

# **Feminism, Internationalism and the West: Question From the Indian Context**

**Mary E. John**

## **PREFACE**

The two relatively short essays reproduced here are an attempt to tackle some of the current problems affecting the women's movement and feminist politics in India from local and global perspectives.

The first essay, "Feminism in India and the West: Recasting a Relationship", discusses the established forms in which the westernness of feminism has been an issue in the Indian context, and suggests some alternative routes for addressing it. The colonial legacy and the identification of women with national culture have made for a selective identification of feminism with an inauthentic westernization. The paper goes on to discuss some of the divergences in the conceptual legacies of western and Indian feminism, and the problems of using analogous arguments from western contexts in India. It focuses especially on the misleading role that critiques of essentialism are currently playing in feminist debates in India, and concludes by calling for a more careful appraisal of the effects of growing disparities on patriarchal structures.

The second essay, "Feminisms and Internationalisms", takes a look at questions of internationalism from an unfamiliar angle. Relations with the West have dominated the Indian scene in such a way that first Europe and now the United States constitute natural frames of reference for a comparative self-understanding of what it means to be a feminist in India. By way of contrast, this essay is structured in the form of a dialogical response to Latin American experiences of feminism and internationalism. It explores the new possibilities such a dialogue provides for analysing internationalism in India in the recent past and today. In the process, colonialism and pluralism become significant themes of comparison with Latin American realities. The essay concludes with a brief account of some of the new directions feminisms in India are taking, with the potential of becoming internationalist alternatives to the current agendas of globalisation.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Vivek Dhareshwar and Mrinalini Sinha who encouraged me to write these essays, and especially to Satish Deshpande who made sure they actually got completed. Earlier versions of each of the essays are being published respectively in *Cultural Dynamics*, vol.10, no.2, 1998 and in *Gender and History*, Special Issue on Feminism and Internationalism, 1998, forthcoming. Permission to reprint them here are gratefully acknowledged. Finally it remains to thank Kumud Sharma for urging me to bring out this occasional paper.

**ESSAY - 1**  
**FEMINISM IN INDIA AND THE WEST**

**Recasting a Relationship**

**Mary E. John**

Since the 1990s, interest in the Indian women's movement has grown considerably, in the form of major studies and important articles (Gandhi and Shah 1992; Kumar 1993; Tharu, and Lalita 1993; Tharu and Niranjana 1994; Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). Scholarship on the history of struggles against patriarchal oppression, along with critical assessments of an equally significant history of feminist intervention are continuously being revised and deepened. Taking all this into account, and that too at a moment when India is entering a new global phase amidst appraisals of fifty years of independence, might make questions about the Westernness of feminism appear dated, a problem that we have put well behind us.

This paper tries to lay out some of the reasons why a fresh interrogation may be vital at the current conjuncture. Although the Indian women's movement can legitimately claim a rich, unique history, recent upheavals are forcing us to reconceptualise (or, it could be argued, to conceptualise for the first time) the basic concepts of patriarchy, gender and empowerment. It is not for nothing that some of the current debates affecting women, such as those around a uniform civil code, or reservations for women in Parliament none of them new issues --- are nonetheless raising far-reaching questions for which existing answers are inadequate. More to the point, the current mood in feminist circles is anything but complacent. One of the most potent factors to have caused a sense of disturbance are the visibly empowered women of the Hindu Right. There is even a certain desperation in some of the efforts to wrest back the initiative where it no longer appears to be, in our hands.

Of course, doubts could well be raised: Why should questions about the West be brought in to discuss entangled clusters such as personal law/religion/communalism /secularism / diversity, or middle class/caste/Dalit/OBC (Other Backward Classes)/ minority (categories which have emerged in relation to debates on the uniform civil code and on reservations respectively), problems that are so identifiably 'ours'? Shouldn't the West be kept in its place, its power tackled around issues of, say, liberalisation and globalisation, the new imperialism? My answer, quite simply, is that the West is an intrinsic part of our current entanglements. Indeed, and this is what needs to be explored, the unique role of the West in our lives may turn especially on contemporary dilemmas in owning and describing ourselves.

