Yesterday it was again declared
of achievement of real freedom
They proclaimed with national flags in hands
'We are united'
'Long Live National integration'
'Eradicate poverty and save the nation' and so on.
At the same time
Some poor naked boys with dirty bowls in hand
Standing helplessly besides roads
Looking at the 'Diwali' of the nation
with filthy eyes and empty stomach
For a piece of bread.

-Satish Pawade (Thag 83)

These three poems by Dalit poets from Maharashtra are taken from the anthology *Dalit Poetry Today* (1991) which includes Dalit poets of the second and third generation, who started writing in the 1980s and '90s. According to Dr. Subash Sawarkar, in the unpaginated foreword to the anthology, the collection was compiled by and includes poets of 'different social background as compared to the conventional Dalit poets'. Among these are a 'representative figure of womens' liberation, Malika Amarshekh, so also the lone carver of Adivasi poetry, Waharu Sonawne'. This spirit of inclusiveness is extended to the thematic range as well. Here we see departures from what the first generation of translated Dalit writing projected as the defining characteristics of Dalit literature : 'revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality'(Dangle xi). In contrast to this, Dr. Sawarkar claims that in this anthology

the collection seems neither to follow the popular trends, nor the traditional norms of the conventional "Dalit" consciousness which is firmly tied with the infernal caste system in the Indian society. On the contrary here is an attempt directed towards widening the scope of this "Dalit" consciousness and projecting it unto the various classes (in addition to the caste-groups) wherein the individuals are denied their human rights...on the basis of their Caste, Creed, Culture, Class or Sex.

The whole text of the foreword is a revealing site of the changes that are coming into force on account for the increased publicity accorded to Maharashtrian Dalit literature, especially in English translation. There is acknowledgement that even the first generation of Dalit poets from Maharashtra had been addressing a non-Dalit reader, who 'was invariably taken for the enemy'. As a result, the audience predicated the thematic 'harping and harping' on the 'revolutionary value of militancy in creativity, the denial of mysticism and superstition'. According to Sawarkar, the 'wide popularity' of this mode of poetry made the scope of Dalit poetry shrink and as a result, it began to evince continued 'self-imitation' of a

formula that had become commodified and almost prescriptive. The anthology claims to be an attempt to counteract this by evading a self-absorbed isolation and tapping into 'the multifarious aspects of human boundages in this conservative Indian society' and thus create '“The Literature of the Trodden”²¹ in its true sense.'

At one level, the dialectical changes occurring due to the reception by a non-Dalit audience require constant introspection and self-reflexivity on the part of the subaltern creator of discourse. At another level, non-subaltern creators, when articulating the concerns close to the lives and hearts of the subaltern, too need a great deal of self-reflexivity and openness to critique.

The sentiments expressed in the three poems find echoes and support in the sentiments of many non-dalits who actively work among subalterns or work with their discourses. Mahasweta Devi, for example, speaks in 'The Chains of Untouchability' of the hypocrisy that is perpetuated in the small town of Daltonganj where 'Dr. Ambedkar's birthday celebration takes place somewhere, official institutions for the upliftment of the harijans exist, but the untouchables are left untouched.' (190) She concludes her essay with a scathing critique of the large dichotomy between a nation that is making huge strides abroad and in space, even as it turns a blind eye to social evils in its backyard :

This explains why the downtrodden never stand up and fight for their legitimate rights. They have learnt that in order to survive, it is safer to suffer silently, because no one is bothered about them. We take part in international affairs, our Aryabhettas and other satellites may reach outer space, but no one in India can raise the untouchables of the

²¹ Dangle's introduction to *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Dalit Literature* interestingly notes, 'The term 'Dalit literature' can be traced to the first Dalit literary conference in 1958, which passed a resolution defining the term. However, this conference went almost unnoticed, thus proving beyond doubt that the Dalit class was indeed neglected.' (xi) It took a little over a decade to emerge from this soliloquy to the public space occupied by the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s.

innumerable *domtolis* of Palamau to the status of free individuals.

Why independence? Why say we are a free nation? What right have we to do so? After so many years of this independence, we see Tagore's words come true. Our untouchables have made us untouchables too, for we have allowed this curse of untouchability to flourish and stay. (190)

Here also the constituency addressed is not subaltern, however, this self-critique by the mainstream mildly reverberates with echoes of the benevolent paternalism of the Gandhian discourse towards Harijans. This is not in anyway to denigrate these voices that raise issues on behalf of Dalits or any other subaltern constituency. Voices like that of Mahasweta Devi are often required to give subaltern discourses that toehold in the mainstream that allows them to get a hearing in the first place, allows them to emerge from a subaltern soliloquy. These voices from the mainstream often, are also responsible for introducing and giving a certain degree of legitimation to the subaltern discourse as it makes its debut. This maybe in the form of the Edward Said's foreword to the special edition of *Selected Subaltern Studies* meant for release in America. It maybe in the form of Eleanor Zelliott and Gail Omvedt lending their name and effort to getting the first translated Dalit novel – *Vasti: Growing Up an Untouchable – life and spirit in a community in India* by Marathi Dalit writer Vasant Moon – to be published overseas. ²²

A glimpse of the complex dialectics involved in this relationship between the subaltern constituency and the non-subaltern entity who purports to speak on their behalf or on issues related to them is available in the article, 'Where non-Dalit commentators err'. Chandra Bhan Prasad and Dr. Sheoraj Singh Bechain, who are the President of the Dalit Shiksha Andolan and the Convenor of the Dalit Writer' Forum respectively, write:

²² Refer to 'A landmark in Dalit literature'. *The Hindu*. November 23, 1999, p 5.

The present-day India bears a striking similarity to the 19th century British-India, at least in one respect – writings on Dalit affairs by non-Dalits. The Dalits are virtually debarred from entering into English medium education, (public/convent systems of schooling, major source of English medium education, do not subscribe to policy of reservations, and therefore, most Dalits receive education in vernacular mediums in municipal/government schools). Those who manage to learn English and wish to articulate the voice of their community, find little favour from the media managers. This vicious cycle (of denial of English education, complemented by the hostile attitude of the press. However, only to maintain pretensions of being democratic, a section of the media occasionally becomes benevolent towards the Dalits, and publishes articles on their world view, their vision.

