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**"DEVELOPMENT AND COLONIAL POWER:
INDIAN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES AND THE TRANSITION TO
'POSTCOLONIALITY'"**

by

KALYANI DEVAKI MENON, B.A.

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Anthropology**

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
July 1996**

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**"DEVELOPMENT AND COLONIAL POWER:
INDIAN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES AND THE TRANSITION TO
'POSTCOLONIALITY'"**

submitted by Kalyani Devaki Menon, B.A.
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

The term postcolonial is a misnomer for it suggests a change in power relations and discourse that did not take place with the dismantling of colonial empires. Focussing on one discursive strategy used during the colonial period to justify British presence and modernisation policy in India -- representations of Indian women as backward, helpless victims of "tradition" -- I argue that the same discursive strategy legitimises development (modernisation) today. These representations lay the blame on "tradition", obscuring the effects of capitalist development on women. It is crucial to challenge these representations of Indian women to question the legitimacy of capitalist development. I analyze women's participation in struggles against capitalist exploitation in India to show that women have not only been agents of change but have been strongly critical of modernisation. To truly transcend colonialism/neocolonialism it is necessary to formulate an alternative to development organised on different principles and discursive signifiers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acceptance form	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: The Discursive "Other": A Theoretical Analysis	12
CHAPTER 2: Indian Women and the Colonial Imagination	35
CHAPTER 3: Development Discourse and Indian Women	56
CHAPTER 4: Indian Women's Resistance	85
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion: An Alternative to Development	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125

INTRODUCTION

The normalizing, generalizing voice of the ethnographic manners-and-customs portraits [and]...the landscape narrator... are authorized by the global project of natural history: one produces land as landscape and territory, scanning for prospects; the other produces the indigenous inhabitants as bodyscapes, scanned also for prospects. Together they dismantle the socioecological web that preceded them and install a Eurocolonial discursive order whose territorial and visual forms of authority are those of the modern state. Abstracted away from the landscape that is under contention, indigenous people are abstracted away from the history that is being made - a history into which Europeans intend to reinsert them as an exploited labour pool (Pratt 1992:64-65).

I contend in this thesis that the discursive¹ construction of Indian women as "backward" and "other" was central to legitimizing the British colonial presence in India, and that the same construction of Indian womanhood is employed to justify the development enterprise in India today. This representation of Indian women is one axis upon which the necessity of modernisation, whether under the guise of "civilisation" or development, is

¹Discourse is "a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs [and practices] ... where meanings are contested and power relations [are] determined" (Scott 1988:36, cited in Parpart and Marchand 1995:3). I add "practices" to this definition because I don't think we can separate beliefs, meanings, and power relations from their material effects since it is my contention that they are in a dialectical relationship with one another. My use of the term discourse is not intended to give it primacy over the material aspects of development. While discourse justifies the material exercise of power, it is the existence of these material effects that permits the establishment of discourse. However, many of the authors that I quote in this text do give primacy to discourse.

evoked. Much has been written about the "postcolonial" condition of many countries in the third world. Following the lead of Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani (1993), I propose that it is essential to question the "post" in "postcolonial" since the same discursive strategies are deployed to justify the same ends -- those of modernisation. The discourse of modernisation, and the representations that belie it, provide the continuum that links the colonial period with postcolonial times. Hence, the term "postcolonial" is in many respects a misnomer, for it suggests a change in power relations and discourse that has not yet taken place. It is true that the mantle of colonial rule was handed over to the Indian elite, however reluctantly, in 1947; however, the same discursive and material strategies that supposedly distinguish colonial rule are consistently replicated in "post"colonial times. I focus on one discursive strategy--the representation of Indian women-- in this thesis. I analyze scholarship on rural women's resistance in India in order to challenge this representation and argue that Indian women are clearly aware of their class and gender oppression. I posit that in their struggles against the neo-colonial development endeavour, as well as their resistance to patriarchal structures, they speak to the need for an alternative path that is truly "post"colonial.

In the passage quoted above Pratt is writing about the discursive techniques deployed by the colonial regimes to legitimize their presence in the colonies

and their exploitation of the natural resources in these colonies -- to their own economic advantage -- all under the general rubric of "civilization". While it is true that the direct political rule of colonial empires has long since been dismantled, I will argue that the discursive manoeuvres employed in the colonial period are still in use today under the new guise of "development". To rewrite Pratt's metaphors, women of the third world have been "abstracted away from the history that is being made" by reductive discursive processes in the first world², and then "reinserted" as targets of development activity which they are seen to be in need of. The development enterprise is legitimized by the "backwardness" and "impoverishment" of women of the economic South. In this thesis I argue that the change since independence has been a "definitive" rather than a "discursive" one³

²The first world consists of industrialised nations, largely in the West, but also including countries like Japan. The third world consists of those nations which are not industrialised (in the language of modernity they are "underdeveloped" in comparison with the "developed" first world). Most nations in the third world are former colonies of the large European empires. The first world is often referred to as the (economic) North, while the third world is called the (economic) South.

³Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani (1993:300) make this distinction to postulate that it is important to question the "post" in postcolonial. They argue that in "post"colonial nations, the change since independence has not resulted in the transformation of political and economic power derived from discursive strategies used during the colonial period. There has, however, been some change since former colonial powers no longer have *direct* political control over former colonies. They contend that since the "West" continues to wield political and economic power indirectly, through a replication of the same discursive strategies, the change since independence has been "definitive" (absence of direct political rule) rather than "discursive".

(Frankenberg and Mani: 1993:300), since the same discursive strategies are used to justify the same ends.

A century ago most of what is now known as the third world was directly controlled by European colonial empires. While colonial regimes were legitimised as civilising missions, they were also, most importantly, economic enterprises. Colonial empires extracted resources from the colonies to fuel their own economies. The existence of the Empire and the availability of cheap raw materials outside Britain was an important precondition for the industrial revolution in Britain. Imperial regimes were fuelled by the demands of capitalism (the embodiment of Enlightenment ideals of progress and rationality) and initiated capitalism on a global scale (von Werlhof 1988: 24). Claudia von Werlhof writes: "Imperialism is the method of enforcing capital accumulation on a worldwide scale, and - in particular - of enforcing a continuation of original accumulation" (ibid). Along the same lines, Rosa Luxemburg contended that "colonialism is a constant and necessary condition for capitalist growth; without colonies capital accumulation would grind to a halt" (quoted in Shiva 1989:80). Capital accumulation is premised on the continuous expansion of capital. The existence of colonies which would provide cheap raw materials, labour and capital was essential for Britain to expand its rate of capital accumulation. Imperialism (or world capitalism later disguised as development) resulted in the uneven development between the

colonies and the colonial powers which still exists in the so-called “postcolonial” era. The “development” of the industrialised first world was (and still is) built both materially and discursively on the backs of third world nations.

Dependency theorists since the early 1950s, have argued that the third world can never reach the same state of industrialisation as the first world precisely because the “development” of the first world is dependent on the underdevelopment of the third world (Lewellen 1992: 156). While modernisation theorists such as W.W. Rostow (1960) and W. Arthur Lewis (1966) contend that underdevelopment is the natural state of third world nations (or former colonies), dependency theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank (1978) have shown that underdevelopment is caused by the capitalist development of the first world (ibid). It has become evident that modernisation efforts directed at the third world since the colonial period have not intended to equalize economic and political power in the world but rather have been aimed at ensuring the progress (the rate of capital accumulation) of the first world.

Modernisation theory was formulated in the late 1940s when colonial empires were being dismantled. Throughout this thesis when I refer to modernisation efforts of colonial empires I am not alluding to the specific

formulations of economic theory that arose in the 1940s with the establishment of the new school of modernisation thought. Modernisation theory is the brain child of neo-classical economists like W.W. Rostow who were charting a course for the development of the third world. It is not possible to project modernisation theory outside its socio-political context and claim that it existed during the colonial period. What existed during the colonial period were specific efforts at establishing the age of modernity (rather than a comprehensive economic theory) defined in the Enlightenment sense of disseminating a "rational" order in the world characterised by the creation of the modern, self-interested individual, capable of harnessing the powers of science and technology (Aptfel-Marglin and Simon 1994:36). Science and technology "were increasingly seen as tools which would enable rational (male) individuals to bring progress and prosperity to humanity" (Parpart 1995:223). The industrial revolution was the embodiment of this Enlightenment project (ibid) and the existence of the Empire lead to the realization of this Enlightenment dream.

With the establishment of colonial empires, the Enlightenment project became a global endeavour. However, while the results of advances in science and technology were disseminated in the colonies, the production of scientific and technological expertise remained headquartered in Europe (Parpart 1995:223). Michel Foucault argues that the seventeenth century was

marked by the creation of scientific specialisations -- the establishment of distinct, specialised human sciences like biology, politics, sociology and psychology (1980:33). With the specialisation of knowledge arose the concept of the "expert" who had access to knowledge that others were not privy to.

Jane Parpart argues that "this specialised knowledge became increasingly associated with the rise of the new middle class, which in contrast to the nonspecialist "renaissance man" or humanist, acquired status and authority as bearers of this new knowledge/expertise" (1995:223). Thus expertise became a fundamental signifier of class; however, it was simultaneously a signifier of race since colonised peoples were not "bearers...of expertise".

Parpart contends that the rise of the "expert" was fundamental to the north/south division of the world for it gave the colonial empires (later the first world) the authority and status to produce knowledge about the third world and chart a course for its civilisation/development (ibid).

Modernisation theory of the 1950s is just one instance of this production of knowledge by the first world about the third world. It is part of the larger historical process of disseminating Enlightenment rationality and Enlightenment modernity to humanity.

Modernisation theory as the underlying charter for third world development replaced the colonial mission as the new disguise of the Enlightenment project of capitalist modernity. To move beyond the Enlightenment agenda it

is not sufficient to simply replace development with another global capitalist enterprise in the same way that development was substituted for colonialism. It is my contention that to truly transcend Enlightenment ideals, it is necessary to formulate not an alternative path of development but an alternative to development itself. This alternative must be organised on different principles and discursive signifiers.

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 1, I examine the theoretical frameworks within and against which I have formulated my thesis. I review anthropological and postcolonial feminist scholarship on the construction of the "other" and its centrality to colonisation. I argue that the discursive construction of the "other" was necessary for the creation of the superior European self, a construction that legitimised the colonial enterprise of disseminating Enlightenment rationality to the colonies⁴. One axis upon which this "othering" occurred was on the arenas of women's bodies. The presumed backwardness of women in the colonies was seen to represent the barbarity of colonised peoples and thus became a justification for the colonial endeavour. Similarly, the construction of third world women as backward, dependent victims of

⁴While my focus throughout this thesis is on discursive strategies, I am not precluding the material aspects of power or giving primacy to discourse. It is my contention that the discursive and the material are in a dialectical relation where each sustains and consolidates the authority of the other (please see footnote on page 1).

tradition, became a major force for legitimising the development project.

In Chapter 2, I look at the construction of Indian women as "other" in British colonial discourse to show how this legitimised British colonial presence in India. I also examine the extent to which Enlightenment ideals colonised reality by analyzing the reaction of Indian nationalists to British allegations of Indian inferiority. Instead of challenging the constructed backwardness of India, nationalists sought to modernise India in order to discredit the legitimacy of British colonisation.

In Chapter 3, I examine "postcolonial" India to demonstrate that the same discursive constructions of "otherness" that legitimised British colonialism and Indian nationalism, now justifies the development enterprise undertaken by the Indian government under counsel from Western "experts" in the World Bank and other development agencies. Now, the construction of rural Indian women as backward, dependent victims of traditional patriarchy both by the Indian Government and the World Bank and other agencies, legitimises the modernisation endeavour. I argue that this construction of reality is crucial to the modernisation effort for it provides a smokescreen that obscures the fact that the "traditionality" and poverty of rural Indian women is the outcome of Enlightenment ideals embodied in world capitalism rather than the result of internal structural and

cultural problems.

In Chapter 4, I analyze instances of rural women's resistance to development and patriarchy in India, in order to discredit myths about their utter victimisation and helplessness. I do this in an attempt to show that mainstream constructions of rural women as helpless victims of tradition are deliberate efforts at silencing their protests against development policies of the Indian government under counsel from Western institutions and governments. I contend that to pay heed to women's voices would necessitate a recognition that the exploitation and oppression that women are resisting is a direct outcome of centuries of world capitalism. The myth of women's victimisation by oppressive tradition (as opposed to the liberatory function of modernisation) is necessary to establish the relevance of development in India.

To question the "post" in postcolonial, is also to suggest that third world countries have not been truly decolonised. World capitalism, whether under the guise of colonialism or development, still ensures the inequality and "underdevelopment" of the third world. It builds its legitimacy through representations of backwardness, and these representations obscure the destructiveness of the system and permits the replication of the unequal power structures that were laid during colonial regimes. In Chapter 5, I argue

that in order to transcend this colonial condition and truly move to a "postcolonial" state, it is imperative to find an alternative to development. By this I mean not simply an alternative path of development, but rather an alternative to the Enlightenment ideals and colonial/neo-colonial power structures that are implicated in the development project.

CHAPTER 1:
THE DISCURSIVE "OTHER": A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter I analyze the process of "othering" and demonstrate its centrality to modernist discourse within which both colonial discourse and development discourse are rooted. "Othering" is a mode of representation that is by definition reductive for it minimises the characteristics of a nation or group of people to an essence. This essence is always constructed to bolster the identity and subjectivity of the nation or colonial empire that has the power and authority to represent the "other". It is therefore always an act of symbolic violence. Modernism was the weapon that colonial empires used to subjugate colonised peoples because it proved the superiority of the former group. Colonial empires entrenched in modernist discourse constructed an essential barbaric and savage "other" which was antithetical to modernity, and according to the same logic was synonymous with backwardness and inferiority. This became an impetus for the modernist enterprise and legitimised it in the eyes of the colonisers and in many cases, in the eyes of the colonial elite as well. I will analyze the modernist lexicon that fuelled the colonial imagination and justified the subjugation of colonised peoples. This legitimation was elicited at several loci. My concern in this thesis is with representations of women which is just one facet in the modernist lexicon

Iroquois Indians, Morgan sought to fit his own data on their kinship systems within an evolutionary framework (ibid). He constructed stages in the evolution of kinship systems based on the French philosopher Montesquieu's categories, whereby "native" peoples belonged to the lowest rungs of the evolutionary ladder (the savages and the barbarians being the lowest denominations), and the British and other European nations headed the scale as the epitome of civilisation. Unilineal evolutionary theory lost its currency at the turn of this century with the establishment of Franz Boas' new school of cultural anthropology and the eventual ascendancy of functional and structural social science. However, now colonised peoples were not biologically inferior but culturally inferior. Moreover, the authority conferred by colonialism to the (European) anthropologist, to represent the "other" remained uncontested until very recently (see Clifford and Marcus 1986, Behar and Gordon 1995).

One of the most significant (for colonial regimes) anthropological contributions was the synchronic view of culture which portrayed the "traditions" of colonised peoples as ahistorical and unaffected by the colonial presence. This construction directly obfuscated the violence and terror imposed on colonised peoples under colonial rule. E.E. Evans-Pritchard's book The Nuer (1940) is a classic example of this subterfuge. Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork was conducted in the context of colonial strife in the

for the invasion, appropriation, and subjugation of the 'savage', 'barbarian'...regions of the earth by the...European civilisation" (1991:4). Once European colonial power had been established, it was less necessary to justify the European presence, however, it was critical to develop strategies to maintain power. Stocking argues that it became essential to collect "more detailed knowledge of functioning societies that would facilitate and maintain an economical and trouble-free colonial administration" (ibid). Anthropologists were sent out as administrators in colonial regimes to document the ways and lives of the colonial "other". Knowledge about the "other", and their economic and political systems, increased the control of colonial authorities over colonised peoples (Garbarino 1977:9). Ethnographies, the written, uncontested, articulation of the "other's" reality, were the primary source of colonial representations of the "savage", "barbaric" and "uncivilized" native. The discipline emerged in the context of the unequal power relations implicated in the colonial encounter (Asad 1973:16). Colonial power relations were the precondition for anthropology, since they provided free and easy access to the "other" and made anthropology a "feasible and effective enterprise" (Asad 1973:17).

Anthropology has its roots in Enlightenment thought, which postulated that the *"universe was rationally ordered, and laws could be discovered that explained the motions of the planets and the behaviour of people"* (Garbarino

1977:12 original emphasis). Human beings became the objects of scientific enquiry (Garbarino 1977:13) and in the wake of exploration, there was a desire to rationalize human diversity. Social evolutionists like Herbert Spencer and August Comte propagated Enlightenment ideas of progress, upholding the belief that European society was the apex of civilisation which all of humanity should progress towards⁵ (ibid). The psychic unity of humanity was an important Enlightenment concept which maintained that all humans originated from the same stock, however, some -- the Europeans -- had evolved faster and had reached a civilised state while others had not. Those peoples who had not reached the civilised state were backward and inferior and needed to be brought into the light of rationality and civilisation. This of course was a perfect justification for the colonial enterprise.