What makes the issue particularly difficult to get a handle on is that those in the women's movement who have identified a problem in feminism's relation to the west, seem to have missed its essential aspects. Thus, for instance, Madhu Kishwar has gone on record to say that she does not call herself a feminist because feminism is too tied up with its western origins, from where universal agendas emanate, but which are inapplicable elsewhere. Feminists in India suffer from being too western-identified, when they should be more concerned with analysing local women's issues 'on their own terms'. (Kishwar 1991).

Even though this formulation does point to the normative power that western feminism has so often assumed (which others have related to an ongoing colonial legacy (Mohanty 1985)), Kishwar's analysis unfortunately neither does justice to feminist positions in India, nor to the nature of Western domination. It also leads, therefore, to equally problematic resolutions. Being westernised comes across as the mark of a special contamination, a lure from which one can nonetheless free oneself, somewhat reminiscent of the image Susie Tharu has provided in another context regarding the 'rigors of colonialism ... [that could be] peeled off like prison uniforms.' (Tharu and Lalita 1993:91)

No one could disagree with Kishwar's view that the use of feminism as a 'label' is no guarantee of 'ideological correctness or of a superior grasp of the issues'. Kishwar in turn, however, seems to rest content with a different guarantee --- that shunning such labels is all that is required for the attainment of a 'greater sense of freedom' and the assumption of 'full responsibility' for one's political ideas, as though independence and a better understanding of Indian realities were a matter of personal will. (Kishwar 1991:8) In my view, such an approach harbours two fatal limitations. First of all, it cannot really take account of the complex relationships between those most marginalised in our society and the emancipator claims of western modernity, except to dismiss them. Secondly, the claim to independence is not quite borne out --- indeed, Madhu Kishwar's work has been hampered by an insufficiently careful view of the very subject matter that most concerns her --- our Indianness. More often than not, our difference from the West, our diversity, our traditions, and so on, are uncritically reclaimed, to the point of being proof of a certain superiority of our own.

Though well-known, Kishwar's repudiation remains somewhat isolated. The more common position within the women's movement is quite a different one, even though it has not been as explicitly articulated. Most of those who have been active spokespersons would claim a feminist identity for themselves; they have also gone on to interrogate the specific reasons behind the singling out of feminism in particular for its westernness. As is almost too well recognized to be recounted, investigations into our colonial past exposed the 'recasting of women', to refer to the tide of the path-breaking collection of essays on women in colonial India. (Sangari

and Vaid 1989) A major consequence of the initiatives of social reform during the nineteenth century, was that middle class upper caste women became the bearers of Indian culture over against the West. We are only beginning to get a richer and less schematic view of the processes whereby the spheres of the middle class home and the family were protected, refined and contested as the privileged sites of nationalist culture --- and often through equally far-reaching processes of distinction from the women and men of other groups and classes. Major changes took place in the subjectification of women, the refashioning of family ideals, the intensification of conjugality and the forging of new patriarchies in different regions of the country. At the same time, especially from the twentieth century, political activism and change by and large took the form of public struggles of various kinds, in which, as we know, women were often active. Here, too, the road was far from smooth. Drawing on existing historical scholarship, Radha Kumar has described how, in the course of the early decades of this century, [t]he Westernized woman was becoming the focus of opprobrium from nationalists all over the country. Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shah Nawaz both declared that the Indian women's movement was not a "feminist" one like the Western movement; V. Rainakrishna Rao displayed an unequivocal distaste for the "sheer grasping suffragette", bemoaning the loss of Sita and Savitri; and Cornelia Sorabjee linked the newfound assertiveness of many Indian women with the "Western influence". (Kumar 1993:88).

