Introduction

In the imaginary of the ‘modern’ world, the words ‘culture’ and ‘India’ have somehow always been stitched together. This ligature, it could be argued, underwrites the very project of modernity itself. The mobilization of ‘Indian Culture’ was as crucial to the West’s construction of its identity in contrast to the Oriental Other as it was to the reconstructed Orient’s attempts to define itself. Culture has inevitably meant in our context the monuments of antiquity, the temple sculpture of a glorious past, the texts of ancient scriptures, all ‘the wonder that was’. So when we turn to look at present-day cultural practices, weighed down as we are by the golden past and therefore by a certain notion of culture, we react with incomprehension, dismissal, embarrassment or shame. Is it, perhaps, the very modernity of our culture that prompts this reaction?

If we were to recognize culture as comprising a variety of signifying practices, perhaps we would begin to make sense of the astonishing proliferation of seemingly disparate phenomena: Hindi cinema and its star system, the rath yatra and the demand for a temple at Ayodhya, the proposed Disneyland in Haryana, the devotional fervour aroused by the Ramayana on television, Madonna and Michael Jackson in middle-class homes, the folklorization of ‘rural India’ for elite consumption, or ‘ethnic’ Rajasthani-Gujarati clothes on South Indian women. And not so insistently visible: the demands for regional autonomy; the growth of the women’s movement; the Dalit struggles for the invention of alternate traditions, both cultural and political; the non-conventional left’s attempts to consolidate a lower class/caste base; the questioning of the concept of ‘secularism’ from both right and left; or even the formation of ‘modern’ communal identities.

All these phenomena appear at the intersections of various discourses, including those of gender, class, caste and religion in our contemporary context. A major effort of cultural theor-
tists today is directed towards analysing these formations. Since
we now see foregrounded the contestation of both ‘Indian’ and
the very notion of ‘culture’ itself, clearly the need today is to
understand ‘Indian culture’ not as some kind of organic unified
whole or as ‘a way of life’, but as ‘ways of struggle’. A genea-
ology of the culture concept, we hope, will contribute to this
effort.

THE CULTURE CONCEPT

The career of a word can often throw unexpected and signi-
ficant light on the pressing contemporary theoretical concerns
that focus centrally, if always implicitly, on that word and
deploy it as a major concept. The word ‘culture’, as Raymond
Williams puts it in his indispensable Keywords, ‘is one of the two
or three most complicated words in the English language.’ It
is so, he goes on to remark, ‘mainly because it has now come to
be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual
disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems
of thought.’ And we, in India, have to confront the further
complications that inhere in that word, in so far as it has been
mobilized, both before and after Independence, for very differ-
ets, sometimes diametrically opposed, purposes. It would be
useful, then, to take a brief look at the different trajectories
of this word, before discussing the possibility and necessity of
having a concept of culture that can be analytically and theo-
retically effective.

Its early, primarily agricultural, use designated ‘tending’,
‘growth’ or ‘cultivation’. Its gradual shift to the particular and
the personal (cultivating one’s mind, oneself), and, later (late
eighteenth and early nineteenth century), its generalized ap-
plication to a process or to the product of a process, set the
word off on its complicated, conflicting, and plural career. In
fact that career is inextricably linked to the career of modernity
itself, if we use the latter as a shorthand for industrialization,
expansion and consolidation of colonialism, the institution of
democracy and post-colonial nation-states. Seen in this per-
spective, it becomes possible to delineate the dominant senses
and uses of the word ‘culture’; to understand its affinities or
alliances with other loaded terms such as ‘tradition’, ‘Art and

Literature’ and to understand the distinctions—‘high’ and
‘low’, for example—it institutes.

Two of the significant senses of culture, the ones that are to
some extent still current—sometimes as residual and some-
times as still dominant, to employ Raymond Williams’ terms
—developed in the late nineteenth century: Matthew Arnold’s
conception of culture as a domain of human values, of what is
most essential, authentic, elevated, the highest creations of
‘Mankind’, something that is opposed to ‘anarchy’, ‘mass’ and
‘philistinism’, and E. B. Tyler’s anthropological conception of
culture as ‘a complex whole’. The two conceptions, though
obviously distinct, did, however, share the same assumptions:
of organic wholeness, continuity and growth. These assumptions
—they are sometimes, depending on context and valuation,
phrased differently: culture as a spatially bound, temporally
distinct entity which has its integrity, essence and purity—still
persist, notably in everyday language, but equally in the dis-
courses of the social sciences and the humanities. James Clifford
spells out the assumption like this: ‘A powerful structure of
feeling continues to see culture, wherever it is found, as a
coherent body that lives and dies. Culture is enduring, tradi-
tional, structural (rather than contingent, syncretic, historical).
Culture is a process of ordering, not of disruption. It changes
and develops like a living organism.’