In this kind of socio-intellectual setting, any one who is comfortable with language, acquires some idea of the Dalit world, and finds the right connections, emerges an instant expert on Dalits affairs. This itself is a positive development, and we are witnessing the emergence of about half a dozen such experts, many of them well-intentioned though, commenting on Dalit affairs. While we are grateful to such scholars, who have, by their choice adopted Dalit issues, we at times feel greatly embarrassed to see our own distorted face in some of their writings. (21)

This article was specifically a response to an article by Gail Omvedt, who the authors claimed had in spite of being ‘fairly acquainted with the Dalit movement’ in the certain instances made representations of Dalits that they could just not let pass. ‘At the time when the Indian society is witnessing sharp polarisation, an ideological battle intensifying even further, we cannot as responsible members of the community, leave certain formulations which present distorted pictures of our history, our movements, and of our consciousness, uncontested.’ (21) The issue here is the politics of representation and counter re-presentation. Identity may be a discursive construct, but its functional parameters in society are so wide that it becomes important to have room for constructing and interrogating constructed identities, lest they ossify into constraining paradigms. In this respect, it becomes equally important that creators of discourse maintain a sense of responsible self-reflexivity and openness to intervention. This applies equally to non-subaltern

entities as well as subaltern ones. The latter too can and have produced highly prescriptive definitions of identity and authenticity that maybe have provisional validity, but need to be open to constant reevaluation. Prasad and Bechain conclude their article with the reminder that the channels of discursivity must be multidirectional, 'Dalits are keen learners, so teach us, that is alright, but learn as well. In every learner, there is an invisible teacher.'(21)

M.S.S. Pandian's article on the Pondicherry Group of Dalit intellectuals - Raj Gowthaman, A. Marx, and Ravikumar - brings together several of the foregoing issues. At one level it discusses shifting discursive centres within subalternity with special reference to the construction of the nation space. The point made is that even when the Tamil/Dravidian movement contests the hegemonic construction of the 'Indian' nation space through a politics of exclusion that privileges 'Hindi', 'the Hindi-speaking north India' and 'the Brahminical Hindu world-view', it is not 'a critique of the category of nation as such' (Pandian 294). The Dravidian nationalistic discourse sets up an alternative paradigm of the nation, which is as prone to the politics of valorization and exclusion.

Raj Gowthaman's books, *Dalit Panpadu* ('Dalit Culture') and *Dalit Paarvayil Tamil Panpadu* ('Tamil Culture from a Dalit Perspective') published in 1993 and 1994 respectively, interrogate the construction of valorized classical Tamil literature texts and heroes/rulers in the realm of social history to form a counter-discourse to the discourses of 'Indian' literature and 'Indian' history. They also however, contest the way Tamil culture and people are constructed as homogeneous through a subtle process of subordinating Dalit discourses. The alternative to this however, is not to replicate the processes of valorization, but to create 'a 'faceless' past, without heroes or heroic episodes...[u]nmarked by the specificities of 'national' glory' leading into an equally 'faceless future'(304).

Lest this Dalit sub-national culture be mistaken as one more agenda for the nation, Gowthaman hastens to clarify that this culture can only be an oppositional culture without ever formalizing itself into any form of power. He identifies 'state, caste, religion, god, morals, justice, norms, regulated man-women relationship, ideology of family, literature...' all institutions that mark civilizational achievements – as institutions of discipline and power to be resisted. (305)

This type of framework, in Gowthaman's formulation, allows for building alliances of subalternity that cut across many boundaries – with American Blacks and women, for instance – and develop a cultural framework, which like that of the tribals is seen as liminal in relation to the construct of nationality. According to Gowthaman, 'any critique of the high cultural claims of the powerful should not be informed by a desire to occupy that very space of power which they are currently occupying'(308). How possible it is in actual praxis to step outside history into a space where no 'civilizational rules of difference' (309) are in play remains to be seen. The deconstructive project though very powerful at the level of discourse, in practice leads either to a politics of constant opposition to reified reference points or to a type of anarchy where no differences are accounted for and no politics is possible. The key perhaps is to avoid slipping into a complacent posture either way and always be open to interrogation.

THE POLITICS OF LITERARY SPACES AND MEDIATION

Literature and literary discourses are integral channels of projecting constructions of identity and value systems. Hierarchical positioning within literary frameworks, incorporation into literary canons defining relative importance, legitimating mention in literary histories and overviews, inclusion in syllabi and promotion by publishing circles are all part of the dynamics of privileging within literary spaces. The many histories of subaltern re-visioning in the realm of literary spaces, be it within feminist, postcolonial or African-American discourses, articulate the acknowledgement of the power these

discourses have to naturalize or legitimate images, values, stereotypes and paradigms. They also manifest the need to control discourses in order to aid in altering existing power structures. Inevitably, as these acts of revision and rewriting are part of a cycle of displacement of certain paradigms in favour of others, the processes of privileging and deprivileging are perpetuated along different axes.

This is especially so in the case of the construction of 'national' literary canons. When a claim was made that Indian writing in English is most able to represent India to the outside world, significant parts of the establishment linked with literary production in the regional languages went up in arms over the audacity of the claim. It remains however, that when Indian literature is marketed outside the nation or even within it, texts in English or in translation, especially those that have garnered accolades and so have the seal of external legitimation, are at a distinct advantage.

These discursive forces come equally into play in the realm of Dalit 'literature'. It is here, perhaps, that it becomes most evident how subtly the dialectics of identity construction operate in relation to the interaction of subaltern and hegemonic discourses, as well as within or among subaltern discourses. Take for instance, the politics of designating literary forefathers (and foremothers when the discourse places equal emphasis on the intersection of subalternity along the axis of gender). As in all such projects of tracing literary lineages, there are quite a few contenders. depending on what characteristics and aspects are sought to be highlighted. Arjun Dangle in 'Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future' maintains that though research has tried to trace back 'the origins of the Dalit literary movement' variously to the fourteenth century saint-poet Chokhamela, Mahatma Phule or S.M.Mate, the lineage should actually go back to Dr. Ambedkar. This despite the fact that Ambedkar did not produce 'imaginative literature' and that the Dalit literary movement flourished only after the Ambedkar's demise (237-238). To this lineage, Dangle also ascribes the reason for the Dalit literary

movement having its 'beginning' 'in the Marathi language in Maharashtra' (238). This is a formulation that at once privileges, among other things, forefathers, originary moments and the Dalit literary movement in Maharashtra. It is a privileging that has persisted with Marathi Dalit literature (evincing a preponderance of writing by men) being translated into English allowing for a wider reading public, easier consumption and inclusion into hegemonic institutional academic structures involving research and syllabi formulation.

This wider parameter of representational access is as spurious a claim to primacy of any sort as the claim that Indian literature in English or English translation is representative of the national mindscape and literary discourse. It is often just a matter of having entered the arena of hegemonic public debate on terms that are acceptable to it or open to its use. Challapalli Swaroopa Rani thus, speaks in 'Dalit Women's Writing in Telugu' of a different tradition and lineage including nationalist poetry like Joshua's 'Gabbilam' and affiliative links with the Dalit Panther Movement (in way similar to the way the Dalit Panther Movement traced affiliations with the Black Panther Movement²³). Her statement that, 'To date there are about 30 dalit poetry anthologies in Telugu (among them Chikkanavutunne Pata, Nisari. Bahuvadasau Valivera, Padunekkina Pata. Gunde Dappu etc. are important)' (WS-21) is indicative of the massive erasures that are part of the commodification of Dalit literature in the mainstream or even among other Dalit constituencies. It also reveals the processes of hierarchization through ascription of value/importance within particular constituencies. Since her project deals with Dalit women's writing in Telugu, Challapalli Swaroopa Rani designates a literary foremother in 'Molla, who wrote the *Ramayanam* in Telugu in the 13th century' and 'could be called the first dalit woman poet' (WS-22). Does 'first dalit woman poet' take a pan-national frame or does it refer only to the realm of Telugu poetry? Is there a discourse on Dalit literature that can envelope

²³ It is perhaps an interesting indicator of discursive asymmetricality that there is not much recorded proof of a reciprocal sense of affiliation felt by the Black Movement for Dalits or of the Maharashtrian Dalit Movement for the Telugu Dalit Movement.

the irreducible heterogeneity of the constituencies included under the rubric 'Dalit' in India?