Similar accusations appear to have been made many decades later in the first years of Hindu Code Bill .Independence, this time in the context of Parliamentary debates over the and Hindu Code Bill and Hindu personal law reform. Neera Desai has recalled how, during the 1970s, when a significantly new phase of the women's movement came into being in many parts of the country, a distinct 'allergy' attached to feminism. (Desai 1995:250). Flavia Agnes has also remarked on how Indian feminists, in an effort to counter attacks of being western, relied on 'Hindu iconography and Sanskrit idioms denoting woman power, thus inadvertently strengthening the communal ideology that Indian, Hindu and Sanskrit are synonymous' (Flavia 1994:1124). Clearly, therefore, feminists have been forced into repeated confrontations with this question. Even those who have otherwise done the most to play down or refuse the problem, have themselves been moved to provide a distinct, authentic and Indian shape to their commitment. For instance, the left-inspired nationalism that went into the making of the Towards Equality report (brought out by the Committee on the Status of Women in India in 1974), which I have discussed elsewhere (John 1996a and 1996b), is indicative of the special place poor working women came to occupy as emblematic of the Indian nation and its reneged constitutional promises, in implicit contrast to a western middle class feminism.

One is thus faced with a legacy whose persistence through such varied historical moments is in itself cause for comment. The production of Indian womanhood as the

guarantor of our cultural difference from the West is, it would appear, still with us. Given the problematic nature of its construction, there are strong reasons favouring a direct rejection of the problem altogether --- as a trap, a false demand for purity and authenticity that is fundamentally suspect. I would like to put forward the view here that it is both necessary to dismantle the existing framing of the problem, while looking to more productive routes for tackling it. The sense of a mismatch or discrepancy between western theories and our own contexts and questions is, after all- genuinely felt by practically everyone. Even groups of individuals have identified with specific positions first articulated in the west, but which come closest to their own self-understanding---such as socialist-feminism or postcolonial feminism---the unease has not dissolved. If anything, it has grown.

## **Divergent Assumptions about Culture**

As the preceding discussion would strongly suggest, problems concerning feminism and the west call forth a crucial third term in our context namely that of culture. But instead of clarifying matters, 'culture' turns out to be a remarkably difficult, if not opaque concept, even as so much seems to hinge on it. Moreover, debates involving culture have become significantly more polarised over the years, especially as attention has shifted from the past to the present. At least some overlap and mutual reinforcement was evident in the first analyses of the nineteenth century involving questions of colonial power, nationalism and women. The developments of the 1980s and particularly of the '90s, however, which have led to the dominance of the Hindu Right and newly visible cleavages within the country, have sharpened differences within the women's movement, while also producing a sense of disarray.

It is this context, characterised as much by divergent positions as by new uncertainties, which could benefit from a different posing of the problem of the west. A useful starting point for such an analysis would be to explore, if only very briefly, some of the fresh valencies that culture has come to acquire in current debates, such as the one over a uniform civil code. There now exists a growing literature on the subject, much of which has taken the form of "position papers" by different groups. For the limited purposes of this paper, however, I will concentrate only on two extended discussions around this theme.

In the course of her historical account of the unmaking of the Hindu Code Bill during the 1950s, Madhu Kishwar has repeatedly insisted that a 'living tradition in India', where 'the power to change its own customary laws rested with each community', was homogenised and stultified. This was process that began (but by no means ended) with colonial rule. Even so, she goes on to aver, [e]ach caste and sub-caste and occupational grouping continues to assert its right to regulate the

inner affairs of its respective community and does not pay much attention to either ancient textual authorities or modern parliament-enacted laws. (Kishwar 1994:2148).

The main tragedy for Kishwar is that the attempt to codify Hindu law by the newly independent nation-state overrode this 'key characteristic of Hindu culture, namely its diversity.' (ibid:2158) In the process, vast powers of reform were taken out of the hands of groups and communities and transferred to the elitist state, but in a manner that was conservative and largely unworkable. The production of communalism in the form of a Hindu majoritarianism deeply resentful of a 'pampered' Muslim minority, as a by-product of this state-initiated venture.

In strong opposition to this way of making a case against a common code, Kumkum Sangari has questioned the recent and quite widespread elevation of the cultural sphere in contemporary thinking, epitomized, in her view, by 'primordial' conceptions of 'community'. Religion, in particular, has become 'the singular, or at least the privileged axis of...cultural diversity.'

Should we strengthen [those] political arenas where religious affiliations can be downplayed or should we, as present communitarian and communal politics would prefer, force them to remould or discard their agendas in favour of religious communities? (Sangari 1995:3288,3289).

