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# REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND SUBALTERNITY IN INDIAN WOMEN'S WRITING IN ENGLISH

by

Romita Choudhury

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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TO

HENA CHOUDHURY

my teacher, friend and mother

# ABSTRACT

This study argues for a reading of Indian women's writing in English primarily as "women's writing." The focus on gender leads to an exploration of educated middle-class women's negotiations with dominant patriarchal discourses, such as Indianness, home, and radical political liberation.

The introduction outlines the need for such a study based on two recent developments: the surge of new writing in English by women and the exclusion of gender from current debates about the postcolonial intellectual. The links between these two apparently discrete developments surface in women's struggles to articulate the political and cultural space they inhabit.

Chapter One, "Women and English in India" explores the relation of women to language as a function of nineteenth-century agendas of Indian cultural reform and revival. This chapter shows that women's centrality to cultural self-definition served mostly the needs of various patriarchal arrangements.

Chapter Two, "Daughters of Indianization: The Gandhian Formula," extends the discussion of the Indianization of gender to the Gandhian ideology of women. The textual analysis of Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1987) shows the powerful influence of Gandhi's interpretation of "home" on women's representation of nation and culture.

Chapter Three, "Daughters of Modernization: Texts of Banality," examines the themes of alienation, unhomeliness, and intellectual stagnation in novels situated

within the home. The attention to the material reality of home in *That Long Silence* (1988) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983) by Shashi Deshpande's and *The Salt Doll* (1978) by Shouri Daniels highlights a crisis of representation that cannot be resolved through nationalist slogans of self-purification and autonomy.

Women's actual relation to politics and political culture remains one of the more difficult questions to answer. The final chapter, "Representing Subalternity: History and Women's Testimonial Narrative," focuses on a collection of testimonies, *We Were Making History . . . Women and the Telangana Struggle* (1985), to assess the possibilities for a women's history or even a third world feminist politics.

The conclusion to this study states that the political vein of Indian women's writing in English lies in the frameworks of its critique of social relationships, in images of the "new woman," and in representations of the entangled space of gender, history, and politics.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1

2. Chapter 1
Women and English in India 20

3. Chapter 2
Daughters of Indianization: The Gandhian Formula 60

4. Chapter 3
Daughters of Modernization: Texts of Banality 112

5. Chapter 4
Representing Subalternity: History and Women's
Testimonial Narrative 166

6. Conclusion
Towards an Indian Feminist Cultural Criticism 236

7. Works Cited 240

# Introduction

## i

One of the foremost issues postcolonial literary studies faces today is the general crisis of the representability of the postcolonial subject. This crisis has intensified with the increasing problematization of the familiar markers of postcoloniality: language, nationalism, the colonial encounter, and cross-culturalism. Although these categories still provide valid and useful approaches to contemporary issues in different postcolonial locations, their boundaries are often exceeded by the multiply differentiated and historically specific experiences of postcolonial subjects. Therefore, the actual self-positioning of the subject has acquired a greater significance than the catalogue of oppositions (identity and difference, domination and resistance) by which postcolonial subjectivity has traditionally been defined.

For feminist work, this is a particularly challenging moment. The narratives of postcolonial female subjectivity reveal a messiness in the network of experiences and ideologies which make it difficult to essentialize either "postcolonial" or "woman." With the subject of feminist discourse being increasingly understood as a historical and political construction, registering simultaneously different strands of identity and their concomitant claims with regard to "woman," the appeal to women's lives and women's experiences is no longer sufficient to explain the ideological categories across which "woman" is defined. In their introduction to *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid claim that "the greatest difficulty lies in relating the ideological to the experiential . . ., of relating various symbolic constructs to the lives and actions of women" (3). An analysis or critique of culture in its constructions of gender will, thus, have to move beyond representations of difference to a more contextualized understanding of the ideological fields in which women articulate their experiences.

At this moment when the frameworks of cultural self-representation are being questioned, when the field of postcolonialism is revealing newer and more disparate constituencies, when myriad forms of globalization are pressing upon our interrogations of power relations, and critical practices are discovering the limits of their assumptions in situations of power, the need to re-examine literary fields also becomes imminent. One such field is Indian women's writing in English, which is usually characterized as Commonwealth literature or Indian writing in English, subsumed in the expectations and assumptions that constitute those fields of criticism. The need for a new critical approach to Indian women's writing in English asserts itself in the surrounding atmosphere of discursive upheaval. At one end, postcolonial studies is shaking the very ground upon which English writing stands, questioning the hegemonic role of English in India, the class and cultural location of Indian literature in English, and the national and global politics of its circulation.[1] At the other end, feminist historiography is interrogating nationalist interpretations and resolutions of the "woman question," looking at how historical processes structure and are structured by gender relations.[2] Alongside these developments, Indian and western critics alike are questioning the elite cosmopolitanism of intellectuals, including writers, and their ability to represent the social realities of the postcolonial world.

Yet, in this moment of critical intensity, Indian women's writing has not just prevailed; it has experienced a new burst of energy. The majority of the new writing appears in short story collections; these stories are either written in English, or translated, in most cases, by the authors themselves.[3] At the same time, English anthologies of women's vernacular writing from 600 B. C. to the present have been produced by feminist scholars.[4] By including a large component of translated works by women, these publications break the equation of Indian writing with English writing. The publishers of *Truth Tales*, for instance, state in their brief note that their intention was to present "a wealth of literature in the regional languages that represented some of the most dynamic trends in Indian writing" (n.p). The seven stories they select for the first volume are in "seven major languages--Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and English," representing not only strong and varied literary traditions, but also "seven distinct sensibilities." Although the publishers do not elaborate upon their choice of English as a major language for the production of literature in India, it is clear that they do not want to repeat the institutional divide between English and vernacular literatures.[5] The inclusion of English as denoting a distinct sensibility acknowledges the constitutive effect of language on the perception of the world, while it disrupts the national/regional divide along which Indian writing in English and Indian writing in Indian languages have been defined. More importantly, the collaborative aspect of these projects points to a cartography of women's writing in the making which does not wish away the politics of language and the social dynamics of its class-cultural conflict. Rather, gender becomes the focus, the position, through whose various configurations in the context of colonial and postcolonial modernity the question of language is presented.

This study is, thus, not an overview or a genealogy of Indian women's writing in English. It does not offer an introduction to this body of writing or plot out its organizing themes. It is, instead, an argument for reading Indian women's writing in English as primarily "women's writing" rather than merely English writing and, more specifically, as a heterogeneous gathering of texts that focus on the problem of women's cultural self-representation from very different political and cultural locations in contemporary postcolonial India. A gender-based approach to this body of writing does not preclude the language question; rather it offers postcolonial critique a framework more solidly grounded in the contemporary cultural and political issues at stake for women.

The focus on gender leads me to explore some of the discursive and experiential issues raised by the writing, most important among them the ideological production of Indian womanhood along the cultural fields of home, work, and politics. I approach the nexus of issues that emerge in these contexts by way of specific texts and their textual strategies, by asking how the subject position of the woman intellectual is produced within essentially patriarchal spaces, and how those spaces are articulated within the framework of self-representation.

Implicit in the organization of this study is the assumption that the political vein of Indian women's writing in English can be best captured by exploring the engagements with powerful and influential patriarchal discourses. The degree of resistance is governed to a large extent by the nature of the relationship between subject and discourse. By starting with relatively muffled voices of dissent and proceeding towards more clearly interventionist positions, I take the risk of appearing to adopt a linear, teleological model of analysis. It seems to me, however, that this somewhat pared approach is useful to convey the changing role of English in Indian women's writing from an elitist means of empowerment to a more politicized and dialogic one. Hence, the title of my thesis, "Representations of Language, Gender, and Subalternity in Indian Women's Writing in English," is a way of insisting that we cannot simply apply the old categories of East and West, oppression and liberation, international and regional, to English writing by women. Instead we need to continue the work of re-examining and rewriting them in the context of past histories and future agendas of Indian gender politics.

## ii

Part of the motivation for approaching the issue of Indian womanhood through figures of the postcolonial woman intellectual also comes from a sense that gender is clearly marginal to current questions regarding the postcolonial intellectual's position in the national and international order. A predominantly male canon of intellectualism largely prevails in these interactions, resounding with the familiar concerns of intrinsicality, autonomy, and representativeness. The definition of the intellectual that structures the discussion is still one who, as Julien Benda has put it, thinks of "large" things, of the past and future of universal mankind, one whose passion is the “pure passion of intelligence” (217). The sedimented image and history of the intellectual as a man of ideas reappears to erase the woman intellectual’s subject position within that very history. The point is not that women are excluded from the conversation about intellectuals, but that their exclusion leaves undisturbed the mystique of intellectual identity, seldom approached from the perspective of cognitive dilemmas, subtexts, contradictions, and inaction resulting from the interplay of social forces of the moment.

Edward Said’s article "Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture" (1990) is one of the more recent attempts at theorizing the space of the postcolonial intellectual. The definition of the postcolonial intellectual that emerges from Said's discussion does not deviate from the traditional approach to intellectuals as a social class--autonomous and innately progressive. Hence, Said remains preoccupied with ideas and their relative efficacy, rather than with the actual production of the intellectual within and through the relations of power. Said opens his discussion with a list of eminent men who exemplify the culture of resistance to imperialism. It includes Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Pablo Neruda, Mohandas Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and many others. Described as "great warriors," "prophets and priests," these figures symbolize the kind of perspective that Said identifies in an earlier article as "the most attractive and edifying . . . for the post-colonial intellectual" ("Intellectual in the Post-colonial World" 29). The situation common to most of the men is the invulnerability to the vicissitudes of immediate struggle; unlike the combatants directly involved, intellectuals can reflect on the common ground *and* the differences between colonizer and colonized.

At the center of Said's vision of oppositional postcoloniality stands the cosmopolitan scholarly figure, whose writings represent for him everything that is unique and remarkable about the emerging culture of postcolonialism. It is not for their differences that Said speaks in one breath of scholars from different generations, continents, and socio-political situations, but for the common ground they share as effective intellectuals. The uncommon ability to give shape to a history, which "itself has changed the terms and, indeed, the nature of the argument," is what sets them apart (33). Whether speaking from within or outside the western system, whether confirming or demystifying "grand and nourishingly optimistic narratives of emancipatory nationalism," these men are able to give expression, through their powerful modes of address, to "the authentic elements in colonized society suppressed by metropolitan culture" (39). They all seem to address their writing "equally to Western scholars, to compatriots, and to native scholars" (44). Finally, they are also exilic figures, at odds with the political situation in their native land and marginal in the metropolis.

Said's use of the terms "colonial" and "postcolonial" has been contested by Aijaz Ahmad for being implicated in western modes of thought. Ahmad objects particularly to Said's description of secular postcolonial intellectuals as those who dispute and challenge the colonial world, arguing that "there is no sense in their work of men standing *outside* the Western cultural tradition, however much they think of themselves as articulating the adversarial experience of colonial and/or non-Western peoples" (36). Attributing Said's generalization about the blurring of boundaries between "inside" and "outside" to the importance he attaches to western techniques and discourses, Ahmad asks "how Said can describe [Ranajit] Guha squarely as a 'poststructuralist' and at the same time designate him the exemplary 'post-colonial' intellectual standing outside the Western cultural tradition; where, one wonders, is that line of demarcation between poststructuralism and the Western cultural tradition?" (206). What constitutes the outside and the inside may be a problematic that situates people in unintended places and cannot be simply assumed. However, one must acknowledge the significance of Ahmad's point that postcolonial studies ought to perceive the limits of scholarly intellectualism and contextualize Western methodologies within the economic and cultural environment of their circulation. Emphasizing the need to address the content of postcolonial scholarship, such as Guha's Subaltern Studies project, Ahmad argues that for Said the actual politics of the work is unimportant. What is "paramount fact for [Said] is the structure of conversation . . . currently available in the American university . . . class origin, privileged access to 'technique' and 'discourse,' the imaginative construction of 'exile' and the subsequent relocation" (210). Interestingly, to counteract Said's cosmopolitan circle, Ahmad produces his own list of intellectuals--historians, sociologists, organizers--who seem to comprise an indigenous tradition of intellectuals genuinely committed to resisting all forms of imperialism. Needless to say, Ahmad's examples, like Said's, are exclusively male. Both discuss their respective models with regard to their representativeness and their disembodied brilliance. Both make their pronouncements with a centrality, sweep, and exclusiveness that erase all traces of heterogeneity and self-positioning.

That these reconceptualizations of the intellectual made from the standpoint of marginality and resistance *command* the belonging of women is apparent in the argument for political representation. Stressing the validity and effectiveness of intellectual leadership arising out of mass movements, R. Radhakrishnan provides examples of intellectuals who have been voluntarily accepted as leaders by the people:

> Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, Jesse Jackson, W.E.B. DuBois and many others were not coercive leaders, nor did they usurp the sovereignty of the people they spoke (and speak) for. Between the leaders and the people there can be a sense of active political community that makes the act of representation genuine and historically real. . . . the people and the leaders together discuss ways and means of historicizing the revolution through political, institutional, and administrative processes. (73)

The accounts of high-ranking Black women leaders and activists about their organizational positions under Martin Luther King's leadership, however, throw a different light on the question of genuine "empowerment."[6] Similarly, Gandhi's support for women's education and their participation in political processes did not mean the same intellectual investment for both men and women: "Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair and, therefore, it is the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof."[7] These political and historical realities do not block or disrupt Radhakrishnan's inclusive structure of oppositionality, nor do they alert him to the gaps in his conceptualization of leaders and people "together discuss[ing] ways and means of historicizing the revolution."

A sense of unreality pervades the horizon of women's intellectual identities. In the texts I have chosen to work with, that unreality is emphasized through the struggles of women situated within very different contexts to articulate their belonging to the political and cultural space they inhabit. I am not suggesting that an alternative tradition of women intellectuals be mapped according to the narrative of polarized gender identities, which, as Jean Bethke Elshtain notes, "requires as its original position a picture of woman as ur-victim" (15). Neither am I suggesting that women as intellectuals have privileged access to a "naturally grounded" feminist subjectivity and consciousness. What I am trying to establish is the gendered conceptualization of the intellectual, which participates in the hegemonic ideologies produced about women.

## iii

In order to relate the crisis of postcolonial representation of subjectivity to the reading of "woman" in English writing, I begin Chapter One, "Women and English in India," by situating the language question within the context of women's historical encounter with English. The role of English in India is increasingly being understood in terms of forces that extend beyond the conquest of India by Britain. The spirit of moral improvement stirred by colonial representations of Indian backwardness and degeneration resulted in what Susie Tharu describes in her essay "Tracing Savitri's Pedigree" as a "torturous psycho-cultural situation" among middle-class urban intellectuals (257). On the one hand, a concerted effort to westernize was promoted with a zeal that surpassed that of British liberals, while on the other hand, iconographies of the golden age of ancient Hindu culture were revived to delineate an era which could hold its own against western impositions. Women of the middle class became special targets of the agendas of both westernization and Indianization. Reading, writing, and the whole domain of women's self-determination became synonymous with purity and self-control. Examining the social logic implicit in those discourses, particularly in the context of traditional and modern enlightenment, can enable feminists to assess the extent to which indigenous and colonial patriarchies have shaped the cultural self-representations of women.

I begin the process of this broader analysis of language through a critique of supposedly pro-women positions in the environment of reform. By inserting a reading of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) into this discussion, I show how English entered the world of the nineteenth-century middle-class women intelligentsia (*bhadramahila*) imbricated in hegemonic structures of indigeneity. Conceptualizing the discourses of westernization and Indianization as ideologies of gender allows me to consider the construction of the colonial subject "woman" across multiple modalities of patriarchal culture. It also signals the need for recognizing the residual values of authenticity and pure Indianness within our contemporary critical apparatuses.

In Chapter Two, "Daughters of Indianization: The Gandhian Formula," I turn to the construction of woman as ideal subjects of the nation. Women's role in the anti-colonial struggle was a major issue in the 1940s and 50s, formed mainly in the mould of nineteenth-century iconized representations of Indian womanhood: chaste victim, decolonized space, agent of preservation, or enlightened motherhood. I pay particular attention to one of the more prominent and enduring fathers of independence, M. K. Gandhi, whose approach to the woman question has come to symbolize both a patriarchal model of self-retrieval *and* a truly non-western tradition of struggle against oppression. Gandhi was able to reach women by recasting the domain of womanhood--home--as a metaphor of the nation's health. Leaving the home-world divide undisturbed, he was able to make women the custodians of the moral spirit of the nation.

As a way of understanding the reconstruction of gender in this moment of nationalism, I read the impact of Gandhism on two narratives of political culture: Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985). The two texts, written twenty-five years apart, by a Muslim and a Hindu respectively, share remarkable similarities in the perception of national identity. The sentient, educated protagonists in both are the ideal daughters of independence, upholding the values that the delegated caretakers abdicate in their pursuit of power. The political importance of the texts' critique of postcolonial culture through the filter of an intrinsically humane and enlightened Indian sensibility is that they show how a certain discourse of Indianness helps to shape the ideological uncertainty surrounding the sign of "woman."

The script of women's moral custodianship gets rewritten, rather surprisingly, in the banal context of domesticity. In Chapter Three, "Daughters of Modernization: Texts of Banality," I use the domestic novels of Shashi Deshpande and Shouri Daniels to show how the metaphorization of women's experience as national space is disarticulated through a depiction of the materiality of home. The bodies of women constructed by traditional and modern perceptions of the domestic space impact upon the intellectual identities of the women in ways that, at one level, cannot even be articulated. The representation of the women takes place away from the public sphere and within a network of sexual and gender relations, which highlights a crisis that refuses resolution through slogans of truth, freedom, and autonomy.

Curiously, the figure occupying center stage in the novels of Deshpande and Daniels is not the homebound woman, nor one who experiences agency in the domestic context. The central figure is that of an intellectual, highlighting even more the discrepancy between the imagined freedom of women in independent postcolonial India and the reality of their subordination and stagnation. The juxtaposition of freedom and entrapment does not necessarily correspond to the radical opposition of outside and inside, public and private, or community and self. In fact, it becomes more pronounced *within* a localized, middle-class, enlightened domestic sphere, which is the focus of both Daniels' and Deshpande's writings. As Deshpande says in an interview, she owes her work to the “silences” breaking every day in quiet, almost imperceptible ways through "the women who go to work, the women who take decisions, the women who take charge of their lives" (25).

The construction of social reality solely from the vantage point of women's experience tends to anchor itself, however, in a homogenizing discourse of "woman" as universal and obvious category. In the novels by Deshpande and Daniels, we see that the differences among women, although quite apparent, do not bring about a mutual crisis of identity. Instead, they are absorbed into a singular consciousness, which remains decidedly middle class, non-confrontational, and internalized.

The image of the educated middle-class woman preoccupied with the domestic space may stand in striking contrast to that of the subaltern woman engaged in revolutionary battle. Yet feminist historiographers have begun to locate certain common points of reference. In Chapter Four, “Representing Subalternity: History and Women’s Testimonial Narrative,” I look at the issue of women’s agency as it emerges through the voices of subaltern women and the voices of their interlocutors. The focus of discussion is a collection of oral/testimonies called *We Were Making History . . . Women and the Telangana Uprising* (1989). In this gathering of memories, impressions, analyses, and critique, women who participated in an armed uprising break their long silence to talk of their experiences to members of a feminist collective attempting to write a women’s history of the Telangana movement.

Women's engagement with mass movements has been largely historicized from elite or male perspectives. As Maria Mies quite correctly points out, "the early radical women leaders came from high-caste, well-to-do and educated strata of society. Working class and peasant women no doubt participated in the various militant movements . . . but little is known about their role as organizers and leaders (61). *We Were Making History* does more than respond to the need, outlined by Mies, for a history which documents the contributions of women. It uses the different roles that women have played in an armed political struggle to articulate the specificity of women's politics and the women's movement.

I begin this chapter by exploring the narrative strategies used by the writers to re-imagine and reconstruct the Telangana uprising from the memories and autobiographical narratives of those women who participated in the peasant revolt. The structure of the conversation between intellectual and subaltern, historian and activist, raises several issues, not only about the text being discussed, but also about the political value of the oral history/testimonial narrative in general. From *We Were Making History*, thus, I move towards an assessment of various critical statements on the testimonial, often considered the transmitter of the authentic voice of the subaltern. I argue that these statements show the centrality of historians and scholars in the production of the narratives, the hierarchical relationship between history and experience, and finally, the dangers of assuming too easily a third world women's common ground of struggle. The chapter approaches these issues mainly in the context of their instrumentality in shaping both the content and the expectations of testimonials. A serious acknowledgment of these conditions and a continued investigation of the critical problems they raise can only facilitate the self-positioning of oral historians in the interview process. If the making of the testimonial narrative brings about a rediscovery of intellectual identity and a recentering of scholarship, then that outcome cannot be less valuable or significant than the "authentic" history of women in economic and political struggle.

Reading any narrative for the issues it raises about culture and politics keeps it vital and open to history. This historicity shows that the self-representations of women are subject to the ideological processes they set out to challenge and resist. Hence, the need for constant critique. It is in recognition of the constructive power of this ongoing critique that I present my reading of Indian women's writing in English, a body of writing which has grown tremendously within the past few years and traveled in many different directions.

## Notes

[1] I am thinking particularly of the essays in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, ed., *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (1992) and Svati Joshi, ed., *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History* (1994).

[2] See Ania Loomba and Suvir Kaul's introduction to a special issue of *The Oxford Literary Review* entitled "On India: Writing History, Culture, Post-Coloniality" (Vol. 16, 1994). In order to emphasize the need for a detailed and specific understanding of the complex ways in which social categories, such as caste, class, gender, and religion function, the authors provide a telling example of the entanglement of Indian women's issues with nineteenth-century nationalism in India and contemporary Hindu fundamentalism:

> The mode of argument [of Hindu fundamentalists] is startlingly similar to that in some statements mouthed by nineteenth century nationalists, whose legacy is now differentially shared across the political spectrum of contemporary India. The Indian state, right-wing fundamentalists, and the left have all offered their versions of "good womanhood", which are far from identical but which have all utilized the rhetoric of India versus the West. Feminists in India . . . have had to sift carefully through this legacy rather than being able to make easy alliances or oppositions. Thus, for example, Gandhi and his political heritage are

> criticized by some for marginalizing women's concerns and seen by others as entirely worth appropriation by the women's movement. (8)

It is becoming increasingly evident that the political and institutional frameworks through which postcolonial studies on India formulates its issues will have to be restructured so as to approach history, culture, and identity through the complex socio-cultural transformations and their multiple motivations that are at play in India today.

[3] Kali for Women, eds., *Truth Tales: Stories by Indian Women* (London: Women's P, 1986) and *Truth Tales 2: The Slate of Life: Contemporary Writing by Indian Women* (London: Women's P, 1991). Both *Truth Tales* collections have been re-edited with introductory essays by Meena Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, respectively. See, also, Lakshmi Holmstrom, ed., *The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women.* Calcutta: Rupa, 1990; Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, eds., *In Other Words: New Writing by Indian Women* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992).

[4] Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, eds., *Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present* Vol 1 and 2 (London: HarperCollins, 1991; 1993). In their preface to the second volume, the editors write that they have excluded those who wrote in English since their work would be "more easily available to the reader." In the first volume "only rare pieces from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in English" are included (xxiii).

[5] Gayatri Spivak points to a similar "artificial" divide between English literature and vernacular literatures which ignores the various ways in which vernacular literatures continue to address and transform colonial representations of nation, class, and gender. Their relationship is complex, "collaborative / parasitical / contrary / resistant" ("Burden of English" 285).

[6] See Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, for an account of Black women's struggle with sexism in organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), where, in spite of their prominent role in organizing and leading others, they were never given decision-making roles.

[7] Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 95-97. See also Radha Kumar, "Constructing the Image of a Woman Activist," in *The History of Doing*, 81-85.

# Chapter 1

## Women and English in India

Understanding the relation of women to English in India requires a different type of inquiry than a general investigation of the politics of English in the colonial period. While recent studies have shown with remarkable clarity and depth the far-reaching role that English played in the complex totality of the imperialist design, there is still a need to direct the inquiry towards how the language question relates to the woman question, particularly since both are such powerful tools in the definition of culture.

In this chapter, I argue that an idea of Indianness promulgated by middle-class, upper-caste men forms the core of women's historical relation to the English language. A brief survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates around women's education and self-determination allows me to illustrate the correspondences between the discourses about English and those about "woman." The complexity of social investments surrounding the image of the enlightened woman becomes clearer through an examination of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* (1912), a novel about political and personal liberation set during the heyday of the Indianization (*swadeshi*) movement. The entire discussion is important to a study of contemporary women's writing in English for two reasons. First, it reveals the tremendous control exercised by colonial and indigenous patriarchies over women's access to or use of language, English or otherwise. Intertwined with the history of that influence is the complex history of the insertion of women and womanhood into the self-perception of the middle class in its path to nation-building and ideological hegemony. Second, it alerts us to the possibility that those assumptions and imperatives underlying the idea of Indianness might continue to haunt current approaches to Indian writing in English.

The critique of English from the point of view of gender thus undoes the binary definitions of culture in which language is so often deployed as the self-evident determinant of identity and selfhood. If English is indeed more than a language in India, being the ideological sign of a superior culture, as many scholars have shown, and if it has manipulated existing hierarchies to demarcate the new notion of culture, then it is in the recastings of woman and womanhood that one will find traces of its most complex effects.

### *Indianization and Westernization in Women's Education*

Both English and education, particularly for women, are problematic terms. Like English, with its arsenal of hidden agendas, women's education was not aimed solely at the achievement of knowledge or professional training; it was also intended for the ennoblement and purification of women's minds. The agendas of English and of women's education came to overlap in the most intricate ways. The comments of the colonial educator J. E. D. Bethune, whose name has become synonymous with the spread of women's education in India, show, even in the brevity of the passage quoted below, how the practical and symbolic functions of English and women determined the educational process:

> . . . in connection with the education of boys of Bengal, you will see how constantly I have dwelt on the importance of sedulously cultivating their mother tongue. . . . We resort to English, chiefly on account of the superiority of its literature, and we expect of our students that sooner or later they will impart to their countrymen in their own language the knowledge which they have gained in ours. Judge then whether these opinions are not likely to be applied by me with ten-fold force on the education of girls. . . . We shall resort to English only for some of those subsidiary advantages, and when we know that the communication of such knowledge is not in opposition to the wishes of the parents. (Bagal 81)

English was not meant to be a language of domination; its purpose was to entrench itself in Indian society as the inimitable carrier of knowledge and advancement. In fact, the main instrument of consolidating the status of English would be the vernaculars, which would carry everything English stood for, producing in turn the ideal colonial subjects who would themselves hunger for the original English source. Women's function in this machine of acculturation was to become the symbols of the appropriate amalgamation of western and Indian values by becoming the partners of men and serving as "instructors . . . in the bosom of their own families" (Bagal 81).

The education of women was aimed not at breaking their seclusion, but at regenerating Hindu character and minimizing the threat felt by the indigenous elite.

Not only women's access to English, but also the whole question of women's education, needs to be situated within the context of Anglicism, which had become a more overt colonial policy after the wave of Indianization in the 1820s.[1] As Uma Chakravarti shows in her essay "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?," recasting the middle-class woman or *bhadramahila* was a key issue in the nineteenth-century reshaping of Indian historical consciousness which took place "within the cultural and ideological encounter between England and India" (29). The reconstruction of a golden past of Hinduism, especially the myth of the golden age of Indian womanhood located in the Vedic period, served as a crucial defense against Anglican and Evangelical charges of Hindu barbarity and a means of generating certain changes through legislation. The main elements of this past were drawn from Orientalist theories of the glories of ancient India, compiled and collated with the help of the conservative indigenous literati, the Brahmin scholars (*pandits*). The emphasis on mythical female figures, added on by the modern literati, exemplified the status of women in early times as religious and spiritual partners (*sahadharmini*) of men. Since all the figures, derived from classical Sanskrit texts, were of learned upper-caste women, the result, as Chakravarti argues, was "the ultimate crystallization of a 'national' feminine identity based on 'high' culture" (38).

Like Indianization, westernization in women's education was a form of control exercised by the elite Indian patriarchy to regain the moral ground which

English/Western education had usurped. The debates over women's education within the Brahmo Samaj--a cultural and religious society that emerged in 1843 in Bengal--record the formation of a discourse of westernization which would construct woman as one of its primary objects. One of the Samaj's prominent members, Keshub Chandra Sen, who led its first dissident section, upheld the norms of English marriage and home life as the most needed focus of women's education. So impressed was he by the "sweetness" and "purity" of the English conjugal home during his visit to England in 1870 that he passionately persuaded Englishwomen to come out to India to teach their illiterate and ignorant Indian sisters the ideals of a happy family life:

> At the present moment a thousand Hindu homes are open to receive and welcome English governesses--well-trained, accomplished English ladies, capable of doing good to their Indian sisters, both by instruction and by personal example. And what sort of education do we expect and wish from you? An unsectarian, liberal, social, useful education (cheers) that will not be subservient or subordinated to the views of any particular religious community, an education free and liberal and comprehensive in its character, an education calculated to make Indian women good wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. (qtd. in Karlekar 84)

With the above goal in mind, Keshub Sen was naturally not in favor of teaching geometry, logic, natural science, and history to girls. When the Samaj split again over the issue of extending the boundaries of women's education, the more liberal faction heading the split also placed its own injunctions on women. Chandi Charan, who assiduously taught his daughter to read the Bible and English literature and encouraged her to take up maths and philosophy, did not agree to women learning medicine. To one of his friends who wanted to send his daughter for a degree in medicine, Chandi Charan wrote that "my daughters will not make a business of medicine. . . . Instead of being curers of the body they will be curers of the mind" (qtd. in Karlekar 173.

The common thread that runs through the gender ethos carved out of "*entangled* space of colonizers, indigenous literati and middle class intelligentsia," as Kumkum Sangari describes it, pertains to the inherent nature of women ("Relating Histories" 40). In her essay, Sangari provides examples of missionary and Anglicist characterizations of Hindu women, from such texts as J. A. Dubois' *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* and James Mill's *History of British India*. In them, either women are crude, libidinous, ignorant, and consumed with domestic trivialities, or they are chaste, virtuous, and submissive. The overlap in British and Indian middle-class constructions reveal the mutual need for control over women and the mutual desire for schooled women. Women's education became identified less with literacy and more with a cultivated moral sense. While orthodox patriarchy claimed women were inherently immoral and, therefore, in need of improvement, the liberals claimed women were capable of wisdom and knowledge through chaste and virtuous behavior with the possibility of becoming a pedagogical category themselves. Based on these connections between the focus of education and the nature of women, Sangari argues that the need for women's education could be made to fit any or all characterizations:

"[t]he swing from chaste abject victim to immoral sexual agent parallels a swing between education as . . . an ornamental form of enlightenment versus education as an imperative for moral tutelage. Education is alternately morally harmful or inculcates morals . . ." (57). The problem of characterization encapsulates the wider problematic of reform and preservation in Bengali middle-class life, of forging a new self and similitude to Europeans, as well as a purifying return to an earlier self which maintains moral and cultural differences.

While the proponents of women's education were priding themselves on a "balanced" curriculum for women, the contradictions in the patriarchal management and perception of "schooled women" did not go unnoticed. An essay by a Bengali woman, Saratkumari Chaudhurani, published in two issues of a Bengali journal in 1891, upholds the benefits of companionate marriage, but criticizes the classification of women into traditional and modern:

> Men will hardly enter into conversation with a woman clad in a broad, red-bordered sari, sindur [vermillion powder in the parting of the hair, a sign of marriage], sankhas [conch shell bangles] on her arms and a number of anklets on her feet. At the same time when they compare these traditional women with their modern contemporaries, they are full of criticism for the latter. They don't stop to find out whether in fact the so-called modern women are guilty of all that they are accused. Nor do they bother to find out whether they lack in the feminine values of love, affection, tenderness and gentleness. Instead whenever men have a pen

> in hand they start writing about the contemporary women in uncharitable terms. (qtd. in Karlekar 146)

In a more ironic, albeit conservative, approach, Kailashbashini Debi, another Bengali woman, uses the increased access of women to public discourse to demand a greater measure of justice *within* the confines of the home. She voices her reason for rejecting the label of non-traditional or "westernized" woman as too simplistic a demarcation:

> I don't believe in Hindu rituals, but nonetheless I observe them. The reason for this is that if I slacken even a bit, my husband will cease being a Hindu. The Hindus are my closest relatives. I cannot give them up and hence I observe all the rituals. . . . My husband can do what he likes, there is no problem in that. Those who have brains do not observe the Hindu religion. I don't believe in Hindu religion but I will never tell my husband this. If Babu hears this from my lips I cannot describe how happy he will be. (qtd. in Karlekar 127)

Kailashbashini characterizes herself as the ideal Hindu wife, modern enough to dress in western attire but Hindu enough to carry the burden of her husband's soul. Yet she also manages to indicate the loneliness of the middle ground, to which she remains rooted for the sake of her own sense of belonging and, perhaps, that of her husband.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the debates over the woman question seem to have subsided. Some historians have read this as a sign of the nationalist period's retreat on the question of modernization and reform, instead upholding tradition as a strategic argument for independence. Others, like Sumit Sarkar, have argued that the "inception of our modernity" itself is responsible for the failure of both periods to tackle the women's question on its own terms (qtd. in Chatterjee, "Nationalist Resolution" 235-236). Partha Chatterjee explains that "the relative unimportance of the woman question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not to be explained by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. It was because nationalism had in fact resolved 'the women's question' in complete accordance with its preferred goals" (237). This resolution was achieved by "a separation of the domain of culture into two spheres--the material and the spiritual" (237). The private/domestic sphere was now the designated spiritual sphere and became the repository of all things essentially Indian and superior to the West. It stood for the only decolonized space. Its representative was the reformed middle-class woman. Reconstituted in relation to the new configuration of class and culture, the "home" acquired a wider metaphoric resonance:

> The colonial situation, and the ideological response of nationalism, introduced an entirely new substance to these terms and effected their transformation. The material/spiritual dichotomy, to which the "world" and "home" corresponded, had acquired, as we have noted before, a very special significance in the nationalist mind. The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But it had

> failed to colonize the inner, essential, identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture. That was where the East was undominated, sovereign, master of its own fate. (239)

As Chatterjee goes on to elaborate, "the 'new' woman' defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy" (244), which was distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition. The central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question was the status it accorded to the middle-class woman, who was different from her predecessors by virtue of education, change in dress, food, and mannerism, but far superior to westernized women of the wealthy classes. She was also "quite the reverse of the 'common' woman who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males" (244).

Chatterjee argues that the nationalist construct of the new woman derived its ideological strength from its ability to make "the goal of cultural refinement through education a personal challenge for every woman, thus opening up a domain where woman was an autonomous subject" (246). The woman question was not part of the struggle for decolonization because women's struggles were placed "in a domain where the nation thought of itself as already free" (250). Yet, the boundaries of home and world were shifting, begging the question of how the correspondence between woman and the private self (of man) were to be managed.

The category of the "westernized" woman, which was equated with questionable moral conduct, continued to serve as an image of excess and a caution against the violation of the designated space for women's intellectual and cultural self-expression. Between 1929 and 1937, *The Indian Ladies Magazine* published several articles on women and education. The following exchange, which I will quote in full, clearly conveys the fear of endangering women's self-control by education and access to unregulated liberty:

> *A reply by an Indian woman to the article on Modern Women written by B. Satyanarayana in the July-August, 1936, issue of the ILM. That article ran as follows:*
>
> They go to the city as regularly as their husbands do. Their excuse is the shop; their attraction is the restaurant. They knock about with other people who knock about, not many of them are faithless to their marriage vows, but they are faithless to their children, faithless to their homes, faithless to the great moral traditions of their people. They regard duty as a dull and narrow rut. When they are hungry they drink tea; when they are raked by nerves they smoke. The slightest illness brings them to collapse.
>
> Tell them it is wrong to be immodest. They will point to the heights, laughing you to scorn. The old idea of the mother finding her heaven in her home and her immortality in her children is no longer the fashion. The great central idea of the human race, 'A pure womanhood,' is ceasing to inspire the heart of our modern women.