This organic, even transcendental, notion of culture, later
elaborated by T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, finds its powerful
institutional embodiment in disciplines such as English Litera-
ture, and underlies modern concepts such as ‘tradition’
(Arnold’s ‘the best which has been thought and said in the
world’), and the related notion of ‘canon’ (a collection
of texts that supposedly preserve universal human values). The
anthropological conception of culture, on the other hand,
tries to extend and pluralize the Arnoldian notion and regards
all cultures as equal or equally valuable. But, interestingly,
this cultural relativism which flourished in the first half of
the twentieth century is in effect a refusal as well as a masking of
the violence of colonialism. Espoused most staunchly by an-
thropology—a discipline made possible by colonial conquest
—cultural relativism obscured the complicity, even collusion,
of scholarship with the project of colonial domination.
THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

These two notions of culture, or their precursors, have not been mutually exclusive. Indeed, as Edward Said has shown, in the construction and representation of something called the 'Orient' as Europe's cultural and racial Other, both these notions are complementary:

To restore a region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own benefit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West; to subordinate or underplay military power in order to aggrandize the project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient; to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition with full recognition of its place in memory, its importance to imperial strategy, and its 'natural' role as an appendage to Europe; to dignify all the knowledge collected during colonial occupation with the title 'contribution to modern learning' when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives; to feel oneself as a European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time, and geography; to institute new areas of specialization; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index, and record everything in sight (and out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers: these are the features of Orientalism.

Said helps us to see how representations of another culture enable, endorse, and perpetuate relations of dominance and subordination. If one important strand of Orientalism, drawing on a textualized notion of culture, propagated the vision of a glorious Indian (Vedic and Aryan) civilization in the distant past, another strand presented in essentialist terms the irrational, immature, deprived and lazy 'native'. Underlying both strands is the assumption that Western intervention can solve the problems of the Orient, either by restoring it to its former glory or by helping it to acquire rationality and achieve progress.

What we see in Orientalist scholarship are the complex intersections of knowledge and power, the 'distribution of geo-political awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts'. When Indian nationalism began to articulate its anti-colonial programme, it often redeployed the Orientalist construction of the Indian past, needing to assert the antiquity, authenticity, and unruptured continuity of 'Indian' culture; it also seemed to subscribe, if only implicitly, to the Western critique of the 'depraved' present.

Although we cannot provide here a detailed discussion of contemporary knowledges of India produced by Indians or others, nor describe the First World needs and desires which produce such knowledges, we must still mention that dominant representations of 'Indian culture'—whether in art, history or in sociology—today replicate to some extent the presuppositions of Orientalism. These disciplines see 'tradition' as a seamless, continuous, unchanging, unified entity, which is then contrasted with its natural opposite, 'modernity'. Their view of culture and 'tradition' is produced by the operation of what Arjun Appadurai has called 'gatekeeping concepts':

... a few simple theoretical handles become metonyms and surrogates for the civilization or society as a whole: hierarchy in India, honor-and-shame in the circum-Mediterranean, filial piety in China are all examples of... concepts... that seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question, and that define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region.

Thus when sociologists, whether Indian or Euro-American, study how 'the great tradition modernizes', or try to explain the nature of social change, there is an astonishing amount of consensus on how to characterize this transformation, the favourite catch-all terms being 'Sanskritization' and 'modernization'. This monolithic view of culture (as concept or as practice) precludes the possibility of seeing tradition as constantly in the making, as strenuously contested and redefined by different communities. The investigators position themselves within disciplinary conventions in a way that exempts their own location or viewpoint from scrutiny. Their attitudes toward 'Indian culture' are formed not only by the discipline but also by their class background. The distinction between...
Introduction

high’ and ‘low’ culture, for example, underpins a whole host of academic disciplines and institutional practices, so much so that when the ‘object’ of study is constituted, the basic assumptions about culture and ‘Indians’ in general are unreflectively reiterated. What seems to happen is that as a result of the caste/class biases of their practitioners, the very configuration of the disciplines (whether humanities or social sciences) is shaped by the assumptions of the dominant culture, which is seen as given rather than constituted.