Sangari is at pains to show that claims of cultural identity based on membership within a discrete, essentialist concept of community are bound to founder. The heterogeneous, fissiparous and cross-cutting nature of all the relevant categories of community, such as religion or sect, but also caste, region, language and so on, poses a fundamental challenge to any coherent definition of 'cultural autonomy' that one might want to offer. Moreover, feminists have every reason to be suspicious of notions of community that are so completely identified with the domain of personal law. For this would mean granting yet another lease of life to the patriarchal equation of the private familial sphere as the privileged site for the reproduction of culture, not, as in the past, against a colonial power, but now in the name of preserving our cultural diversity.

The clearest site of contention for the two views so cursorily summarised here is thus that of community/culture. Where Kishwar hopes to retrieve a diverse 'living tradition' from the homogenising, normative powers of the westernised state, Sangari seeks in various ways to 'play down' this very domain. Levelling her arguments against anyone in favour of personal law reform 'within communities', Sangari demands that we should rather focus attention on 'multiple and overlapping patriarchies', which cut across the public and private spheres, the realms of the state and civil society.

But along with such obvious and deep differences in their positions, it was extremely interesting to discover something else: Significant aspects of the argumentation commonly employed by both critics, whether for or against a common code, bear certain striking similarities to one another. Not only that. Their theoretical strategies dovetail with, and, in fact draw upon the critiques of essentialism made popular by the rise of what is commonly referred to as 'postmortem' thought in the West. This critique of essentialism involves a principled opposition to fixity and homogeneity. It exposes that which is taken as 'given' and therefore beyond question, often due to perceptions of what is natural and hence unchangeable. This is more than a little ironic, if only because neither Kishwar nor Sangari see themselves as being in any way aligned with 'postmodernism'. Sangari accuses others of adopting an essentialist approach towards notions of 'community' and 'cultural diversity' by treating them as 'primordial' and 'given'. Indeed, the very attempt to determine the nature of our diversity has the effect of fixing and freezing what is in a state of flux. Kishwar also sees the problem as one of homogenisation and essentialisation, though for her the central danger lies in the arbitrary creation of a singular pan-Indian Hindu culture by the state.

My concern in drawing attention to this aspect of their methodological strategies is to emphasize how Western theories have a way of impinging on us (even when they are repudiated). Indeed, according to Madhava Prasad, their special power lies in becoming incorporated within our habits of thought to the point of determining at an unconscious level, the reading practices we bring to bear' to our work (Prasad 1998). This is not necessarily only a problem to be overcome, nor can it be simply overcome.

In my own recent study of feminist theory in the United States and India, I tried to examine our relations to the West by paying special attention to those developments within postmodernism and U.S. feminism which have been more alert and responsive to problems of Western domination. At the time, it seemed vital to break away from the false options of universalism and relativism as the only choices available for tackling the applicability or relevance of Western theories to contexts for which they were not made.

Drawing on Edward Said's seminal essay entitled 'travelling theory' (Said 1983), I proposed an alternate view of theory as being structured in partial and composite ways, while also arguing for greater accountability towards the discrepancies and dilemmas of Third World locations. (John 1996a).

It now seems to me that this very focus on discrepancies between contexts was not sufficiently well developed. Moreover, given the kinds of impasses currently besetting U.S. feminism in comparison to those that Indian feminists are struggling with, I doubt whether the notion of a simple 'discrepancy' would be able to carry the weight demanded of it. In what follows, therefore, I would like to pinpoint a little

more precisely the divergences in the historical and conceptual careers of feminism in the West and in India.

## **Western Feminist Theory: Some Impasses**

I have already discussed how inescapable and problematic questions of culture --- cultural identity, cultural difference, now cultural diversity --- have been in the Indian feminist context. As the result, contrast, tension and conflict of various kinds have been characteristic of the relations between the domains of the social and cultural, on the one hand, and that of the political, on the other. Should we turn to Western feminist history, however, something significantly different claims our attention: The most common pair of terms to be evoked and fought over is that between nature and culture.