Lewis Henry Morgan, an American evolutionary anthropologist, like his British counterpart, Edward Burnett Tylor, was influenced by "ideas of human progress and perfectibility of the Enlightenment philosophers and upon social evolutionary schemes of earlier thinkers, like Comte and Spencer" (Garbarino 1977:27). Although an advocate for the American

⁵The social evolutionism of Comte and Spencer is closely related to Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution. However, it would be wrong to assume that social evolutionism was built on Darwinian theory since Darwin and Spencer reached their conclusions at approximately the same time. Both theories are a product and a reflection of the social context in which they emerged -- that is, of Enlightenment ideas of progress, the common destiny of humanity, and the superiority of European civilisation.

Iroquois Indians, Morgan sought to fit his own data on their kinship systems within an evolutionary framework (ibid). He constructed stages in the evolution of kinship systems based on the French philosopher Montesquieu's categories, whereby "native" peoples belonged to the lowest rungs of the evolutionary ladder (the savages and the barbarians being the lowest denominations), and the British and other European nations headed the scale as the epitome of civilisation. Unilineal evolutionary theory lost its currency at the turn of this century with the establishment of Franz Boas' new school of cultural anthropology and the eventual ascendancy of functional and structural social science. However, now colonised peoples were not biologically inferior but culturally inferior. Moreover, the authority conferred by colonialism to the (European) anthropologist, to represent the "other" remained uncontested until very recently (see Clifford and Marcus 1986, Behar and Gordon 1995).

One of the most significant (for colonial regimes) anthropological contributions was the synchronic view of culture which portrayed the "traditions" of colonised peoples as ahistorical and unaffected by the colonial presence. This construction directly obfuscated the violence and terror imposed on colonised peoples under colonial rule. E.E. Evans-Pritchard's book The Nuer (1940) is a classic example of this subterfuge. Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork was conducted in the context of colonial strife in the

Sudan, and yet his portrait of the Nuer is that of a happy, carefree, nomadic population which occasionally engaged in "senseless" battle with a neighbouring tribe -- the Dinka. The fact that civil strife between the Dinka and the Nuer cannot be adequately addressed outside the context of colonial policies, and the context of rebellion against colonial rule, is completely ignored by Evans-Pritchard who only briefly alludes to a colonial presence in the introduction to his book.

Anthropology has always embraced a white, Euro-American, male canon, with male anthropologists like Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Evans-Pritchard projected as the "fathers" of the discipline. It is critical to note that some female anthropologists, such as Ruth Benedict and Zora Neale Hurston, early this century, were well aware of the constructed nature of "truths" about the "other", and the need to question anthropological authority (Babcock 1995:104-130, Hernandez 1995:148-165). However, their ideas were marginalised in the white, male, canon of anthropological thought.

The Us/Them dichotomy is necessarily hierarchical. The subjectivity of the "Us" is always maintained through the partial or absolute negation of the subjectivity of the "Them". Likewise the colonial self is always constructed in opposition to the "other" whose homogenous identity justifies the complexities and the superiority of the colonial self. Spivak, analyzing the

construction of subjectivity in Bronte's Victorian novel Jane Eyre argues that the complexity, purity, individuality and superiority of Jane's subjectivity is evoked through contrast with Bertha Mason's barbaric, animal-like inhumanity (1985: 251, 253). Jane is more fully human precisely because Bertha's subjectivity is less so (1985: *ibid*). Spivak writes: [this is] "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of the self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the coloniser" (1985:251).

Franz Fanon evokes this sense of dissonance most dramatically in his book Black Skins, White Masks (1967). In a poignant scene Fanon describes the reaction of a white child on encountering him: "Look, a Negro ... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened". The moment of recognition is accompanied by a complete disavowal of the Negroid race (Bhabha 1994:76). The Negroid is a type, a total way of being, a complete reduction to animal essence, against which the White subjectivity gains its complexity and purity. It is by detour of the "other" that the self is actualised. Bhabha theorises this moment:

The girl's gaze returns to her mother in the recognition and disavowal of the Negroid type; the black child turns away from himself, his race, in his total identification of the positivity of whiteness that is at once colour and no colour. In the act of disavowal and fixation the colonial subject is turned to the narcissism of the Imaginary and its identification of an ideal ego that is white and whole (1994:76).

Colonial subjectivity evokes its sense of superiority precisely because it cannot

be objectified. "Look a Negro" embodies the symbolic violence that has reified a human being into an object that can be read, predicted and known to its very core. Fanon identifies this as the moment of his recognition of himself as "an object in the midst of other objects" (1967:109). It was only by way of refraction through the black or Oriental "other" that the European self could construct its own transcendence.

Fanon has written extensively on the racialisation of national identity and resistance movements in his book The Wretched of the Earth (1968). Fanon argues that it is through the racialisation of thought that colonial discourse derives its strength and legitimacy. Colonial discourse, by stripping African nations of their diverse cultures, reduces them to the racial category of the "negro". Fanon writes:

The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence (1968: 170).

The constructed essence of the colonised in Africa, was that they were "negroes". This essence is beyond culture -- it refers to the "barbarity" that is written all over the body (or in Fanon's example the blackness) of the colonised person. This barbarity was continental in scope, since it was contended that all Africans were negroes, and thus that barbarity was their racial essence which the Europeans, through their own culture, could redeem. Reducing the cultural diversity of Africa to a racial essence was one

axis upon which the colonisers were able to justify the cultural conquest.

Fanon argues that native intellectuals in their resistance to colonial discourse, begin from the reality that the discourse has constructed. In other words, they begin from the racial essence that has already been constructed, and resist by imbuing that essence with culture. But, Fanon argues, in order to really undermine the colonial project it is imperative to contest the essence itself. Fanon's argument illustrates precisely how the racial category of the "negro" obtains its objective or realistic status. Its reality is legitimized both by the colonisers as well as the native intellectuals who use it as the foundation of their resistance to the colonial enterprise.

Albert Memmi argues that the twin processes of denial of reality and objectification are necessary backdrops to the colonial "drama" (1965). The coloniser and the colonised are objectified in a relationship of mutual dependence, where the denial of the reality of the colonised is essential for the perpetuation of the reality of the colonisers. The colonisers perpetuate "truths" about a homogenized "other" -- they are irresponsible, childlike and backward (84-85). The "other" cannot be free, for she/he/they do not know how to be free and need to be "civilized" and taken care of (85). The colonised are reduced to dehumanized objects existing somehow outside time in order to legitimate the presence of the colonisers.

Edward Said has labelled colonial discourse on the "other" Orientalism. He contends that Orientalism "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, ruling over it...a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1979:3). In other words, the ability to represent, define and characterize the Orient gave the colonisers the power and the legitimacy to rule over the Orient. The Oriental became the "other" which bolstered the European self. Said's work focusses on the power of discourse in the conquest over colonised peoples. I contend, however, that the relationship between the discursive and the material is a dialectical one in which each nourishes and legitimises the other. Through material conquest, the colonisers amassed the authority to define and characterize the Orient as savage and backward, and this discursive construction in turn bolstered and legitimized European rule. Timothy Mitchell in his book Colonising Egypt (1988) argues that the construction of the Oriental was central to the colonial production of "reality" for it was only in relation to the barbaric and immoral "other" that the European seemed civilised and superior. The opposition between the Oriental "other" and the European self and the truth of European superiority that emerged from this relationship engendered a justification for the colonial enterprise.

"DEVELOPMENT" AND THE "OTHER"

Development⁶ is more than simply the machinery of modernist discourse, it is its new guise since the dismantling of colonial empires. Development has to be understood as a discourse which has the power and the authority to represent and define the characteristics of nations and determine the path that they must take in order to "catch-up" with the "developed" world. Nations are characterised as "underdeveloped", a term caught in the dynamics of a binary opposition that immediately evokes the necessity for them to become "developed". Modernisation ideology is premised on a dual systems theory. The rhetoric of modernisation postulates that the world is divided into the traditional (i.e. backward, underdeveloped, uncivilized, inferior) and the modern (i.e. advanced, developed, civilised, superior), and that as the modern sector enlarges, the traditional automatically shrinks. The traditional/modern dichotomy exists not only between the third world and the first world, but also within countries in the third world. For example, India is "traditional" and "underdeveloped" in comparison to the West, but within India the rural sector is "traditional" and "backward" in contrast to the

⁶Throughout this thesis, when I refer to "development" I am alluding to the ideas and theories of development advocated by mainstream or modernisation economists. The modernisation view of development, which I will explain in greater detail, postulates that development is a process that all third world countries must undergo in the necessary transformation from "traditional" to "modern", market-based economies. One of the primary mechanisms for this process to occur is through the injection of foreign capital and technology (I would like to thank Anthony Silvester for helping me formulate this synthesis of the modernisation view of development).

more "modern" urban areas. During the Cold War era, when the world was increasingly being divided up between the super-powers, W.W. Rostow published a book called Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto (1960), an attempt to convince the third world not to pursue the communist path. Rostow postulated five stages in the evolution of the third world. The first stage, according to Rostow, mirrored the condition of much of the third world -- the existence of traditional, backward societies marked by kin-based groups and low levels of productivity (1960:4-5). Rostow posits that the "value system of these societies was generally geared to...long-run fatalism; that is, the assumption that the range of possibilities open to one's grandchildren would be just about what it had been for one's grandparents" (1960:5). In other words, these societies have not been introduced to Enlightenment ideals of unlimited progress and rationality. The second stage, precondition for take-off (take-off is marked by the removal of obstacles to growth) accompanied the first attempts at modernisation in order to "enjoy the blessings and choices opened up by the march of compound interest" (Rostow 1960:6), and was followed by the next two stages (take-off, maturity) of increasing modernisation, culminating in the fifth stage marked by high mass consumption -- the rational, modern ideal. The fifth stage marked the total elimination of traditional society, a process that was set in motion at the onset of modernisation. This influential book posited that tradition was opposed to modernity and was the latter's greatest obstacle. The benefits of

industrialisation, urbanisation and technical advancement, all indicators of modernisation, would gradually trickle down and result in the elimination of traditional society and all the backwardness that it characterised. The assumption of course is that the third world would follow the path taken by the first world in its progress towards its current state of "development".

Rostow's theory was taken up by many Western economists and development practitioners and prescribed as a remedy for the ailment that lay at the root of all the third world's problems -- tradition. Representations of "tradition" were fundamental to the progress of modernisation.

Homi Bhabha writes that the "predominant strategic function [of colonial discourse] is the creation of a space for "subject peoples" (1990:75 quoted in Escobar 1995:9). Arturo Escobar builds on Bhabha's argument contending that "reality" itself has been colonised by development discourse whereby "certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon" (1995:5). Development discourse, by replicating the mechanisms used during the colonial regimes, has created a "space for subject peoples" by endowing identities and reducing subjectivities. This allows those in power (Western governments and funders, the third world elite) to control and direct the lives of subaltern peoples. One of the most significant of these identities/spaces is the construction of the third world woman which has been central to the extension of development

intervention under the auspices of WID (Women in Development) units.

THE THIRD WORLD WOMAN AS "OTHER"

The WID school of development thought, grew out of an idea first presented in Ester Boserup's book Women's Role in Economic Development (1970).

Boserup postulated that women had been left out of the development process and this had resulted in their backward, impoverished status in the third world. Her solution was to integrate women into the development process so that they too could benefit from capitalist modernity. Feminists, mostly women of colour theorising from a socialist-feminist or postmodern perspective, have criticised Women in Development discourse for its projection of women as unproductive and in need of development (Sen & Grown 1987, Ong 1988, Trinh 1989, Mohanty 1991). Chandra Mohanty argues that in much of the literature on Women in Development the representation of women relies on the discursive production of the "average third world woman":

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (1991:56).

Mohanty continues that it is through this "discursive homogenisation and

systematisation of the oppression of women in the third world" that Western feminism (liberal, bourgeois feminism)⁷ (and development practitioners) exercise power over third world women (and over the third world in general) (1991:54). According to Mohanty this categorization of third world women as a monolithic "other" serves two critical discursive functions. First, invoking these stereotypes of the third world woman makes Western feminists [and the West in general] seem liberated, modern and "developed" in comparison since most of them are educated, have control over their sexuality, and have agency and control in their own lives (1991:56). Implicit in the comparison is the perpetuation of the humanist (Enlightenment) ideal that the West is the norm which the underdeveloped world has to progress towards. Second, this objectification of third world women denies them their humanity, agency and the complexities of living in a different cultural milieu. Mohanty describes the discursive strategies (discussed below) that make this reduction possible.

⁷Mohanty is critiquing Western liberal feminism although she consistently refers to it as Western feminism. Mohanty argues that she is using the term "Western" to refer to those writers using the discursive strategies that are a part of the humanist tradition, and she does recognize the heterogeneity of "Western feminists". These strategies include representation of "others", homogenization, objectification, that "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world" (53). In her introduction to the book she further clarifies her use of the term "Western", by arguing that she, and the other contributors in the book, use the term "third world" to denote people and communities that are marginalised by the dominant, white, Euroamerican community (2). This includes women of colour within the "first world"(2).

In Western feminist discourse, third world women have been "abstracted away from the history that is being made" and "reinserted" as objects in the Western feminist struggle (Pratt 1992:64-65). As Mohanty points out, Western feminism is part of the humanist tradition in Western thought, along with other discourses like development (1991:53). In development discourse, the same symbolic violence categorises third world women as a homogenous, ahistorical group "abstracted" from the material conditions of their lives. This reduction is crucial to the development endeavour precisely because it perpetuates notions of the third world woman as victim, as traditional, and in need of development. In Western feminist discourse, the West is the norm that all "others" should aspire to.

Western feminists begin from the assumption that all women suffer the same oppression - namely from a universal patriarchy that keeps them in a subordinate position to men. Mohanty argues that the unity between women from different parts of the world is a political construction (1991:56).

According to her, Western feminists have conflated this constructed universal sisterhood with an actual essential womanhood (ibid). While forging a universal sisterhood is permissible and useful as a political strategy, most Western feminists have not recognized that in reality the lives of all the women who come under this universal sisterhood are historically and

materially diverse and complex (ibid). Women in India do not suffer oppression in the same way as women in the West. In fact feminists cannot adequately address the complexities of women's lives in India by focussing only on the power dynamics inherent in their relations with men. Feminists have to consider several other power structures including the dynamics of race, class, religion, ethnicity and the neo-imperialist presence of the "West" in India - a situation that implicates Western feminists too (1991:54).

Universal sisterhood assumes that the experience of women in the West, who are the main proponents of this discourse on universal oppression and sisterhood, is common to women all over the world. For example, while women in the West may experience motherhood as oppressive to women and seek liberation from it, they have to accept that motherhood does not have the same meaning cross-culturally. A rural Indian woman might actually derive a lot of power from her role as a mother which she doesn't have in other spheres of her life; however, according to a Western feminist, it is because she is a mother that she is oppressed. Feminists should not generalize the oppressive qualities of a particular custom or institution because in doing so they obscure the fact that these customs can be sources of empowerment and agency in certain contexts.

Third world women are often cast as "mindless members of a harem, preoccupied with petty domestic rivalries rather than with artistic and

political affairs of their times" (Enloe 1989:53). Cynthia Enloe calls this the *zenana* representation of third world women that is fairly common in development discourse (1989:53). The *zenana* image is a powerful trope evoking images of women cloistered in the patriarchal confines of a male-dominated environment (Chowdhry 1995:27). It elicits representations of veiled women unable to set foot beyond the walls of the *zenana*, a space where few men are permitted entry. Chowdhry contends that the predominance of this representation serves a critical function for it implies the superiority of Western women who move freely between the public and private spheres (ibid). The superiority of Western culture is constructed on the bodies of Western women and their "traditional" oppressed "other" -- the third world woman. The image is that of the "ignorance and mindless obedience" of the third world woman compared with her actualised, independent and economically productive Western counterpart (ibid).

Mridula Udayagiri writes that "empirical research on women [by development scholars and practitioners] has not transcended Orientalism's preoccupation with essentialism" (1995:162). This is because "knowing" the "other" is the cornerstone to proving the relevance of modernity -- as it is embodied in development -- for the third world. Knowing "third world women", their problems, needs and concerns is central to identifying "solutions". Development practitioners from several industrialised nations

travel to third world countries, or employ members of the third world elite, to assess the condition of women in these "underdeveloped" nations and to assist in determining their needs. The power to represent, to know, and to identify lies solely with the development practitioners be they Westerners or the third world elite. This replicates colonial processes since it is those individuals in power who represent the "other". The "other" has no voice or agency of his/her own.

