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Editors' Note

We would like to welcome V. G. Julie Rajan to the editorial staff as an Associate Editor. She has been invaluable in putting this issue together.

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A Youth Agenda in Population and Reproductive Health Programs and Policies: A Focus on India[1]

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The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo led to a paradigm shift in how the international community addresses population and development. Representatives highlighted the importance of women, acknowledging their right to make decisions about marriage and childbearing without coercion or violence. Within this framework, youths were singled out as a group whose reproductive health should be addressed. After 1994 many countries, including India, changed their approach to reproductive health, shifting their focus from statistics to people. For these countries, the needs of youths are an important part of policy and programs; yet the effectiveness of this approach remains to be seen.

This paper explores the international community's youth agenda in population and development, and examines how this can be incorporated into the development of a youth agenda in India. I argue that understanding the sexual and reproductive health behavior of youths leads to the development of effective youth reproductive health programs and interventions. India can learn from other countries' best practices in adolescent reproductive health and HIV prevention to develop a successful youth agenda. I conclude by proposing a framework for action and examining the key components for a comprehensive approach to youth reproductive health needs.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the ages of "adolescence" as between 10 and 19, "youth" between 20 and 24, and "young people" between 10 and 24 (WHO 1998, 3). Following the convention of international literature, however, I will use these terms interchangeably. Adolescence is a

[1] Many thanks to Dr. Shyam Thapa, Professor Jeremy Shiffman, and Professor Mathiason for their guidance and support.

continuum ranging from childhood to adulthood, interspersed with such phases as menarche, schooling, and marriage (Bongaarts and Cohen 1998, 99).

We often hear that reproductive health programs for youths are necessary because youths are the future, yet it is easily forgotten that these same youths are the present. In 2000, approximately 1.5 billion of the world's 6.1 billion population were between ages 10 and 24. In other words, youths constitute about 25 percent of the world's population (ESCAP 2001). About 85 percent of these live in developing countries; 717 million live in Asian and Pacific regions (ESCAP 2001). The number of adolescents in developing countries between ages 10 and 19 will grow by 600 percent between 1970 and 2025 (WHO 1997).

For most, sexual relations begin in adolescence. Unprotected sex increases the risk of unwanted pregnancy and early childbirth, as well as unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted diseases (STD), such as HIV/AIDS. Adolescents who are vulnerable to sexual abuse and who lack knowledge and skills to negotiate safer sex practices or contraceptives have a high risk of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions, and maternal mortality. In developing countries the maternal mortality of adolescent girls is twice that of older women. Worldwide more than 10 percent of births are given by women 15 to 19 years of age (WHO 1997). Each year 1 to 4.4 million adolescents undergo abortions; most are performed illegally, under hazardous circumstances.

Each year at least 1 in 20 adolescents contracts a curable STD, not including viral infections. Each day about seven thousand youths worldwide between ages 10 and 24 become HIV positive (UNAIDS 1998). Youths under age 25 contract 50 percent of new HIV infections and have high rates of other sexually transmitted diseases (WHO 1997). If these trends continue, the number of infected youths will rise from 12.4 million at present to 21.5 million by 2010 (Summers 2002, 4).

Four factors make youths vulnerable to risky behavior—lack of information and awareness, lack of health services, lack of decision-making power, and lack of resources (Salter and McCauley 1995, 7). The magnitude of the risks and problems for youths demands the attention of policy makers around the world.

In 1994 representatives at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) proposed a youth agenda to solve the problems of population and development. In what may be considered a paradigm shift, most representatives agreed to focus on individuals' reproductive health rather than on demographic targets (Pachauri 1999). This new focus was holistic, addressing such reproductive health issues as mortality, morbidity, abortions, STDs, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, gender relations, and gender-based violence. The ICPD defined reproductive health as "a state of physical,

mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive health system and to its functions and processes" (United Nations Population Division 1994).

The ICPD recognized that adolescents' reproductive health concerns had been largely ignored. Before the ICPD, a number of meetings in The Hague invited 132 youths between ages 15 and 30 from 111 nations and asked for their proposals. These youths were invited because they constitute a large proportion of the world's population and because HIV/AIDS infections are rising in this age group. During the 1994 ICPD, governments agreed to offer adolescents information and services to help them understand their sexuality and avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STI). Governments and NGOs were urged to address adolescent reproductive health issues. Benchmarks were set—by 2010 at least 95 percent of youths between ages 15 and 24 are to have access to information, education, and counseling; other services will help them develop life skills and reduce their vulnerability to HIV. By 2005, governments of the most affected countries are to reduce the rate of infection of young people by 25 percent; by 2010, this will be a worldwide target (Lewis 1999, 1).

The strategies of this "Program of Action" were as follows:

> [a]ppropriate, specific, user-friendly, and accessible services to address effectively their reproductive and sexual health needs, including reproductive health education, information, counseling, and health promotion strategies. These services should safeguard the rights of adolescents to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent, respecting their cultural values and religious beliefs and in conformity with relevant existing International Consensus Language and conventions. With due respect for the rights, duties, and responsibilities of parents and in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the adolescent, and their right to reproductive health education, information and care, and respecting their cultural values and religious beliefs, ensure that adolescents, both in and out of school, receive the necessary information, including information on prevention, education, counseling, and health services to enable them to make responsible and informed choices and decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health needs, in order to, inter alia, reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies. Sexually active adolescents will require special family planning information, counselling, and health services, as well as sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Those adolescents who become pregnant are at particular risk and will

> require special support from their families, health-care providers and the community during pregnancy, delivery, and early childcare. This support should enable these adolescents to continue their education. Programs should involve and train all who are in a position to provide guidance to adolescents concerning responsible sexual and reproductive behavior, particularly parents and families, and also communities, religious institutions, schools, the mass media, and peer groups. These policies and programs must be implemented on the basis of commitments made at the International Conference on Population and Development and in conformity with relevant existing International Consensus Language and conventions (UNFPA 1994).

The ICPD was not without internal debates and controversies. Representatives debated whether to consider abortion a component of reproductive health and a universal right. Some Catholic and Muslim countries rejected portions of the "Program of Action" that addressed adolescent sexuality, arguing that premarital sex should be excluded because it is condemned by their societies (PRB 2001). Developed countries, such as the United States, feared that providing contraceptives and information would promote sex and promiscuity among unmarried adolescents (PRB 2001). Representatives also disagreed about sex education; some argued sex education in schools should be referred to as "sexual and reproductive health education," while others—such as the Holy See (Vatican delegation), Sudan, and Libya—preferred "education about population issues." Consequently, the final text reads: "education about population and health issues, including sexual and reproductive health issues" (Klitsch 1999, 196-213). Because of these controversies, as well as ignorance about youths' reproductive and sexual needs, few countries have provided adequate health care services to adolescents or given priority to these policies.

SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

In 1997 the Policy Project studied the ICPD's effect on the health policies of eight developing countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Ghana, Jamaica, Senegal, Jordan, and Peru), evaluating six criteria—adoption of the ICPD definition, stakeholders' participation (involvement of key organizations, individuals, and ministries), stakeholders' support, setting reproductive health (RH) priorities, RH program implementation, and RH resources (see Hardee 2000, 4-6). This study found that six countries had adopted the ICPD definition; two were moving towards its adoption. India had adopted the

ICPD definition but had done little to mobilize resources (Hardee 2000, 4-6). Bangladesh had garnered the support and participation of stakeholders and mobilized resources for reproductive health programs. Nepal, on the other hand, showed little change in any criteria.

In South Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal—many births occur among adolescents between ages 15 and 19. Twenty-five to 35 percent of South Asian adolescents begin bearing children around age 17 (UNFPA 2001, 10). Early marriage, some as early as between 8 and 12 years of age, prevails throughout South Asia, ranging from 56 percent in some Indian states, to 81 percent in Bangladesh (UNICEF 2001). Adolescent sexual activity is more common among boys than girls. Knowledge about contraceptives is inadequate. Eight percent of births in Asian and Pacific countries are attributed to adolescent mothers; in South and Southwest Asian countries this proportion rises to 10.5 percent (ESCAP 2001). Due to the high proportion of youths in these countries, policy makers and program managers have turned their attention to youth issues (East West Center 2002, 57). These issues include population growth, early marriage, early childbearing, high adolescent fertility, short intervals between births, unplanned births, inadequate promotion of ARH, low use of contraceptives, low educational achievement, and gender disparity (UNFPA 2001, 3-24).

In India, adolescent reproductive health is similar to that of most South Asian countries. Of India's one billion people, 21.4 percent are between ages 10 and 19 (UNFPA 2001, 3-24). India formulated its National Population Policy 2000 in response to the recommendations of the ICPD conference. This policy gives emphasis to reproductive health rather than contraceptive targets and seeks to provide opportunities that enhance people's well-being, making them productive assets in society (Ramasubhan and Jejeebhoy 2000). This policy's section on adolescents reads as follows:

> Adolescents represent about a fifth of India's population. The needs of adolescents, including protection from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STD), have not been specifically addressed in the past. Programs should encourage delayed marriage and childbearing and education of adolescents about the risks of unprotected sex. Reproductive health services for adolescent girls and boys are especially critical in rural India, where adolescent marriage and pregnancy are widely prevalent. Their special requirements comprise information, counseling, population education, and making contraceptive services accessible and affordable, providing food supplements and nutritional services

through the ICDS, and enforcing the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1976 (UNESCAP 2000).

SEXUAL HEALTH AND NEEDS OF ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA

Behavior does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by society and culture. By understanding social and cultural contexts, we can design interventions according to specific problems and needs. Adolescents are influenced by their peers, families, partners, environment, cultural norms, community, and institutions. Jejeebhoy reviewed the major studies on adolescent fertility, reproductive health, and sexual behavior in India, discovering that adolescent fertility occurs primarily in marriage (1998).[2] When considering adolescent reproductive health in India, therefore, one must understand the status of women in traditional families and their decision-making power. Sexuality and reproductive health are neither discussed openly between parents and children nor between teachers and students. Adolescents get most information from peers, which makes tapping peer educators critical in the process.

Women are relatively powerless in most Indian families. Traditionally, part of their role is to fulfill the sexual needs of their husbands. "Contraception and family size decisions typically rest with the husband alone or in conjunction with the elder members of the family" (Jejeebhoy 1998, 1275-1290). Approximately 40 percent of women between ages 15 and 19 are married; this proportion is higher in rural areas. The birth rate among adolescents has risen from 11 percent in 1971 to 17 percent in 1993. Early pregnancies expose adolescent girls to acute health risks. A study in Andhra Pradesh found that the adolescent maternal mortality rate is twice that of women between ages 25 and 39. According to a 1995 IIPS community study, pregnancies during adolescence are more likely to involve complications than pregnancies during adulthood. Ten percent of adolescent pregnancies result in miscarriages or stillbirths. There are approximately 10 million pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers in India. Clearly, we cannot afford to neglect this group.

Although abortion is legal in India, induced abortion is more likely to take place among adolescents than among older women. At least 50 percent of adolescents seeking abortion are unmarried. In Bombay a study found that a large proportion of adolescents seeking abortion had become pregnant due

[2] Shireen Jejeebhoy reviewed both qualitative and quantitative data on sexual behavior and documented research on sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. This section is based on Jejeebhoy's article unless otherwise specified.

to rape or non-consensual sexual activity, indicating the prevalence of sexual violence against female adolescents. Eleven percent of pregnancies in Bombay were due to sexual relations with a relative. Relatives and acquaintances are the perpetrators of most non-consensual activity and sexual violence against female adolescents (Hayward 2000). Adolescents are likely to delay abortion because they fear social stigma and lack awareness of pregnancy and youth-friendly services. Such delays often result in life-threatening second-trimester abortions.

Sexual initiation for most Indian boys occurs with older women or prostitutes. According to one study, in Hyderabad 45 percent of male college students had their first sexual encounter with married women; in Gujarat 78 percent of rural male adolescents had their first sexual encounter with prostitutes (Sharma and Sharma 1995). Other studies have found that adolescents lack adequate information about sexuality and health. This ignorance is aggravated by low levels of literacy and results in misconceptions about sexuality and reproductive health. Even college students in urban areas lack proper awareness of HIV/AIDS. In India, the importance of condoms in safe sex is not widely understood. Condoms are underused, even among youths who are relatively well-educated. Sexual violence against adolescents and children also results from the belief that intercourse with a virgin cures AIDS (Manchanda 1994). Indian Policymakers have not adequately addressed STDs and HIV/AIDS among adolescents. There is little information available to adolescents and youths. HIV rates for pregnant women under age 20 in Maharashtra—where the HIV epidemic is recent—rose from 2.3 to 3.5 percent between 1994 and 1996 (UNFPA 2001, 15-24). Adolescents, as these statistics show, are an at-risk population. It is not adequate merely to target high-risk groups; we must also initiate behavioral changes among young people.

India's Policy and Program Initiatives

Before the creation of the National Population Policy 2000, a health policy drafted in 1999 designated female adolescents as a "special group" whose needs had to be recognized (UNFPA 2001, 48). India's National Youth Policy 2000 recognizes that adolescents are stakeholders and encourages them to participate in planning and policy making. This policy recommends the coordination of different levels of government and organizations, and emphasizes the importance of nutrition, education, and health. The National AIDS Policy 2000 recommends interventions in the 18 to 40 age group (UNFPA 2001, 49).

Two government programs that address the needs of adolescent girls are the informal education program and the ICDS (Integrated Child Development

Scheme). The ICDS was established to provide nutritional supplements and health education to pregnant and lactating women and to their newborn children. The ICDS now includes female adolescents, aiming to improve the nutrition of girls between ages 11 and 18 (UNFPA 2001, 53-54). It offers training in money management, mothering, and home-based skills. But this program fails to address the reproductive and sexual health concerns of adolescents.

Another step taken to address adolescents' reproductive health is to incorporate "population education" into the formal education curriculum. Population education includes gender equality and equity and adolescent reproductive health. The University Grants Commission has integrated population education into the higher education curriculum of several Indian universities and colleges (UNFPA 2001, 55-56). Population Resource Centers are responsible for curriculum development, material development, monitoring, and evaluation. The Family Planning Association addresses the health, counseling, and information needs of adolescents. Many countries in South and Southwest Asia, including India, have adopted FLE (Family Life Education) programs, health and vocational training, youth programs, and information-education-communication (IEC) activities (UNFPA 2001, 53-58). All-India Radio broadcasts programs about sexuality, personality development, and career choices (UNFPA 2001, 53-58). The Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program has expanded its services to include female adolescents. It offers such programs as maternal care, safe abortion, safe motherhood, and STD prevention and treatment. Several NGOs have programs which offer adolescents information about sexual and reproductive health through IEC materials.

India's Achievements, Challenges, and Limitations

India has adopted the ICPD definition and is, in theory, moving towards a more reproductive health approach; the full implementation of this shift, however, remains to be seen. Gauging from India's current programs, there are gaps in understanding adolescents' reproductive health needs. In most programs, adolescents are categorized with women and children, rather than recognized as a separate group with specific needs. The ICDS program, for example, was created to serve the needs of children and pregnant women; it now includes adolescents in the same program. Although the Indian government claims to be moving toward a population policy centered on reproductive health, it is still concerned with demographic targets and numbers. The National Population Policy 2000, for example, has intermediate and long-term deadlines for population stabilization (Datta and Misra 2000,

24-32). At local and district levels, health workers are still evaluated according to how many people have accepted contraceptive methods or undergone sterilization (Datta and Misra 2000, 24-32). Such indicators remain focused on targets and numbers, despite the government's supposed change in approach. Indicators such as sterilization are not feasible for adolescents.

The National AIDS Policy excludes adolescents between ages 10 and 19 and is not integrated with the National Population Policy; these are parallel and distinct policies. The Reproductive Health program—the new name of the ICPD's family planning program—is yet another program without suitable policies for HIV/AIDS and STIs. The National Youth Policy 2000 defines youths as between ages 13 and 35, but divides this category into 13 to 19 and 20 to 35 age groups (UNFPA 2001, 48-49). Although this policy properly recognizes that adolescents and youths must be included in planning and policy making, it does not explain how it will address the different concerns of the 13 to 19 and 20 to 35 age groups (UNFPA 2001, 48-49).

The lack of sexual and reproductive health programs targeting men perpetuates an incomprehensive understanding of reproductive health. The reproductive health of women and men are intertwined and should not be isolated. Gender and power relations influence reproductive and sexual health, especially in South Asian cultures such as India where importance is given to marriage and to a woman's submissiveness to her husband and her husband's family. Unsafe sexual behavior by men has negative consequences for women. The ICDS and other such government programs target adolescent girls but exclude adolescent boys. The population education program is not rigorous—although Population Resource Centers exist throughout India, little is done to monitor and evaluate whether the curriculum is taught in schools.

In India, rights and health represent other challenges to sexual and reproductive health. Policymakers and others consider these to be separate issues, and, as a result, the importance of this issue is not properly addressed and reproductive health is seen as a luxury rather than a necessity (Datta and Misra 2000, 24-32).

Indian policymakers consider gender-based violence—a violation of basic human rights—external to reproductive health. As I mentioned earlier, many unwanted pregnancies among Indian adolescents are the result of rape and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity (non-consensual activity includes molestation and other forms of non-penetrative sex as well). Because sexual violence may lead to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STDs, and HIV/AIDS, these factors should be considered together. Adolescent substance abuse is not adequately recognized as an issue related to reproductive health, even as substance abuse may increase sexual violence and at-risk behavior (WHO 1999). Although the Indian government has tried

to incorporate the international agenda into its policies and goals, it must give much more attention to adolescents' sexual and reproductive health.

FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL YOUTH AGENDA

Developing successful strategies and a successful youth agenda requires an understanding of the context. India can learn important lessons from successful programs in other countries. The following aspects of adolescent reproductive health in India will help us determine which interventions are required: a) most adolescent fertility occurs in early marriages; b) because of inadequate communication between adolescents and adults, peers are the source of most information; c) most negligent and unsafe behavior is due to a lack of awareness and information; d) the first sexual encounter of most males is with a prostitute or an older woman; for most females it is with a relative or acquaintance and is often non-consensual; e) there are gender disparities and power dynamics between wives, their husbands, and their husband's families; and f) adolescents are often socially stigmatized for seeking abortion or going to STI clinics.

The strategies of India and similar countries should follow the reproductive health issues that confront adolescents. To develop a successful youth agenda, a framework for action should be developed at macro, community, and individual levels (Finger 2002, 8-32).[3]

Policy Formulation and Implementation

At the macro level, policies institutionalize the importance of certain issues, bring about awareness, and constitute a framework for action. Policies at the national level should address non-consensual sex and sexual violence against women. These policies should reduce gender disparities and offer clinical and other services to adolescents for reproductive health and sexuality. It is critical that these policies be strictly enforced. Although such policies as the "Child Marriage Restraint Act" date back to the 1970s, they lack rigorous enforcement and implementation and fail to prevent early marriages. These policies must be communicated to grassroots workers and those who

[3] FOCUS and YouthNet (www.fhi.org/youthnet) are both USAID-funded projects. They use three strategies to improve the reproductive health of adolescents and prevent HIV/AIDS: the policy environment, the improvement of knowledge and attitudes, and the use of reproductive health services.

implement policy. The gap must be bridged between research and policy formulation and implementation. In India and in many other countries, this can be accomplished by involving implementers and practitioners in policy formulation. Representatives from government, NGOs, women's groups, and youth groups should identify the challenges and obstacles that hinder effective implementation. An approach to policy and program concerns must integrate many levels and sectors.

Improving Knowledge and Skills

Among the problems confronting Indian youths is ignorance about reproductive health. Because sex and sexuality are not openly discussed between adults and youths, most youths get information from peers. Older friends are the preferred source of information (Andrew 2003, 120-129). Peer educators can reach out to youths. Peer education should be greatly expanded in both cities and rural areas, and should involve more youth-centered organizations. Peer educators must be well-trained in necessary skills and knowledge. Because many men have their first sexual experience with prostitutes, programs should work closely with prostitutes and brothel owners. As in the program in Sonagachi, West Bengal, India, prostitutes can be trained to provide information and a support system to other prostitutes (Jana 1999, 22-24).

The use of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials has improved knowledge and awareness about sexual and reproductive health in such countries as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Brazil (Finger 2002, 15-16). IEC materials should be added to the health education curriculum. Teachers should be trained in how to teach this material without becoming embarrassed or judgmental. Many Indian schools have counselors, especially those in large cities. Counselors should be trained in how to make students who seek their help and advice comfortable. Youths can often feel helpless and isolated, especially if they cannot turn to their families for support. Schools, workplaces, and healthcare clinics should offer such youths an "alternative home."

Most boys obtain information about sex from movies, pornographic films, and magazines; most girls, on the other hand, obtain information from television (Andrew 2003, 120-129). As media has a large influence on adolescents, it must be responsible and provide accurate information. With its vast reach, media can help change the behaviors and attitudes of youths, parents, families, and the community about sexual and reproductive health. Public service announcements (PSAs) and other education campaigns can spread knowledge and awareness; these are effective tools for reaching

school-age and hard-to-reach youths. Media programs should tailor their messages to suit differences in languages and in rural and urban settings.

Because many youths in India, as in other developing countries, do not attend school, workplace programs must be implemented aggressively. Workplace programs to educate factory workers about RH and HIV/AIDS in countries such as Cambodia and Thailand have been shown to reduce risky behavior and increase the adoption of protective behaviors (Finger 2002, 15-16). In India adolescents employed in factories would benefit from such workplace programs.

Life-skills education can empower young girls by teaching them skills in negotiation, decision-making, critical thinking, and communication. It helps boys and girls relate to one another as equals and to resist peer and adult pressure. In Bangladesh young girls and boys are taught marketable skills, opening doors to employment (Finger 2002, 15-16). Life-skills training in schools can use interactive methods—such as role-playing—to teach school-age children about sexuality and protection from sexual and drug abuse. Youths can be taught skills to overcome shyness, communicate effectively, and utilize both verbal and non-verbal skills. Such training can improve self-esteem, open communication about sexuality, and teach safe sexual practices (Karim 2003, 16-22).

In addition, vocational and income-generating skills are critical if we want to build capacity, achieve sustainability, and truly empower these women.

Providing Access to Services

It is difficult to convince adolescents to use clinics because they fear discrimination and judgment. Youth-friendly services and youth centers in Ecuador, Zambia, and Zimbabwe offer a supportive environment, including access to counseling, contraceptives, and other treatment (Finger 2002, 20-24). In India such services should be offered confidentially both in and out of school, without judging or discriminating against clients. Employees in youth centers should be trained to create trust, confidentiality, and non-judgmental behavior—in other words, youth-friendly skills. Youth-friendly services and youth centers should provide counseling, contraceptives, clinical prevention, and treatment services. These services are only possible by improving the attitudes of providers and attaining the support of national governments and the international community.

Other Aspects

Youth Participation: Youths can participate as peer educators, as well as program managers, evaluators, and researchers. More youths are needed to become peer educators and serve as reliable sources of information. Youths should also be involved in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Youth participation leads to informed choices about safe reproductive health; youth involvement makes programs more relevant to the needs of young people (WHO 1999).

Gender Mainstreaming: Gender inequities throughout South Asia, including India, are reflected in the socialization of children. Girls are socialized to be submissive to men, particularly their husbands and elders. Boys are rarely taught to respect a woman's body; instead they are socialized to be aggressive and dominating. Life-skills education can help address these issues. Because many unwanted pregnancies are due to sexual coercion and physical abuse, boys and men must be included in reproductive health programs and policies designed to improve the reproductive health of girls and women (UNFPA 2002).

Scaling Up: Scaling up is a method of rapidly replicating and expanding small-scale programs (Advance Africa 2003). Scaling up is only effective for the successful portions of a program. For example, a project with sex workers in Sonagachi led to an increase in the use of condoms among sex workers (Jana 1999, 22-24). This project also increased awareness of STDs and HIV/AIDS. Scaling up programs such as the Sonagachi Project will prove effective wherever prostitution exists on a large scale. The expense of scaling up can be minimized by building upon an existing infrastructure.

Capacity Building: To determine which interventions should be undertaken prior to scaling up programs, the capacities of different state governments and regional NGOs must be assessed. Capacity building is the "process that improves the ability of a person, group, organization, or system to meet objectives or perform better" (Fond and Brown 2003). It must be emphasized in organizations that provide technical assistance and other support to organizations. An underlying aspect of capacity building is sustainability: can performance levels be maintained when external support is reduced? Initial steps for building capacity include training workshops on strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In ARH programs capacity building improves performance and longevity. This can take the form of training more youths and building partnerships in public, private, and civil societies.