Since there is considerable room for confusion and misreading when dichotomies are drawn, let me explain what I have in mind. The question whether male female as culture: nature was a major debate in Western anthropology and exercised feminists for some time. I do not wish to rehearse those debates here. Nor do I wish to deny the associations that have been made between women, femininity, fertility, reproduction, and aspects of 'nature', such as the earth, and so on, all of which may be quite commonly evoked across many societies.

My point is a prior one: From at least the nineteenth century in the West, if not before, the very assignment of women to biology was laboriously produced --- and older Christian heritages reworked --- especially in the emerging dominant fields of science, medicine, psychiatry and psychology. There is nothing natural about the hysterisization of women's bodies, the privatisation of the family, and the confinements of motherhood --- all of which have been well-documented. One of the major effects of all this groundwork, however, has been that even in the hands of a revolutionary like Freud, 'biology is destiny' as far as the successful development of femininity is concerned. Simone de Beauvoir's celebrated statement 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one' was meant precisely to counter this massive institutional and discursive deployment (still poorly understood in her time), whereby the biological facility of femaleness was uniquely women's burden. Following de Beauvoir, it has been imperative amongst a host of feminists to break the association of women and nature (subsequently articulated in the English-speaking West as the sex versus gender distinction) in order to prove that the structures of patriarchy and sexual difference are fully social and cultural and therefore transformable. (Towards such an end, the differences of non-Western cultures, in terms of their conceptions of male and female, or the nature/culture controversy, have enjoyed an active if problematic presence in this feminist debate.)



In other words, one might speak of a shared allergy among many Western feminists, whose political affiliations otherwise conflicted, directed towards biology, the realm of an unchangeable female condition. It was therefore also crucial to open up this naturalized core, by successfully demonstrating its constructedness as 'a social discourse open to intervention' (Haraway 1991:134). Judith Butler, for instance, turned the sex-gender distinction on its head: By making sex the effect of gender, a legitimation subsequently imposed in order to fix the socially contingent through recourse to an unquestioned biology, 'the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (Butler 1990:7; see also Butler 1993). The conceptual resources of postmodernism, especially drawing on theories of cultural construction and signification, and critiques of essentialism, have become indispensable tools for such an agenda.

But what not so long ago was a productive intervention for feminist politics may have also turned into something of a liability. While certain fields of inquiry are becoming more and more refined, indications are that their focus has narrowed to the point of being fundamentally incomplete. This is visible in Butler's justifiably influential corpus of work. The range of problems and themes that would have to be tackled in order to sustain 'gender trouble' contract into an anti-metaphysics of the body and of language. It is as though the constant reiteration of the structural possibilities of resignification, namely 'that a formula can break with its originary context, assuming meanings and functions for which it was never intended' were enough to conceptualise the processes 'that govern[] the possibility of social transformation'. (Butler 1997:147)

Even in the specific context of her recent discussion of hate-speech, for instance, it is necessary to know something about the historical trajectories and social worlds of 'naming' (around 'queer' or 'black' for example) in order to understand how resignification works, but these are not explored. It is also necessary to offer a comparative analysis of resignification as it takes place in different institutional contexts.

Though she wants to be able to make a case against the legal adjudications of the state in favour of the domain of aesthetic expression, the case is never actually made. One gets the overall impression that the nature/culture dichotomy continues to haunt Butler's arguments, and needs to be repeatedly struggled over, if in successive guises.

Amongst U.S. feminists, Nancy Fraser appears to have done the most to identify impasses in current theorizing. While clearly sympathetic to deconstructive projects such as Butler's, which embody a more radical view of transformation than the accommodations of U.S. style multi-culturalism, she remains deeply critical as well. Fraser finds Butler's exclusive emphasis on resignification through liberation from

an inherently oppressive identity 'far too one-sided to meet the full needs of a liberator politics' (Fraser 1997:217).

She also argues that identity claims cannot be appraised on ontological grounds alone. Nothing is said about 'how a given identity or difference is related to social structures of domination or to social relations of inequality' (ibid.: 183).