*The Reply*:

> I think the immemorial custom of abusing the modern woman of every generation is the fashion of modern men. Unborn generations will be amazed! Some good sense and a great deal of nonsense is talked against modernity. I am tempted to think that such criticisms are promoted either by motives of vengeance, or by callow disregard for fellow beings. Do modern men ever stop to think of the accusations, which can be launched against them for being intellectual starvelings amidst profundity of good thought? (167-168)

The assumption that the "woman question" could be resolved through a division of spaces was already revealing its untenability in the actual experiences of women struggling under the surveillance of patriarchy and its agendas of negotiated reform. Both English and women's education were surpassing the neat boundaries set for them by reformers and the results were too intricate to fit the divisions that Chatterjee has delineated.

### *Indianness in Women's Self-Determination: An Interlude*

The scene is Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* (1914). Bimala, the strong-minded wife of Nikhil, has been brought up to live her life in the *antahpur*, the "inner house" reserved for women. But Nikhil wants to bring his "home-made Bimala, the product of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties" to the outside world (43). Master of a large land-owning aristocratic household, educated, and greatly revered for his sensitive and generous disposition, Nikhil breaks with the tradition of male conduct in his family. He tries to persuade Bimala to come out of the *antahpur* "into the heart of the outer world and meet reality" (12). Bimala is reluctant for fear of incurring the disapproval of the senior women members, who usually dictate the norms of the *antahpur*. Also, she is, as she claims, quite content with her fate and considers herself uniquely fortunate and happy in her husband's devoted protection of her: "I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe" (14).

Irrespective of Bimala's contentment, the outer world has already begun to enter the inner house. Englishness manifests itself everywhere, from furnishings to artifacts to books. Bimala's own dressing table has no shortage of European goods; her wardrobe contains fashionable modern garments and ornaments purchased by her husband from European stores; Miss Gilby, an English governess, comes to teach Bimala and be her companion. Even Bimala's English hair-do adorns her with especial mystery. But nothing brings in the outside with more force and unpredictability, shaking up the foundations of Bimala's home and her world, than the *Swadeshi* movement and one of its leaders, Sandip, who is a friend and beneficiary of Bimala's husband. The appearance of Sandip on the scene finally triggers Bimala's desire to venture out. Her first transgression across the threshold of the *antahpur* with the assistance of her husband has the feel of agency because she herself requests her husband to invite Sandip so that she may attend on him. In a series of rapid turns, Bimala comes to find her self-image deeply transformed by her attraction to Sandip's charismatic personality and his politics and, most of all, by his homage to her as the symbol of intransigent patriotism.

*Ghare Baire* has generally been read in the context of the Swadeshi movement and Tagore's ambivalent attitude towards it. This movement started in Bengal when the province was partitioned by the colonial government in 1905 in order to split up and weaken the strong opposition to its rule in the region. The self-confidence of the region, fostered by cultural developments and an educated, middle class fast gaining ground in media, politics, literature, and education, posed a challenge to the government, which did not anticipate the extent of opposition that would be built around Partition. There were different trends within the call for *Swadeshi*, meaning "of the country" or simply "home-made" (Sarkar, *Modern India*).[2] Tagore supported the Gandhian program of *Swadeshi* with its elements of Hindu revivalism in the form of the traditional Hindu community, national schools, and rural welfare work. With his preference for "slow and unostentatious development" of *atmasakti* (self-strengthening), Tagore was opposed to the more militant stream of the movement which called for the boycott of British goods, education, justice and administration (Sarkar 113). As the latter began to gain control of the movement, Tagore came to distance himself from *Swadeshi* and later from nationalist politics altogether. The two men in his story may be seen to represent the two ends of the spectrum, each a strong individual in his own way, although Sandip's political views have a larger impact and following than Nikhil's.

The difference between Nikhil and Sandip also hinges on dominant attitudes towards the “new woman.” In a recent article, Indrani Mitra argues that the question of gender in the novel is deeply entwined with the question of class. Sandip is "unmistakably a bourgeois 'new man,' the product of a colonial urban economy, . . . a fundamental threat to the paternalistic feudal order that the novel privileges" (248), whereas Nikhil is a mainstay of that very order. Mitra problematizes the obvious conflict between tradition and modernity by looking at how it finally fails to project any simple and unified resolution to the problems that result from that conflict. Sandip's nationalist rhetoric, suffused with barely concealed eroticism, challenges Bimala's newly-aroused passion for Swadeshi. The combination of aggressive bourgeois values of individualism and materialism with an equally aggressive sexual ethos spells imminent disaster for it threatens to dismantle all existing social structures:

> I shall simply make Bimala one with my country. The turbulent west wind, which has swept away the country's veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of wife from Bimala's face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame. . . . Bimala will see such a majestic vision of deliverance, that her bonds will slip from about her, without shame, without her even being aware of it. . . . If only women could be set free from the artificial fetters put around them by men, we could see on earth the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess. (119)

Nikhil's sexual ethos, in contrast, is consistent with his liberal, modern, upper-caste, upper-class feudal base. He envisions a conjugal union somewhat along the lines of the "sweet English home." As Mitra argues quite convincingly, the reinscription of home within Victorian romantic love and companionate marriage "displaces the repressive space of the zenana institutions" (251). Nikhil builds his ideal upon a way of life revolving around the home and the exercise of benevolent authority. He persistently educates Bimala against worshipping him *blindly* but not against worshipping him *per se*.

Bimala eventually learns to love Nikhil the way he hoped she would in the atmosphere of liberty granted by him. But it is too late by then. Bimala's commitment to Sandip and his group of followers already distances her considerably from Nikhil. In the fused intensity of her passion for the cause and for Sandip, Bimala has already exchanged the custodianship of home with its resonances of thrift, sensibility, morality, and obedience, for the symbolic role of independent nature assigned her by Sandip. She embraces the identity of Sandip's Shakti (cosmic female power); she becomes his Queen Bee, the goddess who anoints the patriots. As proof of her commitment to this newly-found identity, Bimala ransacks her home, giving away her jewelry and the contents of her husband's personal safe to the cause.

In spite of the far-reaching effects of Bimala's transgression, the text ultimately steers away from Bimala's "infatuation," as Nikhil describes her attraction to swadeshi, towards her maternal and sisterly longing, her re-embrace of the elevated sanctuary of home. But the experience of his romantic ideal -- westernized wife in harmony with the values of traditional femininity -- eludes Nikhil. He is fatally injured in trying to quell the communal riots unleashed by Sandip's confrontational tactics of mobilizing the village against buying foreign-made goods. Even if Nikhil were to survive, he would have to face Bimala's own undecidability. In her narrative, Bimala "confess[es] there is a great deal in the depths of [Sandip] which we do not, cannot understand,--much in ourselves too" (286). But that is not the subject of the novel, and Bimala is seen at the beginning as she is at the end, contemplating the necessary experience of her loss in order to arrive at true worship of the boons she had obtained and had let slip away.[3]

With its emphasis on reform, the *Swadeshi* movement had a considerable impact on middle-class women. For women intellectuals, it had a special appeal, encouraging many to publish journals and also receive military and political training. Women raised money for those swadeshists under trial while also becoming directly involved with education and welfare:

> [they] contributed jewelry as well as money to *Swadeshi*; there is a report that in some villages women began to put aside handfuls of grain as contribution; and in Barisal, where Aswinikumar Datt had been engaged in "sustained humanitarian work," many women made over their savings to his Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. . . . In Khulna, women smashed their foreign bangles after a speech given by Kaliprasanna Kabvanisnarod; when B. C. Pal toured Bengal in 1907, he addressed women's meetings in Habibgunj and Bhola; and when Surendranath

> Banerjee visited Mymensingh in the same year, he was given a rousing welcome by women. (Kumar 41)

One woman who actively promoted the more militant trend in swadeshi was Sarala Debi Ghosal, the granddaughter of Rabindranath Tagore's brother, Debendranath Tagore. At the age of twenty-three, she left home, despite heavy family opposition, to take up an appointment in a girl's school in Mysore. The reason she gave for her decision was that she "wanted to flee the cage or prison of home, and establish her right to an independent livelihood like men" (Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement* 192). However, Sarala Debi's intentions of earning an independent livelihood were thwarted. On returning to Calcutta, she became involved in the ongoing revivalist movement. She set out to develop a nationalist culture and, more importantly, a Bengali culture that would take as its mythology the normative characteristics of the "golden age" of the Hindus. Choosing figures of martial pride and prowess as her symbols, she launched a vigorous campaign to counteract the internalized subordination of a subject people who needed to be made aware of the historical strength and acumen they possessed. She ran a gymnasium where training in self-defense was given and organized rallies and festivals where various martial rituals of patriotism were held. In an attempt to construct a strategic model of correct masculinity, she even recast the local landlord into a figure of national pride and self-determination:

> [W]hen her uncle Rabindranath Tagore objected to her suppression of the criminal aspect of Pratapaditya, who was a parricide and therefore

> unworthy of being the hero of an entire nation, Sarala's candid reply was that she had not constructed Pratapaditya as a symbol of an 'ideal moral being;' but as the sole brave and manly Hindu zamindar (landlord) to have resisted the Mughal king, and declared Bengali independence. (64)

Sarala Debi rejected the *antahpur* and all the physical and emotional experiences it stood for: the endless rituals, the confinement, birthing, nurturing, and so on. However, the political space that Sarala Devi created for women was framed by Hindu nationalism and a set of values contingent on the personal and social freedoms she enjoyed as a member of the Tagore family.

In many ways Tagore's Bimala owes her energy and passion to the life of Sarala Devi, whose political fervor, it should be noted, far surpassed her own. Bimala faces a choice between two models of womanhood corresponding to two models of nation-making: woman as symbol of the enlightened "home" and woman as symbol of Indianized national identity. Both have been formed by the encounter with colonial forces. *Ghare Baire* is an example of how the patriarchal language of self-government, of freedom from domination by an alien power, folds in a discourse about womanhood. Nikhil's views on the nation's lack of preparedness for radical change resembles closely his judgement of Bimala's readiness for entry into the world: "So long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know we lack the capacity for self-government. Whatever may be our condition, we shall either need some imaginary ghost or some actual medicine-man to terrorise over us" (45). Bimala represents the human vulnerability to unreason. This is quite clear from the debates between Sandip and Nikhil where both men amply demonstrate their willingness to put the intellectual soundness of their respective positions to the test, but address Bimala with a special investment in the magic of political rhetoric. According to Nikhil, Bimala's susceptibility to the passion of words over their substance is due to her lack of self-regulation:

> Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear. . . . I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation for tyranny. But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. (44)

Bimala's performance in the outer world--literally, the receiving room--is a source of profound disillusionment and disappointment for Nikhil. For Bimala has failed to discern the self-glorifying urge in Sandip, the crass materialism of his philosophy. What is more important, however, is not that she has failed to see Sandip for what he is, but that she has failed to "recognize" Nikhil himself. That is where Nikhil's act of renunciation--of declining worship till he and Bimala have met and recognized each other in the world--fails him. Regarding Bimala's moral education as an index of his own readiness for freedom to pursue the highest ideals, Nikhil articulates the typical liberal dream of a delightful domestic space, transformed by an enlightened female presence, no longer incompatible with the spirit of intellectual pursuit. The same idea is voiced by liberal reformer Mahesh Chunder, who declared that women, freed from their world "of ignorance . . . credulity . . . and all the wild passions of the human heart unrestrained by self-command or the placid influence of education," would learn to appreciate "enjoyments beyond the gratification of the senses (Chunder, qtd. in Sangari 92). For Nikhil as well, woman is "the witchery of our own longings and imaginings" (165) and it is "only when we get to the point of letting the bird out of its cage that we can realize how free the bird has set us" (208).

Bimala's narrative announces at the outset that she has been "educated, and introduced to the modern age in its own language" (5). That this language is also formed by caste distinctions, patriarchal practices, and emerging class arrangements becomes clear in the nature of Bimala's dissent. In a singularly rare moment towards the conclusion of the novel, when Bimala finds herself alone for the first time, unanchored from her passion for Sandip and her unconditional worship of Nikhil, she seems to envision a self-image, independent of both the refining zeal of liberal reformism and the goddess cult of militant nationalism. Yet, as the following passage will show, that self-image is difficult to imagine within the languages of identity available to her:

> I saw my country, a woman like myself, standing expectant. She has been drawn from her home corner by the sudden call of some Unknown . . . She is no mother. There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home to be lighted of an evening, no household work to be done. No; she hies to her tryst, for this is the land of the Vaishnava Poets. . . . I,

> also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Ah! wretched wanderer through the night, when the dawn reddens you will see no trace of a way to return. (136-137)

Bimala herself has no children and like the Vaishnavites, generally known as travelling singers and tellers of religious and mythological tales, has left the conventional cares of wifehood behind with some abandon. But her posture of expectancy, standing with her country, in the close proximity of river, rice fields, and the dark sky, is framed by the transcendent ethos of Nikhil. The description of the "distant flute-strains" that Bimala's very soul responds to in that moment, "filling her with "unfathomable yearning," removes from the picture the truth of her physical longing for Sandip (136). Her desire to be involved with something larger than the home is transposed to the realm of the eternal, the unattainable. It is more in tune with the non-temporality of Keats' "self-same song that found a path/Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home/ She stood in tears amid the alien corn" than it is with the earthy devotionalism of the Vaishnavi poetesses.

The repertoire of the Vaishnavites who thronged the market places and streets of nineteenth-century Bengal villages and Calcutta consists of the love songs of Radha and Krishna, the divine pair of Hindu mythology. These songs were often full of bawdy wit and frank sensuality. The subversive and creative content of Vaishnavite performances may also be invoked in Bimala's soliloquy, but the very class origins of Vaishnavism would sit rather uncomfortably with the general tenor of Tagore's novel, unless used at the same time as a metaphor of Bimala's transgression.

Sumanta Banerjee's study on women's popular culture in Bengal provides the following picture of Vaishnavism and women:

> The Vaishnava religion in Bengal, with its stress on the equality of man and woman among other things, provided room for Bengali women from different segments of society: widows of Kulin Brahmins who had nowhere to go, women who wanted to escape prostitution after having been seduced from their homes and deserted by their lovers, prostitutes who, after becoming old, had lost their occupations, or outcastes aspiring to independence and recognition. . . . Here religious norms allowed them a freedom of movement, an access to all corners of society, both high and low, and a certain liberty in their relations with men--privileges which were out of reach for rich and middle class Bengali women of the time. (134)

It is not surprising that the denunciation of such popular cultural forms aided and consolidated "emancipated" women's access to a new social milieu through participation in the cultural affairs of the educated. Banerjee notes that long before Tagore's time, "the Tagore family's male members, eager to emancipate their women from the lascivious stories of Radha and Krishna, had barred their doors to the Vaishnavite kathakata reciters" (151). This script of educated Bengali men's vigorous campaign to suppress the Vaishnavite culture, composed overwhelmingly of women, is barely legible in Tagore's story.

The invocation of the Vaishnava poets might be seen as a retrieval of Bimala's buried indigeneity, callused by the twin processes of anglicization and sanskritization. The Vaishnava poets lend a devotional angle to Bimala's symbolic desertion of home, while placing her own devotion to the cause and to Sandip within a popular, indigenous form of worship rather than within the elevated worship of Shakti, the image that crowns Sandip's passion for Bimala. However, in *Ghare Baire*, the opposition set up between the truly home-made culture of the Vaishnavites and the illusory home-made culture of *Swadeshi* is ambiguous at best. The mediatory figure of Bimala fails to engage these oppositions in a way that would draw out their inner logic and their dynamism because Bimala's struggle is contained by death and return to the folds of the home. The possibility of her emancipation, as perhaps the decolonization of India, remains trapped within the one question that frames the novel: What is real Indianness?

## *Indianness in Approaches to Indian Writing in English*

The Indianization of gender, as we have seen, was of foremost importance in nationalist interpretations of Indian culture and in shoring up an uncolonized space in the bodies and minds of women. The alienation of women by this discourse continues to occupy a subterranean level even today in Indian women's writing, both in English and in the Indian languages. Critical attention focusing for the most part on the generalized conflicts of tradition and modernity, country and city, language and identity, especially where English writing is concerned, has pushed this political vein of women's writing deeper into the recesses of the unspeakable.

Given the complex negotiations that women were making to position themselves within the shifting parameters of "western" and "Indian" value structures, it is not surprising that the project of the Indianization of gender and writing, in some instances, was taken up more vehemently by women anxious to prove by example that those who had acquired a western education need not be necessarily less attuned to the nationalist demand for chaste, pure, and refined womanhood.[4] Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers like Toru Dutt or Sarojini Naidu, for whom to be a "first-rate writer of English" was a gesture of emancipation from social and intellectual confinement, are primary examples. Their writings responded to the need for a new image of the westernized elite as they attempted to transcribe with relentless diligence an essential Hindu spirit into the language of Sidney or Spenser, Yeats or Eliot. Likewise linguistic discourse has been the main route for critics in apprehending and configuring the ideological conflicts in the writings of these women. One critic explains the incongruity between Naidu's "public experience and her poetic personality" as evidence of artistic immaturity: "in her political speeches, she spoke out boldly of the need to liberate Indian women from their homebound roles and make them equal partners of men in national struggle, but in her own poetry, she presented women as panting doves" (Nagarajan 29). The class and gender ethos that these women writers were representing and conserving through their literary productions, the imperatives of the Victorian myths of womanhood they were surrounded by, and their part in the Indianization of those myths are submerged in the critic's assessment that had Naidu mastered the poetic idiom enough to realize that she needed new images and techniques she might have achieved greater heights of representation. "If," Nagarajan suggests, "[Naidu] had kept in touch as a poetical practitioner . . . with post-1914 developments in English poetry, she would have an instrument to cope with the Indian reality of which she was most certainly aware" (29).

Indianness continues to function, directly or obliquely, as a tool of Commonwealth literature criticism. Shantinath K. Desai's teleological model of the development of Indian English writing reflects many of the major statements of this kind of literary (and social) criticism. The four stages of Desai's model are made to parallel what he calls "a counterhistorical consciousness." During the first stage of consciousness, the colonized intelligentsia turns from its feudal masters to the colonial master for leadership and support in order to usher in modernity. Although "the awakening of consciousness that occurs in a colonial context is entirely different from the awakening that takes place in a free nation," being imitative and uncritical of British models, new forces are released "which initiate the second phase of its evolution" ("History Against History" 39). In the second stage, the ambivalence felt towards the master nation increasingly permeates the quest for freedom and for anti-imperialist allies. This ambivalence in colonial consciousness is "characterized by an 'explosive' mixture of love and hate--by a critical attitude towards the West and a patriotic admiration towards its [own] glorified past" (39). In the third stage, national identity asserts itself by the "deliberate turning back to the traditions of folk culture, on the one hand . . . and to the most modern models of the West, on the other" (40). The fourth stage marks the nation's coming into its own. It is "a period of confident re-assimilation of the master nation's culture from the standpoint of equality and strength" (40). Commonwealth literature, Desai argues, owes its success to the urge for establishing a "separate identity coupled with "the urge to seek relationship with others of similar nature," facilitating the formation of new identities (41).

Desai ascribes the best in Indian English writing to the third and fourth stages, when the nation realizes "the necessity of going 'backwards'-- to our 'roots,' to our ancient Sanskrit poetics, to our folk literature, to the 'genuinely' Indian" ("Trends and Possibilities" 57). In its urge for a distinctive Indian sensibility anchored in the conflictual yet creative experience of tradition and modernity, this argument iterates a process of Indianization not all that different from the nineteenth-century project of acculturation. Commonwealth literature criticism, when it draws upon the notion of Indianness to predicate the independence and anti-colonial consciousness of Indian writing in English, subscribes to an invented tradition that served the needs of an indigenous patriarchy eager to assert its moral and cultural superiority. It overshadows the gender politics of that conjunctural moment of anti-colonial consciousness.

Desai's definition of this body of writing represents a strong strain not only within Commonwealth criticism but within current Indian cultural studies as well. In Badri Raina's essay, "Language and the Politics of English in India," the political rhetoric of the argument for vernacular languages resounds with the claims of indigeneity, national selfhood, and the desire to retrieve the essence, the soul of India, as it were. Raina delineates the role of English as "cultural organizer" with a great deal of insight and sensitivity, showing how it interpellates the modernized postcolonial subject, particularly in the academic world, creating distinctions between the language of intellectual work and the language of sociality and community (269). Yet, the opposition between English and the vernaculars loses its political significance, when the vernaculars are attributed not only a "mutually affective closeness," but also an awareness of and affiliation with "mass reality" (268). English, on the contrary, is seen to fit the desire for "distance" and "self-esteem." For his examples of a radical language politics in the making, Raina draws upon the positions of nationalist leaders like Bankim, Gandhi, and Rammanohar Lohia, each of whom desired to reform Hinduism, not change the class structure of Indian society; each perceived the invasion of the English language in terms of political and historical "emasculation" (283, 285). One wonders what the feminine equivalent of that loss would be in terms of women's writing and use of English. It is not insignificant that Raina, in fact, begins his essay (perhaps as a trope of his basic argument) with a statement about women's amenability to English as a short cut to freedom from sexism:

> I have often in recent years wondered why it is that many more Indian women than men among the English educated urban classes, even when they hold a critical view of the Indian colonial experience and of the role

> of English in it, conduct their spoken interactions in English. What seemed an easily remarkable contradiction now strikes me as issuing from a contemporary historical urgency deeply related to choice of language use. . . . Often it must be that in their perception the vernacular carries a cultural load which inhibits the desired status of a gender-free and autonomous self-hood. Consider especially that whereas in English, verbs are gender-neutral, in Hindi, for example, these are everywhere inflected for gender. . . . To the extent, therefore, that gender functions as a more pressing cognitive category than, for instance, class, the use of English in the case of such subjects must bear deeply on the perception of being. (266)

There is no doubt that the visibility of women who do their intellectual work in English has increased. Many of them teach English literature, publish in western presses and move about in circles where English is taken for granted. Interestingly, some of the strongest critiques of English and its role in Indian society seem to come from feminist intellectuals deeply involved with the language. Their concerns with the language are finally concerns with identity and privilege, with forms of hierarchical displacement that compel the continuous interrogation of available languages and techniques of negotiation. However, instead of developing a critique about issues of women's literacy or the gender/class intersections in language use by taking the question of women and English seriously enough to explore some actual interdiscursive contexts, Raina opts for an explanation based on linguistic norms alone. The underlying assumption of Raina's argument is that the question of gender is a matter of discursive choice, a matter of psychic engagement or disengagement, an "impersonal location," which needs to be exchanged for involvement with "a vernacular ordinariness" (270).

Even when contemporary scholars recognize that all colonial and postcolonial Indian literary production is tied in various ways to that of the metropolis, the question of an adequate representative apparatus firmly situated in the vernacular returns at the site of cultural criticism.[5] Meenakshi Mukherjee warns that

> In India, so long as the parameters of theoretical discourse are set by the available texts in English, nothing important will ever be achieved, because English texts, regardless of their literary and other values, have always been isolated phenomena in India unconnected with the network of pressures that determine the basic cultural design. These texts do not become points of intersection of larger social, political or historical forces. It is the Indian language texts that throw up theoretical possibilities. ("The Centre Cannot Hold" 45)

Mukherjee mainly proposes a re-reading of nineteenth-century Indian language texts "as a take-off point for a new theoretical discourse on colonial India," to be carried out in light of recent developments in the disciplines of history and other social sciences that have contributed greatly to this emerging discourse (43). However, the possible outcomes of such an endeavor reveal a contradiction in the very approach to theoretical discourse. It is a means of establishing continuity, of sealing ruptures even as it opens a window to the "complex network of historical tensions and cultural pressures" that constitute the environment of postcolonial writing in India (43).

Mukherjee's critique of English writing rests upon the ability of texts to interpellate a clearly defined insider. In a more recent article, Mukherjee juxtaposes the true plurality of Indian society with the false Indianness of English fiction, where "there is an essentializing of India, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community" (2608). The Indian language writer, according to Mukherjee, knows his exact constituency and is secure in the knowledge of the shades of response his associative word-play or ironic understatement will evoke in the [Indian] readers who are equipped with the keys for decoding these oblique messages" (2608). A broader distinction underscores Mukherjee's differentiation between English and vernacular: India-colonized versus India-in-spite-of-being-colonized.

> [I]n very few of the major works of fiction in the Indian languages is colonialism an important concern. Far more pervasive has been, for example, the theme of partition, and the writers in at least four languages of the country (Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi) have gone back again and again to this rupture to understand our present. Many other forms of internal dissension, dislocation and oppression engage the bhasha writer today relegating the trauma of colonial experience to the background . . . Most of our fictional literature has been conditioned by other, either

> older or newer, more local, diverse and complex pressures and intricate social hierarchies than what can be explained by British rule in India. (2610)

The relation between ideological location and language choice becomes especially complicated in the event of bilinguality. Some nineteenth-century women intellectuals used English mainly to be heard. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, author of *Sultana's Dream* (a highly applauded fantasy, published in 1905), claimed that she wrote her first and only book in English "to pass the time;" her biographer suggests, however, that "[Hossain's] motivation for writing in English was partly to demonstrate her proficiency in English to her non-Bengali husband" and partly "to test her ability in literary forms other than essays" (Jahan 2). The bulk of Hossain's essays on women's education, social reform, and equal rights of Muslims was written in Bengali. Another example is Pandita Ramabai. She wrote her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman* in English in 1886, the proceeds of which she used to set up a widow's home in India. Ramabai's book had the desired effect of stirring Hindu and Christian patriarchy alike, especially due to her command over Sanskrit. She was able to argue with ample and precise evidence that there never was a golden age for Hindu women. As Uma Chakravarti observes, "the glorious Aryan woman did not exist for Ramabai precisely because of her knowledge of Sanskrit" (68). Hossain and Ramabai demonstrate the kind of "creative bilinguality" which Svati Joshi identifies as a distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century intellectuals, who were "more firmly located in the cultural and social formations of their community" than the contemporary intelligentsia, who "is cut off from linguistic communities with whom it can speak or share its knowledge" (24). These earlier writers also show something else: bilinguality is not a sign of the cohesiveness of culture or "genuine" Indian intellectual traditions. For their work, whether conducted in English or in Indian languages, women had to struggle with the power and influence of male reformers. Pandita Ramabai's conversion to Christianity, her marriage to a lower-caste lawyer, and her radical-reformist activities caused her to be marginalized even by her women contemporaries. That marginalization continues to this day, when, as exemplary figures of "bilingual-bicultural interactions," critics cite Tagore, Gandhi, and Aurobindo, without investigating the caste-class-gender nexus within which those interactions take place.

The consolidation of English as a language of progress and autonomy through the active support of the indigenous intelligentsia and the simultaneous growth of the Indian languages are deeply entangled processes. Thus, Joshi qualifies her observation of "the lack of groundedness in contemporary English language writers" by pointing out that it is

> not a question of language alone, for this is also to some extent true of the urban elite writers, critics, and academics functioning in their own language whose sensibility has been broadly shaped by liberal aesthetics. . . . One finds that their terms of discourse are the same as those of the literary tradition of modernism, and now even occasionally, of the theoretical and philosophical positions of postmodernism. (24)

The colonial history of Indian languages shows that they are far from being free of the dominating influence of English. In fact, they were recast and redefined, not only in the interest of smooth administration but also to establish the need for colonial intervention in making the natives aware of their own language and cultural history.[6] As part of the massive knowledge bases produced by the British to justify and maintain their control over India, Indian languages were reconstructed in accordance with the principles of the English language. Their preservation became the responsibility of the Europeans. Dictionaries were produced, grammars of Indian languages were composed, and generally a whole mode of conceptualizing and practising language was put into circulation. The main purpose of this elaborate system of standardization and codification was to construct an India that could be represented to Indians as the true and authentic one. So, Indian languages themselves became the means of introducing new ways of thinking and of perceiving the world. In his essay "Colonialism and the Vocabularies of Dominance," P. Sudhir argues that the conquest of language "was a necessary adjunct of the economic and political conquest" (335). In the Telugu-speaking regions, for instance, "the growing political dominion of the Company required increased and 'authentic' knowledge of local conditions, and for this the acquisition of mastery over Telugu appeared to be an essential precondition" (336). The aggressiveness with which the British followed their language policies is apparent from the fact that the acquisition of language skills by colonial officers became necessary for their career advancement. "Professorships" were introduced exclusively for Europeans, who were paid at least five times more than "native" teachers (Sudhir 337). Printing also intervened in the shape and growth of the Indian languages. To facilitate faster printing of Telugu, for instance, many of its orthographical practices were eliminated as archaic ones (Sudhir 344).

English, however, continues to function as a language of command and domination in India. So deep is its hold that it cannot be ejected simply through replacement by an Indian language. Furthermore, the context of global technology and capital distribution strengthens the position of English every day; the Indian bourgeoisie must speak to the world in a cosmopolitan tongue to signal its "non-protectionist" stance. It would indeed be difficult to find a non-English space in India. If we believe that language works through a discourse and that in a prolonged hegemonic position, its diffusion could be almost untraceable, the rejection of English for the vernacular is tantamount to a search for an invented "purity." At the same time, we cannot ignore the historicity of English in India and attribute the deliberate rejection of English simply to cultural essentialism. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, for example, uphold a postcolonial syncretism that distances itself from a “culturally essentialist stance which might reject the use of English because of its assumed inauthenticity in the 'non-English' place" (42). In this case, the use of postcolonial discourse to demarcate a “free” space of cultural expression tied to English functions like a command, under which the conceptualization of postcolonial subjectivity is supposed to take place. Those choosing to write in Indian languages within a postcolonial context face the danger of being banished from the liberating cosmopolitan discourse of "syncretic postcoloniality," for addressing the world in an

Indian language instead of an interesting "variant" of Standard English. Glossing, untranslated words, and syntactic fusion, are hailed as signs of intervention in the colonial language, signs the western reader can read and thereby place himself or herself within a system of resistance largely engineered with its own materials and meaning-making process.

English and Indian cultural spheres, like Westernization and Indianization, are deeply entangled processes, and language as an apparatus of acculturation has the curious history of participating in both. Women's negotiations with English in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, in fact, negotiations with the controlled access of women to literacy, the patriarchal configurations of modernity, and the representations of womanhood in the hegemonic ascendancy of the middle class. The discourses of westernization and Indianization, which have played important roles in the reconfiguration of Indian middle-class culture as ready both to reform itself and to assert its religious and political autonomy, were aligned with English and formed by its characterization of Indian culture and tradition. Equated with tradition by colonial and indigenous patriarchies, women became the prime candidates for the amalgamation of westernization and Indianization, for the reform and preservation, purification and revival of traditional systems.

In this chapter, I have used this broader interpretation of English to draw attention to the culturally sanctioned models of femininity which were imposed upon women. Indian women intellectuals had to confront the ethos of womanhood that emerged from the intersection of those discourses. If Indian women's writing in

English is defined only as part of the body of Indo-Anglian literature that grew out of the psycho-cultural pressures on those who came into close contact with colonial presence, then this important ideological imperative of women's self-representation will be missed. The confrontation took on added complexity when the struggle was linked to the prevailing agendas of decolonization, primary among them the re-invention of tradition to mark out a space free from the effects of history. In the next chapter, I will look at a more concrete example of such a linkage and its far-reaching effect on women's perception of their national and cultural roles.

# Notes

[1] Orientalism was official government policy till the 1820s, when Orientalist scholars promoted the study of Indian languages and literatures, particularly Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, in keeping with the general tenor of the eighteenth century to rediscover ancient eastern cultures. With Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835, the tide of Anglicism took control with a vigorous campaign for Western instead of Eastern learning. English came to be firmly ensconced as the language of administration and higher education. Its purpose was to create at least a class of people who would benefit from this education in economic terms and who would act as the virtual agents of British rule in India. Ultimately both movements were aiming to construct a India that would strengthen the argument for the continued presence of British in India and for the dissemination of western forms of knowledge. There is a sizeable body of writing on colonial management of Indian culture. See Kalyan Chatterjee's *English Education in India* (1976), Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989), and Susie Tharu's "Government, Binding and Unbinding" (1991).

[2] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (London: Macmillan, 1983). For a more detailed analysis, see Sarkar's *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908.* Sarkar cites *Ghare Baire* as one of Tagore's finest novels, reflecting the ambiguities and tensions of that tumultuous time.

[3] In the film version of the novel, Satyajit Ray translates the end as a final removal of Bimala to the *antahpur*. The film begins with several quick shots of

Bimala before and after her widowhood; the stark white sari, the cropped hair, and complete lack of ornaments have a shocking effect and linger throughout the subsequent story told in flashback. See Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, 263-273, for interesting details on Satyajit Ray's reworking of the novel and his approach to the characters.

[4] See the chapter "Views on Women and their Roles" in Malavika Karlekar, *Voices From Within*, 76-110. Karlekar analyzes a selection of women's personal narratives which contributed to the construction of the *bhadramahila*'s identity. The campaign for women's education and their access to forms of public discourse was carried on side by side with the exhortation to women to obey and serve their husbands, and to affirm their femininity through domestic grace and restraint.

[5] See Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Two Views of the Periphery," *Kunapipi* 11.1 (1989): 41-48. Like Desai, Mukherjee identifies the impact of colonialism on literature as having inculcated a sense of the superiority of English literary forms, so that "the major literary figures in India from the nineteenth century onwards, even when they wrote in the Indian languages, wrote within the discursive limits set by the study of English literature and in some cases deliberately set out to emulate the examples and sequences that constitute literary history in Europe" (42). It is only recently, Mukherjee points out, that these figures have been studied for "the nature of the mutation that took place," for the complex network of historical tensions and cultural pressures" that attended the writers' incorporation of new genres and narrative modes. It is important to keep in mind the implicit binary of form and

content that informs Mukherjee's line of argument. The ideas in this essay are modified and extended in a later essay, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English," *Economic and Political Weekly Nov*. 27 (1993): 2607-2611.

[6] See Sangari and Vaid, "Introduction," *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, and the essays by Niranjana, Sudhir, and Padikkal in Niranjana *et al*, eds., *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India.*

# Chapter 2

## Daughters of Indianization: The Gandhian Formula

The idea of Indianness continues to be critical for women during the 1940s and 50s, the period of consolidating the gains of the national liberation movement and creating a nation state that will reflect its dominant cultural values. Perhaps the most powerful and enduring model of women as ideal subjects of the nation was forged by M. K. Gandhi. The key feature of Gandhi's model is the image it offered women of themselves, that of the true "satyagrahi," one who fights for non-violent political action. The strength of this image lay in its materials, taken from the traditional values of motherhood, sacrifice, purity, and disinterested service. Although Gandhi discouraged women from direct political action as a general principle, believing like the nineteenth-century reformers in constructing the home as the separate and unsubjugated sphere of middle-class life, he granted them custodianship of the nation's spiritual and moral health. Considering the Victorian undertones of Gandhi's model and its exclusion of a growing population of working women, not to mention women's increasing awareness of the chasm between real and imagined freedoms, it would seem that Gandhi's model would not outlast the heyday of cultural nationalism. On the contrary, Gandhism has flourished and is even being energetically revived in women's political and cultural organizations.

I start this chapter with a discussion of the social and political appeal of Gandhi's construction of womanhood. Next, I explore the production of decolonized female subjectivity in two novels deeply influenced by the Gandhian ideology of nation and women's emancipation. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hossain and *Rich Like Us* (1985) by Nayantara Sahgal, written nearly twenty five years apart, variously interpret, modify, and expand the contours of the Gandhian model of womanhood in order to make it workable for the specific situation and historical context of their writing. In both settings, the writers address the crisis of moral and cultural identity resulting from the awareness of domination in two very different spaces: the Muslim zenana and the Indian Civil Service respectively. The Muslim feudal aristocratic setting of Hossain's novel and the elite bureaucratic one of Sahgal's re-inscribe Gandhism as an instrument of change without self-destruction.

Crucial to the Gandhian recasting of woman and womanhood is the reconceptualization of "home." Until Gandhi, women's education was predicated upon their service to the home as a separate sphere of Indian middle-class life. Partha Chatterjee has explained how the nineteenth-century discourse of nationalism resolved the woman question through the differential construction of home and world. Since the social reform period of the late nineteenth century, the home had been conceived as the dwelling-place of the "inner spiritual self" of the Indian people and their "true identity" (238). It stood apart from and even opposed to the material world, which was the product of colonial ideas and practices. The home-world relationship, it would seem, did not correspond to a simple separation of private-public spheres. However, that does not mean that powerful dichotomies were not attached to them. Even as Indianism became the crucial factor in determining the substance of "home," the division of home and the world, as Chatterjee notes, was layered with connotations of inner and outer, god and animal, superior and inferior, uncolonized and colonized, which made it easy to set "the new norm for organizing family life and determining the right conduct for women" (243). Woman was to be the guardian of the home and man was to be in charge of the material world. Consequently, woman could not be deemed the inferior and inessential partner of man, but rather was to be the indispensable keeper of his unsubjugated self. The emphasis on woman's duty to protect the home against "the profane activities of the material world" linked the social construction of woman to tradition, nation, and the whole people (239).