These assumptions operate not only in academic disciplines but also in our everyday perceptions of culture. The notion of ‘traditional Indian culture’ redeployed in the contemporary rhetoric of Hindutva, for instance, illustrates how the dominant culture obscures by its homogenizing gesture the historical complexity of our cultural/ideological formations. The very perception of tradition as unchanging is a misrecognition that denies the historicity of tradition, the ways in which it is continually invented, constructed and improvised. In other words, the dominant ideology attempts to freeze the conflictual and contestatory process of meaning production in order to consolidate its own hegemony—which is in a way nothing but social meaning presenting itself as shared and binding. What we would like to claim here is that the work of cultural interpretation—whether academic or ‘popular’—is continuous with and implicated in this process of producing meaning. Viewed thus, culture is pre-eminently the site of the political. Interpretation, whether employed in the interests of the dominant groups or towards undoing the hegemonic culture, needs to be recognized as a political activity.

Strikingly illustrative of the politics of culture is the intersection of new electronic media with the state, technology and multinational capital. The particular definitions of national, communal, caste and gender identities projected by Doordarshan serials such as Mahabharata or Chanakya, or the training in consumerism made available by high-tech advertising would not have been possible without the enormously powerful conjuncture of a state power and a technology underwritten by global capital.

Similarly, the way academic disciplines such as sociology or history school us into construing cultural phenomena is ex-

emplified by the manner in which we commonly understand caste and gender inequalities, nationalism or communalism in contemporary India. For instance, the dominant paradigms of caste—seeing it as a manifestation of the essentially hierarchical nature of Indian society or as a category irrelevant to a radical analysis of inequality (the assumption being that class rather than caste is the determining factor)—produce particular interpretations of caste which in simplifying or dismissing an entire social struggle elaborate their own political agendas.

What can we do, then, with a concept whose trajectories have made it so deeply problematic to use? We cannot, obviously, abandon ‘culture’ on the grounds that it is too messy, precisely because we should be able to account for the messiness at some level. Some of the newer ways of theorizing culture (Benjamin, Williams, Hall, Bourdieu, Foucault) attempt to view culture, in the words of Stuart Hall, as ‘a site of convergent interests rather than a logically or conceptually clarified idea’. The field of culture is seen as ‘a constant battlefield’ where there are no victories to be gained, only ‘strategic positions to be won and lost’. Cultural practice then becomes a realm where one engages with and elaborates a politics.

STUDYING CULTURE TODAY

In this volume, we have brought together some of the most interesting work on culture being done in India today. It is work, we would like to think, that implicitly or explicitly challenges Orientalist constructions of Indian culture while exploring alternative modes of representation. Clearly, the contributors do not often share methodologies or vocabularies, but there is a certain overlap of concerns and perhaps even of perspective. These essays stress the materiality of culture, the connections between culture and ideology, and the intersections of culture, knowledge and power in the colonial and post-colonial contexts. The investigations are resolutely interdisciplinary, not in the sense of putting together information or methodologies provided by the existing disciplines, but in breaking down their boundaries and creating a new ‘object’ of study.
Introduction

The first five essays attempt to conceptualize the visual field, from cinema to photography to painting, showing how the construction of modernity is informed by the image, still or moving.