Political Commitment: The elements noted are woven together by the political commitment to improve reproductive health and prevent HIV/AIDS among youths. Uganda, an often-cited success story, saw significant declines in HIV, largely because the President of Uganda spoke openly about AIDS and also because of public education campaigns by government, community, and religious organizations. In Thailand, growing political commitment should be credited to the campaigns and actions of a senator named Mechai Viravaidhya. The Thai government promoted "100 percent condom use" in brothels. Young men subsequently reduced their visits to sex workers and by 1997 the percentage of young men infected with HIV dropped to less than 3 percent (D'Agnes 2001). In Indonesia, safe motherhood rose to national prominence because of effective political entrepreneurship, widespread organizational concern, and the availability of feasible policy alternatives (Shiffman 2003). These examples demonstrate how national governments can effect change in adolescent reproductive health.

CONCLUSION

The 1994 ICPD conference was a turning point in population and development. After 1994 many countries adopted population policies focusing on reproductive health and rights rather than on numbers. Although India has adopted the ICPD definition and made progress implementing certain programs and policies, it is still far from ensuring effective programming and policy formulation and, thereafter, effective implementation and enforcement. Indian youths remain poorly informed about reproductive health, pregnancies, STDs, HIV/AIDS, and unsafe abortions. To develop effective interventions we must understand the problems and challenges that confront youths with respect to sexual and reproductive health. At the macro level, policies must take into account the needs of adolescents. At the community and individual levels, youth-friendly services must be undertaken, and knowledge and skills must be improved. Although youths are especially vulnerable to unsafe behavior, they are also receptive to learning and changing their behaviors and attitudes. Adolescents and youths are not a threat or a problem; rather, they are an opportunity.

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Creations of Myth:
Sinhala National Identity and the *Mahāvaṃsa*

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The construction of a nation depends upon the creation of a viable national identity. This identity endows the national enterprise with legitimacy, while demarcating and mobilizing those people within the nation who will be asked (or forced) to consider themselves citizens. Mythic discourse often plays a role in this process. Here I explore the use of mythic discourse in nation-building and in the construction of national identity. I suggest that mythic discourses appeal to nationalists because the identities they deploy are products of the *imaginaire*, rather than products of empirical evidence. The first step in a myth's successful utilization is a selective process of appropriation.

In this essay I hope to facilitate new critical assessments of the *Mahāvaṃsa* in Sinhala nationalist discourses. I argue that there is not a direct link between the *Mahāvaṃsa* and nationalist discourse. Instead, the *Mahāvaṃsa* is read selectively by nationalists, who use particular narrative accounts while simultaneously silencing others. Nationalist readings give primacy to a constructed national myth, which derives source material from several different texts. Because of this selectivity, nationalist accounts of history are vulnerable to criticism.

I will begin with a brief introduction to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, followed by a history of Sri Lankan ethnic communities and the Sri Lankan Civil War. Next, I will explore how and why the *Mahāvaṃsa* is appropriated by Sinhala nationalists. Finally, I will present a theoretical argument that calls for a new evaluation of the *Mahāvaṃsa* and highlights this text's capacity to challenge the claims of nationalist discourses.

THE *MAHĀVAṂSA*

The *Mahāvaṃsa* proper is a Pāli language text composed in sixth century Sri Lanka by a Buddhist monk, Mahānāma, who belonged to the conservative *Mahāvihāra* monastic community.[1] Mahānāma most likely drew material from an earlier (roughly fourth century C.E.) text, the *Dīpavaṃsa*. The *Dīpavaṃsa* appears to be the work of several authors who compiled records of the royal courts, regional events (e.g., wars, famines, and uprisings), and events involving Buddhist religious communities. In the *Mahāvaṃsa,* the *Dīpavaṃsa's* various narratives are reworked into an elegant whole. Without altering the work of the first author, later authors added new narratives to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, detailing events that occurred after the first author ended his narrative.

Later extensions were created around the twelfth century by another Buddhist monk, Dhammakitti; in the eighteenth century by the monk Tibboṭuvāvē Buddharakkhita; in the nineteenth century by two monks, Hikkaḍuvē Sumamgala and Pandit Baṭuvantuḍāvē; and in the early twentieth century by the monk Yagirala Pannananda. These extensions did not revise any of the prior text but merely began where the previous author had stopped. Each extension was written in Pāli, the language of the Theravada Buddhist textual tradition. The most recent extension was commissioned by President J. R. Jayewardene in the late twentieth century. Since this extension is distinguished from the other extensions by several qualities, I will examine it in detail subsequently.

ETHNIC CONFLICT

Sri Lanka is home to people of several different heritages. The Sinhala-speaking majority is predominantly Buddhist, but there are also Sinhala Christians of various denominations. The Tamil-speaking minority consists of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. There are also small communities of people of European descent (mainly Dutch) who trace their ancestry to colonial times. This is a rough demographic breakdown by language and religion; in fact, there are no strict divisions separating these groups.

Episodes of communal violence have occurred sporadically on the island. In 1983 such violence culminated in a civil war between the Sinhala Buddhist-

[1] I use the term "conservative" to signify the *Mahāvihāra's* preoccupation with maintaining a strictly *Theravādin* tradition of Buddhism and to distinguish it from other contemporaneous monasteries and their reported associations with monks of the *Mahāyāna* traditions.

dominated central government and the Tamil-speaking residents of the island's northern and eastern provinces. Tamil militants were led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Eelam is the name this militant group has given to the Tamil homeland, over which they desire autonomous control. The roots of this conflict are deep and complex, and there are no simple solutions to resolve it. In this context, Sinhala nationalist discourse has stoked the fires of the conflict.

As the government became increasingly aligned with Sinhala-centric policies, Tamil interests gained little political support. The infamous "Sinhala Only Act" of 1956 made Sinhala the official language of the government, effectively eliminating the Tamil language from the political arena and alienating Tamil speakers from government affairs. Other problems, such as scaling university entrance exam scores to benefit students from rural Sinhala areas, have created a rift between the two communities. The construction of a Sinhala national identity has not only contributed to these problems but in some cases has initiated them.

The identities of Sinhala-speaking Buddhist communities have been constructed, contested, and debated at least since "Sinhala" became a category of ethnic identity during the colonial period.[2] "Ethnic" refers to the tradition of human classification originated by Europeans who—influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and romanticist theories of culture such as that of Johann Gottfried Herder—believed that humans belong to distinct groups on the basis of such traits as language, religion, customs, physical characteristics, and geographical origins. Ethnicity, I argue, is solely a product of this tradition; it does not signify natural classes of human beings. Ethnicity is constructed; its usage depends on whoever makes such categorizations. Nevertheless, colonial subjects who were once classified according to this tradition have adopted the idea of ethnicity.

At the time of independence from British colonial rule, Sinhala identities had been invigorated by three main factors: a Buddhist social activist movement sparked by such leaders as Anagarika Dharmapala, an increase in vernacular educational institutions, and the implementation of ethnic discourses instigated by colonial administrators' attempts to control the island's inhabitants with systems of rigid ethnic classification. Although

[2] It is debated when Sinhala began to be applicable as a group identity. Compare R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "'The People of the Lion': The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography," in Jonathan Spencer, ed. *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. New York: Routledge, 1990 and K.N.O Dharmadasa, "The People of the Lion: Ethnic Identity, Ideology, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Ethnic Studies Report* 10, no.1 (1992): 37-59.

several historical conditions have contributed to the emergence of Sinhala ethnic identity, scholars of Sri Lanka have focused their attention on the role of the *Mahāvaṃsa*. My objective in this essay is to challenge such scholarship which over-privileges this chronicle tradition as a source of Sinhala ethnic identity and instead opens new ground for studies examining how particular individuals have, in fact, selectively constructed ethno-nationalist discourse from multiple sources.

MYTH AND HISTORY

My use of "myth" derives in part from Bruce Lincoln's genealogy of the term (Lincoln 1999). Lincoln argues that myth is ideology in narrative form. Myth is a category that can be applied to any discourse, and there is much at stake in deciding which discourse will receive the label. Describing the classical Greeks' struggles to define "*logos*" and "*mythos*," Lincoln writes: "these words, along with many others, were the sites of pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of truth" (Lincoln 1999, 18). Lincoln identifies two sites of conflict: the struggle over whose definition of *mythos* and *logos* would be authoritative, and the struggle over which types of discourse would fall into which category. In other words, the debate was over which type of discourse would hold power and which would be rendered suspect.

Modern Sinhala nationalists are in a similar situation. Nationalists have searched the past to find evidence of an enduring Sinhala ethnic community, hoping to give legitimacy to their nation-building project. They produced a narrative that recounts a long-standing community of ethnically Sinhala people on the island. They used this narrative to argue on historical grounds that these Sinhala people are the rightful rulers. Nationalists attempted to produce a defendable history of the Sinhala people, not a myth. They needed to create a narrative that would align with *logos*, rather than *mythos* (in the Platonic sense which Lincoln discusses). Why did these nationalists turn to the *Mahāvaṃsa* as a source for their narrative of Sinhala history? Was the *Mahāvaṃsa* considered history or myth?

In fact, the *Mahāvaṃsa* has been described in both ways. In 1837, George Turnour, a civil servant in the British colonial administration, published his first translation of the *Mahāvaṃsa*. Turnour believed that the *Mahāvaṃsa* was a key historical text that would make an important contribution to both Sri Lankan history and the history of the entire subcontinent. With the Bengal Asiatic Society's support, Turnour constructed a historical timeline, linking key events of the *Mahāvaṃsa* given in "Buddhist years" with Western dates produced by other forms of evidence (mainly

archaeological). Turnour spearheaded an effort to re-categorize the *Mahāvaṃsa*, a text which other scholars—particularly Edward Upham—had labeled as myth. Turnour later abandoned the use of the *Mahāvaṃsa* to construct a history of the subcontinent; nevertheless, he continued to view the text as an attempt at history. Scholars continue to support Turnour's assumption that the text is historical. For example, Jonathan Walters writes:

> . . . even though Oldenberg, Geiger, and Malalasekera claimed to be correcting Turnour's work, they were doing no more than strengthening his argument that the authors of the Pāli Vaṃsas really were protoscientific historians dressed up as medieval Sinhala monks (Walters 2002, 161).[3]

Walters suggests that such scholarship, in which the *Mahāvaṃsa* is categorized as history, has prevailed up to the present. Steven Kemper, however, relates an important event that complicates the story.

G. C. Mendis, one of Sri Lanka's first professional historians at the University of Ceylon, argued:

> [s]uch an account, however valuable, cannot be a history of any country in any modern sense. Nor can it be reconstituted, as many writers have done, by omitting what is partially factual, and by adding what has been omitted . . . . [Modern history] answers questions different, for instance, from those the author of the *Mahāvaṃsa* asked. The author of the *Mahāvaṃsa* seems to have asked the question, what lessons of permanent value can be learnt from these doings of rulers, chiefs, and craftsmen, and attached importance to them accordingly. A modern historian of Ceylon asks the question, how did the kings and chiefs manage their affairs two thousand years ago in the political, economic, and social sphere, and how have they come to do things differently afterwards. The answer to the second question cannot be based on the facts supplied to answer the first.[4]

[3] Walters also introduces an alternative approach to the *vaṃsa* literature. He sees the texts as non-historical narratives that try to explore the meritorious nature of the island's kings and monks within a paradigmatic, cyclical narrative structure modeled upon stories of the Buddha's past lives.

[4] G. C. Mendis, *Problems of Ceylon History* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries, n.d.), p.79 quoted from Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 93-94. The German philosopher Hans

After Mendis' statements were made public, "newspaper editorials denounced him, saying that his Christian loyalties stood in the way of love of country" (Kemper 1991, 94). I propose that Mendis' critics were angered by his categorization of the *Mahāvaṃsa* as inappropriate material for historical arguments. Although he did not devalorize the text, denounce its Buddhist values or deny the heroism of the kings in its stories, nevertheless his opponents believed he committed a serious offense against the nation by challenging the historicity of the *Mahāvaṃsa*.

If the *Mahāvaṃsa* is to support the national project, it must be read as history. History gives legitimacy to national identities in ways that myth cannot. Because history is rational and secular, it carries authority in the international arena. If Sri Lankan nationalists accepted Mendis' argument, their projects would lose a valuable source of legitimacy among members of the international community who reject arguments based on Buddhist morality.

The most recent extension of the *Mahāvaṃsa*—the *Mahāvaṃsa, Nūtana Yugaya*, produced under the auspices of the J. R. Jayawardene administration in 1987—is intriguing in this respect. In opposition to the previous four extensions, Buddhist monks were no longer the sole authors. In addition to a Pāli Gāthā, the Compilation Board consisting of monks who were to translate Sinhala prose into Pāli verse, Jayawardene permitted the assembly of a Compilation Board consisting of experts in such fields as arts, sciences, medicine, industry, and literature to write the extension (Kemper 1991, 183-186). Thus, by translating the text into Pāli verse, those working on the *Mahāvaṃsa, Nūtana Yugaya* project tried to maintain the appearance of tradition, despite making significant breaks from it. Although each extension differs considerably from the aims and subject matter of the previous extensions, the changes of the *Mahāvaṃsa, Nūtana Yugaya* are designed to bring the text closer to the demands of history. The employment of field-experts who had doctorates, as well as the subject matter itself, left little room for designating this extension to the *Mahāvaṃsa* tradition as myth.

The *Nūtana Yugaya* deals with secular subjects like agriculture, medicine, dance, economics, and mass media—like a list of university subjects. The

Blumenberg makes a similar argument; he contends that modern, secular history sought to overextend itself by answering questions it was not equipped to deal with. This is similar to Mendis' point: Sri Lankan historians would overextend themselves if they attempted to answer the questions of the *Mahāvaṃsa's* authors. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Translated by Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983, p. 48.

first of this extension's two chapters ends with the year 1956, the year the infamous "Sinhala Only Act" passed through Parliament. This is no coincidence. In 1956 discourses of Sinhala ethnic identity became more popularly accepted than more pluralistic discourses favoring a Sri Lankan national identity, which was inclusive of Tamil speakers of various religious traditions. Both of the major political parties (the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) adopted the policy to make the Sinhala language the nation's sole political language. One can understand the *Mahāvaṃsa's* function as history by examining the relationship between ethnicity and national politics.

ETHNICITY AND THE NATION

Ethnicity is a constructed category through which cultural and biological traits demarcate communities. Ethnicity is not a natural feature of humanity. Viranjini Munasinghe, assessing the work of B. F. Williams, writes that "ethnicity functions in three modes of abstraction, in three specific (though overlapping) discursive arenas: the lay, the political, and the academic" (Munasinghe 2001, 17-18). Utilizing Munasinghe's concept of discursive arenas, I argue that ethnicity functions only at the lay level when it has been introduced through the political level or the academic level.

Ethnicity must be introduced. People are not born with the knowledge of ethnic belonging; they must become aware of ethnicity before using it to describe their similarities and differences. Otherwise, they will not associate their group's peculiarities with ethnicity. Certain groups may have delineated themselves in similar ways prior to the introduction of ethnicity, but such groups would never identify themselves by an ethnicity before becoming aware of this peculiar concept and its associated ideas.[5] Ethnicity carries connotations and connections to other categories which can be understood only when ethnic discourse is introduced and put into practice.

According to Munasinghe, "an ethnic group acquires its significance only because it is an imagined cultural community with an organic relationship to another imagined community—the nation" (Munasinghe 2001, 24). A form of group identity may exist at the lay level which exhibits the theoretical qualifications of an ethnic group. Nevertheless, only when the concept of ethnicity is introduced to this group at the lay level and individuals are made aware that their particular groups are considered ethnicities does it become possible for them to imagine themselves as a nation. A category such as

[5] My argument here resembles that made by Munasinghe against Anthony Smith (p. 27).

ethnicity may never actually enter the lay level, nor even the political level. It may remain a tool of the anthropologist or historian. In the case of Sri Lanka, however, there is ample evidence that ethnicity has penetrated both the political and lay levels.

The construction of a nation and a national identity is related to the development of ethnic awareness. Let us think of the nation as a form of political power where consent to rule is derived from an agreement by the members of the polity to enact the citizens' will. For their rule to appear valid and legitimate, the members of the polity must show their citizens that they know what the people want and what is best for them and their interests. Politicians must offer their citizens an image of national identity, which includes and excludes certain behaviors, cultural traits, and biological traits. This allows a nation of individuals and their interests to be delineated from others. The nation-building process, therefore, must include the production of a clearly demarcated and stable national identity—achieved with respect to other ethnicities within the nation's borders. Inclusive politicians incorporate many ethnic groups into the national identity; more exclusive politicians align the national identity with only one ethnicity. At both ends of the spectrum, however, boundaries are erected.

The creation of a citizenry is important to the creation of a nation. Unlike other forms of government, in a nation, political identity is located in the "citizen." E. J. Hobsbawm, discussing the monarchies of feudal Europe, writes: "the duty of the *subject* in such regimes, other than those specifically charged with military duties, was obedience and tranquility, not loyalty or zeal" (Hobsbawm 1990, 75, *my emphasis*). In contrast, "states [nations] required a civic religion ("patriotism") all the more because they increasingly required more than passivity from their *citizens*" (Hobsbawm 1990, 85). Hobsbawm makes a crucial distinction between the passive, tranquil "subject" and the active, loyal, zealous "citizen." I suggest that Hobsbawm's categories are ideal types in the Weberian sense; many people in a nation who claim citizenship may never actively participate in or care about the nation. My point is that national leaders have invested in ways to create new subjectivities which—in contrast to those of feudal eras—call on active citizenship for such institutions as the military, schools, elections, and public works.

David Scott makes a similar distinction. Deriving his argument from Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault, he states:

> [i]f with sovereignty, the relation between ruler and ruled is such that power reaches out like an extension of the arm of the prince himself, announcing itself periodically with unambiguous ceremony, with government, governor and governed are thrown into a new and

> different relation, one that is not merely the product of the expanded capacity of the state apparatus but the emergence of a new field for producing effects of power—the new, self-regulating field of the social (Scott 1999, 38).

Scott's distinction between sovereignty and government is related to the distinction between subject and citizen mentioned earlier. People who lived in the realm of a king or a queen were subjected to a different system of rule. Because of this type of subjugation, a different identity was placed on them. As nations developed from other forms of government and as "citizen" emerged in opposition to "subject," people were confronted with developments at the social level to control and shape the formation of a new type of person: the citizen. Scott continues:

> [i]f premodern forms of power are concerned with subduing the body, with taking hold of it and directly extracting from it a useful surplus, modern power is concerned above all (though, needless to say, not exclusively) with identifying and restructuring the conditions of subject formation and action so as to oblige these to take a desired direction (Scott 1999, 152).

This is somewhat exaggerated; to manipulate their subjects, feudal societies no doubt employed discursive forms of power in addition to direct, physical force. Nevertheless, the point is well taken. The development of the nation requires political authorities to employ new methods of shaping people's behavior by presenting them with new conceptions of self—namely, as citizens with an intimate relationship to the nation.

The emergence of the citizen, therefore, deserves special attention in the processes by which nations are constructed. Munasinghe reminds us that

> the historical task for nation builders propelled into the era of Universal History was to define the "self" in the doctrine of self-determination against other structurally similar but qualitatively different selves that now posed the legitimate units of the standardized international political order (Munasinghe 2001, 32-33).

A national identity is always in competition with other types of identity. Munasinghe's point is that the other "selves" are "structurally similar" to the one created by the incipient national identity, but different in quality. The national identity not only contests identities that are structurally similar

(which could replace the national identity at the level of political authority), but also identities that confound the premises of nationhood.

According to Chakrabarty, a dominant historical narrative (History 1) works to consume all other histories (History 2) within it. In his example of the history of capital, Chakrabarty writes: "Only History 1 is the past "established" by capital, because History 1 lends itself to the reproduction of capitalist relationships," and "History 2's are thus not pasts separate from capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic" (Chakrabarty 2000, 64). If we substitute "nation" for "capital" and "nationalist" for "capitalist," the argument still holds. Chakrabarty's analysis describes how one type of hegemonic narrative competes with other narratives that do not lend themselves to the qualitative reproduction of the story told by the hegemonic narrative. At the lay level there are practices and cultural traits that can dislodge the premises of national identity. For this reason, promoters of successful discourses of national identity insert the potentially disruptive factors of human culture and history (History 2) into their own narratives. This explanation contributes to the reproduction of their own logic of the nation. As Chakrabarty notes, "'History' is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate, on behalf of the modern . . . these other collocations of memory" (Chakrabarty 2000, 37).

During the British colonial era in Sri Lanka, Sinhala ethnic identity became a site of contention. Other forms of identity had existed prior to British rule, just as non-ethnic and non-national identities persisted throughout the colonial period and to the present day.[6] The eventual hegemony of the ethnic category, however, resulted in silencing these other ways of being human (Chakrabarty's History 2); they then had to be covered over by the ethnic narrative (History 1).

In 1833, after the British government instituted the Colebrooke and Cameron reforms in Sri Lanka, a Legislative Council was established which included three Sri Lankans to be appointed by the governor. The British established the Legislative Council for two reasons relevant to this discussion: first, to legitimize their rule in the eyes of British citizens and the larger international community by claiming that a form of representation was given

[6] See Rogers 1994, where he argues that although ethnic identity was established and essentialized during the British period, other forms of identity had rivaled those developed in the colonial era. He takes issue with scholars who see the colonial period as the focal point from which to discuss forms of modern identity. In other words, while a new, hegemonic framework of identity was put in place during the colonial era, the importance of pre-colonial identity factored just as heavily in the production of, and quality of, modern Sri Lankan identities.

to the colonized subjects; and, second, to enable the British government to administer the colony better by placing a check on the governor's office.

As Ananda Wickremeratne points out, at this time "a Low Country Sinhalese, a Burgher, and a Tamil were initially appointed and the formula was retained practically till the end of the nineteenth century," but later on "as if to drive home the point and reiterate its faith in communal representation, the government created two new seats in the Legislative Council, one for the Kandyan Sinhalese, and the other for the Muslims, neither of whom had evinced interest in constitutional reform or political change" (Wickremeratne 1995, 34-35). Wickremeratne's observation highlights important aspects of ethnic identity at this time. First, Sinhala identity was not a unified, ethnic identity as it would become in the eyes of later nationalists. There was a distinction between Kandyan and Low Country Sinhalese based on characteristics that were disruptive to the creation of a solid, stable Sinhala ethnic identity. Caste was such a characteristic. The colonial era had a much greater impact on the low country than on the Kandyans. The island had been colonized by the Portuguese and the Dutch before the British, but neither had conquered the Kandyan Kingdom of the central hill country—as the British did in 1815. The Goigama caste still held strong political power in the Kandyan region, whereas other castes found economic and sometimes political opportunities in the colonized coastal areas. Even new Buddhist monastic fraternities developed in the Low Country because of exclusionary policies based on caste hierarchy. The dominant fraternity, the Siyam Nikaya, still based in Kandy, was traditionally controlled by Goigama monks. Wickremeratne notes that "the leaders of the Karawa caste [a Low Country caste] who made great economic progress under British rule challenged the political paramounty of the Goigama caste from whose ranks alone successive governors of Sri Lanka had nominated the Sinhalese member to the Legislative Council" (Wickremeratne 1995, 35). Thus, caste conflict—instigated in part by class conflict—prevented the formation of a unified Sinhala ethnic identity during the early years of the Legislative Council.

By 1924 the British had increased the number of representative seats on the Legislative Council. Of thirty-seven Sri Lankan representatives, twenty-three were elected regionally by about four percent of the population who were enfranchised under British criteria of property and education (Wickremeratne 1995, 40). Due to the 1924 Legislative Council elections, in which few Kandyans were elected to the Council, Kandyan political leaders broke away from the Ceylon National Congress, an assembly created by Sri Lankan political elites to create an independent Sri Lankan nation. Then, in 1927, the Kandyans formed the Kandyan National Assembly, which urged for

"Kandyan regional autonomy on a federal basis" (Wickremeratne 1995, 40). This also occurred seven years earlier when Tamil members of the Ceylon National Congress withdrew for similar reasons.

During the two decades before independence, being Sinhala was not necessarily a clear statement of political identity. The variety of Sinhala identities needed to be qualified (e.g., Kandyan or Low Country). In the ensuing decades independence was granted and the formation of a national Sri Lankan identity became even more urgent to politicians interested in controlling the nation. Changes at the political level led to the discourse of a unified Sinhala ethnic identity, which blurred preexistent lines of cleavage. In time this identity dominated the new national government's idea of what it meant to be Sri Lankan. Let us examine how texts like the *Mahāvaṃsa* were used by politicians to construct this new, unified Sinhala identity. From this it will become clear why some members of the Sinhala ethnic group became exclusivist in their quest for control of the nation.

HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In his study of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Steven Kemper links this text to the development of Sinhala nationalism. He is satisfied merely with describing how modern and contemporary Sinhala nationalists have viewed the *Mahāvaṃsa*; he does not discuss the forces that have shaped these views. Kemper seeks to dislodge the theoretical assumptions of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, which he believes deny non-Europeans significance in nation-building.

Both Anderson and Gellner argue that nationalisms in the post-colonial world are mere imitations of modular examples derived from the colonizers. Nationalism arrives through either the development of industry (Gellner) or the medium of print-capital (Anderson) in which events that caused the creation of nations elsewhere become models for newly independent nations. Kemper shows how colonized people and their histories have played a central role in this process.

Gellner and Anderson make valid points; the framework of nationalism has arrived in the colonial world through the colonizers. However, the processes by which post-colonial nations built their respective nations (and national identities) involve much more complicated issues than can be explained by simple reference to the skeletal framework of the bare concept of a nation. In fact, some nations may gain more inspiration from a neighboring nation's development than from a modular European example. For instance, Japanese nationalism may have shaped Indian nationalism which, in turn, influenced Sri Lankan nationalism; likewise, changes in ideas of Buddhist

identity in Southeast Asia may have influenced how Sinhala Buddhists conceived themselves in relation to their nation.[7]

Kemper provides an example of this same process whereby Sinhala people build their own national identity rather than resort to mere imitation of the colonizers. The Sinhala people of the Sri Lankan nation derived much of their national identity from their history. But Kemper ignores the relationship between the content of Sinhala national identity and the rules and framework set by the idea of a nation. Kemper only mentions the concept of "unity," claiming that

> [n]ationalism builds the civic order by claiming it was there all the while. Of course, it was not, but the instruments of nationalist practice were there, in this case in the form of a political rhetoric of righteous, unifying leadership and cultural forms such as the keeping of chronicles and attending to sacred places. If the Sri Lankan case has any larger moral, it is that the nationalist past cannot be invented arbitrarily. It is rather the product of a complex negotiation between colonial administrators, Western and local scholars, traditional intellectual elites, and the people of the place (Kemper 1991, 224).

Kemper goes on to qualify this "unity" by stating that

> [t]he modern view envisions a political order that includes people from all social classes. The women at risk are poor, but they vote. Such is the cultural expression of political circumstances. The ordinary person—rich or poor, male or female—has replaced the hero. The logic of argument is no longer the synedochic [sic] force of the hero who represents the whole, but the aggregate force of equal individuals (Kemper 1991, 225).

I believe that Kemper oversimplifies the process by which the "instruments of nationalist practice" (e.g., the heroic figures of the *Mahāvaṃsa*) become "Sinhala nationalist" instruments. He mentions only the positive consequences of Sinhala people reading a nation out of the *Mahāvaṃsa*; he claims the texts offer models of unity in which all Sri Lankan citizens can find solace and inspiration.

[7] I take this observation from correspondence with John Rogers (11/27/2003).

However, the unity created by nationalist readings of the texts is hardly ubiquitous among the Sri Lankan population. Kemper fails to mention how the use of the *Mahāvaṃsa* has been a cause of both division and unification.

The construction of a Sinhala ethnic identity demanded the construction of "others." According to Munasinghe,

> [a]lthough the elements of the ethnic situation just identified refer to forces within the group, they always presuppose the existence of the 'other'—usually, the wider society or groups within it. Each of the elements gains significance and meaning only in reference to that other (2001, 25).

The "others" read into the *Mahāvaṃsa* were the other ethnic groups of the nation, especially the Tamils. Although Kemper qualifies the theoretical assumptions of Anderson and Gellner, there is more depth to the problems he introduces. Kemper is correct that the past, and all its cultural associations, should not be excluded from discussions of Sinhala nationalism; the past has played an important role in the construction of Sinhala national identity. But this does not explain how Sinhala identity subverts the "other" (i.e., other ethnic groups and Sinhala identities).

Let us look at an example. A prominent story in the *Mahāvaṃsa* describes the victory of the Sinhala King Duṭugämunu over the Tamil King Elāra. Duṭugämunu is championed as a hero of the *sangha* (institutional Buddhism); Elāra is the dramatic foil. To Kemper, Elāra is not depicted as cruel or tyrannical; he is even lauded. Kemper writes that

> Elāra was a worthy source of justice, even treating in detail three incidents where he dispenses justice (*Mv*. 21.15-26). But Elāra is kind as well as just. His equity guarantees that sufficient rain will fall; and his kindness brings all that rain during one hour of one night each week when it will not bother people (Kemper 1991, 61).

Nationalists do not give this reading when they tell this story in their history. A pamphlet issued at the enshrinement of King Duṭugämunu's ashes in Anurādhapura in 1980 states:

> The Buddha Sāsana that [had been] established by Ven. Mahinda nine decades earlier was in decline due to un-Buddhist (*abauddhaya*) actions of the Coḷas. *Rasavāhinī* [a fourteenth-century text] states that the Coḷas of Elāra had converted the beautiful city of Anurādhapura into a graveyard. They had destroyed the vihāras and

> dāgabas. The pleasant vihāra premises were filled with dirty smelling matter. The branches of the sacred bo tree where devas and men venerated were cut. The Coḷas had used the surroundings as lavatories and latrines. Buddha images had been shattered. They lived in shrine rooms and behaved like animals. They caused indecent actions. When bhikkhus were seen, they pulled off their robes … King Duṭugämunu resolved that this should change.[8]

These citations allude to a highly selective process of textual appropriation. To historicize the processes of identity formation, we must trace moments of selection and deletion when certain groups or individuals choose one narrative over another—as was done by the writer of the pamphlet noted. Rather than take the story of Elāra and Duṭugämunu from the *Mahāvaṃsa's* account, the authors of the government pamphlet took a story from the fourteenth century *Rasavāhinī*. I suggest they chose this version because it polarizes Sinhala and Tamil identities. Nevertheless, the *Rasavāhinī*'s account not only establishes this division, but also portrays the Tamil as an antagonist.

Ernest Renan writes: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality" (Renan 1990, 11). Renan's "forgetting" can also refer to selection in the creation of national identity. Nationalists silence some past narratives and let others speak in ceremonies, pamphlets, newspapers, television, and other media. The necessity of forgetting reveals an important nationalist use of history.

In the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Sinhala nationalists found episodes of Sri Lankan past which they claimed as history. The *Mahāvaṃsa* was not the only source of history; for example, the government used another text to construct its account of King Elāra. Nationalists draw from a vast textual tradition, of which the *Mahāvaṃsa* is only a part, albeit a highly glorified one. Although nationalists may benefit from the *Mahāvaṃsa* being considered as history rather than myth, the selective process used to create a nationalist narrative leads to a national identity. The selective process gives this identity—in Max Weber's terminology—a specific "culture" mission (Weber 1994).

[8] *Duṭugämunumaharajatumā* (Colombo: Sri Lanka Government Press, 1980) pp. 27-28, cited in Kemper, p. 130 (brackets in citation).

CONCLUSIONS

When Sinhala nationalists use mythic discourse to create a national identity, they first categorize such myths as history. This gives legitimacy to their constructed Sinhala identity in the eyes of both the international community and the individuals they desire as citizens. The process by which myths are used to produce national identity draws selectively from several sources. We must examine how such identities penetrate the lay level of discourse and affect people outside of the political arena.

In contemporary Sinhala nationalist discourses, the *Mahāvaṃsa* contributes to the creation of Sinhala identity; but it is only one factor. Parts of the *Mahāvaṃsa* need to be selectively replaced by narratives from other sources and forgotten. Scholars could unmask these national identities as mythical constructs. The textual tradition offers what Chakrabarty refers to as History 2—histories which subvert the hegemony asserted by the nationalist project.

The post-modernist legacy has made scholars afraid to intervene in the traditions they study. I argue against the tendency to privilege a nationalist's historical interpretation. Unlike those at the lay or political level, scholars can point out the existence of alternative discourses.

Approaching a Sinhala village with this critical perspective does not mean that a scholar should distort the culture. Instead, the scholar may examine the culture in order to uncover History 2, other ways in which the people live and other ways that people interpret their textual traditions. Members of nationalist regimes create and support their own national identity and highlight certain narratives and certain ways of being citizens. The scholar has the ability to challenge and understand those aspects of a culture that may be hidden by biases of nationalist projects.

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The *Femina* Mystique: Reading Inconsistencies in India's Most Popular Women's Magazine

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When *Femina* was first published in Bombay in 1959, the tradition of women's magazines in North India was already well established. What set *Femina* apart from the earlier history of "suitable" literature for newly literate women was its self-portrayal as a magazine for the "independent" woman—the "woman of substance" (current website: http//femina.indiatimes.com). On the letters to the editor pages in these early decades of publication, readers describe it as "not a mere knitting and cooking manual" (March 25, 1977, p. 5). Rather, it is the one magazine "worth a woman's name" (March 11, 1977, p. 5). The responses to these letters develop the claim that the magazine calls for and aids in the creation of equal rights empowering identities for women, in part by tackling controversial issues dealing with women's education, reproductive health, and the lives of career women. Its target audience was, more or less, what it is today—English-educated, middle-to-upper class urban women who are married with two or three children and who possibly have a career as well.

In many cases, articles and short stories demonstrate the claims made by the magazine. The magazine presents such topics as violence against women, the new reality of single career women, and women's education in ways that might encourage discussion or introspection. In these issues it seems that the magazine presents the ideal of an informed woman who questions and challenges herself and those around her, a woman fighting for equality within socially sanctioned roles for women. This ideal certainly fits *Femina*'s portrayal of itself. However, in the course of my research I encountered many examples—generally of entire issues and not merely singular articles or short stories—that seem to contrast this portrayal and that establish a very different ideal woman. This paper addresses these exceptions and, thereby, explores a divergent dialog.

The issues explored in this analysis were published throughout the late 1960's and the 1970's, during the first two decades of publication. The ideal

woman depicted in the pages of articles and advertisements in those issues raises bright and well-behaved children, domestically pleases her husband, entertains his business partners and their guests with ease and finesse, keeps abreast of (but does not challenge) changes in inheritance laws and local and national elections, and makes informed choices from a host of products touted as "international," which will benefit her family's health and happiness—all while wearing the latest fashion of *sari* and sipping Nescafé. It seems a picture similar to the ideal family-oriented, product-consuming woman described in contemporary women's magazines in England and America, one that is not divorced from the ideal mentioned earlier—they too, in part, suggest a woman interested in domesticity and commodity consumption. My point is that the challenging, questioning woman found in other issues, who fits so well within the self-representation of *Femina,* is missing from these scenarios. I suggest that these particular issues of *Femina* were in fact less about the actual lives and concerns of women—even in the idealistic sense of "woman" generally found in magazines—and were more about the concerns and aspirations of the middle-to-upper classes as a whole.

With attention to tone, particularly to the overwhelming use of the male point of view, one can read these particular issues of *Femina* in terms of representations concerning class—not gender—aspirations and concerns. Taking literature for women as a symbol, in the same way that women's bodies became a symbol in colonial *sati* and child marriage discourses in North India, I further propose that these early *Femina* issues may reflect more the aspirations of upper-class men than women.

It is impossible to make these claims without contextualizing the emergence of *Femina* first within the research concerning woman's magazines in general and second within the history of women's magazines in North India. There is much research on women's magazines in England, from the late eighteenth century to the present, and I rely particularly on this. In some feminist activist literature, magazines have been called oppressive, despite claims that they represent the only chance for a strictly female-based form of mass culture (Wolf 1990, 76). Alternately, magazines are called the perpetuators of a cult centered on churning out "eager-to-please women" (Ferguson 1982, *en passim*).

Unlike activist-oriented critiques, approaches that are more academic in nature identify several main characteristics of woman's magazines across time periods, three of which are explored subsequently.

First, femininity in magazines is fractured—magazines present it as both an assumed, basic quality in its readers and as something desirable that must be achieved—and this goal can be achieved with the aid of the magazine (Beetham 1996, ix). Femininity is thus at once presented as both natural and

as the result of much deliberation and effort. Magazines generally address women who are interested in nurturing and caring for children and family, in maintaining an efficient and supportive home environment, and in looking attractive—but who also require the lifestyle advice, homecare tips, fashions, and beauty products found on the magazine's pages in order to achieve that identity. The magazine presents and addresses this gap between woman's reality and her ideal (Ballaster et al. 1991, 11). Thus, magazines present, through advertisements and lifestyle articles, not only a singular product but also an entire lifestyle in order to "help women to" bridge this gap (Maitrayee 2000, 268).

The second feature of magazines lies in their ability to promote a community of readers—on the pages through dialogue, letters to the editor, and advice columns, and beyond them through the physical sharing or discussing of each issue of the magazine between friends and family (Beetham 1996, 2 and 20). That community of readers is also assumed, as magazines address what are deemed the shared experiences of women—which are often centered on the domestic sphere (Ballaster et al. 1991, 8). Letters to the editor might ignite responses from other readers, and the discussion may continue for many issues (as did the infamous corset controversy in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in the 1860's [Beetham 1996, 81-83]). Through that medium, readers might attack or praise articles only to suffer attacks or garner praise themselves in subsequent issues, creating a sense of continuity between sequential issues. The establishment of a shared body of literature occurs also between friends and family readers of the magazine by word of mouth. This is reflected by the fact that it is notoriously difficult to establish readership of magazines, as many are circulated to other readers by the individuals who themselves have purchased and recommended them.

Third, as Beetham suggests, magazines offer a variety of viewpoints and the possibility for diverse readings, making them open to interpretation (Beetham 1996, 11-12), and thus possibly less repressive than the aforementioned researchers believe. Multiple writers, diverse topics, reader response, and possible authorship of articles help to create this dynamic. A thorough investigation of *Femina* entails an exploration employing these points of discussion.

Although the history of the establishment of women's magazines in North India, beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, shares some characteristics inherent in Western countries such as England, it has many unique qualities relevant to the contextualization of *Femina.* The most salient feature that I will deal with here is its claim to being a "suitable" literature for newly literate, upper-class women, and as such its intent to instruct and

discuss those women without disrupting the system of patriarchy in the family and the community (Minault 1998a, 58).

In that time period, as some elite women were receiving formal education for the first time, anxiety arose over the creation of a literature that would be appropriate for them to consume. The goal of new literature, and education for women as a whole, was not to challenge the social order but rather to improve life within the existing family structure (Minault 1998a, 62). In keeping with that theme, magazine articles instructed women with tips for running an efficient household, curtailing expenses, and doing away with wasteful superstition. Pieces of short fiction contained in magazines reiterated these ideas by depicting good or bad female characters who faced the appropriate consequences for their respective actions (Minault 1998a, 100). Controversial topics were discussed—such as the practice of *purdah* and women's education—but not with the intention of creating social overhaul or establishing even greater equality for women. Mention of such issues—and indeed the general content of the magazines—was done with the goal of "improv[ing] the lot of women within the framework of patriarchy," that is, to enable mothers, wives, and daughters to have a "better deal" within the family. In short, to empower themselves within the pre-established family structure (Talwar 1999, 205). The goal of creating a "suitable" literature that would not rock the patriarchal boat is central to these early magazines. These factors are important to remember in understanding how the purported scope of *Femina* differed when it emerged from this context.

It is important to point out that men pioneered these magazines; the editors and writers were exclusively men in the earliest decades of publication. Some titles were later handed over, in part or in whole, to wives or daughters, but even then the majority of magazines published for the woman reader were subject to varying degrees of control and editing by men. Male editors might ask their wives to serve as an editor in name only, and even some articles that were presented as being penned by female authors were in reality written by a man assuming a women's penname (Minault 1998b, 207). Males also controlled whether or not their wives and daughters read the magazine at all—as leisure commodities for elites, it was men who generally purchased and brought them into the home. While I do not assume that contemporary women in India with a greater role in production would have necessarily produced a radically different magazine, initiating the magazine from a male point of view had a profound effect on its message as a whole. I will discuss that effect subsequently.

Finally, as I have implied, these earliest magazines were only available to a certain portion of the most elite classes. This was because only a portion of elite women were permitted the formal education needed to read (but not

necessarily to write), and education for women was a much-contested debate continuing throughout this period. In addition, as a leisure commodity, only those who had both enough leisure time and money were able to access and read the magazine.

We must also contextualize *Femina* in its city of origin, Bombay. I consider it here as a unique product of Bombay (Mumbai). As a hub of big business and finance, a port city, and the capital of the prolific Hindi movie industry (Bollywood), the social environment of Bombay impacts the overall makeup of *Femina* and will be instrumental later to the class, as opposed to gender, aspiration that I argue it represents. Mazzarella, in his recent book on advertising agencies in India, writes: "'Bombay' hypostatizes in one signifier the *transformative allure of modernity, both material ... and phantasmic"* (Mazzarella 2003, 179; *emphasis mine*). He goes on to quote Amrit Gangar, who writes that Bombay (I take this to mean its "transformative allure") exists throughout India in various forms (Mazzarella 2003, 179). I read this to mean that the idea and appeal of the aspirations that Bombay seems to create and to cater to exists in the minds of people throughout India—so, too, throughout the pages of *Femina.* While it is impossible to sum up briefly Bombay's exact influences on the magazine, I will attempt to present a view of the (perhaps mythic) glamour and international flavor that Bombay is often portrayed as promising by examining in brief a popular classic Hindi movie, *Shree 420.*

Appearing just four years before the first issue of *Femina*, *Shree 420* follows the struggle and ultimate triumph of the hero, Raj (played by Raj Kapoor), who comes to the city from a village life of poverty. Having lived in Bombay for only a short time, he is confronted with two lifestyle choices, represented by two women: the honest, hardworking, virtuous Vidya ("knowledge" in Hindi), and the wealthy, extravagant, sensual Maya ("illusion" or "wealth"). In Bombay we see that it is possible for Raj to come from nothing and to suddenly flirt with unimaginable wealth, social elites, and Western habits. Here he has options (characterized by women)—one of which is clearly not available in the village of his origin, but either of which is fully viable in Bombay and not elsewhere. I discuss this movie in order to show what Bombay might have meant to the people of India at the time of the emergence of *Femina*. Bombay represented in part both traditional India and modern, international living. The effect of Bollywood in *Femina'*s pages is not insignificant. This ability to choose between the options suggested by the city's "transformative allure"—choices which are not viable options for so much of India's population—is also represented in *Femina.*

I will begin my discussion of why particular issues of *Femina* address class rather than gender concerns by pointing to examples from these issues. These examples seem to suggest that these issues run contrary to *Femina*'s

purported aim, which the magazine does often fulfill. These articles, and short fiction at times, seem in fact unwelcoming, even hostile, to female readers. First off, I will mention that the contents of *Femina* in the 1960's and 1970's were written by a variety of authors—both male and female, one-time and regular writers. Often male or female authorship may be clearly discerned by the author name itself (laying aside the possibility of the use of either male or female pennames), but frequently authors (and editors) use only the initials of their names, making it impossible to determine the author's gender. Regardless of authorship, in the majority of the features the tone is the same, and I categorize it as a distinctly male point of view.

In these pieces, women, whether real or imagined, are most often described in terms of their bodies—sometimes in terms of their bodies alone—and are evaluated in terms of the shapes, attributes, or imperfections of their individual body parts. In the article, "India's 10,000 Most Beautiful Women Live in Bombay," the author details *ad naseum* the physical shortcomings of the women of other major Indian cities (January 14, 1977, 47).

Although Sita in "Seascape" is "tall and slim and fair," it is quickly pointed out that "she [physically] hadn't much else," and is therefore not a threat to the conniving female narrator who is too nasty to invite sympathy from the reader (September 4, 1970). Sita does eventually discover an artistic talent, but she is so lacking in social skills that her talent does not progress far. She is dismissed as fairly unattractive with little other redeemable qualities. Nearly one-half the paragraphs in the short story, "Come on Venus," describe the main female character, Lakshmi, in terms of her breasts, characterized as "blooming womanhood," or in terms of her statuesque figure (April 14, 1972, p. 21). In the end, Lakshmi's body is described as the "fruit which … had ripen[ed] to perfection," to the delight of her former boss, and she complies excitedly when he acts on his desires, despite his being already married and having no intention other than to engage in a physical relationship with Lakshmi. Not only fictional characters but cover models, too, are generally described in blurbs mentioning aspiration, education, and career pursuits, but also overwhelmingly relying on adjectives such as "fair skinned," "doe-eyed," and "innocently impish" (September 5, 1969, p. 2). Even on a page that highlights women's achievements around India, "Woman's World," it is common in these issues for the women featured to be described as lovely or attractive, even though their achievements are not in modeling but in social work, academia, or scientific research.

Beyond these pieces are the pages and pages of calls for contestants to be similarly rated by entering the "Miss Femina," "Miss India," or "Miss World" pageants—including one for infant girls ("Little Miss India"). *Femina* currently organizes and sponsors the Miss India pageant annually, and ex-

Miss World (1994) and current Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai began her public career as Miss Femina. Her success is taken by many to be a point of national pride (Chaudhuri 2000, 271) and is often referred to on the magazine's web page. That *Femina* has always encouraged such scrutiny and judgment of the female body and has achieved national "success stories" by doing so is something that the magazine seems to rely on, even in the issues that I claim do well to support its original aim of addressing a very opposite image of womanhood. However, in the issues I examine here, it seems that it is only the pageant (whose beauty-obsessed ideals are reiterated by the tone of fiction and articles) that offers a feasible, non-domestic option for women, not the career choices represented in these same and other issues of the magazine.

I suggest that this overt tendency to qualify and judge women in the magazine on the basis of appearance in these issues goes beyond what is typical in a women's magazine. It is valid to point out that plenty of fiction in women's magazines in general provides physical descriptions of women, and it is impossible to deny that nearly all, if not entirely all, magazine covers in the present day depict women who are generally identified as sexually attractive and often scarcely clad. That *Femina* also participates in the objectification of women is not something that deviates from the norm of women's magazines. What is unique is the reliance on the objectification of women as a key social tool (as discussed in terms of pageants) and the style of the implied male gaze that goes with it. This is similar in idea but different in manner to the male authority over the production and readership of earlier magazines. Its style is seen on one level in the practice of placing, in the accompanying illustration to an article, a man giving an approving gaze to the women who are seen wearing the fashion described in the text (August 8, 1969, p. 53).

The style is also evidenced on another, less visual level as well. Many, and I would suggest the majority, of the short stories are written from a man's point of view, often with a male narrator. This point of view not only objectifies the female characters but also marginalizes their interests and concerns. "Kings and Lovers" is written from the perspective of a husband, whose wife has just undergone a major unnamed surgery that will enable her to have children (March 11, 1977, p. 8). Given this premise, it seems logical to assume that in a woman's magazine a description of the wife's frustration at not being able to give birth, her struggle to come to terms with it, and her ultimate decision to undergo surgery would be included in the story. It is not. The story instead centers on the husband's efforts to become a writer, which are limited by his being "tied down" to a wife and a practical job. His wife acts only to thwart his attempts. Paralleling this view of women, the prostitute Gulabi in "Priorities" (March 25, 1977, p. 8) is sent to the "Home for

Fallen Women," but while there we do not hear about her struggle with her lifestyle or of her possible desire to change it; instead, we hear only of Gulabi's unquestioning desire to get back to the excitement and glamour that the men she encounters as a prostitute have to offer her. Eventually she does get back and she is all the more relieved and happy for it. We know little of the wife of Velu in "The Moment of Truth" except that she is shy, grew up in a small village, and that her husband loves her because she shares his detestation for public displays of affection and accepts his belief that birth control for women borders on sin (April 14, 1972, p. 67). The adult daughter, Sumitra, in "The Nightmare" is highly educated and wishes to delay marriage in order to start a school of her own. She needs only her father Lala's permission. The story, which is told from his perspective, finds him making a decision as the result of a nightmare, which itself is the result not of careful deliberation but of painful indigestion (September 4, 1970). After overeating at Sumitra's birthday party, Lala falls asleep and dreams that his daughter has eloped with a poor grocer. He wakes in a cold sweat at the thought of such an "unsuitable" match and immediately gives his permission for his daughter to delay marriage and establish a school. Her earlier appeals concerning her future are not taken seriously, but rather are in the hands of the whims of a man who happened to fall asleep on a full stomach. While this synopsis could be taken as satire, depicting the deplorable lot of a woman who must wait for an arbitrary decision by a man despite the fact that her own reasons are logical and sound, this is not the tone of the story. Rather, it is written to engage more sympathy for the ailing father than for the daughter whose concerns are described only briefly.

The list complied here could continue on and on; nearly every short story in these issues reads with the interests of men in mind. Even when subjects pertinent to women are introduced (childbirth, abortion and birth control practices, and education), we are left wondering how the women in the stories truly feel and indeed learn more about how the male characters react to them.