Development experts have made a telling distinction between "strategic" gender interests and "practical" gender interests (Molyneux 1985, Moser 1993, Wieringa 1994). Maxine Molyneux introduced this distinction while Caroline Moser played a crucial role in popularising these concepts in development discourse and policy. "Strategic" gender interests are "derived from the analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist" (Molyneux 1985:240 in Wieringa 1994:839). "Practical" gender interests are "a response to an immediate perceived need and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality" (ibid). "Practical" gender interests, according to Molyneux and Moser can work against women's own interests, because sometimes they may put the needs of their families ahead of their own. The implication here is that "strategic" gender interests are somehow better or more worthy than "practical" gender

interests. I find this distinction highly ethnocentric, because the relative worth of "practical" versus "strategic" gender interests is being judged by the standards and values set by liberal Western feminists: when women struggle against gender oppression they are actualised human beings, while their struggles for practical needs as a result of their constructed roles demonstrate their own perpetuation of patriarchal oppression. This assumption gives primacy to women's gender oppression while ignoring the fact that women in the third world (and indeed in the first) face several interlinked axes of oppression -- imperialism, racism and poverty.

Even more troublesome is that the onus of determining the capacity in which women are acting falls on the "expert", the outsider who often lives a rather cushy existence in the West or among the third world elite. In fact the elite, whether third world or first world, have the power to represent not only the character traits of rural third world women as a whole, but also to identify their "real" needs -- the "strategic" gender interests. Cross-cultural analysis has shown that women may adopt "patriarchal" customs in order to assert their autonomy. Women in many Islamic nations adopt the veil sanctioned by Islamic fundamentalists to effectively challenge Islamic constructions of womanhood: it is through the adoption of this "patriarchal" custom that women are able to move freely in the streets, earn a living, and through a degree of financial autonomy assert some influence in the household.

According to Molyneux and Moser the adoption of the veil can only be a "practical" gender interest since it entails the adoption of a patriarchal custom; however, in the example above there is no clear cut distinction between its "practical" and its "strategic" value since women are using the veil to challenge patriarchal values. Eventually it is only the women themselves who can decide on the practical and strategic value of their actions.

SUBALTERN HISTORIES

In the last decade there has been a surge of scholarship by a small group of postcolonial academics who call themselves the subaltern studies group. Their fundamental contribution to postcolonial scholarship has been the assertion that the history of postcolonial nations has been a history of the elite which has marginalised the experiences of subaltern groups thus reinforcing the power and domination of the upper classes (Guha 1982:1-8). This eclectic group of scholars including Ranajit Guha, Gyan Pandey, and Partha Chatterjee, attempt to reclaim subaltern histories, thus testifying to the centrality of subaltern groups in nationalist movements through their resistance to the domination of both the upper classes and the colonisers. Yet, despite this commendable movement to retrieve the histories of subaltern resistance, women, the group most entrenched in a subaltern subjectivity, have been ignored by male and female scholars alike. This is by no means a

startling discovery on two counts: first, it is part of the larger historical trend of ignoring the gendered dimensions of experience; and second, since the "subaltern" ("native", "third world woman" etc) is a constructed category is it even possible to retrieve subaltern voices (Spivak 1995:24). Spivak writes:

No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolute Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self (1985:253).

In other words, the "self" that the postcolonial scholar is seeking to establish by retrieving subaltern voices, is already and primarily an imperialist construction. The subaltern "other" at its inception as a category of analysis was constructed in the language of imperialism "for the glorification of the social mission of the coloniser" (Spivak 1985:251). Thus Spivak claims, "if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow" (1995:28).

The first explanation mentioned above for the absence of records of women's histories, unfortunate though it is, also poses the realistic obstacle that women have faced the world over -- namely that the gendered aspects of existence have been either completely ignored or explored very marginally in most scholarship. It is the second explanation that I find deeply problematic for it is afflicted by the postmodern inertia that has become so trendy in the social sciences. I, for the most part, agree with Spivak's argument; however,

it is troublesome in that it resonates with political apathy. The fact that the "subaltern" is a discursive category does not negate the very real material consequences that people marginalised into this category have faced. To discursively deconstruct this category does not in any way minimize the materiality of peoples' experiences. Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani state that while we may continue to deconstruct the subject we must not ignore the fact that people still experience the world based on their, albeit fabricated, subjectivities. They write:

The integrity of the subject may have been exposed as a ruse of bourgeois ideology by philosophers and cultural critics, but law, to take one powerful institution still operates as though this were not the case (1993:301).

Thus, while my contention throughout this thesis is that the subjectivity of Indian women is an imperialist discursive construction charged with what Spivak has powerfully named "the epistemic violence of imperialism" (1985:251), I also posit that the effects of this epistemic violence has real material manifestations. As such, I argue that it is crucial to speak of rural Indian women's resistances to the material consequences of imperialist epistemic violence, in order to challenge the colonial and the neocolonial/modernisation endeavours.

CHAPTER 2:

INDIAN WOMEN AND THE COLONIAL IMAGINATION

The efforts of the native to rehabilitate himself and to escape from the claws of colonialism are logically inscribed from the same point of view as that of colonialism (Fanon 1968:170).

In this Chapter I revisit the period in Indian history when the country was under British rule. This Chapter is not a history of British India, but rather an explication of the discourse that legitimised the subjugation of India under British rule and the anti-colonial Indian nationalist response. As Foucault has argued (1980) discourse is multifarious and contains within it the possibilities of both domination and resistance and always the struggle for power. I will analyze one site of this struggle over meanings and power between the British and Indian nationalists -- women's bodies. I argue that women's bodies were one of the most important loci upon which both the backwardness of Indian identity and the superiority of the Europeans was constructed. I also will discuss the Indian (anti-colonial) nationalist response, arguing that it was not only elitist and racist (since it was premised on racist colonial representations of Indian society), but most centrally gendered since it accepted the British construction of Indian womanhood. The "othering" of Indian women as backward, traditional "victims" was objectified in the

struggle for power between the British and the Indian nationalists⁸.

THE INVENTION OF INDIAN HISTORY

Take up the White Man's Burden -
 Send forth the best ye breed -
 Go, bind your sons in exile
 To serve your captive's need;
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild -
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.

- From Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" 1899

British involvement in India was marked by the establishment of the East India Company in Calcutta in 1603. The company was primarily responsible for regulating the trade of tea, spices and cotton between Britain and India. British involvement in India was initially restricted to the area around Calcutta, a city on the East coast of India. In 1757, with the battle of Plassey, often cited as the beginning of the age of British imperialism in India, the British gained control over vast amounts of territory previously under the

⁸In this thesis I focus on the nationalist voices who remained dominant in the post-independence period (Jawaharlal Nehru, Raja Rammohun Roy) at the expense of other divergent anti-colonial views. Gandhi, for instance, was always critical of capitalism in India. Subash Chandra Bose rejected the principles of non-violent resistance and firmly believed that militancy was necessary for national liberation. My decision is guided by the fact that Indian policy-makers since independence were predominantly influenced by the views of these nationalist responses.

dominion of the Nawab of Bengal (Jayawardena 1986:75). By 1823 British expansionary politics succeeded in colonising almost all of what became India (ibid). Having established imperial rule in India through the might of their armed forces, the British needed more innovative strategies to maintain their control over the colonised territory. The most significant of these was the invention of an Indian history and tradition that established the barbarity and underdevelopment of the colonised, thereby legitimizing Britain's presence in India as the civilizers, who sought to bring modernity and truth to the backward Indian masses. Civilizing the "new-caught, sullen peoples" through modernization and education became the "White Man's Burden".

Throughout the centuries of colonial rule, the British presence in India was legitimized as a civilising mission. According to the British, Indian customs and traditions were backward and even savage, and it was the responsibility of the civilised world to bring the oppressed non-European out of this "darkness", and into the "light" of modernity and Westernisation. This absolute "otherness" of the Indian in contrast to the British self was constructed, in part, on the territory of the female body. The "backwardness" and "otherness" of the homogenous Indian woman was crucial to legitimizing the British presence in India. The Indian resistance to the colonial presence accepted the British construction of Indian womanhood, and what followed were a series of ideological debates and reforms, centred

around women and women's bodies and sexuality.

I will analyze the construction of a homogenised Indian identity by British (male) historians of India, who fall into two main schools of thought -- the Orientalists (William Jones, H.T. Colebrooke), who romanticised a glorified Indian past which had degenerated over the centuries, and the Utilitarians (John Stuart Mill), who believed that Indian culture was depraved and backward from its inception. The Orientalists and the Utilitarians produced a "reality" of the Indian past that was fundamentally Hindu, casting the Muslims as the pilfering militant invaders from central Asia. Thus Indian identity was not only thought to be synonymous with Hindu identity, but this was facilitated by the construction of the Muslim as "other" against which the Hindu subjectivity was refracted -- a construction which still remains central in Hindu nationalist discourse. Thapar contends that this Hindu identity itself was a colonial construction. Prior to the systematic collation of the Hindu identity by British historians, there existed several sects and communities practicing multiple and often contradictory versions of what is now known as "Hinduism" (1993:77). In fact, the term "Hindu" as it appears in ancient Indian texts (during both Islamic and Hindu eras), was used to connote a geographical area rather than a religious community (Thapar 1993). Thapar argues that the reconstruction of the term "Hindu" as a religious/national identity was a concern of more recent times and required a

prejudiced construction of India's past (1993:84). Thapar postulates:

Histories of the "Hindu" religion have been largely limited to placing texts and ideas in a chronological perspective with few attempts at relating these to the social history of the time. Scholarship also tended to ignore the significance of the popular manifestation of religion in contrast to the textual (1993:62).

Having established this common ground between the Orientalist and utilitarian schools of thought, I must emphasize that further interpretations of history that emerged from each school had little in common. The Orientalists wrote about the glory of the (common) Indian past, the Utilitarians used their research on ancient India to attack contemporary Indian society (Chakravarti 1990:30). However, both schools focussed on the position of women in Indian society to establish their case. For these historians, to focus on the position of women in Indian society, was imperative, once the "reality" of a "Hindu" India had been established. To explicate this rationale I will detour into Srinivas' concept of Sanskritisation.

Sanskritisation assumes the hierarchical structure of the caste system. It describes the process by which lower castes (especially those belonging to the intermediate strata) attain higher positions in the caste system by adopting allegedly Sanskritic values (Srinivas 1952:65). The most important signifiers of caste mobility involved women (Mazumdar 1994:250). For example hypergamy was practiced by the lower castes. According to this custom, one could improve one's caste status by marrying one's daughter to a man of a

higher caste, giving additional dowry as "compensation" (ibid). Marriage customs and the control of female sexuality were also key demarcators of upper-caste status (ibid). In Bengal, it was the Brahmins who practiced *sati* (widow immolation), child marriage, and who would not permit widow remarriage (ibid). Therefore, a lower caste seeking a higher caste status would adopt the Brahmin practices of *sati*, child marriage, and prohibition of widow remarriage in order to climb the caste hierarchy⁹. Thus, caste status necessitated a certain construction of gender roles, and it was through women that caste ideology was articulated (ibid). Mazumdar points out that this is the reason "challenges to this ideology presented by colonialism and capitalism have inevitably focussed on women" (ibid). It was because women were key signifiers in the discourse of Hinduism, that British challenges to the ideology focussed on the position of women. The British, whose presence in the 18th century was restricted to the Eastern state of Bengal, used the role of women advocated by Bengali Brahmanical religious texts to signify the backwardness of the Indian people. Chatterjee contends:

By assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, the colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of the country (1993:118).

⁹While Sanskritisation permitted people of lower castes to move up in the caste hierarchy, in actual practice it was fairly difficult for members of the lower castes to gain acceptance by the higher castes.

The Orientalists romanticised the glory of an ancient "Hindu" past by focussing on the allegedly high status of women in ancient India. They derived their theory from ancient scriptures, such as the *Dharmashastras* and the *Srutis*, in which women were portrayed as relatively free and autonomous subjects. The Orientalist view of history relied heavily on the work of the German philologist Max Muller who postulated an ancient racial connection between the ancestors of the Europeans and the ancient invaders of India -- the Aryans. Significantly, Romila Thapar writes that the term *arya* was used in the scriptures to connote a person of high status, which in the Vedic context means a person who spoke Sanskrit and observed caste restrictions (1993:4). However, Muller gave the term a racial significance, since he connected the glory of ancient Indian society to the external influence of the Aryan race. What emerged from this racial connection was a theory that postulated that the reason for the degeneracy of contemporary Indian society (as was evident in the barbaric customs and traditions and the treatment of women) was the intermingling of the superior Aryan race with the degenerate original denizens of ancient India. The "White Man's Burden" was articulated in racial discourse whereby it was the duty of the colonisers to bring Indian civilisation back on track by reinfusing its Aryan spirit through modernisation and by uplifting the position of women.

The Utilitarians, with John Stuart Mill as one of the main proponents,

claimed that Indian civilisation was barbaric and degenerate from its very inception (Chakravarti 1990:35). Mill's criterion for judging the state of civilisation was the position of women, evidence for which, once again, was garnered from scriptural sources rather than social history (ibid):

Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which Hindus entertain for their women...They are held in extreme degradation, excluded from sacred books, deprived of education and (of a share) in the paternal property.... That remarkable barbarity, the wife held unworthy to eat with her husband, is prevalent in Hinduism (Mill cited in Chakravarty 1990:35).

I quote this passage from Mill not to claim that these practices did not exist in ancient and contemporary India, but rather to emphasize that these were specific to the community of Bengali Brahmins that Mill used as the sole sources for his interpretation of the scriptures. And yet, the "barbarity" Mill speaks of is considered a legitimate mark of national Indian character. Mill concludes that colonial intervention on various customs pertaining to the treatment of women was essential to counteract the "natural" degeneration of the Indian population (ibid). The debates around the abolition of *sati* were spearheaded by the Utilitarians. In the following section I will discuss the relevance of these debates to the emerging nationalist consciousness. I will describe the struggle for power between the British and the Indian nationalists as it played out on the arenas of women, women's bodies, and women's sexuality.

SATI: THE NATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF AN ESSENCE

Contrary to the projection of the practice of *sati* as a nationwide phenomenon, Mani claims that of the 8,134 cases of *sati* that had been recorded by British administrators between 1815-1828, sixty three percent of these took place in and around Calcutta in the state of Bengal (1990:88). Almost all of these could be traced back to upper caste Hindu families, the majority being Brahmin families (Mani 1990:121). Mani argues that tradition was reformulated under colonial rule and since women were constructed as the repositories of tradition, it was over their rights and position that the struggles over this re-articulation of tradition occurred (1990:90). However, the construction of the tradition itself, as I have previously argued, is not based on the social history of communities. Tradition derived its legitimation from the scriptures, and it was the British historians, who conducted comprehensive studies of the ancient scriptures, who, in effect, established practices like *sati* as a nationwide phenomenon even though they had little relevance for the majority of Indians (Mani 1990:90). Thus, the scriptures were cast as prescriptive texts for Indian society. Significant too is the fact that scriptural instances of *sati* were often ambiguous and fairly sparse. However, this did not concern British historians who were more interested in proving the existence of the practice in the texts rather than determining their centrality or even the authority of the texts themselves. The British designated the Bengali brahmins as the chief interpreters of these

scriptures thereby legitimising their authority to dictate the customs and traditions of India. It is interesting that popular religious practices were dismissed by British historians who claimed that the majority of Indians were "ignorant of their religion" -- which was of course equated with scripture (Mani 1990:95). According to the British, women were victims of this cultural patriarchy, whether in fact they resisted such practices or not (Mani 1990:97).

Mani writes:

Women were cast as either pathetic or heroic victims. The former were portrayed as beaten down, manipulated, and coerced; the latter as selflessly entering the raging flames oblivious to any physical pain. Superslave or superwoman, women in this discourse remain eternal victims (1990:97).

Mani concludes that this representation of women in official discourse is marked by the negation of women's subjectivity as embodied in their own agency, which in effect legitimised colonial intervention (1990:98).

The nationalist response to *sati* objectified the tradition as a national prescription, for rather than debating the validity of the British interpretation, the nationalists sought to reform both "Hinduism" and Indian women in order to counter the legitimacy of British rule. Chatterjee writes:

It was colonialist discourse that, by assuming the hegemony of Brahmanical religious texts and the complete submission of all Hindus to the dictates of those texts, defined the tradition that was to be criticised and reformed. Indian nationalism, in demarcating a political position opposed to colonial rule, took up the women's question as a problem already constituted for it: namely, as a problem of Indian tradition (1993:119).