Even in the delimitation of literature as written, a whole sphere of Dalit expression is placed under erasure simply because it does not fall into categories that are amenable to particular projects. The subaltern can speak and often has been speaking for a long time, but our frameworks limit our capability to hear and perceive. Our so-called structures of privilege are the very means that debilitate us to a certain extent and place limitations on what we can know and how we can know it. At the same time, those very same structures of privilege allow those who have access to them, to facilitate the entry of the subaltern into those hegemonic discourses, albeit on terms that very subtly coopt its subalternity.

Viramma: life of an untouchable, as mentioned in the introduction, is a highly mediated book, being translated from oral Tamil discourse into French and then into English by yet another translator. However, the nature of the mediation is much more inflected than that. Will Hobson, who translated the text into English writes in his 'Translator's note':

Viramma's knowledge of popular songs and laments made her a valuable source for Josiane Racine's ethnomusicological research; but when asked about her life, Viramma's initial tendency was to play down its hardship and, in general, to gloss over any feelings that might appear provocative or critical of the established order. Over five years, a close relationship developed between the two women, which while acknowledging their differences of class and caste – 'Sinnamma', Viramma's epithet for Josiane Racine, reflects the latter's middle-class Tamil background – allowed Viramma to speak more openly about her memories and experiences. A sense of trust and affection prompted her to discuss subjects which, under other circumstances, would have seemed either too personal, too controversial or as her husband Manikkam puts it, 'degrading': that is, likely to play into the hands of those who would stigmatise her caste as 'uncivilized' and deserving of their position in society. (v)

Speaking of the 'inevitable compromises and omission when an oral literature is represented in print' he lists the inability to 'retain all the context that informs conversations – gestures, facial expressions, the pitch and tone of voice, the interjections of other participants'. Also there is an inability to capture the way in which 'Viramma pronounces, contracts and alters words in distinctive ways which, incidentally, the castes of the *ur* consider as a falling short of 'correct' Tamil usage'(vi). Like Josiane, Hobson decided against transcreating this phenomenon by using British or American demotic dialects. He also retains 'her use of swearing and sexually explicit language' notwithstanding external criticism on that count. In spite of being aware of the elisions this whole process of mediation would cause, he expresses the 'hope that this translation allows Viramma's identity to emerge, not just through her thoughts, emotions and the ways she has reacted to the events of her life, but also through the way she expressed herself to Josiane Racine throughout the 1980s' (vi).

Josiane and Jean-Luc Racine admit the inflected nature of Josiane's relationship with Viramma. 'Meeting after meeting, year after year, confidence after confidence and then complicity grew between two women, both Tamil. Listening to Viramma was to hear those who normally do not speak, who humiliation renders circumspect or even silent in the presence of others.'(309) This is probably one of those situations that would often be immediately classified as delimited by axes of power and privilege that render 'true' dialogue impossible. However, admitting that such asymmetry is the nature of all discourses and negotiating it with as much responsibility and self-reflexivity possible, allows for the possibility of alteration in that asymmetry. It allows for the subaltern to speak, albeit framed by the concerns of more hegemonic discourses. It allows us to hear, knowing the mediated nature of what we are hearing and accounting for it as best as we can.

Viramma belongs to the Paraiyar caste. Paraiyar, according to the Racines means ‘the people of the parai’ – a drum played by the men of the Vettiyan sub-caste to which Viramma and her husband belong. Apparently it is from this word that the French and British colonizers derived the more generally applied term pariah. The Racines explain the frames of reference these set up in the text :

Depending on how it is used, this word can sound either like a deliberate insult, a condescending mark of contempt or an inescapable fate. Unlike her husband [a communist sympathizer] and her son [connected to the DMK party], Viramma has always used it, and so we also kept it, even if it is no longer used publicly and even though many people including the government of Tamil Nadu, call for all caste names to be abandoned. But we have kept it, above all, because Viramma has always seen herself as such, and stayed faithful to the language of her everyday life: *paratchi*, a Pariah woman; *paraimelam*, the Pariah orchestra; *paraceri*, the *ceri* of the Paraiyar... Bearing witness to her words and her vision of the world, we have not put the term Dalit artificially into her mouth. She was unaware of the word throughout the ten years of our conversations and she still didn't know its meaning in 1996. Neither have we toned down her forthright language, considered by puritan or non-puritan or more hypocritical local mores to set her caste apart, nor added an echo of the atrocities committed against Dalits in Tamil Nadu or elsewhere to make her account more dramatic or to enrich its impact.

The testimony we give after listening to Viramma is not a Dalit text – in the sense that Dalit literature can be said to have specific aims – but it is the text of a Dalit. It is not in a primary sense, a text attacking oppression, but it is a text which tells how an oppressed woman lives and thinks... Hers is essentially an example of the internalisation of oppression, which must be understood as an ideological system representative of the old order of the world. In telling her life, in expressing her philosophy, Viramma does not formulate a damning critique of that system: she simply tells it in her own words, how it functions in the village space, in the heads of the ‘high-born’ and ‘the low-born’. And her portrait of the ‘low-born’ makes us understand both how the system has held for so long and why it is cracking apart today. (310-311)

The convoluted dialectics of identity construction requires this play of contexts and positions. The Racines are aware that the images and voice of Viramma, in their text, may offend a more militant Dalit sensibility. Their plea however, is that her voice, in however mediated a fashion, be heard too, even if it does not seem to fit into the agenda of Dalit politics that easily. In making this plea they reveal the programmatic nature of such Dalit politics as inscribed in the realm of literature. Like other hegemonic discourses that attempted to silence Dalit subalternity because it interrogated their premises, Dalit identity too can become a discourse that attempts to place under erasure those subaltern voices and discourses that problematize it. This dynamic of contestation and negotiation through supplementarity are part of the processes that keep the axes of subalternity shifting and the parameters of identity fluid.

CHAPTER IV

ABORIGINAL SUBALTERN DIALECTICS IN AUSTRALIA

Something is gone, something surrendered, still
We will go forward and learn,
Not swamped and lost, watered away, but keeping
Our own identity, our pride of race.
Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river
And where is your wine? There is only the river.
- Kath Walker
'Assimilation – No!'

Aboriginality is a concept linked *a priori* to the moment of colonial conquest in Australia and the discursive struggle that come into play within asymmetrical moments of cultural contact. The power to define the nature of those moments of contact, predicates within the discursive construction of Australia, the power to define identity and narrativize history vis-à-vis that construction of nationhood. What was to the Aborigines the invasion of 1788, was narrativized as the beginning of a peaceful British settlement for non-Aborigines. What was in 1988 the celebration of two hundred years of survival of the Aborigines in the face of policies approximating racial genocide, was to many non-Aborigines the bicentennial celebrations of the formation of the Australian nation. The more virulent the struggle for discursive control, the more conceptual continuums such as 'identity' and 'authenticity' become sites of heated debate and contestation especially along the front of appropriation of voice and within the framework of the construction of the putatively post-colonial nation.