This focus on masculine views is true not only in short fiction, but in articles as well. A regular feature of these early decades, "Male Viewpoint," is a series of articles written by a man who offers anecdotes of his wife (who is referred to simply as "the wife"). These anecdotes always depict his wife's involvement in one ridiculous exploit after another; in each story, she is depicted as having to pick up the pieces of her most recent mistake only to self-righteously move on to the next. Thus, when "the wife" gets a job she racks up expenses far above her new wages in order to entertain, dress extravagantly, and arrive to work in style (February 25, 1977, p. 17). As a result, her husband must take out loans to cover her expenses. Meanwhile, the children are neglected and left with a neighbor. This sarcastic portrayal

continues when "the wife" gets a traffic ticket and must appear in court, which she dramatizes severely and blames on her husband (March 31, 1972, p. 35), when she causes a scene at the airport over a missed flight and misunderstanding on her part (May 12, 1972, p. 51), and, quite tellingly, when she visits the editorial board of *Femina* to demand that they consider writing "against men" instead of detailing the faults of women (March 17, 1972, p. 27). Based on this synopsis it could be argued that this section, "Male Viewpoint," is meant to be a gently cautionary tale. Whether it is or is not, I mention it here to point out that the tone makes it impossible for the female reader to identify with the character to which she might otherwise most naturally relate, and serves, instead, to alienate the reader from her.

This last example is the most pertinent, not only because it exemplifies the general tone of these "Male Viewpoint" articles, but because in it, the magazine in part answers my own concerns. It follows the formula, found in the other examples, of the wife who is in the end appeased, whose husband must sort out the details, and who all the while is oblivious to the reality of the situation—and we are meant to have a good laugh at her expense. By publishing an article in which a much-ridiculed woman visits the editor and demands to know why every fortnight readers laugh at her silly behavior, and not ever at that of men, it dismisses the question as silly itself. "The wife," who has hitherto never done anything insightful or even reasonable, asks a question that we are meant to take as another joke—the implication of such a question asked by such a ludicrous character can engender only one response: *of course* this article or magazine would not appear with any other scope. Her calls for a "sisterhood"—for the ("hardboiled") female employees to join with her in her opinion ("if we don't stand up for ourselves, who will?"), her subsequent struggles with the word "subjugated," adding "you are helping the men … haven't they had their way for always?" (March 17, 1972, p. 27) all, by default, fall into the realm of the ridiculous—leading the readers to buy this line of thinking as well. In this revealing half-page article, not only is the male viewpoint established, but also any grounds for questioning it are immediately rendered ridiculous.

It is crucial to point out that such views are not only present in fiction and in "Male Viewpoint" essays. They are pervasive in the magazine's articles as well. In "Are You Guilty, Madam?" ten middle-class husbands are asked to describe and criticize their wives' spending, gossiping, and child-rearing practices. After being so attacked, the wives are not called on either to defend themselves or to detail the parallel offenses of their husbands (February 25, 1977). The poem "Tribute to My Secretary" describes an attractive woman who rushes to fix the problems that her male boss creates (August 22, 1969, p. 47). In the end, the boss admits she "does indeed earn her livelihood"—she is

not simply an asset because she is an attractive woman, but it seems she works hard as well. Although the magazine is written for women, a man might often be able to more easily relate to these particular issues.

Precisely because it *is* marketed as a magazine for women, I will compare it to both women's magazines in general and to earlier women's magazines in North India. The first point, mentioned earlier, concerning women's magazines in general is that femininity within its pages is fractured. It is certainly true that at times in all issues *Femina* assumes that it understands the "femininity" of its reader—it does so when it offers tips on hair and skin care, recipes, and notices for beauty pageant contestants. I also believe that many issues as a whole during these decades clearly speak to women about an ideal woman. However, as should be clear from the examples and argument noted earlier, in the issues in question a woman reader is overwhelmingly required to read with a man's perspective. If the brand of femininity that these issues hope to sell to readers and to help them aspire to is created outside of advertisements and home-and-beauty-tip pages, it is done in a manner that belittles women and that engenders a negative reinforcement of femininity. It would be difficult for the reader to see any benefit in changing her ways, unless that benefit were to keep a low profile. This is quite different from the tone of other contemporary issues of *Femina* that allow women to question and explore issues and identities without this hostility. In these issues the fractured nature comes not from within, among the pieces within in each independent issue, but in opposition to other contemporary issues, which do exhibit the type of fractured femininity that Beetham suggests is common to women's magazines.

As for the community of readers created by magazines, we do see in *Femina* some ongoing responses to articles and to other letters to the editor. We can presume, too, that the magazines were shared with family and friends. It seems to me, however, that the tone of these particular issues is not necessarily one of community. Constant appraisal or criticism of women's bodies, short stories that center around cat fights over men ("The Favorite One," August 8, 1969, p. 59 is one such example), and the emphasis on a male point of view hardly contribute to the promotion of a community of women readers.

As to the third point, that of the possibility for diverse readings, it is true that many stories end unresolved, leaving plenty of cognitive dissonance to interpret. One might read the unresolved intentions of these stories as a means by which to create dialog, calling readers to identify or criticize them—and I believe this is true in many of the issues that do indeed fit within *Femina*'s self-portrayal. However, in the cases examined here, this freedom is cut short by other elements in the story. We could read "Moment of Truth"

(mentioned earlier) as a starting point for a dialogue about birth control for women; however, the message inherent in the tacit condemnation of a legal abortion gone wrong for one character and the second-guessing of "God's will" for another is so strong it leaves little room for debate. Likewise, although "Come on Venus" (also mentioned earlier) and the similar story, "Kunda" (March 17, 1972, p. 51), might seem to offer women the freedom to discuss prostitution or to question their ability to change their lot, the message of the plots in which the women only leave one bad situation for another and remain at the mercy of men, suggest otherwise. In short, the agency of these characters is not their own, but fashioned by a masculine-centered discourse. It seems in these issues that the reader is only encouraged to label the topic at hand as good or bad, not to explore it further—something other issues encourage. Hence the variety of viewpoints that Beetham and others describe seems to be limited.

How does *Femina* compare to earlier magazines in North India? In distinguishing them from "suitable" literature, many issues of *Femina* point to gender inequalities and call for social changes, or at least encourage the questioning of them. In stark contrast, the issues I examine here decidedly do not wish to shake up patriarchy—they only speak in the context of a revised system. Men whose wives read *Femina* are represented (often by themselves) as "enlightened" (the author of "Male Viewpoint" makes this claim, for example [February 25, 1977, p. 17]). It is assumed that these women readers will be at least somewhat educated and at least have in theory the option of having a career. However, as implied by the examples noted earlier, a wife who does silly or damnable things, such as leaving her children with a trusted neighbor while she is away at work (February 25, 1977, p. 17) or thinking too seriously about contraceptives ("Moment of Truth," April 14, 1972, p. 21), will either be ridiculed or punished. The particulars of patriarchy have changed, but the emphasis on keeping woman "in her place" is still present in these issues.

Having dealt with the presence of male writers and editors in *Femina*, which is consistent with earlier magazines, having added to the discourse concerning the presence and effects of an overwhelming male point of view, I now turn to class and education, comparing the magazine to earlier publications in India. The fact that *Femina* is printed only in English and that it drops throughout its pages references to Western writers, such as Tolstoy and Joyce, assumes, as did earlier magazines, a fairly elite education of its readership. The content is certainly not accessible to every (English-literate) woman in India. I will come to this in my later argument that the magazine is centered on class concerns.

The earlier discussion exposes not only that there is a sharp contrast between the issues I examine here and other contemporary issues of *Femina,* but that these issues go against even general characteristics of woman's magazines. Furthermore, even though they share some qualities with earlier Indian woman's magazines, they lack others that might be deemed empowering and in line with *Femina*'s purported aims (such as the fostering of community). This magazine that speaks for women's concerns—to "women of substance"—is not for all women in general. Indeed it is only for a small portion—and this portion is further cut down by the hostility found in the issues on which I focus. The magazine not only removes itself by speaking to a lifestyle to which most Indian women cannot relate, but the issues in question hardly fit the mold of a magazine for women at all. While all issues do share some elements in common with many women's magazines (i.e., advice columns, beauty tips, fashion, and recipes), I propose that these issues in fact only take on the *guise* of a women's magazine and indeed do stand for something different. Not only do they undermine a dialogue of gendered concerns, but they also go against the examples of *Femina* issues that in fact advance the magazine's declared aims.

I propose that behind this guise of gender identity lies class struggle. These issues become a ground on which to map the discourse of identity for the middle-to-upper classes of India. Representations of class interests are observable in most, if not all, women's magazines. But in a reverse of what is commonly seen, I argue that in these issues, which are quite frequent, *Femina's* gender dialog is secondary to that of class.

In the majority of woman's magazines, class interests can be identified both by the fact of the magazine itself (as a commodity item) and by the contents of the magazine, and these interests are secondary to those of gender. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* and by countless others, women tend to identify more with the concerns of their class status rather than with the concerns of women from different socio-economic levels, despite their shared "woman-ness." Class and the amount of disposable income became important factors in speaking and relating to readers, particularly as magazine revenues came to be derived more and more from advertising (Beetham 1996, *en passim*).

Woman's magazines can be considered as a way to talk about class. But the issues of *Femina* that I look at here go beyond this; class becomes the focus, rather than the background. We see this in the way that the ideal woman is presented, when she is presented, as lacking the questioning and challenging that is part of the ideal woman of other issues. The ideal here places a woman within a very different context, related almost always to the concerns and aspirations of her husband. It defines her not by her own career

or reflections on the world (in short, by her own agency as an individual) but by her relationship with her husband; consequently, we hear more about what he thinks of her than how she feels, relegating her decisions to his masculine propensities. Perhaps influenced by the "transformative allure" of Bombay, these issues reflect the promise of glamour, Western influence, and international flare, but with a tone that is hostile to or that excludes women. It is my contention that if these issues are about women at all, they are about women who will come to represent the sought-after upper-class lifestyle by buying what is required (with her husband's income)—and if she is frivolous with money, she may be ridiculed, but all the better (as long as the family is not neglected), as it shows that her husband can afford it. Similarly, these women are not unlike those in the earlier "suitable" literature whose efforts more or less compliment or feed into the aspirations of her husband—the ideal woman giving a nod to modernity and upper-class lifestyle while benefiting, but not interfering with, her husband's career or non-family concerns.

In short, the ideal qualities represented all complement and complete her husband's social position without much independent worth of their own. The reader of *Femina* is here represented as are the two women in *Shree 420*—they are important because of the social meaning they can provide in regards to the hero. The choice that Raj makes decides not only his marital partner but the entire lifestyle that she will bring to him. Likewise the ideal woman of these issues of *Femina* provides only what is deemed a desirable lifestyle choice for her husband. This is inconsistent with *Femina*'s purported aim; these issues indeed read more like a man's dialogue of concerns than a woman's. It is the man who has ultimate agency in deciding whether his wife and the lifestyle she represents are appropriate to his needs.

Not only are these issues simply inconsistent with other issues, but in the manner of their being so, this literature for women takes a troubling turn. It begins to look a lot like the discourse for identity that took place on the grounds of women's bodies during the *sati* and widow remarriage debates of nineteenth century British Raj. In this debate, however, a guise was assumed and a battle fought that (undeniably) had to do with women, but it would be a mistake to assume that the struggle was fought for the woman's benefit. The debates actually impede progress for women by sensationalizing concerns that only directly affect a minority instead of focusing on other, more common concerns of all women (such as alcoholism of the husband, domestic abuse, and police violence). Similarly, issues of identity and class aspiration that are not necessarily central to women—which in fact shift the focus from issues that are—appear in what is portrayed in *Femina* as purely female literature. Women (and their literature) become a mask for class struggle, grounds for a different battle—a class struggle that did not completely concern them and

that consigned their concerns to the background. An arena purportedly focused on women to some degree has only served to marginalize them.

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Chittrovanu Mazumdar:
Art Confronts Violence, Violence Confronts Art

HELEN ASQUINE FAZIO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CENSURE AND CENSOR

Increasingly, in the decade preceding India's celebration of fifty years of independence from the Raj, India's modern artists and writers began to take stock by creating works that both refer to India's ancient history and critically assess the quality of the still new nation and its developments. The wealth of Indian fiction was so abundant that the 1997 June 23 & July 30 double issue of *The New Yorker* magazine was dedicated to Indian fiction. Salman Rushdie, as keynote speaker for the issue, commented, "Fifty years after India's independence…. India's writers have torn up the old map and are busily drawing their own" (Rushdie 1997, 61). In that article, Rushdie was an apologist for the use of English in much of the new fiction, but he had mercifully given up apologizing for *The Satanic Verses* (1989), the Indian-English, magical realist work that precipitated Rushdie's rise to international status and cult stardom and that also sent him into hiding for almost a decade. The association of Rushdie with transgression, righteous or otherwise, has been both very bad for the author, and also very, very good—very bad in the first years after the *fatwa* since Rushdie himself went into hiding, and very good for name recognition and book sales. As author Shashi Tharoor said, "We [Indian authors] are all at his feet" (Interview, 1996), although one prefers to think that Tharoor was referring to Rushdie's successful creation of hybrid styles, not his calling attention to Indian fiction by becoming the object of death threats.

Rushdie is not the only Indian writer or artist who has offended the conservative critics. Indeed, there is a history of censure for artistic social critics in India that is both absolute and, at times, violent. One of the first to be censored in the modern period was Aubrey Menen, the gay Irish-Indian or Indo-Irish writer. The choice of terms depends upon which country is laying claim to his wit at a given moment. In 1953, Menen's *Rama Retold* was banned in India immediately after it was published. It is still banned for re-issuance as well as importation into India to this day. *Rama Retold* was subsequently published in 1954 in both the United Kingdom and the United

States, where it was hailed as a delightful book, but it was totally misunderstood. Critics thought this rationalist retelling of *The Ramayana* was the actual story of the epic itself. In a *World Book* article about recommended new fiction of 1954, the author calls Menen's shocking and brilliant little book, "a witty retelling of a Brahmin legend…" completely missing Menen's critical points. What Menen had done was revisit the plot of *The Ramayana*, but he humorously recast Rama, Sita, and Laxmana as ordinary people dealing with extraordinary stresses in practical ways. Insofar as Rama is the incarnate Vishnu, Menen's characterizations made Rama fallible on many counts; because Menen had transgressed upon sacred material his books were banned by a decision that appealed to fundamentalist Hindu groups. So banning in India and a complete lack of understanding in the West of the ways Menen was using *The Ramayana* subtextually, effectively obscured Menen's book and he was not as lucky as Rushdie, for Menen's social criticism was squelched and infamy did not help him to become famous. India could not tolerate him and the world at large in 1954 was not yet ready for him.

Magbool Fida Husain, one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists, was famous before painting his Hindu goddess series in 1996. Husain's "nude goddess series" consists of colorful, abstract silhouettes of three Hindu goddesses: Laxmi, Sita, and Sarasvati. Husain, a Muslim, is an eclectic senior artist who, throughout his career, has painted many subjects from non-Islamic cultural traditions—Hindu, Christian, and secular. He was the victim of a conservative *hindutva* vendetta in 1996 that culminated in an attack on the "nude goddess series" being shown in an Ahmedabad gallery and brought him under indictment (Guha-Thakurta 1999, 157). In Madhya Pradesh, Husain faced lawsuits from various community members who were affiliated with fundamentalist political movements (Sen 1996, 5). A conservative Hindu periodical, *Vichar Mimansa*, published an article by Om Nagpal; the article came to the attention of the then Shiv Sena conservative Hindu political party leader, who was also the Maharastran Minister of Culture. The minister brought Husain to court (Swami 1998, 27). Online, some of the South Asian chat rooms revealed an alarmingly raw public reaction that reflected the warmth of the immediate onslaught. One Hindu high school student living in Dubai wrote: "I think we should have draw [sic] Allah in the nude… then we would be justified" (Vyas 1996).

It is doubtful that the online activist could have actually seen the paintings he was ranting against. His comments, however, point toward the public memory of the conservative reaction to Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. That the goddesses were nude was not the inspiration for the outrage. The material evidence of representation throughout the history of Hindu art in India is clear testimony to the use of the idealized nude for sacred images.

The Hindu conservative political agenda was deliberately reacting similarly to the Muslim conservative reaction to *The Satanic Verses*, not in defense of Rushdie, but in a calibrated counter-reaction that aimed to say that sacred Hindu goddesses were not to be subject matter for Muslim artists.

The offenses are not parallel. Rushdie offended Muslim conservatives because he was said to call the wives of Mohammed the Prophet whores. In reality, he criticized the Ayatollah Khomeini, characterizing him as both anti-progressive and anti-woman. So Rushdie's problems lie within the community of Islam. The outrage over Husain's depicting of Hindu goddesses actually gathers its momentum from the history of the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 when "saffron activists," people under the influence of a branch of the Bharata Janata Party, destroyed a mosque allegedly built upon the birthplace of Rama, the hero-god incarnate of *The Ramayana* (Sharma 2001, 48). To bring the crisis to a temporary close, the Indian art community came to Husain's defense. Eventually the heated debate simmered down and the paintings, which had not been damaged beyond repair, found themselves buyers.

These tales of infamy share one significant element. Each alleged transgressor—Rushdie, Menen, and Husain—stepped over the line of artistic license and trod critically on sacred, mythical ground. Because Rushdie put fictional fantasy wives—*not* characterizations of the real, historical wives—of the Prophet in a whorehouse and because he conflated the Ayatollah Khomeini's battle against progress with an epic battle between the pre-Islamic goddess Al-Lat and an evil Iman, he was seen as having besmirched figures of myth and religious history. Menen's big mistake, intentional or not, was that he rationalized God. Rama of *The Ramayana*, as one *avatar* of Vishnu, came to earth for a purpose, specifically to save the world from demonic destruction. Writing a text that sees Rama as an ordinary man of limited intelligence, albeit a man who possesses great survival skills, denies both Rama's perfection and his divinity. Because Husain, a Moslem, painted Hindu goddesses not at a time of tolerance and interfaith dialog, but at time of interfaith turf warfare, he was seen as having appropriated and dirtied figures that are sacred, mythical, and holy to Hindus alone.

CHITTROVANU MAZUMDAR: SOCIAL CRITIC SOCIALLY CRITICIZED

Another contemporary artist, Chittrovanu Mazumdar, has recently come under *hindutva* attack. I will describe a series of paintings of the goddess Kali done in 1996 and give an iconographic history of the references and associations the artist uses to build his message. Then I will describe how an association with

the work of Husain in 2004, and a somewhat unfortunately chosen iconography, brought Mazumdar's aggressively positive approach to feminine empowerment under attack from the same group who attacked Husain eight years earlier.

Chittrovanu Mazumdar, a resident of Kolkata, like Aubrey Menen is of mixed national parentage. His mother is French and his father, Nirode, is a Bengali artist. Mazumdar's wife is a Moslem, and this modern South Asian couple retain aspects of each heritage but also release themselves from the limitations of an orthodox adherence to any conservative tradition. Unlike Menen, Mazumdar lives his life as a Bengali, rather than as a citizen of the West (Interview, 1998). Born in 1956 in West Bengal, Mazumdar studied art at the Government College of Arts and Crafts and graduated first in his class. He became recognized very quickly with a solo exhibition in 1985 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Calcutta (Interview, 1998). This recognition is a particularly special honor and one with a certain fateful vibration, because, before Mazumdar's solo show, the last artist recognized was Magbool Fida Husain.

Mazumdar has had a history of concern for social issues, although paradoxically he seems somewhat hopeless about the effect of his advocacy work. In a 2003 interview he commented: "If Picasso's 'Guernica' couldn't stop war, can my work do any better?" (Dasgupta 2003). So Mazumdar believes art should try to criticize culture, but realizes that the message of such art can fall short. Even so, he has participated for over a decade in exhibitions with civil rights or charity fundraising themes. These include the Exhibition for the African National Congress in celebration of Nelson Mandela's birthday in 1988 in Kolkata, The Birla Academy Human Rights exhibition in 1989 in Kolkata, the Wounds Exhibition against violence in Kolkata in 1993, the Shraddha exhibition for the mentally ill of the streets in Bombay (Talwar Interview, 1996). More recently Mazumdar participated in Art for Concern, an auction held February 26-28, 2001 in Mumbai to benefit the victims of the Gujarat earthquake ("Art for Concern," 2001). Human rights, the rights of the most downtrodden of India's vast majority, and the rights of the most unprotected, clearly matter very much to Mazumdar. He is a risen star, risen enough to have his political viewpoints taken seriously, risen enough to attract attention when he participates in a charity function, and successful enough that he can afford to donate to social causes. As for disclosing his position on social issues, Mazumdar speaks obliquely. I asked him about his reaction to the 1996 outrage about M. F. Husain's nude goddess paintings. Mazumdar said he was quite familiar with the upset. He added very broadly, "My wife is a Muslim and of course we, my wife and I, hate all that repression who does and says what, women being unable to get

anywhere, artists being unable to make any headway." (Interview 1998). At the time, asking Mazumdar for a comment came to have a strange irony, which neither of us could anticipate at the time of my first 1998 interview with the artist.

Mazumdar's own goddess series from 1996 brings the viewer into confrontation with India's marginalized poor. Each of these four canvases is named "Untitled" and all are aggressive and moving paintings. There are searing whites and murky depths, crimson flows and a huge assertive brush line boldly coursing throughout. Each image brings the goddess Kālī, a figure from religion and myth, into Mazumdar's urban scrawl to look back at her audience with an accusatory glare. But no painting appears out of a vacuum. There are familial, cultural, and artistic antecedents to the Kālī series that are important to understand since their layered meanings each look out at us from Mazumdar's canvasses.

Mazumdar, living in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, is a resident of the high holy seat of goddess worship in India. His father, Nirode Mazumdar, specializes in depictions of Kālī and he is well known for his pen and ink illustrations for a volume of devotional poetry by Rāmprasād Sen, the famous Kālī *bhaka* who lived between 1718 and 1775. The book, *Song for Kālī: A Cycle of Images and Songs: Nirode Mazumdar Inspired by Ram Proshad* (2000), is a collaboration between Nirode and Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak, who translated the poems into English (Marguerite Mazumdar 2000, 27). I asked Chittrovanu why he himself painted Kālī images and what is his relationship with Kālī as subject; is he following in his father's thematic footsteps? Mazumdar replied that the Kālī images are self-portraits. "Didn't you see my face in those paintings?" he asked (Interview, 1998). His puckish comment has deeper resonances for a Kolkata artist, especially. Probing further, I discovered Mazumdar feels that everything he paints is a self-portrait, since his paintings come from his own inner self and appear through his hand and brush on the canvas

When Mazumdar says that the imagesof Kālī are images of himself, he is speaking in a manner that is consistent with the traditional worship of Kālī, in which the devotee identifies literally with the Goddess. Becoming Kālī is a religious tradition, but *being* Kālī evokes perilous confrontations. In his film *Devi* (1960), Satyajit Ray created an evocative and frightening story of a young wife who is persuaded by her excessively religious father-in-law that she is the human avatar of Kālī. Initially resistant, the woman comes to cooperate in his fantasy. In a more pleasant way, Rabinindranath Tagore wrote a story for children in which a brave young girl dresses up as Kālī to extort *dakshina* money from a group of dangerous bandits (Tagore 2002, 206). Being in Kālī's clothes makes the girl brave enough to stand up to them and to

succeed in terrifying them with her sword. In the tradition of Kālī worship, men also are often called to become Kālī through dress. In Mutiyēttu, a Keralan form of ritual theater, only high-caste men dress up as Kālī to enact an annual recreation of the Goddess' fight with the Buffalo Demon. Women never act in Mutiyēttu and thus only cross-dressing men may become the Kālī (Kripal 2003, 208). In Madhya Pradesh, male mediums participate in a ritual of being possessed by Kālī to the extent that they become, temporarily, dangerous and ferocious incarnations of the goddess. They dress like her, and are adorned, adored, and worshiped for a time before they again resume their mundane identities (Mallebrein 1999, 142 and 148.) The reason for being Kālī as part of a community religious ritual is in order to honor her and to cause her to exist for a time in the world. Individual Kālī *bhaktis* have attested to a complex relationship associated with becoming dressed as Kālī. If Mazumdar sees himself as Kālī, then he has come to speak as he thinks Kālī will speak as an advocate for the poor.