In Fraser's view, such imbalances are symptomatic of the contemporary 'postsocialist condition', which has witnessed a decoupling of cultural politics from social politics, and a relative eclipse of the latter by the former' (ibid:3). Her project is to bring about a reintegration of these two domains. Towards such an end, Fraser proposes a double strategy linking the cultural politics of 'recognition' with the political economy of 'redistribution'. The major impediment facing such a project is that the logic underlying conceptions of redistribution tends to be at cross-purposes with that directing questions of recognition --- they pull in opposite directions. Where redistribution aims for the abolition of identity (formed within unjust social structures), the politics of recognition (involving a revalorization of disparaged identities) moves towards redressal through affirmation.

Fraser's efforts in finessing this dilemma by looking for the most consistent combination of 'socialism in the economy' with 'deconstruction in culture' are often instructive. And yet one is left with fundamental doubts. Is the nature of the problem one of an 'eclipse' of the economy by culture, or has there not also been an exhaustion of the inherited paradigm of political economy and its vision of a future through socialism? It is telling that Fraser has much more to say about the blind-spots in current work on culture than about possible modes of renewal of the socialist project. There is only the somewhat odd elevation of women's housework to what she calls 'universal caregiver status' in place of the conventional capitalist principle of the male breadwinner. But beyond this revival of an old debate, no new questions seem to have been generated at the critical interface of 'recognition' and 'redistribution'. Moreover, Fraser herself is disturbed by the experiential remoteness of her theoretical efforts (of combining socialist economics with deconstructive cultural politics) from the lives of most people in the United States today.

## **Questions for Feminism in India**

The above discussion on U.S. feminism has tried to highlight how pivotal the nature/culture relation has been for structuring Western theorizing. In our context, I have been concerned to make a case for the presence of a different pair of terms, namely that of culture and politics.

But this is where we run into a problem. For the combined legacies of the colonial encounter, on the one hand, and the dominance of Western theories, on the other, prompt us to conceptualise the culture/politics problematic along analogous lines to that of nature/culture. Culture becomes our 'essence', and our political task, therefore, one of deessentialization. We are thus moved to investigate 'theories about us' by employing 'theories that impinge on us', especially social constructivism, critiques of essentialism and so on.<sup>1</sup> The problem is that such critiques have not taken us onto new terrain. It should not, after all, surprise us to discover that the sphere of culture is made not found, that traditions are invented, and, in general, that a selective--and patriarchal--historical process is always at work (rather than some cultural truth about women).

The shortcoming of this approach is that the shift from cultural essence to historical process is made as though this would somehow solve the problems one began with.<sup>2</sup> The reason why accusations of essentialism strike me as being particularly ill-suited to our context is because all the participants in current debates (including the Hindu Right) occupy the political terrain of history. Let us not forget that even the most conservative responses to colonialism were about 'recasting women', a project already fully within the ambit of resignification. As the debates over the Hindu Code Bill during the 1950s attest, members of the Hindu Mahasabha were intent on reshaping a 'new India' through a modern system of laws that would both consolidate 'Akhand Hindustan' and help usher in a more up-to-date capitalism by 'making [family] property liquid in the hands of men' (Kishwar 1994:2158). Today, as Janaki Nair reminds us, it is the BJP which fields the largest number of women candidates (Nair 1997).

The fact of our dependence on Western theories should not be cause for paralysis, quite the opposite. In order to make further headway in what is doubtless difficult terrain, my suggestion is that broadly two kinds of inquiry would be a pre-requisite: The first involves providing a better picture of the meanings and social locations that attach to group identities, produced through histories of naming, renaming or misnaming, intertwined with processes of relative dominance or exclusion. Nancy Fraser's demand for the integration of the cultural with the economic are as relevant in our context as elsewhere. Though India enjoys a rich legacy of political economic analysis, it is troubling that discussions of secularism and communalism, for instance, so rarely address the structural forms of marginalisation that have gone into the making of the 'Muslim'.

Conversely, we know far too little about the reasons behind the successes of the upper castes in reproducing their hegemony in a world so remarkably different from the one which ostensibly gave us the caste system in the first place.