To say that Aboriginality is a construct, begs the query who makes the construction and to what effect. The shifts in government policy from assimilation through integration to the 'multicultural' policy have had the cumulative effect of attempting to deracinate the Aboriginal peoples under the auspices of 'national' cultural policies. These various state policies were all changing modes of

managing cultural difference through administrative channels that tried to eliminate it, subsume it or accommodate it in ways that did not threaten the conception of the Australian nation by hegemonic groups. In these circumstances, Aborigines continuously reiterate their demand to be the arbiters of the parameters of their own identity and history. David Hollinsworth avers, 'Arguments about the nature of Aboriginality and the means of claiming, contesting and authenticating Aboriginal identity are central to both the future of Aboriginal Studies as an academic area of study and to political struggles over Australian nationalism and the position of indigenous people within it.' (Quoted in Bourke. 10)

Brunton identifies basically two contradictions that beset the construction of Aboriginal identity in the public sphere. The first is 'the possible pressure to conform to certain ideas of Aboriginality' and the second is the 'conflict between local regionalised identity as against a concept of pan-Aboriginality based on a common cultural framework'(19-17). Both these problems extend into the realm of literary discourse as well. The imperative to build a politics and an aesthetics based on identity can easily slip into a highly prescriptive mode of cultural determinism that perpetuates a mechanism of exclusion based on the specious constructs of authenticity or conformity. Equally so, it can subsume micro-interests and the politics of difference under the homogenizing action of a generic rubric. The impulse can be quite hegemonic in its proclivities and therefore very open to subversion as well.

IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Identity and the concomitant value-laden parameter of authenticity have been used to measure Aboriginal writing both by the white critical establishment and from within the Aboriginal creative community itself. The dominant white discourse used these parameters as a double-edged sword that cut both ways. Initially, denigration or approbation of creative Aboriginal production was

accorded after it was measured against the scale of how close it approached the hegemonic discourse's own familiar literary and cultural standards. Mary Durack, in her patronizing foreword to Colin Johnson's (later known as Mudrooroo) first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*, reflects the ethos of an integrationist policy that sees him as a success story on account of his not conforming to traditional negative stereotypes of Aboriginal males held by whites. As his mentor, her approval is tinged with a surprised awareness that he seemed to have broken free of certain moulds which were invariably associated with Aboriginal youths:

An above average I.Q. could however, have been more burden than advantage had he inherited the typical instability of the out-camp people. We observed that Colin was not apparently lazy. He found jobs for himself about the place and did them well. He also had a sense of time and he began to seem – was it possible? – even dependable.(Johnson xvii)

In his later years, however, this was to dog him as a negative assessment for it marked a certain lack of what the dominant community had constructed as being characteristic manifestations of Aboriginal identity. It marked him as someone who had carved a niche for himself within the establishment. As a result, his writings – both creative and critical – were deemed as not being authentic enough. The fact that he had established himself as a writer and critic and was part of the university institutional framework, heightened this sense of his supposed alienation. His educational background and travels had furthermore given him substantial exposure to world literature, which he brought to bear on his writing in terms of content and aesthetic features. Duncan Graham complains that 'Narogin writes as a white academic, caught up in the jargon of his trade, unable to escape back to his cultural roots'(Quoted in Shoemaker 86)

In many ways Mudrooroo became both the initiator and the eye of the storm in Australian literary circles surrounding the use of authenticity and Aboriginality as yardsticks within the Aboriginal literary community. His own

attempts to steep himself further in Aboriginal lore can be witnessed in the multiple changes he has made in his appellation. He went from the white integrationist appellation of Colin Johnson, through to Mudrooroo Narogin – because he was born in Narogin, Western Australia – and then Mudrooroo Nyoongah or Nyungar – because Nyungar referred to the hybrid indigenous peoples of south-west Western Australia who he considered his people. However, when he tired of explaining how he had adopted Nyungar as an alternative to the term ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Aborigine’, which he considered a homogenizing ‘white imposition on the indigenous peoples of Australia’ (Thompson 55), he switched to simply Mudrooroo. The word means ‘paperbark’ in Bibbulmun, the language of his mother’s people and was a totem of his being a writer. This then is the politics of naming at the level of individuals to reflect their connection with their Aboriginal heritage. Kath Walker and Ruby Langford too have modified their names to Oodgeroo Kathie Cochrane and Ruby Langford Ginibi respectively. At the collective level, the rubrics ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Black’ have been used depending on what aspect of the collective identity was sought to be foregrounded.

Mudrooroo has been intensely critical of other Aboriginal writers on the grounds that they compromised or moulded their Aboriginality to suit market forces and the demands of a publishing industry geared to accommodate the Aboriginal discourse. In *Writing from the Fringe*, Mudrooroo trains his critical guns repetitively at some writers who he feels have commodified their Aboriginality. Time and again, he accuses Sally Morgan and Glenyse Ward of being accommodated or coopted by the hegemonic white discourse. He feels they ‘do not see themselves as part of an active ongoing movement, but as individuals either searching for their roots or seeking equal opportunity in a multicultural Australia’ (1990: 14) The styles of their books too are, according to him, proof of their cooptation by the traditions of the hegemonic discourse.

Aboriginal literature as a literature of the fringe does not belong to the Metropolitan tradition, or does it? This is a matter of contention, for example when teaching Aboriginal literature, students have drawn my attention to the styles of *Wandering Girl* and *My Place* [by Ward and Morgan respectively] as lying respectively in such popular women's genre as 'Mill and Boon' and 'gothic romances'.(1990: 33)

The denigration implied in the comparison is palpable. Later in the same book, Mudrooroo implies that because *My Place* falls within the category of the battler genre and has a happy conclusion, Sally Morgan defies the unwritten Aboriginal dictum that 'There can be no happy endings until liberation'(1990: 162). Even Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love To Town* is critiqued for steering 'clear of any political confrontation' and therefore failing to use the genre of the life story to challenge 'the hegemony of White Australia'(1990:163). In his later critical survey, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: milli milli wangka*, also he cites Sally Morgan as exemplifying the agenda of reconciliation, which asks that 'Australianness' be given precedence over 'Indigenality'(1997:196-7)

These observations seem a little perverse in their logic at times, especially as Mudrooroo himself experimented with a mixture of European modes of expression such as Existentialism and Surrealism in his own oeuvre. He too has had his fair share of critical acclaim. Moreover, by his analysis, very few Aboriginal authors qualify as representatives of Aboriginality. Labumore Elsie Roughsey, Robert Bropho, Lionel Fogarty, Kevin Gilbert and of course sometimes he himself qualify. Jack Davies, Archie Weller, Sally Morgan, Ruby Langford and Glenyse Ward fail to make to mark. However, the tables were turned on him in the Aboriginality and authenticity debate when evidence came to light that he was of questionable Aboriginal lineage. Perhaps at this juncture, it would be appropriate to leave this debate with two comments that point out of this mode that can so easily slip into a cultural determinism which deals, to its own detriment, in the politics of exclusion. The first is taken from Simon During's

review of *Writing from the Fringe* and the second is Mudrooroo's own response to the query : 'How do you know what Aboriginality is?'