The nationalist movement, spearheaded by an elite, Westernised, male leadership, leaned heavily on the work of British Orientalist historians and reaffirmed the idea of a past cultural glory. However, while the Orientalists claimed that degeneration had resulted from the mixing of races, the nationalists contended that the current state (backwardness and barbarity) of Indian civilisation was the result of the corruption and decadence of the priestly class. As in the case of the colonizers, it was the traditions implicating the position of women which were foremost on the nationalist agenda. The nationalists perpetuated the colonial negation of women's subjectivity and their portrayal as victims in order to legitimise their own reformist agendas. They sought to eradicate *sati*, child marriage and the prohibition of widow remarriage in order to cleanse the religion and the Indian identity of its impurities. Mani contends that the abolition of *sati* in 1829 marks the turning point in the history of women in India. I contend that what is equally significant is that the legislation against *sati* and the strong opposition to *sati* by Indian nationalists, as an Indian tradition that needed to be abolished, designates the beginning of the cultural hegemony of Hindus over Muslims in India. The Indian nationalists accepted that Indian national identity was essentially Hindu, thus marginalising the minorities and empowering the Hindus and further perpetuating ancient Hindu ideals of womanhood as the alternative to the current position of women (Mazumdar 1994:252). The British posed a challenge to Indian nationalists in two related

ways. First, the "backwardness" of customs in India provided impetus for the project of "civilisation" within the country (Jayawardena 1986:77). The British sought to abolish abhorrent practices like *sati*, child marriage, and sought to revoke the religious decree against widow remarriage. The Indian woman was portrayed as the victim of all these oppressive national traditions. Second, the propaganda of the missionaries that the British brought with them claimed that Hindu culture was incompatible with progress and change (Jayawardena 1986:77). This posed a threat to the constructed essence of the Indian nation as located in Hindu practices, for it favoured the spread of Christianity, especially its influence on women, since their education was primary on the missionary agenda. Christianity symbolised the West as opposed to Hindu India. At no point was the very concept of "the Indian" contested since the nationalists developed their resistance strategies around this essence.

THE "MOTHER'S" OF THE NATION: A NEW SUBJECTIVITY FOR WOMEN

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Us/Them dichotomy is necessarily hierarchical. The subjectivity of the "Us" is always maintained through the partial or absolute negation of the subjectivity of the "Them". In the colonial period in India, white female subjectivity was contrasted against the reduced subjectivity of the traditional Indian woman. The depiction of

the traditional Indian woman as victim, passive, oppressed, and lacking individuality served to strengthen the subjectivity of the Victorian woman as agent, actualised, and free¹⁰. The "othering" of the Indian woman was crucial to evoking the superiority of the coloniser whose culture, steeped in the ideals of modernity and individualism, "naturally" resulted in the freedom and autonomy of "their" women. Therefore it was crucial to Indian nationalists to depict Indian women as autonomous human beings while still maintaining their status as the repositories of Indian cultural superiority.

Indian nationalists, informed by Oriental scholarship, created a discursive dichotomy between the "material" West and the "spiritual" East (Mazumdar 1994:257). Chatterjee explicates this argument contending that the nationalists perceived that India had been defeated by the British in the "material" sphere because of the superiority of science, technology and material innovations (1993:120). Thus, it was crucial that India modernise and arrive at the same level of technological advancement in order to challenge British rule (ibid). Gleaning proofs from Orientalist scholarship on ancient India, the nationalists claimed that in the "spiritual" realm India was superior, since it was unhampered by the greed and selfishness of the

¹⁰The subjectivity of Victorian women was not a self-representation and was not a reflection of their actual status in Victorian society. It was a construction by British male colonisers eager to prove the superiority of their own culture.

capitalist mentality. The spirituality of Indian women, in comparison with the "liberated", individualistic European woman who had no compunctions (according to male Indian nationalists) about displaying her sexuality was another area in which the male nationalists claimed the superiority of India. Thus, it was essential that the spirituality of India be nurtured and promulgated. The essentially Hindu "spirituality" constructed by orientalist historians was equated to the "true" national identity which above all must be protected from dissolving in the face of rapidly changing material conditions. An allegedly ancient ideal of spirituality was imposed and incorporated into the contemporary colonial context.

Analogous to this spiritual/material distinction was the dichotomy that was created between the "inner" and the "outer" which was even more powerful (Chatterjee 1993:120). The material represented exterior forces to which the country was forced to adjust; thus for the nationalists, becoming a part of the global economy was not only inevitable, but necessary (ibid). However, because they were exterior they were ultimately unimportant as the changes were only on the outside and thus superficial. It was the inner realm that was sacred for it embodied the "true" self or the spiritual essence that was India (ibid). While material changes could not affect the Indian identity, encroachments into the inner, spiritual realm by the foreign rulers (i.e. by Christianity on Hinduism) would be tantamount to an attack on the very

essence of what it meant to be Indian.

In the language of daily existence, this inner/outer distinction translated into "a separation of social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world" (Chatterjee 1993:120). The world was material and practical male space, while the home was spiritual, sacred, and female space (ibid). The distinction of social space into the material and spiritual rendered a gendered definition of both spaces and social roles. Since Indian women were traditionally conscripted into the home, the superimposition of the categories of spiritual and material onto the already gendered social space led to the feminisation of the spiritual and the masculinization of the material. This separation also crystallised the role that women were to play in the nationalist movement. They were the keepers of the essence and the signifiers of Indian identity. Mazumdar writes that "the upper-caste Hindu Indian woman became the repository of this natural spiritual essence; a "goddess" who must remain untainted by 'Westernisation' and its implied pollution" (1994:257).

Indian nationalists sought to reform "Indian" traditions in an attempt to counter the allegations of "backwardness" that had been hurled by the British, and, since women signified this "backwardness", the reform movement focused on the improvement of their condition. Since the efforts towards the liberation and empowerment of women extended only so far as to legitimize

Indian nationalist discourse, it did not hamper the essence of Indian identity built around the patriarchal family structure. The reforms, therefore, were simply facelifts that would give Indian women an apparent empowerment, while keeping them within the patriarchal confines of religion, home and family (Jayawardena 1986:80). The family was central because it formed the model for the Indian nation in terms of the roles played by men and women (Visweswaran 1994:58). Gandhi claimed that "the doctrine of *satyagraha* [the fight for home rule] is not new: it is merely an extension of domestic life into the political" (Gandhi, cited in Visweswaran 1994:57). Thus, the family was crystallized in nationalist discourse as the metaphor for the nation, and as a result, the power differentials within the family unit were obscured (ibid). Thus, as in the family where men dominated over women, in the wider context of the nation, this metaphor translated into the unequal distribution of power and authority between men and women in the country in which men defined the roles that women played and the areas for women's emancipation (Visweswaran 1994:58). Visweswaran refers to the family as the arena of nationalist silence (1994:42). She argues that the family is necessarily the moment of nationalist silence because "it cannot change because the Home is the realm of nationalist victory over colonialism when the World has been lost to the West" (1994:57).

Indian reformers tackled issues of *sati* and widow remarriage believing that

this would therefore give the impression of India's advancement and progress and "civilization" while posing no threat to the traditional family structure (Jayawardena 1986:80). Philosophers like John Stuart Mill of the Utilitarian school of thought laid great emphasis on the importance of education in women's emancipation. Indian nationalists, not to be outdone by the British, also began to agitate for women's education. However, as Visweswaran has pointed out, in Indian nationalist discourse women were either mothers, wives or sisters (1994:55), and education was aimed at increasing the efficiency of women in these capacities. Education, thus, far from empowering women, made them even more suitable to the patriarchal organization of society and family and served to reinforce these structures (Mazumdar 1976:56). Gandhi was a key figure in the nationalist movement and the educational policy was drafted with his ideals in mind (Jayawardena 1986:96). Gandhi supported the equality of women in relation to men; however, his notion of equality was not that women should aspire to the same goals as men but rather that they complement men in their roles (ibid). His thought, deeply steeped in Hindu philosophy, saw women as embodying the virtues of sacrifice and suffering, and as mothers (ibid). Consequently, he felt that although the education of women was essential, it should be geared differently than men's education in order to inculcate values that would be useful to them as wives and mothers (ibid). Women's education thus consisted of classes in cooking, music, poetry and literature, dance and

religion (ibid). The education of women was not for women per se but for the benefit of the nation and of men (Mazumdar 1994:255).

All this served to emphasize women's roles as mothers and wives, their place within the home, and their strategic positioning in the national struggle. The woman's primary duty was to the home and her family. Gandhi's ideal of womanhood was Sita, one of the main characters in the Hindu epic Ramayana (ibid). Sita was self-sacrificing, chaste and loyal to her husband Rama in spite of all the hardship he put her through. This was the image that the Indian woman was expected to live up to and the essence of the Indian identity that was to survive despite all the pressures that the forces of Westernization inflicted on the country.

Nalini Natarajan identifies three movements in nationalism in India and the corresponding conceptions of womanhood that accompanied them. First, the claim to modernization in which women's bodies were the site for testing out the modernity of the Indian nation to counteract British allegations of backwardness (Natarajan 1994:79). Thus, women were educated, and were permitted to be a part of the nationalist struggle. Second, the claim to a unified India, despite the threat of communalism, favoured the belief that Indians of all creeds and religions were united since they all belonged to the

same "motherland"¹¹ (ibid). The country was referred to in nationalist discourse as *Bharat Mata* or Mother India, and this reemphasized the role of women as mothers, not only within the family but also of the nation (ibid). Third, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, and the consequent "Hinduisation" of womanhood (ibid). Thus, women were "daughters of the nation" with traditional Hindu self-sacrificing virtues, and this countered "Westernization" and "women's Liberation" (ibid). Natarajan uses Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" and writes that in India, cinema adopted the role that the print media played in the West, creating a universal conception of nation and womanhood in the face of contradicting realities (Natarajan 1994:78, Anderson: 1989). This role was crucial since there was no universal mother tongue in which to spread the nationalist message to the Indian people. Cinema propagated Indian women as traditional, self-sacrificing, loyal to home and husband, chaste, mothers and so on. She writes, "Woman becomes the site of the East-West cultural battle so often depicted in India cinema" (Natarajan 1994:87). Thus the "bad" "Westernized" woman would by the end of the film realize her "evilness" and reform herself by embracing the values of traditional Indian womanhood (ibid). The

¹¹Communalism is religious nationalism. The independence period in India was rampant with communal sentiments arising from the attempts of Indian nationalists to project the Indian identity as essentially Hindu. Indian Muslims felt increasingly marginalised by Hindu hegemony within the Indian nationalist movement and began to agitate for the establishment of the separate Islamic state of Pakistan. In 1947, Pakistan and India became two separate and sovereign nations.

association of women with Mother India, lead to the embodiment of the goddess in the figure of a woman (Bacchetta 1993:40). It was the role of the goddess, characterized by spirituality, chastity, and devotion to family and country, that the woman had to play both for the nation and within the home. The role of women within the Indian struggle for freedom was to give the appearance of emancipation, to be signifiers for the nation as goddesses and mothers, but primarily to serve patriarchy within the immediate family and in the national family. As Jayawardena states:

Thus, while Indian women were to participate in all stages of the movement for national independence, they did so in a way that was acceptable to, and dictated by, the male leaders, *and which conformed to the prevalent ideology on the position of women* (1986:107, emphasis added).

Chatterjee points out that the construction of woman-as-goddess served to erase their sexuality and facilitated their movement into the strategic positions assigned to them in the nationalist struggle without threat to the essence of Indian subjectivity (spirituality).

CONCLUSION: THE MODERN NATION

I have argued that the construction of the traditional Indian woman emerged from the clash between the British colonisers and the Indian nationalists. It is my contention that the Indian elite, who were at the forefront of the Indian struggle for independence, were smitten by the ideals of modernity and the necessity of selective modernisation. The mainstream nationalist

movement, far from rejecting the ideals of modernity, instead "supplied an ideological principle of selection. It was not a dismissal of modernity but an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project" (Chatterjee 1993:121). Thus, as long as the distinction between spiritual/material, home/world, and gender roles was maintained, modernity was welcomed by the Indian national movement. In fact, the culture of modernity necessitates these dualisms and maintains and perpetuates them. The crystallisation of gender roles and the objectification of a national spiritual tradition embodied in womanhood permitted the modernisation of the material realm without threat to the national identity. The distinction was part of the colonial motivation premised on modernisation. Colonial subjects, seduced by the rewards of modernisation, sought to facilitate the transformation of India into a modern economy premised on these ideals, while holding on to a spiritual essence in order to maintain the distinctiveness of a national identity. The negation of women's subjectivity was crucial to this agenda, leading to the objectified Indian woman as "other" -- goddess, mother, cultural symbol, but definitely not as an active agent of change.

CHAPTER 3:

DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND INDIAN WOMEN

India gained independence from Britain in 1947 and Jawaharlal Nehru was appointed the first prime minister of the country. Having completed his higher education at Cambridge, along with many other members of the Indian political elite, Nehru's ideals for the newly independent nation were steeped in the principles of modernisation and development. He pioneered what is now known as Nehruvian socialism, a model of development that sought to synthesize Gandhi's principles of self-reliance, basic needs and welfare with the ideals of modernisation -- "progress and a passion for science and technology" (Joshi 1972:126). India's development under Nehru progressed along the path of industrialisation, with substantial budgets allocated to building the infrastructure and strengthening the bureaucracy, and providing social services such as education, health care, and food subsidies. However, India's development cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger global restructuring that occurred in the decades after the second World War. I will begin by analyzing the crystallisation of Indian goals and ideals of development in the broader context of global restructuring. Following this I will articulate my argument, that the discursive processes that legitimised the colonial mission of modernisation and civilisation,

continue to be central to India's development agenda, justifying interventions by foreign development agencies. While there are multiple sites upon which this discursive colonisation is replicated under the guise of "development", I will focus on one -- women's bodies. It is my contention that the reductive construction of the "traditional" Indian woman as victim, oppressed and "other" was central to the legitimation of development interventions. The discursive processes of reductive essentialism and the negation of the subjectivity and agency of Indian women was crucial to the establishment and the continued deployment of the development agenda. It is through this lens that I view the new era of Indian development.

MODERNISATION IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are the victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas....I believe that we should make available to peace loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life....Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. (Truman 1964 quoted in Escobar 1995:3).

Harry Truman made this proclamation in 1949 at his inaugural address as President of the United States (Escobar 1995:3). Many scholars contend that "poverty" is a fairly recent category of analysis (Escobar 1995, Dean 1992, Shiva 1988), and the above quotation demonstrates the centrality of this

construction for forging alliances among nations subsequent to the dismantling of colonial empires after World War II. With the disintegration of direct colonial ties between core and peripheral nations, the impoverishment of the "third world" legitimised the authority and power of the industrialised world over the former colonies. It is my assertion that the development enterprise reconstituted colonial forms of authority like Orientalism (Said 1980) in order to permit the first world to continue to dominate, restructure and have authority over the third world.

In Truman's address, poverty is not only a source of "misery", but also a "danger" to the third and the first worlds. Throughout the Cold War years, the former Soviet Union and the United States vied with each other for the authority to direct the development of the newly independent countries of the third world. The "threat" that Truman highlights is the possibility that these nations would align themselves with the Soviet bloc or take other socialist development paths. In fact, economic growth, as the appropriate path for third world development, was seen as antithetical to communism by many American economists and development planners. This is abundantly clear in the title of W.W. Rostow's landmark publication The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto (1960). Infusion of foreign aid into newly sovereign nations became the means by which the super-powers (the United States and the Soviet Union) could influence the

development of these countries -- by promoting either capitalist or socialist ideology. In spite of their ideological oppositions both models had at least one thing in common when it came to charting a new course for the development of the third world -- the belief that underdevelopment was the source of the third world's problems. The panacea for the third world's malady was modernisation which would gradually replace the backwardness of third world countries and put them on the path to progress. However, the superpowers disagreed on the route to modernity. The Soviet Union advocated socialist development with a strongly centralised system of government controlling all aspects of development and modernisation. Additionally, they did not view the third world's underdevelopment in isolation, contending that it was the end product of centuries of economic exploitation under colonial capitalism. The United States promoted capitalist development and the introduction (or further entrenchment) of third world countries in the system of international trade.

Jawaharlal Nehru declared India a non-aligned nation, thus refusing to commit India to either cold war ideology (Asaf Ali 1991:246). However, both the Soviet Union and the United States endeavoured to influence the country's development through the allocation of financial assistance for various development projects. The Soviet Union funded India's military projects, importing weapons and expanding and strengthening the armed

forces. The U.S. provided aid for various development projects -- mainly large infrastructure projects such as hydroelectric dams, and population control programmes. The main funding agencies were the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and later the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Mridula Udayagiri writes that "empirical research on women [by development scholars and practitioners] has not transcended Orientalism's preoccupation with essentialism" (1995:162). This is because "knowing" the "other" is the cornerstone to proving the relevance of modernity -- as it is embodied in development -- for the third world. Knowing "third world women", their problems, needs and concerns is central to identifying "solutions". Development practitioners from several industrialised nations travel to third world countries, or employ members of the third world elite, to assess the condition of women in these "underdeveloped" nations and to assist in determining their needs. The power to represent, to know, and to identify lies solely with the development practitioners be they Westerners or the third world elite. This replicates colonial processes since it is those individuals in power who claim to represent the "other". The "other" has no voice or agency of his/her own. Characterisations such as "poor", "traditional", "economically backward",

"victims of disease" (Truman 1964 quoted in Escobar 1995:3) are fundamental signifiers of the need for development, as well as indications of the power of the first world to demarcate and characterize the third world. In the following sections I will theorize this reduction of Indian women as backward and traditional in the language of modernity and the necessity of development that it produces.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY: WOMEN AS WOMBS

In India, the Five-year plans published by each elected government at the beginning of their term, chalk out the development ideals to be implemented. Until the early eighties, Indian Five-year plans were male-centred, but were premised on the assumption that both men and women would benefit equally from the policy goals (Varma 1992:29). Prior to the 1980s, special mention was given to women only in chapters on family planning and birth control and on health (since most of the budgetary allocations to the health sector went into providing family planning clinics). Until the 1970s both the Indian Government and foreign development practitioners viewed women primarily as reproducers, ignoring their work as productive actors (Kabeer 1994:188,268, Escobar 1995:172). Escobar writes:

[W]omen appeared for the development apparatus only as mothers engaged in feeding babies, pregnant or lactating, procuring water for cooking and cleaning, dealing with children's diseases, or, in the best of cases, growing some food in the home garden to supplement the family diet. Such was the extent of women's lives in development literature (1995:172).