Who, then, is Kālī, and how does she function for Mazumdar? She is the patron goddess of Hindu Bengal and a protective goddess throughout India (Gupta 2003, 60). Plate 1 is a copy of a souvenir *murti*, which depicts a photograph of the Kālī enshrined in the temple in Dakineshwar.[1] Kālī can be depicted as a thin, ferocious, and many armed woman, nude but decorated with skulls and bones and dancing on the prostrate Shiva, or she can be depicted as a distillation of her salient attributes: red eyes, red mouth with lolling tongue, and dark body. In the case of the Dakineshwar icon, Kālī s body is a dark solid stone. As one of the manifestations of *Sri*, or *Devi*, which is a generalized term for "goddess," Kālī is also a specific goddess personality with myths and legends associated with her alone. Her name also means "time," and through this title she becomes a kind of inevitable *alpha* and *omega* for origins and destinations. Never seen in the traditional posture of tame and helpful wife to a corresponding god, she is considered to be a single mother to her devotees, no matter how typically non-maternal her presentation may seem. In a conflict she is invincible, as described in the "Sauptikaparvan" chapter of *The Mahābhārata* Kālī appears as a spontaneously combusting by-product of the fusion of revengeful Aśvatthāman, son of Drona, and Shiva:

> Then, chanting, there appeared before them a black-skinned
> Woman, the Night of all-destroying Time,

[1] All images appear in print in black-and-white. The full color images are available in the .pdf file of this article on the *Sagar* website: http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic/pages/sagar/index.html.

> Whose mouth and eyes were the colour of blood,
> Whose garlands and unguents were just as crimson,
> Who wore a single blood-dyed garment, and
> Held in her hand a noose.
> They saw horses,
> Elephants, and men, bound by terrible cords,
> Driven by her as she carried away
> All kinds of hairless spirits, roped together
> With the great warriors, divested of their arms (*Sauptikaparvan* 1998, 64-5).

As life itself is almost always unfair and arbitrary, Kālī herself can be both. As life begins and ends with difficult and mysterious passages from darkness to light and back again from light to darkness, so Kālī is both of those portals. Kālī presides over everything that happens, the good and the terrible, as an all-encompassing reality.

But it is more often the bad or the terrible that is Kālī's domain. Kālī's world is the arbitrary and pain-filled world of her devotees. She has no sacred mountain abode like Parvati, no shimmering lake like Laxmi. She is found in the ashes of the world. Here is Anita Desai's description of a Calcutta street singer of *bhajan* (devotional songs) to Kālī from her *Voices in the City* (1965):

> The harmonium player…circled the ring that the onlookers had formed…flinging large, beseeching gestures…. the face was that of the Eternal Mother, the Earth Mother, a face ravaged by the most unbearable emotions of woman, darkened and flayed and scarred …. On what ground did those emotions rain their fire?… On building the funeral pyres of her own children? On her worship of the goddess Kali? This woman had slit throats and drained blood into her cupped hands. She had bathed and soaked in the sweat of lust…. Her spectators shook their heads in an excess of understanding…. (236-7 *passim*).

To worship Kālī is to accept the disillusionment, the harsh doom of being incarnate in the world, and to embrace it, because only through surviving the world can her devotees leave it behind. Jeffrey J. Kripal, author of several articles and editor of an anthology on Kālī, discusses coming to terms with the fierce goddess. In the course of his theological training, Kripal came to study and understand Kali and he points out that her extreme presentation is best understood "*by not looking away*" (Kripal's italics). She presents a kind of

Plate 1: Kālī Murti (Author's collection.)

truth that needs to be seen and needs to be internalized (Kripal 2000, 250). Mazumdar's Kālī images from the 1996 series arrest the spectator's gallery-sweeping gaze and they look back, challenging the viewer to dare to try to look away.

When I asked Mazumdar what the historical inspiration for his iconography was, he asked, "Have you ever been to Kālighat?" Kālighat is the location of a famous, historical Kālī Temple, originally situated along the banks of the Ganges on a stepped bank or *ghat* before the gradual build-up of silt along the riverbank changed the course of the river, distancing the temple from the actual *ghat*. (Basu Roy 1993, 5). Kālighat is also the name applied to a distinctive popular art style in painting and pottery that developed in the vicinity of the temple through the 19th century and was bought by pilgrims as a souvenir (Jain 1999, 9). Originally, British and Anglo-Indian period watercolors were models for Kālighat paintings, but as the imitation of European genre scenes took off, a style evolved that was distinctive of and indigenous to the Kālighat area (Archer 1971, 44). Some of this expression is religious and some, like the playful image in "Victim of a Charmer," (Plate 2) is secular. The secular art in the Kālighat style often depicts interesting and atypical, or even violent, power relationships between the sexes, as the charmer herself does, leading her pet man about on his leash.

In Kālighat art, the gender and power relationship themes often also expose the low and sensationalist sensibilities of the general public who came to the vicinity attracted by the dual motives of religious pilgrimage and vacation. Plate 3 is a scene from a gruesome event that actually happened in the Kālighat area in 1873. A wealthy *babu* (man of the town), Nabin, was betrayed by his wife Elokeshi with a temple priest. Nabin and Elokishi had reconciled briefly before Nabin yielded to frustration and slit her throat with a fish knife. The scandal of the murder trial was highly public; the details of easy money, domestic violence, and sex were reported episodically in local newspapers (Freitag 2001, 56-7). A play was made of the drama, and paintings of scenes from the story were circulated for years after, becoming the stock purchase of pilgrims, no matter what else they may also have picked up (Jain 1999, 127).

Powerful women, overbearing women, and women being disciplined are themes that participate in the dialog of how women are both championed and feared in the Kālighat expression (Mookerjee 1988, 91). Mazumdar's reference to an interest in Kālighat art reflects his interest in the power struggles of Indian women now. The problematized feminine element of Kālighat art becomes an expression of the wife or mistress of that time who had decided to take her life into her own hands in spite of the peril. Stylistically, Mazumdar is not inspired by the local street art, but thematically

Plate 2: Kālighat "Victim of a Charmer" (Arts India Gallery, NY collection)

Plate 3: Kālighat "Nabin Kills Elokeshi" (Arts India Gallery, NY collection)

Kālighat art's feminine energy, aggression, and strident anger become sympathetic muses. From his own statement, it is clear that both he and his wife feel strongly about the ways that women's freedoms and mobility are limited. He associates freedoms for women with the freedom that M. F. Husain should also have in order to paint without having himself terrorized or his works vandalized. Mazumdar's Kālī paintings neither look like him, as he wryly suggested, nor follow the hallmark style of Kālighat paintings. But we will observe they do express what the artist wants to say about the poor women of India—Kālī's children, as it were.

In the 1996 series of Kālī images, Mazumdar combines his social concerns and his heritage as a Bengali Hindu painter. His Kālī images represent poor women of Bengal and India in general and these paintings appeal to the viewers to not look away. They are the eloquent visual representatives of the voice of a man who prefers not to be asked to speak. Mazumdar asks his viewers to see in his Kālī images a kind of everywoman whose status needs affirmation and whose compromised position demands rescue.

"Untitled 1" (Plate 4) is the brightest canvas of the four. Kālī appears to be coming forward out of a chalky white field. Her eyes are great dark cavities, her nose is broad with flared nostrils, and her lips are full and smudged with red. It is an almost beautiful face, but it is neither compromising nor pleasing. The plume that flows downward also suggests her red tongue. Kālī's black, empty hands, thin as spiders and strong as cords, flutter before her and reach vacuously toward us. Her nails are chalky white, suggesting encrusted clay. Black rivulets of paint suggest her streaming and blood-drenched hair. Her head is surrounded by blurred brushstrokes, as if she pulls a murky darkness in her wake. The fingers twitch forward to receive the viewer who stands before her, pulling him or her toward the blood and the dust. This is a goddess who wants and needs everything because she is very much disenfranchised and very hungry. Here, she is the *omega* only, not the *alpha*, and she pulls the spectator toward her vacuous center, like a dark star.

"Untitled 2" (Plate 5) is a more obscured Kālī, lurking intensely in a narrow, high-walled alley. She emerges, her hands push back the dust or mist or smoke, but she does not step forward. In three-quarter profile, turned to her left, her face is delicate with gaunt cheeks. Her ovoid, almost cowry-like eyes are outlined in vermilion, which also glints on her upper lip and embellishes her full lower lip. She has delicate white fangs glittering in the darkness of her open mouth. On her forehead her third eye glows like an ember in darkness. A vertical burn of red on her breast is the stylized reminder of the Kālī tongue. This Kālī has many hands, or else very agitated hands, and they gesture before her like those of an agitated beggar.

Plate 4: Chittrovanu Mazumdar "Untitled 1"
(Bose Pacia Gallery, NY collection)

Plate 5: Chittrovanu Mazumdar "Untitled 2"
(Bose Pacia Gallery, NY collection)

"Untitled 1" and "Untitled 2" are very similar. The black woman sits in her own darkness surrounded by a white field. Red washes of paint cover her, suggesting her tongue or blood. Both Kālī images look directly at the viewer with an accusatory stare.

In each image there are aspects of the feminine representation that suggest, as well as the goddess Kali, also a thin and beggarly Rajasthani laborer. This is one of the untouchable caste women who break concrete and carry rocks at construction sites and who can be found after work hours seated amid the urban refuse begging, since the daily pay is negligible. If a spectator happens accidentally to catch one of these women's eyes, and this rarely happens because the tendency is to make these laborers invisible by not really seeing them, the look in her eyes is ferocious. Accidentally locking onto the eyes of a spectator usually causes the woman to reach out her hand with the palm up. The motion asks for something, and simultaneously the motion becomes a concise expression of the circumstances of the woman's situation. She is nothing but needy. Mazumdar's "Untitled 1" and "Untitled 2" represent both goddess Kālī and the needy women of India who are neglected and relegated to the sidewalks. Mazumdar is saying that social circumstances have put Kālī in the gutter, and neglecting the poor of India is like neglecting the mother goddess of Bengal.

There is another antecedent from the art world for Mazumdar's "Untitled" 1 and 2, the famous painting by Amrita Sher-Gil, "The Child Bride" (Plate 6). Setting Sher-Gil's "The Child Bride" beside "Untitled 1" and "Untitled 2," we can see Mazumdar's work as reductions of the child's face and figure. Black, red, and white are the dominant colors in each work, with a sea of white surrounding the black and red figure in each. In each of the three paintings, the women have scarlet lips and huge, oval, staring eyes, also rimmed in red. The hands of the child reach downward and forward and the thin fingers of her dark hand are splayed, as are the arms and hands of "Untitled 2." The child's red-skirted knee creates a vertical stripe on the left side of the picture, similar to the vertical stripe of red in the left side of Mazumdar's pictures. Both "Untitled 2" and "The Child Bride" have the fleck of brightness above the upper lip.

Every formally trained modern artist in India is aware of the traditions of the famous artists of the early twentieth century. "The Child Bride" is arguably Sher-Gil's most important work and through it she expresses her very limited social consciousness—meager when compared to that of Mazumdar. Sher-Gil was a woman of middle class privilege who, as I noted earlier, returned to India after her years of art training in France to paint the poor of India. Her biographers have on record a diary entry made when she was twelve years old describing a child bride who anticipated the "cruel fate"

Plate 6: Amrita Sher-Gil "The Child Bride"
(National Gallery of Modern Art, Jaipur House, New Delhi collection)

that awaited her. The diary entry itself could hardly have been written by a twelve-year-old, unless she had an adult editor, but perhaps Sher-Gil was very precocious. She certainly was cruel, as in a letter to a friend she commented that if there were no poor in India, she would have "nothing to paint" because the poor are "strangely beautiful in their ugliness" ("Biography," 2004). "The Child Bride" is a beautiful painting. While Sher-Gil's compassion may have been slim, the painting itself conveys the fragility, youth, and poverty of the child who is being married off. She looks out to the viewer with an accusatory stare that asks to be rescued. Mazumdar surely would have been aware of Sher-Gil's motivations and career ambitions, but I think that it is the formal elements and the simple iconography that have attracted him to experiment with elements of "The Child Bride," not an identification with Sher-Gil's mission to paint the beautiful poor, but with a mission to represent the poor.

"Untitled 3" (Plate 7) is an unframed mixed media work consisting of oil painting combined with collage. It is Kālī again in the rectangles and squares of the urban setting, but perhaps this Kālī is not in India because the poster to her left is in French. On the top, the print advertises repeatedly in the redundant European fashion and on the bottom, upside down, it again advertises with the logo of a transit system. The grimy newsprint suggests the flotsam and jetsam of the urban landscape, where yesterday's messages are expendable. Newsprint transforms itself in the wind and weather into trash or fuel or bedding. This canvas is not stretched on a frame but is rather suspended from a rod at its top, making the whole work appear to be a blown piece of shabbily treated cloth, a rag with fraying edges, ripped irregularly from its frame but then abandoned to the gritty wind.

In "Untitled 3," Kālī is seated composedly wearing a tiara with a triangular ornament. The triangle is a depiction of the *yantra*, a reduced diagram of the essential structure of or a sacred symbol for the *Devi*, the Goddess in Hinduism. The triangle pointing downward represents an abstraction of the female pubic triangle and abdomen, the essentially feminine structure: belly, womb, and birth canal.

The last Kālī in the 1996 series, "Untitled 4" (Plate 8) shows Kālī's face, like a portrait bust, looking out from a black window as the smoky ether parts. A red sun floats out of the dirty swirl above her. Her oval and passive face has less of the ferocity of the other three in the series, but she appears to smolder. Her eyes squint, the lips are pressed together and pale. A slash on one cheek marks the hollow under the bone; it is a scar or maybe a mark of soot from her dirty smog-filled world. The center of her face, down her nose to her chin, is marked by a vertical red glow. In contrast to the tremendous quiet of her expression, Kālī's black hair becomes a great cloud of inky

Plate 7: Chittrovanu Mazumdar "Untitled 3"
(Bose Pacia Gallery, NY collection)

Plate 8: Chittrovanu Mazumdar "Untitled 4"
(Bose Pacia Gallery, NYcollection)

agitation, floating and billowing above her sallow and muddy face. A plumed vertical shaft of chalk white rises from the bottom of the canvas, blazing a glaring strip toward Kālī and illuminating her lower face in its glow.

All of the Kālī representations in the series show the goddess at a disadvantage. She is not rampant on the chest of Shiva, ornamented and enthroned in a sea of red *kumkum* powder with offerings before her, or seated in meditation on her tiger skin—all traditional iconographies. She is badly placed in the filth and anonymity of the city, narrowly crowded by concrete walls, choked by the heavy air. Kālī, thin and defiant and disenfranchised, becomes the poster child for the legions of poor, neglected, and starved.

Mazumdar has taken his native Bengal's most important goddess and shown that, by neglecting the social issues, she is also neglected. He has recognized the presence of the goddess in the most outcast and powerless members of the Kolkata street scene to make his socially conscious point about the issues he has always cared for throughout his career: women's rights and the status of the poor and the homeless.

Mazumdar paints for us Derrida's "new archaic violence," not the "bare hands" mutilation of body parts (Derrida 1996, 52-3), but the discarding of that which is of value in the body of a human being. Such neglect is murder in its least sanitary form. The poor for Mazumdar are not "strangely beautiful in their ugliness," as they were for Sher-Gil ("Biography"), and he does not deliberately make his neglected women appear to be beautiful. Kālī, their model self, is not beautiful. As the goddess of the outside and lonely spaces, as the goddess who is without a consort or a child, Kālī is the heroine role model for his queenly, but lowly placed, women in the "Untitled" series.

Mazumdar's artwork also was a victim of the same "new archaic violence" when, on January 29th, 2004, Bajang Dal and Hindu Parishad (both *hindutva* fundamentalist parties) henchmen stabbed and burned one of his paintings in the Garden Gallery, a private museum in Surat. The painting, which was destroyed and thus *cannot* be seen as Plate 9, was entitled "Durga" and was distinguished by being an image of another protective goddess, mythologically associated with Kālī and with Bengal. Durga, unlike Kālī, is typically depicted as a beautiful woman, riding a tiger or a lion, and brandishing weapons in her many arms to protect her followers from harm. The artist had applied a condom as collage to the picture surface. Mazumdar said he did not want to cause offence—his message was a criticism of "a certain kind of consumption," not a discredit to the goddess Durga ("Not My Painting," 2004). M. F. Husain spoke out on Mazumdar's behalf saying:

> We have a composite culture in this country and India's contemporary art is linked to that culture. That is why these people

> have to attack and try to destroy this culture, this identity (quoted in Sharma 2004).

Ironically, it was discovered that the attackers destroyed the painting because they thought it was one of M. F. Husain's, not Mazumdar's. But when it was clarified that Hussain was off the hook and it was a Hindu artist who had put the condom near Durga, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad regrouped and, thinking expediently, issued a statement through its Surat secretary: "We are against such artistic freedom. We would do whatever it takes to protect our culture" ("Art Vandals," 2004). When the destruction of Husain's brand of composite culture is the project of the culture police, the world is moving backward toward barbarism.

Mazumdar evokes mythology, the indigenous and traditional mythology of his heritage and turf, to speak up for the people who do not have voices. The actual vandals in the *hindutva* terrorist campaigns are recruited from untouchables and tribal groups who are vocationally angry over having had their rights denied by the Hindu community (Sathe 2002, 170). Their way of belonging is, yet again, to be used by the powerful above them to destroy the work of an artist who is worried about their survival. Mazumdar painted Durga, the goddess of protection from the buffalo demon, she who has all the weapons at hand, and gave her a condom. It seems a logical juxtaposition in the modern world, the world of "composite culture" that is India now, but fundamentalist movements are notoriously essentialist and reductionist.

Mazumdar has idealistic tendencies, but his images have the consciousness of a realist social critic who wants to confront problems within the fabric of his society's traditional and popular metaphors and images. For Menen, Rushdie, Husain, and Mazumdar, the self-appointed culture police succeeded in either crushing or sensationalizing the ways artists and writers criticize and construct upon traditional forms. A cartoon from India's *The Sunday Express* that accompanies an article against censorship, which came out on January 25, 2004, just four days before the attack on the Mazumdar painting, depicts a politician speaking on Republic Day. He says: "Work for 100 per cent literacy so that when we ban a book the entire nation benefits" (Chatterjee 2004). We can only hope that the seething contradictions within India's continued modernization eventually come to a truce, not only in order to allow the arts to flourish, but to ensure the continuance of public progress. We can look with somewhat tainted hope toward a truly "composite culture," neither archaic nor violent.

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Purity and Pollution: The Dalit Woman Within India's Religious Colonialism

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Dalits have been colonized as "untouchables" in India within a culture renowned for spirituality and nonviolent resistance to colonial rule. Such social segregation has imprisoned both the caste woman (when I say "caste woman" I include all the four castes, keeping in mind that the higher the caste, the more rigid the ritual obligations) and the Dalit woman. In this paper I discuss the state of the caste woman as burdened with the task of maintaining purity and the state of the Dalit woman cursed as the polluted outcaste. The binary opposition still manifested in the purity and pollution division of people will be discussed with regard to the treatment of women within a Hindu ethos.

Indian nationalism is a fascinating phenomenon, which has amalgamated political, historical, and sociological movements in constructing a nation founded solely on religious sentiments. Indian nationalism did not develop as a movement "for" any particular reason but as a movement "against" a Christian Western idiom of colonialism even as it sustained a colonialism of its own. Western colonialism to some extent challenged certain deeply entrenched characteristics of social and religious identity even though it did not dismantle a system that was in many ways congenial to its rule. Hence, the Indian social order structured on caste and gender is on a continuum with colonialism.

British rule in India thrived because of the high caste who worked in collaboration with the British in setting up a regime that would allow privileges for the select few. One of the reasons why this acquiescence turned to antagonism was the direction of British policies towards open education for all and hence open opportunities for all. The British did have their own agenda of investing in such policies, but the Indian National Congress was formed in 1875 as a counter movement to prevent this open accessibility of privileges. As Christophe Jaffrelot states, "This organization … was to a large extent set up in reaction against the British colonial state and the Christian missions" (Jaffrelot 1996, 11). Ardent Hindu national leaders could

not underestimate the progressive implications for the oppressed within such systemic allowance of privileges.

Another major reason was that the British strongly represented a Western religion that had started questioning some of the fundamentals of social practices related to the Hindu culture (Aloysius 1997, 105-106). While colonialism is subject to severe scrutiny from postcolonial writers who have claimed convenient social positions outside of India, nationalists who vehemently still practice the colonial paradigm thrive on an internally oppressive structure. If colonialism proved to be destructive to a nation's ethos, the freedom attained from such colonial power for more than half a century now is resulting in massive self-destruction due to internal strife. The two religious cultures of Hinduism and Islam have developed into strongly opposed powers claiming territorial and social identities. The bloodshed over Ayodhya in the past decade and the gory violence in Gujarat in 2002 are all manifestations of a projected fear of an inherent power in minority communities. Arundhathi Roy states that in the Gujarat violence, the economic base of an entire Muslim community, has been destroyed. All this, according to Roy, is the result of an imperialist empire in the incarnation of an "ultra-nationalist Hindu guild" (Roy, 2003). Ironically, the religious ideals of *ahimsa* or non-violence, popularized by Gandhi and revered by many as one of the most commendable values in Hinduism, is disregarded in order to protect religious identity. The apparent contradiction has developed as a reactionary process to the religious minority groups such as Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and others.

Minority religious groups in India are made up mostly of lower caste groups and Dalits for whom mass conversion strategies are political statements rather than just a religious conversion. The mass conversion to Budhism led by Babasahib Ambedkar in Nagpur on October 14, 1956, was a testimony to the rejection of an oppressive religion by the Dalit mass (Keer, 1990, 499). The conversion to Islam of a whole Hindu Dalit village in Tamilnadu near Tirunelveli in March 1981, which was followed closely by another one hundred and fifty Dalits renouncing Hinduism near Ramanathapuram in Tamilnadu, is a concrete example of such political statements claiming their human rights and freedom from an "oppressive Hinduism" (*The Hindu*, October 20, 2002). If India claims to be a secular country, then certainly the mass conversion to Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism must be viewed as a process against the denial of human dignity and social mobility within the conservatism of Hinduism. These religions seem to provide a centrality to human dignity, at least within their religious ideals and within the Indian context. Of course the gender issues and self-righteous attitudes of the fundamental expressions within these religions

are questionable because gender discrimination and caste practices have now become rampant also among Christians and Christian institutions. The militant manifestations that we now have within both Christianity and Islam do make it problematic to present them as counter movements to the developed manifestations of Hinduism. One has to mention, however, that the mass conversions that started among Dalits during colonial times continue today. While Hindu nationalists saw British power as an overarching supremacy, the Dalit mass saw British power as an external force that created viable social and economic spaces for them. The much critiqued benevolence of railways and roadways of colonialism were in fact symbols of new institutions that hired Dalits for real jobs, as opposed to their traditionally assigned jobs of dealing with bodily fluids and dead matter.

The criticism that Dalits were lured by education is irrelevant to the fact that for the first time education was made available to them. Those who proselytized freely during colonial rule were able to combine religious conversion with social and economic benefits, which was the central attraction for the Dalits. For the first time they experienced human dignity in just being heard and seen. In the late eighteenth century, the white missionaries, who symbolized power, were the first to raise their voices against caste. In the late nineteenth century, a time when upper-caste women getting education was still a fashionable new phenomenon, Dalit women could access highly advanced education in British schools in India. Dalit women could dialogically interact with British men and women while they could not with caste women and men. Such intrusions of power from the outside facilitated questioning caste as a paradigm. After independence, however, colonialism continued in Dalit colonies. Though a handful of Dalits did achieve social mobility with education and a decent job, the mass of the population, totaling to over one hundred and sixty million, continue to live in socially and economically degrading conditions (Human Rights Watch Report, 1999, 1).

Ordinances against conversion from Hinduism were implemented in the states of Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Orissa in 2002. These ordinances were efforts to stifle the potential creation of an oppositional political majority among the minority groups. It was also a clear indication of the recognition of the economic viability of Dalits within the religious structures they embrace. Radha Venkatesan—writing for *The Hindu*, a major newspaper in India—states that Tamilnadu has a history of conversion as a form of protest. She quotes Dalit activists who raise the question, "When I am not given the right to offer worship in Hindu Temples, how can the government force us to remain? First, let the government stop the exploitation by caste Hindus and then prevent exploitation by religious fundamentalists" (*The Hindu* Sunday, October 20, 2002. 17). Despite the joint efforts of leaders

from various minority groups the mentioned states have implemented these ordinances. Tamilnadu implemented it as recent as October 5, 2002. A Brahmin woman, Jayalalitha, who is strategizing a coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist political party, now rules the state. According to her ordinance, the penalty for conversion is doubled if it involves a Dalit whether converting or causing conversion. The ordinance reads:

> 3. No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.
> 4. Whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 shall, without any prejudice to civil liability, be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years and also be liable to fine which may extend to fifty thousand rupees.
> Provided that whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment of a term which may extend to four years and also be liable to a fine which may extend to one lakh rupees (Tamilnadu Government Gazette Extraordinary, 223-224).