Gandhi reconfigured the essential dichotomy of home and the world by metaphorically recasting the nation as home. Thus, he was able to mobilize large numbers of women by removing the cultural barrier between the home and the world in political struggle; more importantly, he was also able to turn the home itself into a site for nationalist resistance. Not only would the home become an important site of anti-imperialist struggle for the reclamation of indigenous industry and culture, but the nation itself would take precedence over the household and its hierarchy: "the women have the right to even question their husbands' authority, if he does not let her take the Swadeshi vow," that is to practise and promote the use of indigenous commodities (Patel 380). The purity of women and men's honoring of that purity were to be the cornerstones of both "self-production" (*swadeshi)* and "self-rule" (*swaraj*). To practise swadeshi was to protect Indian womanhood. These moves resulted in the increased participation of women in the public sphere, in their political voices being heard. But the very nature and logic of that freedom ensured that their "original" designation as guardians of the home and preservers of Indian culture would be kept intact.

Gandhi made strategic use of the prevailing notions of femininity to involve women in the struggle for negotiated independence. To women he attributed all the qualities associated with *Satyagraha*, the celebrated Gandhian principle of non-violent political action. Women, in suffering silently for many centuries, had learnt fearlessness, patience, *ahimsa* (non-violence), and, most importantly, obedience. Woman, abused by religion and superstition, burnt as *sati*, married off as child and made prey to male perversion, cast off as a widow, used as a plaything, knew what it was to suffer. What made woman unique was her capacity to draw strength, even joy from pain: "What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? . . . She [Woman] can become the leader in *satyagraha*, which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith" (Gandhi, *Collected Works* V. 35, 29). Woman, having suffered and sacrificed by virtue of being woman, was naturally strong, courageous, patient, compassionate, and forgiving, and therefore more fit than man to serve as the morally superior conscience of nation and home. Woman, as Gandhi never failed to repeat, *was* the true *satyagrahi*, the fighter for truth.[1]

One of the more powerful movements initiated by Gandhi to give the political goal of *swaraj* a popular symbol, a rallying point, was the spinning of home-made cloth (*khadi*). Home-spun cloth never constituted any significant economic threat to the British-owned cloth mills or the Lancashire industries, being more expensive and coarse than mill-made cloth, but as a symbol of self-rule it had tremendous influence. The spinning wheel (*charkha*) came to epitomize the qualities of simplicity, duty, patience, self-help, unity, and Indianness. It came to stand for passive resistance to exploitation. An activity that could be undertaken at home without assistance and in silence, spinning incorporated Gandhi's ideology of womanhood. Gandhi urged women to take up the spinning-wheel, which would "become a symbol of [their] purity and [their] independence" (*Collected Works* V. 35, 44). For women, spinning would be a private symbol. However, control over the processes of spinning and the assessment of its political benefits would rest solely with men. In the same speech cited above, Gandhi made it clear that he was not prepared to shake the foundations of the home in any fundamental way: "I cannot cheapen khadi and I cannot popularize khadi unless I have an army of expert spinners from men who, and who alone, can penetrate the villages and reinstate the spinning-wheel by giving necessary instruction and doing the organizing work" (*Collected W*orks V. 35, 45).

Gandhi's perception of the new woman, namely his pronouncement of her moral superiority and her capacity for disinterested national service, draws almost exclusively upon what he considered the fundamental attribute of women--motherhood:

> Refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies, and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourselves, and don't go in for scents and lavender waters; if you want to give out the proper scent, it must come

> out of your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birth-right. Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again. (Prabhu and Rao 290)

However, Gandhi's policy of making the question of women's rights and freedom from exploitation contingent upon women's role as mothers did not go unchallenged even in Gandhi's time. Several members of the All India Women's Conference raised questions on behalf of unmarried professional women. At the 1929 meeting of the Conference on Educational Reform, the President, Rani Lalita Kumari Saheba of Mandi, made the following comments on women's education: "Women benefit by the highest education as much as men and it is a narrow view indeed which seeks to fit woman only for the needs of motherhood and domestic life, though it is not argued on parallel lines that man's education should be ordered so as to make him primarily a good father and a good husband" (Bald 8). Voices such as these were not strong or persistent enough, however, to have a decisive impact on the overpowering influence of Gandhi in the Indian nationalist scene.

Elite women in mainstream nationalist politics used their position to highlight the role of women as mothers of the nation. Sarojini Naidu, the first woman President of the Indian National Congress, a prominent member of the Women's Indian Association, conceived and organized by British women, active on several political fronts, a poet and an orator, gave the following assurance to Congressmen in 1918:

> I do not think there need be any apprehension that in granting franchise to Indian womanhood, they will wrench the power belonging to men. Never, never, for we realize that men and women have separate goals and separate destinies and that just as a man can never fulfil the responsibility of a woman, a woman cannot fulfill the responsibility of man. Unless she fulfills the responsibility within her horizon and becomes worthy and strong and brave there can be no fulness or completeness of National life. (Naidu 159)

It is possible, as Radha Kumar suggests, that Naidu's adoption of a supplementary role for women in public life might have been "a device to render women's activism acceptable, by making it appear unthreatening" (Kumar 57). With the growing involvement of women in politics, there was a continued emphasis on their presence as desirable mainly to "help improve the moral tone of society and elevate political activity" (Agnew 117). Women who began their political careers in the 1940s and 50s and were in the forefront of such activities as recently as the 1970s continued to project the private image to keep intact their credibility as political women.[2]

The Gandhian brand of politics relied heavily upon sacrifice, self-control, and self-purification, with the joint aim of aligning the middle and upper classes with the poor of the country and deterring the latter from seizing the initiative for *swaraj*.[3] The long-term economic effects of this form of politics on working women and lower castes, both of whose causes Gandhi championed, clearly testify to their continued subordination:

> The Indian Constitution [adopted in 1950] was followed by a series of laws designed to further gender equality--Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, and Equal Remuneration Act. All were government efforts to achieve equality between the sexes. Nevertheless, since the women who had worked closely with the Indian National Congress during the nationalist struggle for independence came from the educated middle- and upper-middle classes, it was not surprising that in the working of these laws, it was these women who tended to benefit more than their illiterate and poor sisters. For example, whereas women professionals and executives and high-level civil servants now receive salaries close to their male colleagues, the women agricultural labourers, who comprise almost 80 percent of the working Indian women, earn only 68 percent of what men receive. A study commissioned by the Indian Council of Social Science Research indicates that the government itself is often in violation of the anti-discrimination laws. In their investigation of public sector industries . . . Hussain and Rao (n.d) found evidence of women being relegated to lower-paid, dead-end jobs. Even when those women were experienced or had adequate qualifications, promotions tended to go more often to men than women. (Bald 11)

The statistics provided by Suresht Renjen Bald show that organizations like the All India Women's Conference, functioning under the aegis of the nationalist movement, could not represent the interests of women from the subordinate classes. Therefore the argument that the support of leaders like Gandhi for the women's movement generated a certain amount of complacency in the women's movement applies only to the privileged classes. Madhu Kishwar, social activist, critic, and editor, suggests that one of the legacies of Gandhianism is "the absence of the kind of hostility from men that women's movements in some other parts of the world had to face," which might "account for the lack of sufficient militancy in the women's movement on women's own issues in India" (1700). While it may be true that the impact of Gandhi and his followers allowed the question of women's freedom from male domination to be linked to the question of the country's freedom from colonial domination, the main idea of decolonization of both woman and nation remained mainly a regenerative idea. Both were to assert the strength in tradition and restore its essential relation of classes, sexes, and castes. In Gandhism the accepted correspondence between reform and modernization comes to be questioned. Reform was not an improvement in traditional social relations; it was the reinstatement of their intrinsic and real values.

More recently the economic content of Gandhi's ideology of women has been discussed by Sujata Patel, who argues that Gandhi's construction of womanhood is founded upon "an urbanised middle-class upper-caste Hindu male's perception of what a woman should be" (378). The point that Patel makes refers to Gandhi's constituency: "Gandhi was writing at a time when urban India had many visible women workers who did not remain at home. He was also extremely familiar with rural areas, where women workers have been part of its visible reality and had toured the country before setting up the Sabarmati Ashram. Yet, his image of woman is enclosed and confined within that articulated by the middle-class reformers" (379). Gandhi not only accepted the doctrines of nineteenth-century reformers, who propagated the theory of separate spheres for the sexes rooted in biology, but he also extended them by recasting the home itself as a political space, a space from which the fight for nation, for uplift of humanity, and for truth, can be fought.

Gandhi's propagation of asexuality, however, remains an area of interest for the women's movement. Madhu Kishwar suggests that its main purpose is to address the social disempowerment and objectification of women by men. Even the critics of Gandhi, who point to the "middle-class patriarchal" roots of his gender ideology apparent in his call to women "to remain in the house and fight for Swadeshi from the house," concede that Gandhi's construction of womanhood is aimed at "demolishing her seclusion and her image as a sexual object" (Patel 380-81). Situating Gandhi's negation of sexual pleasure in the context of his "experiments with changing key aspects of the usual power relationship between men and women," Kishwar finds in it a much-needed, although somewhat extreme, emphasis on the development of women's self-perception through their own consciousness and judgment, instead of the desires of men (1755). According to Madhu Kishwar, where

> Gandhi remains unsurpassed in terms of impact and influence even today is in the fact that he helped women find a new dignity in *public life*, a new place in the national mainstream, a new confidence, a new self-view and a consciousness that they could themselves act against

> oppression. From passive objects, women could become active subjects or agents of reform not only of their own predicament but of the whole society. (1694, my emphasis)

Kishwar acknowledges the fact that Gandhi's views on women were informed fundamentally by his moral approach to all social problems and hierarchies. The chaste, pure heroines of mythology--Sita, Draupadi, Damayanti--were his primary examples for women to fight their own oppression. However, she finds in his unprecedented use of tradition an imaginative and highly effective strategy for freeing women for public service.

As we will see in the following sections, building upon traditional roles rather than rebelling against them is a primary concern for women writing about the nation and national culture. Attia Hossain's novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, is particularly interesting in this context for its attempt to reflect the problems of the nation through the *zenana*.[4] Paralleling many of the major political and economic issues of independence, such as Partition, landlord power, Hindu-Muslim relations, and terrorism, the zenana also faces fragmentation, liberalization, and uncertainty. Its only hope for survival, like the nation's, depends on a definition of true Indianness, which, in turn, can frame the questions of what constitutes true freedom and empowerment.

## *National Liberation and Feminine Identity in* **Sunlight on a Broken Column**

> (i) The day my aunt Abida moved from the zenana into the guest-room off the corridor that led to the men's wing of the house, within call of her father's room, we knew Baba Jan had not much longer to live.
>
> Baba Jan, my grandfather, had been ill for three months and the sick air, seeping and spreading through the straggling house, weighed each day more oppressively on those who lived in it.
>
> Aunt Abida withdrew into a tight cocoon of anxious silence, while Aunt Majida dissolved into tearful prayers. The quarrels of the maid-servants were desultory and less shrill; the men-servants' voices did not now carry over the high wall; the sweeper, the gardeners and the washerman drank less and sang no more to the rhythm of the drum. Visitors spoke as if someone was asleep next door, and Zahra and I felt our girlhood a heavy burden (*Sunlight* 14).

> (ii) "Child, put away that book. Those insect letters will eat away your eyes" . . . .
>
> "Bua, Bua," I said, hugging her. "These books will be garlands of gold round my neck" (*Sunlight* 17).

The two extracts above set out the central and overlapping issues of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*: the death of the grand old patriarch and the education of the protagonist, Laila. The journey that Laila makes from her wealthy, yet strictly regulated, Muslim heritage to her educated, humble, secular state at the end of the novel provides the backdrop for Attia Hossain's exploration of the meaning of women's emancipation in the newly liberated Indian nation. Through her narrator's survival and struggle for a sense of belonging during the turbulent aftermath of the independence and Partition of India, Hossain engenders the political realities of war, displacement, and personal loss. The development of Laila's character reflects the formation of a national identity within new social configurations, resulting in the disruption of "habits of mind and living conditioned by centuries" (277). How well Laila will be able to house herself in the new nation depends on how she positions herself as a woman, a Muslim, and an Indian. Through the composite ideal of Indianness and womanhood, Laila emerges as not only a principal witness but also a principal critic of the changes that take place.

The death of Laila's grandfather Baba Jan is the first and most important in a series of episodes that signal the death of the old order. The new way of life creeps into this wealthy landowning Muslim household in the early 1930s. In fact, the house, lovingly named "Ashiana" (abode), stands witness to three ways of life corresponding to the three periods of its ownership, which, in turn, correspond to the history of the economic and political changes that took place in the region from the 1930s to 1952. The three owners--Baba Jan, the autocratic upholder of the *taluqdar* (big landlord) lineage, Hamid Chacha, the threatened politician-*taluqdar*, and finally, the present well-to-do Indian-Hindu inhabitants, who had migrated from Pakistan after Partition--are crucial figures in the story that Laila tells.

The city in which Laila grows up, goes to college and University, where she learns to live in two different worlds at the same time, once belonged to Baba Jan and his friends. Although its name is never spelled out, the dominant cultural notations make it clear that the unnamed city is none other than Lucknow. The complex class-cultural history of the northwestern province, known then as the United Provinces, and now Uttar Pradesh, is conveyed through the social leadership of *taluqdars* and *rajahs* (princely rulers) and their alliances with the British administration, the strong Muslim influence on elite Hindu culture, the absence of radical political movements, and the idyllic surroundings of the family estate. D. A. Low paints a picture of both the region and the city in broad, effective strokes:

> As the Mughal empire collapsed its association with the various petty rulerships which emerged in its aftermath subsisted intact. Together Indo-Persian culture and its associated traditional rulerships might well have been finally swept away by the British, but for the particular events of 1857 when the little rulerships provided the rallying points for those who were in revolt against the British; and the British decided that the best means of recovering their control over the region was to compound with them. In the Canning settlement of 1858, the key figures in U.P., the Taluqdars of Oudh, received sanads guaranteeing them a locally

> dominant position and this enabled them to survive to become the linchpin of the whole subsequent settlement.
>
> Lucknow was its headquarters. There the Taluqdars had their town houses. There was the centre for their Urdu cultural activities. . . . For over half a century they remained profuse in their loyalty to their British benefactors. The British reciprocated, and spent their time asserting that the Taluqdars were veritable British gentlemen. . . .
>
> The elite tradition which all this comprised was to remain dominant for a remarkably long time. It dampened nationalist political activity long after this had become extensive elsewhere. It secured its most dramatic victory when the capital of U.P. was transferred from Allahabad to Lucknow, by the then Governor of U.P. Sir Harcourt Butler. . . . [T]hroughout the dyarchy period of the 1920s and the 1930s the most fervent upholders of the elite tradition, the U.P. landlords, dominated the legislature of the province and for most of the time the executive as well. This was the only major province in India in which the landlords were so pre-eminent for so long (8).[5]

Very discreetly, as if to keep in tune with the upper-class *Lakhnavi* (of Lucknow) culture she depicts, Hossain draws the contours of the new order. This proves a difficult task for two reasons. Firstly, the old way of life symbolized by Baba Jan is not a simple one, but a complex arrangement of heterogeneous forces of power and privilege. Secondly, the new way of life, whose coming seems inevitable and imminent, is tied in numerous ways to the former. The *zenana* (women's section) becomes the touchstone of Laila's narration, for most changes are evaluated on the basis of how they affect the zenana.

Baba Jan's successor, the English-speaking, pipe-smoking uncle, Hamid Chacha, certainly relaxes several of the strictures imposed by Baba Jan, allowing Laila to enter college and university; however, Laila's new life becomes a lonely and uninspired one. During her uncle's anglicized regime, those figures that stood for different kinds of resistance to authority leave Laila's world one by one. Aunt Abida, in whose care Laila had grown up since her parents died, who taught Laila her "own language and heritage" (139), and whose love and protection mitigated the relentless authority of Baba Jan, leaves the zenana. In compliance with the imperatives of duty and responsibility that she has taught Laila, Abida accepts Hamid Chacha's decision and marries a man twice her age and already the father of several children. From one zenana where she functioned as its virtual head, she silently moves to another, where unquestioning obedience and silence are the law.

The second person to depart is Asad, Laila's cousin and friend. The confrontation between Asad and Hamid Chacha illustrates Laila's gradual realization that freedom from domination will have to be an internal struggle, not to be achieved by liberal education, extended social circles, new dress, or manners. When Laila's cousin Asad declares that he would prefer to study at the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) in Delhi, Hamid Chacha drops his democratic exterior and chastises Asad for being irresponsible:.

> "Young man," said Hamid Chacha loudly. "Finish your education and think of politics afterwards, when you are not dependent on others."
>
> Asad flushed, "I shall not be a burden on anyone. I shall work there as well as study. I have thought the matter over."
>
> "You have thought the matter over!" said Uncle Hamid icily, "and you make your own decisions without consulting those who have made you fit to do so!"
>
> It might have been Baba Jan speaking when his wishes were thwarted by those he considered inferior or beholden to him. . . . Why must power always be used to humiliate? (111)

Asad's choice angers Uncle Hamid more than the audacious declaration of his will because of the university's anti-colonial history and reputation. Several national universities came into existence in the early twenties. Of them, the Jamia perhaps had the most radical beginnings. The University was first set up in Aligarh on the eve of the Non-Co-operation Movement, which took off with full force in 1921-22. When Gandhi visited Aligarh along with Muslim nationalist leaders to campaign for Non-Co-operation and severance of all ties with government, he received tremendous support from students and teachers. The fight for nationalizing the university continued for quite some time, but the Trustees were able to crush it with police help. A new university, the Jamia Millia Islamia, was established; in 1925, it was shifted from Aligarh to Delhi. It sought neither recognition nor resources from the government, preferring "the hardships and ordeals of an honourable independence to the enervating security of a permanent grant which would frustrate its noblest ambitions."[6] Uncle Hamid's sons have been educated in Cambridge, one of whom has joined the Indian Civil Service like him, and the other become a barrister.

Under the confusing pressures of Uncle Hamid's liberal autocracy, Laila cannot sustain her critique of the *zenana* as circumscribed space, where her experiences are often "ordained, enclosed, cushioning the mind and heart against the outside world" (59). The opportunism of her westernized aunt and her glittering connections provokes in Laila "a core of intolerance hardened against the hollowness of the ideas of progress and benevolence preached by [her] and her companions" (138). Laila's sense of the *zenana* as a site of resistance to civilization becomes stronger in the face of its usurpation by a new group of brocaded and bejewelled women, who are "prouder of Western culture than those born into it and more critical of eastern culture than those outside it" (129).[7] The *zenana* of Aunt Abida, in spite of its austere and regimented code of conduct, stands out in Laila's memory as a space that concealed a genuine spirit of tolerance and service within its numerous folds of propriety, evident, for example, in the respectful relation of the zenana with one-time courtesan, Mushtari Bai.

The treatment of Mushtari Bai, though brief, reveals the contradiction at the heart of Laila's conceptualization of the *zenana*. Once upon a time honoured by "the richest and most cultured aristocrats" for her musical talents, Mushtari Bai becomes "a wandering mendicant" (66). Having lost her voice and given her wealth to charity, she depends on "the homes of those who had once known her greatness" for support and sustenance (66). Her gestures of etiquette and courtesy are reminiscent of a courtly culture unattainable from the most perfect of English governesses. The significance of Mushtari Bai's link with the zenana is unmistakable, drawing attention to the solidarity and friendship among women as well as to the strict division of inside and outside upon which the "symbolic shelter" of the zenana is built.[8] Why is Mushtari Bai homeless? Would Aunt Abida be as kind to any other talented courtesan? Or is her obligation confined only to those who have served the men in her family? Some of these questions assert themselves in the muted text of Mushtari Bai, but they remain too deeply entangled in the threads of nostalgia for a dying culture to effectively interrogate what "the dignity of her profession" means to Mushtari Bai and to the women of the zenana, or how the absent presence of gender constructions informs the relationship between the women. As part of the glorification of Mushtari Bai's cultural role, the sensuality of her profession is glossed over, as Aunt Abida's own invisibility is covered by her status as the protected, respectable benefactor of the unsheltered, visible women of the outside world. Hossain's zenana does not reveal the full extent of its function as an institution of patriarchal power and authority; instead, it celebrates female strength and friendship made possible through the enlightened ways of women like Aunt Abida.

The *zenana* continues to exert a tremendous influence on Laila's intellectual awakening and functions as a guide in her isolation even though Laila breaks all ties with it to marry Ameer in the teeth of family opposition. Later, she uses the same "sense of duty" and self-control that she has been accused of lacking to authenticate her break with custom and tradition. Laila carefully differentiates her pursuit of happiness from the rebelliousness of "the 'smart set' of Bombay and Delhi" (276). She stands opposed to the inter-religious marriage of her cousin Kemal with a Parsi woman, for instance, because in their defiance she detects the traces of a colonial consciousness. Like all "neo-Indians," who "wore their nationalism like a mask, and their Indianness like fancy dress," Kemal's educated wife "spoke of ancient culture in European idioms, tried to learn the Bharata Natyam style of dancing, and had gone to an *ashram* in the south for a period of meditation" (276). Laila associates the union of Perin and Kemal with the discovery of India by westernized, cosmopolitan intellectuals, whose "counterfeit" intellectualism" defines the cultural politics of the modern. She contrasts her love for Ameer--the object of her rebellion against age-old taboos--with the neo-colonialists by evoking an Eastern spirituality:

> [It is] as pure and eternal as the snows we had been watching in deep communicative silence. It was a part of every moment before it, the moment for which I had been born to become a part of existence before and after it, to know its meaning and fulfil its purpose. I knew a sense of such completeness and harmony that it seemed I was the earth, the sky, the light and the snow. (222)

Similarly, in a language replete with purificatory symbolism and divine fulfilment, Laila transposes the experience of physical pleasure on to a plane of internalized cultural wisdom:

> Through the body's worship, the consummation of passion, and the desire of each sense I was filled with a profound sense of mystic fulfilment. Through physical union came the knowledge of the oneness of separate beings. We, being part of each other were part of the whole creation, knowing no beginning nor end, only the consciousness of being. (314)

Laila's domestic life with Ameer, the birth of their daughter, and her experiences as a single mother remain unarticulated in the narrative. This gap is especially conspicuous, given the awakening of Laila's political and cultural sensibilities and the independence of mind with which she sets out on this phase of her life.

The treatment of sexuality as a metaphor for the rebirth of Indian womanhood and the nation is strongest in Laila's reunion with her cousin Asad, seven years after her husband's death, in the cold, unhomely grounds of Ashiana. It is perhaps no coincidence that the person who has extended solace and refuge to Laila is Asad. He looks "like a monk" and his life of dedicated action is "as indestructible as the cause" (318). His dreams live on, giving apposite reply to those who mocked his belief that he would "drive [the English] away with Truth and Non-Violence" (102). Laila undertakes the responsibility of sealing the relationship with an asexuality that, in spite of its ambiguity, remains the final image of the text: "I could not tell him that I did not wish to deceive him with my mind's acquiescence while each cell of my body remembered Ameer. . . . But now I wondered how much my mind had been deceiving me, how much falsehood there was in my excessive truth" (319). As long as Laila does not divulge the excess in the truth, she can keep her relationship with Asad free from sexual taint, particularly since she has recovered from the blow of her personal loss and is finally ready for national service.

Laila's emphasis on her return to the home of her childhood and youth for the last time in 1952 is important, not only at the personal level but also at the political level. Only a year before, "the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Act of 1951 . . . had destroyed the position of the Taluqdars and other former big landlords in the province, and great was the fall thereof" (Low 13). Laila herself observes that "[w]here the Raja of Bhimnagar's palace and garden had once been," there were now "three-storeyed cement blocks of cheap flats" (270). Her own erstwhile "Ashiana" has been taken over by urban professionals–doctors, dentists, lawyers–whose names on the gatepost hide "the marble slab, on which the neat black letters of uncle's name were fading" (271). The turmoil of Laila's own ambivalence towards these changes is expressed in metaphors of revulsion and acceptance: "Patches of damp and peeling plaster disfigured the house like the skin of a once beautiful woman struck by leprosy. Over the porch creepers of bougainvillea flamed orange and red and purple against the blue sky" (271).

Laila sees the past and present through "the complex vision of [her] nostalgia and sadness" (270). The present suggests an inevitable decay in "the greatness of the Islamic world" and of the "language and manners" that carried its essence (301). Nationalism, with its new commercial urban culture built upon forced migrations and the economics of integration, has created an acute sense of uprootedness in the very moment of belonging. The familiar and solid social formations have disintegrated but not disappeared. Their decaying remains cling to the new, and are documented in a catalogue of physical detail, such as "uneven spaces," crude wooden poles," "cold shadows," and "sightless houses" (271-72). The frenzied pace and rhythm of modernization that Laila sees in "the expanding city with its rash of new buildings, . . . new scars added to those left when the royal era was destroyed," are symptomatic beginnings of a new order; they also foretell "the end . . . our theories and enthusiasm had supported" (277). The position from which Laila perceives the chaotic development and renewal of the immediate post-independence, post-Partition period is a liminal position between two elite traditions. To a large extent, Laila is haunted by "the one specter" that, in the words of Marshall Berman,

> really haunts the modern ruling class, and that really endangers the world it has created in its image, . . . [one] that traditional elites (and for that matter, traditional masses) have always yearned for: prolonged solid stability. In this world, stability can only mean entropy, slow death while our sense of progress and growth is our way of knowing for sure that we are alive. To say that our society is falling apart is only to say that it is alive and well. (95)

In the transition from tradition to modernity, the ideological apparatus of civility with its feudal encodings of landlord-peasant relationships cannot explain the new relationships that emerge in its wake. A pervasive sense of dislocation, thus, accompanies Laila's perception of these trends: the rise of unholy alliances between unscrupulous Hindu businessmen, Muslim landlords, and religious separatists; the deep prejudices of women like Begum Waheed, Mrs Wadia, and Aunt Saira, concealed in their "doing good" through "government-approved committee[s] for social service and women's welfare" (302).[9] These too are part of the changes that signal the passage of the nation from colonization to freedom. While all these developments are indeed products of the new state and its partition into two nations, it is surprising that Laila has not thought of similar alliances between Baba Jan, the Hindu kings, and colonial officers, each supporting the other's system of exploitation and oppression.

Patriotism, not nationalism, emerges in the novel as the authentic political culture of India and a feminine agenda. Akin to love of the nation without the narrow desire of possession and confrontation, patriotism is associated with benevolence, humanity, and compassion.[10] Apart from the context of Partition, where fiercely defended economic and political interests of "different nationalisms" and "different families" confront one another, the most important statement on patriotism comes out of Laila's educational environment. Among Laila's four friends, Nita Chatterjee is described as "the strongest character," with a genuine commitment to fighting British imperialism in an "organized and disciplined" manner, using "the kind of weapons that will not misfire" (124). It is important that Nita categorically differentiates her position from "that stupid cousin of [hers] who tried to shoot some pompous official and was nearly hanged for his pains" (124). The underlying reference is to the revolutionary terrorist movement of Bengal and Punjab. It was strongly opposed by

Gandhi who saw it as a passing phase among the younger generation, driven to it by a sense of helplessness and humiliation.[11] There is another, and perhaps more significant, implication to Nita's utterances. Her description of effective political methods is, in fact, a critical response to the participation of women in terrorist actions in Bengal. In February 1922, Bina Das attempted to shoot the Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson, and was sentenced to nine years rigorous imprisonment; in December 1931, two Bengali girls, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chaudhary, shot dead the district magistrate of Tipper and were sentenced to life imprisonment; in September 1932, Preetilata Wadedar, a student of Dacca University in East Bengal, bombed an European club, and was found dead later, having poisoned herself with cyanide.[12] Nita's opposition to these anti-imperialist tactics as "heroic but misguided" is all the more suggestive of a gender politics in question, if we know that Gandhi's principles of Truth and Non-Violence were explained as essentially feminine weapons of struggle (124).

Hossain's characterization of Nita Chatterjee expresses oscillation between the new image of woman forged in struggle and the zenana civility of Laila's upbringing. Nita, always arguing, always looking for social significance in every comment, always confronting her friends on their political opinions, seems to lose out on the dignified status of woman. In her very appearance, Nita approaches the comical: "She was short, plump and always in a hurry as if she were tripping on the heels of time" (124). Nita, constantly arguing with Nadira, whose "strongest belief was that Muslims had to defend their heritage" (125) and with Joan, the Anglo-Indian, who felt she had "more in common with the English than with Indians" (127), seems not to possess the civility that Gandhi describes as "an inborn gentleness and desire to do the opponent good" (Andrews 279). Curiously, Laila discovers such a civility in the "conscientious, simple and generous" Anglo-Indian Joan, whose "weakness in arguments came from the very quality that gave her personal strength. She did not hate as we did. She did not hate Indians as we hated the British; she merely considered them a race apart" (127). Whereas Nita's aggressive criticism provoked the ire of her friends, making them angry and defensive, Joan "blunted the sharp points of prejudice" and "provided reason for respect" (127). Even Asad, to whom Nita's activism should seem laudatory, does not take Nita too seriously: "Sometimes when she is excited in an argument I imagine a fat little figure bristling with armour, swinging a huge broad sword, lopping off the heads of giants" (145). Nita's death from the blow of a policeman's baton during a rally does not bring about any new thinking in Laila; it merely confirms the futility of Nita's engagement with active politics.

The novel's reluctance to entertain the possibility of rebellion fully may be attributed to a period of cultural reconstitution and re-orientation, when, as Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha argue in the first volume of *Women Writing in India*, the "radical edge" of the earlier period of militancy had been blunted. Nation building itself had marked a shift in women's participation in political and cultural life. Whereas the figure of the woman in the reform period cultivated the "naturalized Victorian ideals of domestic virtue, patient and long suffering," that of the new woman forged in the thick of the nationalist movement and various militant anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggles, tended to be "self-confident and autonomous, conscious of her power and of the strength she could find in tradition" (172). Not as victims of *sati*, or widowhood, or child marriage, but as political mobilizers, women were exercising their right to make their mark on the nation.[13] Numerous women's organizations began to reflect these new directions from the early 1900s onwards.

The dominant trends in women's writing of the fifties and sixties, Tharu and Lalitha contend, evolve mainly from the concerns with housing the self or soul in a space that is "secular and universal" and at the same time "essentially Indian" (91). The voices of national responsibility "lose all marks of social difference" (69) and the travails of the "solitary heroine" (91) come to be situated in "the human condition itself" (92). The forties and fifties were crucial in setting up a canon of nationalist history and national belonging "that underlay national life until the late sixties, and further, the cultural conjunctures of the eighties and early nineties need to be understood in the light of those earlier configurations" (44). The electoral mandate secured through universal suffrage in 1951 and the programs of planned economic development and modernization effectively gave "shape and authority to the new, essentially upper-caste, middle-class, and male view of the agent-state" (57). Political and cultural texts contributed to this shift in "the process [that] might well be thought of as one of translation: the politically energized, heterogeneous articulations of the earlier period were rewritten into the quietist language of social policy and legislative reform" (58).

Although framed by elite zenana culture and patriotism, the feminine agenda of Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* does interrogate the narrative of national transformation through the displacement of a minority culture at a time when the nation was still celebrating progress and scientific socialism. However, the critical possibilities released by the educated, thinking protagonist's awareness of the class and communal politics of her feudal ancestry are folded back into the more forcefully presented argument for dignified and respectable womanhood.

In the next section, we will see how the restoration of democracy is linked to the ability of individual women to realize and activate their moral consciousness. Nayantara Sahgal's novel, *Rich Like Us*, demonstrates a far more personalized investment in the model of Indianization. Set in the period of Emergency, almost thirty years after Indian independence from British rule, the novel invokes the founding principles of the nation mainly through the memories of women, who also become indirectly responsible for the retrieval of those principles.

### *Elite Neo-Gandhian Feminism and* **Rich Like Us**

> Papa, a member of the ICS [Indian Civil Service] himself, had said with a pride I was used to hearing in his voice, "Sonali, people like you, especially women like you are going to Indianize India." It was the day my name had topped the list in the competitive examination for the civil service. He was an emotional man and that day, fifteen years ago, there had been tears in his eyes with the achievement--his as much as mine--of

> having passed on to me, and only to me of his two daughters, a precious responsibility he had carried, and his firm faith that huge historical change could be peaceful. (*Rich* 28)

> The emergency had given all kinds of new twists and turns to policy and the world's largest democracy was looking like nothing so much as one of the two-bit dictatorships we had loftily looked down upon. The things that had set us apart were not very clear to me any more. (*Rich* 31)

By conferring on Sonali the task of Indianizing India, Sonali's father echoes a well-known Gandhian dictate that women must be custodians of the moral spirit of the nation. They must bring to the warring public world their capacity for self-control and non-aggressive behavior. The focus on Sonali is important for another reason. She represents what Nayantara Sahgal calls "the schizophrenic imagination," characteristic of "that breed of westernized Indian for whom his plural culture meant a bewildering reckoning with himself, a balancing act, where the priorities were never in doubt, but where 'Who am I?' remained an on-going search and question" (18). *Rich Like Us* traces the political legitimacy of the schizophrenic imagination through its ability to represent major cultural conflicts of the post-independence era. The novel combines the symbols of an essential humane Indianness with a cosmopolitan, migratory psyche to depict the female protagonist's awakening to a crisis of moral and political identity.

The novel is set during the infamous emergency rule promulgated by Indira Gandhi on 26 June 1975. The protagonist, Sonali, a bright, young, Oxford-educated civil servant, finds herself totally unprepared for the political and personal realities of the emergency. Dismissed summarily from the post of Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Industry, she also witnesses the incarceration and murder of close friends, among them the English woman Rose, a mother-like friend and confidante to her. For Sonali, the emergency is a completely alien phenomenon. It dislodges her not only from the administration which was "more to [her] than her home"(32), but also from "the tradition [the freedom fighters] were trying to build" (28). This self-positioning carries added significance if one takes into account the fact that the author of the book, Nayantara Sahgal, is the niece of Nehru, the first Prime Minster of free India, and the author of the Emergency rule, Indira Gandhi, is his daughter. While the wayward daughter assaults the legacies of the fathers of independence by imposing a dictatorial regime, the good daughter undertakes the task of reconstructing their tradition in the present crisis.

Sonali's accidental recovery of her grandfather's manuscript performs the first task in retrieving a buried consciousness of the real India. In the document, Sonali's grandfather, a western-educated lawyer and the son of a reformer, writes about his mother's horrific death by committing sati. Neither his father's reputation as a passionate abolitionist nor his own beliefs, let alone all the British laws and statutes, are able to protect her. Writing in English ten years after the incident as one who "cannot believe in Hinduism," he, nevertheless, makes a passionate argument for

Hindu Reformation (151). In his view, sati is one of the many "corrupt practices . . . making a mockery of religion," like "encrustation upon encrustation" growing onto "a religion of immense antiquity with no traceable beginning, without a founder, a prophet or a church, with no single bible or commandments, no judgment day, no heaven and no hell" (133). Thus, only an understanding of the universalism of Hinduism can isolate and confront its specific distortions. Sahgal draws a parallel between past and present from this foray into the issue of sati. The political reality of emergency is to Independence what sati or untouchability is to Hinduism--a "subterranean layer" of evil, a "power of darkness" that has entered this ancient civilization.