Even if there were such a thing as an identifiable 'Aboriginality', this book is part of the process of its dissolution ... In fact, any primordial Aboriginality would itself be hybridized, textualized, as soon as it is expressed in writing. (Quoted in Shoemaker, 1993: 86-7)

Well it's the quest that matters and not the arrival. The process is that continuing one. You know ...it's a dialectical process. So, if you try to go back into your Aboriginality you'll create some sort of Aboriginality because there isn't this sort of state there which you can go back to anyway ...If you believe in pan-Aboriginality and, of course, the Aboriginal culture is usually community and land-based, you should move around a lot to make those connections and also see the parts of the land to again make a connection. If you haven't been to a place it's very difficult to describe it. (Quoted in Shoemaker, 1993: 161)

RE –VISIONING HISTORY AND THE NATION

History is a way of not just narrativizing the past, but of creating narrative spaces for the present. White Australian history constructed and narrativized the story of contact between the Aboriginal peoples and the European colonizers along lines that placed under erasure a plethora of sites marked by the inhuman destruction of large sections of the indigenous community and their culture. The very concept of *terra nullius* allowed the Australian law to perpetuate the myth of peaceful settlement history that facilitated the denial of Aboriginal claims to their own sacred land. The Mabo decision, besides taking the Aborigines one step further in their struggle for land rights, called into question some of the premises that had gone into the construction of this fallacious sense of Australian national identity. The Bicentennial history project too gave Aborigines a forum to articulate alternative historical perspectives. The construction of multicultural Australia as a land of immigrants, where the Aborigines represented the first wave, the British the second and later ethnic immigrants the continuing third

wave too was shown to be a mode of narrativization that subsumed the claims of the Aboriginal peoples who had lived on the continent for over 60, 000 years with that of those who had occupied the land for just over 200 years and more recent arrivals.

In 'Assimilation, Unspeakable Traces and the Ontologies of the Nation' Pugliese argues that under the framework of assimilation and multiculturalism, for example, in 'the schema of restitutive colonial teleology the Aborigine is magnanimously positioned as the first immigrant who – silently, submissively and fatalistically – will prepare the ground for the 'second great wave of immigration'. The agentic history of indigenous contestation and struggle against the invasion is thus reduced to silence' (230). This requires an 'active forgetfulness' (245) of the violence of nation building discourses whose practices participated in the violence of mastery. 'When situated within the networks of exchange and commodification of the neo-colonial Australian economy, the anonymous traditional Aborigine circulates as the token other who can be continuously appropriated and reinscribed in the nation's cultural capital.'(231) Today, the aboriginal discourse is contesting such reinscription and commodification with alternative modes of visioning and narrativizing realities.

Oral histories legends and myths form an integral part of the Aboriginal mode of narrativizing time. Stephen Garton relates how academic historians critiqued Phillip Pepper's Aboriginal oral history *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be* (1980) which 'retains the concerns and language of Aborigines with minimal editorial interference' (203). They felt the material should be put to academic use 'incorporated into a wider social history of 'native policy' and black response' (203). However, Diane Barwick pointed out that the historiographical techniques academic historians had been trained in, developed within the Eurocentric frame of the rise of nation states and might be inadequate to deal with culturally very different material. Historical practices and methods are culture

specific. Moreover, in the face of the national myths that have been passed off for history in Australia the whole question of academic credibility is problematized.

Biographies by Aborigines or in collaboration with representatives of the mainstream too sought to provide alternative perspectives. Elsie Roughsey, whose Aboriginal name is Labumore, for example, speaking to Virginia Huffer about a project to teach school children Aboriginal legends avers, 'We will teach the things they do not know, of how things were done in our early days, before the white man came to take away all our good laws and customs and put in their poor stuff.'(Huffer 72) Labumore went from being an object in Virginia Huffer's psychobiographical study of some of the Aboriginal women in Mornington Island to eventually tell her own life story assisted by editors. Interestingly, she is singled out for approval by Mudrooroo who feels her sense of community and the sadness of her closure remove her work from 'the battler genre and firms it as a black text.'(1990: 161)

COMMODIFICATION AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In the foreword to *The Dawn is at Hand*, Kath Walker admits to being aware of her commodification when she says, 'I am well aware that the success of *We Are Going*, which went quickly into seven editions, was not due to any greatness in my simple verse, but to the fact that it was the work of an Aboriginal. It had therefore what I believe the French call a *succès de curiosité*.' However that seems, to her, a small price to pay for being part of the discourses that increase public awareness among whites about 'the plight of the Aborigines'. Revealing her accommodation of white readers' preferences, she adds that her choice of poems has left little room in the present volume for the criticism to be leveled against her that her poetry is imbued with propaganda or is 'somewhat angry and bitter; as though atrocities were never to be mentioned by nice people'.(3)

Mudrooroo himself was not beyond the grip of niche marketing by the publishing industry. His first novel also happened to be the first novel to be published by an Aborigine in Australia. According to Shoemaker, the blurb of the original copy of the book had a conspicuous red promotional blurb that read:

A breakthrough in Australian writing – by the first young intellectual of aboriginal [sic] blood ... an ex-bodgie ... His talent could rock you with its charge of promise. (1993:17)

The commodification of Mudrooroo's achievement made the unique selling point of the book the fact that it was a debut novel emerging out of Black Australia by an Aboriginal 'intellectual' authenticated by his blood lineage. Even later imprints of the novel stresses the lineage and pioneering literary nature of the work in hyperbolic diction, 'Its publication in 1965 marked a unique literary event, for this was the first novel by any writer of Aboriginal blood to be published in Australia' (Shoemaker, 1993:17).

When Mudrooroo critiques *My Place*, he also marks out for sarcastic mention that though most of the book employs 'Standard English as this is her [Sally Morgan's] everyday discourse...when she uses the methods of oral history to tape-record the voices of three members of her family, and introduce them into her text, the English blackens'. He feels that even the editing of the Aboriginal discourse does not detract from its 'authenticity', but actually makes it more accessible to more 'Black and White' readers alike. 'As a publishing ploy, it was extremely successful and her book sold in thousands' (1990: 163) This raises yet another facet of the process of commodification. As John Scott asks in his appraisal of Aboriginal theatre – does 'sold out' mean selling out? The questions he asks about how Aboriginal theatre should measure success can be applied to the other genres of Aboriginal creativity. 'Is success filling a mainstream theatre with middle-class white Australians? Can this be achieved without selling out our Aboriginality? Who *is* the audience for black theatre?' (109) Surely emerging out of soliloquy into the sphere of public debate demands that the subaltern

constituency engage with itself as well as with hegemonic discourses. The point being made, however, is that it is a thin line that divides success within the mainstream and cooptation by it. One that must be trod on carefully.

Of concern also, is the control of the Aboriginal voice and forms of language through the process of editing in general, most often at the linguistic level into Standard English and at the level of content in terms of designating what is acceptable. Jack Davis relates an anecdote about how a friend who had submitted the manuscripts of Archie Weller's short stories to a publisher got back a note from the editor reading : 'Well written, but the reading public will not believe that what Weller writes about really happened'(Davis 14).The issue at stake is discursive control of content, forms and meaning that can be exercised without understanding, respect or self-reflexivity. Worse still, it is about mechanisms that will silence what will not sell in a market informed by hegemonic mores. This is especially pertinent in the case of oral literature where decisions about translation or transcription can alter the complete nature and intent of a text²⁴. Also at stake are community access to control over funding, to publishing houses and an awareness of the determining nature of audience expectations.