Such ordinances are dangerous experimentations that would cause major communal clashes instigated by caste because these ordinances affect the outcastes.

Hindu nationalism was developed within a continuum constantly identifying itself against an Other identified in Islam, Dalits, British imperialism, Christianity, and modernization, in forming a binary opposition that sustained the caste paradigm of oppression.

Since Independence several movements and discourses have developed around caste as a sophisticated phenomenon rather than as a socially degrading institution. In the past decade, or more, however, writers, literary, sociological or anthropological, have engaged with the issue of caste. Arundhathi Roy is one such significant voice in India who questions the nationalist commitment to thwart a democracy. She views such a government as an "empire" devoted to destroy the Other (Roy, 2003). These Others, she says, are identified as anyone who is not Hindu. She lashes out against the lack of respect for human rights as an inherent quality within every sovereign

empire and she identifies the right-wing Hindu nationalists as one. Her efforts to involve herself in the justice issues of the tribals and Adidravidas,[1] or Dalits, has not just gained more attention for her but assures the significance of the necessity for a collective voice within the Indian nationalist regime.

The Narmada Dam project is one example of such a collective effort. Although the Indian Supreme Court approved the dam project in October 2002, the momentum gathered around the claiming of the human rights of those who are displaced by this project in Gujarat remains. The Indian Government's proposal to build over 35 large dams with the waters of Narmada has been an issue of contention since 1995. This would displace nearly half-a-million of India's poorest. Prominent figures in India including actress Shabana Azmi have been rallying around this issue of displacement done in the name of eradicating deprivation. Such rallying is an evidence of the concerted efforts of the privileged communities to focus attention on the communities who have been swept aside. These movements question the very foundations of democracy: justice and equality.

Roy's book, *The Greater Common Good*, raises the issue of self-sufficiency of the Tribal people who live on the resources of the river and the forest, now further impoverished (Roy 2000). She raises the question of whether we need development for a selective mass at the cost of a collective mass of people. This has been the traditional ploy of Hindu nationalism and the consistent pattern of caste.

M. N. Srinivas, a well-known sociologist in India, has written extensively on the concepts of caste and the effects it has perpetrated through the imposition of religious discourse. In his book *Village, Caste and Gender*, he talks about Indian nationalism as a phenomenon that involves loyalty to a particular way of thinking where caste features as a prominent element (Srinivas 2001, 128). The *Idea of India* by Sunil Khilnani exposes Brahminic strategic hoarding of wealth and education as monopolizing the country (Khilnani 1999, 19). Khilnani explains that caste as a social norm controlled literacy to the extent that the power of education was vested in one social group and education became closely tied with religion. Since religious education encompassed all forms of education, power came to be understood and practiced as exclusion of certain Others from this field of learning. According to Khilnani, this power has now come to rest as political power due to the colonial paradigm and he traces the rise of Hindutva (Hindu nation) as a

[1] *Adidravida* is a word derived from the claim of Dalits to have originated from the Dravidian race. It literally means ancient Dravidians.

communal power that started with the partition of India and Pakistan at the time of Independence.

P. Sainath, in his book, *Everybody Loves A Good Drought*, has captured the nuances of the state and federal government's strategies to include and at the same time exclude the Dalit communities from being economically viable communities (Sainath 1996). He focuses on the plight of Dalit women, whom he sees as major contributors to the Indian economy, although they go unrecognized for their skilled labor and are paid the wages for unskilled labor. He raises very crucial questions on the ploys of the government to evade accountability to mass economic injustice. As a journalist, he challenges the Indian press to expose the realities of the day-to-day struggle of the Dalits trapped within the caste paradigm. Sainath's recent photo exhibition titled "Visible Work, Invisible Women: Women and Work in Rural India" (currently traveling all over the world) is a phenomenal work capturing in vivid impregnated pictures, true stories of injustice and exploitation of Dalit women.[2] The inclusion of Dalit women in the national language of politics and economics is seen as a necessary move towards justice. This calls for a shift in ideological perceptions of the Dalit woman as the socially denigrated being as opposed to the caste woman who is also exploited but only as the embodiment of purity.

An Indian woman, a term excluding a Dalit woman, has been fixed as a signifier of purity within the Hindu tradition. Partha Chatterjee in *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question* says that nationalism created two spaces, the inner and the outer:

> Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day to day living separates the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material: the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity….The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and the woman is its representation. So one gets an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into ghar and bahir (Chatterjee 1989, 624).

[2] The photo exhibition is widely called for and reviewed by the international community. It involved over a decade of extensive traveling and intensive research on facts based on real life stories as narratives from Dalit women rather than academic statistical information.

The inner space was that of the caste woman. This was also the binary opposition of the material and the spiritual. Since India needed a nationalism that would characterize the country in terms of tradition but enable progress on the material level, it conveniently burdened the woman with maintaining the distinctive spiritual character of the country. Thus, the inner spiritual space is the domain of the caste woman and is the core of Indian nationalism. While the caste woman is the signifier of purity, the Dalit woman is the embodiment of pollution.

The maintenance of binary oppositions is essential both to Hinduism and Indian nationalism. Purity is an integral part of spirituality that is symbolized by purification rites performed at all times of worship. The elements of purity, water and fire, are used for physical cleansing as well as for cleansing of thoughts. In the *Manusmriti*, dated to circa 600 B.C. and translated as *The Laws of Manu* in 1991, it is stated: "A man is said to be pure above the navel; therefore the Self-existent one said that his mouth was the purest part of him. The priest (Brahmin) is the Lord of this whole creation according to the law, because he was born of the highest part of the body, because he is the eldest, and because he maintains the Veda" (*Manusmriti* 1:92).[3] The foundation of the religion is purity. The purest being is the Brahmin who came from the mouth of God. The mind is pure and the body impure.

The *Manusmriti* states that it is the responsibility of the caste woman to maintain the purity of her husband, as of the whole Brahmin patriarchy. She constantly performs the ritual of purifying in her daily household chores, involving the elements of water and fire: "The ritual of marriage is traditionally known as the Vedic transformative ritual for women; serving her husband is (the equivalent of) living with a Guru, and household chores are the rites of the fire " (*Manusmriti* 2:67). The woman is the one who maintains spirituality in the domestic sphere and thereby extends the benefits of her purity and rites to the larger world of the material. The *Manusmriti*, however, clearly ascribes power to the Brahmin male, who alone can provide meanings to practices and rituals and interpret the scriptures; he has the power to read and to speak the scriptures. He is the voice for the caste woman, directing her to gain her salvation through maintaining the purity of her household and of her husband.

The *Manusmriti* states: "A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a God, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges in lust, and is devoid of any godly qualities. Apart from their husbands, women cannot sacrifice or undertake a vow or fast; it is because a wife obeys her husband

[3] All translations from the *Manusmriti* are from Doniger's translation.

that she is exalted in heaven" (*Manusmriti* 5:115). This details the life of a caste woman who is also told that "the woman who restrains her body, mind-and-heart, speech and body through this behavior wins the foremost renown here on earth and her husband's world in the hereafter" (*Manusmriti* 5:116). Therefore, the Hindu scriptures dictate the life of the caste woman and her role is to fulfill the scriptures through her chastity.

In the Hindu epic tradition, Sita, the wife of Rama, is glorified and deified for her excellence in her role as wife and mother. She represents the true femininity that takes pride in being the loyal wife and the good mother. Through this character of noble servitude she gains her husband's salvation and then her own as well. Thus, as David Kinsley points out, *The Ramayana* states: "Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as God by a faithful wife" (Kinsley 1986, 70). The Hindu woman is the keeper of spirituality; she is deified not in terms of the respect that she is due by the worshipper, but in terms of how doubly perfect she has to be because the man is not bound by such duties. As Partha Chatterjee writes: "…the spirituality of her character has also to be stressed in contrast with the innumerable ways one had to surrender to the pressures of the material world" (Chatterjee 1993, 130). The Hindu woman's body and mind are the agents of purity and instruments of maintaining spirituality in that purity. The woman had to take great care to deny her corporeality and rise above that which is material, physical, and therefore impure. Vasantha Kannabiran and K. Lalitha in their essay: "That Magic Time" write: "Expressions of power internalized and built not only into the attitudes of the men but even, or importantly onto the very bodies of the women so that their subordination was constantly and subtly reinforced—a subordination so apparently tenuous, yet so pervasive, that it was difficult to articulate. It is structural and invisible" (Sangari and Vaid 1999, 182). The opposition between the Dalit woman and the caste woman is systemized to balance the needs of the men who have one woman to take care of their spiritual requirements, and another to satisfy their physical needs.

A woman's body, being the fundamental location wherein female identity is described and questioned in terms of the encapsulation of procreativity and sexuality, is a space where social, cultural, and political representations are defined. Traditionally, a woman's own understanding of her body is effaced by external definitions and representations. The system of the Devadasi or the temple prostitute, which is an offering of the bodies of women, who are mostly Dalits, to Brahminic temples, is an extreme case of such social and cultural coercion.

The duty of a temple prostitute is to serve the temple priests and devotees. A Dalit girl is married to a deity or to a particular temple. Most often the girls

are initiated into the system by means of deflowering by a priest or by a prominent urban politician who would pay a handsome amount of money to the priest. The term Devadasi means female servant of deity. If she belongs to the deity or to the temple, then she belongs to all. She is public property. There is a saying in Marathi which Shri Jyant Debnath quotes: "She is a servant of God but wife of the whole town" (Janmanadas 2000, 125). The Devadasi is public property as declared by the priest. The sexual act itself is purified as an act of self-sacrifice by the Dalit woman, like the ritual of Sati.

Devadasis are made to dance in the temple by way of serving the devotees and the priests. This art of dance and music is highly eroticized so that the sexuality of the Dalit woman can be intensely enjoyed and at the same time treated as something that does not have to be protected or respected. Since this sexuality is religiously sanctioned, it is legitimized. There is a religious practice in Maharashtra called "Okali," observed during the Hindu New Year, in which the Devadasis are made to line up for public spectacle. They are ridiculed and played with by the caste young men who touch them and fondle them. This is observed in the name of God Billi Kallappa (Janmanadas 2000, 81).

We are also informed by Vasant Rajas of a practice in South India where the Devadasi is suspended on a rope and rotated so that her private parts are exposed. She is rewarded with a sari and betel nut for which she is expected to be thankful to the crowd who have cheered and jeered at her sexuality. It is believed that such a ritual will bring prosperity to the town (Janmanadas 2000, 81).

The religious phenomenon of the coming together of the aspects of purity and pollution in the body of the Dalit woman reveals both the helplessness of the Dalit woman as well as the power of the Brahmin patriarchy. The Devadasi is made not just to dance and provide sexual gratification but she is made to clean the temple, just as in the act of consummation with the man, she cleans him of his carnal desires by providing her body for him to discard his carnal desires.

Dalit women all over India are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by caste men. If an upper-caste landlord wanted to make a statement to his Dalit workers, he would sexually abuse their women. Saurabh Dube, who has researched the caste operation in a small community, Satnami in Central India, quotes an elder among the Dalits of the Satnamis: "The Caste men would not touch us...But they were always ready to fornicate. For "doing it" our women were not untouchable. Great is caste. Even after licking the privates of the Satnami women, they would not lose their purity. The rich supplied food and the drink. We had to run errands and supply women" (Dhube 1998, 71). Since the body of the caste woman is confined to the home,

which brings with it the connotations of religious duty, chastity, and reproduction, it is left desexualized. The caste woman is not allowed to express her sexual desires or to flaunt her sexuality. She has to be docile, submissive, and non-aggressive. The Brahminic patriarchy uses caste women for the maintenance of social prestige and religious order and uses Dalit women for its carnal desires. Especially in the system of temple prostitution, the Dalit woman's sexuality appears to be valorized, keeping the tradition passed on from generation to generation, alive.

Since the Devadasi is the property of the temple, she is the property of the priest. Rajas writes of the pre-epic period when

> [t]he Brahmin priests claimed that they being the representatives of gods in heaven, the bhudevas, i.e Gods on earth, they have the first claim, as anything offered to god belongs to Brahmins, so also the girls offered to gods must belong to them. The Kings retorted, that they make appointments of Devadasis, they give them money and land and feed them, so they have greater claim. Ultimately the conflict was resolved by an understanding and Devadasis were branded on their chest with emblems of *garuda* (eagle) and *chakra* (discus) for kings and *chanka* (conch) for Brahmins (Janmanadas 2000, 81).

Their bodies were commodities subject to carnal trading between the caste men. This commodification of the body goes beyond sexual commodity. Her victimization was an assertion of male power, a trade between institutions, individuals and social and religious order all within the domain of the male Brahminic hegemony.

A distinct pattern of alienation emerges in the social location or dislocation of the Dalit woman. Within the Hindu religious tradition, which informs the ideology of Indian nationalism, she is not a human being and therefore niether features in the social dichotomy of masculine/feminine nor in the nationalist dichotomy of the material and the spiritual. While the Dalit woman stands outside these dichotomies, she satisfies the sexual desires of uppercaste men. To the Indian patriarchy, her femininity does not exist because of her dispensability as a lesser human. *Manusmriti* states: "The animal killed by dogs or a fierce untouchable is unpolluted" (*Manusmriti* 1:82). The reduction of a Dalit to a nonhuman is evident in this categorization along with animals. Therefore the sexuality of the Dalit woman is made free for all, because there is "nothing" in her to be violated. The state of nothingness becomes her identity in the eyes of the violator.

As much as the society denies any social interaction with a Dalit woman, her presence is needed as the Other to that which is pure. She is needed as the Other whose sexuality can be violated because the caste woman's chastity is needed for the preservation of the sanctity of the masculine. The caste woman has religious duties and responsibilities, whereas the Dalit woman is not bound by those religious responsibilities. Though this is in many ways liberating for her within her community, because she can rebel and not conform to the standards of a proper woman. It is also a state in which she is "nothing." She has no social ties except as the provider of the binary opposition to the purity of the caste woman. The caste woman and the Dalit woman together form the duality for the uppercaste Indian male.

The role of the Dalit woman is that of both the polluter and the polluted. She is called to purify society, but at the same time is fated to pollute. As she sweeps the streets, removes feces, removes the garbage, and cleans up after the other members of society, she enters into a state of alienation from society, invisibility and untouchability. She is both indispensable and dispensable. Contaminated by what is unclean and thrown out of the body, she is both the signifier and the signified of that which is rejected.

According to the Manusmriti, the caste woman is impure when she is menstruating. Manu says: "If a man has touched a 'notorious by day' Untouchable, a menstruating woman, anyone who has fallen (from his caste), a woman who has just given birth, a corpse, or anyone who has touched any of these objects, he can be cleaned by a bath" (*Manusmriti* 5:85). It also says, "Even if he is out of his mind (with desire) he should not have sex with a woman who is menstruating; he should not even lie down in the same bed with her. A man who has sex with a woman awash in menstrual blood loses his wisdom, brilliant energy, strength, eyesight, and long life" (*Manusmriti* 4:41). It also says, "If a priest unknowingly has sex with a fierce untouchable woman, eats their food or accepts gifts from them he falls, if knowingly he becomes their equal" (*Manusmriti* 11:176). This is the comparison that one is forced into: The caste woman becomes impure when her body is fulfilling the biological necessities of being woman, whereas, the impurity of the Dalit woman is not bound by such biological function since the Dalit woman herself is that impurity all the time.

The body of the Dalit woman is needed to provide the standard of beauty for the upper caste as that which is not Dalit in its features, coloring, or character. Partha Chatterjee observes that the "new woman was quite the reverse of the common woman who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subject to brutal physical oppression by males" (Chatterjee 1992, 627). He refers to the modern educated woman as the new woman, the caste woman. The new woman

suggests an illusory shift that is possible for the uppercaste woman from being the uneducated traditional submissive woman to the educated, but still submissive, new woman. The fact that she is educated, however, does not provide her with the license to rebel; she still has to maintain the contrast to the common woman, only traditionally. So the uppercaste woman has the choice not to fit into traditional molds, whereas, a Dalit woman is left with no choice but to remain stagnant in her traditionally dictated status as the polluted Other to the caste woman. The Dalit woman, believed to be the polluted, the ugly, and the sexually promiscuous, guarantees the caste woman her status of virtue and beauty.

Saurabh Dube brings our attention to Louis Dumont's observance that "…the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution is the overarching organizing principle, the underlying structural logic, of caste within the Hindu social order" (Dube 1998, 171). Purifying objects is a significant part of Hindu worship that is only performed by the male Brahmin, therefore symbolically proclaiming the operative power that comes with the act of purifying. Clearly, the purity-pollution dichotomy correlates to a power structure where those who are pure are considered powerful and those polluted are oppressed. While both the Dalit woman and the caste woman are both affected in the depositioning by the Brahminic hegemony, the caste woman's depositioning is done in the name of purity while the Dalit woman's depositioning is done in the name of pollution. The Dalit mass cleans up after the Brahminic society, being polluted in the process while the Brahmin is able to stay in his position of the pure. The polluted, then, become the necessary Other for the display of power and as the highlighter of purity.

Within the postcolonial ethos of Hindu nationalism, the Dalit woman and the caste woman are not just being victimized, they are made the perpetual boosters of the national male identity through their subjugation. National identity is built on the intensified identity deprivation of another who is spatially within the country but is not part of the nation as in the case of the Dalits.

What emerges in a social structure that disregards the female gender, especially the Dalit female, is "…the homogenization of power within culture as the becoming of a nation " (Aloysius 1997, 87). The dangers of the state of substitution of religion and power affect the powerless mass as the nation's identity is built at the cost of the identity of its masses. Such an identity of the nation state is not different from that of the colonial state. When the same paradigm of hegemony and dominance is replicated, it calls for a deeper look into how post-colonialism manifests itself in the so-called nation state.

Hinduism, as a force, has become the machinery for playing out sexual and gender politics. Within this machinery, that which is culturally private,

the woman's body, becomes public in the case of a Dalit woman due to the availability of her body. The public sphere of politics, either social or cultural, becomes localized into private sites to suit the needs of the patriarchy. The positions of private and public become transferable by the authority of the caste male. Purity and pollution, which are domestic religious constructs, control the public as well as the private lives of women. There is no distinction that one can make between the public and the private sector in the lives of Dalit women and the caste women because they are constantly thrown back and forth into these socially defined spaces according to the whims of Hindu patriarchy. Religion is not just an agent or a part of the public but it becomes both public and private as it is incarnated in cultural, social, and political institutions. This happens through the operative machinery of religious power, which allows amalgamation, transference, transgression, oppression, binary opposition, and much else.

A culture that operates out of religion makes it difficult for any Indian feminist to lay hands on strategic change. Does one start with religion or culture or politics or sexuality or psychology? The social determinism imposed upon a caste woman or Dalit woman calls for resistance and refusal to actualize the concepts of purity and pollution as separate entities in specific female gendered bodies.

The Dalit woman today sees the need to displace the oppressive system's categorization of her. She has started to deconstruct the myths that have determined her identity as the polluted untouchable. She has gained the courage to expose her power of speech and other forms of self-expression denied to her. She has challenged the authority of the ancient Hindu religious texts in speaking the language of protest and speaking to and with the uppercaste. She catches their attention by merely doing something she has been forbidden to do—organizing for change and moving into action. She is anyway the coarse and vulgar woman and therefore has nothing to lose in her language of protest if she can gain clean drinking water, food, and skills to be self-sufficient.

She gets to the root of domestic abuse such as alcoholism as seen in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh in 1992. In this district Dalit women protested against the selling of liquor and in a matter of months were able to close down liquor stores and affect state policy prohibiting the sale of alcohol (*When Women Unite*, video, 1996). The Dalit woman is willing to take the risk of breaking through an oppressive system at the cost of her life.

In the late nineteenth century the missionary movement in India provided avenues of education for Dalit women but failed to initialize any structural changes due to a lack of active encouragement to question an oppressive system. In a country where religious colonialism thrives on the basis of

cordoning of wealth and opportunity by the upper caste, the Dalit woman fights for human dignity.

Linda Alcoff writes: "We are constructs—that is, our experience of our subjectivity is a construct mediated and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond (way beyond) individual control" (Nicholson 1999, 337). If the experience of subjectivity is controlled by another force through the objectification of one's physical state of being within a given religious structure, it results in reductionism based on gender and caste. Alcoff brings to our attention the fact that men attack women's "life giving energy" because that is where they know they can get them (Nicholson 1999, 332). When both "biological reductionism" and religious determinism control women's subjectivity as in the case of Dalit women and caste women, as pollution and purity they are forced to nurture male subjectivity and in the process lose their own. Both Dalit women and caste women can gain their own experience of subjectivity outside the physical, spiritual, and psychological dimensions set by their men only by resisting coercive submission.

When self-expression is blocked by social boundaries, one needs to adopt transgression of social norms. Dalit women have crafted a tradition of expressions of experience and resistance that has not been heard by the outside world. They have traditionally gained their own experience of subjectivity outside the physical, spiritual, and psychological dimensions set by the society that islands them. This power of self-expression, along with self-realization of missed opportunities, moves them to create changes. As they recognize the power of speech and action, formally educated Dalit women realize the imminent need to write in order to be able to communicate with the rest of the world in building a network of solidarity with other communities of women.

Sara Suleri in her essay, "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Post Colonial Condition" states: "Life remains the ultimate answer to discourse" (Ashcroft 1995, 276). Discourse then takes various forms of protest and resistance for the subaltern. Upper-caste women find new languages within their bodies and minds to challenge their role of the pure deity waiting on the physical and spiritual needs of their men. They have had to move away, spatially, in order to actualize such discourse. For some it is a movement from objectivity to subjectivity for some it is movement from one realm of objectivity into another since oppressive systems are not unique.

Dalit women also have taken to various forms of discourse. Most Dalit women find their subjectivity in story telling, in repeating their own stories or stories of the past, their family history, or their own history. It is a reverted subjectivity, where in repetition of what has brought them to their present stage, they form counter-subjectivity. More radical moves towards

subjectivity have been found in politics and taking to arms. Dalit women find this self-asserting as well as self-protecting. They look for physical protection, protection of their self-respect, and protection of their psyche.

The intertwining of Indian nationalism and religious colonialism being religiously sanctioned is unquestionable, and therefore caste women and Dalit women are locked within the mutual relationship of culture and religion. The patriotism of the citizens is built on such devouring of identities in the name of nationalism to bring it under one convenient regime of fundamentalist Hinduism. Caste women have resisted the image of the self sacrificial Sita as the epitome of a "good" woman, but there has been no significant social progress made in India since Independence because progress calls for a total shift from the colonial paradigm. India has claimed freedom from colonial hegemony, but is innately bound by the colonial episteme. The women in India need to claim their subjectivity as a united entity across caste boundaries as a counter-identity to the one imposed by religious colonialism. Dalit women are now waking up to the reality that their state of being the polluted is a social construct to keep them powerless.

Dalit women are becoming aware of their state of being cast out, that they are now beginning to fight back against this social demonizing of the Other. They are taking to arms, politics, and education in order to protect, promote, and protest. They are beginning to break through the myth of the dichotomy of purity and pollution. When we rise up to challenge the epistemology of Indian nationalism and the separation of the entities of purity and pollution embodied in different categories of people, then the very ground on which the paradigm of religious colonialism is built is shaken.

Dalit women have started writing in the past decade. I met several of these writers including Bama and Sivagami from Tamilnadu, Shamala and Namboori Paripoorna from Andhra Pradesh, and Jothi Lanjewar from Maharashtra. They all seemed to have the agenda of pushing for a strong Dalit female consciousness. They felt the need because of the ways in which they have been seen as objects of derision. They are involved in the process of making Dalit women visible as strong individuals committed to creating positive changes within their communities.

Bama's *Karukku*, translated by Lakshmi Holstrom, reads as testimonial literature. As the voice of her community, her community speaks through her as she lays out her life as a Dalit girl in her colony and later as a Dalit woman outside her colony. She reveals the fact that no amount of education could stop the stereotyping of her Dalit identity. She reveals the way in which the Catholic church in India practised caste discrimination.

Jothi Lanjewar's poems in Marathi are embedded with experiential reality and a calling for Dalit women to take pride in their bodies and souls as

sources of life and energy. When I interviewed her, she spoke of herself as being undaunted in spite of the threats and mishaps in her family due to her claiming her right to speak of the plight of Dalit women. These Dalit writers choose to write in their mother tongue.