Indian independence, Gandhi had declared, would not merely mean independence from foreign rule. It would mean the rediscovery and reappropriation of the essential Indian spirit embedded in the "poetic truth" of ancient Hindu texts such as the *Gita*, the *Vedas*, and the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.[14] It would achieve its shape from the lived experiences of its people and the safeguards they would learn to develop against its corruption. The word "swaraj" thus took the place of "Independence" in the Congress movement, not simply as an indigenous word but as one that encapsulated the very spirit of Indianness and its difference from the independences of the world. In a speech outlining the moral superiority of *swaraj*, Gandhi made the following assertion:

> Let us . . . understand what we mean by independence. England, Russia, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Chile, Bhutan have all their independence. Which

> independence do we want? . . . Our goal at any rate may be known by an indigenous word understood of the three hundred millions. And we have such a word in "swaraj" first used in the name of the nation by Dadabhai Naoriji. It is infinitely greater than and includes independence. It is a vital word. It has been sanctified by the noble sacrifices of thousands of Indians. . . . It is a sacrilege to displace that word by a foreign importation of doubtful value. . . . My ambition is much higher than independence. Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation in which England is the greatest partner . . . Mine is an ambition worth living for and worth dying for. In no case do I want to reconcile myself to a state lower than the best for fear of consequences. It is, therefore, not out of expedience that I oppose independence as my goal. I want India to come to her own and that state cannot be better defined by any single word than "swaraj." Its content will vary with the action that the nation is able to put forth at a given moment. India's coming to her own will mean every nation doing likewise. (*CW* Vol.35, 456-457)

The ideal of *swaraj*, or the Indianization of India through a new spiritual idiom, could be fully realized, Gandhi declared, "not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused" (Prabhu and Rao 317). *Swaraj* was not to be "the monopoly of the rich or the educated," but was for all, "emphatically including the maimed, the blind, the starving, toiling millions" (Prabhu and Rao 318).

What Sonali never doubts is this mystique of swaraj, the cult of *swadeshi* as she has come to understand it through the nationalist movement. That is her subsoil and that is what absorbs, processes, and revitalizes the effects of her various social and political experiences. Change must come with an Indian face, originating not in class struggle, but in the depths of Indian religion, customs, and traditions. Hence, not Marx, but Gandhi; not class war, but a "new vocabulary" like "daridranarayan" (God of the poor) and "harijan," (God's people), that would be the "the language of a new epic"--in other words, a new Hinduism (109).

The draconian policies with which the Emergency launched its offensive on the democratic and human rights of the people, particularly of the poor, are well-documented.[15] However, Sahgal fails to note that the Emergency was not the first time that Indira Gandhi dismissed a democratically elected government. In 1963, as President of the ruling party, she revoked the Communist government of Kerala, an event that Sahgal describes as "ultimately timely" in her book on Indira Gandhi (75). If less than thirty years after the process of decolonization has started, foreign capital continues to batten itself on cheap labour and raw materials, opposition party members are jailed, the struggles of the oppressed are crushed with armed force, the bureaucracy and government collude with landlords and big capital, one wonders if the nightmare of the Emergency can be truly alien to the political formations marking Indian independence. That the Emergency was not just the end of the benevolent epoch of Gandhi-Nehru, but the end of a period of mass political movements against price rise, state corruption, deforestation, landlordism is a reality that remains marginal to Sahgal's novel. Although Sonali acknowledges that like many others she has become used to sights that should appal her, move her, make her question her own worth as an individual, she considers the emergency as a whole new configuration of power. For her, it illustrates the deep rupture in the historical dream of pre-Independence India.[16]

A Hinduist conceptualization of Indian culture combined with an intrinsic belief in ethical conduct are the main elements in Sahgal's critique of authoritarianism and injustice in *Rich Like Us*. Through the diversity of the victims of the Emergency, from civil servants to small businessmen, beggars, and ordinary women, Sahgal seeks to outline a unified cultural-political identity that can transform class consciousness into a powerful and purposive spiritual-democratic sentiment. Sahgal expresses this sentiment of inclusiveness more clearly in her book, *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1982), where she discusses the legacy of Gandhi and the nationalist leaders of the early years of independence:

> [Mahatma] Gandhi had welded the educated with the mass, convinced that progress to freedom required a true identity of interests between the different sections of society, a tradition carried on after independence. Gandhi's war had been against India's most ancient injustice--caste. Philosophically this was the reverse of class war. The challenge was projected not as rich against poor, but as civilized men against the

> injustices of their society. . . . The welding had survived principally because Indian leadership had nurtured it. (66)

The critical position taken by Sahgal's heroine as administrator and historian stems from a personal sense of integrity instilled by family, education, and work. The moral tenor of this position is established throughout the book, reinforcing those qualities that Gandhian political culture deployed so successfully to assert the spiritual superiority of its goals and to differentiate Indian independence from the independences of the world. The possibility that both Sahgal and her protagonist refuse to consider is that the *agent-provocateurs* and mysterious sources of evil that seem to cloud the vision of people, driving them to desperate, despicable actions, is so powerful and frightening because it implicates that very "humanity," that arrangement of social forces which nationalist historians and politicians have tried so hard to posit as impeccable, if occasionally misguided.

Sahgal struggles with the role that Gandhi was most ambivalent about with regard to women: the role of the doer. "Passivity," writes Sahgal in her essay on the schizophrenic imagination, "can become an active choice, a strength, among people where invasion and reconquest have been the pattern, because it is one's best chance of remaining whole" (19). And passivity, combined with compassion and dutifulness, become the hallmarks of Sonali's resistance to the regime. At the end of the novel, Sonali is seen tentatively accepting a job as a researcher for a wealthy Englishman, who wants to create an international panoramic exhibition of the seventeenth to mideighteenth century through art. She claims that she is "preparing all the while for the future" (266).

A more convincing argument for an Indianization of India through the recovery of its essential humanity is forged not in the public world of business and politics but in the private world of one woman, who is neither Indian nor Hindu. She is the Englishwoman Rose, the second (and illegitimate wife) of Ram, a wealthy businessman and an old friend of Sonali's father. Rose, a woman of working-class origins, meets the wealthy, debonair, and charismatic Ram while he is in England and chooses to marry him, knowing he has a wife and child back in India. Shunned by Ram's family, angry and embittered, Rose contends in silence with illegitimacy and loneliness, until a spontaneous act of kindness on her part plunges her into the very centre of her new home. Thus begins a process that encapsulates what might be called the "Indianization" of Rose.

Rose's Indianization follows a trajectory that personalizes the understanding of Indian tradition. Rose herself comes to stand for a West and an Englishness that appears different from the colonizing one. The first step in this process is Rose's realization that Ram's orientalist and cosmopolitan world is a fantasy that shields him from the real changes that are taking place. Initially Rose had been enthralled by Ram's gift shop, which seemed to reflect his own exotic and amorous personality:

> [He] had such a thorough acquaintance with the pleasures of the senses, a voluptuary's delight in everything his hands and eyes touched, the treasures in the gift shop he had opened, the special editions he kept

> there in a private alcove with illustrations of court ladies and their lovers, peacocks and lotuses, books of Persian and English poetry and, of course, Rose herself. It was his world, from roof terrace to alcove, and she an idle guest, housed, feasted and invited to enjoy herself. (63)

But Rose soon finds that Ram's treasure house is an embodiment of his distance from "his own people's battles" (123). He remains indifferent to the political turmoil in which "his countrymen shout themselves hoarse in their processions," and to "what was happening on the streets and who was getting arrested and why Mahatma Gandhi had gone on a fast" (123). Not only that, Ram's complacency threatens to jeopardize their very livelihood. During the war, Ram's business of imported luxuries practically comes to a halt and Rose must seek assistance from Lalaji, her father-in-law, whose own business was solely in "Indian cotton and wool from his own mills" (116). This constitutes the second stage in Rose's transformation.

Rose's encounter with Lalaji might be seen as her experience of "that other India," which Ashish Nandy has defined as "neither pre-modern nor anti-modern but only non-modern. It is the India which has survived the Western onslaught" (75). Lalaji's austere traditionalism, like Gandhi's, only appears so in comparison to the culture of Westernism. Beneath, Rose discovers a richness of experience, akin to the Indian cloths that glow with "the romance and colour of a subcontinent," quite unlike the "tame" English cloth good for "tea-and-tennis frocks" (117). Lalaji's story, as told by Rose, brings out a configuration of Indianness which is neither a rejection of modernity nor an unqualified acceptance of its logic:

> "Take my father-in-law. 'E never saw a contract in 'is life. Couldn't speak a word of English. Wouldn't even have chairs and tables in 'is part of the 'ouse. 'E was a villager, that's wot 'e was, and that's wot 'e stayed till 'is dying day. . . . 'E became quite a power on the stock exchange. And with no education to speak of. 'E told me 'e taught 'imself to read and write by the light of a kerosene lantern in the room behind the shack where 'e sold kerosene and matches and strings and things. Funny when you think of all the money 'e made, it didn't change 'im one little scrap." (13)

Lalaji's non-modernity is universalist, transcending social divisions of class, caste, and color. His prayer meetings, "patterned after the Mahatma's, with readings from the Gita, the Koran and the Bible," are peopled by "rich men, poor men, beggar men," as well as "all sorts and classes of Hindus and Muslims" (123). Lalaji's Hinduism, fluid and activist, is shown as more creative than that of Mona, who uses her religiosity like a protection against what she cannot control or change.

Rose's inclusion in the prayer meetings evokes Gandhi's own affinity for what Nandy identifies as "the other culture of Britain, and of the West" that stands against "the history and psychology of British colonialism" (49). Rose's ordinariness is transformed as Lalaji links her name to those eminent critics of the modern West he admires:

> You are in good company, Rose, Lalaji told her animatedly, fondly recalling English names that had become as good as Indian, C. F.

> Andrews, college professor and friend of the Mahatma, editor B. G. Horniman who had taken off his English suit, put on a *pyjama-kurta* and joined the civil disobedience marchers in the streets of Bombay, and the English admiral's daughter, now Miraben, who had given up an admiral's daughter's life for an ashram and a spinning wheel. Ram, uneasy with his father's animation, and already seeing him with the tinkers, tailors and untouchables in the street, said, I hope you are not planning to join the Quit India movement. Lalaji gave his son a pitying look. I had already joined it before it was called the Quit India, and long before you were conceived. (128)

Lalaji's brand of nationalism, which is more a fidelity to his essential, inner self, his personal mythology, than it is to the call of a single leader, is able to provide a space for Rose that Ram's unencumbered modernity cannot. Ram may seek to diffuse the guilt and restlessness that Rose feels with regards to Mona by citing instances of polygamy and polyandry in Hindu mythology, but it is Lalaji's respect for Rose's sense of duty and responsibility that finally helps her deal with her marginality. In fact, after Rose rescues Mona from committing suicide, she not only gains Mona's trust and friendship, but also Lalaji's affection. These developments coincide with Rose's increasing alienation from Ram's cultured world of "Moghul miniatures, English poetry and Persian mysticism" as she finds in the once alien world a space for her own history, her cultural memory (117).

The irony of Rose's Indianization is that it remains ambiguous till the end, offering her no protection from the forces against which she defines her Indianness. Like Sonali's great grandmother, whom nothing--not even being an abolitionist's wife--can protect against sanctioned murder/suicide, Rose's connection with the India of freedom fighters cannot save her from the "legitimacy" of her corrupt and greedy stepson, Dev. Afraid that his father might leave his property to Rose, Dev has her brutally murdered by hired killers. Rose, one might say, becomes a *sati* too. She has already read the signs of her impending death in the changing atmosphere of the house: Ram's terminal illness, following a stroke; Dev's unscrupulous business ventures; her own alcoholism. However, she can do nothing to resist or change the flow of events. Taking assistance from no one, she submits to the end planned for her. In fact, in the moment before her horrid death, "she found herself as relaxed as a yogi in her cross-legged posture, her thoughts beautifully clear" (249). With this description of the murder/suicide of Rose, her Indianization seems to have been finally completed.

In the character of Rose and her story as a whole, Sahgal creates what appears to be the very opposite of Sonali's world. Rose's working-class background, her lack of formal education, and her unconventional sexual and domestic choices contrast sharply with the stable and secure life of Sonali "on whom a family's love and pride and a good education and years of training have been lavished" (37). Before meeting Ram, Rose had "never seen a smart expensive London" (41), nor learned about English history and English language, nor discussed "anything about poly-ticks" (66).

Rose stands for everything that Sonali is not. Yet, the ways in which her westernized, outlaw household registers national history give to Sonali's intellectual pursuit an experiential framework, both confirming and extending the lineage that she is attempting to trace. Although a generation apart, Rose and Sonali begin their transformation when their respective identities come to a crisis. Just as the blurring of distinctions between wife and mistress, foreigner and citizen, compels Rose to look beyond such recognizable boundaries, so the inseparability of democracy and dictatorship, alien and national governments in Sonali's world becomes the reason for her own self-searching.

Like Sonali, Rose also represents the schizophrenic imagination, which Sahgal further describes as "a state of mind and feeling that is firmly rooted in a particular subsoil, but above ground has a more fluid identity that doesn't fit comfortably into any single mould" (17). Rose crosses continents, cultures, desires and hopes in order to fit into a world she has defined by love and mystery. That, if anything, forms the subsoil of her imagination; it is her "Cythera," the place "where you embarked for when you left your native shores . . . [your] exile, [your] home" (74). The quietness and underplayed brutality of Rose's death manages to bring alive a sense of ultimate triumph in one woman's ability to transform her exile into her home.

The similarities between *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Rich Like Us* are more significant than their differences. First, in both, the contemporary scenario epitomizes the crisis in national character and in the conceptualization of Indianness.

The present moment in both narratives falls short of the ideals of Independence, revealing deep patterns of corruption and divisiveness. Like Laila's depiction of the opportunisms that are part and parcel of decolonization in *Sunlight*, Sonali's world in *Rich* features corrupt businessmen, dolled-up upper-class women, sycophants, and stooges feeding off a corrupt and dictatorial regime. Second, the crisis in national character in both texts is produced as a result of the upper classes and intellectuals losing their sense of duty and responsibility and being unwilling to make the sacrifices required of them. The image used to denote the blindness of the powerful in both texts is strikingly identical. In *Sunlight*, Aunt Saira, who clings desperately to the age-old privileges of her class, unable to accept the fact that they were soon to be curtailed, is compared to "the story-book Emperor [who] had donned his non-existent clothes, but there was no one to make her see the nakedness of her illusions" (275). In *Rich Like Us*, the illusion itself is synecdochic of an intricate pattern of professionalism that conceals the self-serving tradition of the Civil Services: "So long as it didn't touch us, we played along, pretending the Empress's new clothes were beautiful. To put it charitably, we were being realistic" (29). Finally, the middle ground that both heroines occupy provides a framework, presented as nationalist and anti-hegemonic, for interpreting the situation. Laila and Sonali appear to be ideal candidates for representing this critical space because, although insiders to the world of privilege and opportunity, both also stand outside it--Laila by virtue of her democratic sensibilities and her marriage, and Sonali by the lessons she has learnt from the Emergency and rethinking her own position. Thus we see in *Rich Like Us* a lament, and not a political criticism, of the discontinuity between the Congress of emergency rule and the Congress that brokered the independence of India.

The well-being of the home has everything to do with the well-being of the nation. Both Laila and Sonali become "homeless," not because of political action against the powers that be, but as a result of their unwillingness to participate in the rampant opportunism and corruption that surround them--Sonali from the Civil Service and Laila from her grandfather's house. The "unhoming" of the protagonists from these spaces comes to represent the fallen state of the Indian nation and the loss of the essential spirit of Indianness. The direct link between the relations of power in the home and the state of the nation leaves the specific functioning of male authority and power in the home untouched, and the passive resistance of women grants them a power and agency derived primarily from their relationship with the home. While *Rich Like Us* provides a strong symbolic presence of the woman intellectual in Sonali, making her account of the economic and political corruption of the nation central to the narrative, it cannot offer a feminist critique of the nation. The daughters of independence seek to close the fissures between the Gandhian definition of nation as spiritual home and the explanation of home as a site of female resistance, a problematic that is addressed very differently by another group of writers, whom we may call the "daughters of modernization."

# Notes

[1] The collected volumes of Gandhi's writing run to over eighty volumes and it is hardly possible within the scope of this study to analyse the various aspects, many contradictory and experimental, of his political and social theories. However, it is important to note here that there was a wide gap between the idea of *satyagraha* as non-violent civil disobedience of the masses and the *satyagrahi* as leader. As Partha Chatterjee has shown, the "political concept of the *satyagrahi* as leader" was Gandhi's way of containing the resistance to state oppression within the orbit of law. After the agitations in 1919 against the Rowlatt Bill, he writes in his autobiography that "before restarting civil disobedience on a mass scale, it would be necessary to create a band of well-tried, pure-hearted volunteers who thoroughly understood the strict conditions of satyagraha," *Collected Works* Vol. 39, 374, quoted in Chatterjee's "The Moment of Maneuver: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial Discourse: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986). The emphasis on purity had interesting class implications for women who answered his call. On the one hand, Gandhi declared that women's issues must not revolve around women only, but should be concerned with rebuilding the whole of society. For that, "the few educated women we have in India will have to descend from their western heights and come down to India's plains . . . This question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of untouchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like resolve themselves into penetration into the villages, reconstruction or rather

reformation of the village life" (quoted in Kishwar, 1694). On the other hand, when prostitutes of Barisal organized under the Congress banner to undertake social work like helping the poor, nursing the sick, spreading education among themselves, and involving other organizations involved in satyagraha, Gandhi declined to give them Congress membership, and refused to accept their donations until they had given up prostitution: "None could officiate at the alter of swaraj who did not approach it with pure hands and a pure heart" (Kishwar, 1693).

[2] In the foreword to the posthumously edited *Sucheta: An Unfinished Autobiography*, the husband of Sucheta Kripalini writes about the courage, dedication, and simplicity with which Sucheta performed her public duties, as MLA, MP, and then the Prime Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh: "Many of her qualities I have described above are those of an ideal Hindu wife and a house-holder. However, in her case, they were practised along with hard and strenuous public activity--periodically going to jail before independence and, after it, fighting her own elections and those of party men, taking part in demonstrations and political agitations, conducting the affairs of the largest State in the Indian Union as Minister and as Chief Minister, organizing and managing a number of charitable and philanthropic institutions. Thus, she combined in herself the old virtues of Indian wife and the new virtue of working for the freedom of the nation and the service of its starving millions" (xxiii).

[3] See Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," in R. Guha and Gayatri Spivak, eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988). In a fascinating discussion on how political

consciousness and political action were translated by Gandhianism into spiritual commandments for the *sadharan janta* or common people, Amin talks about Gandhi's visit to Gorakhpur in 1921. He quotes from an article published just before Gandhi's arrival that tells the oppressed to await the darshan (holy appearance/sighting) of the Mahatma, while the elite are urged to take leadership and initiative in giving "the clarion call of swaraj" (305). As Amin points out, "[t]hat such a journey [of the peasants], made often in defiance of landlord opposition, could in itself be a political act and that Gandhi's message may be decoded by the common villager on his own, without prompting by outsiders, were possibilities not entertained" (305). Also see Shashi Joshi, *The Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920-47: The Colonial State, the Left and the National Movement*, Vol.1 (1992).

[4] The *zenana* is the focus of Hossain's other writings as well, namely her collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled*. However, the representation of Muslim culture is far more diversified and intricate in the stories than in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, resembling the work of another Muslim woman writer and Hossain's contemporary, Qurratulain Hyder. Hyder wrote primarily in Urdu and translated her own work into English. One finds traces of Attia Hossain's reading of women's reactions to the modernizing Muslim home in more recent writers, like Shama Fatehally, author of several short stories and a novel called *Tara Lane*.

[5] This history is supported by another contemporary study: Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968). Seal, covering an earlier period, states that "The North-western province and Oudh had been a centre of Muslim power since the

end of the twelfth century. Here the community was a minority of some 13 percent, but as a whole it was more influential, more prosperous and better educated than its co-religionists in any other provinces of British India" (303).

[6] Quoted in Syed Nurullah and J. P. Naik, *A History of Education in India* (1951). The objectives of the university, as summarized by the authors, are also relevant here in order to understand Asad's integrity and his defiance of Uncle Hamid as a political defiance: "(i) It seeks to broaden the education of the youth on their own cultural heritage without rejecting what is true and useful in the culture of others. It inculcates the spirit of service, of tolerance, of self-control and self-respect. (ii) It aims at building character by providing adequately for the intellectual and emotional needs of the growing mind and affording constant opportunity for active self-expression, and by replacing the discipline of fear by the development of initiative and responsibility" (736). Another study informs that "in 1928, the affairs of the Jamia Millia were placed entirely in the hands of the staff, the majority of whose members . . . took a pledge of 20 years' service without claiming more than Rs. 150/- a month as their salaries" (454). See Bhagwan Dayal Srivastava, *The Development of Modern Indian Education* (1963). Secularism from a Muslim point of view seems to have been the university's priority, demonstrated in its focus on Urdu as the medium of instruction and Islam as the pattern of life, which in turn is "so designed as to harmonise our national culture with the universal culture of mankind" (Jamia pamphlet quoted by Srivastava, 455).

[7] Janaki Nair, "Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings, 1813-1940," *Journal of Women's History* 2.1 (1990), 22. Nair discusses how the zenana was used by the "daughters of empire" in their service to the imperialist project. Of all these constructions--the zenana as site of reform/change, symbol of a collective female past, of female power, and site of resistance to the civilizing mission-- the last had the most currency, corroborated and endorsed by the national patriarchy itself. Predominantly Hindu and Gandhian, this stream in nationalist discourse was powerfully expressed in the work of Margaret Noble, Annie Besant, and Margaret Cousins. They declared that "woman alone represented that unbroken continuity with a precolonial past through her residence in that uncolonized space, the zenana" (23). Her essential qualities were creation and conservation, qualities that provided a reservoir of endurance and heroism quite different from that of men. As Janaki Nair shows, "even in the writings of nationalist sympathizers . . . the final reliance was on the 'primal,' natural power of woman's biology, a power which could be summoned at will at particular historical junctures" (23).

[8] Hannah Papanek uses the term "symbolic shelter" to describe the intricate discourse of separate worlds, in Hannah Papanek and Gail Minault, eds. *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia* (1982). While the construction of the zenana as a safe and sheltered space for women might imply that women are its main agents, control and obedience are its main corollaries. The zenana is supposed to afford protection from unbridled sexual desire, aggression and violence, projected on to the

outside world. As Papanek argues, "Women's proper behavior as sheltered persons becomes an important source of the status of their protectors" (37). The sheltered space, thus, is not only the index of men's status and their ability to protect their women, but also a space where women guard their own "shame," translatable as virtue in this discourse of protection. How this whole discourse with its implications for religious, moral behavior, marriage and family, constructs the unsheltered and unprotected woman is most interesting. While prostitutes and dancing girls are the source of much romanticized colonial literature, their role in the families and lives of sheltered women through their men has more complicated ramifications than simply being a counterpoint.

[9] Muslim women had been active in the All India Women's Conference after the All India Muslim Women's Conference petered out in the 1920s. During the thirties Muslim women became involved in political activity in a variety of ways. For some, as Gail Minault notes in her essay "Purdah Politics: The Role of Muslim Women in Indian Nationalism, 1911-1924,"

> women's emancipation, in terms of greater educational and social service opportunities, was the main reason for organizing. These women continued to work in those fields in the expanded opportunities of the 1930s, in the national organizations for women, in educational institutions, and in support of social legislation such as the Sarda Act and the later Shariat Act. For other women, fighting for national emancipation and cultural identity was the foremost priority. These

> women continued their work of political mobilization, becoming ever more active in the Gandhian movements of the 1930s, Swadeshi, the Salt Satyagraha, picketing liquor shops, courting arrest, and so on" (*Separate Worlds* 257).

Laila's approach to the socially active women around her does not seem to take into account political women. It could be that given her class background she does not have the opportunity of encountering professional women too closely, or, that given the generally low level of political radicalism in the region, the presence of such women was rare. It is perhaps important to note here that feminist histories of women's struggles and movements in India remain to a large extent celebratory and heroic. Hence the focus is on the leaders and movers, who are mostly Hindu and mostly nationalist. Neither Aparna Basu's *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-1990* (1990) nor Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing* (1993) deal with the question of Muslim women's politicization. Names like Begum Shah Nawaz or Lady Abdul Qadir or Begum Muhammad Ali come up occasionally in the general discussion on purdah, but very few independent details are provided. Kumar cites a story about the activist "wife of Ismail Mirza" and the effect of her involvement in the All India Women's Conference on her husband. The name of these women is not even mentioned because the event is the AIWC and the main character is its founder leader, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (81).

[10] Simon During provides interesting information on the meaning given to the word by the eighteenth-century political debate between Tories and Whigs. In the

Tory Bolingbroke's book, "a patriot is defined in a classical sense by his love of country rather than personal ambition . . . patriotism is given value in an anti-statist, anti-economist (though not anti-mercantile), anti-urban discourse. A patriot is neither an 'enthusiast' concerned with his or her inner life and relation to God, nor an urbanite interested in money and civility" (141). See Simon During, "Literature--Nationalism's Other?" in Homi Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration* (1990).

[11] A. Appadorai, *Indian Political Thinking in the Twentieth Century from Naoroji to Nehru: An Introductory Survey* (1971). Appadorai writes that Gandhi's stress on non-violence had made terrorism appear an illness that had to be remedied. It was also seen as "an outworn and profitless method for gaining political objectives" (34). "Political dacoity," as the Revolutionary Party called its actions, was seen as a waste, and the quotation that Appadorai provides from J. B. Kripalini's *Gandhi: The Statesman* (1951) seems have distinct echoes in the opinion expressed by Nita Chatterjee. Kripalini wrote, "Such activity leads to terrorist repression on the part of the authorities resulting in long periods of political depression. Besides, it sacrifices human material, useful for any future activity in the right direction" (18).

[12] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (1993), 85-88.

[13] See the chapter, "Organization and Struggle" in Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing* (1993), 53-73, for the part played by Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, and others in giving women's organizations an "all India character" (54). Also see Vijay Agnew's *Elite Women in Indian Politics* (1979) for a description of the socio-economic and educational

background of the leading Congress women and those who led the women's organizations. Agnew attributes the growth in political and social awareness of women to the westernized and liberal sections of the community: "The A.I.W.C. [The All India Women's Conference] membership was comprised of wealthy, educated women from large urban centres" (117).

[14] CW, Vol. 63, 339. See Partha Chatterjee's "The Moment of Maneuver" for a description of Gandhi's argument that the ancient Hindu texts could not be read as history or theory. The interpretation of those texts would come from how one lives one's life and how one's sense of justice and morality is constituted. Chatterjee himself argues that this conception of "universal religiosity" in Gandhi is what places him "outside" the "dominant thematic of post-Enlightenment thought" (97).

[15] See A. R. Desai; R. Kothari.

[16] Randhir Singh has argued against other scholars who look at the post-independence political evolution of India in terms of two periods--of Nehru and of Indira Gandhi--offering instead a theory of "two levels" of Indian politics, that is the politics of the ruling classes and the politics of "our common people" (78-80). According to him, the Nehru era was dominated by the politics of the ruling classes on the basis of a working consensus among the beneficiaries of the system as a whole. The economic crisis of the 1960s diluted this consensus, as a result of which ruling class politics lost its legitimacy. Faced with popular disruption and disorder in civil society, the ruling classes tend to lose faith in democratic politics and seek authoritarian solutions.

# Chapter 3

# Daughters of Modernization: Texts of Banality

## *The Thematics of Home*

One unlikely source of challenge to the Indianization of gender through the nationalist meaning of home comes from what might be called the "domestic novel." Far from being glorified as the cornerstone of freedom and truth, the home in this type of fiction is often seen through middle-class sexual relations, and the displacement and intellectual stagnation of women. In fact, the home is not even a safe place for women, let alone an unsubjugated space for the spiritual actualization of nationalist dreams. Within this deeply fractured discourse of the home and the world, I want to situate an analysis of a kind of women's writing in English, which makes the home the center of its critique of society and culture. Whereas writers like Hossain and Sahgal attempt to link the intellectual effectivity of women to the process of Indianizing India through a unique cultural nationalism, writers like Shashi Deshpande, Shouri Daniels, Raji Narasimhan, and, more recently, Githa Hariharan, C. S. Lakshmi, Mrinal Pande, and Shama Fatehally, explore the liberal space of the modern, middle-class home both as a way of understanding women's real relation to it and as a way of determining the role of familial ideology in shaping their social identity. The private space comes into focus not just as a political site but as a *different* political site with its own rules of functioning, its own systems of recognition. The critique of culture is formulated at the level of the women's desire--

the desire to imagine a self outside the framework of moral responsibility celebrated so highly by the daughters of Indianization. Breaking the links that bind the intellectuals to the home in particular ways turns out to be a painful process, displaying the constitutive effect of cultural politics on every concrete act of interpretation and analysis and on the characters' own participation in the myriad forms of its circulation.

The primary focus of this chapter is an exploration into how the material reality of home interrogates its discursive category. The texts selected for this purpose are *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1988), by Shashi Deshpande, and *The Salt Doll* (1978), by Shouri Daniels. These texts are of particular interest because the choice of intellectual as protagonist within the context of the domestic space seems quite deliberate.[1] These women characters do not share the predicament of Tagore's Bimala, whose self-discovery is emblematized through the momentous historical act of crossing the threshold of the house and into the world, and thus into the vortex of political action, sexual desire, intrigue, loss, and suffering. The women in these novels are already in the world.

In Deshpande's novels, the home stands in for a personal history whose physical and psychological claims must be negotiated by the protagonist in order to come to some sort of understanding of the contradictions in her social position. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu, a successful and well-to-do young journalist, visits her parental home after twelve years of estrangement. Unable to ignore the summons of her dying great-aunt, she arrives in haste to discover that the old woman, who had been most hostile towards her for marrying outside her caste, has made her the beneficiary of all her wealth. Although angry and confused at first by this sudden entanglement in the affairs of a family from which she had long since removed herself, Indu stays on after her great aunt passes away. While the funeral arrangements are made, she tries to decide what to do with the inheritance. During this period, she relives all the familiar rivalries, tensions, alliances, and betrayals of her large extended family, through the direct and oblique demands of its various members. Indu feels a tremendous urge to exercise the power she has never had--the power to judge, act and bestow as she pleases. She longs to make one grand gesture with which she can calm the troubled waters and at the same time remain above it: she could buy the crumbling house herself and save her uncle and aunt from having to sell it to a businessman who has promised to turn it into a hotel; she could extricate her cousin from the possibility of marriage to a crude, uneducated man chosen by her parents; and finally, she could free herself to "do the kind of writing [she] wanted to do," as well as "look after the old, help the deserving" (158). The exalted position from which such dreams emanate turns out to be quite shaky as Indu begins to realize how superficial the gap is between this rancorous family's stakes in the legacy and her husband Jayant's plans for their home; how uncannily comparable, after all, are the situations of the women in the house who "had no choice but to submit, to accept . . . their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse" (6) and Indu's own sense of self reflected completely through Jayant's gaze, as if she were "fluid, with no shape, no form of [her] own" (54). With this realization, the prolonged sense of alienation slips away, but Indu does not and cannot belong to the family anymore. Before she leaves, she has another experience which, in spite of its tragic end, contributes to her decision-making and leads her to express herself in a way that she had never thought possible. She meets Naren, a distant cousin and an outsider like herself. Their old friendship and attachment are soon rekindled. Breaking a long-standing protocol, they make love. No new bond is created between them and neither is guilty or uncomfortable about the encounter later. However, within a few days, Naren dies in an accident. Claiming her inheritance as she does her roots, with a mixture of inevitability and distance, Indu chooses to put the money into a trust fund for needy and meritorious students, with the caveat that nobody from the family should have access to it. She returns home at last to Jayant with the resolution to see "if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty" (205).

Deshpande's later novel, *That Long Silence*, also structures the protagonist's access to a personal history in the form of a return to familiar but estranged territory. Like Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, Jaya is forced to return to her past home because of unexpected and shocking circumstances. When Jaya's husband is caught and suspended for fraudulent business practices, the couple quickly leave their tidy, carefully maintained home in a posh locality of Bombay and escape to Jaya's maternal home in Dadar to avoid relatives and friends. They secrete themselves in a house that had remained locked for so long that it "reeked of mildew and rot . . . the fetid smell of garbage . . . the closed-in monsoon mustiness" (12). Unlike the crowded atmosphere of the ancestral home in *Roots and Shadows*, there is no one in this old house. Only the shadows of its previous inhabitants flit in and out of Jaya's memories. During their sequestration, Jaya finds it difficult to keep up the "the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting [Mohan]" (98). She can neither question nor criticize him on the recent events. Eventually, all communication breaks down between them. It seems that the silence within Jaya, bred by prolonged compromise and compliance, has at last externalized itself. The alienation that years of routine activities and responses had kept out of sight has suddenly taken actual shape. Jaya's exploration of "that long silence" begins at this critical juncture. The four sections of the book correspond to four main types of relationships Jaya revisits: with the women in the family; with Mohan, her husband; with Kamat, a male friend and mentor; and finally, with her two children. Jaya describes her narrative position thus: "Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces" (1). Those different relationships and faces reveal the silence to be more than a continuing saga of victimhood. As Jaya scrutinizes what she considers her most real face, that of the writer, she recognizes in it the same history of conformity and burial characterizing her normal, everyday existence. She finds it impossible to extricate any part of her self that was not, in some way, enmeshed in the social norms and expectations that had made Mohan who he was, that had contributed to Kamat's lonely death, or that had led to the suicide of her "crazed" cousin, Kusum. The novel thematizes the difficulties of approaching that reality by subordinating it to these various discrete stories, each one sketching more experientially, more protractedly, and more decipherably the isolated, bourgeois, middle-class, upper-caste contours of her existence. A very tentative reconciliation occurs between Jaya and her husband towards the end of the novel with Jaya resolving, like Indu, "to speak, to listen, . . . to erase the silence" (192).

In Shouri Daniels' *The Salt Doll*, the home represents primarily the female body and its articulations of gender and ethnocultural identity. In contrast to the brooding, ponderous style of Deshpande, Daniels' language and tone pulsate with the energy, colour, and movement of her narrator's diverse experiences. The novel is divided into two parts. Book One evokes variously the "liminologies" of Mira Cherian's Syrian Christian background, through hilarious episodes of conversion and reconversion, fragmentary accounts of the numerous locations of her upbringing, and a general preoccupation with the idea of contamination, to which food, language, and the female body are particularly subject. This section of the narrative takes within its sweep everything from the lush village of Kuttapuzha in Kerala, where Mira lived with her maternal grandparents, to the city in Aden, Yemen, where she joins her parents at the age of eight, through the nine boarding schools to which her mother sends her, "one every year of my years at school" (35), and finally to "Anand Bhawan, a working man's college for Harijans and lame ducks," which she enters in complete violation of her parents' orders (52). The confidence and strength displayed in this part of the narrative give way to an unexpected sense of disempowerment, as the second part of the book opens, with Mira taking up residence in an international writers' colony at Khilgesh, a mountain town situated in the heart of the Himalayas.

Here, Chinese, Lebanese, American, Japanese, and Indian writers practise a free and open lifestyle. Although Mira has many unusual encounters in the place, the lack of narratorial intensity betrays a deep sense of pain and frustration. Book Two tells nothing about Mira's writing career. It tells the story of Mira's relationship with her husband Nanjundan, who becomes the centre of her circle and her life. This whole section deals with the character of Nanjundan, interspersed with Mira's own struggles to keep herself from surrendering to his tormented, paradoxical, and esoteric personality. Mira refuses to be the watchdog of Nanjundan's soul. She eventually packs her bags and leaves the Writers' Farm to "take that road from nowhere to nowhere, and keep [her] date with what's to come" (188). Her destination is San Francisco.

Deshpande and Daniels structure the women intellectuals' search for their female selves in the autobiographical, coming-to-consciousness mode. As they unravel the multiple threads of home and familial ideology that weave the relentless pattern of their lives, they also implicitly critique the earlier but still influential ideology of Indianization, which metaphorized the home as the core of pre- and un-colonized cultural and moral resource. While no radical decisions are taken and no dramatic revelations made, the characters do arrive at new modes of self-perception. But a self imagined in isolation and on the plane of individual struggle leads to a dead end. The non-celebratory language in which the characters articulate their "arrival" bears testimony to that aspect of the texts.

The issues that capture the politics of experience as the definitive structure of representation in the texts are domesticity, alienation, language, and creativity. By bringing into the discussion selected postcolonial critical statements on locations of culture and literary production, I place the texts within a field of theoretical discourses from which they have been largely excluded. In the process, I also hope to reinforce my overall intention of reading postcolonial women's texts, whether written in English or Indian languages, in the context of Indian cultural politics.