In her essay on *Sant Tukaram* and *Devi*, Geeta Kapur traces two attitudes—revelation and doubt, faith and suspicion—thrown up by nationalism and defining what she calls a ‘living tradition’ relevant for any understanding of ‘contemporary cultural practice’. These alternatives are compounded ‘to form the modern’. Geeta Kapur argues that this is not merely an ‘ideological operation’ but one that needs to be perceived at the level of ‘aesthetics proper’. Cinema, like other popular art forms, transfigures, inflects, and radicalizes the iconography it inherits. What we perceive with embarrassment as naïve or crude in Indian popular art is named by Kapur as the formal category of frontality (of word, act or image) which marks the emergence of the modern (as in *Sant Tukaram*) and which is sought to be effaced by late nationalist realism (as in *Devi*). A different tendency from Ray’s inflection of neo-realism is seen by her in the work of Ritwik Ghatak, who represents for her a truly radical transformation of inherited iconography and therefore a strand of modernity from which the Indian cultural avant-garde today can learn.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s essay on the Phalke era sets the filmmaker in the context of an emergent nationalism, indicating how the initiative to deploy Indian subject-matter in painting and cinema complemented the growth of Indian capital and Indian industry in the early part of the twentieth century. Dadasaheb Phalke attempted to set up a truly ‘Indian’ film industry, so that the swadeshi image would circulate in a new chain of production and distribution controlled by Indians themselves. Detailing how traditional practices influenced the reception and appropriation of new technology, Rajadhyaksha argues that the mediation of the image into cinema was a mediation into modernity. The late-nineteenth century concern with the decline of Indian handicrafts and the antagonism towards machinery—what Rajadhyaksha calls the aesthetic opposition to modern technology—has marked all the later Indian debates on realism and modernism. However, when a specifically nationalist programme begins to find articulation, political demands are made on the ‘popular’ genres and the modern is inscribed onto the popular. Hence there was no single anti-colonial, or anti-capitalist, response. Rajadhyaksha suggests that ‘the question of “ours” will be best resolved if we return the question itself to history, to see the successive changes that occurred and how this was interpreted to serve different conditions, different aspirations’.

Sonam Zutshi’s article analyses the conjuncture in contemporary commercial Hindi cinema of three ‘primary images’ of nationalism—Woman, Nation, and the Outsider. The analysis is preceded by a detailed discussion of how the images are constructed and reconstructed in the works of such nationalists as Peary Chand, Bankimchandra, Phalke, Veer Savarkar, Gandhi, and Tagore. Zutshi points out how the ‘Woman Question haunted nationalist thought’, and how the ‘control of the nation (body politic) was linked to the control of the woman (the female body)’. The reappropriation of Indian history that was so central to nationalism depended crucially on defining the true Indian woman as also the Outsider/Other (often the Muslim) from whom the mother country must be saved.

Gulam Mohammed Sheikh attempts—with within the framework of traditional art criticism—to differentiate what is ‘ours’, taking his examples from European Renaissance painting, from Mughal art and from twentieth century Indian nationalism. Analysing Velazquez’s famous *Las Meninas*, Sheikh shows how the technique of oil painting made illusionism synonymous with realism. In the age of the emergence of individualism, the subject position provided for the viewer is also the position of the painter, whose gaze is all-encompassing. In contrast, Mughal painting as well as later Indian painting is ‘independent of the windowed view’. Unlike illusionism’s ‘climactic moment’ of revelation, Indian painting required a longer stretch of time to ‘appraise pictorial space’. Since the point of contact with the viewer lay in the narrative structure of the painting, the artist, although familiar with illusionistic techniques, used them only to ‘make pictorial imagery believable’. In a discussion of *The House of Shaikh Phul*, Sheikh describes how the central figure of the saint is watched through ‘multiple eyes of onlookers in a prolonged sequence’, with the
viewer entering the painting from a number of possible entry points. Sheikh ends with a discussion of Benodebehari Mukhopadhyay's mural, *Medieval Saints*, which allows the eye 'to traverse in multiple directions'. The movements and gestures of the figures become important in an epic mural such as this, where the 'story' emerges from corporeal rhythms'. By contrast, Western painting focuses more on the head than the body. Whereas in Western painting the viewer's gaze is 'arrested and stilled', in the traditions of Indian painting a certain mobility informs the spatial structure.

The reconstruction of people's 'visual space' in the modern world after the photographic image begins to determine 'the entire visual field of perception and experience' is R. Srivatsan's main area of interest. His concern is to grasp the politics of photography in a context where it penetrates every discourse and 'powerfully [reconstitutes] its logic and practice'. Srivatsan examines the 'icon-building' functions of photography, showing how it 'structures our desire, and our conceptions of what is truth itself', how the seductiveness, reasonableness and authority of the image shapes the practices of our daily life. Drawing his examples from advertising, newspaper journalism, television and cinema hoardings, he analyses the complicity of the photographic image with neo-imperialism, communalism, the restructuring of patriarchies and the 'micro-politics of subjection'. Srivatsan argues that there is an urgent need to counter the hegemony of the 'imaging apparatus', a process that requires conscious questioning and critique on the part of the viewer. How is popular pleasure to be reappropriated, he asks, and inflected 'in ways which turn it into a critical force'?