It is true that in most countries in the world motherhood plays a very important part in women's lives. The problem lies in the "equation of motherhood with womanhood" in most development texts which negates all the other responsibilities that women play in society, engendering a reality that is more a reflection of the mind-set of policy makers than the reality of women's lives (Kabeer 1994:191). Naila Kabeer contends that "women as mothers or would-be mothers are rarely perceived as competent actors, capable of making responsible choices in their own and in their families' interests" (1994:188). Consequently, development "experts" derived the authority to make these choices for them (ibid). Because women were allegedly irrational, had no knowledge about how to control their fertility, and their reproductive roles were absolutely determined by their tradition, they became "objects" of concern to development practitioners who saw the threat of the "population explosion" and sought to limit the fertility of women in the third world. Women were objects rather than subjects in development discourse. This is powerfully evoked in the film on India's family planning programme, *Something Like a War* (1993). Government practitioners interviewed by the filmmakers, used dehumanising language like "targets" and "cases" to refer to Indian women. The language used by the Government practitioners erased the humanity of Indian women casting them as objects of population control programmes.

India was the first country to adopt a nationwide family planning programme in 1953. The programme evolved from a welfare-based family planning programme backed by minimal political will and limited public resources to a full-fledged population control programme in the mid-seventies (Nair 1992:237-252). Increased interest on the part of international donor agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Ford Foundation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in providing additional assistance in financing the country's development programme from the 1960s accompanied the change in population policy (ibid). Development policy, flavoured with the ideology of these institutions, led to an increasing sense of urgency over the issue of the country's burgeoning population. The prevailing belief in the West was that the root of the Third World's underdevelopment lay in its unsustainable rates of population growth -- women's "over-productive" wombs. Not only were large populations hindering the Third World's development status, but in the wake of Ehrlich's book The Population Bomb (1968), they posed a threat to the West in terms of political stability and the West's share of the world's resources. USAID and the Ford foundation, the main funders of population control programmes in India, along with the World Bank, clearly espoused the belief in the immanent population explosion. This influenced Indian development policy not simply through the hegemonic transference of ideology, but also more directly because international aid was contingent

on the adoption of severe population control measures (Buxamusa 1985, quoted in Nair 1992:240).

High fertility rates in India were perceived as a problem of "women having too many children." Women were the "perpetrators" of the problem (Ravindran 1993:29). As early as the 1950s, compelling myths regarding the backwardness of Indian women, encouraged a programme that was coercive and treated women as "targets" rather than subjects who had the right to control their own fertility. The rhythm method was the first form of family planning that was advocated but it was quickly replaced by more foolproof, doctor-controlled methods. A Ford Foundation expert concluded that "illiterate village women [in India] proved incapable of sustaining the complex calculations needed for even minimal success with this [rhythm] method" (quoted in Heim & Schaz 1993:13). In the same period John D. Rockefeller 3rd proclaimed: "if tradition or custom or religion keeps women in a situation where the only way they can succeed in life is to bear children, then they will continue to bear children and population will increase" (quoted in Heim & Schaz 1993:18). According to this logic, the reason women continued to have children was because they bore the mantle of tradition which determined their fertility patterns in a simple cause-effect relationship. While women usually have rational reasons (such as poverty) to have large families, my reading of Rockefeller's statement is that giving birth has less (or

nothing) to do with a choice arising out of a situation of poverty, but is the result of blindly following the dictates (or established parameters of "success") of custom or tradition. Women's illiteracy was another obstacle to be surmounted by development practitioners. The relationship between women's illiteracy and the failure of the rhythm method is a very loose one; however, in the language of modernity and its catchall construction of tradition, it is self-evident and need not be explained.

Between 1953-1975 women's reproduction became increasingly medicalised; however, it was only after 1975 that population control became synonymous with coercion and human rights abuse. In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency rule over the country, suspending civil liberties and transferring all power to the Central Government¹². Emergency rule was declared in the wake of a severe economic crisis instigated by the surge in international oil prices, international recession and the consequent decrease in international demand for Indian exports (Visaria 1981:35). Economic insecurity triggered countrywide strikes and riots, and Indira Gandhi's legitimacy as Prime Minister came under question in Parliament. Her response was to declare Emergency rule. This period, which lasted until 1977

¹²Throughout my thesis I use the term Central Government to denote the national or federal government as opposed to the state governments.

when Gandhi's government was forced to step down¹³, also saw the most severe population control measures in the history of the country. Mass sterilisation camps were established and in the first year of Emergency rule 8.3 million sterilisations, most of them coerced, were performed on men and women (Visaria 1981:35). The international community, instead of deploring the flagrant abuse of human rights, applauded Indira Gandhi for her efforts at curbing the rates of population growth. Robert McNamara, president of the World Bank, who visited India during Gandhi's Emergency rule, congratulated her administration for "the political will and determination shown by the leadership at the highest level in intensifying the family planning drive with a rare courage of conviction" (quoted in Hartmann: 1995:252). According to Betsy Hartmann, Dr. Joep van Arendonk of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) who went to India in 1976 to "investigate" the situation, claimed that there were no compulsory sterilisations "except for a few abuses" (ibid).

INDIAN DEVELOPMENT: THE MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN

Despite Nehru's (1947-1964) socialist ideals which laid the foundation for India's early development, Indian development policy, has always favoured the burgeoning middle and upper classes and often negatively impacted

¹³Gandhi's government was forced to step down after a No-Confidence motion was passed in Parliament. Members of both Gandhi's Congress Party and the Opposition parties united against her in Parliament.

impoverished rural populations -- particularly women. Indian development policy failed to analyze the effects of capitalist patriarchy and the perpetuation of local level patriarchal inequalities by the larger capitalist structure. The green revolution in India exemplifies the process by which capitalism aggravates local inequalities thereby worsening women's status in society. The government began to import green revolution technologies in the mid-fifties. The implementation of green revolution technologies, including capital intensive agricultural techniques, chemical fertilisers and high yielding varieties of seeds, is still heralded as a success in Indian development manuals and text books. However, several feminist scholars have analyzed the negative impact that the green revolution has had on women, and more generally the poor, in rural India (Shiva 1988, Desai and Patel 1985). Most green revolution technologies were introduced to relatively wealthy men and the resulting economic disparities between men, and between men and women, perpetuated and accentuated patriarchal violence against women. Women were ousted from the land that they had used for subsistence by male farmers growing cash crops (Shiva 1988:103-104). Unable to meet subsistence needs effectively, women were declared "unproductive". Shiva writes:

With the market as the measure of all productivity, the 'value' of women's work and status falls, while their work in producing food for survival increases. By splitting the agricultural economy into a cash-mediated masculinized sector, and a subsistence, food producing 'feminised' sector, capitalist patriarchy simultaneously increases the work burden and the marginalisation of women (1988:113).

Tradition became the scapegoat for women's lack of "productivity" since it provided an explanation for women's low status while obfuscating the effects that patriarchal capitalism, perpetuated by the green revolution, had on women.

By casting the family as the basic unit of development intervention, the government obscured the unequal position of women within the family -- a situation aggravated by capitalist development since independence. This is consistent with the colonial period in India to the extent that the family continues to be the area of nationalist silence (Visweswaran 1994: 57).

Government policy efforts were directed at the family as a unit and consequently they failed to interrogate the inequalities within the family that hindered women's access to basic needs such as health care and nutrition.

Thus, despite efforts to meet the educational, health and nutritional needs of the population, the government failed to significantly impact women's lives beyond their roles as reproducers. The focus of development activity was on dispensing the services rather than women's access to them. Women's lack of access has less to do with "tradition" than with the increasing burdens placed on them by the modernisation effort. Male-centred technologies provided a material basis for male domination within the family leading to the diminishing status of women and a further curtailment of their rights. I am not suggesting that inequalities did not exist prior to the modernisation

process. Rather, it is my contention that “tradition” is not some ahistorical vestige of the past, but instead, a product of capitalist “modernisation” in India.

Indian Government discourse on women replicated many of the discursive representations prevalent in British colonial discourse on Indian women. Women continued to be regarded as the repositories of “tradition”. In her Independence Day speech of 1966, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said: “Women constitute fifty percent of the population. For centuries, they have imparted strength to the nation. For centuries, they have upheld the noble traditions of India. We look to them again to maintain the high traditions of our culture” (Government of India 1971:10-14). At the same time, contradictory statements about Indian “tradition” proliferated in Government discourse, with “tradition” being projected as the cause of India’s problems. Colonial imagery of “natives” as lazy and stupid is powerfully evoked in a speech Indira Gandhi gave at the Sixth All India Conference on Family Planning in 1968: “The biggest enemy of family planning in India is the lassitude of our people. Even when they are convinced of the benefits of a course of action they make little attempt to exert themselves” (Government of India 1971:273-275). A high level Indian administrator, V. Jagannadham writes:

The mass of people, *accustomed* to abysmal poverty, resignation and fatalism, cannot awaken themselves to hard labour and

savings for investment....The *traditional* value of abnegation and the *traditional* virtue associated with poverty operate as hurdles to rouse the consciousness (1973:x emphasis added).

It was only in the Sixth five year plan (1980-1985), that Indian policy goals recognised women's unequal access to development and began to pay attention to women's issues (ibid). This awareness came in the wake of international concern with "integrating women into development" during the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985).

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT: THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN INDIA

"Women in Development" was a term coined by the Women's Committee of the Washington, DC, Chapter of the Society for International Development, a coalition of women development practitioners influenced by the work of Ester Boserup (Moser 1993:2). Boserup's book Woman's Role in Economic Development (1970) brought women to the center-stage of development activity. Boserup contended that the deployment of development was male-biased, since women in most third world countries have been left out of the development process. She argued that while men have had access to the benefits of modernity, women have been excluded from this sphere and have been increasingly relegated to the traditional sphere. Her solution to women's underdevelopment was to integrate them into mainstream development activity and to ensure that they too could reap the benefits of capitalist modernity. Boserup's book was revolutionary in many respects:

among others, in highlighting the gendered division of labour worldwide, in recognising women's work and productivity, and in acknowledging the adverse impact that colonisation and capitalist development have had on women in subsistence economies in the third world (Beneria and Sen 1981:141-143). However, there were several major limitations of her work, most significantly, that she does not question the theoretical underpinnings of development and sees modernisation as a solution to women's subordination in third world countries (ibid). Her work on women's roles in third world nations and their need for integration in mainstream development theory and practice, led to the institutionalisation of Women in Development (WID) units in most development agencies, focussed on making the markets and development accessible to women. Although WID discourse has been extensively critiqued by academics and development practitioners it continues to be replicated in development documents and practice.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, Homi Bhabha contends that the "predominant strategic function [of colonial discourse] is the creation of a space for "subject peoples" (1990:75 cited in Escobar 1995:9). Arturo Escobar posits that development discourse, by replicating the mechanisms used during the colonial regimes, has created a "space for subject peoples" by endowing identities and reducing subjectivities. This allows those in power

(Western governments and funders, the third world elite) to control and direct the lives of subaltern peoples. One of the most significant of these identities/spaces is the construction of the third world woman which has been central to the extension of development intervention under the auspices of WID units.

Chandra Mohanty argues that in much of the literature on Women in Development the representation of women relies on the discursive production of the "average third world woman" who leads "an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc.)" (1991:56). As I elaborated in Chapter 1, Mohanty contends that it is through this "discursive homogenisation and systematisation of the oppression of women in the third world" that Western liberal feminism (and development practitioners) exercise power over third world women (and over the third world in general) (1991:54).

With the Sixth Five-year plan (1980-1985) came a shift in focus from the provision of basic welfare for people (including women) to the development of women (Chowdhry 1991:195). The primary objective of the Sixth plan was the elimination of poverty (Chowdhry 1991:197). For the first time an entire

chapter was devoted to women's development in which four strategies were outlined for the eradication of women's poverty: economic independence; educational advancement; access to health care and family planning; and income generating activities for rural women (ibid). The emphasis given to women was an attempt to raise their economic and social status in order to integrate them into mainstream development (Chowdhry 1991:198). The Seventh plan (1985-1990) followed along the same lines, with "a stress...laid on devices [science and technology] to reduce drudgery of women so that the time saved is utilised for development activities" (ibid). Efforts were undertaken to intensify the availability of income generating activities which would "enable women to participate more actively in socio-economic development" (ibid). The Eighth plan (1990-1995) basically reproduced what had already been said in the Sixth and Seventh plans with an additional emphasis on "releasing the productive and creative energies of rural women, so that they become equal partners in the socio-economic transformation of our society" (Chowdhry 1991:200).

Thus, rather than recognising that women did (and still do) play productive roles in society, the myth of women as reproducers placed serious limitations on the ability of development planners within the government administration to understand the complexities in women's lives. The plans were premised on the idea that women had been left out of the development

endeavour and needed to be made productive so that they could be integrated into mainstream economic activity. However, as in the example of the introduction of Green Revolution technology in India, it is clear that it is not so much that women were left out and therefore limited to domestic work prescribed by "tradition", but that the roles they played were in fact a result of development efforts.

The conception of women as unproductive and in need of integration into "productive" economic development flies in the face of statistics that demonstrate that 20% to 60% (varying by region) of families in India are female-headed households depending solely on women's incomes (Shrivastava 1993:2). Jaya Shrivastava maintains that women are not just reproducers but, as importantly, have always been "economic producers, home-managers, and community organisers" (ibid).

Until the 1980s, India maintained very strict controls on imports that had kept the country free from unmanageable debt burdens¹⁴. In the early eighties, various controls on exports and imports were lifted, a tactic

¹⁴Until Rajiv Gandhi's government came into power in the 1980s, the government protected India from the vagrancies of international market forces by controlling the country's integration in the world capitalist system. Imports were restricted so that the country could remain free of crippling international debt from international loans that they would have had to resort to if the monetary value of imports was more than that of exports.

"intended to stimulate the purchasing power of the rich" (Ravindran 1993:27). Industrial production shifted to a focus on luxury commodities, and the wealthy in India doubled their already overflowing coffers. Both these trends resulted in the increase in the country's foreign debt, aggravated by the liberal loan policies adopted by the Reagan-Thatcher administrations at the same time. By the end of the decade the country faced a severe balance of payments crisis and "interest paid on foreign debt increased from 9.1 percent of export earnings in 1980-1981 to 26.3 percent in 1990-1991" (Ravindran 1993:27). The loans fell due in October 1991, and in July of that year the Government of India approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan. The IMF approved the loan on the condition that India implement a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) characterised by: devaluation of currency; liberalisation of trade; removal of all government controls on imports; elimination of government spending on social infrastructure, welfare services and subsidies; tax reform; privatisation; and so on. These conditions were embodied in the New Economic Policy implemented by the Indian Government in 1991 whose ruling principle, according to activist Jaya Shrivastava, was "money at the cost of survival" (1993:5). The next few years in India were marked by a massive increase in unemployment, unmanageable price hikes, and huge cuts to the public distribution system¹⁵

¹⁵The public distribution system provides essential food rations and other essential commodities like kerosene and cooking oil at subsidised rates to the rural poor.

and food security (Shrivastava 1993:12). There were huge cuts to state spending on elementary education (14% cut), while the non-formal education programme was cut by 17% (Participatory Research in Asia - PRIA 1992). Budgetary allocations to Tuberculosis and Malaria programmes (diseases that kill thousands in India every year) were cut by 27% and 38.9% respectively (ibid). The people most adversely affected by SAP policies were the poor, particularly, women, who depend on state subsidies and the public distribution system for survival. Additionally, it is the poor in rural India who are most affected by diseases like tuberculosis and malaria. While the rationale of the New Economic Policy was the eradication of poverty, it clearly worsened the already impoverished conditions experienced by the masses in rural India, particularly women. The New Economic Policy intensified efforts at limiting the population -- which was projected as the reason for India's poverty. The budgetary allocation to family planning programmes was increased by 34% in 1992-1993 (PRIA: 1992). Women continue to be the targets of population policy (Shiva 1994:38).

THE WORLD BANK ON INDIAN WOMEN

Part of the cultural definition of the female in India is her association with the inside, the home and courtyard where the family is cared for. This is in contrast to males who belong outside in the fields and bazaar where livelihoods are earned and economic and political power is transacted (World Bank 1991:3 original emphasis).