A shift has occurred in the mindset of educated Dalits. The first generation Dalits who had access to education and jobs during the colonial rule left their colonies behind in a hurry, fleeing from a social degradation. Many were able to pass off as lower caste in the towns or cities they moved into, buying into the idea of self-promotion, wanting to erase a shameful past. The emergent Dalit wave now has an infrastructure due to the collaboration of various grassroots Dalit organizations. The second and third generation educated and economically viable Dalits are now claiming the Dalit identity, because they can afford to be identified as Dalits now. They have the knowledge of the strategies of social stratification. They have national and international solidarity groups and several human rights organizations throughout the world are now aware of the Dalit struggle. Human Rights Watch in New York, under the leadership of Smita Narula, for the first time documented atrocities against Dalits in a report titled *Broken People* (1999).

Dalit women have their own representatives now, locally and globally. There has been an emerging microcosmic leadership only in the past decade for a population of over one hundred and sixty million who live in economic deprivation. While there are concrete changes brought about by strong Dalit leadership, there are also severe opposing reactions to these positive changes.

In the summer of 2002, I visited over twenty-five Dalit colonies in the states of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh in South India to talk to Dalit women about their leadership initiatives within their colonies. I visited some of these colonies after a period of over a decade. In that lapse of time, I observed a confidence in the women that I could not locate in my previous conversations with them.

Chandrika from Kathariceri[4] colony in Chingleput district reported that she is the head of the women *sangam* (organization) in her colony.[5] She has been able to negotiate with the state government and has helped start an elementary school in her colony. She has also been able to lay concrete pathways to and from her colony as opposed to struggling thorough shrubs and clogged pathways to get to her colony. She was very proud of her achievements (but I could not help but notice that she refused to sit down in

[4] Names of people and places have been changed.

[5] Information in this section taken from personal interviews conducted between July and August 2002.

front of her husband). She believes it will be a constant struggle to make sure that the school is maintained with good attendance from staff and children and that the standard of education will have to be monitored constantly.

Mala from Malarpaalayam in the Chingleput district is the treasurer of the women's *sangam* in her colony. She reported that the state government does not allow more than twenty members in the *sangam*, so there are about seven *sangams* in her colony. This she says is a strategy of the government to cause divisisive politics among the colonies. Some of them, however, meet as one group but are registered as various groups. These *sangams* promote the concept and practice of savings by and for Dalit women. Some colonies have a pool that they draw from when a colony or a particular individual is in need. They have a monthly membership fee in these *sangams*. Currently they have over twenty thousand rupees in their account, which is used for loans towards crisis in families or in the community. She reported that there are currently 150 members that put in a savings deposit of fifty rupees a month (49 rupees was about one U.S. dollar at the time of my research).

The *sangams* are popular entities that boost Dalit confidence and enable them to start their own small business such as weaving, making fuel from cow dung, gathering firewood, raising poultry, etc.; they are evolving as self-sufficient communities of Dalit women. She also added that the enslavement of their women by caste landlords and the belittling of their efforts is a continuing phenomenon. She said that once they are economically empowered then they will gain the confidence to protect their morale.

Similar stories of efforts to better conditions within their colonies were reported by Bhimamma from Nandipuram colony and Pentamma from Parigeemanadalam colony in the Mehbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. Bringing in education and self-help initiatives into their colonies seems to be their main agenda. They are referred to as village *sarpanchs* who take up leadership positions in their colonies to represent their cause to the government whether local or state.

I also met with a group of *jogin* (temple prostitutes also referred to as Devadasi) women in the colony Hadkomandalam, about fifty kilometers from Hyderabad. These women were very proud to be a part of an organization called Mahila (Women's) Action Centre (MAC), and they said that only after organizing themselves have they gained the confidence to even sit on chairs and not be afraid of being punished for it (normally a Dalit woman is not expected to sit on chairs, her place is on the floor). Mariyamma, the secretary of the MAC testified to the fact that, "We will not accept the vicious cycle for

our children anymore. They need to be educated and find jobs. We want a better future for our children."[6]

This is reiterated by Meera Shenoy in her interview with *jogin* women who said, "My father made me a jogin to make his ends meet. I will do everything possible to make sure my daughter does not go through the hell I have experienced" (Shenoy, *India Abroad*, February 28, 2003). Devadasis claim the right to education and their children are high school graduates, in engineering and polytechnic colleges and even have jobs in Hyderabad, the closest city booming in technology. Nariyamma, also a *jogin*, states that they receive good support from the state government to fulfill their ambitions.

Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh seemed to be very organized and well supported by NGOs. Educated Dalit women are now giving back to their communities by giving their time and talent as lawyers, trainers, surveyors, monitors for atrocities, etc. This provides the incentive for Dalit women in colonies to invest their time, energy, and monies into organizing around specific issues as basic as providing clean drinking water. Dappu is a highly organized collective of NGOs in Hyderabad, founded and run mainly by Dalits for Dalit Bahujan (peoples) empowerment. Paul Diwakar, a Dalit, and Annie Namala, a non-Dalit are the key forces behind this initiative. The collective supports Dalit communities towards developmental needs of the trade union, cooperative federation, and they facilitate economic enterprises and business management among Dalit communities. This provides the space for Dalit women to be in leadership roles, as role models and mentors to Dalit women in the colonies.

The *New York Times* published an article, "Ideas and Trends: Why Governments Tumble; India's Poorest Are Becoming its Loudest," in which Celia W. Dugger observes that

> The percentage of people from formerly untouchable castes who said they were members of political parties rose from 13 percent in 1971 –19 percent in 1996, while the percentage from upper castes who said they belonged to a party declined from 36 percent to 28 percent. The percentage of very poor people who believe voting makes a difference rose from 38 percent in 1971 to 51 percent in 1996 and jumped from 42 percent to 60 percent for low caste people" (*New York Times*, April 25, 1999).

[6] From interviews with *jogin* women on August 10, 2001, in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

We also read of Dalit women such as Mayawati from Uttar Pradesh who have entered politics in the hope of being able to make changes for the Dalits. As the *New York Times* has it: "She was a former schoolteacher who became the first, and as yet, only Dalit woman ever to serve as Chief minister of an Indian State" (*New York Times*, September 23, 1999). Mayawati strongly believes that there has to be Dalit representation in the parliament. It is happening now.

At the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in August-September 2001, the Dalits were a strong presence. They were there to demand the inclusion of caste as a form of discrimination within the UN charter (the UN has since appointed two special rapporteurs for caste). The Indian Government did everything possible to thwart the efforts of the Dalits. Over 250 Dalit men and women from all over India participated in the conference. The presence of Dalit women especially made a very strong impression on the delegates at the conference. Dalit women not only spoke at NGO sessions, they even succeeded in drawing international attention through their art of drumming. This is a new gesture that Dalit women are taking to. A Dalit nun trains and builds strong teams of Dalit women drummers, a movement that she calls Shakthi, which is very untraditional in its concept. Dalit drums are only traditionally played by Dalit men to announce a death. Such symbols of mourning are now being subverted to become symbols of celebration by Dalit women. Shakthi is now very popular for its powerful performances of drum beating by Dalit women. They were at Durban, as a symbol of the power within Dalit women to challenge existing oppressive systems and to provide new meanings for their identity.

Several Dalit women activists were present at the World Conference Against Racism, representing various NGOs and The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in India (NCDHR, the first national coalition of Dalit movements). The NCHDR has Dalit women represented in its national programs as office bearers such as, Ruth Manorama, Fathima, who take part in international summits representing the Dalit issue. These women are movers and shakers; they write, speak, to represent Dalit issues at the UN summits, and impact changes locally. They organize Dalit women who are subject to lower or no wages for their labor and sexual abuse, and are victims of manual scavenging, etc. They find legal support and protection for Dalit women and help them gain rights to protest. Movements such as REDS (Rural Education for Development of Society) headed by Jyothi Raj, a Dalit woman, work at various levels: publications to reach the educated mass, huge Dalit gatherings to reach the common Dalit mass (I attended one of those mass gatherings in January 2000 in Tumkur, Andhra Pradesh), organizing protests, literacy programs, training task groups with Dalit men and women,

independent committees headed by Dalit women to promote education, self employment, labor unions, etc.

Several other organizations such as Prajwala, headed by Annie Namala, deal with issues related to sexual abuse, economic abuse, temple prostitution, etc., in the areas surrounding Chittoor in South India. Dalit women from these areas are trained by Prajwala to take up leadership in representing these issues affecting Dalit men and women. Navsarjan, another organization based in Gujarat, deals with the issue of manual scavenging (cleaning up human feces from dry toilets) among other issues, which affect Dalit women largely in this area and throughout the country. Mari M. Thekaekara, in his book, *Endless Filth* writes about the plight of this community of manual scavenging referred to as Bhangis. He mentions that seven hundred Dalit women who protested in 1996 were arrested and brutalized, for demanding better wages for the dirty work that they do (Thekaekara 1999, 13). The women were very persistent in their demand even after all the police brutalities. They did win their case and were given more wages. But now, organizations such as Navsarjan are organizing Dalit women and men to totally eradicate this job that further brands them as polluted and untouchable. Very committed Dalit women and men are working tirelessly towards creating rehabilitation programs to find alternative jobs for the Bhangis.

Martin Macwan, Founder-Director of Navsarjan, strongly believes that even if efforts are going into eradicating manual scavenging, people's attitudes have to be changed from considering Dalits as impure. Macan narrates how the Bhangi woman with her child has to beg for her food, which is given to street dogs. Sometimes the street dogs walk away from the spoilt food that the Bhangi eats because she would be abused for refusing food from the upper-caste home (Thekaekara 1999, 65).

I met Manjula, who works with Navsarjan and participated in the "Women's Global Leadership Institute" at The Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University in 2002. Manjula works specifically with women who are sexually abused in fields and plantations. Dalit women who were afraid to talk about their plight now speak up when they are wronged and are educated on prevention of sexual victimization.

In the past ten years, the growth of Dalit movements in India and especially the leadership of Dalit women has been tremendous. The post-Durban impact is seen in many parts of India. While violence against Dalits and minorities in general has been escalating in parts of India, at the state levels several changes have taken place: a commission on untouchability has been made public in Andhra Pradesh, twenty-two orders have been set against caste discrimination in the state of Madhya Pradesh, and a few other states, such as Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, and Maharashtra have similar impacts. In

Andhra Pradesh, Dalit women organized themselves to abolish the selling of liquor in Dalit villages, and the state then issued a prohibition order on liquor. Seeing all these positive changes, international funding agencies have started putting monies into Dalit development programs throughout the country. Most notable is the setting up of a National Center for Dalit Studies in New Delhi. This provides tremendous opportunity for publications, for academic councils around Dalit writings, and for the forming of a credible Dalit intelligentsia.

As Jyothi Raj, a Dalit woman activist mentions in her article, "The Impact of Globalization on Women," notes: "Dalit women are day by day pushed to a more vulnerable, unwanted, and unrecognized position …their survival is at stake" (Viswanath 1998, 45). Dalit women cannot compete in the economy of globalization. They will continue to be exploited for cheap labor. Raj therefore sees the need for organizing Dalit women, who need to assert their economic rights and not allow exploitation of their labor. Raj proposes, in order for Dalit women to be able to resist exploitation, involvement in building an integrated and sustaining Dalit culture as opposed to a materialistic consumerist culture. This culture must promote values of human dignity and be focused on sustaining the village community, as opposed to the fragmentation of capitalism, a culture that is inclusive and does not exclude in the name of purity and impurity, a culture that will promote cottage industries, building self-reliant and self-sufficient communities, and promoting indigenous knowledge and medicine. She points out the resilience of Dalit women, which is their force in becoming agents of change. She also suggests that the goddess Kali be the symbol of sustaining energy and power, the symbol of new energy to destroy what is destructive and to preserve and birth what is positively productive towards building a better future for the Dalit women and children.

Dalit women are in the forefront organizing, protesting, writing, performing, going to jail, affecting state policies, etc. They act as a community of women to effect positive changes that benefit the community as a whole. They have found the space from which they can take the risk of deconstructing the social constructs of purity and pollution, of analyzing the exploitative reality behind such religious ideology and of acting for change. "It (a constructive analysis) must realize that cultural fields are ideological in character, and that ideological areas—legal, political, religious, philosophical, literary, aesthetic are places where conscious battles for conservation and change have been and can be fought" (Sangarai 1981, 1).

As much as the danger of dissolution of identities in eradicating distinctions cannot be denied, the risk of protesting the "Othering" of identities through binary opposition must be taken. The binary opposition of purity and pollution has not just deified one and demonized the Other but

within that structure of binary opposition colonizes both the signifiers. This power of the Brahminic male hegemony, which is in control of the nation's identity, has to be challenged from the inside, from within its structure of internal colonialism. When women unite across caste boundaries to question and resist, there is hope for a change that can initiate a new postcolonial identity for a nation that would be socially and culturally progressive. That phase has started in the past decade among Dalit women and caste women who are reclaiming their identity by reversing traditional attitudes and promoting their rights and privileges as citizens of the largest democracy in the world.

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The Indus Script: A New Decipherment Paradigm

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Since the first announcement of the discovery of the Indus civilization in 1924 by Sir John Marshall, there have been over fifty full-fledged decipherment attempts of the Indus script. These attempts have varied greatly in their approach. Many scholars initially compared the script to other writing systems for graphic similarities. Hunter, Langdon, Gadd, and Waddell looked for answers in Mesopotamian writing systems; Pran Nath understood the language to be alphabetic, an ancestor to Brāhmī; and Bedrich Hronzý saw it a predecessor to Hittite.[1] The poor results in pictographic studies, comparisons of the Indus script to other writing systems, led to a decline of such studies.

Another interesting approach has recently been put forth by Steve Farmer. In a recent presentation at the Fifth Annual Harvard Indology roundtable meeting, Farmer presented an abridged form of a larger forthcoming paper that addresses the question of whether the Indus inscriptions reflected "encoded speech."[2] Farmer concludes that the Indus inscriptions were not representative of speech. His arguments will be briefly discussed here.

The first argument examines a number of common cultural "markers" used by societies with manuscript traditions. Those societies that do not have these "markers" do not have manuscript traditions. His study, a response to the idea that the Indus civilization may have had longer texts on perishable material, suggests that if the Indus civilization did have longer documents, one should be able to find a number of "markers" in the archaeological record that would be suggestive of this manuscript tradition. These correlations are based on a number of civilizations including those of South Asia, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Aegean, Egypt, China, and Mesoamerica. In these traditions,

[1] For a thorough review of some of the more well-known decipherment attempts, see Possehl 1996; for some more recent decipherment attempts, see Iravatham Mahadevan 2002.

[2] Steve Farmer, "Five Cases of 'Dubious Writing' in Indus Inscriptions: Parallels with Vinca Symbols and Cretan Hieroglyphic Seals." Handout from the Fifth Harvard University Roundtable, available from http://www.safarmer.com/downloads, accessed February 25, 2004.

Farmer finds markers suggestive of a manuscript tradition. However, none are to be found in the evidence from the Indus civilization.

His next argument examines the frequencies of the fifty most common Indus script signs. He asserts that, when compared with other logo-syllabic scripts, the Indus script, in respect to sign occurrences, seems to be largely syllabic in content. However, with a closer analysis, one may see that sign repetition in other logo-syllabic scripts and that of the Indus script is quite different—the Indus script shows very little repetition when compared to logo-syllabic scripts. This corroborates the argument against the Indus script as encoded speech.

He continues to build on this thesis with the cooperation of Richard Sproat. They state that the discovery of new, unseen Indus signs is directly proportional to the discovery of new inscriptions (Farmer 2003). In a typical logo-syllabic language one can expect to find, with the discovery of more inscriptions, more occurrences of those signs with a previously low frequency. Hence at some point the discovery of unseen signs should reach a plateau, regardless of the amount of new findings. However, this is not the case for the Indus inscriptions. Over the last few decades, new signs continue to appear with the discovery of new inscriptions. This again is evidence against the understanding that the Indus script "encoded speech."

These three points—all quite different in their approach—seriously challenge the idea that the Indus script represented language.[3] Farmer's contentions are interesting and worth further examination. However, an in-depth discussion is outside the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say, it is conceivable that the Indus inscriptions did not represent language.

Aside from Farmer's approach, and ignoring politically motivated attempts to compare the Indus script to Sanskrit, the dominating trend in Indus script studies today continues to favor a comparison of the Indus script to later *languages*—mainly those of Dravidian origin. Perhaps the three most well-known proponents of such Dravidian comparisons are Asko Parpola, Iravatham Mahadevan, and Walter Fairservis. All three of these authors agree, to some extent, that the underlying language in the Indus script is a proto-form of Dravidian. Most scholars concede that the Indus script is far from being deciphered; however, Parpola and Mahadevan's ideas currently receive the most serious attention in the scholarly community today.

Asko Parpola's method posits that some characters of the Indus script may have been represented by their homophone. This method, termed the

[3] A stable positional order of the so-called "fish" signs also suggests that the Indus script did not likely represent language. For this discussion, see Michael Korvink 2004, pp. 11 and 46.

"rebus principle," can be seen most transparently in the so-called "fish" signs. He asserts that the "fish," too numerous in the Indus inscriptions to literally denote fish, did not mean fish, but rather a close homophone meaning "star." Additionally, stars in later Indian traditions are, according to Parpola, often associated with gods; hence he speculates that the fish signs indirectly refer to gods.

Without the benefit of a bilingual inscription every decipherment attempt is, by nature, speculative due to its dependency on the pictographic transparency of the Indus signs. In Parpola's approach however, the meaning thus derived is three times removed from the original pictography of the sign.

I will use the "fish" sign to demonstrate. First one must determine what the scribe originally intended in drawing the character. For Parpola, this sign is interpreted as "fish." This is somewhat subjective however. For example, Fairservis affiliates the sign with the "pir" in Dravidian and hence reads the sign as a "loop" (Fariservis 1992, 51). Parpola then claims that the fish is used as a homophone to represent "star." Finally he claims an associated meaning of "stars" with "gods."

It is very difficult to readily accept a meaning so far removed from the original inscription of the character—that is, if it is in fact a drawing of a fish. For this reason it is apparent that Parpola's use of the Rebus principle will remain deep in the realm of conjecture until further evidence comes to light.

Iravatham Mahadevan also uses an *a priori* approach, but seems to be much more hesitant in his claims. He asserts that the use of "bilingual parallels" can give insight to some meaning of Indus signs. The method compares both graphic and thematic "survivals" from later Indian culture to the pictographic transparency of Indus signs. For example, by examining the graphic and thematic survival of what appears to be a "spoked wheel," a sign in later Indian traditions often associated with the sun, Mahadevan concludes that the sign likely represents a "sun-god" (Mahadevan 1979, 262).

Mahadevan's approach is somewhat stronger than Parpola's in that it attempts to compare the "transparent" sign to both a graphic survival and tangentially to a thematic survival. Even with the "bilingual" comparison, the derived meaning from the inscribed sign (e.g. *wheel* to *solar wheel* to *sun god* [Mahadevan 1979, 265]) is twice removed from its original pictographic meaning—assuming its pictographic meaning is correctly inferred.

Walter Fairservis' approach is much simpler in theory. With the aid of a Dravidian Etymological Dictionary, Fairservis attempts to identify the meaning of a sign based on its pictographic transparency. The tentative meaning thus derived from its graphic examination is compared to Dravidian words of similar denotation. As with Parpola and Mahadevan, difficulties arise in such *a priori* approaches.

The Indus civilization covered a span of approximately 1,000,000 square kilometers (Possehl 1996, 2) and hence it is surely conceivable that aspects of its culture have survived to this day. For example, toy bullock carts closely resemble those in use today in many parts of India, and what appears to be a yogin, seen on some stamp seals, may indicate that yoga originated in the Indus civilization. Yet such direct correlations cannot be made so easily in language. In writing systems, characters, as will be discussed below, may deviate in many ways from their pictographic value, making it almost impossible for an outsider to decipher.

Although it is somewhat discouraging that the use of pictographic transparency and the inherent speculation in using it, is inescapable, a much greater impediment in Indus script studies is the dependence on the Dravidian Hypothesis—a hypothesis recently encountering serious criticism. At one time it seemed quite plausible that the Indus people most likely spoke a proto-form of Dravidian, but recent studies put forth by a number of scholars have allowed us to challenge the Dravidian Hypothesis. Let us briefly review the debate.

Near the end of the Indus civilization, there was economic decline and by 1700 BCE strong trade networks had dissolved (Kenoyer 1999, 179). The script by this point ceased to be in use (Kenoyer 1999, 77). Soon after the economic decline of the Harappans was the advent of the Indo-Aryans coming from the Northwest. An investigation of the *Rg Veda*, the earliest book of the four Vedas, shows that there are a number of loan-words from Dravidian languages typical of South India today. The discovery of these loan words led many to think that the Harappans were the Dravidians and subsequently that the underlying language of the Indus script was Dravidian.

To further corroborate this argument many scholars draw attention to an interesting survival of Brahui—a Dravidian language now spoken in the Indus region (i.e., Baluchistan and Sindh). Brahui is curiously isolated in North India while other Dravidian languages typically occur in the South India. It is also known that major trade networks were in decline within Indus cites in the Late Harappan Period and that new smaller trade networks to the Gangetic planes began to develop east of the Indus (Kenoyer 1999, 179). The shift of Indus trade to the east coupled with the presence of an isolated pocket of Brahui led many scholars to conclude that the Indus people were the Dravidians. Thus, after their economic decline, the Indus people, or proto-Dravidians, migrated to the South. This would explain the remnants of an isolated pocked of Brahui in the Indus region.

Recent studies however show that in the earliest substrata of the Rg Veda, books 2 and 7, shown no Dravidian influence but rather a Munda influence (Witzel 1998, §10.1). Therefore as the Indo-Aryans moved through the Indus

region, Munda was the first language that was encountered (Witzel 1998, §10.4). The late influence of Dravidian loan-words in the Veda can most likely be explained by a migration of Dravidians from outside of India at a time *after* the Indus civilization (Witzel 1998, §9.2).

In addition, J. Elfinbein has discovered phonological differences between Brahui and the Dravidian languages of the South, further corroborating that Brahui was a language of a second post-Harappan wave of Dravidians from outside of India (Elfinbein 1987, 215-233).

Evidence from non-linguistic research presents more problems. The argument that the Dravidians were the Harappans fails to explain the total absence of similar archaeological material between the Indus valley and South India where one finds the Dravidian languages. Though it is understood that language moves independently from cultural motifs, one would expect some indication in the archaeological record of such a shift to South India.

Therefore, with the aforementioned linguistic studies and lack of archaeological finds, one can conclude that insufficient evidence is available at this time to continue to advocate the Dravidian argument as it is presented today. The understanding that Dravidian is not likely to be an underlying language in the Indus civilization has serious implications in the study of the Indus script.

If we abandon the Dravidian hypothesis, the approaches of Parpola, Mahadevan, and Fairservis have no meaningful application to the Indus characters (i.e. there is no language proven appropriate of having these methods applied). Therefore, the methods for approaching the script must be updated. An analogous situation can be seen in the decipherment of Luwian Hieroglyphs. A. H. Sayce suggested that the glyphs were the product of the Hittites, but had no successful reading over his twenty years of research (Daniels 2000, 89). Significant progress was not made until I. J. Gelb released a cold study of the glyphs in the form of three pamphlets analyzing the structure and segmentation of the texts (Daniels 2000, 89). With thirty years of unsuccessful readings with the Dravidian methods, a new, less speculative approach is in order. As with Gelb, a study is necessary in the Indus inscriptions that is based on structural analysis and the positional frequency of various signs, not on a Dravidian presupposition.

An examination of I. J. Gelb's well-known grid of undeciphered scripts will prove helpful (Gelb 1973, 268):

	Writing	
Language	Known	Unknown
Known	0	I
Unknown	II	III

Figure 1: Gelb's Typology of Undeciphered Writing Systems

The grid graphically represents four possible classifications for an undeciphered script. The first of these classifications, Class 0, refers to writing where the language and the script are known. This class is more a matter of transliteration than decipherment. Class I languages have a writing system the language of which is known but the writing of which is unknown, followed by the reciprocal, Class II, where the writing is known but the language is unknown. In other words, it can be pronounced but not understood. Finally, we have Class III, a script where both the language and the script are unknown. Current approaches to the Indus script, such as those asserted by Mahadevan and Parpola, usually classify the Indus script in Class I in Gelb's grid, where it is thought that the Indus script encodes a proto-form of Dravidian.

However, the available evidence suggests that the Dravidian language should not be a candidate for the basis of the Indus script. Until further evidence is revealed as to what language the Indus people spoke—not to say that the Indus script "encoded speech"—a Class III script, where both the language and the script are unknown, is a much more viable classification and is likely to produce less speculative results.[4]

The most straightforward starting point in approaching a Class III script is a positional-statistical analysis, where one segments the inscriptions into prefixes, suffixes, words, and word-dividers. Unfortunately, such an approach does not provide any insight into the meaning of the Indus signs.