Yet another form of institutionalization that is part of the process of incorporating Aboriginal discourses into frameworks of the establishment is through educational institutions. Shoemaker notes that 'the first university-level course in 'Aboriginal Literature' began at Murdoch University in 1983' with Colin Johnson as founding tutor. In 1984, Archie Weller was nominated writer-in-residence at ANU (1989: 268). Kevin Gilbert notes how in the 1980s 'A whole new education 'industry' has arisen in the academic area where it would appear that every student is doing his or her Ph.D. English thesis on 'Aboriginal Literature''(xvi). On one hand, this implies more exposure for Aboriginal writers

²⁴ Refer to S. Muecke. 'Aboriginal Literature – Oral'. *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*. Ed. L .Hergenhan. Ringwood: Penguin. pp.27-35.

and increased job positions for Aboriginal instructors. On the other, it also involves becoming part of the privileging discourses of those institutions and therefore having a vested interest in perpetuating or replicating the discourses that sustain them. This is part of a dialectical double-bind that marks most subaltern discourses that are offering alternative paradigms to the mainstream.

Subalternity is most potent then when it occupies liminal spaces that allow it to interrogate and maintain a distance from the reified positions it is intervening in. However, these are moments and spaces in subalternity that can very easily be transformed into reified positions themselves. This is why there is constant need for internal critique if a subaltern constituency is to maintain its potential to intervene in a viable way. Jackie Huggins writes in her critique of Sally Morgan's *My Place* revealing how this internal critique in subalternity is discouraged on specious grounds that would eventually be debilitating to the subaltern discourse itself:

In writing this article I stand to be castigated on a number of fronts. Some non-Aboriginal academic colleagues have suggested that I make my comments to Morgan in an 'Aboriginal' forum (in order, I take it, not to embarrass the Aboriginal race). What forums are these then? On the other hand I have never once advised these colleagues not to criticise their own as professionals in a white forum. It appears to be a form of inverted racism being acted out here. Therefore when Blacks publicly analyse and criticise each other it is perceived as infighting. However, when non-Aboriginals do the same it is considered a healthy exercise in intellectual stimulation. Why is the area of intra-racial Aboriginal debate such a sacred site? (463)

Perhaps one reason for this suggested delicacy is that the Aboriginal community has not been very open to external critique by non-Aborigines. This position exemplified in Jackie Huggins' own strong declaration, 'I detest the imposition that anyone who is non-Aboriginal can define my Aboriginality for me and my race. Neither do I accept any definition of Aboriginality by non-

Aboriginals as it insults my intelligence, spirit and soul'(459). This vehemence comes from a long history of discursive fallacies perpetuated by non-Aboriginals to maintain socio-economic and political power. That part of the vehemence that spurns further attempts at appropriation of voice and discursive control is well justified. However, when the subaltern appropriates the power to question and make interventions, it also cannot interminably protect itself from external interventions. By very virtue of questioning and subverting the status quo, it opens itself to reciprocal action. This it must counter and negotiate constructively based upon the merit of the particular situation. Engaging in public debate makes it imperative that the subaltern also listen to its worst critics and respond not by shutting them out but by countering their positions where they are invalid and taking heed when they are valid.

CHAPTER V

INTERROGATING POSTCOLONIALITIES

we were people before we were citizens
- Kath Walker
'Civilisation'

This country is broken into a thousand pieces;
its cities, its religion, its caste,
its people, and even the minds of the people
- all are broken, fragmented.
- Bapurao Jagtap
'This Country is Broken'

Postcolonialism is a term that has been problematized on at least two grounds that are pertinent to this study. Anne McClintock argues in 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism' that the term 'in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism runs the risk of obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power' (294) It also fails to capture nuances or differences in types of colonization and concomitantly in types of de-colonization or the multifarious and pervasive subtlety of globalization as a neo-colonial force. Ella Shohat comments in 'Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'':

This problematic formulation collapses very different national-racial formations – the United States, Australia and Canada, on the one hand, and Nigeria, Jamaica, and India, on the other – as equally 'post-colonial'. Positioning Australia and India, for example, in relation to an imperial centre, simply because they were both colonies, equates the relations of the colonized white settlers to the Europeans at the 'center' with that of the colonized indigenous populations to the Europeans. It also assumes that white settler countries and emerging Third World nations broke away from the 'center' in the same way. Similarly, white Australians and Aboriginal

Australians are placed in the same 'periphery', as though they were co-habitants vis-à-vis the 'center'. The critical differences between Europe's genocidal oppression of Aboriginals in Australia, indigenous peoples of the Americas and Afro-diasporic communities. *and* Europe's domination of European elites in the colonies are leveled with an easy stroke of the 'post'. The term 'post-colonial,' in this sense, masks the white settlers' colonialist-racist policies towards indigenous peoples not only before independence also after the official break from the imperial center, while also de-emphasising neocolonial global positionings of First World settler-states. (324)

According to Ania Loomba, 'When nationalist thought becomes enshrined as the official dogma of the postcolonial State, its exclusions are enacted through the legal and educational systems, and often they simply duplicate the exclusions of colonialism' (198) She cites as an example to prove her point Kancha Ilaiah's position that to the Dalit in India the culture of the hegemonic Hindu upper-caste as disseminated through the educational system is as alienating as the colonial imposition of English education under the auspices of Macaulay's minute.

What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook that talked about Milton's *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*, or Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Macbeth* or Wordsworth's poetry about nature in England, or a Telugu text-book which talked about Kalidasa's *Meghsandesham*, Bommera Potana's *Bhagvatam*, or Nannaya and Tikkana's *Mahabharatham* except the fact that one text-book is written with 26 letters and the other in 56 letters? We do not share the contents of either, we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. We cannot locate our family settings in them. In none of these books do we find words that are familiar to us. Without the help of a dictionary neither makes any sense to us. How does it make any difference to us whether it is Greek and Latin that are written in Roman letters or Sanskrit that is written in Telegu. (Ilaiah 15)

This dialectic equally informs the process of creating subaltern discourses that emerge out of a soliloquy directed primarily at the subaltern community and efforts to mobilize it. However, in the very process of engaging with hegemonic discourses in the sphere of public debate the mechanisms of cooptation or accommodation dialectically interact with the subaltern's potential to interrogate subvert and provide alternative paradigms. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge point out, 'The Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo Narogin Noongah certainly recognizes the paradox of his writing in the language of the master, for the master, in novels and criticism that nevertheless insist upon the category of 'Aboriginality' as a defining feature of the Aboriginal postcolonial.' (Mishra and Hodge 281) Recuperative work through discourses formerly or still controlled or predominated by hegemonic forces involves this sense of loss simultaneous with the sense of having created a space from which to articulate its concerns. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge suggest that 'we drop the hyphen, and effectively use 'postcolonialism' as an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power' (284)

At a socio-political level the Dalits in India and the Aborigines in Australia are potential sites of the way these two countries attempt to construct their postcolonial status. The rise in recent times of a fundamentalist Hindu Right in India has foregrounded many issues of discursive control. Increasing public awareness of the way in which nationalist historiography, the media, the educational system and the legal system can be interpellated to the ends of the party in power are becoming more evident as the new custodians of power seek to alter the configurations of these discourses to their advantage. This site of rupture is has become a cause for concern for members of the old guard or those who are not sympathetic to the ideologies of the new hegemonic forces. It is also an opportunity for those that seek to not only reveal the constructed nature of what had been naturalized before but also that which is sought to be naturalized under the auspices of Hindutva's conceptualization of a Hindu Rashtra. Subaltern

constituencies such as the Dalits, Adivasis, religious minorities and ethnic constituencies are employing their subalternity to contest and reconceptualise the new and old notions of their relation to the state. The result is a palpable fragmentation of the national identity, as modes of continued internal colonization are laid bare.