### *Home, Identity, Alienation*

In his essay "Locations of Culture," Homi Bhabha considers the home as a metaphor of identity. The "homely" home stands for identity that is built upon the "the singularities of 'class' or 'gender,'" the given materials of construction; the "unhomely" home represents cross-cultural identity which has been unhinged from its familiar moorings by the impact of a range of "subject positions--of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation--that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world" (1). At once an architectural project adhering to certain conventions of construction and a creative production of separate and connecting spaces, home/identity constitutes the main domain of Bhabha's model of cross-cultural negotiation. Its most important element is movement, without which the home would be a prison and identity a fetish.

Bhabha's conceptualization of "unhomeliness," derived from Freud's theory of the "uncanny" or "unheimlich," is of interest for two reasons. First, it emphasizes cultural difference as the paradigmatic social condition of the modern unhomely. Following Freud's basic postulation that the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" Bhabha suggests that the negotiation of different and sometimes incommensurable subject positions can open up problems of identity by revealing a newness within the self that is often unrecognizable, even unsettling, to the person concerned ("The Uncanny" 634). The importance of the "doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" in the Freudian production of uncanniness (630) is further elaborated by Bhabha to explain how the assumption of any one position gives rise to "identities that . . . are estranged unto themselves" (3).

Second, Bhabha develops his thesis about the correlation between unhomeliness and expansion of identity through a definition of the "in-between" or "interstitial" space symbolized by the narratives of minorities, migrants, and the diasporic in western nations. In this space, the polarities of culture are broken down, giving place to "new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1). The presence of so many borderline constituencies literally brings home to the developed western world its unspeakable histories of colonization and continuing exploitation; it brings languages and cultures that defy the claims of modernity and modernization. At the same time, the minority perspective itself emerges variously through the complex mediations of past and present, through the contradictions encountered by new trajectories of experience. The most important effect of these discontinuities and revisions is the gesture towards the beyond embedded in the conditions of migrant existence: "In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9). That vision assumes immense importance in Bhabha's entire discussion as he translates the material experience of relocation into a trope for crossing borders internal to the self.

In certain respects, the fictional world that Deshpande and Daniels create is shot through with the kind of "double vision" that Bhabha attributes to the migrant's eye. In *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* the treatment of personal history juxtaposes two worlds of being: individual and communal, traditional and modern, past and present. The protagonists' psychological displacement *both* from the ancestral family *and* from the modern nucleic one, each with its extended rituals of allegiance and its own code of propriety, initiates the moment of rethinking their social identity. *The Salt Doll* explores identity through an ever-widening sphere of cultural difference. Whether by ethnicity, religion, political affiliation or gender, the developing character of Mira Cherian registers a range of perturbations that continually alters the topography of her identity, much like the changing map of post-Independence India does to the idea of Indianness. What is inside becomes the outside, what is central becomes marginal. As Mira's dwelling places change, the movement away from certainties, from known borders of the self continues. In Bhabha's terms, this situation, where the characters find they are unable to belong fully to any of the dominant structures of identity surrounding them, exemplifies the beginning of a process of minoritization that opens up areas of the self with initially frightening and alienating consequences.

In his locational discourse of identity, Bhabha speaks of the home primarily, even solely, on a metaphoric level. It seems that in interpreting identity through the theory of the uncanny, Bhabha must necessarily ignore the materiality of what he perceives as "homely" (or "unhomely," for that matter), the opposing entities being fundamentally products of the mind, a state of consciousness as it were. Anthony Vidler's definition of the architectural uncanny as expressed through the topoi of home and city will clarify this point further:

> In both cases, of course, the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming. . . . But in each moment of the history of the representation of the uncanny, and at certain moments in its psychological analysis, the buildings and the spaces that have acted as the sites for uncanny experiences have been invested with recognizable characteristics. . . . (11)

As Vidler points out, to construct the unhomely, something must be constructed as its opposite--the domestic and the homely--and, although "das unheimliche" reveals the complicity between the two, it is only by placing one against the other that the effect of the unhomely comes into full play. Bhabha's emphasis on the metaphoricity of home as essential identity effaces the uncertainties and discontinuities of the home as domestic space. Thus, when Bhabha explains "cultural hybridity" through the example of "the intimate recesses of the domestic space becom[ing] the site of history's most intricate invasions" (9), one not only detects a "slippage" between the two meanings of home, but also two meanings of history, *in* and *of* the domestic space; the latter would need to be approached through gender and class, those categories that Bhabha defines as "originary and initial subjectivities" unsuitable for elaborating new strategies of selfhood (1).

*The Salt Doll* addresses the interconnectedness of apparently separate spaces within the framework of identity production. Written from the perspective of a woman, belonging to the minority community of Syrian Christians in India, who continually looks for new ways of configuring the self along the faultlines of her minority existence, this text validates Bhabha's theoretical articulation about the interstitial space being the one from where "originary and initial subjectivities" can be challenged. Its first-person narrative explicitly stages and narrates the production of identity from different locations. However, whereas Bhabha's formulation of the problematic of unhomely homes enlists the forces of destabilization mainly from the field of *inter*national experience, Daniels situates the instabilities experienced by her narrator specifically within the national context. Using a peculiarly Indian social phenomenon such as caste, more precisely, Brahmanism, both in its realistic and symbolic sense, Daniels ties together the concepts of home, motherland, and mother, all three being gendered spaces formed by the ideology of purity and renunciation. As the experiences of the rebellious young narrator, eager to explore the world and her sexuality, show, extricating identity from those given formations is tantamount to "cutting the umbilical cord," to growing up and growing away from those enclosed places (61). But the older narrator also discovers that those solid, intractable spaces against which the interstitial or in-between space is defined are themselves formed by power. Their apparent homogeneity or solidity conceals the social processes by which woman is made the crucial instrument of sanctifying nation, home, and motherhood, but only after her position as a doing and desiring subject is taken out of it.

Mira's first contact with Brahmanism as a real force takes place, ironically, at Anand Bhavan, a nationalist institution which aimed to "give deprived men (occasionally women) a sense of self." There she learns her first lesson in "the limits of self" (53). Fully at home in her new circle of friends, encompassing almost the whole range of multicultural India's prominent social entities, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and Parsi, soaking up the libertarian environment, and delighting in the opportunity to discuss every kind of subject from aesthetics, politics, and philosophy to the generation gap and even the law of the father, Mira suddenly encounters the chasm that no leap of intellectual faith can overcome:

> When I joined Anand, I found that when caste Hindus invited me to their Hindu homes, if I touched a pitcher of milk, it usually went out of the window.

> If a friend's mother visited me, she would bring her own glass, her own water, etc, and the only edible things I could ever offer them were fruit with the skin on.
>
> At first it was very hard to bear. The first time I noticed my touch pollutes anything on the dining table, I was dining with Ranjan's family--Kshatriyas from the Punjab. The mother came from the third caste. To test my observation I often reached out at table and touched the *roti*, or beverage, or *dhall*; each time it was taken away by the servants." (156)

The original script of this bizarre performance of identity, of course, has been written by "the highest caste, the least polluted, purest, rarest, all by birth, and thenceforth by breeding"--the Brahmins (159). From them, all other castes derive their standards of selfhood. Even the Syrian Christians "kept aloof from every community, particularly Indian Catholics and Protestants" (157). Legend has it that the Hindu kings of Kerala had recognized Syrian achievements by granting them a singular honor of eating like an aristocrat. Whereas "only the princes and royalty are allowed to eat on feast days on two banana leaves, one on top of the other . . . [a] Syrian is allowed to bend the corner of his leaf as a symbolic double layer, approximating to the two leaves of the rajas!" (157). Ever since, the Syrians of Kerala have believed they were Brahmins.

The supremacy of the Brahmin epitomizes difference as ritual. It does not depend on wealth or progress, but on the ability to resist whatever comes from the "outside." As Aiyar, the professional Brahmin who runs a fiction writing workshop, informs Mira, the difference between a Brahmin and non-Brahmin is insurmountable because in the Brahmin person, nature and culture have achieved the most perfect amalgamation:

> "a) the moment a Brahmin man, woman, or child opens his mouth, you know he is a Brahmin; his dialect is different, and no one can learn it at school . . . b) a Brahmin bathes differently, eats differently . . . c) Brahmin women are bred differently . . . d) Brahmin food is chaste . . . Everything used in a Brahmin home is pure, as nothing is bought from outside, not even ground spices or prepared condiments. Pure, pure, pure, butter is made at home. Coffee is . . . drunk traditionally only as medicine. . . ." (160)

Mira can never be part of that bloodless culture of purity, for her social identity is already sullied, first by her origins and then by her inability to keep her body free from invasion by "toxic" materials. Mira has already tasted the delight of the body's first awakening as with Cousin Mathai in the half light of the attic, "with bananas in proliferation . . . the hurricane lamp, the rafters, the cobwebs, the dust," she had experienced "that region [she] knew as the heart" (17). In her moment of frustration with words, she has not hesitated to implore and demand that the "Spirit of Keats come enter into [her] body," arousing much concern in her literal-minded mother that Mira was possibly "sex-starved" and needed to be married off without much delay (48).

Daniels attacks the notion of purity of origins by speaking about the *production* of difference. Securing difference at the level of the material body, Daniels approaches it mainly through its unquestioning, ritualistic manifestations and its concealments. This by no means limits the range of self-expression; the possibilities are many, and the narrator revels in showing how diversity seen from this angle makes the banal realities of everyday existence seem quite unreal, even slipping into myth, rumour, and gossip: "The Parsis eat a few dates every day," and "Madrasis eat asafoetida once a day," or "Old Tamil kings kept Greek and Roman mistresses" (20). Some differences are the result of unattended maladies that have simply been absorbed by the body and made its own. So "Parsi men have bow legs. Gujaratis roll, and Maharashtrians walk with a spring to their steps" (50). There are still others that are a matter of language or the lack of it. Thus "[having] no language of sexual stimulation . . . a Brahmin copulates silently" (160) and the American is aroused when he is told that "your touch will restore me back to myself" (185).

Mira Cherian's earliest intellectual endeavors contravene the limits set upon the self by the contract between outsider and insider, the pure-bred and the hybrid. Using memory and history, Mira unearths a genealogy of her family that her parents' ritualistic observation of the clean Syrian Christian life had kept out of sight, one that is messier and ridden with doubts and confusion. Her first entry into this buried territory takes place through her recollections of her grandmother, on whose body the traces of their past (the grandmother's and, by that token, Mira's) are indelibly marked:

> I was well-acquainted with only one feature about her, her ear lobes. In her Hindu youth she had worn so much gold in her ears that her ear

> lobes were loops through which I could put my fingers when I sat beside her . . . She always sat with one side of her face turned the other way, away from everyone. I never knew till I was eighteen that her nose was once made to sparkle with diamonds, a Hindu practice. And there she was on the verandah of a Syrian Christian household, mother to six sons and four daughters. . . . (5)

Those large holes on her grandmother's body open a vista for Mira. They are like gaps, splits, through which seep out all those realities that constitute the "other" history--sporadic, fragmentary, and non-linear--that does not fit into the neat packaging of identity that her parents present her. Mira tells the story of how her Hindu grandmother walks out on her husband to follow a missionary in his travels, and then meeting a Syrian Christian decides to marry him, which results in his ostracization and disinheritance from his Syrian Christian family. She tells the story of her reputedly eccentric uncle, a Syrian Christian, who marries a Hindu woman, and after having nine children, simply picks up and vanishes one day, returning not only as a Hindu but as a *sanyasi,* a wandering ascetic: "thereafter he spent his time translating Sanskrit texts into Malayalam, and earned his livelihood by doing carpentry (a Nazarene affectation?)" (8). These stories, while revealing to Mira the undecidablity at the heart of self-definition, also show the difficulty of residing in the liminal space. The urge towards specificity becomes in effect an urge towards resolving the crisis of identity.

The main character through whom the text organizes and focuses its critique of Brahmanic culture's authority and moral certitude is Mira's husband, Nanjundan. A South Indian Brahmin, Nanjundan epitomizes the self-protective liberalism of the entire intellectual community of the Writers' Farm at Khilgesh and its "experiment in international living" (88). The ironic incongruities of this place are built into its conception: "Khilgesh is the collective dream that every one of us once dreamt individually; and so the foreign capital poured into this place had no trouble collecting us" (89). Thus, it provides an ideal background for cutting through the skin of internationalism to reveal the forces of domination at play.

The physical details by which Nanjundan is described make him appear both comic and frightening: "The corners of his mouth go up in a permanent curve even when he cries. His nostrils are so fine that you can see through them as through the walls of some fine Moghul tomb . . . When he sits still his hands and feet or the corners of his mouth are in constant motion" (88). In his impulsiveness, he is childlike; but in his powers of persuasion and his ability to inspire awe and admiration, he is imposing, even frightening. An intellectual *par excellence*, he is claimed by well-known men to be "a fellow botanist, biologist, artist, musician, philosopher, historian, satirist, and mathematician" (94), Nanjundan has a remarkably "adolescent body" (104). Mira calls him the Mahatma (the great soul), for he is all intellect.

Nanjundan's actions parody those of the real Mahatma. And like all parodies, they look uncannily like the original, revealing a complicity between the first and the third castes (the Brahmin and the Baniya), between the modern intellectual man and the anti-modern nationalist leader. One sees the Brahmanic roots of Gandhian notions of cultural purity and freedom, just as in Nanjundan's eccentric sexual conduct one sees larger issues of patriarchal power. Like the Mahatma, Nanjundan "is not just a man; at the highest moment he is also a woman" (89). His use of Mira's body to claim his androgynous capabilities obviously recalls Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with his cousin's granddaughter to test his own immunity to sexual desire (Gandhi and his nineteen-year- old grand niece slept together without any clothes, holding each other). Nanjundan's proclamations of diffusing the boundaries between the sexes has a "masterful" edge to it, not unlike Gandhi's project of exercising womanly qualities in his personal relationships with his followers, even counting himself as a woman on several occasions. There is also the added agenda of de-sensualizing woman for her own good, so that she will not be treated as a sexual object:

> Nanjundan's identity reaches sainthood when he makes me sit in front of him, naked and our two organs meeting, resting against each other, he says:
>
> "Is that my cunt?" and I shudder.
>
> "Is that your cock?" he says and I shudder again.
>
> It is a mystical moment for him and for me just plain crazy. (89)

Mira realizes that Nanjundan's identification with her sexual body is a deeply troubled one, leading on one hand to his "approximating and appropriating her femininity," and on the other to fantasizing the ability "to borrow Mira's view of the world," to "register the world . . . through [her] eyes" (104). In this apparent give and take of bodies, Nanjundan does not seem to reconsider his own masculinity and/or maleness (89).

Another contradiction in Nanjundan's fluid, amorphous notion of identity is that he cannot do away with English language in conducting his experiments in saintly Hindu transmutation. For, it appears that "a Brahmin has no vocabulary for genital organs . . . Nanjundan, who dreams in five incarnations, does not know the word for cunt, cock, penis, or vagina, except in embarrassed English, a language he learned from books" (161). Yet, with his "damned promiscuous intelligence," he can "talk physics to the physicist . . . [and] of beauty" to concerned women (107).

Nanjundan's power over Mira reaches its zenith when he succeeds in Brahmanizing Mira, not literally, but in making her function like the true Brahmin wife. Here again, the similarity between the modern Mahatma and the original one resurfaces. Mira finds herself within a role that seems to be a composite model of the two prominent women figures in Gandhi's life-- Mirabehn, who, although tormented by her love for Gandhi, continued to follow him in his work, and Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, who always remained the wife, never an autonomous partner in his cause. The positions of both women were determined by service to the ideal man. The modern, cosmopolitan, hashish-smoking, alcohol-drinking Mahatma's household, however, seems more oppressive, for Nanjundan is a man of many interests and tastes:

> Ten days before the wedding, Nanjundan moved into the cottage we now live in. He borrowed two extra stoves and started me on cooking for all and sundry. No sooner would I finish one meal, he would bring in more people. He insisted I make *dosa* and *idli* and *payasam* and all the time-consuming south Indian dishes. There would be breakfast parties, lunch parties, tea parties, and dinner parties . . . I forgot I had lived any other way. It looked natural to be doing what I did. In fact, I had lost the ability to step outside the cottage or cross the street by myself. (144)

Not until Mira meets Nanjundan's mother does she witness the future, her own future as the guarantor of the essential difference, the incandescent centre of the dark interior, the center of purity. In a figure that is familiar and shocking at the same time, purity is linked to pain. Instead of the bliss of eternal childhood that her dependence would seem to grant her "she [the mother] suffers from her joints. When she cannot walk, she crawls. What she cooks is got together from scratch by her" (153). Although this uncomplaining woman "owns nothing, would own nothing," she has nothing to fear, for "she is not mad Lear, hounded out by children, homeless, wandering from house to house, dogs at her heels" (153). She possesses the "incredible powers" of the "Great Provider" (153). At her command, men would jump to action. The personification of renunciation, the Brahmin mother is the reservoir of moral strength. Her symbolic superiority rests upon her real place within the household.

As opposed to Nanjundan's denial of the material body, the "felt thing," as it were, in his theory of experience, Mira's vivid narrative emphasizes pain and dissolution as the foremost female experiences. Mira speaks of her disillusionment, her wounded mental state caused by Nanjundan's infidelities, in sheer physical terms: "Every dream ends in pain. I wake in pain. I go to bed in pain" (163). The agonizing birth of her child is described through her body alone which has become unrecognizable in its tortured and mangled state. Ultimately, Mira uses her suffering as a metaphor of the fluidity that men like Nanjundan aspire to but can end up merely approximating. The paradox embedded in that comparison does not evade Mira, as is evident from the title itself--*The Salt Doll*-- which encapsulates both the powerlessness and the transformative potential of that essential difference. The doll suggests an automaton, a deaf, mute, and blind repetition; but being made of salt, it cannot retain a fixed form as automatons do:

> . . . a figure of salt must forever avoid the sea. Men can sail the seas in search of white whales: they can hang up their souls at the Cape of Good Hope and pick them up on the way back. Men live sequentially; thing leads to thing.
>
> Not for her. If she reaches the sea by instinct, as do newly hatched sea turtles, she will become the sea. The rest is silence and children. (98)

The sea, that vast space connoting heroic journeys, on which the hero embarks, after much diversion, becomes a far more problematic sign in Mira's narrative. For Mira crosses borders in order to speak (and write) for herself, rather than in the borrowed language of the past. She tries to reinvent herself by subverting her religious and cultural origins. But the journey becomes a nightmare, as the open sea turns into a place of confinement for her, and the familiar polarities of the home and the world break down, only to reveal that the rules of the home remain fully in place in apparently "free" spaces, and the past lives on in the modern present. The book ends with Mira looking across the San Francisco Bay at the island of Alcatraz, now "a paradise" because "empty" (191). In a striking inversion of the thought-matter dichotomy that she has been battling, Mira relishes the visual beauty of that once grim prison, even as she shapes the "desperate thought" that "once to think was to feel and to feel was to know . . . now to know is the loss of feeling which gives rise to thought" (191). This bodes a strangely alienated journey into the new terrain of her home and her writing.

While Shouri Daniels approaches intellectual and emotional homelessness through the gendered construction of a number of different sites, the domestic space being one of the more crucial ones, Deshpande focuses almost exclusively on the banal operations of the home. Daniels meets the challenge of her narrator's experiences with a language replete with irony, satire, and parody, and a narrative frame precariously holding together the materials of those experiences. In contrast, Deshpande's realistic portraiture, especially in *That Long Silence*, mirrors faithfully her middle-aged, middle-class narrator's silent and pent-up sense of alienation, attempting mainly to reduce the gap between content and form. The difference between the two writers, however, is not merely a matter of technique. It also consists in how they perceive the resolution to the crisis in the identities of their protagonists. While both break through the patriarchal constructions of domestic homeliness, and both launch an attack on the silence of women and the containment of their anger, Daniels seems to posit a "transcendent" or psychological unhomeliness, a liminality which her protagonist must be willing to embrace in order to speak both as woman and as intellectual. In Deshpande the awareness of contradictions itself is presented as a gesture towards something new, and the moment of empowerment is suggested in the *return* of the protagonists with a new consciousness to the environment from which they feel alienated.

Both of Deshpande's heroines negotiate identity by trying to reclaim their past, not in terms of what remains or exists but in terms of what has become buried or erased. The fact that Jaya and Indu are both lodged in the familar yet alien surroundings of their maternal homes, clearly associated with traditional values and lineage, brings to the process of retrieval a deliberate act of counter-memory. The focus accordingly keeps shifting from the characters themselves to the process of sifting, arranging, selecting, and assessing all those discrete parts torn asunder by the imperatives of their present existence. In each case, the formation of identity through the inclusion and exclusion of different aspects of the self forms a central motif of the texts.

The return of the women to the family home takes the shape of an encounter with the past they have chosen to leave behind. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* arrives at a moment when the old joint family is on the brink of disintegration and the house itself is up for sale. Her estrangement is quite apparent at the very outset of her visit as she struggles with names she has forgotten, faces she has begun to confuse, children who are afraid to come near her. More importantly, to those women in the family, who daily observe the ritual of circumambulating the holy tree (*tulsi*) for the long life of their uncaring husbands, women who would never utter their husbands' names, Indu is "too clever" (36). For the young men struggling to make a living, her reputation as journalist and writer is unquestionably "formidable" (43). Indu obviously has very little in common with these members of her family, and, as she herself finds, she would always remain an outsider here.

Indu's alienation is described in a way that makes it almost akin to that of the expatriate from the developed world visiting her original place of belonging. Like the expatriate also, her responses express nostalgia for the deep familial bonds of the past and a desire to bridge the chasm of privilege and cultural difference that divides her sentient, professional, and decidedly modern way of life from the semi-feudal, semi-metropolitan existence of her parental home. While detail upon detail graphically renders the chaotic and crumbling state of the place, repeated statements of belonging attempt to sublimate the experience into a sense of homeliness that is more than the sum of its parts. Indu observes that "at home we changed our sheets twice a week . . . Here, the sheet was none too clean, the blanket smelt of Kaki's body. Sometime some child had urinated on the thin mattress. . . . And yet I stretched myself on the bed with relief. Even joy" (34). Although appalled by such conditions as "the bathroom with its slimy stone floor and huge copper vessels so rarely cleaned that they had turned green inside," Indu insists that "This is our house. . . . I am home" (37). Almost identically, Jaya's narrative in *That Long Silence* misses nothing. From the stairs leading to the tiny, crowded flat, with its "trail of garbage . . . cigarette butts, scraps of paper, bits of vegetable peel . . . squirts of *paan*-stained spit" (7), to the interior of the rooms themselves, complete with its fungus-filled shoe, dust-laden surfaces, and a clanging toilet, everything announces the difference of this dwelling place from the one Jaya has left behind. Yet, she describes her first morning here in unambiguous terms:

> It seemed to me as I drifted between sleep and waking, that I could hear the distant roar of the sea. Then, almost instantly, I was out of it, with a clear realization of my surroundings. That was not the sea but the frantic rushing of an early 'local', a surburban train. And I was not in the large bedroom of our Churchgate home, but in the small crowded room of [the] Dadar flat. Yet, there was none of that frightening disorientation that overcomes me when I wake up in a strange place . . . The things around me were all familiar and reassuring--. (18)

The emphasis on the sense of belonging in this disorderly setting serves another function besides highlighting the nostalgia and guilt of the estranged daughter; it brings into relief the self-sufficient, individuated, and tidy environment of the married home, which now appears to Jaya "like a glossy, coloured advertising visual" (4). There is, however, a crucial difference in the way that each character situates herself in the gap between the two frames of reference. Whereas in *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's reclamation of her daughterly role takes place in opposition to her wifely role, in *That Long Silence* the two zones cannot be so clearly demarcated. Before her husband's meteoric success, Jaya has lived in the old house. It contains many of her old diaries and manuscripts. Every ordinary object spurs her memory, and "the ghost of [her] old self" appears at every corner, haunting her with the realization that she has become the obsessive guardian of Mohan's domestic happiness long before leaving this crowded place for the peaceful isolation of Churchgate (13). The "sense of homecoming" and "freedom" that Jaya feels are thus also described as "queer" and "strange" (25).

The most important function of the past in both narratives, however, is that it interrupts the *performance* of the present. Almost the very first sign of that interruption in *That Long Silence* occurs with the explosion of the laboriously carved persona of Jaya's monthly column in a woman's magazine, accompanied with her own photograph. In this column, Jaya writes "light, humorous pieces about the travails of a middle-class housewife" who is pointedly called Seeta (148). "Seeta" epitomizes the image of the ideal modern woman sanctioned and approved by patriarchy; her wit, intelligence, knowledge, and humanity come from an earthy and committed domestic role. From the scattered references to the column, it appears that Seeta would be a precursor of the eponymous "Rajani," a highly-acclaimed television serial in India, where an intelligent housewife, well-aware of her civic rights, tackles various day-to-day problems of her middle-class neighbourhood in a sincere and forthright manner, and in the process enhances the consciousness of the people. She is the new independent woman of official male discourse, self-reliant, but also fully at home in her domestic space. This image, derived primarily from the urban, educated, middle-class career woman, is also the advertiser's choice for selling consumer products. Although Jaya sees in Seeta "someone masquerading as [her]self," the character is a great favorite with her husband (119). "Seeta" had provided a safe subject, not only for Jaya, who until the sudden disruption of her life had been unable to write about women like herself, but also for Mohan. The only time Jaya dares to write a story resembling her real life with Mohan, he is devastated. It does not matter to him that the story wins a prize and gets published: "To Mohan, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist" (144). Jaya's own investment in the column cannot be minimized, however. Seeta seems to have provided a rationalization for the Jaya who had obsessively and humorlessly "scrubbed and cleaned and taken an inordinate pride in her achievements, even in a toilet free from stains and smells" (13). The implications of the break with Seeta, when it does come, are quite far-reaching: "There was nothing left of her, not even bits and pieces that could be put together" (69). The demise of "Seeta" spells the end of Suhasini as well, the name given to Jaya by Mohan on their wedding night, signifying beauty and gentleness; it paves the way for the return of Jaya (whose original name signifies victory).

Jaya's moment of self-consciousness de-houses her from a second space of self-imaging or self-production. This time it is her diaries, those objects of intimate thought and expression, which appear to be almost entirely influenced by her domestic role:

> what bewildered me as I looked through the pages of the diaries was that I saw in them an utter stranger, a person so alien to me that even the faintest understanding of the motives for her actions seemed impossible. There was no clue here, nothing that gave me a chance to connect. I flipped through the pages with a faintly admiring incredulity. Had I really recorded all this? Matter-of-fact, prosaic, everything was meticulously noted down here--what I had bought, how much I had paid for it, the dates the children's school had begun, the servants' absences, the advance payments they had taken, the dates of our insurance payments . . . . (69)

"The Diaries of a Sane Housewife," as Jaya ironically decides to entitle the documents, are the picture of an efficiently run household machinery, constituting the very essence of domestic satisfaction and contentment. But what the narrator actually reproduces for us within the scope of her narrative is not that catalogue of familiar details, but a rather different kind of entry. In it she writes of a beautiful evening spent at Juhu beach with her family. At the end of the day, walking back to the car, licking their cones, they encounter a group of beggar children. Jaya recalls how she protected her own children from those "hungry eyes, those dark starving faces" by herding them into the car: "Fear entered into me--I had to roll up the glass, I had to keep [the beggar child] out. Higher and higher I went, the hand still holding on, clinging on as if it would never let go" (73). Through the inclusion of this story, the narrator juxtaposes her secure, private reality with other realities in relation to which she has no efficient solutions--only passivity and silence. The diary turns into a symbol of what might be described as "heimlichkeit," suggesting both pleasing domesticity and place of concealment ("The Uncanny" 621-623). It reveals the deep connection between the two aspects, although one is open knowledge and the other witheld from view.

The interruption of the present through various strategies of de-domestication cannot take place without confronting the past itself. In order to refigure the past, she turns to the histories of women in the family that her present has buried. The project, however, is fraught with difficulties. Although the ghosts of those women had "invaded [Jaya's] being, screaming for attention," they do not now arise phoenix-like from the ashes of Seeta or the Sane Housewife (149). First of all, Jaya clearly cannot and will not identify with them. They belong to another class, another world: Mohan's mother, who, suffering much physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband, finally dies trying to abort her seventh child; Mohan's sister, who hides her pain from everyone and is diagnosed with ovarian tumour only days before she dies; Kusum, her distant cousin and the mother of three daughters, who commits suicide by jumping into a well. Although Jaya undertakes the role of scribe, her biggest problem is that she lacks the language in which to speak of/for them. What she knows and understands of these lives remains linked to a decidedly male discourse of womanhood. If, for instance, she were to use Mohan's words, his mother, sitting before the fire long after midnight recooking dinner for her husband because he had just thrown his plate at her in a fit of temper, would be a "tough" woman: "he saw strength . . . I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender" (36). Conversely, if she were to write Kusum's story, she would have to pierce the barrier of Kusum's "mental condition," the undiminished "aura of defeat about her," to touch her fear and loneliness, without acceding to the terms in which she has learned to define those conditions (23). Even women's stories produced in women's words follow the equation of silence and strength.

In contrast to the victims, there are the women who come across as powerful figures, but their power is built upon a battlefield of dead hopes and desires. One such character is "ajji", Jaya's paternal grandmother: "being with ajji was like sitting on those chairs in her room; there were always nails that came out to pierce and hurt" (27). The portrayal of Jaya's grandmother matches perfectly Daniels' model of the "Great Provider." In fact, Deshpande too attacks the brahmanic code of womanhood that remains firmly entrenched even in middle-class families:

> *Ajji*, a shaven widow, had denuded herself of all the things that make up a woman's life. She had no possessions, absolutely none, apart from the two saris she wore. Her room was bare, except for the large bed on which my grandfather had slept, a bed . . . unburdened by a mattress. There were also two chairs in the room . . . the hardness of their slatted seats . . . augmented by sharp nails that seemed to sprout from the most unexpected places. . . . Ajji herself sat on the bare ground and slept on a straw mat at night. The bed was a memorial to grandfather and the chairs

> meant for any male who, wearing trousers, could not sit comfortably on the ground. (26)

Writing about these women is as difficult as writing about the victims, perhaps more so because they have turned their self-renunciation into a finely honed code of female conduct that they wholly endorse. In *Roots and Shadows*, it comes as a shocking revelation to Indu to learn that her great aunt, who is the ultimate figure of authority, wealth, and power in the household, rose to that position only by enduring silently a traumatic marriage of more than twenty years. She had entered the house as a child bride and in trying to escape the terror of her husband's sexuality had been whipped and starved into total submission by her mother-in-law. Her husband spent most of his time with his mistress and his dying wish had been to see her by his bedside, the only wish that his wife denied him. Until her own very uncharacteristic act of making Indu the sole inheritor of her property, this long-suffering woman had enforced every domestic convention by the rule of thumb.

At this point it might be worth reviewing the question of self-positioning in *That Long Silence*. Jaya's narrative enacts the struggle with identification and self-representation in different ways. When Jaya writes the stories of women from the past--she adopts the objective mode, denoting distance, even alienation from them. Except in the case of Kusum, whose insanity becomes a touchstone for her own normality (she was "not-Kusum" 24), her point of view is usually that of observer, listener, or reporter. In contrast, when she narrates her own experiences, she does not observe a simple chronological order. Action and memory, past and present are juxtaposed; the conclusions are tentative; and dreams, delusions, shifts in narrative voice are all continually used to represent the destabilization of fixed identities. Nevertheless, in comparison to the narrative of Daniels' heroine, that of Jaya appears quite restrained. Mira Cherian's story possesses many of those qualities that Helene Cixous attributes to writing within the "libidinal economy," which means that the text bears the imprint of the female body in all its functions. As Cixous describes it, a piece of writing within this economy would be "messy", "loose," "running amuck," unlike the "stiff", "erect", "tight" "thesis" of male writing. In her story, Jaya, on the other hand, seems to reflect what she calls the coldness of "sensual memories" (95). Both Daniels and Deshpande shy away from the extrapolation that feminine writing by virtue of being closer to the body would be closer to the mother. The protagonists move *away* from mothers and foremothers. Several critics have pointed out that in Deshpande's work there is no mother who could serve as a model for the daughter. As in Daniels' only novel, mothers, wherever they are present in Deshpande's novels, are usually ruthless, superstitious, manipulative, and sexist. They value the role of men, those who accomplish things in the "real" world, and their relationship with their daughters is shaped by the authority and desire of the father.

Having unpegged themselves from known and practised entities of domesticity, motherhood, and sexuality, Deshpande's heroines, however, find no new space, no new context in which to exercise their newly realized selves. Creative unhomeliness, represented by wanderers and nomads, is still the exclusive privilege of men. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's cousin Naren "is incapable of living by any rules" (119). He comes and goes as he pleases. His only tie to the family is his aged grandfather for whom he returns time and again. Considered a wastrel by most of the family, Naren's sharp-witted, unpretentious, and candid personality holds special appeal for Indu. But what draws Indu to him most, what she finds truly reassuring, is his detachment. She describes its effect in relation to sexual politics: "Twice, briefly, our flesh had touched. But that had, oddly, created no new bond between us. It had not been so for me with Jayant. . . . [W]ith his touch, I had felt as if I had lost not only part of myself, but the whole. Now Naren's detachment made me feel untouched" (188). Indu's father, a photographer, also leads an itinerant lifestyle. During his brief visits, he "brutally reopen[s] the cicatrice on the face of the family," exposing all its discriminatory rules and practices, and then goes on his way (180). In a Brahmin household, holding fast to the vestiges of its difference by rituals and exclusions, his voice is the voice of pure reason. Indu highlights the same feature in her traveller father as she does in Naren: "To be so detached and objective with your own daughter . . . it's a rare gift. Perhaps we should make it a rule that children be brought up, not by their parents, but by strangers" (180). Indu's admiration is not, however, an innocent one as she reflects upon what his absences meant to her and the prejudices they possibly concealed: "How else could he have parted with me, a fifteen-days-old motherless baby, to the family he hated and despised? He had not even come to see me until I was more than a year. But that, perhaps, was because I was a girl. If I had been a son. . . ." (179). In spite of such reservations, men without wives, family, and a settled domestic abode, occupy an important place in Deshpande's novels. In *That*

*Long Silence*, the character of Naren seems to have achieved a "perfectly" asexual yet uninhibited form in Kamat. Living by himself, resisting the dependence and helplessness that men project with their " 'Mother, I'm hungry . . . sort of thing,' " forthright in his appreciation and his criticism, Kamat puts Jaya completely at ease: "With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself--Jaya" (153). Their relationship, which seems "frighteningly fluid," has the depth and possibility of flowing almost anywhere or taking any shape at all (151). Its most significant quality is that it allows Jaya to imaginatively regain control over her sexual passions:

> . . . he held my face lightly within his palms, so light a touch that I had scarcely felt his hands . . . his eyes had looked steadily, almost dispassionately at me. And my body had responded to that look, that voice, that touch. I had almost felt his body on mine, becoming a part of mine, I had felt his mouth on mine, I had almost been able to smell and taste his lips. (157)

True to his independent character, Kamat dies without burdening another person, leaving Jaya to cope with the ordinary feelings of guilt and self-pity. Jaya, who had needed him more than anyone else to sustain her anger, to keep herself from forgetting the writer she aspired to be, has to ask herself why, when she "had found him dead--glassy-eyed, foul-smelling and dead . . . [she] had walked away from him . . . and gone in to Mohan" (157-58). Confronting her relationship with Kamat, "put[ting] the bits and pieces together," is thus a major component of Jaya's project of re-membering. It is a vital piece in the re-arrangement of the present.

Deshpande's protagonists make sense of the events occurring around them as a function of gender and sexual relations experienced within the context of home. The awareness of their alienated female bodies, the reclamation of past ties and connections, and the desire to pry open concealed hierarchies all delineate a patriarchal social order expressed in the relationship of man and woman.

### *Domesticity, Domestic Fiction, and the Reality of the Modern Indian Woman*

The preoccupation with domesticity in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* has raised questions about the politics of that text, the ideological implications of its representation of the modern Indian woman. In a recent article, "The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian novels in English," Rajeswari Sunder Rajan argues that by focusing on the details of domestic life, *That Long Silence* fails to engage with another reality of Indian women taking shape through political movements, professional experiences, conflict and confrontation--a reality that is liberating and where women are grasping agency. Rajan compares the feminist agenda of Deshpande's novel to that of nineteenth-century English women writers who "protest against the limitations of women's lives," but in whose novels, ultimately, "women's roles in the family are revalorized after much questioning" (78).