The segmentation of Indus texts relies on the use of a concordance. Concordance-based studies require considerable care. With the use of a concordance one must fully accept the redactor's decisions regarding the "lumping" and "splitting" of signs into variants and functionally different signs. The latter terms, though often used in the taxonomic division of species, are useful in the compilation of a concordance. When one begins to create a concordance, the compiler must first list the great variety of signs, regardless of their minor graphic variations. This is often a much longer body

[4] While the Indus script does not likely represent language, isolated units may be compared to words of later Indian texts.

of signs than will go in the final product. With this list, a decision must be made as to which signs can be considered the same, called synonymization, or which differ too much graphically to be considered the same. For example, let us say that we are strangers deciphering the yet undeciphered roman script. A decision would have to be made whether "G" is considered a graphic variant of "C" or if there are significant pictographic differences to distinguish them as having a separate meaning.

In an unfamiliar script this can be quite difficult. The positional patterns of the sign are helpful in determining if a sign should be combined or distinguished from another. Although "i" and "!" are pictographically similar, the consistent terminal placement of the latter ensures us that the two signs may be distinguished as separate.

The lumping of two signs that are functionally different could have serious consequences in the concordance. For example, if a sign having a terminal function, like the character "!," were mistakenly catalogued as a variant of another sign having a medial function, "l," the statistics for the sign from their erroneous combination in the concordance would be corrupted. In this example the mistake would render the statistics for that particular sign and all of its occurrences in the catalogued inscriptions useless.

A much simpler error can occur. One must trust that the concordance has accurately represented the inscription. The majority of the Indus inscriptions can be represented linearly in a concordance without much difficulty. However, the linear order of a number of inscriptions must be interpreted. For example, in the case of boustrophedon writing,[5] one may see two lines of script, each with their own linear order. This happens when a scribe, coming to the end of the object being engraved, wraps the text so that the first line is right-to-left while the second line is left-to-right.

There are benefits that may offset these difficulties. With a computerized concordance, scholars share a common source. In this sense it is a standardized resource to use. One can easily check another scholar's work with access to the same concordance. For example, if a would-be decipherer claims that sign "A" occurs with sign "B" in ninety-nine percent of its total occurrences, his work could quickly be confirmed by an examination of a concordance.

A positional-statistical study analyzing the inscriptions individually would yield greater rewards, but this is close to impossible. Without forming

[5] The term "boustrophedon" refers to writing that changes direction due the curling of the script to the next line.

a font or a concordance, human error in compiling and analyzing the inscriptions would outnumber the benefits.

Such a standardized concordance can also unfortunately solidify the mistakes of the redactor. Therefore a standardized concordance is by no means codified. As researchers continue to study the script, more confident decisions can be made as to which signs are incorrectly synonymized and which signs should be further distinguished. Hence a concordance of an undeciphered script is a constant work in progress.

Moreover, variations of signs can often have only a minor difference in pictography while having a separate denotation. This can be seen quite transparently in the two Sumerian signs listed below (Labat 1994, 144 and 160):

Figure 2: Sumerian Signs

While "BUR" and "GA" have close graphic similarities, they have a different denotation. In the proposed positional-statistical approach, it is the *function* that is being investigated. Therefore, if two signs, which have the same positional function and different denotation, as the above two signs, are mistakenly combined as one by the compiler of the concordance, little harm is done for the purposes of this thesis. It would be similar to confusing the "?" and "!" signs in Western scripts. While there is significant variation in the meaning (i.e, question and exclamation), the syntax and function (being sentence ending markers) remains the same for these two characters.

At this stage of decipherment we are hoping for a basic segmentation of texts by function. It is only at the next stage of study, which cannot be pursued at this time with the available evidence, that meaning can be pursued. Signs divided by function could then be further delineated by meaning. To use the above example, terminal markers such as "?" and "!" in roman scripts should first be determined. It is only later that one can examine the differences in meaning. To use a more analogous example, let us say that "BUR" and "GA" are erroneously combined in a concordance. While the two signs have a different meaning, they both function as nouns. Problems would only occur, in respect to this type of study, when signs having different syntactical functions are combined (e.g. a prefix and a medial sign). The most common combination of variants occurs when a more frequent sign is

combined with a less frequent sign of similar pictography. For example, the fish listed below on the left occurs at a greater frequency than the one on the right.

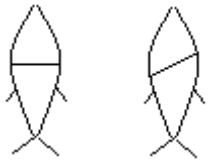


Figure 3: Indus Fish Signs

Due to the close graphic similarity of the signs, they are often thought of as one (Koskenniemi 1982, 20 and Mahadevan 1977, 32). It can be inferred, assuming a correct synonymization of the signs and a fair sample of the inscriptions, that the fish on the left is the most common rendering of the sign.

It should be noted that, with the availability of a concordance, many have made the mistake of trying to apply a universal program for segmenting the Indus inscriptions (see Siromoney 1998, Koskenniemi 1970, and Zide 1976). Such approaches often assign the same functional value to all of the Indus signs and have yielded little useful information. Signs that function differently must be examined with different approaches. A terminal, medial, and prefix, for example, obey rules specific to their placement and thus cannot be approached as a homogenous body.[6]

In the present essay, two tools for segmentation can be employed in the Indus script to isolate units of information that can be considered separate ideas. These methods are somewhat subjective and much less formulaic. The first of these methods examines the strength of the bond between two signs.[7] An example will prove helpful:

Strong Bond		Weak Bond	
11		9	
A	B	A	B
12	17	50	63

Figure 4: Example of Bond Strength

[6] For a discussion on Indus terminals, see Mahadevan, "Terminal Ideograms in the Indus Script" in *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, 315. For prefixes and terminals, see Korvink, *Starting from Scratch,* 23 and 35.

[7] A bond here refers to the sign pair frequency over the frequency of the individual signs.

Let us say that the letters "A" and "B" represent Indus characters. While the number above the two signs represents the frequency of the pair's occurrences, the numbers below represent their individual frequencies. Therefore, the strength of the bond may be measured by the frequency of the pair over the frequency of the individual sign. This may also be expressed as P/I. The greater the proportion of "P" compared to "I," the stronger the bond between the two signs. This tool may be employed to determine which pairs of signs are likely to represent a separate idea.

The second method that can be employed in conjunction with the strength of the bonds between signs is the process of elimination. By removing signs that are thought to be prefixes and terminals, one may isolate a sign or sign combination (Mahadevan 1977).

I will now apply these two methods in the context of the Indus inscriptions. One starts with a suspected pairwise combination—that is, two signs thought to represent a separate idea.[8]

Figure 5: Indus Sign Pair

This pair has been chosen for two reasons. Both of the above signs have a high frequency in the medial position. This is indicated quite clearly in the chart below:

[8] For an interesting attempt to decipher this pair see Mitchiner 1978.

Sign		Sign	
Solo Occurrences	0	Solo	0
Initial Occurrences	3	Initial	16
Medial Occurrences	53	Medial	54
Final Occurrences	2	Final	0
Total Occurrences	58	Total	70
Frequency of the Pair			27

Figure 6: Indus Sign Pair Occurrences and Frequency of Pair

The initial and final occurrences of the signs are likely due to the absence of prefixes and terminals (Korvink 2004, 23 and 35). Also, the frequency of the pair (being twenty-seven) is a significant portion of the total individual frequencies of fifty-eight and seventy respectively. Hence the strength of the pair's bond merits further investigation.

It is helpful to view the strength of a bond in the context of an inscription (Mahadevan 1977, Inscription 1703):

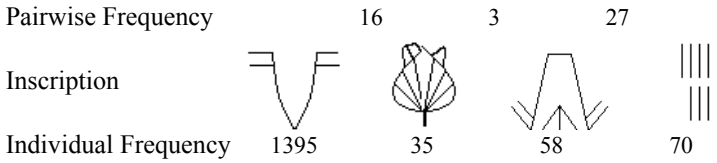


Figure 7: Indus Sign Pairwise Frequency

Firstly, the bond between the so-called "jar" and "pipal" leaf, as it has been termed by Fairservis, is of little value, for it represents a combination of signs from a terminal and medial class. Therefore the first combination frequency of sixteen may be disregarded. This leaves us with a combination of three and twenty-seven. One may see that the joint between  (27) is stronger than the joint between  and  (3). Hence the joint of  is worthy of further investigation.

The isolation of the above pair can be corroborated by a process of elimination. This is demonstrated in the following inscription (Mahadevan 1977, Inscription 1344):

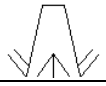
Terminal	Medial	Prefix
		

Figure 8: Indus Inscription

For the above inscription, one can simply remove the prefix and the terminal for the pair to be isolated as separate idea. Therefore, with the use of strong and weak bonds in addition to the process of elimination, one can isolate the pair.

Due to of the unique nature of the Indus inscriptions it is often difficult to segment texts. This can be attributed to the extremely low frequency of many Indus signs. Statistics from Mahadevan's concordance reinforce this observation (Mahadevan 1977, 17):

Frequency of Range	Number of signs
1000 or more	1
999-500	1
499-100	31
99-50	34
49-10	86
9-2	152
Only once	112

Figure 9: Indus Sign Frequency

The signs in the frequency range of (1) and (2-9) are of weak statistical value. Yet if one exempts these ranges from the analysis, one must ignore roughly 63% of the characters. Therefore the majority of this analysis would rely on the remaining 37% of the inscriptions. However, many of these lower frequency signs are graphic variants or compounds of more frequent signs. Other less frequent signs that have no graphic similarity to more frequent signs are not likely to be segmented until further evidence is discovered.

However, once a unit of information has been successfully segmented by processes of bond strength and elimination, one can then, and only then, begin

to try to gain insight into the meaning of the sign. This is the most difficult and most speculative step in the process.

Without the benefit of a bilingual inscription or knowledge of an underlying language, the only available means to determine meaning is by the pictographic transparency of the signs. In other words, one must simply try to infer what the sign or signs represent. The majority of the Indus signs do not seem to be pictographically transparent. In the rare case where both signs of a segmented pair seem to be pictographically transparent, one may turn to the next step: the search for meaning.

There are four possible scenarios that can occur in using pictographic transparency to speculate meaning:

1) The sign is read correctly and the meaning of that sign is a direct reflection of its pictography.
2) The sign is read correctly but has an associated meaning.
3) The sign is read correctly but is a homophone.
4) The sign is read incorrectly.

Let us take the example of the so-called "bearer" sign. In the first scenario, the sign would in fact refer to a person carrying a yoke. Thus the sign denotes "yoke-bearer." However, in the second scenario, the sign refers to a yoke-bearer but has an associated meaning. For example this sign could refer to "labor." The third scenario, termed the "rebus principle," refers to the use of homophones. It is difficult to convey an abstract word with pictographic transparency. However, a homophone can be used to escape this problem. For example, one may draw a tin "can" in the place of the verb "can" (to be able to). This happens quite often in logo-syllabic scripts in West Asia. Pictographic scripts tend to become more syllabic in their development. This may be due to the necessity of writing foreign words in a native script. In their transition, pictographic words can be stripped of their meaning and used solely for their syllabic value. Suppose we have a picture of a "man" and a "yak." Together we could, allowing some phonetic distortion, form the word "maniac" without an obvious connection to either "man" or "yak." Finally, one could simply misread the sign altogether. A drawing of an Indus script sign will prove helpful:

Figure 10: Indus Sign

An individual looking at this sign outside of this study might be tempted to call this a set of "headphones." Yet in the context of the Indus civilization, this is impossible. It is more likely that the sign refers to something unknown to us. While the use of pictographic transparency is currently the only available starting point in our search for meaning, there are a number of ways that one may make an error in using it.

For argument's sake, suppose that one has correctly read that sign and that the sign does literally represent the object. For example, a drawing of a peepal leaf simply denotes a "peepal leaf." One can then turn to later Indian textual sources to which this sign can be compared. It is at this point that the question can be asked: what is the most plausible language spoken in the Indus region at this time?

Before this however, a word of caution is in order. One need not assume an underlying language in the Indus inscriptions in order to attempt to find comparisons between the pictography in Indus inscriptions and words from other languages. Isolated words in Sumerian accounting tablets could very well be compared to Sumerian tablets with a narrative function. Similarly, one can confidently compare words in a narrative context with the isolated units from the Indus. With the vastness of Indus civilization, it is not inconceivable that many of their words have survived through later Indian texts. Therefore one hopes that that these loanwords may have some overlap with the segmented Indus inscriptions.

A possible source in which this type of comparison may be executed is the Rg Veda. As stated earlier, Dravidian is not likely to be the language of the Indus Civilization; however there are other linguistic substrata, such as Munda influences in the Rg Veda and Masica's Language X, that might be candidates in our search for meaning.[9]

The Indo-Iranians branched off from the Indo-Europeans before the advent of agriculture.[10] Hence the Indo-Aryans (a subgroup of the Indo-Iranians) adopted many agricultural-related loan-words from the indigenous people (most likely being the Harappans) (see Masica 1979, 137-138). The earliest books of the Rg Veda, showing no influence of Dravidian, show influence from Munda and a pre-Munda substratum language (Witzel 1998, §5.1,2). The first of these is Munda, a form of Austro-Asiatic. Munda,

[9] For an excellent discussion on this topic, see Michael Witzel, "The Languages of Harappa."

[10] One of the arguments for this theory is that words, previously not related to agriculture, were later developed to describe agricultural-related items and activity in Indo-European. However, this phenomenon does not occur in the Indo-Iranian branch; rather a number of loan-words (not Aryan in origin) take their place. See Masica 1979, 55-151.

thought to have been spoken in Eastern India, has often been ruled out by scholars of the Indus script as being too far removed geographically to be the language of the Harappans. Recent linguistic studies however suggest that Munda was likely to originate in or perhaps west of the Punjab (Witzel 1998, §9.2). This reinstates Munda's candidacy as a possible Indus language.

The second possible source, Masica's Language X, is a group of Hindi loan words whose origin is uncertain (Witzel 1998, §1.5). A comparison of the pictography of the segmented Indus inscriptions to the two linguistic sources may be the method that can lead us to speculate on meaning in the Indus inscriptions (Witzel 1998, §14.1).

In conclusion, methods for deciphering the Indus script based on a linguistic presupposition cannot be employed at this time. The necessary alternative to the former Dravidian approach relies on the segmentation of texts and its subsequent comparison to loan-words of early Indian textual sources. Such comparisons rely on the pictographic transparency of the segmented unit and are thus speculative in nature. A new paradigm based on segmentation, though having its limitations, offers a much more meaningful analysis than those methods based on the currently wanting Dravidian theory.

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Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce. *Civil Society and Development.* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 266 pages
Paperback: USD 22.00, Hardcover: USD 55.00.

The book explores the triadic relationship of the market, state, and civil society both in the theoretical realm of development thinking and in the practice of donor-assisted development programs. Development agencies and foundations like the World Bank, UNDP, Ford Foundation, Kettering Foundation, and others with their separate civil-society projects and programs have supported civil-society reconstruction in many countries. The book demonstrates that the relationship between civil-society and democratic development is complex, varied, and dependent upon both time and context, by highlighting the fallacy of thinking of the relationship in a linear manner. The authors begin the analysis with mainstream thinking on civil society as distinguished from the alternative vision. They then examine how the concept of civil society has grown in theory and in practice in the U.S.A., in the European tradition, and in certain other selected third-world countries. The ideal relationship between the civil society, the state, and the market in the mainstream discourse takes the form of a "socially responsible capitalism." This model is based on the principles of unity among the three nodes. In contrast, the European tradition with its recognition of the historical and political role of trade unions, churches, and other bodies in their struggle for democratic and state reform, is a model of conflict.

The book is organized into seven chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. The chapter on donor interventions points to a very interesting paradox in the development debate by raising the question of how empirically civil society is dependent on donor funding and is only ideologically independent. Donor assistance given in pursuit of the socially responsible capitalist model often comes in conflict with the existing civil-society organizations at the other levels of society. In many countries the gap between the normative and the empirical models of civil society has been wide and found to operate at cross-purposes. In trying to operationalize the concept of civil society through donor interventions, donor agenda had been geared toward limited political autonomy in China, stabilization in Guatemala, modernist civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa, promotion of market forces and privatization in Central Asia, and partnership in Latin America. In practice, China is still a highly corporatist state. In Guatemala, there is a struggle between the forces of the activist and that of the donor-assisted peace process. Development and advocacy working hand in hand led to the disintegration of

the existing nation states in Central Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa; the focus on modernization moves civil society away from the traditional kinship organizations.

Many scholars have examined the context-specific complexities of civil society within and among individual nations. This work sets itself apart from other secondary literature with its thorough scholarly analysis. The authors have shown the inter-connectedness of specific historical, political, and social circumstances and the donor agenda. Further, they have demonstrated that the inter-connection has given rise to a unique form of civil society in each country. This analysis of the historically and socio-politically embedded civil-society organizations in various countries will provide donors with a new perspective by which to consider their actions. However, an analysis of the situation of civil society in South Asia would have added more depth to the analysis. Aid practices for civil-society reconstruction and the necessity of conforming to the normative model of Western ideal has been found to leave out the large chunk of the uneducated and poor population in South Asian countries. Omitting an entire social strata from formal civil-society activities has led to the distinction between the "political" society and "civil" society (Chatterjee 2001, 173). At the political-society level, marginalized groups sometimes join hands with groups connected to the state that oppose any civil-society related reforms. Interventions made from the top down through reforms at the governance level then become slow and tempestuous due to the activities at the political-society level.

The book is a useful addition to the current discussions on the relationship between civil-society and democratic development. The implications presented in the concluding chapter of the book, however, cannot provide any practical guide for donors. While it is true that donors cannot be equipped with any mysterious power to assess how particular civil-society organizations at the receiving end of aid may or may not behave in the future, it would have been useful to distinguish civil-society organizations working for economic development (as in China) from those working for political development (as in Guatemala). The relationships between civil-society and political or democratic development can be quite distinct from those between civil-society and economic or social development. In countries like Bangladesh, civil society is far from a democratic context in which non-governmental organisations continue to work for economic development, while the existence and strength of civil society even in developed countries does not necessarily explain the strength of democracy. The vibrant Swedish civil society with deep historical roots stands in sharp contrast to civil society that

co-existed with fascism in Italy and Germany. The book is useful to the limited extent where donors, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, researchers, and others desire to understand the processes behind the empirical reality of civil-society and democratic development.

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Vatsyayana Mallanaga, *Kamasutra: A New Complete English Translation of the Sanskrit Text with Excerpts from the Commentary of Yashodhara Indrapada, the Hindi* Jaya *Commentary of Devadatta Shastri, and Explanatory Notes by the Translators*. Translated by Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (Oxford University Press: New York: 2002)

The ex-C.E.O.s and unreformed hippies who joined hands in an L.A. version of tantric orgy on HBO's *Real Sex* the other night certainly make up the ideal readership Wendy Doniger imagines for her new translation: "people who are free to choose their partners." For Doniger this means "it is for us." Doniger and Kakar's wide, modern audience has been only one of the many the *Kamasutra* has instructed since Prajapati Brahma ordained the composition of a treatise on kama (sexual pleasure) by Lord Shiva's attendant Nandikeshvara, whose one thousand lessons dwindled to 500 in the hands of Uddalaka's son Shvetaketu and then to one-hundred-fifty once the Panchala Acharya Babhravya took up the science. Babhavrya divided the science into seven domains of inquiry (*General Observations*, *Sex*, *Virgins*, *Wives*, *Mistresses*, *Courtesans*, and *Esoterica*) and bequeathed them to later researchers such as Charayana, Gonikaputra, and Suvarnabha, who further reduced the legendary far-flung science to a humanly manageable size and generally specialized in one of the seven domains of the science of pleasure. Vatsyayana's work sought to bring the disparate domains together into one treatise and, by affirming sexual pleasure as an end in itself, aimed to make it compatible with the two other human ends (purushartha)—Dharma (religion) and Artha (power). "Undertake any project that might achieve / the three aims of life, or two, or even just one, / but not one that achieves one / at the cost of the other two" exhorts Vatsyayana. To what degree this moral message may have been observed in Vatsyayana's own third century C.E. India is of course a difficult question, but Yashodhara's thirteenth century commentary, the *Jayamangala*, already tends toward an emphasis of the erotic over other ends. It is not surprising that the 1893 translation by the adventurer Richard Burton is accurate when it comes to sexual positions, but not much else. Such a trend has continued into the present, practically submerging the original text of the *Kamasutra* under a plethora of porn, toys, games, gimmicks, guides, cartoons, and condoms. So Doniger and Kakar's restitution of a rich, multifaceted text through extensive research in Sanskrit and Hindi sources is no small feat and will certainly be of interest to any audience jaded by all the regular hoopla—and, of course, those forever titillated by it.

Perhaps no other textbook in the history of the world has lent itself to so many fanciful readings and appropriations, including Doniger's own interpretation of it as essentially a dramatic fiction in seven acts, or Kakar's view that it is a memento of a real "psychological war of independence" of some two thousand years ago. It would indeed be surprising if one was never lofted into daydream or full-blown heroic fantasy by this textbook's typology of slapping and scratching, its strategies for picking up virgins, or ways of managing wives, courtesans, other men's wives, and so forth. Vatsyayana himself gets swept away by it all. At his most original and imaginative, he brings into the purview of fantasy even female sexuality and insists that in the case of sexual climax there is no distinction between the essences of the male and female subjects. Vatsyayana thus posits a disembodied ecstatic subjectivity at the limits of ethics and scientific knowledge: "When the wheel of sexual ecstasy is in full motion, there is no textbook at all, and no order." Such is the pursuit of pleasure, or the pursuit of science, that possibilities of moral subversion always loom large. In this manner, the *Kamasutra* often seems the sexual counterpart to the *Arthashastra's* realpolitik: its vision of *realerotik* is just as uncompromising, and its science goes perverse in accounting for all the possible mindsets, against the regulations of Dharma itself. The predatory man-about-town, the calculating courtesan, and the self-serving senior wife all tend toward various extremes in their attempts to maximize sexual prowess, and Vatsyayana often ends up having to indicate possible social repercussions. Considering the vast array of sexual facts in the classical epic works, the varying customs associated with marriage, the range of regional sexual appetites, and the diversity of sexual pleasure in Indian tradition, Vatsyayana's delimitation of the object becomes increasingly difficult, especially within the confines of any particular coherent social order. The object's scientific inexhaustibility ultimately gives way to fantasy and imagination, and in this manner the *Kamasutra* fills in the backdrop for much of classical Sanskrit erotic poetry. Thus we find in Vatsyayana a psychological portrait of the *Amarushataka's* pining house wife, the common prostitute of Damodara's *Kuttanimata,* and other stock characters such as the libertine, panderer, and clown. The inspiration to poetic fantasy for centuries, there is no telling what *Kamasutra* will inspire in new enthusiasts of this new translation, especially in an age when America and India all too often find each other reflected in their respective erotic fantasy.

There is much more for the student of South Asia to take from this work than merely lessons on getting lucky in love or drugging someone in case that is not happening. Doniger and Kakar's impressive scholarly apparatus raises a series of questions worth pursuing, as it gleans classical and modern

commentaries to dig up valuable background information of philological, mythical, philosophical, and historical sorts. How do the urban, social, and moral orders of the *Kamasutra* tally with those of other texts, such as Hala's equally raunchy but bucolic *Gathasaptashati* or the idylls of Krishna and Radha in early modern vernacular poetry? Which works of the Indian tradition build on the sociology and psychology of the *Kamasutra* and which diverge from it? Does traditional knowledge of sexuality in India remain confined to the seven major domains continued by *Kamasutra* and its abridged version, the *Anangaranga*, or did new types of research evolve alongside the new logic, linguistics, and other branches of science in early modern India? The selections from Devadatta Shastri's 1964 Hindi commentary "Jaya," as well as references to other modern Indian language editions, bring to the fore questions about the interpretation of traditional knowledge in the wake of colonial and national sexual countenances. Furthermore, the illustrations beautifully reproduced from a Nepali manuscript and presented in the translation reveal some of the conventions of depicting sex in painting. These beg further analysis of the relation between scientific text and illustration, or full-blown sculpture as in the famous temples of Konark and Khajuraho.

This is all to say that despite the fame of this text and its role in the contemporary eroticization of India by both East and West, very little of a concrete contextual nature seems to be known about traditional sexuality in India or the long history of idioms and practices relating to sex. In contemporary Indian society, sex and sexuality are often veiled by a silence seemingly foreign to the frankness of Vatsyayana's work. Ignorance of the past and contemporary silence provide a screen upon which a variety of fantasies and understandings of modern Western origin, such as those shared by Doniger, Kakar, and members of their "post-moral world," are so easily projected, and occasionally prove penetrating.

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