In Australia too with the policy of reconciliation being advocated in some quarters, there is a realization that many narratives of national identity are going to have to be reinscribed. David Roberts details the nature of the relation between the Aboriginal peoples and the Australian nation, which did not even accord them full citizenship until the referendum of 1967. Although at some levels the changes were merely mechanical and on paper, the result of the referendum recognized the claim of the Aboriginal people to a space within the formulation of the Australian nation they had never had before. It enabled for the devolution of some powers and even facilitated the inclusion of the Aboriginal peoples in the census.

Over the past 200 years Australia has moved from colonial status to independence while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have remained in a situation described ... as one of *internal colonialism*. Internal colonialism is characterised by relations of dominance and subordination, the expropriation of the land and natural resources of the colonised peoples, the exploitation of their labour and their marginalisation to the fringes of majority society. It involves systematic discrimination of the subject peoples by the conquering group in a manner that serves to separate them and entrench inequality. Their subordination is justified and rationalised by the emergence of ideologies based on beliefs of racial and cultural superiority and becomes institutionalised throughout the structures of society. (Roberts 221)

One way of counteracting this phenomenon in the case of the Aborigines of Australia, has been to articulate alternative notions of nationhood. Ian

Anderson in 'Aboriginal nation(s)' argues that while, 'Notions of nationhood, on the other hand imply an imagined community of people connected by a common experience of colonialism', it can also be the substitution of one regime of hegemony for another. [W]hilst notions of aboriginal nationhood subvert aspects of the colonial tradition, they do risk collapsing particular histories and identities into a unitary category' (Anderson 68) These are the pitfalls of identity politics and pan-identities. He adds, 'Further, globalisation highlights the limitations of Aboriginal political forms which seek social change through political action oriented primarily at the Australian nation state. ...Perhaps rather than 'Aboriginal nation(s)?' we should be seeking indications of an imminent global Indigenous' (Anderson 80) to offset the impact of globalization on indigenous communities.

The term postcolonial as applied to countries like India and Australia thus is continuously problematized by subaltern constituencies within the putative nation space who articulate the ways in which they have been excluded or marginalised within the national equation, through modes that replicate the structures of colonialism. The 'post' in postcolonialism does not occlude the violence of colonialism perpetuating itself in novel forms nor does it preclude the continued contestation of different modes of. In 'Assimilation. Unspeakable Traces and the Ontologies of the Nation' Joseph Pugliese avers, 'National identity, as a symbolic construct is always mobile, historically contingent and unstable, despite attempts to secure the figure by invoking the grounding operations of ontology, and its metaphysical baggage of privilege. Indeed the very semiotic status of the icons and figures of national identity generates the possibility for an interrogation and a rewriting of claims' (251).

It is equally important for us to be aware of the proclivities our own discourses have of perpetrating modes of discursive colonialism. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge point out that 'even with the best of intentions one might, and sometimes does, give the impression that through one's own discourses the Other

is now representable without due regard to its bewildering complexity' (278-9). Discursive institutionalisation of difference and the plenitude of realities under the framework of research operates through an implicit silencing of what it does not foreground. As Joseph Pugliese puts it in 'Parasiting "Post"-Colonialism: On the (Im)possibility of a Disappropriative Practice', there is a 'disjunction between a critical "post"-colonial practice and recursive strategies of neo-colonialism. It is this disjunction which generates those polarised spaces which empower one to critique oppression in the "public" sphere without having to account for the ethics of one's own cultural production within the confines of the institutional spaces one occupies.'(351)

The politics of subalternity will entail a continual modification of power structures and the continual shifting of subalternity. These fissures, displacements and configurations make the politics of reading possible. Part of the politics of reading involves the use of contingent theoretical constructs and rubrics to facilitate intervention. There are modes of discursive parasitism and colonialism involved in the readings that constitute this work. This too is part of the dialectic of the study of subalternity.

...[I]f we ask ourselves why it is that we attack historiography's dominant discourses, why we seek to find a resistant presence which has not been completely emptied or extinguished by the hegemonic, our answer must surely be that it is in order to envisage a realm of freedom in which we ourselves might speak. Our political concern is thus differently constructed from that of the subaltern. It contains a contradiction; but in such circumstances our best practice is to let it stand... . To seek ways out of it, back to the realms of the absolute, whether in the form of post-structuralist Critic, or of the historian *engagé*, serves only to reinforce the myth that there can be such a transcendent subject-position. (O'Hanlon 219)

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alam, Javeed. 'Peasantry, Politics and Historiography: Critique of New Trend in Relation to Marxism' in *Social Scientist*. Vol.11, No.117, February,1983. pp. 43-54.
- Amin, Shahid and Dipesh Chakrabarty. 'Preface'. *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Delhi: OUP, 1996.pp. vii-viii.
- Anand, Mulk Raj and Eleanor Zelliot (eds.). *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1992.
- Anderson. Ian. 'Aboriginal Nation(s)' in *Meridian*, Vol 14:2, 1995.pp.65-82.
- Ashcroft. Bill et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London: Routledge. 1989.
- Barker, F. et al, (eds.). *Colonial discourse / postcolonial theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.
- Bhadra, Gautam. et al, (eds.). *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: OUP. 1999.
- Bhattacharya. Sabyasachi. 'History from Below' in *Social Scientist*. Vol.11, No.119. April, 1983. pp.3-20.
- Bhaumik. S.. 'North-East India: The Evolution of a Post-Colonial Region'. *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State*. Ed. P. Chatterjee. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. pp.310-327.
- Bourke. Colin et al (eds.). *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*. St.Lucia: UQP, 1994.
- Bourke. Eleanor. 'Images and Realities'. *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*. Eds.Colin Bourke et al . St.Lucia: UQP, 1994.pp.4-16.
- Brunton, R..*Black Suffering, White Guilt?* Victoria: Institute of Public Affairs Ltd, 1993.