Our next group of essays centres around the literary text as cultural practice. They concern themselves with the politics of reception (Tharu and Lalita) and with the beginnings of new genres (Padikkal, Sangari).

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita examine the significant continuities between colonialism and nationalism in rendering visible the eighteenth century Telugu text *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radhika). Composed by Muddupalani, a *ganika* at the Thanjavur court, the poem was sought to be reprinted in 1910 by Bangalare Nagaratnamma, a later *ganika*. The text had already been attacked by social reformers as obscene and immodest, and now the British Government declared it objectionable. This ban was lifted twenty years later after pressure from nationalists, but the book is still difficult to find. Unlike upper-caste women of the time, Muddupalani as a *ganika* had access to education and the leisure to write or to practise the arts. Her poem employed new rhythms and a new vocabulary inspired by the artisanal rebellions of the medieval period; even more significantly, she subverted the received tradition in her portrayal of the relationship between Radha and Krishna. Radha became the sensuous central figure—a depiction that was transgressive, radical and provocative. The work's 'legitimation of female desire', suggest Tharu and Lalita, 'and the casual confidence with which it contests asymmetries of sexual pleasure' is difficult to imagine even in our present-day context. Tharu and Lalita argue that the debate around Muddupalani's text provides 'a perspective with which it becomes possible to tease apart and display the processes, at once partial and overdetermined, through which cultural authorities were fashioned and secured as they were drafted into the emerging historical projects of empire and of nation.' The discrediting of Muddupalani's text is a pointer to the nineteenth century respectability of the emerging middle-class woman, defined in contrast to the lower-class/ caste woman. And, of course, the 'moral degeneration of the Indians', as indicated by their preoccupation with sex, was a notion that underwrote the need for colonial intervention. The new morality promoted by English education led to the marginalization not only of individual works but even entire traditions, including that of literature written by women. Orientalist scholarship in particular ignored works which appeared to overturn traditional gender and caste hierarchies. The norm of the 'virtuous domestic woman', however, was crucial for the Swadeshi and Self Respect Movements also. The delegitimation of the *devadasi* as artist, for instance, went together with the transformation of the *sadir* dance form into Bharata Natyam as the nationalists created an 'Indian' tradition and a superior national culture based not on eroticism but on spirituality. Although the lifting of the ban on *Radhika Santwanam* was a nationalist act, the 'interests of empire and of nation', say Tharu and Lalita, are
not in obvious contradiction. They suggest that the cultural politics of this text must be seen against the horizon of patriarchal reconstitutions in the interests, among other forces, of Enlightenment, Orientalism, imperialism and nationalism.

Shivarama Padikkal's essay deals with the pan-Indian phenomenon of the emergence of the novel in the nineteenth century. Suggesting that literary production is one means by which the dominant group ‘constructs its reality and its history’, Padikkal contends that an uncovering of this construction must focus not on the ‘pure text’ of traditional literary criticism but on the entire historical moment. The reception of a Western literary form—the novel—was not an individual decision but a complex historical transaction. Padikkal’s argument is that the Indian novel did not simply derive from the Western genre; neither did it merely continue an older indigenous form. Instead, we must see it as an entirely new genre, arising from the historical moment when the English-educated middle class is attempting to imagine a modern nation. The medium of print, says Padikkal, created unified fields of communication and thereby provided new status and prestige to the vernacular languages. Indian nationalism shaped itself along with the identities of the modern Indian languages: ‘Language-centred regionalism and the concept of a nation that transcends linguistic divisions emerge as complementary notions.’ Focusing in particular on the novel in Kannada, Padikkal shows how the early Indian novel was part of the educated middle-class response to colonialism, being a literary expression for political aspirations not-yet-feasible in the realm of politics.