The World Bank in particular has been criticised for reducing the subjectivity

of third world women into oppressed victims of patriarchy, tradition and poverty with no agency of their own. This discursive manoeuvre has extended the control and intervention of the Bank and other foreign agencies.

In my review of World Bank documents on Indian women, the inside/outside, public/private tropes were fairly predominant. Geeta Chowdhry, citing Cynthia Enloe (1989:53) calls this the *zenana* representation of third world women that is fairly common in development discourse (1995:27). This casts third world women as "mindless members of a harem, preoccupied with petty domestic rivalries rather than with artistic and political affairs of their times" (Enloe 1989:53). The *zenana* image is a powerful trope evoking images of women cloistered in the patriarchal confines of a male-dominated environment (Chowdhry 1995:27). It elicits representations of veiled women unable to set foot beyond the walls of the *zenana*, a space where few men are permitted entry. Chowdhry contends that the predominance of this representation serves a critical function, for it reflects the supposed superiority of Western women who presumably move freely between the public and private spheres (ibid). The superiority of Western culture is constructed on the bodies of Western women and their "traditional" oppressed "other" -- the third world woman. The image is that of the "ignorance and mindless obedience" of the third world woman compared with her actualised, independent and economically productive

Western counterpart (ibid).

The World Bank advocates increasing women's economic productivity as a solution to this "cultural" phenomenon (1991:5). A World Bank document contends: "market forces should be allowed to influence the boundaries of culturally acceptable women's activity" (1991:xvi) since "economic incentives can weaken the inside/outside dichotomy" (World Bank 1992:60). The argument proceeds: "market forces have great potential to influence gender ideology and increase the perceived value of women" (World Bank 1992:59). The "fact" that women live miserable lives within the confines of their "harems" has legitimised the free-market ideology perpetuated by the World Bank. Governmental intervention cannot be substituted for the market forces since -- "governmental intervention in the private domain where gender relations are rooted is problematic" (World Bank 1991:xvi). The argument is clear if simplistic -- the problem lies with Indian culture and its prescribed role for women. The only way to improve the status of women is to change this culture by allowing the "neutral" intervention of the market forces.

The assumptions are numerous: that there is one Indian culture; that all Indian women lead the same lives absolutely determined by a homogenous tradition; that Indian women have no agency of their own; and that market

forces are neutral and transcend any political agendas. According to this ideology, with the introduction of modernity through the intervention of the market forces, the traditional sphere will slowly lose its "absolute" grip on the lives and minds of women. Again, just as women are passive victims of "tradition", they continue to be passive objects to be manipulated in this change from tradition to modernity. Women are cast as pathetic helpless victims in need of salvation from the development practitioners (Parpart 1995:228). A World Bank study contends:

Culture and tradition vary but often confine women and girls inside the family or close to home....As a result, women's productivity is frequently depressed well below potential levels - and this carries a cost in economic efficiency. Women are, in a sense, *wasted*...women feel reluctant to seek help for themselves or their children....In some societies where *women are not encouraged to think for themselves, authority figures have helped persuade women to seek health or family planning services, continue breastfeeding, and so on* (World Bank 1989 cited in Parpart 1995:228 emphasis added).

This paternalistic image of women projects them as hapless, unproductive "robots", who are unable to even think for themselves. Women's location on the "inside", coincides with the representation of them as mothers. While it is true that the majority of Indian women are mothers, it does not follow that their lives are necessarily determined by or limited to their "reproductive performance". However according to the World Bank: "In essence, a woman's status is determined by her reproductive performance, particularly the birth of sons" (1991:145, 1990:48). Moreover, according to the World Bank, *purdah* (veiling or confinement within the home), is universal in India:

"The preferential investment in males and imposition of constraints on female consumption and activities are born of the prevailing system of patriarchy which is most obviously manifest in the practice of purdah" (World Bank 1991:47). While certain communities in India may practice *purdah* it does not follow that the custom is prescribed throughout the country. Additionally, women and communities may have different reasons for adopting *purdah*. In many villages in India, women cover their heads while transplanting rice in the fields. In this case, women have adopted this, albeit patriarchal, custom in order to work outside the home and attain a level of economic autonomy within the household which they would not have been able to do otherwise.

The World Bank should not be viewed as an isolated institution which promotes colonial representations of third world women. Alternative development institutions such as Oxfam have also adopted this "reality" of Indian women's culture-bound determinacy. According to the Oxfam Field Directors Handbook for India: "women will often by virtue of their role in society, accept without question prevailing norms and will not challenge the injustice they experience....[Indian women] are brought up to play what has been called a lifelong role of subservience and self-effacement" (Pratt and Boyden 1988 cited in Parpart 1995:233). The adoption of these reductive representations of Indian women by institutions of alternative development

thought confirms Escobar's contention that development discourse, in this case WID discourse, has colonised reality to render its own representations and agenda self-evident (1995:5). WID discourse has colonised the everyday experiences of women in India, rendered them homogenous, and thereby "created a space for subject peoples" -- namely the inside -- which needs to be acted upon and controlled -- namely by development agencies -- in order to integrate women into development -- namely to introduce them to the outside. The validity of the inside/outside dichotomy in the Indian example and the erasure of diversity is never questioned.

CONCLUSION: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

I have argued that WID has been an important instrument in the hands of mainstream development agencies and practitioners to extend the avenues of intervention in the daily lives of people, particularly women, in the third world. Central to the success of development/modernisation in the third world is the construction of "tradition" and I have shown that it is upon women's bodies that this latter notion is framed. The popularly held belief is that Indian men have been modernised while women remain immanent in the world of tradition, unable to transcend its clutches without the help of development practitioners steeped in the ideals of modernity. The tropes of salvation and civilisation belie the power and efficacy of this representation. This representation begs the question of whether modernisation *can* in fact

replace tradition and set third world countries on the path followed by the industrialised nations.

Several socialist-feminists have contended that the "traditional" and the "modern" are not separate spheres at all (see Draper 1985, Stivens 1987, Beneria and Sen 1981). They argue that it is the existence of the "traditional" sphere that in effect sustains and subsidizes the "modern". Draper argues that "what modernisation theorists conceive of as premodern and what structuralists see as noncapitalist modes of production are actually among the many forms of labour found under capitalism in the third world" (1985:13). Draper illustrates this by demonstrating that women's informal work and subsistence household activities have "come to perform complementary functions in maintaining the system" of capitalist production (1985:12). This factor becomes abundantly clear if we analyze the policies of the World Bank in India.

In 1991, under the auspices of the World Bank and the IMF, the Government of India instituted a structural adjustment programme as a remedy for the country's balance of payments crisis. The structural adjustment programme mandated that the government decrease its spending on social programmes and infrastructure (including health, education and food subsidies) in order to permit freedom of the market forces. Significantly, World Bank

documents on India published between 1990-1992, emphasised the importance of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in the development of the country (World Bank 1990, 1991, 1992). The documents advocated that NGOs be responsible for providing primary health care facilities and education programmes, sectors that were previously under government jurisdiction. The transfer of power from the government to the private sector (funded and influenced by foreign donor agencies) is apparent. More insidious is the strong promotion of income generating activities and savings and credit programmes among women in rural India. The argument is a familiar one wrought with the stereotypes endemic to development discourse. Since women are economically unproductive they are unable to move out of the "traditional" sphere. Income generation activities and savings and credit programmes give women access to economic productivity and thereby loosen the grip of tradition on their lives. The unstated and untheorised element of this agenda is that women continue to bear the burden of subsistence in increasingly difficult economic times and are forced to add to their already full days by engaging in income generation activities in order that their families, in effect rural India, survive the transition to a free market economy. Their "traditional" roles as mothers, wives, and subsistence producers, are being exploited by free market ideology to facilitate a harsh economic transition. Representations of Indian women as traditional, oppressed victims of cultural patriarchy make this possible by

creating a smokescreen around the effects of capitalism, thus obscuring the fact that it is capitalist relations rather than “tradition” that has impoverished and marginalised women in India. In the next chapter I will explore some of the contradictions between representations of women promulgated by development discourse and the fact of women's active resistance to mainstream development activity.

CHAPTER 4:
INDIAN WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

I have argued that the constructed category of the Indian woman as the traditional, dependent, victimised, backward "other" in contrast to the self-actualised, autonomous, modern, Western individual provides one axis upon which the necessity of development and modernisation in India is evoked. In other words, these representations provide the matrix within which the indispensability of modernity is produced. I have demonstrated that the production of this truth in both colonial and postcolonial India suggests that the change since independence has been a "definitive" rather than a "discursive" shift (Frankenberg and Mani 1993, see Introduction). The experience of subaltern groups in India, most significantly rural women, suggests that colonisation continues to provide the discursive lexicon upon which the material effects of non-egalitarian power relations are established. The discursive construction of representations (such as woman-as-other) maintain and perpetuate the discursive and material reality of colonial hierarchies.

My contention throughout this thesis has been that the subjectivity of Indian women is an imperialist discursive construction charged with what Spivak

has powerfully named "the epistemic violence of imperialism" (1985:251, see Chapter 1). However, I also posit that the effects of this epistemic violence had real material manifestations. As such, I would argue that it is crucial to speak of rural Indian women's resistances to the material consequences of imperialist epistemic violence, in order to challenge the colonial and the neocolonial/modernisation endeavours.

In this chapter, I challenge the representation of rural Indian women as eternal victims of patriarchy and tradition by highlighting their struggles against class and gender oppression, both aggravated by colonial and postcolonial elitist modernisation endeavours. I analyze women's pivotal roles in organised peasant insurgencies in rural India including the Telanghana, the Tebhaga, and the Bodhgaya struggles against feudal exploitation, the Baliapal struggle against the construction of nuclear testing sites in eastern India, and the Chipko movement against ecological destruction in the Uttarkhand Himalayas. I have chosen to focus on these struggles because they demonstrate an interesting change in the nature of social movements in India, since the emergence of the Indian women's movement, and also provide an illustration of the difference between non-modern Gandhian based social movements and those lead by the Communist Party of India since independence.

The lack of writing and analysis of women's participation in Indian resistance movements and struggles has served to strengthen the truth value of the representation of women as backward, dependent, traditional victims. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, in recent years there has been an increasing awareness and recognition of peasant resistance in the social science literature; however, very little mention has been given to women's participation. Some feminist scholars, however, have focussed on women's resistance to development and patriarchy, Aiwaha Ong (1987), Bina Agarwal (1994), Vandana Shiva (1988) and Gilleen Hart (1991) among others. Agarwal and Shiva have analyzed women's organised resistance, while Ong has examined less obvious, individual "everyday forms of resistance"¹⁶. In this Chapter I focus on women's organised resistance under Gandhian and Communist Party leadership in India in order to highlight women's efforts to initiate structural change.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Grassroots social movements in India have largely, though not entirely, been ecological struggles. I define ecological struggles as those movements that are

¹⁶James Scott defines everyday resistance as "*virtually always a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power*" (1989:23 original emphasis). These everyday acts of resistance include: "footdragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threats, and so on" (1989:5).

motivated primarily against the appropriation of common resources by those in power, or by the manner in which these resources are used and distributed. Indian development since Independence has resulted in a dualism whereby the upper classes have seen an improvement in their standard of living, while subaltern groups have experienced the gradual annihilation of their ability to access land and other resources that comes with privatisation and industrial development (Sethi 1993:122). Harsh Sethi writes: "rarely have our [Indian] planners and intellectuals understood that in large, diverse, and predominantly pre-industrial societies like India, basic survival for the poor is deeply dependent on access to and use of natural resources, what in current literature are referred to as 'the commons'" (ibid). Sethi argues that with colonisation "a different framework for the use of natural resources" was established whereby the use of resources (like land, trees, water) was funnelled towards the development of industry resulting in a commodification of nature and the increasing inaccessibility of the poor to these resources (1993:123). The industrial revolution in Britain required the creation of cotton and indigo plantations (for cloth production and dyeing) and the large-scale felling of trees (for ship building and railway construction) (ibid). The development goals of independent India aggravated the conditions even further by pursuing economic development based on industrialisation and commercialisation of agriculture (ibid). Sethi writes:

In the first two decades of planned development the base was laid for widespread modernisation of all sectors of productive

life - industry, agriculture, forestry, fishing etc. - with inevitable consequences both for natural resource systems and the communities whose livelihood patterns and lifestyles depended on these resources" (ibid).

Another political condition that was significant for the emergence of these movements was the feudal land tenure systems set up by the rulers of Indian kingdoms prior to colonisation. Britain's initial colonial policy was of indirect rule through "India's existing political and administrative elite" (Masani 1987:7). While Britain annexed Indian kingdoms, it left the administrative and political systems intact, and established de facto rule through Indian rulers. In order to maintain the allegiance of these rulers, the British did not interfere with their internal policies (ibid), and oppressive feudal systems continued to exploit the impoverished subjects of these kingdoms. When India attained her independence, the newly established sovereign government, catering to the needs of the Indian upper classes, did little to alleviate the feudal conditions in many parts of the country.

Grassroots struggles in India emerged within the political context of these forms of exploitation (redirection of resources to industry and feudal landownership) initiated or embraced by Britain and replicated in independent India. Early social movements such as the Tebhaga

movement (Bengal), and the Telanghana movement (Andhra Pradesh), were against feudal landownership, resulting in the abolishment of forced labour in 1951 (Kannabiran and Lalitha 1990:202). Later struggles were directed against the appropriation of rights to “the commons” by those in power. Thus the Bodhgaya struggle (Bihar) was against the appropriation of land by the Hindu priesthood in the area resulting in a system whereby the peasants had to turn over a certain portion of their produce to the temple. The Baliapal movement (Orissa) was against the immanent appropriation of land by the government to build a nuclear testing site, and the Chipko movement (Uttarkhand Himalayas) was against the destruction of natural resources (large-scale felling of trees) by commercial loggers. Both men and women actively participated in these struggles, although women’s roles within these struggles has largely been ignored or overlooked. I discuss these movements in detail below with special attention to the roles played by women and the obstacles they faced.

philosophy that maintained the unity of all Being, and the understanding that the individual self is only the vehicle for the unified soul or *atman*. It is through the propagation of the *atman* that the self is realised. *Swaraj*, in the Gandhian sense, requires each individual to recognize that it is in the progress and happiness of the whole community that his/her fulfilment lies. A struggle built on Gandhian principles is necessarily an instance of prefigurative politics -- the struggle has to embody the end. *Swaraj* by definition cannot be achieved by a few at the expense of others, and it cannot be attained if it rests on the inequality and exploitation of others.

Consequently, when women raised issues of gender discrimination and their exploitation as women, the organization and the men who participated in the struggle were forced to pay heed in order to prove their commitment to the Gandhian ideal of *swaraj*.

Contrary to the liberal worldview, gender exploitation cannot be tackled in isolation from the discursive field that supports its current manifestations. Gender discrimination is part of a larger structure of exploitative practices deployed to uphold, white, Euro-American, male supremacy. As such it is inextricably intertwined with discourses on race, imperialism and of course, class. For instance, the green revolution technologies implemented by the Government of India to initiate agrarian reform in the country, were clearly patriarchal, elitist and entrenched in the opposition set up by modernisation

**EARLY PEASANT PROTESTS AGAINST FEUDAL EXPLOITATION:
THE TEBHAGA AND TELANGHANA STRUGGLES**

- CPI¹⁷: Kamamma, either you must give this child away to someone or else you must leave us....
- K: Which mother, I ask you, can find this courage? I wept a little then. I said I couldn't go....
- CPI: This is not the correct consciousness for the working class....
- K: My head reeled....I had not come into the struggle for a livelihood. I had come to do my share of work and die....I changed my mind and agreed to go and leave the child.
- (Kamamma's story, Stree Shakti Sangathan 1989:50).

It is often alleged in the writings of social scientists on India that Indian women who have participated in rural struggles against feudal exploitation have done so in a purely supportive capacity and that they have displayed little if any consciousness as women in their efforts to gain equality. I argue that this has not always been the case. What is troublesome is that in the infinite cycle of citation among scholars, the argument that women lack an awareness of their oppression as women, has gained so much validity that it has obscured the reality of those struggles in which women have in fact played a very central role. In other words the discursive image has colonised the reality of women's experiences thus rendering them unauthentic. Eminent scholars like the economist Amartya Sen claim that "traditional" women, or as he puts it "underdogs," are immersed in a kind of false

¹⁷CPI stands for the Communist Party of India that played an instrumental role in these struggles. I have abbreviated Kamamma's name to "K".

consciousness in which they perpetuate their own oppression (Sen 1990:126). He claims that these women have little comprehension of their self-interest and "the underdog comes to accept the legitimacy of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice" (ibid).

Writings on the Tebhaga and Telanghana struggles have been similarly afflicted by this highly patriarchal construction of women's lack of consciousness. The argument has been that women supported men in the class struggle without any consciousness of gender based oppression (Agarwal 1994:96). However, my readings of women's own stories of their participation in the Telanghana struggle suggests a different argument. It is not the women who did not have visions of equality from both a class and a gender perspective, but rather that their needs and demands were consciously suppressed by the communist party leaders in the interests of a proper "working class consciousness". At the beginning of this section, I quoted Kamamma's story because it demonstrates the scorn that women faced when they demanded justice and the recognition of their needs as women in the struggle against feudal exploitation. This discrimination is not specific to the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist parties all over the world have been criticised for ignoring women's issues. In a classic example early this century, Lenin reprimanded Clara Zetkin for discussing women's issues rather than the "more pressing" issues of "working class" oppression (Jaggar

1983:243).