Rajan makes three main points in her critique of Deshpande's novel. First, she observes that the novel, in spite of its realistic elements, fails to provide an accurate and believable representation of present-day, urban, educated, middle-class Indian women. While the treatment of Jaya's character in a certain context, such as the similarities between different generations and classes of women, is "so compellingly realistic . . . that no Indian woman reader can read this novel without a steady, sympathetic identification and, indeed, frequent shocks of recognition," it is completely unrealistic in another (78). As Rajan explains, "in terms of the actual Indian social situation, for a woman in Jaya's position to take no cognizance of the world of work, politics, even physical geography is to neglect an important component of the reality of the Indian bourgeois woman's situation" (81).

Rajan's second point elaborates upon the conservatism of Deshpande's realism, as of the realistic genre as a whole, arguing that the apparently faithful depiction of reality in effect amounts to "a refusal to undertake a radical social critique" (79). Not only is the writer unable to imagine a different reality, she also fails to represent the possibilities of a different reality present all around her:

> What makes Jaya's resolute "keeping" of her place within the home so unusual is that, given her historical location as a present-day, urban, educated middle-class Indian woman, there should be so little consideration of several contemporary realities which, while they are not precisely "solutions" to her problem, do impinge upon it--such as the option of a career, or the knowledge of an actual political women's movement built precisely upon the very consciousness of oppression that has come to be hers. (79)

Rajan finds that Deshpande, by not allowing her protagonist to engage with these different possibilities, fails to give society a face and patriarchy a public character. Every social relation becomes personalized and privatized.

Rajan's final point sums up the domestic situation in *That Long Silence* as ultimately reproducing, even reinforcing, the division of spheres that causes women's isolation and dependence. The way in which Jaya's experience with writing is depicted suggests to Rajan that this public act is deliberately rendered private by making it simply a function of Jaya's self-expression and self-knowledge. It is never made to transgress the boundaries which smother her creativity: "at the end of the story, Jaya chooses to operate within the self-imposed limits of the family, resolving to change her life by renegotiating the power-relations and improving the interpersonal relationships within it rather than through the instrumentality of her writing" (81). Rajan also sees an unwillingness on the part of the author to delve into the politics of women's writing in India by making the process part of the final product: "Deshpande insistently marks the social obstacles--the prohibitions imposed by Jaya's husband, her editors' expectations, the exhortations of her 'private' reader, Kamat--that prevent Jaya's 'true' writing as a woman from finding expression; but she remains silent about the means by which *this* narrative finally escaped into the public domain" (80). Rajan's point here concerns not only the personal history of the writer thematized in the text we read as *That Long Silence*, but the history of publication that equally constructs the writing. By not presenting the contingencies of writing as a woman in India with all the privileges of her middle-class background, Rajan argues that Jaya, alias Deshpande, has "conformed to an almost standard profile of the 'Indo-Anglian' woman writer," who writes about nation, gender, and cultural difference without probing the ground upon which she stands (74).

I have presented Rajan's position in some detail here because her critique of Deshpande touches upon several areas, most importantly, the function of domesticity in what is known as "domestic fiction" or "domestic realism." Other areas include language, audience, and postcoloniality in contemporary women's writing in India, particularly in English. Finally, there is also the question of the postcolonial woman intellectual and her self-representation through the dual roles of narrator and writer. The strength of Rajan's critique lies in asking what, if any, is the political framework Deshpande employs in her depiction of the domestic sphere. While observing that Jaya's intense awareness of stultification in *That Long Silence* does serve the function of self-criticism, Rajan remains unsatisfied with its direction. For, as she points out, Jaya's "self-castigation" is "so acute indeed . . . that it is hard to think of a female protagonist in recent fiction who dislikes herself more" (79). But it only leads to "the even-handed distribution of blame among both men and women" and, more importantly, "the premise that women's silence is a result of the failure of communication between individual men and women rather than the flawed structures of social arrangements" (79). The problem with Rajan's critique, however, is its underlying general assumptions, which reveal a greater concern with her own critical stance than with understanding the various factors that make the domestic environment of the text both a self-critical tool and a source of entrapment.

Rajan's dismissal of Indian women's writing in English as inhabiting a "rarefied realm" and being dated, conservative, and elitist becomes a signal of political affiliation rather than a means of recognizing the familial and social coordinates of the writing or how patriarchal structures are renewed or modified in the narratives through the gendered subject (75). Brief references to "feminist researchers [who] seek out women's song and folklore, record their spoken narratives, create spaces for their reception" and to "the mode of 'revolutionary fantasy' that Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi employs in her story of tribal insurgency in *Bashai Tudu*" are evidence of this kind of self-identification. Not surprisingly, inherent to this strategy of mapping the literary scene is also the generalized idea that "to write fiction in English in India today is to write in the shadow of Salman Rushdie," a statement that Rajan goes on to illustrate with an all-male list of writers--Amitava Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri, and Upamanyu Chatterji, among others--all living and working outside India. The connection that Rajan makes between these writers and women writers living and working in India is that "after all, they are products of the same configuration of social circumstances (class, education, professional affiliations) that has produced the male writers of their generation" (76). Rajan's sweeping generalizations not only blow away the scent of an obvious crisis in her own critique, but they also indicate an anxiety to determine the authentic postcolonial position. Thus Rajan speaks of the distance and affiliation that are the privileges of English writing in India without wondering why that standard of representativeness should be applied to novelists and writers alone and not to other intellectuals. Furthermore, she does not ask why the feminist researchers to whom she refers have translated the folklore and oral stories of the earliest women poets into English rather than other Indian languages. Or even why it takes an American university-based Bengali academic's translation of Mahasweta Devi's work into English for it to become finally readable, analysable, and quotable by feminist critics in India. Rajan warns that "to write as a woman in English and publish in the west is to be additionally conscious of how readership structures the politics of writing" (77). Yet, she takes her cue from British feminist presses and British reviewers, who have hailed Deshpande as a "universal" or "representative" Third World feminist writer, to conclude that the regional flavours of Deshpande's novel "provide the 'indigenous' fixes of her work--even as the language she writes in, her place of publication, and her 'feminist consciousness' are aspects of an education and, of what we may broadly call, a sensibility, that are western" (83). These responses provide the starting point of Rajan's assessment of Deshpande's novel, and through them she judges her work.

Thus, when Rajan reads Indian women's writing about home and personal history as simply a belated version of nineteenth-century domestic realism, without the trangressive potential or allegorical import of that genre at the moment of its emergence, she is unable to make the texts yield more than the evidence of a failed event. While there are certain parallels between the version of "good womanhood" of domestic realism and that with which the contemporary Indian "domestic novel" contends, there are important differences between the historical imperatives, the political functions, and the cultural hegemonic role of the genre in the heyday of

British capitalist growth and in Indian women's writing today. I will return to my specific argument by way of a brief detour through the terrain of domestic realism, as defined by theorists of that area, to show that the basic point of difference is the function of domesticity itself.

Almost without exception, the overriding framework of Victorian domestic fiction remains the security and stability of the bourgeois home, rendered through graphic details that express the solidity of ordinary, recognizable bourgeois life. Vineta Colby studies a characteristic passage from *The Vicar of Wakefield* to show that the literary techniques by which the "home-based and family-based" idyll was produced had begun in eighteenth-century literature:

> Generations of English novel readers and novel writers grew up on *The Vicar of Wakefield* . . . Goldsmith captured the spirit of simplicity, intimacy and privacy, immediacy and precision of detail, that informs English domestic realism. Size is modestly scaled down--"little habitation," "little enclosures," "one story," "three other apartments." . . . Inside and outside there is "neatness," "nicely white-washed" walls and decorated only with home-made pictures, no "richer furniture. (8)

The representation of home functions as a cornerstone of the cultural self-consolidation of the middle class. Its modest, clean, and pleasing interiors reflect the effects of female education in tasteful and prudent expenditure. The main pleasures derived from these representations are those of recognition and identification. Thus was codified a domestic ideal and an ideal of womanhood that continued into the high period of Victorian literature. The experiences of ordinary living and sensitivity to feelings and emotions aroused by what Charlotte Bronte calls "something unromantic as Monday morning" represented the "truth" that Victorians found in the fiction or genre of domestic realism (Colby 26).

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong outlines the basic principles of what has come to be called domestic realism: the moral superiority of a seemingly unified middle class, projected through the principles of frugality, discretion, and modesty in the domestic space and the domestic woman; the removal of the material body in ascertaining value, thereby distinguishing the middle-class woman's body from the ornamental and laboring bodies of the aristocratic and working classes, respectively; self-regulation as the means for a woman to gain authority over the domestic world, where her supervision constituted a form of value in its own right; and finally, the purificatory paradigm, where the individual woman asserted herself not as a heroine, but as an angel in the house.

This scheme accommodates most Victorian domestic realist fiction, including that written by women. Yet, this category of fiction has registered shifting political moods by deploying domestic space in very different ways to serve different political ends. Undoing the dominant tendency of "most literary historical accounts of domestic fiction . . . to make a continuous narrative out of material that actually proceeds in fits and starts," Armstrong shows that the difference, for example, between Austen and the Brontes is not primarily a matter of literary processes, but of their respective position in relation to the social movements of their time (161). For example, the representation of sexual desire as an index of the respectable woman's ability for self-control and allegiance to her social group above everything else undergoes many changes during the 1800s. With the domestic novel of the 1840s onwards, for instance, "the heroines of Richardson, Burney, and Austen who seemed to challenge the boundaries of family, status, and role" all but disappear. In the new novels, "marriages that changed people's status never led to personal happiness. Most often they led to personal disaster, especially for women. Meanwhile the household became a place for restoring the boundaries that had been obscured by exactly this socially ambitious form of desire" (177). One might say, then, that domestic fiction has participated with ever increasing aggressiveness, along with other intellectual discourses, in upholding order and existing class structures. Although marriage and misguided desire are still the issues, the political target changes as sentimental convention works "to confine political disruption within an apolitical framework," and "class conflict comes to be represented as a matter of sexual misconduct and family scandal" (178). This period also witnesses the entry of the monstrous woman through the figures of the ghost, the madwoman, and the prostitute, which emphasized the terror of an alien presence and strengthened further the case for the moral control of the bourgeois state.

Now, a comparison of women's writing in India with nineteenth-century domestic realism would necessarily have to ignore the tremendous economic and political power upon which the development of domestic realism took place.

Armstrong speaks of history as the uncanny force that intrudes upon and disrupts the traditional order of the household, evidenced, for instance, in the "archaic inheritance laws and British colonialism" in *Jane Eyre*, but she does not examine this aspect further or show how the Victorian desire for a unified middle class reflected not only the strength of capitalist development at home, but also the accumulation of colonial wealth. She likewise does not investigate the function of *Englishness* in producing the image of the ideal Victorian household, whose virtues of orderliness, individuality, morality, and efficacy were essential qualities of the English people, making them fit to be the most powerful "civilizing" force in the world.

The representation of the domestic sphere in current Indian fiction by women, the concern with desire, sexual relations, marriage, and so on, carries neither the scope nor the hegemonic agenda of nineteenth-century domestic realism. In fact, if we look closely at those issues, we will find a far more fractured and incongruous set of relationships than are attributed to the heroines of Victorian fiction. At issue is the liberal space of the modern Indian home itself--not class, or nation, or even social identity. Broadly speaking, the writing comes out of middle-class women's confrontation with the specific norms by which their own class constructs and reproduces the domestic space as the "private" space of patriarchy, as the non-modern space of the modern nation. Thus, while the autobiographical, personal narrator's depiction of her predicament through the apparently mundane workings of social convention might be comparable to the technique of domestic realism, the actual conflict is more internal than external. In the case of Deshpande's novels, the same graphic details that render the solidity and assurance of the domestic space themselves become the source of destabilization. This occurs not through the incursion of alien forces, but through the reinscription of known and apparently predictable relationships. As the characters begin to delve into the pasts of other women who lived in the house, a sense of terror and foreboding, a coldness flows out of the cracks and crevices in the house. Each of the objects so familiar, so reassuring, becomes linked to histories of horrific domestic violence, marital rape, neglect, self-abnegation, madness, and suicide, all of which get woven into the very texture of "home", "domesticity," or the "private sphere," whatever we may choose to call it. Similarly, in *The Salt Doll*, strangeness erupts within everyday language, where a casual metaphor reveals gruesome realities and the normalized female body discloses its grotesque and phantasmatic inscriptions.

There can be hardly any doubt that the treatment of the private world through its terrors and enclosures would have been far more enriched by linking it to specific political realities of women or, as Rajan puts it, by "the knowledge of an actual political women's movement built precisely upon the very consciousness of oppression that has come to be [Jaya's]" in *That Long Silence* (79). Instead, it remains a function of the self-knowledge of the protagonist, leading to a psychological (and social) truth which, however, does not depend on modifying political reality.

At the center of Jaya's search for autonomy, there is a perceptible core of individual moral responsibility, which she at once resists and exercises. A good example of the ambiguity in her position can be found in the answer she provides to her own question of why she has failed to break through the boundaries of marriage and to embrace her intellectual self more fully:

> The job I wanted to take, the baby I had wanted to adopt, the anti-price campaign I'd wanted to take part in . . . But even as I listed these to myself, it came to me that perhaps it had nothing to do with Mohan, the fact that I had not done these things, that I had left them alone. Perhaps I had not really *cared enough* about those things myself. (my emphasis 120)

What most of Deshpande's narrators do care about is marked by a pervasive sense of guilt. Jaya's disavowal of her own desires is projected as a symptom not only of repression, but of the coldness and selfishness that marriage instils in her in the name of the family's protection. The ghosts of Kusum, Kamat, and all the others, to whom she could not reach out, merge with "the ghost of Jaya's old self" (13). Facing them feels as "awkward" as "meeting the ghost of your past self . . . like a stranger" (14). The importance given to internalized sources of oppression also tends to make the acquisition of power a very localized phenomenon, in this case within the household, in the capacity of mother, wife, sister, and daughter. It leads to the ontological statement that "the dark holds no terrors," as the title of another of Deshpande's novels suggests; the terrors are within oneself. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1985), Saru is raped nightly by her husband, but there is no evidence of the brutal ritual anywhere in her husband's demeanour when he brings her her morning tea. Saru doubts her own body; she cannot link "the hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body" to a familiar face (102). Saru's fear of her husband's sadism brings her to her parental home, where she tries to deal with her long-standing belief that as a child she had been responsible for her younger brother's death by drowning. This motif of self-blame is, in fact, more fully developed than the issue of her husband's sexuality. Only when Saru frees herself of guilt, shame, and humiliation, is she able to resist her husband and restore to herself the pride she once held in her professional acumen as a doctor.

Jaya's inability to make her writing the instrument of identity transformation, a feature that Rajan points out as evidence of the writer's (fictional and real) privatization of a decidedly public act, is tied very closely to the ideology of moral responsibility. The only relationship in the narrative that could bring home to Jaya the contradictions in her attempts at de-domestication is never explored beyond the metaphoric level, and that is the relationship between Jaya and her maid, Jeeja. Jaya realizes that her sympathy and compassion for Jeeja in her bitter, unending struggles is a form of self-protection: "it was Jeeja and her like [she] needed; it was these women who saved [her] from the hell of drudgery. Any little freedom [she] had depended on them" (52). The impact of that statement loses its ironic edge, however, and becomes quite real when Jaya begins to identify with Jeeja's silence, her refusal to discuss her struggles, and even uses it to authenticate her own silence: "I find I have an answer to Jeeja's question, if I ask it of myself, as she had done: With whom will I be angry? With myself, of course" (192). Through this statement, Jaya not only alludes to the strength of the suffering woman, but she also recasts her in the framework of her own alienation. In the end, Jaya joins the lessons of Jeeja's stoicism with the philosophical lessons of the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagwadgita*, which predicates knowledge with free choice and desire, sanctifying, humanizing, and relativizing the struggles of women like herself and Jeeja. The literary work, like Jaya herself, thus makes a kind of psychological escape, while the material body, the treatment of real relationships, remains housed in the domestic space, for which Jaya has found no alternative.

There are two kinds of silences in *That Long Silence*: the silence of the "warm and safe hole" of wife and mother and the silence on being "prodded out of it by cruel, sharp staves" (173). What has Jaya's writing, presumably the book we are reading, ultimately achieved? Jaya seems prepared for the question: "Well, I've achieved this. I'm not afraid anymore. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible" (190). Jaya's slow, hesitant efforts at reshaping her place within the home at her own time and pace contrasts sharply with the reality of many working mothers who walk a tightrope between home and work, trying not to precipitate the crisis in either arena. Mrinal Pande writes of them in the following words:

> Hardly ever do you meet women who dare confess publicly, that they work for the same reasons as a man, and who then proceed to plan far ahead into the future for actual clear-cut goals. As a result, most middle-class women, even when well-qualified and gifted, are reluctant to be

> seen methodically preparing and bargaining for jobs. Mostly after a sort of furtive search, they clutch at the first job that comes their way and never let go of it, regardless of low salaries, humiliating conditional clauses . . . and lack of promotional avenues. The reasons they give, can vary from: "--Well the timings suit me and I'm home before my husband" . . . to "My children and/or in-laws prefer that I work part-time. (*The Subject is Woman* 74)

What would the representation of the middle-class home from that scene of struggle look like? Perhaps it could be read as the third circle of silence in the novel.

### *Language and Interpretation*

Writing about the intimate recesses of home in English, which is predominantly a language of public affairs in India, signals a specific mode of entry into the domestic space. It reflects the privileged, educated, upper-class, multilingual, and decidedly modern social position of the women writers and their quasi-autobiographical heroines. Both Daniels and Deshpande are concerned with language as an important issue in identity construction. The highly fluid world of *The Salt Doll* is shaped and reshaped by language, making it difficult to interpret subjectivity, belief, and action through a singular material of construction. The language of identity, Mira Cherian learns, is carved not only out of words, but out of other materials as well. In the city of Bombay, people live out whole stories, cultures, and fantasies located elsewhere. The Menzes family "spoke Portuguese at home, spoke of visits to Lisbon, and were trying to live some continental myth of the struggling musician supported by the heroic seamstress" (44). Likewise, the Walker family, consisting of a mother and thirteen daughters, are a riot of Hollywood myths and characters: "the eldest Walker girl is called Scarlet, has a friend called Ashley, and marries another called Rhett. Ashley married a younger sister, slim and pale, called Melanie . . . Ava Walker looks like Ava Gardner. She even talks like Ava Gardner" (43). But like Naipaul's Bogart, they "could not be dismissed as marionettes" (45). Their imitation has a creativity and energy that hardly indicate "they have been conceived originally as line drawing with single lines" (45).

As fragmented, diverse, and overlapping as the language of identity is, reading practices must needs evolve from more than the written word. Mira recounts how she learned to read the nation through changing signposts from English to Indian languages, names of streets, statues and monuments. Independence comes with the utterance of unfamiliar names, learned and pronounced haltingly: "Clive prancing on a horse in the centre of the plaza, for a hundred years, turns overnight into Shivaji, also on horseback, not prancing, but coming down the Western Ghats" (54). In the coalescence of this territorial and figurative reversal of colonial conquest, embodied in the masculine, heroic, and Hindu idol, Daniels once again locates her identity in the liminal space.

*That Long Silence*, which revolves around the problem of articulation, constantly discloses the link between experience and culture on the question of language. Deshpande uses English to evade the taboos and conventions of her mothertongue/motherhood, but cannot evade the upwardly mobile social category which allows her that evasion and which she critiques through Jaya's experiences.

> "Let them learn good English," Appa had replied. "It's going to be more useful to them than being good Brahmins."
>
> And so I had been ready for Mohan who--he had told me this soon after we got married--had wanted to marry a girl "who can speak good English." That statement had amazed me as much as Dada's words, when he had first told me about Mohan. "I believe," Dada had said, "that what he wants is an educated, cultured wife. He says he isn't bothered about dowry, money and all that." (90)

The context of Jaya's search for the appropriate language is defined by another notion of culture, that which evolves out of women's experiences and women's lives. But Mohan's aspirations to culture tend to draw Jaya into the circle of exclusivity, where Jaya is "so exactly like the others, [that she] is almost invisible" (142). The simple, stark language of the novel attempts to situate the narrator outside that circle, indicating the possibility of a new *auto*graph; whether it will be able to rewrite the material self remains open to further evaluation.

In this chapter, I have argued that the silences and gaps in women's writing in English cannot be explained away simply as a sign of apathy or individualism. As the characterization of Mira Cherian in *The Salt Doll* shows, the concern with home is a very deliberate one. The stories of Mira Cherian, who refuses to be homebound, joins the labour party in college, gives speeches at the town hall, writes articles for a nationalist syndicate on anti-British terrorist activities, and aspires to become a journalist, remain encased by the story of her relationship with her parents and with Nanjundan. Had the details of her public life formed the bulk of the narrative they would not necessarily ensure the "arrival" of Daniels' protagonist or the politicization of the gendered subject. Meanwhile, intended or not, the troubling reminder of the gendered constructions of home, if that is all we see finally in the novels, must be valuable to educated, professional, urban, middle-class women because the public face so often hides unresolved issues, characterized as "domestic," so close to home, so much "smaller" in scope, and yet so difficult for women to confront and change.

The articulation of middle-class femininity as a starting point of inquiry into the constructions of women under patriarchy does not mean, however, that it cannot align itself with other levels or contexts of analysis. As we will see in the next chapter, the process of exploring the historical construction of women in political discourse leads feminist scholars and critics towards an exploration of the hidden languages, desires and silences of their own positions, as women and as historians.

# Notes

[1] Both Deshpande and Daniels have struggled with the influence of powerful male intellectual figures at home. For Deshpande, "writing was possible, writing was done," as she says in an interview with me, because her father was a writer. But there was always the fear of writing too much, revealing too much. Daniels had to wait for a long time before she could circumvent the overwhelming presence of her husband, A. K. Ramanujan, a poet and translator. Both writers are fluent in a number of Southern or South-western Indian languages, such as Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, and Telugu, but write only in English.

# Chapter 4

## Representing Subalternity: History and Women's Testimonial Narrative

Feminist historiographers and activists attempting to locate a women's history in the annals of one of the most well-known political movements of India--the Telangana People's Movement--have found instead a continuation of the deep cultural consensus about woman and womanhood. The version of "women's role" that emerges from their research reinforces the mainstays of traditional patriarchal structures. Although the movement remains unparalleled in its remarkable battle against age-old forms of feudal oppression, the outcome of the research shows that the whole question of women's oppression remains largely a politically uncharted area; therefore, it is not surprising that the specificity of women's experience does not shape the existing history of the movement. There is a growing sense among many women activists that "a great deal of the creativity and insights, understanding and direction, that belong to the women's movement, do not fall within the existing parameters of debate within the Left" and that there is thus a "need to redefine politics and political organisation" (Kannabiran and Shatrugna 23). The tendency within most Left organizations to ignore gender difference or reduce it to an undifferentiated, single category, "women," has led to a vast gap in theorizing the social relations they seek to change. In spite of the increased number of women's organizations and the growing impact of the autonomous women's movement, women's groups continue to confront the "uncomfortable suspicion that the women's question is a western bourgeois concept and women activists in the third world should be really getting on with questions like those of food, drought, or wasteland development" (Kannabiran and Shatrugna 25).

In this final chapter, I discuss women's testimonial as a kind of history built around women's lives and experiences within the context of radical social transformation. By no means a common phenomenon in India, women's testimonial is, nonetheless, a significant effort towards the kind of feminist historiography that, in Kumkum Sangari's words, "undertakes to demonstrate our sociality in the *full* sense, and is ready to engage with its own presuppositions of an objective gender-neutral method of enquiry as well as with the social moments and movements it sets out to represent" (*Recasting Women* 3). The project of developing such a method of enquiry is implicated in a nexus of debates on how to identify the subject of history. The terrain these debates traverse is complex and broad, including in its contours challenges to a number of categories inherent to history, chief among them the position of the historian in relation to the movement she represents. Since the testimonial, like some oral history, documentaries, and ethnographic accounts, focuses on the lives of women within a subaltern social formation and depends on a dialogue or encounter between writers and speakers, it provides an apt place from which to discuss this issue, which is fundamental not only to women's histories, but to all histories that intervene in the social order.

Two main strands run through the entire body of this chapter: genre and history. Each of its four sections deals both with the pre-eminent features of the testimonial and with the problems of writing a women's history. The first section identifies some of the prominent gaps and silences that result from the structure of the conversation and, ironically, from the lack of a women's history. The second section interrogates the claims of autonomy and representativeness in the testimonial and discusses their significance in constructing the subaltern subject of history. The third section situates the testimonial within the broader arena of women and politics in order to explore and explain the problem of information-gathering and its role in the production of the testimonial. The last section looks at different political agendas of a "third world feminist consciousness" arising out of the current world-wide interest in testimonial narratives of postcoloniality by women. The postcolonial intellectual's role is immensely significant in the context of this whole discussion.

The text which serves as the main point of reference is a collection called *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising* (1989).[1] In this book, women who participated in an armed peasant revolt against a brutal feudal regime in colonial India, during 1945-51, speak of their experiences, telling their interlocutors what "general" histories of the movement do not. The tellers range from landless labouring women to college lecturers, from members of landowning families to those who have known only slavery and bondage, from women who were already grandmothers when they joined the movement to those who were only twelve or fourteen years old. Many of these women evolved collective forms of local resistance, gave up home and family to join the armed squads, acted as couriers, carrying weapons and secret messages, fed, sheltered, and protected the Party members, and served as doctors, teachers, and cultural workers during various stages of the movement.

The editorial group that interviewed the Telangana women activists and supporters and re-presented their stories in WWMH belong to a women's collective based in Hyderabad, India. Formed in 1978, the Stree Shakti Sanghatana (translated literally as Women's Force/Power Organization) consists mainly of middle-class professionals, many of whom have been closely involved with Left politics for a long time. The Sanghatana has been engaged both in research and theoretical projects as well as in activist work around issues of dowry, rape, shelter, and health. Through these issues it has also tried to address the limitations of the radical mode of functioning, characteristic of the Left, which has resulted in alienating the mass of middle-class women. Along with *We Were Making History*, the Sanghatana has published another book which is a reworked version of the Boston Women's Health Collective book, *Our Bodies Ourselves*. Written in Telugu, this book surpasses the original, particularly in the way it connects prevailing ideas about women's bodies and health to public and global politics. The main focus of the group, thus, is to direct itself towards "evolving a style of political practice that is responsive to the specific nature of women's oppression . . . not only to fight the 'enemy' out there, but address the capillary forms in which power is rooted in the everyday world and through which its reproduction is guaranteed" (Kannabiran and Shatrugna 34).

At a moment when the Sanghatana and other women's groups in India are rethinking the question of women's participation in public politics and mass organizations, the decision to research the experiences of the Telangana women is an enormously significant one. The growing concern among Sanghatana members over how women can hold on to the gains they make through their involvement in insurgent struggles, without having their energies and strengths diffused or dissipated in so-called "larger" issues, is reflected in the process of the interviews. The questions, although excluded from the narrativization of the oral testimonies, seem to revolve around the lives of the tellers, their perspective on the movement, and their sense of their identity. The agenda of those questions points to gender and history: What did the women contribute to the movement? What kind of political consciousness did they achieve? What does the articulation of their experiences tell about the discursive locale of their struggles? Can a women's history be signposted through the answers to these questions?

The representation of subalternity takes place through language and discourse; *both* the women who experience the Telangana movement *and* the feminist scholars, critics, or theorists who draw upon women's lives as the basis for new knowledges make sense of the experiences from a host of vantage points. In that sense, WWMH stages a kind of ideological encounter between the subaltern figure and the intellectual figure, whether or not that encounter is explicitly plotted into the narrative in which it appears. When a narrative--historical or literary--announces its alternative locus of enunciation through the representation of subaltern politics, it becomes possible to read in it a text of the intellectual's testimony on her own thinking. As the editors say, "Writing [the book] has been a process of discovery: not only of the limits of traditional historiography, but of the possibilities that emerge as we recentre our scholarship" (32). The discourse of subalternity that emerges in the pages of oral testimony will be read as part of this text of self-discovery.

The Telangana uprising has no place in official Indian history, although it has become legendary among Left circles for its impact upon the structures of the Indian feudal system. It started in 1945 in the Telangana districts of Hyderabad, the largest princely state of colonial India. The Nizam of Hyderabad, the state ruler, was the most wealthy beneficiary of the "Paramountcy," a contract under which the Crown undertook to protect Indian princes from external invasion and internal revolt in exchange for complete recognition of its political and financial rights. The exploitation of the peasantry and landless poor in the Telangana region was unparalleled in the entire state. Agricultural tenants and labourers alike were bled dry by unending revenues and taxes. Armed with their network of henchmen, spies, and agents, the landlords routinely extracted *vetti* or free service from people of different castes and professions. It was a most dehumanizing system in which women were extremely vulnerable. The resistance against this oppressive regime owed its initial success to the climate of progressive nationalist liberation movements and increased political activities in the state as a whole. Later, however, as it gathered militancy, it came under the leadership of the then undivided Communist Party of India. Lasting nearly six years, the movement spread across three thousand villages. As one historian and leader of this far-reaching struggle states, "in these villages, the hated landlords were driven away from their fortress-like houses. . . . One million acres of land were redistributed among the peasantry under the guidance of the people's committees. All evictions were stopped and the forced labour service was abolished" (Sundarayya 2). The potential of this movement to seriously upset class relations was felt not only by the landlords and their mainstay, the Nizam of Hyderabad, but also by the national government that came into power with the independence of India in August 1947. The Indian army, which was ostensibly sent out to subjugate the Nizam, having done its job, turned upon the organizers and supporters of the Telangana movement. The severe repression that followed was no different from the terror unleashed by the dreaded paramilitary organization of the Nizam during the intensification of the struggle. Many were killed; armed volunteer squads retreated to the forests; it became more and more difficult for activists to find shelter. Finally, in 1951, after prolonged internal debates, the Communist Party called off the struggle.

The movement is also noted for the participation and active support of women. Numerous accounts of the struggle celebrate the tremendous resilience of the women during the hardships of underground guerrilla resistance, the physical and mental torture in raids and captivity, the losses, the loneliness. Although women were mobilized in large numbers, changing the rural ethos in remarkable ways, the ideological challenges their participation posed went unrealized by the predominantly male leadership of the movement. In the accounts of party leaders and subsequent histories, women not only appear in a "supportive" role, but the quality and extent of their participation are simply judged as a reflection of the successes or failures of the movement. Women were indispensable to the movement, but their subjectivity, their proper identity, was never given serious consideration. Their material presence continued to be associated with biology, sexuality, morality, and home, those signs of sexual difference that the women were dismantling even as they were operating under them. Needless to say, once the movement was called off, the lives of most of the women faded into the walls of the house.

The nature and extent of women's participation in the movement are of special interest to the members of Stree Shakti Sanghatana. The editorial group's focus on the experiences of women in this unprecedented political event is not intended simply to set the record straight by attributing specific contributions to women that highlight their capacity for independent action. In other words, it is not just the "woman's side" of the story. The stories of the women are meant to draw out an analysis and critique of the movement itself, the assumptions about political organization, and the general approach to the politicization of women's issues. As the interviewers listen to the accounts, they try to understand not only "what the women meant," but more importantly "what they could have meant to the movement" (260). From the insights that these stories provide about political struggles involving both men *and* women, the authors try to trace the contours of a women's history that will "move towards the history of humankind and therefore to the possibility of its future . . . not just to place women's history alongside that of men, but attend with humility and eagerness to the revaluations, reformulations and reorientation that it demands" (WWMH 28).

The testimonies of the Telangana activists are inseparably linked to the editorial group's extended commentary, which frames them, lays claim to them, analyzes and reinscribes them in the discourse of women's history. The first chapter outlines briefly the economic and cultural conditions under which the Telangana movement took shape and its diversified assemblage of political forces. The subject of that outline is the movement itself. Although written from the perspective of subaltern mobilization in the struggle against feudal autocracy, the narrative focus and style are patterned on conventional historiography. The second chapter, "Writing About Women in People's Struggle," poses the question of where women's history should be placed: Can it be incorporated into the general history of the movement? Should it be written as parallel history? What colour does the politics of women's history have? This chapter describes the limitations of specific methodological tools brought by the group and the need to forge new ones. These two chapters are followed by sixteen oral testimonies, named after the individual women, and one group discussion, named after the village in which it takes place. The book concludes with three more editorial pieces and a glossary. The "Afterword" provides a critical analysis of the gender politics of the movement by looking at what possibilities it afforded the women and how these came into conflict with the ways in which women were beginning to imagine themselves. This section documents the editors' attempts to interpret the contradictions and inconsistencies they detect in the stories as symptoms of more complex negotiations on the part of the women than have been acknowledged in the histories, memoirs, and interviews of the (male) leaders of the organization. The penultimate chapter, "Writing This Book," provides snapshot glimpses of the individual women whose narratives appear in the book. Each entry highlights the warm and friendly atmosphere of the interviews and the lasting connections established with the interviewees. The final chapter, "About the language in this book," explains the problematics of creating an "unspectacular text," particularly in the context of language. The interviews, conducted in several dialects, have been transcribed, edited, and rewritten into the standard language of the region (Telugu), as well as into English, with careful attention to the class, caste, and gendered modalities of usage. This political project of translation and historicization has brought an important segment of women's history within the realm of critical discourse; however, much of the experience of articulation, of listening, and responding has inevitably been lost in the process.

The overall significance of the editorial framing that I wish to emphasize is the continued effort by the editorial group to situate themselves in relation to their institutional and political practices and, thus, their own production as readers (and writers) of subaltern texts. Without apologizing for or diminishing their active role in the making of the book, the Sanghatana members actually foreground their participation in what might be seen as a *conversation*. The editorial analyses and the separate stories face each other like identities. Although questions do not form part of the written narratives, they are often implied in how the details are shaped. Furthermore, considering that testimonies of struggle are generally seen to transmit the realities of a situation requiring immediate action (a point that I will explore in more detail when I deal with the relationship between history and the genre of testimonial), it seems important to keep in mind that by focussing on an event that took place half a century ago, the interviewers clearly indicate that the immediacy of the cause is not their main concern. Nor is it simply the recovery of the buried lives of those women who fought a difficult battle with amazing courage and commitment, for then their accounts would have been enough in themselves.

The Sanghatana's main purpose of reviewing the Telangana movement from the perspective of women--intellectuals and subaltern women--is to move towards what it calls "the recentering of knowledge that a women's history demands" (22). This means that for women to be the subject of history, the issues of their struggle, their consciousness, their experiences, and their values in all their differences and contradictions will have to be made the main object of inquiry, as the interviewers try to do:

> In this history women are not spoken about, they speak for themselves. As listeners we also had to learn how to lay our urgencies temporarily aside and allow this emphasis on the *telling*, as against the *asking*, to emerge. Slowly, as we heard the life stories we began to build a sense of what the movement was for women; a sense of the isolation, the courage, the ingenuity, the creative brilliance of their lives. . . . The women we interviewed were opening doors on their private lives, often drawing on areas of experience that had never been exposed to scrutiny before. And in doing so they were challenging centuries of silence. (26-27)

The fact that the historians have their own agendas and that it is up to them to create a context in which the tellers feel they can speak the unspoken suggests the centrality of their position. Thus, I have chosen to consider this writing as part of my study on the representations of the woman as intellectual, which means that I see WWMH mainly as a text of the women intellectuals who produced it and I rely for the most part on its written form. This is not to take away anything from the boundary-breaking initiative of the editors or their anti-elitist stand on historiography. It is simply to understand their role in the project and thereby to situate the issues I will be discussing within the context of intellectual production, not in the arena of "authentic" subaltern voices.

### *WWMH, History, and Women's Silence*

In spite of their success in beating all odds to bring together the oral testimonies of the women revolutionaries of Telangana, thus producing a first document of its kind, the writers of *WWMH* find that signposting a subaltern women's history through the testimonies of women in struggle poses a much more difficult task than they had expected. Their attempt to subvert the patriarchal ideologies shaping both elite and subalternist histories, by upholding the memories of women in the Telangana movement, comes up against the women's self-representation. With their orientation "as members of a women's organization writing a history of women in the movement," the Stree Shakti Sanghatana is able to elicit much information that brings into focus those areas "where a great deal of the politics of the women's question is actually located: the family, the policing of personal life and of sexuality, childbearing, nurturing, . . . the movement as a place of refuge, a sanctioned or legitimate opportunity for escape from the confinement of the family . . . and so on" (29-30). But, for the most part, they are unable to instigate much discussion about the public and leadership aspects of the women's involvement. In that sense, the stories have remained to some extent as "data."