Kumkum Sangari’s article sketches a way of articulating the difference (epistemological as well as historical) between contemporary fictional modes of the ‘Third World’ and the ‘West’. Although its focus is not exclusively Indian, we include the essay here for its economical laying-out of conceptual problems crucial to any discussion of studying the specificity of Indian culture today. Examining the marvellous realism narratives of Gabriel García Marquez and Salman Rushdie, Sangari questions the politics of the easy assimilation of these texts into a Euro-American post-modernism. She argues that the cultural heterogeneity of Latin America is not only the result of a long process of ‘historical sedimentation’, but, ‘in a complex way Latin American history secretes the history of Europe and in turn renders it ironic.’ The ‘cultural simultaneity’ suggested by marvellous realism comes out of a specific historical situation partly deriving from colonial and neo-colonial rule. This is quite different, Sangari points out, from the ‘cultural synchronicity’ of the West, which is the ‘joint apogee of a cultural modernism and a consumer culture’. As a cognitive mode, marvellous realism is simultaneously attached both to ‘a real and to a possible’, which is why emergent societies draw on it for ‘renewed self-description and radical assessment’. As a Third World writer living in the metropolis, representing a middle class imbued with the colonizer’s language and cultural ethos, Rushdie’s use of the nonmimetic mode is somewhat different from that of Marquez, since he strains to produce a ‘double coding’ for his different audiences. Sangari sees in Rushdie’s narratives a ‘totalizing potential’ as well as a modernist aesthetic and epistemology of the fragment. She does, however, recognize in him an ability to play with different notions of the subject as well as different ‘ways of seeing’, which opens up possibilities for ‘more incisive descriptions of interpenetrative cultural formations’.

The two essays by Lata Mani and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan focus on the representation of sati and female subjectivity in colonial and post-colonial India. Lata Mani, who has been working on administrative, missionary and indigenous discourses on early nineteenth century sati in Bengal, suggests that the ideological legacies of these discourses inform our contemporary understanding of a variety of issues concerning gender, colonialism and the nation. She attempts here a feminist analysis of the politics of eyewitness accounts of sati. After the legalization of the practice by the British (on the grounds that voluntary immolation was sanctioned by the Hindu religion), widows were cross-examined by colonial officials to ascertain whether they consented to become satis. Mani points out that even the ‘minimal and overdetermined’ official reports of the cross-examination reveal a sense of the widow’s subjectivity and the ‘logic of her actions’. The discourse on sati represents women either as heroines or as ‘pathetic victims’. ‘These poles’, suggests Mani, ‘preclude the
possibility of a female subjectivity that is shifting, contradictory, inconsistent. The notion of agency implicit in the discourse positions women as objects to be saved, a positioning of Indian women that we may find not only in colonialism but also in nationalism and in mainstream Western feminism. Lata Mani tries to read the early colonial eyewitness accounts in such a way as to indicate a different conception of the widow’s agency, to show her as a woman who acts rather than being only acted upon.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan examines the representation of sati in various contemporary discourses from law to cinema, attempting to show ‘how the politics of representation crucially intersect with the procedures of subjectification of the sati in India today’. She maps the tradition/modernity debate that structures the arguments of those defending or opposing the practice of sati. Since the defenders evoke the ‘negative identity of modernity’ (as elite, alienated, Western) to criticize the opponents of sati, the opponents, argues Sunder Rajan, have to negotiate their position within the tradition/modernity problematic even while they are questioning the very terms of the debate. While suggesting that the historicization of the phenomenon produced by women’s rights activists reveals the ‘modernity’ of contemporary sati, she implies that our conception of the agency of the woman involved still lands us in a methodological impasse—women continue to be imaged either as heroic or as victimized. A way out of this impasse, she suggests, is to shift the emphasis from ‘sati-as-death (murder or suicide, authentic or inauthentic) to sati-as-burning’, to investigate ‘both the subjective pain and the objective spectacle’. Drawing on Elaine Scarry’s notion of the body in pain while maintaining a critical post-humanist perspective on it, Sunder Rajan argues that the condition of pain can be used to ‘define the human subject in certain contexts’, and sees this as ‘the very condition of a move towards no-pain’.

The two papers by Tejaswini Niranjana and P. Sudhir explicitly focus on language and colonial domination. The former draws attention to how the aesthetics and metaphysics of translation are underwritten by colonial discourse, while the latter examines the production of Western style grammars and their relation to cultural hegemony in the colonial period.

Tejaswini Niranjana’s argument is that translation’s privileging of ‘coherence, balance, consistency, smoothness and fidelity’ cannot be separated from ‘the general problem of representation in the colonial context’. Translation as a practice, she contends, ‘shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relationships of power that operate under colonialism’, its aim being to represent the Other ‘in such a manner as to justify colonial domination’. These representations of the Other acquire, through translation, a naturalness that makes them seem unchanging ‘rather than historically constructed’. To challenge these representations is also to question the conventional notion of translation which regulates and is ‘regulated by the imperialist enterprise’. Analysing, and re-translating, a twelfth-century Kannada poem, Niranjana argues for a ‘speculative, provisional, and interventionist’ practice of translation that shatters the coherence of the so-called ‘original’. At a time when the projects of nationalism are being put in question, she claims it is ‘more urgent than ever to be aware of the arbitrariness of what is presented as “natural”’ and of the instability of the “original”, which can be meticulously uncovered through a new practice of translation.