Another criticism levelled against rural Indian women is that their consciousness is a middle class feminist construction (Jackson 1993:402).

What is significant about the Tebhaga and the Telanghana struggles, both of which originated between 1940 and 1955, is that there was no fullblown women's movement in India at the time to ensure that women's protests were heard and acted upon. As such, women's needs and demands were *ignored* rather than nonexistent.

The Tebhaga and Telanghana peasant struggles were fought by male and female peasants against exploitation by feudal landowners in the region. Most of these peasants were sharecroppers who had been denied occupancy rights and faced the constant threat of eviction (Agarwal 1994:97). Landowners, and government officials who colluded with them, manipulated the peasants' economic insecurity and forced them to comply with their demands. Women were sexually exploited by the landowners (ibid). For the most part, women did play supportive roles in these movements, as one would expect given women's subordinate status in much of rural India. Many women supported the struggle by warning others when the police were approaching by blowing conchshells and ringing bells, or rescuing and administering first aid to wounded victims, and forming

barricades. But they often actively engaged in the frontlines of the struggle using their own tools -- broomsticks, clubs, and pestles to fight the police (Agarwal 1994:98). The Indian filmmaker Ketan Mehta produced a film based on women's struggles against both feudalism and patriarchy called *Mirch Masala*, or Spices. The film is a fictional account that draws on women's real experiences in these movements as victims of both sexual and class violence by the landowners. In this film men of the village give up their struggle against the landlords but women who have borne years of sexual abuse refuse to give in. They seek refuge in a spice factory and when the police and the landowners approach to "teach them a lesson" they throw spices in their faces and refuse to be defeated. While the film romantically portrays the heroines' resistance, it is not as farfetched as it seems. Writing about women in the Tebhaga struggle, Chakravartty says:

Tied to their saree-ends they carried handfuls of dust, mixed with chilli powder. As they [women] approached the police, they threw this powder in their eyes and the police ran for their lives (1980:94).

Women in these struggles were cognisant of their inequality within the household and they did see the larger struggle against class exploitation as a means to redress gender inequalities within their households. One woman in the Tebhaga struggle said:

[W]hen the husband and wife together are dying in the field, in the battle for Tebhaga; when the two together are fighting against the enemy, how then was it possible for one soldier to beat the other after returning home? (quoted in Custers 1987:177).

Women voiced these demands to the leaders of the struggle, the Communist Party of India. However, the Party did not consider these problems integral to the struggle and sought to silence them (Agarwal 1994:99). The Party, committed to its image of purity, saw women's emancipation as a danger to its public image (Agarwal 1994:101). Women demanded more aggressive roles within the movement, but the Party, in an effort to pacify male members, tried very hard to limit women's roles to supportive ones.

Dronavalli Anasyamma of the Telanghana movement retorts:

There was a strong argument in the Party that women should not be taken into the squads - that it is physically difficult for them. When I wanted to join they said the same thing. I argued saying that nowhere in the world could a revolution succeed without women participating in it....Initially though they were doubtful of my strength, but later they acknowledged it (Stree Shakti Sanghatana 1989:264).

Even more telling are the words of Ravi Narayan Reddy, a leader of the Communist Party. When asked why women were not recruited to the squads in the Telanghana movement he replied: "[women were] not that way emancipated, in the sense that they did not have the consciousness to fight with rifles and all that. After all they are women....We did not like that women should be taken into the battlefields" (Stree Shakti Sanghatana 1989:271).

Once these struggles attained their end (in class terms) and appropriate amendments were made by the Indian government to rectify the situation, women were forced by the Communist Party, colluding with male peasants, to return to their homes and resume their roles as good wives and mothers. Women did not want this for themselves, but with no support from either the Party or their families, and very few other options available to them, they had little choice. Mallu Swarajayam of the Telanghana movement expressed her disgust with the Party's actions saying:

In the Party they will see only what the movement needs. Questions concerning women are often suppressed....Their [women's] use is that. So when the struggle was withdrawn they told us to go and marry....We fought with them. We said that even if the forms of struggle had changed we should be given some work (Stree Shakti Sanghatana 1989:272).

Another woman complains:

They have used us so long and now they say go stay at home. How could they even understand what the situation was at home....What mental torture- I was really upset. That was my first taste of suffering (ibid).

For the most part women did return to their homes after the struggle and resumed their lives within the household (ibid) Some women, however, went on to be teachers and looked for jobs outside their homes (ibid). But despite the exceptions little change was effected in the gender hierarchy in the larger social structure. The aftermath of the Tebhaga and Telanghana movements sharply differs from that of the Bodhgaya struggle that began in 1978. I will explore this in the next section and demonstrate that the

difference lay in the fact that by this time the Indian Women's Movement was strong, and the more powerful middle class feminists took up the causes of women who participated in the struggle, in order to effect change in both the class and gender hierarchies.

THE BODHGAYA STRUGGLE

The Bodhgaya struggle was a movement of sharecroppers and landless labourers in Bihar to demand rights to land which was controlled (but not owned) by the Hindu Math - an organization of Hindu priests (Agarwal 1994:103). Although the peasants tilled the land they were required to turn over their produce to the Math (Agarwal 1994:104). Exploitation was both economic and, in the case of women, sexual (Agarwal 1994:103). The movement was mobilised by the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (Student Protest Organization), a youth group organised on Gandhian principles of nonviolence and civil disobedience (ibid). Women participated at all levels of Vahini and actively sought to prioritise women's needs in the course of the struggle (ibid). Both male and female peasants played active roles in the movement.

Women in the movement expressed the need for a women's cell, organised by women members of Vahini, to discuss their particular concerns and problems (Gandhi and Shah 1991:280). These women's cells played a critical

role in gaining rights for women when the movement succeeded in protecting peasants from exploitation by the Hindu Math. Discussions in these sessions covered a range of issues including discrimination against girls, violence against women, women's sole responsibility for housework, and the need for women to gain title to land (Agarwal 1994:104). In October 1981, the Government of India identified 1000 acres of land for redistribution to the peasants (ibid). Women activists in Vahini, acting on the demands of peasant women, struggled with the Government and Vahini's male membership to get the titles to the land issued to individuals (including women) as opposed to the family as a unit (Agarwal 1994:105). Government officials strenuously objected to this demand, claiming that men were the heads of the household and therefore were the rightful holders of land titles (ibid). Women's voices, both within Vahini and among the villagers, was so strong that the men in the villages refused to accept the Government's offer unless women were also given titles to the land (ibid). Finally, land titles were issued in women's names in two villages (ibid). In these villages women received titles either as individual title owners or joint owners with their husbands (ibid). Widows, destitute women, unmarried women and disabled persons became eligible for land titles of about one acre in some villages (ibid).

While initially women faced opposition from Vahini's male membership and from male peasants, they managed to overcome this. The strongest

opposition came from the Government officials entrenched in the patriarchal thought that has flavoured official policy in India. It was only when the men in the village refused to accept the Government's settlement unless it met women's demands, that the Government changed its position. The fact that men agreed to women's demands derives from the strength and unity with which women argued their case against gender discrimination. Manimala, a peasant activist, when told that her demands would weaken class solidarity, challenged the alleged Gandhianism (self-reliance, social justice and equality for all) of the male membership:

Equality can only strengthen, not weaken an organization, but if it does weaken our unity, that will mean that our real commitment is not to equality or justice but to the transfer of power, both economic and social, from the hands of one set of men to the hands of another set of men (Agarwal 1994:108).

When told by other villagers that women should get married and live in their in-laws homes and that therefore they did not need land, she responded:

If we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of a man-woman relationship founded on inequality, why should we assume that a woman must leave her home and go to her husband's home to provide heirs for his family and continue his line (ibid).

This from a woman who resides in Bihar, a state indexed by many social analysts as being among the most backward in India. I would not claim that the strength of this woman's response has nothing to do with the influence of middle class feminists within Vahini. However, I do not believe that

Manimala is simply regurgitating the views of middle class feminists, especially given the context of the Tebhaga and Telanghana movements in which women raised similar concerns with no help from the Indian women's movement. I contend that the views are her own, albeit couched in the language of the largely middle class Indian feminist movement. Bina Agarwal supports this contention, arguing that middle class feminists played a "catalytic role...in giving shape and direction to peasant women's demands, and in group mobilisation" (1994:110).

THE BALIAPAL MOVEMENT

The Baliapal movement against the national government and the Indian military was initiated in Orissa in 1986 by Baliapalli peasants. The struggle attracted voluntary organisations and civil rights groups from all over the country who came to Baliapal to support the movement. Unlike large tracts of Orissa which are famine prone, the Baliapal region is very fertile and accounts for about eighty percent of India's Banarasi *Paan*¹⁸ production (Routledge 1993:47). The average annual income earned from *Paan*

¹⁸Paan is the leaf of the Betel plant which is consumed all over India and is even exported to other countries in the subcontinent. Banarasi paan is a variety of paan available in the Indian city of Banaras (originally Varanasi renamed Benares by the British).

production in Baliapal amounts to about Rs.30 crore¹⁹ (ibid). In addition to *Paan* cultivation, villagers in this region earn money for subsistence through fishing and artisanal trades (ibid). While the men continued to engage in the more traditional occupations of fishing and artwork, women, who had previously engaged in rice cultivation, entered the newly introduced (c. 1973) and extremely lucrative occupation of *paan* cultivation and established their stake (economically) in the land and resources of the region (ibid). In the early 1980s the National and State governments gave the military permission to build a testing site in Baliapal for new weapons technologies (including warheads with a nuclear capacity). The denizens of Baliapal organised along the principles of Gandhian nonviolence and civil disobedience to stop the military from taking over their land. Women, with their important economic stake in the land, were at the frontlines of the struggle and among the most militant protesters (Routledge 1993:53). The protesters used tactics of noncooperation, sit-ins and verbal protest to stall the military's plans (Routledge 1993:55). In an interview conducted by Paul Routledge, an activist contended: "For Baliapalis the land is our mother, our earth, our home. This is in the hearts of people" (1993:58). Routledge contends that it was the women who, drawing on both Hindu and folk culture in the region, were the main proponents of this ideology (ibid). In Orissa the most powerful goddess

¹⁹1 crore = Rs. 10 million

Rs. 30.00 = U.S.\$ 1.00

Rs. 30 crore = U.S.\$ 10 million

is Durga or Kali, the Warrior Goddess in Hinduism who is also the destroyer of evil. Villages, both Hindu and non-Hindu, build their communities around a shared goddess, invariably a local adaptation of Durga (Routledge 1993:58). The women in the movement found their strength in the powerful imagery surrounding the Warrior Goddess who embodies the female power -- *shakti* (power, energy, action) (Routledge 1993:62). According to Routledge: "Durga is evoked as the spiritual guide of the *maran sena* (suicide squad) before whose image the *sena* members have pledged themselves to give their lives to prevent the government from entering Baliapal" (1993:62). Fifteen hundred women joined the suicide squad forming human barricades to prevent military trucks from entering the region (Routledge 1993:54). Folk songs were adapted to the struggle and became a call to arms and a source of unity and strength:

Blow upon your conches
 Mothers, aunts, and sisters
 To shake the parliament with your sound
 Destroy the evildoers and their descendants
 In mother Durga's form
 (Purushottam Behera, trans. Unnayam, Routledge 1993:62).

Eventually, after two years of nonviolent resistance the Government decided to pull out its troops from Baliapal. Part of the reason was that several voluntary organisations and civil rights groups from all over the country began to converge in Baliapal and put increasing pressure on the government to leave the region (Routledge 1993:69). Second, the constant Baliapalli

resistance was so tight that the Government could only win through violence and bloodshed (Routledge 1993:68). Being under the scrutiny of both the media and civil rights groups the Government eventually decided to back off (Routledge 1993:69).

THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

The Chipko movement in the Uttarkhand Himalayas is one of the most well known environmental resistance movements in the world. While the movement began in 1973 (Guha 1993:98), it emerged in the context of a long history of peasant protest in the area. British colonial policy marked the turning point in the history of the region, for it resulted in the appropriation of woodlands by the state (Guha 1993:83). The colonisers took over the land and felled trees to build railways and to increase revenues (ibid). The appropriation of land by the British initiated two major changes: first, peasant access to the forests began to be strictly regulated; and second, it resulted in the commodification of nature into a resource to fuel capitalist production (Guha 1993:85). Ramachandra Guha writes:

At a deeper epistemic level, the language of scientific forestry worked to justify the shift towards commercial working. The terms 'valuable' and 'desirable'...were in every instance euphemisms for 'commercially valuable and profitable' (ibid).

As early as 1930, peasants drove state officials from the area and proclaimed

their own government (Guha 1993:86). The police fired on unarmed peasants to quell the revolt, further aggravating peasant opposition that has lasted through the decades and fuelled numerous insurgencies (ibid). However, despite a history of peasant revolt in the Uttarkhand Himalaya region, it was only in 1973 that the Chipko movement began as a sustained organised rebellion against government ecological policy in the area. Chipko is a Gandhian, non-violent movement directed against commercial loggers authorised by the government to come to the region to cut trees. Villagers responded by demonstrating against the loggers, and most importantly, hugging trees or forming human barricades around them to thwart the attempts of the loggers. Women have always played an important role in the Chipko movement, partly because the lack of sustainable subsistence possibilities in the area since state appropriation of the land, resulted in the men of the village migrating to find work outside the region (Omvedt 1990:28). Additionally, women had always played important roles in the relatively egalitarian village community (ibid). Women's participation in social movements in the Uttarkhand area was part of a historical trend started in the 1960s when women took part in anti-alcohol movements organised by an organization based on Gandhian principles in the area (Guha 1993:101). While the Chipko movement has predominantly been under male leadership, women have participated actively at all levels of the struggle and

have empowered themselves and their community through their actions²⁰. They have been very critical of government policy in the area and the destruction of the forests by commercial loggers, and have thus far been fairly successful in thwarting the destructive attempts of both the government and the loggers.

CONCLUSION

I have focussed on rural women's resistance in order to challenge mainstream representations of women in development discourse. The large numbers of women who participated in the Tebhaga, Telanghana, Bodhgaya, Baliapal and Chipko movements did not fit into the stereotype of women as dependent, backward, victims with no minds of their own. This chapter begs the question of *why* representations of Indian women as backward, dependent and helpless are consistently replicated in discourse despite compelling evidence that they are in fact often agents of change and resistance. Perhaps a Foucauldian framework can deconstruct this conundrum. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault demonstrates that prisons

²⁰The leadership of Chipko is by no means uniform and like all large social movements there are many contesting views within the community. The most well known leader of the movement is Sunderlal Bahuguna who holds the loggers and government officials solely responsible for ecological destruction (Guha 1993:102). Chandni Prasad Bhatt, another leader, also holds villagers responsible for destruction but maintains that this is the result of "separating the local population from the management of forest wealth" (ibid).

have failed to eliminate the existence of delinquency which presumably is the reason for their existence (1979, 1995). According to Foucault, the eradication of crime is not the fundamental purpose for the existence of prisons. Prisons serve another function that is instrumental to the operation of power -- the legitimisation of a certain reality. He writes:

[The prison] helps to establish an open illegality, irreducible at a certain level and secretly useful, at once refractory and docile; it isolates, outlines, brings out a form of illegality that seems to sum up all others, but which makes it possible to leave in the shade those that one wishes to--or must--tolerate. This form is...delinquency (1995:276-77).

By establishing the parameters of delinquency, prisons implicitly objectify a norm of behaviour and are thus able to control people's actions. Prisons create an opposition between normal and abnormal behaviour and by applying disincentives to the abnormal are able to inscribe the norm on peoples' bodies, actions and lives. While prisons reify the opposition between normal and abnormal behaviour making the distinction seem self-evident, they simultaneously obscure the role that power relations have played in establishing this "truth".

Similarly, while the representation of Indian women as backward, traditional, dependent victims, may be fallacious, it is consistently replicated because it evokes a certain truth -- the necessity of modernisation and development. In portraying this necessity, these representations also obscure the fact that

women's struggles have been against the development policies of the Indian government and the Western elite. An examination of women's struggles and resistance suggests a powerful critique of modernisation, development and patriarchy, a challenge that, from the perspective of world capitalism, should remain hidden.