One of the discrepancies that disturbs the interviewing group most is that, although so many of the women interviewed had been frontline activists, engaged in organizing, training, and other responsibilities, "in the interviews the emphasis is always on the problems of interpersonal relationships and the responsibilities on sustenance and nurture, rarely on the significant work that they did" (270). As an example of this tendency among the women to ignore their experiences in the public world of specialized knowledge, or analyze their problems in relation to what they could have accomplished, the editors cite the example of Regalla Acchamamba. Regalla was only fourteen when she joined. She attended a training camp led by a doctor and was given a doctor's responsibility in the organization. Under the most dangerous circumstances, she cleaned and bandaged wounds, gave injections, and delivered babies. She was even asked to travel to nearby villages to administer treatment. In these places she was often greeted as "Errakka" or village goddess. But in her narrative these experiences receive hardly any attention at all:

> Here was a woman who at sixteen was perhaps one of the first barefoot doctors in India. With a background like hers one would expect a great deal of detail about her medical experience and some discussion of the

> medical policy or problems she faced. The emphasis instead is on the adulation she received, the adventures she had and her narrow escapes. Her professional skill becomes secondary, as it were, to her role as a woman. Acchamamba, who recognized the public importance of the work she was doing does not seem to have realized the value of the knowledge she had gained. . . . The texture of her experience as a doctor eludes us somehow and we are left with her experience as a woman. The emphasis even for her is on the gratitude and admiration that was showered on her rather than on the revolutionary dimensions of her practice. We do not need to emphasize the political loss involved in this. "Where else would they get another person like me?" she says. And she simply lost these hard-earned skills once the struggle ended. We must ask the question--Why? (270)

What indeed are the implications of the emphasis on physical "dangers" and "scandal" in the narrative of someone like Acchamamba? What are the structuring principles of her story, her self-representation? Is her silence on the public dimensions of the expertise she had gained due to lack of awareness? Is it part of a private struggle to deal with experiences for which there is no space within the movement?

For the editors, Acchamamba's story, like that of many other women, reveals a gap between "the ideal of equality" and the "extent of its existence in practice," or between "what they [the women] claimed and what happened" (270). Although both the heroic and confessional underpinnings of Acchamamba's story reflect for them a "whole parallel realm . . . that lay outside the realm of political understanding at that time," the editors also stress "the striking awareness" among some of the women of "the ideological filter that determined memory and the power of critical analysis" (30-31). The space of gender in testimonials is not an empty one, nor is it filled by silence. It is marked by an idiom of resistance that may or may not have grown out of the specific struggles of women.

Several points may be considered in attempting to explain the inability of the women to articulate the discrepancies that were part of their politicization. First, it is obvious that the narratives of the women are fragmented depictions of the realities of their lives. They are constructed selectively by what was considered significant in the past and what is worth remembering in the present. While the past with its multiple levels of experience enters the present, it is also framed by a consciousness that was tempered in the very thick of struggle. Part of the act of remembering entails evoking the consciousness of that "magic" time in a present with which it has very little in common.[2]

Second, the contradictions that arise from the *confrontation* between public and private memories are not admitted forcefully into the process of re-articulation and re-membering. Often "hidden conventions and models" related to the hierarchy of gender guide the process of grasping and projecting their lives (31). According to the Popular Memory Group,

> [the] kind of recovery that has become the mission of the radical and democratic currents in oral history, popular autobiography and community-based publication . . . has to take in the dominant historical representations in the public field as well as attempts to amplify or generalize subordinated or private experiences. . . . Private memories cannot, in concrete studies, be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses. It is often these that supply the very terms by which a private history is thought through. (211)

In the case of WWMH, and many other testimonials of women, the dominant discourse, on one level at least, is that of the Party leaders, who tend to perceive the role of women as an extension of their role in the family, an attitude that deeply influences the self-representation of women entering the world of political activity for the first time. Hence their eagerness to talk about their management of various relationships and duties as mother, wife, and comrade, their anxiety about their moral rectitude, and their concern with proving themselves capable of performing the tasks given to them.

In her article "Oral History, Narrative Strategy and the Figures of Autobiography," Susie Tharu, one of the editors of WWMH, writes that the inscriptions of surrounding discourses should be one of the foremost concerns of feminists working with oral history. Tharu contends that while the Telangana women "enrich our knowledge of detail and incident, the question of women is almost as invisible in their narratives as it is in the mainstream or even socialist history" (184).

Their strategies of narrativization exemplify the processes by which women are excluded. According to Tharu, Acchamamba speaks of her experiences in the way she does because she conceives her subjectivity on the basis of and through the models of self-representation and rhetorical appropriateness available to her: "the communist tradition provides two kinds of life scripts. There are models one may aspire to: the hero, the martyr, the canny organizer; or their converse: the coward, the traitor, the revisionist. These models often remain inter-textually complicit with a tradition and a subjectivity alien to communism" (188). In a form of first-person narrative noted for presence, the virtual disappearance of women that Tharu points to is striking. Whether or not one considers the models of conduct associated with communist practice to be life-scripts or battle tactics in the thick of guerrilla struggle, clearly there is a need to locate the gaps and silences in the women's testimonials.

The focus on conspicuous acts of heroism or personal relationships, common to narratives of political resistance generally, but particularly in women's struggle literature, is not always expressed as physical courage and valor, even though it is true that the contributions of women have been measured by their ability to be like the men. Sometimes the heroism gathers importance only in the sense of purpose and fulfilment it conveys. In Moturi Udayam's narrative, for example, tales of her escapades in the city, working as a saleswoman, casual labourer, and courier, raising money, evading arrest, and surviving, belong to this category. In one instance, she relates how she and another activist are dismissed from a factory when it is discovered that they are communists. The two women reject the money offered them by a compassionate co-worker, saying, "we don't want money. The people will lift us high and worship us if we go to them" (186). Belonging to the Communist Party in the face of terrible repression itself connotes a heroic experience. The affirmation of this new identity and its recognition are vitally important. This is also apparent in the narrative of Swarajyam, whose trenchant criticism of the Party's gender politics does not diminish the pride and self-confidence with which she recounts her ability to overcome her limitations and force the leaders to recognize her capabilities: "When I lectured, people used to think I was B.A.! I was fourteen or fifteen years old. I had studied up to the fourth class or so. In those days even the women who had studied up to B.A. would not go on to a stage" (241). In another story, Chakilam Lalithamma demonstrates her quiet strength through her verbal exchange with the deputy superintendent of police in the chilling situation of custody: "He said, 'bring that one into the room' . . . I objected, saying that such language was not decent, that he should refer to me properly' . . . 'How do you expect me to talk to you?' he asked. I said, 'be a little more respectful' " (217). Surviving the dragnet of informers, performing like leaders, guarding their own dignity, these women were confronting their traditional place both outside and inside the organization. In each case, it is the perception of the political relevance of their action that dominates. Thus, even though it may seem that the text of gender virtually disappears in the narratives of the women who themselves marginalize and devalue their importance, it is not entirely so.

Producing a collection of stories that documents the Telangana struggle, as "seen through the eyes of women and judged by the values they define," is the main aim of WWMH (26). By choosing to speak to a range of women participants who have neither the reputation nor the credentials that would normally make them legitimate commentators, the editors have moved beyond "compensatory history," which perceives its task "as having to locate, and place alongside the great men of history, the great women who had been 'left out' " (19). However, they find it considerably more difficult to move beyond the pattern of "contributory history," which "shifts from documenting the achievements of notable women, to describing and assessing the quality and extent of women's participation in [social movements]" but regards women as "contributing to something that exists/existed independent of them" (20). The editors have asked for the life stories of the women in the Telangana movement, "with the emphasis that had come out of their own experiences," but they have not received an analysis of those emphases; they have asked about the degree and quality of recognition the women received for their work but they have not really touched their perceptions of the political culture in which they were operating; they have noted contradictions in many of the major statements, but they have not been able to get their interviewees to address them.

The critique of contributory history in WWMH as history which judges and values women's accomplishments on the basis of their appropriateness to the movement, rather than according to their value or importance for women, evokes Gerda Lerner's description of that type of history, which she also calls "transitional women's history":

> Under this category we find a variety of questions being asked: What have women contributed to abolition, to reform, to the Progressive movement, to the labour movement, to the New Deal? The movement in question stands in the foreground of inquiry; women have made a "contribution" to it; the contribution is judged first of all with respect to its effect on the movement and secondly by standards appropriate to men.
>
> The ways in which women were aided and affected by the work of these "great women," the ways in which they themselves grew into feminist awareness, are ignored. . . . Margaret Sanger is seen merely as the founder of the birth control movement, not as a woman raising a revolutionary challenge to the centuries old practice by which the bodies and lives of women are ruled by man-made laws. In the labor movement, women are described as "also there" or as problems. (5-6)

In their analysis of previous histories of the Telangana movement written by both men and women, the editors of WWMH show how authoritative and patriarchal norms haunt existing accounts of women's participation in political movements. By showing how even the most progressive history is blighted by a patronizing attitude when proceeding from the assumption that women's issues are not only separate from, but also secondary to the larger movement, WWMH stresses the need for a recentering of knowledge. This means that women's experiences do not simply provide the raw material for a more general theory of change, but also necessitate new concepts and methodological tools of investigation.

The old category of "women's role" is not easy to dismantle. If feminist historiography is to move beyond individual women's experiences, it must address the ways in which experiences are explained. Putting gender in the very structure of rewriting history means we have to radically restructure that process, so as make connections between ideology and experience and to yield a narrative with the potential to reimagine the subject of history. Such connections are not inherent in testimonials. For instance, in *Sandino's Daughters,* although the women of Nicaragua highlight their specific roles in the guerrilla war against the dictatorship, their personal sacrifices and difficulties, gender comes into focus solely in demonstrating their ability to overcome traditional boundaries and engage wholeheartedly in political work. We do not hear much about the women's analyses of political decisions, which would have been part of their experience of political culture as women. This gap occurs in spite of the editor's intention to produce "a different kind of history: women speaking for themselves about their own experiences as women, and at the same time analyzing the political development in their country" (i). Like the interviewers of WWMH, Margaret Randall "wanted to know how [women fighters] began to articulate their need to join in the political struggle; how they made their decision, a decision that would affect every facet of their lives; and how they overcame the traditional obstacles thrown up by family and social prejudice" (vii). Fragments of such details are present, making clear the widely different situations and subject positions from which women had come into the revolution, but they do not represent the women's critique and their own visions of the future.

The fact that all the stories in *Sandino's Daughters* are situated at the peak of revolutionary activity, documenting specifically women's experiences in the Nicaraguan Revolution, creates an effect of homogeneity. Most of the stories deal with the brutal repression against FSLN members and its sympathizers and with the tremendously difficult tasks of organizing and carrying on the struggle in the face of imminent capture or death. The elements of action and heroism are present throughout. Each of the narrators is a survivor with a significantly successful story to tell. Each is full of conviction and optimism. Ultimately what binds these narrators together is their participation in the new Nicaragua, free from military dictatorship. Women like Lea Guido and Gloria Carrion, organizers of the Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the Nation's Problems (AMPRONAC), and Dora Maria Tellez and Leticia Herrera, guerrilla commanders in the military organization of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), currently play decision and policy-making roles in high-level government positions. In contrast, the Telangana women have nothing to go back to after the struggle is called off. The painful memory of the sense of emptiness that they feel never fades from their memories. Kondapalli Koteswaram says, "We thought Independence was in sight. We lost all our property. Now we had to go back" (136). Priyamvada says that she often felt like committing suicide. For Swarajyam, who returned to active political work after ten years of domesticity and even got elected to the state Legislative Assembly, the history of discouragement and lack of support have been like lifetime fetters: "If I've survived in politics so far I am only half of Swarajyam, not the complete one. I was not able to produce to the full extent of my capacity" (246).

The approach of the interviewees to their oppression destabilizes the assumptions of the scholars about narratives of "victims". Prepared with a history of the severe exploitation of the peasantry in the Telangana region, the interviewing group is surprised that they "did not hear more about forced labour and the cruelty of the landlords, about purdah and rape" (29). Undoubtedly, many of the women had witnessed or experienced slavery in the landlord's household. Yet, in the only group discussion there is, the women, who are poor and old enough to have lived through the worst part of the feudal regime, *cannot* speak of their experiences. Says Golla Mallamma: "We suffered a lot. Do you think I remember? Look if you want to help us--help us. Now I am sixty years old. Do you hear? . . . Do you know? How to tell you? So many generations--we can't tell you" (63). Or, as Golla Buchamma puts it in her seven-line testimony: "They burnt . . . they killed . . . they raped . . . what else can I say? It's all the same story. Do you think we can tell our story? No, we don't know how" (64). It is interesting to note that this is one segment of the collection that the editors do not elaborate upon. The inaccessibility of this earlier generation of women to the testimonial project, their outright declaration that they cannot speak of their suffering, challenges the oppression-oriented ethnographic bent of oral history.[3] Even more importantly, the demand for change, for improvement in their conditions, so intricately meshed with the history that the feminist intellectuals are trying to describe, falls obviously outside the framework of the project. In a way, the women have spoken, refusing the objectification and spectacularization of the horror of repression and refusing to be fixed in a state of total vulnerability.

In WWMH, women's bodies, like those of men, are targets of brutal oppression and reprisal, but it is not in the context of this known oppression that the women speak of their bodies. The experiences they do speak of constitute their sharpest critique of the movement leadership. The Party had made it possible for many women to leave behind a life of unending servitude. Trained in self-defence, fighting in guerrilla squads, travelling long distances alone at night under hazardous conditions as messengers and transporters of weapons, administering medical aid, attending political meetings, organizing activities, the women felt they had been given a new life altogether. One can imagine, then, their confusion and pain when they discovered that women were still a "problem": their sexuality, their pregnancies and childbirth, the situations arising from their initiative in breaking out of the moral framework of their prior existence were "technical difficulties." There is no doubt that the conditions of underground resistance made such issues far more difficult to negotiate in accordance with political belief and intention. But as many of the stories reveal, the attitude of the Party was quite ambiguous, and women were very alone in their struggles to cope with the new feeling of equality and the simultaneous visible reinforcement of traditional ideologies: Acchamamba was expelled from the Party on charges of sexual misconduct; Kamalamma had to give away her child six months after its birth because at that time she was in a guerrilla squad and it would have been too dangerous to move about with a child. For the interviewing group, the fact that the women's pain and loss remained their personal matter provides a perfect example of how the Party evaded the issues that emerged as a result of women's participation, which, if treated as political issues, could effect far-reaching cultural changes. Taking these situations seriously would involve "a radical questioning of the very structure of the family and the nature of its oppression for women. It would also involve the recognition of the woman's right to choose between the family and political life; it would question the assumption that the onus of maintaining the family intact rested with women" (269). The failure of a progressive organization to respond politically to the realities of sexuality, childbirth and pregnancy awakens the women's group to "the significance of the connection between ideology and everyday life, especially for women" (263).

The self-representations of the Telangana revolutionaries confound the interviewing group because of the underlying assumption that the common identity of woman would diffuse the boundaries between them; further, with the correct method of interrogation, the genuine inner selves of the interviewees would be retrievable. Why, wonder the feminist intellectuals, did the women, with their range of knowledge and experience acquired in a widespread anti-feudal, anti-colonial movement, not demonstrate more of a critical perspective appropriate to their consciousness? Why, in spite of their tremendous organizational, literary, and survival skills, were they not able to speak more analytically about the contradictions that they had to deal with? The contradictions and discrepancies evident in the narratives underscore the significance of ideologies of gender (class, caste, religion, and so on) in knowledge production and in the politicization of consciousness.

For the writers of WWMH, the work of producing (a) women's history has obviously not ended, not even in the context of the book itself. Towards the end of the section "Writing About Women in Struggle," the writers note that simply being aware of the ideological context of oral history is not enough. One must be prepared for the heterogeneity of subaltern women's "experience" and the limits of the representational discourses of history and fiction. Translating this theoretical paradigm into the language of oral history/testimonial, the editors posit the following methods of information retrieval and its interpretation for women's politics: "We can . . . hear the questioning, the wavering, even the outright rejection of explanations as we read against the grain of the text's volubility and listen for the gaps, the hesitancies, the silences, the evasions" (32). The symptomatic reading of the testimonies by the editors thus extends to their own understanding of the theory and practice of socialist feminism, as they "loo[k] at its secret languages, its silences, its unarticulated values . . . even the needs and desires it still nourishes, the substratum of fear and ambition it draws upon" (30). With this note they signal not only the need to rethink their representational apparatus, but also the specific history of parliamentary left politics in India that has measured the consciousness of women by their ability to participate in mass organizations and in the general democratic movement.[4] Through their focus on the "private," as opposed to all that is considered public and political, the narrators have shown the persistence of many of those structures of oppression that are invisible or unspoken within the space of male-dominated political culture, as well as the need to organize women around issues in which their involvement will not be considered gestural or a "tactic."

The emphasis on telling and listening in *We Were Making History* establishes its links with oral history. To the editorial group, however, it is not the verifiable aspects of the individual accounts that are important, but the act of remembering itself and the translation of memory into story. Silences, suppressions, taboos are often part of that act, and the attempt to read these culturally and politically remains their primary agenda:

> For us as a women's group searching out our past, oral history has a particular appropriateness. . . . For each other, women have always had stories that never saw the light of the more public modes of patriarchal cultures. . . . Teaching and learning in this parallel culture is intimate, personalized, practical; the knowledge communicated nearly always about survival and resistance in a shared oppression. There were many moments in these conversations when we touched on these notes. Sometimes we were asked to switch the tape recorder off as the "still unmentionable" questions of (women's) politics were discussed. (28)

The writers realize that their interview method, which is able to create the intimate and respectful atmosphere of the conversations, will not be enough in itself to render oral history an instrument of "the theory and practice of socialist feminism *today*" (30, emphasis mine). Without the political dimension, neither the content nor its reading will throw light on the continuity or breaks in the structures of power with which women still have to contend. As a result, the final product will not be able to reflect the complexities resulting from the cultural sanctions on memory, so that often "hidden conventions and models shape the 'fiction' through which we grasp and project our lives" (31). Awareness of the social relations of research leads the writers to concentrate on the "microdynamics of women's oppression" instead of the efficacy of method to begin the work on women's history (30).

A note of mutual crisis is, thus, sounded. The Sanghatana's own notion of women's lives as self-evident ground for knowledge is problematized, and the self-representations of the Telangana women revolutionaries reveal traces of the dominant discourses. Consequently, the stories of the Telangana women emerge as more than luminous tales of heroism and courage, and the editors' role goes beyond that of mere reporters of oppressed subjectivity.

Like oral history, testimonials are based on the experiences of "real" people. Although testimonials usually have a more overt political context than oral histories in general, their reception is haunted by many of the same questions of reality and representation that have been noted by oral history scholars. Being read in history, political science, and literature departments of academia, testimonials often get caught between various forms of the "art" versus "life," "fiction" versus "truth" debate, even as they encourage creatively interdisciplinary critique. Ironically, this leads to a critical unyoking of the individual life being represented from the literary, textual, linguistic, and historical effects of that representation. In the following section, I will look at how testimonials may be thought of as history without compromising our notions of the interconnectedness of literature, culture, subjectivity, and agency.

### *The Relation between Testimonial and History*

The majority of recent critical statements about testimonial narrative argue for the radical difference of the genre and attempt to lay down some of its emergent characteristics, so that this form of writing is not subsumed in existing literary and non-literary practices. It appears that the testimonial's appeal lies in its potential as the harbinger of a fresh lease of life (or action?) into intellectual pursuit, a material groundedness, and a resurgence of belief in political engagement. As a narrative form that has emerged out of the desire for alternative histories, produced from the perspective of the subaltern, the testimonial shares common ground with radical, interventionist oral history. The situation of encounter between the intellectual who functions as interlocutor and the narrator who tells his/her story is also similar in both cases. The main distinguishing feature of the testimonial, however, is its groundedness in political struggle against various repressive state machineries. The personal life story of the testimonial narrator emerges from that context of struggle. Since the narrators are usually ordinary people, not aggrandized heroes, the narratives have generated considerable interest as a new form of writing that has the potential for genuinely reflecting the realities of subordinate classes and groups. The common thread running through almost all the reponses to testimonials is, thus, an emphasis on the authenticity of the testimonial subject.

This does not mean that the critics disregard the mediatory role of the intellectuals through whom the texts reach the readers or the effect of authoritative languages and discourses in translating political struggle into narrative. For example, Claudia Salazar contends that the well-known and oft-cited testimonial, *I . . . Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984), based on interviews conducted by Paris-based Venezuelan anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, "is more informative of [the editor's] and her readers' own interpretive agendas than of Rigoberta's, hence transforming the latter's testimony into a Western logocentric mirror that reflects our own assumptions about what a narrative by someone like Rigoberta *should* look like" (99). Likewise, Doris Sommer notes that "the very fact that a first person singular is marshalled to narrate a plural history is a symptom of Western penetration" (111). Such reservations notwithstanding, the testimonial serves as a vehicle for bringing the margin into the centre and challenging the conservatism of the western institution; it also serves to transcend the boundaries of a prevailing Third Worldist criticism, which chooses as its constituency the indigenous and diasporic postcolonial elite.

A strong desire for the authentic subaltern voice persists in testimonial criticism, as a means of both explaining the growth of this genre and stressing its difference. Ironically, the eagerness to carve out a space for the testimonial as the representation of a pure form of resistance against domination also diffuses two of the most crucial differentials of the genre: history and gender. These are the two ideological spaces where the testimonial may actually inscribe its radical alterity, its subaltern politics. Although in studying the testimonial, the desire to document "the history of those who before were not allowed to voice their story nor their history" is considered to be important (Gugelberger and Kearney 9), critics do not really concern themselves with the analysis and contextualization of subaltern oral testimony, preferring instead to receive the genre as the passionate voice of experience. The definition of testimonials as *narratives of dramatic political conditions* is symptomatic of this tendency. Thus, certain issues have become central to the genre: communication leading to action; reliability; lack of bourgeois aspirations; collective voice. John Beverley, a strong proponent of this framework, describes the testimonial as "by nature a protean and demotic form," where "the situation of narration . . . has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself. The position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom" ("Margin at the Center" 93-94). The sole focus on oppression and advocacy makes irrelevant the ideologies underpinning the different movements from which testimonials arise, the uneven and situational contexts of subaltern politics, and the specific part the narratives could play in deconstructing dominant historiography. A further evidence of the tendency to fence in the testimonial is seen in the unwillingness to value testimonials that are produced outside revolutionary conditions, that do not seem to involve a pressing and immediate problem, that do not, so to speak, lay bare their agenda. For example, regarding recent Nicaraguan testimonials, Beverley remarks that they are inappropriate and problematic because "they lack the urgency of the testimonios of the revolutionary period" (" 'Through All Things Modern' " 21). Although Beverley does not go on to elaborate what those problems are, it seems that when the narrative situation in testimonials goes beyond the immediate, physical predicament of the narrator, beyond the call for recognition and support, testimonials lose their appeal to the academic community. As voices of the dispossessed they are of interest; as contributions to the more complex task of reconstructing or recentering history, they are seen as too invested, and therefore, less authentic.

A great deal of the case for reading testimonials as a genre of authentic subaltern self-representation rests upon the "truth effect"--a problematic area in testimonials and oral history. The persistent desire for the authentic subaltern subject asserts itself at the moment of rupture between location and subjectivity. Let us consider again Claudia Salazar's critique of the textual reproduction of Rigoberta Menchu's story. Making note of the distortions that the story necessarily undergoes in the hands of her translator, thus transforming a testimony of resistance into an image of logocentric assumptions, Salazar produces another persuasive analysis of how Menchu *does* perform her insurrectionary role in her narrative. Salazar applauds Menchu for overturning the structures of telling: "Rigoberta's symbolic re-appropriation of the private as public enables her to construct a new social identity for the Indians, an identity that in turn becomes a ground for political struggle" (96).

Beverley's approach coincides--merges, one might say--with Salazar's, as he tries to prove that Rigoberta herself performs an editorial function by controlling the choice and flow of information. Beverley argues that she clearly exercises political agency, "exploiting her interlocutor in order to have her story reach and influence an international audience, something that . . . she sees in quite utilitarian terms as a political task" (100). What is more interesting than this process, particularly for the purposes of the present discussion, is how the critics actually work out Menchu's textual transgression. So strongly is her re-appropriative strength and ability secured to her *experiences* of domination and resistance, that one almost forgets to ask whether they are enough in themselves to break the powerful fetters of logocentrism that tie the text to the level of the translator and her readers' interests. What textual maneuvers is Rigoberta able to outmaneuver? What assumptions about subaltern identity does she shatter? What does she provide in its place? Would her story have the same currency if she forged an identity that did not look like an identity for *all* Indians?

Like autonomy, representativeness is another quality highlighted as proof of the testimonial narrator's authenticity. Although the relationship between individual and community is recognized as a "lateral network of relationships," to use Doris Sommer's words (109), there is a tendency to present the testimonial as a whole: an uninterrupted movement from encounter to text, suffused by a homogeneous cause and a single political ideology, without all of which the subaltern woman cannot set in motion the modalities of resistance appropriate to her. The first few lines of

Rigoberta Menchu's text are cited in almost every critical essay to substantiate the argument that subaltern testimony, unlike autobiography, articulates a collective self: "I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people. . . . My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people" (1). The framework of that declaration, progressing from "my people" through "all poor Guatemalans" to "a whole people," could also quite easily converge upon "all oppressed people of the world." On one level, Menchu's symbolic identification with a community larger than her own may be read as transcending individualized subjectivity; on another, it can be read as a mode of interpellating her readers within *her* political world. It is surprising that a critical apparatus so inclined towards unravelling the "difference" of subaltern reality, seldom picks up on Rigoberta's statements about the conflicts within that world, or her constituency if you will, that problematize the testimonial project as only an urgent communication of repressive conditions :

> there's a conglomeration of ethnic groups, languages, customs and traditions, and even though there are three mother languages, that doesn't mean we all understand each other. We don't. . . . I must say it's unfortunate that we Indians are separated by ethnic barriers, linguistic barriers. It's typical of Guatemala: such a small place but such huge barriers that there's no dialogue between us. (143)

The barriers among Indians that Rigoberta Menchu talks about will likely remain in place long after the intense moment of struggle has passed. Their part in the making of subaltern history in Guatemala is no less significant for that, perhaps even more urgent than anything else where self-definition in the context of the struggle for political and economic rights for aboriginal peoples as a whole is concerned. As Robert Carr points out, the "standard operating procedure to assume an easy metonymic relation between the subject of testmonial and the ethnic group from which she or he comes" elides the particularities of the political and cultural location from which the voice of testimonial speaks (157). Carr shows how the English version of Rigoberta's testimony deliberately excises the complexity of this voice by deleting a manifesto released by the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC), to which Rigoberta belongs, thereby making Rigoberta "more comprehensible" and silencing "a historical specificity that opens onto the role of First World economic interests in the superexploitation described in the book, and a call to arms" (161).

The valorization of testimonial as a literature of struggle cannot escape the asymmetrical structure of representation upon which it depends, highlighting the dominated subjectivity and yet denying it the fullness of being. The discussion of testimonials often leads towards a gigantification of subaltern subjectivity, embalmed as it is in truth, integrity, resistance, and political commitment, while attributing to it a fundamentally spontaneous and non-analytical identity. Rey Chow draws attention to this aspect of the representation of dominated subjectivity in her article on domination and othering. As Chow explains, the process of "othering is initiated within even the most anti-colonial, anti-imperialist stance" at the moment of inserting the "other" as pure ideology:

> any perception of inequality, however genuine, . . . needs to be supported by a radically reorganized division and distribution of intellectual labor: not only should "inequality" be approached through the concentration of intellectual complexities such as ellipses and undecidabilities in the "dominating subject," but the "dominated object," too, has to be liberated precisely in its contradictions, its specific structurations. (157)

Although testimonial criticism always attempts to criticize this kind of asymmetry between subject and object, the desire for those forms of resistance that will offer the western critic so many ways of opposing the western literary canon from within leaves the subaltern figures, to use Chow's words, "intact in their totally valorized and totally deprived state" (160).

The debate over the literariness of testimonials exemplifies well the binaries within which the representation of the subaltern is fixed. John Beverley describes the testimonial narrator as either "functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer," resulting in "a sort of erasure of the function, and thus also of the textual presence, of the 'author,' which by contrast is so central in all major forms of bourgeois writing" (The Margin at the Center" 97). Arguing against literariness in testimonials, Beverley categorically states that "[I]f Rigoberta Menchu had become a 'writer' instead of remaining as she has a member of, and an activist for, her ethnic community, her narration would have been an autobiography" and no longer suitable for the representation of oppression and struggle (103). Beverley's protective gesture towards the testimonial in the context of "bourgeois writing" unwittingly surrenders to the normative strength and power of the literary establishment, for the division between literature and politics has traditionally rested upon the division between thought and action. In our postmodern times, this difference finds expression in the opposition of groundedness to indeterminacy, of acts of resistance to modes of escape, screening, ironizing, and parodying. Thus, when one testimonial narrator, Ana Guadulupe Martinez, insists that her account "has no intellectual or literary pretensions" (qtd. in Beverley 7), she, in effect, reiterates the unwritten assumption that the field of subaltern political action is marked by a consciousness that is collective, undivided, and singular. By that logic, those representing the politics of the people *ought not* to have intellectual or literary pretensions (read aspirations). Although not every one holds such a compartmentalized view of the testimonial as Beverley, most critics are caught in what Gayatri Spivak describes as the quandary of "the radical intellectual in the West," who must choose between "granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes or, instead, a total unrepresentability" (*Selected Subaltern Studies* 17). Thus Sommer's article, "Rigoberta's Secrets," which contrasts with Beverley's in its attempt to read Rigoberta's occasional withholding of information as "deliberate textual strategies" aimed at confounding "our craving to know," explains the situation in terms of structural inevitability: "her secrets would be incomprehensible to us. We could never know them as she does, because we would inevitably force her secrets into our framework" (34-36).

By the same token, the self-positioning of editors and researchers as political subjects does not normally require clarification and is seldom the focus of investigation. In fact, the ethical agenda forecloses such a clarification on the ground that it would perpetuate domination by the imposition of analysis on experience. If, indeed, as Beverley says, the situation of encounter in testimonial is "a concrete means of the union of a radicalized (marxist) intelligentsia with the subaltern," the terms of reference for that union do not seem to have ventured very far beyond "genuine respect," "mutuality," "sensitivity," and "tact," those denotations of good oral history, depending largely on the personal awareness of the interviewer of her privileged status.

*We Were Making History* could also be considered a narrative of dramatic political action, given that the focal point of the testimonials is the Telangana movement, especially at the peak of its insurgent moment. But the impact of the testimonies goes far beyond the clear-cut demarcations of the genre as a result of the critical tensions that shape the document as a whole. In the multiple, diversified testimonies of WWMH, the intellectual aspirations of the narrators become a concrete means of understanding the implications of the Telangana uprising for the women's movement, for women's speech and subjectivity within the discourse of history. Class, culture, and education leave their mark on the construction of the different subjects of the collection, among whom there are the leaders and the led, urban and rural participants, poor and middle class, party members and independents, Hindu and Muslim. The selection of the accounts itself reveals the editorial attempt to interweave the multi-strata, multi-cultural heterogeneity of the Telangana movement with a history of women's participation in the movement. Thus at the beginning, we have the testimony of Chityala Ailamma, "the heraldic figure" and "the symbolic beginning of the Telangana movement" (275). It is in support of her dogged refusal to surrender the fruits of her labour to the landlord's men that the organization first comes into open armed confrontation with the state. The other testimonies span other "legends," women who brought into the movement their courage, initiative, and leadership. Each testimony highlights specific issues that emerged from the participation of women at various levels of political organization and which are picked up by the editors in their extended discussions on the content and methodology of the collection.

That testimonials are written and published by writers, scribes, and historians is itself testimony to the requirements of knowledge and creativity in textualizing memories and experiences. The editorial group provides ample evidence of the richness and complexity of their task in the sections "Writing this book" and "About the language in this book." Both pieces together show the gap that inevitably underlies the translation of oral narrative into written form: "How different what writer and reader agree to accept as speech is from what the tape records . . . Statements take on meaning or lose it as part of a dialogue that is created in so many ways--a gesture, a smile, a withheld response . . . an anxious or normative presence" (283). But it is not just the decoding of expressive and verbal language; the whole premise of analysing the movement from the perspective of women is at once an immensely difficult and creative task. It involves getting across the acuteness with which the narrators express their sense of both the immense possibilities and the loss and betrayal that they have experienced. Kondapalli Koteswaramma was a member of the cultural squad. She recalls selecting books for the " 'literature week' when the women workers used to carry all this progressive literature in bags and travel from village to village" (124). She has since published several stories in verse with women as central characters. Moturi Udayam was the editor of a journal run by women in the movement. She wrote two books, one on children in India and the other on the women's movement. After the struggle was withdrawn, some were able to draw upon the skills acquired during the movement; in the case of many others, as one narrator puts it, their "dreams were smashed--crushed like an egg" (73).

The feminist intellectuals of WWMH have turned towards a history of militant subaltern resistance to look for an alternative women's history. Yet they cannot simply claim a past of revolutionary struggles, without recognizing the present, which asserts itself in the telling. A separation of story and history thus informs the general structure of the collection, and is hinted at in the very title, which obviously acknowledges the *making* of history over its *writing*. The two, however, remain very different tasks in the context of the book. Evoking the extent and quality of their participation in the movement through descriptive narratives remains the task of the participants. Bringing the past and present together into an interlocking framework of history remains the task of the historians. And the present is signified by two parallel trajectories (or realities) as well. Although some, like Swarajyam and

Sugunamma, are still engaged in political work, and those who already had a profession when the movement started have returned to it, others are barely eking out an existence, with little or no trace of the life they once had as revolutionaries. Thus, for the women who tell their stories, *discontinuity* is what lends grist to their impassioned recollections. For the interviewers, the present will be defined by what they choose to do with the past of the interviewees. In their collection of the experiences of the Telangana, they seek to "celebrate a lineage of resistance and growth," broken but traceable (19). So the feminists must look to *continuity* in order to translate "the new forms of political behavior that emerge most clearly in the battle against women's oppression" (22). As they proceed in their efforts to "revive the significance of [the women's] own struggle after a long period of silence," they must be conscious and continually alert about this gap in their project (259).

Perhaps the most incisive critique of the oral history project as well as the experiential focus of testimonials emerges in Mallu Swarajyam's response, as the editorial group's work brings home to her more painfully than ever the loss of her chances to interpret and analyse the struggle from within:

> We also thought there should be a women's history. We wanted to write about Ailamma. There are hundreds of people like Ailamma. Their history has vanished without trace. Who can do this? Only people like us. Only the people who took part can do it. My life never gave me the chance--to listen to the radio, to read books, to take up pen and paper and write. I worked twenty-four hours in the field . . . There were days

> when I did not even get the daily paper. Days when I was underground in the dark! What can I write? . . . none of us wrote. Who else will write? It is because *we* could not write that it came to you. (252)

### *Information in History, History of Information*

A primary task of the producers of testimonials is to gather testimonies or accounts testifying to certain facts or occurrences. However, the responsibility for identifying narratives of experience as facts, of separating data from analysis, and of translating the information received into a readable history of the moment, rests with the writer/historian. In the next section, I will address the difficulties of approaching the source, substance, and utilization of information within a domain clearly demarcated by fact and fiction, history and mythology, politics and culture.

Although oral history, testimonial, and similar narrative forms are fairly rare in India, the interview method as a means of gathering information on women's issues is not. Social scientists and development workers acknowledge the constitutive effect of the interview, but express doubts about its ability to capture the multiple dimensions of experience or even the dynamics of the interview situation itself.[5] The following statements illustrate the need for foregrounding the interviewers' own investments in the project:

> the autonomous women's movement, even at its high points, has failed to involve working-class women in significant numbers. But why? . . . It was in order to answer such questions that we took up this enquiry. . . .