P. Sudhir’s essay explores one of the crucial devices colonialism deploys to achieve and extend its hegemony, namely, control over the languages of the colonized. At one level, this becomes a part of the project to codify and authenticate texts. At another, the process is more explicit, with administrator/scholars compiling vocabularies, making bilingual dictionaries and preparing grammars, all of which contribute to the conquest of language. Sudhir carefully details this process as it takes place with regard to modern Telugu, showing how the evolution of the language becomes enmeshed in the technologies of colonial power.

The final paper in this collection opens up for historical and cultural analysis a phenomenon that has proved particularly resistant to such investigation. S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina write about science in the colonial period, and the appropriation of Western rationality in India. Their article focuses on Master Ramchandra, a mid-nineteenth-century mathematician, educator and journalist, who demanded, along with others, that Western scientific knowledge be made
available in the vernacular languages. Habib and Raina argue that Ramchandra’s demand was political, and ‘articularated a critique of the Macaulayan educational policy’ which implemented higher education only in English. Ramchandra’s position, however, cannot simplistically be called an anti-colonial one. He was ‘overawed’ by the achievements of Western civilization, especially by their science and technology, and underwent conversion to Christianity. He tried to develop a critique of Indian society based on his own concepts of realism and rationality, advocating the empirical method to counter scholasticism in learning. Through his commitment to vernacular education, argue Habib and Raina, Ramchandra attempted to come to terms with his predicament as a colonial subject. Science was used ‘to oppose the cultural and intellectual erosion’ caused by colonial rule, as in the early nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals’ critique of Christianity.

For Ramchandra and a whole generation of scientists after him, science ‘offered itself as a catalyst of change’ and ‘served as a weapon in the still nebulous struggle against imperialism’.

The essays collected here have, in their own specific ways, tried to come to terms with our modernity. They have done so by looking at cultural forms, formations, and institutions as practices that have ‘impure’ beginnings and heterogeneous articulations. Although they share no common politics (in the narrow sense) or common epistemology, taken together they contribute to the elaboration of a politically sensitive mode of cultural analysis that will enable us to begin mapping the complex path of colonial pasts as they are transformed into post-colonial futures.

Tejaswini Niranjana
P. Sudhir
Vivek Dhareshwar

Introduction

NOTES

For a list of works which provide theoretical frameworks for, as well as specific examples of, the study of culture, please see the select bibliography.

1. Ernesto Laclau, in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Times* (London, 1990), glosses the concept thus: ‘The imaginary is horizon: it is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility for the emergence of any object. In this sense, the Christian millennium, the Enlightenment and positivism’s conception of progress, communist society are all imaginaries’ (p. 64).


4. Ibid.


8. Although Said’s argument here focuses primarily on West Asia (the old Middle East), his conclusions are obviously applicable to the other colonial contexts he mentions, especially the Indian one.

9. Ibid.


11. It is necessary to construct the genealogy of the human sciences in India from this perspective. An exploratory attempt with regard to Indian sociology has been made by Sashee Hegde, ‘On Sociology in/ of India: Toward a Discursive Deviation’, *Social Scientist*, 17: 5–6 (May–June 1989): 93–108; and by the Subaltern Studies historians, for example Gyanendra Pandey, ‘In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu–Muslim Riots in India Today’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 26: 11–12 (March 1991): 559–72.


In order to do interdisciplinary work, it is not enough to take a "subject" (a theme) and to arrange two or three sources around it. In order to do interdisciplinary work, it is not enough to take a subject. It is also not enough to take a particular research question or task and to create a new object which does not have any relationships to the sources or evidence being used. In order to do interdisciplinary work, there must be a new object which is created out of the relationships among two or three sources, and it must be a new object itself. This relationship is not one of inclusion, but rather of mutual formation and creation. 

14. See the recent bibliography for a description of work by these writers.

Exploration and Social Theory, 333.

15. Hall, Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms, in Richard Court, 333.