The movements that I have described show an interesting contrast between those struggles under modernist Communist Party leadership and those espousing a non-modernist Gandhian view. What was noteworthy about the Telanghana and Tebhagha struggles was the reluctance on the part of the Communist Party of India to take up women's issues and needs. This sexism is not specific to the Indian Communist Party or to Indian "tradition". It is a symptom of the institutionalised sexism that has colonised modern discourse. The leader of the Communist Party of India who reprimanded Kamamma for behaviour unworthy of the working class, echoed the voice of Lenin half a century ago who scolded Clara Zetkin for trying to introduce women's issues into the communist agenda (Jaggar 1983:243). Social scientists writing about social movements have often assumed that women did not struggle to change their own lives through their participation in these movements. They have also assumed that women have played little more than a supportive role in the movements. While this is often the case, both the Telanghana and the Tebhaga struggles attest to a different reality. I have

quoted women who have brought up a range of issues that led to their own disillusionment with the Communist Party of India. Kamalamma was instructed to abandon her child for the cause of the working class, Dronavalli Anasyamma fought an uphill battle in order to get recruited into the squads, and several women resented the Party for not supporting them after the struggle ended. Women who participated in these struggles criticised both the Party's policies as well as other men in the movement who abused them at home. While the Party's analysis of oppression was limited to class exploitation, women in the movement were aware of their oppression as members of the feudal classes and their exploitation as women by their husbands and by the Communist Party of India. This became abundantly clear in the Bodhgaya struggle, when the feminist movement in India voiced the complaints of women who had formerly been ignored and whose needs had been subsumed by the larger political cause. What emerges from a contrast of these movements is the necessity of vertical organization on multiple axes as opposed to the single axis of class.

Perhaps another difference lies in the fact that while the Telanghana and Tebhaga movements were organised by the Communist Party of India, the Bodhgaya struggle was mobilised by a group founded on non-modernist Gandhian ideals. Central to Gandhi's philosophy is his notion of *swaraj*. *Swaraj* literally means self-rule, and it has its roots in ancient Hindu

philosophy that maintained the unity of all Being, and the understanding that the individual self is only the vehicle for the unified soul or *atman*. It is through the propagation of the *atman* that the self is realised. *Swaraj*, in the Gandhian sense, requires each individual to recognize that it is in the progress and happiness of the whole community that his/her fulfilment lies. A struggle built on Gandhian principles is necessarily an instance of prefigurative politics -- the struggle has to embody the end. *Swaraj* by definition cannot be achieved by a few at the expense of others, and it cannot be attained if it rests on the inequality and exploitation of others.

Consequently, when women raised issues of gender discrimination and their exploitation as women, the organization and the men who participated in the struggle were forced to pay heed in order to prove their commitment to the Gandhian ideal of *swaraj*.

Contrary to the liberal worldview, gender exploitation cannot be tackled in isolation from the discursive field that supports its current manifestations. Gender discrimination is part of a larger structure of exploitative practices deployed to uphold, white, Euro-American, male supremacy. As such it is inextricably intertwined with discourses on race, imperialism and of course, class. For instance, the green revolution technologies implemented by the Government of India to initiate agrarian reform in the country, were clearly patriarchal, elitist and entrenched in the opposition set up by modernisation

theorists between the developed first world, and the underdeveloped and backward third world. The liberal WID solution to male-biased development was to integrate women into the development process. However, gender discrimination is just one facet of a larger organised structure of oppression and hence cannot be tackled without addressing other discourses that intersect to engender the multilayered dominations faced by impoverished women in the third world. Deconstructing these intricately woven threads of racism, elitism and sexism suggest that to substantially move to a postcolonial state (signifying the end of oppression in all its guises) would entail transcending the modernisation paradigm that is both fuelled by and in turn reifies the authority of the white euro-american male.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION: AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEVELOPMENT

Social movements in India, particularly those that I have discussed in the previous chapter, have highlighted issues of class and gender exploitation which are the outcome of centuries of modernisation enforced during the colonial and the neocolonial/development eras. As I have mentioned earlier, I am not implying that class and gender exploitation did not exist prior to the age of modernity. Rather, I argue that oppressive societal structures should not be viewed as vestiges from the past, but as institutionalised forms of oppression that have been embraced and reconstituted over time to render them inseparable from the dynamics of power relations today. Modernisation theorists of the 1950s, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, contend that gender inequalities belong to the traditional realm that presumably exists atemporally. These theorists posit that it is through modernisation and the subsequent elimination of the traditional sphere, that gender inequalities will be transcended. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, development policy has not resulted in the elimination of gender inequalities since development itself is steeped in patriarchal ideology.

Social movements in India, similar to grassroots movements all over the third world, embrace an important critique of modernisation. The dominant struggle against colonialism did not reject modernity, and postcolonial nations like India embraced the discourse of modernity in its new guise -- development. Peasant struggles, however, have rejected elitist perceptions of sovereignty. The impoverished masses in India did not gain sovereignty with independence. For them, the oppression of the colonial period continued in "post"-colonial times. Their criticisms suggest a rejection of the modernist ideal itself, and therefore the need not for an alternative development path, but an alternative to development itself. It is only by transcending the colonial/neo-colonial power relations implicated in the development endeavour that we can initiate a truly postcolonial state in the world. It is the conception of an alternative to development and a shift to a postcolonial state that I examine in this chapter.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEVELOPMENT?

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Arturo Escobar uses Homi Bhabha's analysis of colonial discourse to argue that development is not simply a technology to change material reality but a political discourse that has colonised reality (Escobar 1995:5). Cristina Rojas de Ferro defines development as a regime of representation (Rojas de Ferro 1995:150-173). Rojas de Ferro contends that economic concepts of production and markets cannot be separated from the

context within which they were produced. Regimes of representation consist of the lexicon of self/other relations which endow these concepts with meaning. For example, the meaning of the concept "economic actor" varies cross-culturally. An economic actor in Europe cannot be simply equated with an economic actor in Columbia. There is an entire discourse of colonialism, race and gender which distinguish the two.

Escobar uses Rojas de Ferro's concept to contend that development is a regime of representation that has been historically produced. Escobar argues that development is a regime of representation for it creates a "space for subject peoples" within which knowledge is produced and identities and subjectivities are endowed (Escobar 1995:9-10). As a regime of representation, development effectively exercises control and establishes authority over the third world (ibid). Development discourse provides "an efficient apparatus that systematically relates forms of knowledge and techniques of power" (Escobar 1995:10). In other words, development discourse is an epistemology that legitimises a certain ontology, such that people, including those in the third world, come to see themselves as developed or underdeveloped.

Rojas de Ferro argues that languages of civilisation and barbarism that were

introduced with colonisation, engendered a "will to civilisation"²¹. In Chapter 2, I discussed the actions and ideology of Indian nationalist reformers who felt that the British had colonised India through the might of modernisation, science and technology. This belief engendered a "will to civilisation" consisting in the nationalist adoption of the ideal of modernisation. With independence this "will to civilisation" continued through the self-imposition of development measures by the Indian elite seeking to establish the ideals of modernity in India. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, colonial discourse as a regime of representation (the construction of the other as barbaric and inferior) was pivotal in producing the "will to civilisation". Similarly, development as a regime of representation (the construction of the backward, dependent "third world woman") in postcolonial nations was central to reconstituting this "will to civilisation" into a "will to development".

An alternative path to development would simply provide a new disguise rather than challenge the constructions of truth and the power relations that modernity has established. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis the technologies of development are superficial expressions of the discourse

²¹de Ferro is using Foucault's concept of will to knowledge. Foucault claims that in the seventeenth century with the establishment of the social sciences the will to knowledge (incitement to discourse) was exercised to produce the discourse of sexuality that became the cornerstone for the exertion of power over peoples lives (Foucault 1980:12).

of modernity. Prohibiting some of these technologies is therefore simply a superficial solution to the problems posed by development. The challenge has to come at the level of discourse whereby the truths, oppositions, subjectivities and spaces constructed by modernity are contested. In the words of Alberto Sandoval: "The issue is not to throw away the canon of Western civilisation but to expand its horizons through inclusiveness"²². Escobar analyses this process:

[C]hanging the order of discourse is a political question that entails the collective practice of social actors and the restructuring of existing political economies of truth. In the case of development, this may require moving away from development sciences in particular and a partial, strategic move away from Western modes of knowing in general in order to make room for other types of knowledge and experience. This transformation demands not only a change in ideas and statements but *the formation of nuclei around which new forms of power and knowledge might converge* (1995:216).

According to Escobar, this process will lead to the enactment of a new hybrid modernity, challenged and synthesised through its engagement with a multiplicity of other discourses (1995:217). In the rest of this paper I analyze various proposed alternatives to development in order to synthesize my own view of such an alternative which does not imply moving back in time to some past glorified society but rather to move ahead and implicate a hybrid modernity with a new vision.

²²Baccalaureate Speech presented by Professor Alberto Sandoval at Mount Holyoke College, May 1996.

ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

Various social scientists have formulated alternatives to mainstream development theory. In this section I discuss the work of two major contributors to the field of alternatives to development: the DAWN (Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era) group and the idea of delinking first proposed by Samir Amin. I use the ideas proposed by both to develop my own alternative to development later in this chapter.

The DAWN manifesto for an alternative to development was composed by Gita Sen and Caren Grown in a book entitled Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions (1987). The book is a comprehensive critique of mainstream development theory (modernisation theory) and signals the need for a new vision for development. Sen and Grown propose an alternative to development based on the rejection of hierarchy (1987:79) and the redirection of resources to the empowerment of people rather than big industry and "the production of the means of destruction" [e.g. military spending] (1987:80). They contend that it is not the lack of resources that has prevented governments from meeting the needs of the impoverished masses, but the lack of political will (1987:81). In other words, the problem lies in the demarcation of political priorities whereby huge budgets to military spending are allocated at the expense of basic human needs such as health

care, nutrition, and education. Sen and Grown propose several long-term strategies including legislation to "underwrite male control and privilege" (ibid), reduction of military spending, and the control of multinationals (1987:82) all part of the larger transformation of directing development planning to meeting peoples' needs. Short-term strategies include food-for-work programmes, credit for women, and support for the informal sector (1987:85-86). Additionally, global measures should be undertaken towards restructuring the international monetary system and demilitarisation (1987:87). While for the most part I agree with the strategies outlined by Sen and Grown, they say little on how the third world is to get from their current disempowerment in the world capitalist system to asserting these demands. Perhaps the fault lies in the fact that while they have critiqued capitalism extensively in their manifesto, they do not concretely lay down (to my knowledge) the dismantling of the capitalist system as a precondition for their alternative era. Perhaps this (the dismantling of the capitalist system) can be assumed from their critique and from the fact that the strategies that they have formulated, such as the elimination of hierarchy, are incompatible with capitalism.

Samir Amin, conversely, has identified the world capitalist system as the primary detriment to the third world's development and sees "delinking" from the international order as the only way to transcend the current state of

third world disempowerment (1990a). Amin contends that:

World capitalist expansion has always had and still has a polarising effect. From the very beginning it produced and perpetuated, in a variety of forms, a contrast between centre and periphery that was immanent in actually existing capitalism. In this sense, then, the development of the periphery has always entailed a never-ending 'adjustment' to the demands and constraints of the dominant capital. The centres are 'restructured', and the peripheries are 'adjusted' to these restructurings. Never the reverse (1990b:x).

Amin's phrasing of the problem explicitly lays out the power structures and inequalities imposed on the third world by the world capitalist system under the guise of "development". It also highlights what is for me the central problematic implicated in the "development" process -- which is that development has never *primarily* been about improving the conditions in the third world, but rather about ensuring the advancement of those who control the international system (i.e. the industrialised countries of the first world). Amin argues that the only possible way out of this exploitative structure, built on destruction (1990b:x), is a complete delinking of third world countries from the international capitalist system (1990b:xii). Amin defines delinking as follows:

delinking is...the subordination of external relations to the logic of internal development....More precisely, delinking consists in refusing to submit to the demands of the globalized law of value, that is, to the alleged 'rationality' of the system of world prices that gives concrete form to the requirements of the reproduction of globalized capital. It thus assumes that society has the capacity to define for itself a different range of criteria of rationality of internal choices, in short a '*law of value that is national in scope*' (1987:xii emphasis added).

Delinking involves a reversal of power relations since the laws and policies of countries are no longer dictated by the demands of the world capitalist system but rather by the internal needs and requirements of national development. My problem with the concept of delinking is two-fold. First, it does not really challenge enlightenment ideals of progress within the national arena. Amin in fact advocates an internal "double agricultural and industrial revolution" for the "development of the productive forces and improvement of living standards of the broad masses" (1987:xvi). This idea is based in the assumption that the path followed by industrialised nations in Europe should be prescribed for the third world too. I disagree with this formulation because I believe third world nations should be given the opportunity to chalk out their own development paths. My second problem with delinking is that given the crippling debt situations in the third world, I think it is unrealistic to believe that there is any simple way to undermine the hold of international financial institutions on the third world. However, I think Amin's alternative poses some interesting possibilities which I will explore in greater detail in the next section.

HYBRIDITY: TOWARDS A GANDHIAN ALTERNATIVE

It is both unrealistic and perhaps reactionary to reject everything that modernisation offers. An alternative to development does not mean

reclaiming the past or moving back in time to embrace a former way of life.

The fact is that we cannot erase modernisation and we cannot ignore the fact that it has colonised all aspects of reality.

To espouse a Gandhian alternative does not mean the elimination of all material signs of modernisation -- industry, cars, and skyscrapers -- but to embrace a new ideological foundation and establish a new vision. It is true that Gandhi was against industrialisation and ascribed to and advocated a life of poverty. However, it is important to distinguish the philosophical underpinnings of poverty from its materiality and also to put his ideas in the political and historical context within which they were framed. Gandhi equated the term "poverty" with subsistence where people provided for themselves through manual labour and produced only what they needed to live. He is speaking in the historical context of colonial India when industrialisation and capitalism were goals for the nation rather than a reality in the making. In the 1990s it would be futile to tear down the product of almost half a century of development in India. However, the ideals of basic needs, community development and grassroots empowerment that are the foundations of the Gandhian vision can replace capital accumulation and economic growth as new goals and defining characteristics of development and progress.

Rural women in India have demanded equality and justice for all, the right over their land and work, and have struggled against modernised violence -- patriarchy, nuclear technology and class exploitation. I have demonstrated that this violence is entrenched in the modernist vision precisely because its goal is not human welfare but capital accumulation. Capital accumulation for its own sake has consistently proven to be dangerous. However, if the goal of development was to provide basic needs, and to ensure equality and justice, perhaps we could transcend the ideology of modernisation and achieve a postcolonial state based on welfare rather than greed. What is needed is a new vision and social movements in India that have embraced Gandhian ideals to provide this vision and perhaps an alternative to development.

It is important to clarify that an alternative to development cannot be premised on capitalism and cannot exist alongside capitalism. However, in the current world context, most of the third world is under crippling debt situations and have their financial policies masterminded by officials in the World Bank and IMF through Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed as part of their loan conditionalities. As such it is very difficult to strategise on an alternative to development because the question remains as to how third world countries can transcend their current state of powerlessness in the world capitalist system in order to assert their right to define their own

development priorities. In order to reinstate real democracy in the world and transcend the autocracy of Western financial institutions and governments, I would argue that it is essential for third world governments and activists all over the world to lobby for a total debt write-off. While this may seem grossly unfair to many, I still maintain that since the first world's current levels of advancement has been exploitatively built on the backs of third world countries, in a power relation established during the colonial period, that this is not too high a price for the first world to pay. Indeed it is the only way to initiate real decolonisation and hence a truly postcolonial, democratic state in the world.

Once the third world is able to throw off the shackles of international debt and the world capitalist system, I think it is possible to establish the context of freedom necessary for each country to lay out its own development agenda. This agenda should result in "the subordination of external relations to the logic of internal development" (Amin 1990s:xii). This does not mean that we should not have international trade and exchange, but that this exchange should be based on the requirements of development prioritised at the national level not in the West. Third world countries should not have to adjust their development to the demands of international capital, but rather the reverse should happen. This also does not mean the delinking that Amin advocates, since delinking is not a solution to world capitalism but a

rather dangerous isolation from it.

Development according to national priorities is not an end in itself but it lays the foundation for a more democratic system within third world nations which will allow them to pursue their own development paths. Ultimately of course it is the people themselves who will have to ensure that the government is held accountable and that their demands are met. My vision of this new era in India (for I do not believe that every country should adopt the same path of development) will not mark the end of social movements but rather their strengthening and empowerment. The government and the people should work together in a democratic system to make internal development focus on meeting basic needs first and to direct "resources...to relieve oppression" (Sen and Grown 1987:80). Economic growth should not be an end in itself but a resource for the empowerment of people through meeting their basic needs: health care, education, nutrition and housing. For it is only when these basic needs are met that India can claim to be democratic. It is this Gandhian vision of empowerment, basic needs, and community development that should direct the development of India in order to initiate the establishment of a truly postcolonial state.

In this thesis, I have addressed the need to challenge representations of women-as-other in development discourse for it is these representations that

legitimise development intervention and colonial/neocolonial power. I have shown that recasting women's histories suggests the need to transcend the colonial power structures and Enlightenment ideals that are entrenched in development discourse. It is only through this transcendence and the establishment of a new discourse based on empowerment and social justice, that we can move beyond the colonial/neocolonial power that belies and advances capitalist modernisation to achieve postcoloniality.

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