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'DISCUSSION: Invitation to a Dialogue'. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: OUP, 1985. pp.364-376.
- Chatterjee, Partha (ed.). *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Chopra. Suneet. 'Missing Correct Perspective' in *Social Scientist*. Vol. 10, No.111, August 1982. pp.55-63.
- Dangle, Arjun (ed.). *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Hyderabad: Orient-Longman, 1992.
- Das, Veena. 'Subaltern as a Perspective'. *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: OUP, 1989. pp. 310-324.
- David Hardiman. ' "Subaltern Studies" at Crossroads'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 15 February, 1986. pp.288-291.
- Davis, Jack. 'Aboriginal writing: a personal view'. *Aboriginal Writing Today*. Ed. Jack Davis and Bob Hodge. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985. pp.11-19.
- Davis, Jack and Bob Hodge (eds.). *Aboriginal Writing Today*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985.
- Davis, Jack et al (eds.). *Paperbark: a collection of Black Australian writing*. St.Lucia: UQP, 1994.
- Devi, Mahasweta. 'The Chains of Untouchability'. *Dust on the Road: Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi*. Ed. Maitreya Ghatak. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997.
- Garton, Stephen. 'Aboriginal History'. *Australian Studies: A Survey*. Ed. James Walter. Oxford:OUP, 1989. pp.189-205
- Gilbert, Kevin J. (ed.). *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Graham, Colin. 'Subalternity and Gender: problems of post-colonial Irishness'. *Journal of Gender Studies*. Vol.5, No.3, November 1996. pp.363-373.

- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Ed. and trans. Hoare. Quentin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd., 1996.
- Guha, Ranajit. (ed.). *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: OUP, 1982.
- . *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: OUP, 1985.
- Guru, Gopal. 'The Politics of Naming'. *Seminar: Dalit*. 471, November, 1998. pp.14-18
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *A-Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. 3rd Edition. London: Arnold, 1998.
- Healy, J.J.. *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*. Second Edition. St.Lucia: UQP, 1989.
- Huffer, Virginia. *The Sweetness of the Fig: Aboriginal Women in Transition: Virginia Huffer with the collaboration of Elsie Roughsey and other women of Mornington Island*. Sydney: NSWUP, 1980.
- Huggins, Jackie. 'Always Was Always Will Be'. *Australian Historical Journal*. Vol.25. No.100, April 1993. pp.459-464.
- Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindu Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Calcutta: Samya, 1996.
- Johnson, Colin. *Wild Cat Falling*. Sydney: Collins/Angus and Robertson, 1965.
- Kamble, Ramesh. 'Dalit Interpretation of Society'. *Seminar: Dalit*. 471, November, 1998. pp.19-23.
- Krishnan, P.S.. 'Untouchability and Atrocities'. *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Reassertion of the Subalterns*. Ed. Walter Fernandes. New Delhi: ISI, 1996. pp.122-139.
- Kumar, Kapil et al. 'Subaltern Studies III & IV: A Review Article'. *Social Scientist*. Vol.16, No: 3, March 1988. pp.3-40.
- Langford, Ruby. *Don't Take Your Love To Town*. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988.

- Lloyd, David. 'DISCUSSION: Outside History: Irish New Histories and the 'Subalternity Effect''. *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Delhi: OUP, 1996.pp.261-277.
- Loomba. Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- McClintock, Anne. 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism''. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 291-304.
- Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany. *The Untouchables: Subordination, poverty and the state in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Mishra, Vijay and Bob Hodge. 'What is Post (-) colonialism?' *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 276-290.
- Morgan. Sally. *My Place*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987.
- Mudrooroo, Narogin. *Writing from the Fringe: A Study Of Modern Aboriginal Literature*. Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990.
- . *Indigenous Literature of Australia: milli milli wangka*. Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997.
- Narayana. Singamaneni. 'Makaramukham'. *Telugu Dalit Short-Story Texts*. Trans. K.Srikanth Reddy. M.Phil diss. Hyderabad:CIEFL, 1998. pp.184-194.
- O'Hanlon. Rosalind. 'Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia'. *Modern Asian Studies*. 22, 1. 1988. pp.189-224.
- Omvedt. Gail. *Dalit Visions: the anti-caste movement and the construction of an Indian identity*. Hyderabad: Orient-Longman, 1996.
- Pandian, M.S.S. 'Stepping Outside History?: New Dalit Writing from Tamil Nadu' in *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of Indian Nation-State*. Ed. Partha Chatterjee. Delhi: OUP, 1998.pp 292-309.

- Prasad, Chandra Bhan and S.S.Bechain. 'Where non-Dalit commentators err'. *The Hindu*. January 4,2000.p21.
- Pugliese, Joseph. 'Parasiting "Post"-Colonialism: On the (Im)possibility of a Disappropriative Practice' in *Southern Review*, Novevember28, 1995. pp.345-357.
- . 'Assimilation, Unspeakable Traces and the Ontologies of the Nation' in *Meridian*, Vol14:2, 1995. pp.229-254.
- Ramulu, B.S. 'Prisoner'. *Telugu Dalit Short-Story Texts*. Trans. K.Srikanth Reddy. M.Phil diss. Hyderabad:CIEFL,1998. pp.170-183.
- Rani, Challapalli Swaroopa. 'Dalit Women's Writing In Telugu' *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33, No.17. 1998.
- Roberts, David. 'Self-determination and the Struggle for Aboriginal Equality'. *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*. Eds.Colin Bourke et al . St.Lucia: UQP, 1994.pp.212-236.
- Roughsey, Elsie. *An Aboriginal Mother Tells Stories of the Old and New*. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Roy, Arundhati. 'The Greater Common Good'. *Frontline*, Vol. 16, No.11, 1999. pp.4-29.
- Said, Edward. 'Foreword'. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: OUP, 1988. pp. v-x.
- Sarkar, Sumit. 'The Decline of the Subaltern in *Subaltern Studies*' in *Writing Social History*. Delhi: OUP. 1997.pp82-108.
- Scot, John.. 'Aboriginal theatre: does 'sold out' mean selling out'. *Race and Class*. 35. 4, 1994.pp.107-111.
- Shoemaker. Adam. *Black Words. White Page: Aboriginal Literature: 1929-1988*. St.Lucia: UQP, 1989.
- . *Mudrooroo: A critical study*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993.
- Shohat, Ella. 'Notes on the 'Post-Colonial''.*Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold/Hodder Headline Group, 1996. pp.321-334.

- Siddiqi, Majid Hayat. 'Book review of *Subaltern Studies III*.' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. Vol.22, No.I, January-March, 1985. pp. 92-95.
- Singh, Sangeeta et al. 'Subaltern Studies II: A Review Article'. *Social Scientist*. Vol.12, No.10, October 1984. pp.3 – 41.
- Singh, Tejbir (ed.). *Seminar: Dalit*. 471, November, 1998.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 'DISCUSSION: Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography'. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: OUP, 1985. pp.331-363.
- . 'A Literary Representation of a Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini''. *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: OUP, 1987. pp. 91-134
- . 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 66 –111.
- Thag, Bhagwan (ed.). *Dalit Poetry Today: An anthology of Dalit Poems Rendered into English*. Washim: Jansahitya Prakasham, 1991.
- Thompson. L.. *Aboriginal Voices*. Brookvale: Simon Schuster Australia, 1990.
- Tugby, D. (ed.). *Aboriginal Identity in Contemporary Australian Society*. Milton: Jacaranda Press, 1973.
- Viramma. Josiane Racine and Jean Luc Racine. *Viramma: life of an untouchable*. Trans. Will Hobson. London: Verso; Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1997.
- Walker. Kath. *The Dawn is at Hand*. Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1996.
- Ward, Glenyse. *Wandering Girl*.Broome: Magabala Books, 1987.
- Williams. Patrick and Laura Chrisman (eds.). *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Yang, Anand A. 'Book Review: *Subaltern Studies II*'. *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol.XLX, No.1 November,1985. pp. 177-178.
- Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992.