For this enquiry we spoke to over one hundred women in Bombay and Kanpur . . . One thing we tried to do is to treat the experience and aspirations put forward by these women seriously, and understand what is valid in them, even if they are commonly seen as being "backward" either in the workers' movement or in the women's liberation movement. . . . This does not mean we presented ourselves as impartial researchers, or refrained from arguing our point of view. (*"My Life is One Long Struggle": Women, Work, Organisation and Struggle* 1-4)

* * *

For us . . . Participatory Research is an ideologically biased non-neutral methodology of inquiry into the phenomena of oppression, poverty and marginalisation, with the active collaboration of the have-nots (or their representatives), with a view to their obtaining knowledge, as well as its tools, about their situation and thereby acting on the basis of that newly acquired knowledge to change the situation structurally by collective actions in their common interest. (*Beyond the Fire Line: Perceptions of Eight Tribal Women* 6)

* * *

We believe that the role of subjectivity has to be reconsidered in social science research methodology so that we as researchers are able to interweave experiences, feelings, our interactions with people and "soft" data with facts and "hard" data. Why, for example, do "we," the

> researchers become anonymous in seeking neutrality and objectivity? Who we are and why we happen to be co-authors is also very much a part of this book. (*The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement* 1)

The common ground that the above projects and *We Were Making History* share is the realization that the lives and struggles of women must be documented as a first step against the erasure of women from history. The attempt to make this information, gathered through the interview, relevant to the life histories of women also makes these different projects belong together. The authors of "*My Life is a Long Struggle*" (1982) observe that while their interview method, based on very specific questions, yields some "quantifiable results" regarding women's oppression in the workplace and in trade union organizations, it is "a total failure in discovering the attitudes and ideas of the women themselves" (5).

In spite of the fact that WWMH belongs, in a broad sense, with these feminist and subalternist projects that aim to break the silence of women, there are some noteworthy differences. The status of the interview in sociological studies is determined primarily by the empirical paradigm. The relationship between the answers and the commentaries is thus integral, one validating the other. Whereas the pattern of questioning in the participatory research methodology follows a disciplinary and statistical path, the Sanghatana group in WWMH create a context, where "the stories . . . emerge with the emphases that had come out of [the women's] own experiences" (29).

Information is not an apolitical zone in the political field of evaluation, representation, and contextualization. It is as much a contested site as its analysis. This becomes apparent in a recent dispute between another women's collective, *Saheli*, and Madhu Kishwar, the editor of the women's journal *Manushi*.[6] In her article "Why I Do Not Call Myself a Feminist," Kishwar castigates Indian feminists for strengthening the hands of cultural imperialism. She specifically accuses the organizers of a campaign against injectible contraceptives of launching the campaign without "careful study, interpretation and evaluation of specialized data," and without even "finding out whether these methods [of contraception] were being used in India and if so, how widespread was their use" (7). Kishwar's main objection is that the feminists involved with the project, having aligned their priorities and information with their western counterparts, fail to consider other issues that are more pressing, more conclusively studied. *Saheli*'s riposte to the article defends the campaign and vouches for its preparation through "extensive library research, reviewing studies conducted by ICMR [the Indian Council of Medical Research] and its associated centres and from published material of WHO [World Health Organization]" (26). The letter concludes with the following countercharge: "We have consistently sent you information on the campaign. However, you have chosen to neither acknowledge nor publish this material" (26).

The rather acrimonious exchange between the two groups not only illustrates how deeply meshed data collection and political practices actually are, but also demonstrates the complex, sometimes contradictory, and unevenly determining ideologies of women's politics. While facts, figures, and material resources are indispensable concerns in formulating specific issues around which to rally public opinion and effect certain systemic changes, the use of that information to generate the problematics of those experiences, which involves a fuller social analysis, is a much more contentious process. Kishwar challenges the validity of *Saheli*'s actions on the ground that the problem is not widespread enough; the evidence is not substantial enough; the research is scanty. But these conditions in themselves could not be adequate reasons for objection. *Manushi* itself regularly reports on women's lives and struggles within specific groups or minority communities about whom little is heard, let alone any investigative work done. In Kishwar's own words, its aims are to collect information about "the vast, complex, unplumbed reality of the day to day struggles of millions of ordinary women in India" (*In Search of Answers* 1). Such reports are expected to encourage further research and support for political programs on their behalf. The basis of Kishwar's criticism of *Saheli*'s programs, then, lies not in the latter's research technique, but within the context of an ideological struggle that cannot be resolved simply by invoking, as Kishwar does, "the reality of women's lives in India" (4). Kishwar's own contention that "third world feminists" are importing wholesale ideologies, methodologies, even debates and issues from their western counterparts, in effect, calls into question the discourses through which that reality is being understood, interpreted, and enunciated. Dissociating herself from feminism (and all other "labels" and "isms"), as a tactical dismissal of issues and controversies that do not seem to arise from Indian socio-economic and cultural contexts, does not guarantee authenticity or representativeness. If anything, her self-positioning blurs the multiple workings of history and ideology in the political articulation of women's equality and freedom.

As the writers of *We Were Making History* discover, gathering information about subaltern women in political struggle and making the stories part of their own mythology can be a contradictory venture. The two processes, although connected, do not mean the same thing:

> When we first chose to do this study, one of our aims was to recover our own history (we saw the women in the Telangana Struggle as founders of a history of women's action in Andhra, indeed in India itself. So we thought we would be tracing a lineage). We envisaged the study as an analysis of the role of women in the Telangana Movement. The life stories that we collected were to be part of our data! Would all of us agree on such an analysis; would there be different trends; would it be balanced, fair enough, radical enough, we wondered. There was a growing anxiety about the end result (none of us quite foresaw at the time the shape it would take). The interviews, we began to find, were astonishing, rich, moving. Our relationship with these women grew more concrete day by day. But it was after we had done nearly forty interviews, that we decided it would be best to publish them as life-stories. We now thought of it as a book that was theirs, as much as it was ours. (280)

The anxieties expressed by the interviewers resonate with the very questions that currently inform the critique of oral history, ethnography, testimony, and similar forms of representation. While it is true that without the initiative of intellectuals like the Stree Shakti Sanghatana's working group on the Telangana Struggle, these stories would not have been told, it is also true that they can be told *only* through the linguistic, literary, and critical translations of feminist women intellectuals. How can the experiences of the women who lived the struggle be translated so as to avoid closure and appropriation? What are the meeting points? Who are the audiences for such writing? If they are narratives of resistance, what is their value when the resistance is no longer going on? Such concerns are spread throughout the text. The answers are partial and tentative.

The Popular Memory Group of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham describes oral history as "a very large range of practices only tenuously connected by a 'common' methodology" (216). Indeed, recent developments in western feminist research and interviewing models illustrate the different political aims with which oral history can be practised. Following Ann Oakley's ground-breaking thesis that the process of interviewing is a "masculine paradigm" in itself, a number of alternative procedures have been proposed towards building a feminine model of interviewing (31). Oakley argues that the canon of research methodology not only positions interviewer and interviewee on opposite sides, but also disempowers and disenfranchises the interviewee. The researcher's role as expert reduces the researched from source of information to the information itself, the data, so to speak. Whereas the researcher has the right to ask questions, even manipulate the trust of "the informant," the latter's right to ask back is foreclosed. This is the contradiction that Oakley reveals at the heart of the so-called conversation underlying the masculine model of the interview process, one that she believes to inform the larger model of "sociology and society" (31).

Oakley's own propositions for de-professionalizing sociological research--making it more equitable--rest upon the force of method. She shows how, by turning the interview into an interpersonal one and by activating the subject's definitional urge, she is able to elicit more "cooperation" (51). In other words, she is able to gather more accurate, more expansive information. But the role-reversal that Oakley suggests, through which the the interviewer is converted from a representative of the rarefied realm of the institution into "a data-collecting instrument for those whose lives are being researched," leaves untheorized the influence of the researcher's culture on the information gathered.

The questions regarding the interview mode posed by Oakley are also the questions that oral historians ask themselves regarding their scholarly practices. These questions also demonstrate, in the search for answers, the inclination towards improving the technique and environment of the encounter, which obviously becomes the centre of knowledge production. Daphne Patai, the author of many books on the life-stories of third world women, argues for a politics-free interview situation to minimize the imposition of the privileged outsider's values and ideologies on those she writes about:

> of the frequent claim that the interview process, as conducted by feminists, is empowering in that it "gives a voice" to those who might otherwise remain silent, one may well ask: is it empowerment or is it appropriation . . .? What does it mean furthermore, for researchers to claim the right to validate the experiences of others? . . . The only projects that avoid these problems are those that are at all stages genuinely in the control of a community, with the community assuming the role of both researched and researcher. (47)

For Patai, it is not so much the information obtained from direct encounters with the subaltern that is problematic, but rather the ways in which it is obtained. Her approach, like Oakley's, stresses the local, individual conditions of research as factors which determine whether or not the women who tell their stories will be actually heard. As a result, Patai emphasizes the "how" of her research methodology over the "why." In her article "Who's Calling Whom Subaltern?" she defends her own work with Brazilian women in terms of concrete research practices, such as standards of honesty, self-awareness, and feminist commitment, but does not tackle the more fundamental question of subaltern politics and the ways in which the life stories of the women help in understanding the relationship between that politics and the subject of feminism.[7] Patai inadvertently voices the need for addressing such questions, when she states that to ask whether the subaltern can speak "makes no more sense than asking 'does history speak?' " (24). It seems that the notion of "speaking" as articulating a subject position eludes Patai. For if history did not speak, and speak predominantly, from the perspective of the elite classes, there would be no need for history from below, from the perspective of the working class, peasantry, women, minorities, and other marginalized groups.

Even when oral history critique foregrounds positionality, defining the relationship between researcher and researched remains a problematic one, as seen in Susan Geiger's essay "What's So Feminist about Doing Oral History?" Stating at the outset that oral history can only become a feminist research method if the "information derived from oral history . . . is systematized in particular feminist ways," Geiger points to a shift from personal relations to social ones in the interview process (306). She also articulates a fundamental tenet of feminist standpoint theory that feminism is "a 'position' in society, which is shaped by and in turn helps shape ways of knowing, structures of power, and resource distribution" (Hennessey 67). Geiger designates the term "oral historian" to the individual relating her history to the researcher and stresses that the interview relationship is a mutually productive one: "Doing oral history within a feminist methodological framework is about intellectual work and its processes, not about the potential for or realization of a relationship beyond or outside that framework" (311). Exactly what these relations of intellectual production are isn't clear, however. In part, they are embedded in the discourses that deconstruct the unitary subject of feminism, indicating that women's experience by itself does not generate feminist knowledge. They are also rooted in the discourse of "oral history conduct" which means "an attentiveness to the concerns, interests, and circumstances of oral historians themselves" (314). Yet, for all the power of these assertions, Geiger's elaboration of the researcher's role does not deviate from that of agent *and* conduit through whom change is brought about in the way that "the lives of women living in tragic or difficult circumstances" are "interpreted, appreciated, and understood" (315). "The scholarly environment," into which the "multiple truths" of these other lives, interests, and values will be released and that knowledge base reproduced, remains the main focus of Geiger's feminist methodology.

Both positions illustrate differently the point that the genre of oral history in itself cannot guarantee a challenge to dominant ideologies or necessarily lead to a "real" history of the people. The question above all others is how practitioners of oral history, like Patai and Geiger, relate to the histories and discourses within which their subjects--Brazilian and/or Tanzanian women--are situated. For without the context of history and an interventionist political agenda, the whole process of gathering information about the lives and experiences of women can quite easily render them transparent. At the same time one must pay attention to the specific socio-political context in which the discourse of the intellectual is positioned. Only then will it be possible to contextualize not just the writing of the oral history but also its reading.[8]

## *Testimonials and a Third World Feminist Consciousness*

Although testimonials originated in Latin America from the general political climate of the 1960s, it is only recently that they have become part of the current feminist interest in developing historical narratives of women which can challenge hegemonic culture.[9] With the publication of more and more women's testimonials, gender critique has become a very important point of entry into testimonials. As several essays in the *Latin American Perspectives'* special issues on testimonials (1991) show, women's testimonials have become a rallying point for women's solidarity and a third worldist feminist consciousness. Acknowledging the basis of women's testimonials in general revolutionary struggle, feminist readings argue that the testimonials are part of the specific creative and interventionist process of recovering women's writing and women's history all over the world. In fact, they claim that collective identity and the collaborative mode of production--precisely those distinctive features by which *all* testimonials are generally characterized--constitute the essential difference of women's testimonials. For example, Lynda Marin suggests that "almost all writing by women under patriarchy would have something essentially in common with what constitutes the genre of testimony, that is, a kind of speaking from the margins to and about the systems which oppress that speaking" (52). What makes collective voice and identity in women's testimonials different, Marin argues, is that they are typically the forms of women's resistance to the "tyrannical" first person of "patriarchy, the colonizer, the dominant position" (53). She shows that in contrast to the collective voice of Latin American women's testimonials, gender in the testimonials of male speakers often finds expression in the preoccupation with "the individual man" and his "transcendental moment of self-recognition" (53).[10] Marin highlights the instrumentality of the collaborative process of women's testimonials in situating testimonial discourse within a multicultural/multiclass environment and thereby effecting important transgressions of gender boundaries by compelling readers to locate themselves within an "exchange among women" (64).

The attention to gender challenges the uniformity of resistance, creating another deviation from the ideal of commonality in testimonials.[11] In a curious way, the categorization of women's testimonials as a product of the feminist commitment to women's lives and work contests Barbara Harlow's theory that the "refusal . . . of either individual accomplishment or filial ties based exclusively on gender or race, sex or ethnicity" constitutes the political essence of resistance in testimonial narratives (Harlow 121). As women's oppression comes to take center stage in the reading of women's testimonials, the state of siege, under which both testimonial and resistance literature narrators are known to tell their stories, is claimed as the generalized condition of women in society. Nancy Saporta Sternbach uses one testimonial narrator's description of her son's tortured and broken body as showing "a different nakedness" to make the point that "his treatment echoed, paralleled and reproduced . . . the abuse and oppression of women in patriarchy" (96). Even the status of the collective, which symbolizes the commitment to the "common struggle" and a challenge to literary conventions of authorship, undergoes change, as testimonials of women reveal their displacement from both the dominant and the oppositional systems of representation. In addition, the collectives of women take precedence over the broad political collective, invoking the teamwork of women of different classes and cultures as the most significant attribute of the testimonial.

Through the recent gendered interventions into testimonial critique, it has become possible to trace the continued presence of a masculinist ethos in the definition of testimonials. Latin American scholar Rene Jara has stressed the need to study the etymological roots of "testimonio," suggesting one possible source in "testigo" (witness), a primary requisite of testimonial narrators and a word that derives from "testes," an anatomical and legal requirement for all those who gave witness in a Roman court of law. Amy Kaminsky notes that some of the generic features of testimonials are clearly masculinist and do not apply to women's testimonials:

> Latin American testimonial writing has been noted for its nonliterariness, a kind of no-nonsense approach to getting the facts straight . . . what some writers see as a kind of discursive manliness. One way to prove one's masculinity after having undergone the disempowering experience of arrest and torture is to write on one's experience as a political actor and to do so without submitting to an effete attention to language. . . . Since few of the testimonies to come out of recent political struggles in Latin America have been written by literary people, to praise their artlessness may merely be a means of making a virtue out of a liability. It is not insignificant, however, that this liability achieves its standing as a virtue by dint of being codified "masculine." (52)

What Kaminsky and a number of other critics have identified as a primary source of the critique and reinvention of history in women's testimonials is their specific experience of their gendered bodies: as revolutionaries, prisoners, mothers, partners, and comrades. These experiences, they have shown, can be narrativized from the women's perspective only when such a project is undertaken by women.

While these feminist readings of testimonials by women perform a very important critical role in the re-orientation of testimonials as cultural and literary documents, the undercurrent of biologism that runs through many of them severely limits the possibility of ideological critique. In many cases, even as the public domain of testimonial and its complex production through memory and authorial mediation are acknowledged, the argument for the transformative potential of the genre relies heavily on the correlation between the testimonial and the life-giving, maternal instinct of the narrators themselves. A form of "writing the body" replaces political speech with "maternal practice", the theoretical term for the experience of "collaborative survival, collective deliverance," as Lynda Marin puts it (65). The voices of women thus speak a politics of peace for which they seem "naturally" prepared through the instinct of motherhood, which causes them to know, as men cannot, the cost of losing their children, the flesh of their flesh.

Along with the biological model, the celebration of affinity among different groups and classes of women also relies quite heavily on a shared culture of oppression and survival, erasing, in the process, class and race differences, or subsuming them under the category of "third world woman." Chandra Mohanty has shown how this category operates within hegemonic Western feminism whose normative power becomes evident in the "process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world" ("Under Western Eyes" 54). That the representation of the third world woman is inextricably tied to the self-representation of Western women is borne out by Amy Kaminsky's analysis of gender in Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School.* Having credited the entire circulation of the Argentinian testimonial--publishing, reading, discussing, and teaching--to the "feminist commitment to honor women's words and lives," Kaminsky, a particularly sophisticated and sensitive critic, goes on to claim that although the narrator "does not raise the question of gender as an issue, . . . to my eye gender is inescapable in the experiences recounted. . . . all have to do with being a woman in Argentine culture and can be directly addressed by feminist analysis" (49). The unproblematic analysis of the "sexual difference" of Partnoy's narrative not only makes accessible what it means to be a woman in Argentina, but also leads to an equally reductive and homogeneous notion of "Argentine culture," all of which Kaminsky is able to derive by virtue of her feminist consciousness. What makes Mohanty's work extremely important in the context of reading, understanding, and locating the testimonial institutionally, is the emphasis she places on "the necessary and integral connection between feminist scholarship and feminist political practice and organizing," feminist scholarship being "not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject [but] a directly political and discursive *practice* in that it is purposeful and ideological" (53). Since it is the practice that is central here, uncovered through its universals and encoding of otherness, it holds for all scholars who employ those categories of analysis, irrespective of whether they are western women or third world women.

The link between feminist scholarship and feminist political practice is fraught with myriad interconnections and intersections between discourses, which, when confronting the text of the oppressed, become all the more complicated. The implications of separating each strand in the knot to determine which is primary and which is not are brought out quite interestingly in two separate articles in *Subaltern Studies* (Vol. VI 1989). In the first article, "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category 'Non-Western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India," Julie Stephens shows that Western and Indian feminist discourses converge in their search for the sovereign female subject. "Yet," Stephens argues, "it is in its search for the sovereign female subject and in its attempt to define the autonomy of the Third World woman that feminism gets entangled with nationalism and Orientalism" (100). Through the examples of developmentalist anthropological studies by feminists like Perdita Huston, Miranda Davies, and Patricia Jeffreys, Stephens shows how Western feminism contributes to the category of non-Western woman through a kind of research on women in the third world, which celebrates cultural specificity and calls for an international sisterhood at the same time. Various realist techniques are used to mark the texts as "information," while the association with the ordinary everyday experiences of oppressed Third World women legitimates the feminist odyssey that appears to transcend its western origins. Stephens identifies the same paradoxical strain in Madhu Kishwar's position on the collusion of feminism and imperialism.

Kishwar too uses "the experiences of ordinary women" as the most genuine manifestation of women's autonomy from Westernization in order to create a discursive space for her "nationalist-feminist" politics. Kishwar's choice of a re-created Sita as the symbol of liberated Indian womanhood leads Stephens to argue that after all, "what is deemed important for Kishwar's feminism is not the class background of the women who are classified as subjects 'in their own right,' but rather the extent to which they have rejected 'the West' " (105).

Stephens' analysis of the junctures at which "feminism collides and colludes with the discourse of Orientalism" (93), well-researched and persuasively argued, provokes a sharp response from Susie Tharu in "Response to Julie Stephens." Although agreeing with Stephens' argument that "the institutional site from which some feminist discourses have spoken of Third World women . . . is deeply and subtly imbricated with Orientalist assumptions" (126), Tharu finds that "as an analysis and judgment of 'contemporary feminist discourse,' Stephens' thesis is politically irresponsible" (127). Tharu's attempt to counter what she sees as a certain transparency and reductionism is best described in the following excerpt:

> [I]t is not difficult to accept that feminism "collides or colludes" . . . with Orientalism . . . [b]ut to suggest that that collusion is a total or adequate characterization of what takes place is to let the contestatory nature of feminist or subaltern discourses slip through a theoretical sieve too gross for such fine gold. Stephens' methodology is peculiarly insensitive to the subversions, elaborations, hybridizations, transformations, realignments

> or reappropriations that do take place within oppositional discourses and must be taken into account . . . If Omvedt or Kishwar are to be read in the context in which they wrote, then they have to be read not only in relation to the discourses they inherit and reproduce, but in relation to the other discourses they align or engage with, and the specific rearticulations they are forcing. . . . The supercilious distance from which Stephens views and passes judgment on the muddy world in which we feminists live and fight, entangled in nationalism and not "purged" of the axioms of Imperialism and so on, quite takes one breath away. (131)

The gist of Tharu's critique is this: it is not enough to analyse the textual strategies by which feminist discourses become susceptible to cultural imperialism; there is a much greater need to produce a historically informed analysis that places the feminist discourses under discussion in a specific socio-political context and deals seriously with the heterogeneous struggles that went into making these discourses. Speaking as a feminist critic and political activist, Tharu questions the detached, objective stance with which the essay addresses feminism in India and makes sweeping claims about the images and not the actual struggles of peasant, working-class, and tribal women in India.

What I have tried to achieve through this lengthy foray into the question of (third world) women's solidarity based on the representation of the subaltern is an iteration of the problematics of information and history from the perspective of global and class divisions. Speaking of the intractability of the subaltern subject in post-imperialist spaces, Gayatri Spivak outlines the limitations of a notion of a transcendent feminine identity that obfuscates race and class differences:

> Subaltern historiography must confront the impossibility of such gestures. The narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme.
>
> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is "evidence." It is, rather, that, both as subject of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more in shadow. ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 287)

What is unique in Spivak's position is that it does not attribute the effacement of the woman subaltern to "just a question of *double* displacement"--a description commonly applied to postcolonial women's subjectivity--but to their dispersal along the lines of different discourses of colonialism, imperialism, culturalism, and negotiated political independence (295). Examining the debate over *sati* (or widow immolation) in nineteenth-century Bengal as one instance of how female agency is manipulated, Spivak constructs two sentences that illustrate the two main sides: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" and "the women actually wanted to die" (297). The first is an example of the imperialist construction of the colonized/third world woman as victim, and the second, a nativist image that upholds women's courageous desire to prove their conformity to traditional norms. Both discourses of protection circle the knowledge and free will of women, which become the figuration of a "violent shuttling" between tradition and modernization (306). Spivak's suggestion that the identity/voice/consciousness of the subaltern as subaltern can never be recovered, except as an effect of those discourses, proceeds from this meaning of displacement. The space of the subaltern in post-imperialist spaces is always spoken of (and for) within the empire-nation exchange, where, as Spivak says in her interview with Howard Winnant, "the real effort is to pull them into national agency with the sanctions that are already there" (91). The subaltern woman remains in deeper shadow, as the ingredients of her history, her agency, continue to be taken from the normative narratives of the development of the Indian nation, "mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization" (295).

Keeping in mind the complex itinerary of the female subaltern subject that Spivak delineates, it becomes extremely important to guard against the claims of representativeness in the testimonial narrative and its production of the subaltern "voice." The role of the postcolonial intellectual as investigating subject becomes particularly significant as well: "[i]n seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege" (295). What would "unlearning privilege," or learning privilege as "disablement," mean? According to Spivak, it would mean the production of a "testimony of the women's voice-consciousness," which "would not be ideology-transcendent or 'fully' subjective, of course, but it would have constituted the ingredients for producing a countersentence" (297). Such a countersentence is not available to the subaltern-*sati*, but is it available to those who speak through the testimonial narrative?

The answer to that question lies in the institutional and disciplinary framework through which the testimonial comes to the readers and critics. Perhaps what Jean Franco has to say about the dilemma of Latin American women novelists trying to "plot themselves" into the narratives of national identity and liberation, which have traditionally been male terrain, is a fit description of the narrative situation of women's testimonials as well. What happens, asks Franco, when women set out to textualize their experiences in history and revolutionary change "without becoming masculine or attempting to speak from the devalued position, the space of the marginalized and the ethnic, which was not the space of writing at all?" (132). Their "attempts to plot themselves as protagonists" usually end in "a recognition of the fact that they are not in the plot at all but definitely somewhere else" (146).

In testimonials configuring the encounter between two different classes of women, the "somewhere else" still remains elusive. Franco herself discusses Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte, Jesus mio* (Till I See the Eyes of the Lord), based on the life story of Jesusa Palancares, as if it were a "compositely authored work" which, as a result, "avoids the hierarchical alignment of writer and informant, writing and voice" (178). Yet, her entire discussion revolves around the "life" of the "protagonist" without a parallel analysis of Poniatowska and her (re)production of a certain kind of discourse *for* the illiterate Jesusa.

In spite of the emphasis on the collaboration and mutuality involved in the production of *We Were Making History*, a tension prevails throughout the editorial summaries between the question of the Telangana women's consciousness as central to the historiographical project and the problematics of recovering buried "truths." The gaps between the movement the intellectuals had heard and read about and the oral histories themselves are not easily resolved by a "consciousness which was aware of the power relations between men and women, and its connections with power relations in society as a whole, which could understand, analyse and resolve these contradictions on the basis of that knowledge" (273). At the same time the editors realize that many of the difficulties they confront arise mainly from the historical category of subaltern women's struggle, which is the main source of the text's heterogeneity and indeterminacy. The socialist ideology through which the feminist intellectuals of WWMH try to make sense of "ordinary" women's lives is not enough to unravel the political, social, and cultural arrangements which ensure the exploitation of women. There is a constant need to historicize, to place the text of women's political struggle within those structures of violence against which the women try to articulate their experiences. WWMH tries to go beyond the retrieval of alternative narratives of the Telangana movement; while it presents what might be called the "voices" of the participants, it also emphasizes the contradictions embedded within those narratives, begging the question of how and why hegemonic ideologies become naturalized, shaping even the counter-hegemonic environment and the practices within it.

Collective identity, the urgencies of struggle and solidarity, and the desires of the individual, acquire a whole set of different implications in women's testimonials that disturb the general assumptions about resistance literature. However, the crucial difference of women's testimonials lies not in the degree of their marginalization but in the divergences and discontinuities they insert into the political trajectory of the testimonial. While testimonials by women are witness to great social movements for change, to heroic deeds of bloodshed and sacrifice, they very often assimilate and render faceless women's search for a place within the framework of this change. The result is a battle with alienation, isolation, and loneliness both from without and from within--experiences that receive varied forms of articulation in the testimonies. The testimonial space, no matter where it is lodged--oral history, autobiography, ethnography, or the *testimonio*--will be largely marked by the problem of *knowing* the truth, one that continues to haunt our literary critique of boundaries between fiction, history, everyday life, and politics.

# Notes

[1] This text will henceforth be cited as WWMH.

[2] I refer here to the article "That Magic Time: Women in the Telangana People's Struggle" by Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalitha, both members of the Sanghatana and part of the interviewing team for WWMH. The authors note that "the magic of that time" is how women describe the upheaval of the period, "when everything entered the realm of possibility [for them]" (185).

[3] The preoccupation with oppression in ethnography has been noted by George E. Marcus as having been reinforced by the recent attempts at dismantling the boundaries of the discipline: "ethnography has shown the effects of major events and large systems on the everyday life of those usually portrayed as victims; the subjects of ethnography have usually been victims, or, because of modern ethnography's commitment to social criticism, they have at least been portrayed as such" (168).

[4] See Vimal Randive's *Feminists and the Women's Movement* (1986), where the attitude of autonomous feminist groups, such as organizing around explicitly women's issues in smaller, local forums as opposed to mass actions, is criticized as disruptive to the women's movement and class politics.

[5] Some of the recent publications on the role of women in the trade union movement, the rise of autonomous women's organizations, the development of the Indian women's movement around issues of violence, health, employment, law, and the environment draw attention to this issue. See Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita,

eds., *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from* ***Manushi*** (1984); Sujata Gothoskar, ed., "*My Life is One Long Struggle": Women, Work, Organization and Struggle* (1982); Flavia Agnes, *My Story . . . Our Story, of Rebuilding Broken Lives* (1984); Celine Aranha, ed. *Beyond the Fire Line: Perceptions of Eight Tribal Women* (1991); Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, eds., *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (1992). All these texts depend on oral testimony to formulate their arguments.

[6] *Manushi* is a women's journal launched by a Delhi University-based women's group. It is published in Hindi and English. After a very difficult start, surviving on donations and voluntary services, and depending on readers' involvement for an everyday confirmation that it existed because of a felt need among individuals and organized groups, *Manushi* now enjoys a widely established readership, extending to Britain, Canada, U.S., and several Latin American and African countries as well. Its coverage has also altered over the years to include issues of fundamentalism, self-determination, and communalism. A collection of articles from *Manushi*, tracing its own development as an organization through its work of reporting on women's struggles in India as well as leading and participating in numerous protest movements, appeared in 1986: *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from* Manushi, edited by Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita. This book brings together an array of documentary evidence to create an awareness of women's lives. It includes a wide selection of survey and field reports, statistical data,

newspaper extracts, interviews and taped conversations, letters, photographs, and even editorials, published in *Manushi* during the period 1979-1983.

[7] This article is mainly a response to Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and the implications Patai reads in it for her own work. Patai finds that Spivak's position on the intellectual's representation of subaltern women leaves her only the options of "insuperable distance" on the one hand and "excess of identity" on the other (25). Observing that Spivak's subaltern "is in no sense a living, breathing person," Patai goes on to defend her own work on Brazilian women, looking at their speech and its reproduction within the framework of the scholar and the subject, not the question of how the life stories are institutionalized.

[8] For an interesting debate on information-based writing on Indian subaltern women see Julie Stephens' article "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category of 'Non-Western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India" (*Subaltern Studies* 5, 1989) and Susie Tharu's reply to it in the same issue. I will return to this debate in more detail in the next section.

[9] Tracing the Latin American origins of the testimonial or "testimonio," Doris Sommer observes that its main impetus came from an "international trend to promote oral history" (115). At that time, concerns about the "(un)representativeness" of the intellectual, broached in earlier literary/cultural movements of the region, were brought forward again with greater vigor and seriousness:

> The mandate to rewrite Latin American history from the "people's" perspective was renewed with a greater sense of cultural independence

> after the Cuban Revolution. By the 1960s, after Cuba's "assault on the impossible" turned into a triumphant revolution . . . some Latin American writers began to rethink their position in society and . . . began to realize that the people whose causes they advocated were subjects, not objects, of national history . . . Therefore, some journalists, anthropologists, and literati left their writing desks to become scribes. The women writers stood to gain the most; they could address their double marginalization by helping to portray other women as workers, militants, strategists. (114)

The genre received additional stimulus from the decision by Cuba's literary and cultural authority, the Casas de las Americas, to offer a prestigious literary prize in the category of testimonial. The emphasis on veracity in testimonials has made them useful to political organizations, ranging from human rights groups to various solidarity networks. In US classrooms, the testimonial is taught in literature as well as anthropology, sociology, and political science courses, as a way of introducing new methodologies of interpretation and analysis and questioning traditional disciplinary classifications.

[10] Marin speaks specifically of Omar Cabezas' *Fire in the Mountain, the Making of a Sandinista* (1985), where Cabezas' self-discovery corresponds with the realization that his real family is the Nicaraguan men in struggle, thus "reengendering his origins, erasing the woman altogether and replacing her with a line of self-same male heroes" (54).

[11] Beverley clearly designates testimonials "a component" of resistance literature, as Barbara Harlow defines it.

# Conclusion

## Towards an Indian Feminist Cultural Criticism

The struggle to reimagine the frameworks of Indian postcoloniality has opened into newer and more challenging grounds with the increased recognition of the heterogeneity of its constituencies. Even a minority phenomenon, such as Indian women's English writing, reveals unrelated subjectivities at various levels of engagement with one another. However, this revelation does not occur naturally. It needs a critical practice that does not look for totalities, that situates the text/figure within a problematized environment of discourses and ideologies, and that employs the interactive relation between text and reality to investigate the institutionalization of different positions and histories. The reading of "woman" in English writing by women would be futile if one were to approach this body of literature without problematizing its Englishness, its diverse forms and content in the articulation of middle-class gender politics, and its investments in different discourses of autonomy and selfhood.

To develop a feminist practice interested in de-homogenizing the figure of woman, it is necessary to revisit the nineteenth-century resolutions of the woman question, which shaped and continue to shape the constructions of Indian womanhood in rather diverse locations. The image of the autonomous woman was a cornerstone of such resolutions. It symbolized the enlightened middle-class home, where the goal of cultural refinement was a personal challenge for women. Education, particularly

English education, was meant to strengthen this goal. Not only did oppressive social customs need to be reformed, but also the nature of women themselves needed to be recast and regenerated to fit the image of a new patriarchy fashioned in the mold of amalgamated western and Indian values. The knowledge, conduct, and disposition of women were supposed to mark out the contours of the middle-class private sphere. Women's autonomy, thus, meant their internalization of the patriarchal necessity for a gendered division of spaces, the necessity, in other words, for a non-intellectual, ethical, morally-conscious, truly Indianized partner of man.

As an initial step towards re-reading Indian women's writing in English with this political, cultural, and economic context of gender in mind, a broader and more productive meaning of English is needed, which will emphasize not just the language of the word, but the language of articulation, of ideology. The danger of assuming an overlap of identity with language is the danger of simplifying the project of colonialism. To assume, for instance, a vernacular authenticity or mass appeal in opposition to the factitiousness or elitism of English leads to the very homogenization one seeks to counter through the opposition.

Priority is still given to English writing produced by those living and/or working outside India, that is, to writing with an international flavor. This phenomenon has defined all shades of the critical reception to Indian writing in English. Furthermore, fiction is privileged over all other categories. My concern here is that, as a result, Indian women's writing produced in India -- fiction, poetry, autobiography, testimonials, children's literature -- and its crucial role in imaging the "new woman" goes unrecognized, unchallenged. The majority of texts included in this study are from the 1970s and 1980s. Their selection for discussion was not based on representativeness or aesthetic achievement. Their most interesting feature is that they return in different ways to the issue of Indian womanhood, forged in an earlier and more nationalistic moment. The political significance of the texts lies in the possibility of their questioning the ways in which gender is used to make sense of the cultural norms and realities of today.

The engagement with the symbolic projections of womanhood in texts that come out of very different scenarios forces certain conclusions on the study of gender and postcoloniality. First, it is clear that, although the nineteenth-century characterization of the *bhadramahila* does not fit the profile of the present protagonists, who are mostly English-educated, liberal, cosmopolitan intellectuals, the gendered separation of spaces is fundamental to their experience of what it means to be a woman. Second, the approach to this division is marked by internalization and alienation, by overlaps as well as ruptures. For example, the Gandhian bureaucrat voices the desire to join the gap between the image and reality of women's position by reclaiming the moral and spiritual custodianship of the nation. The liberated middle-class wife and mother dismantles the ideal notion of home, even as she seeks to improve upon its elements of mutuality. The scribes of a radical women's history explore the exclusions of women from real power and leadership by the patriarchal structures of Left political movements, only to discover the gaps in their own beliefs and practices. Thus, we find a sense of return underlying most situations, which suggests a desire for negotiation rather than simply continuity. Finally, the self-positioning of the postcolonial woman intellectual within the different sites I have described demonstrate that liminality is more than a third space, between two opposites; it is a highly differentiated space, marked by ideology.

My approach to cultural self-representations in Indian women's writing (in English) opens a number of avenues for future work. A full-length systematic critique of the effect of English on women's education and the conceptualization of women's emancipation would be very useful to understand its class-linguistic underpinnings. A second area of investigation is the relation between autonomous women's movements in India and Indian women's writing. Such movements are giving increased coverage to the masculine "blind spots" of progressive ideologies from the perspective of women's issues and struggles. A detailed discussion of how the women's movement is constructing the woman-as-intellectual might be able to constructively investigate the problems in a third world feminist consciousness. Finally, a thorough compilation and survey of the shorter works in English by women, together with the publication history of the collections in which they appear, would point towards the trends and directions towards which women's writing in English is moving today in India.

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