The second, not unrelated line of inquiry is more reflexive in nature. Western theories have been restructured and mediated for at least a century by the formation of Indian disciplines, such as sociology, economics, history or literature, and, more recently, by domains like women's studies. The intellectual field that has been mapping different problematics, assigning aspects of Indian society to particular disciplines, maintaining authority over and hierarchies between areas of research --- all of which has shaped the study of women --- lacks thematization. The fluctuating careers of specific disciplines have not simply mirrored problems in the West; Western concepts have often occupied distinct trajectories in our academic and political contexts. Thus, for instance, the concept of patriarchy (which western feminists have more or less dropped in favour of gender) has been repeatedly pressed into further service here.<sup>3</sup> This genealogical exercise would throw up indispensable clues about the conceptual resources available for tackling fresh questions.

With history as their point of departure, these lines of inquiry have the potential of conceptualising patriarchy and gender anew. Debates around the uniform civil code and Parliamentary reservations for women have made it amply clear that we are struggling at the level of conceptualising power relations as such. The subsequent question of what the best instruments for redressal might be, those with the greatest chances of taking us towards more democratic and genuinely inclusive modes of empowerment, is critically dependent on such an analysis.

Kumkum Sangari's warning that patriarchal power extends well beyond ill-conceived notions of cultural community is well-taken. But I am less certain than she seems to be that multiple patriarchies, the products of social discrimination along class, caste and communal lines, are more shared and overlapping than diverse. My hunch is that investigations into the structures underpinning patriarchies --- the growing disparities that have been the hallmark first of development and now of globalisation --- would tell a rather different story, one of unequal patriarchies and disparate genders. This is not the same thing as claiming that there are separate, 'multi-cultural' patriarchies, so to say, as Madhu Kishwar's evocation of the diverse living tradition of India's castes and peoples sometimes seems to suggest.

Western theories serve us poorly if we believe that we can prove our case by convicting others of essentialism. What is needed, I have been trying to suggest, is a more sober assessment of our historical and conceptual legacies, one that might prepare us better for the challenges and promises of the present.

## NOTES

1. I borrow the distinction between 'Western theories about us' and 'Western theories about its own experiences that nevertheless impinge on us' from Vivek Dhareshwar (1996: 22). \
2. For a recent example which displays these limitations quite extensively, see Narayan 1997.

3. The concept of gender, on the other hand, remains something of a 'donor category', and has yet to make its proper mark.

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## ESSAY - 2

### FEMINISMS AND INTERNATIONALISMS

The relations between feminism and internationalism have invariably been entangled ones, with local and global questions increasingly co-implicating one another. If this is true of the Indian context I am familiar with, Asuncion Lavrin's essay about Latin America, "Feminist Internationalisms: Latin American Alternatives" to which I have been asked to respond, indicates that the context she writes about is no exception either.

Nonetheless, it has been somewhat disorienting to read about feminist initiatives and problems from the perspective of a continent that lies, culturally speaking, considerably to the West of India, but is at the same time also part of "the South". Lavrin's essay not only exposes the extent of my/our ignorance of "other others", but, even more important, it highlights the elusiveness of "internationalism" as a concept and a goal. Does such an internationalism imply total blindness to questions of national affiliation? If not, what are the criteria by which it would seek to differentiate nations and national contexts? What sorts of commonality would it look for or hope to cultivate? For it is obvious -- today more than ever before -- that while an internationalist perspective must, by definition, take one beyond national concerns, dominant transnational (global?) forces preposition us to look in certain directions rather than others.

From the Indian side, I can vouch for the fact that there has been little pressure to think about possible connections to Latin America. This is in spite of the historic misnaming of the "indios" by the conquistadores five centuries ago, or Latin American influences of more recent decades such as dependency theory, liberation theology, or, at a different level, the charismatic inspiration of the Guevara. But these have been transient presences in India, insufficient to build on, and with no immediate feminist implications. If truth be told, Indians, even educated ones, are more likely to know of a figure like Eva Peron through the Bombay remake of the U.S. musical *Evita*, rather than her campaign for Argentinian women's suffrage.

I do not know whether (or in what ways) the Latin American situation is different from ours, nor what place -- if any -- India has in feminist debates there. If my response is, therefore, something of a shot in the dark, I see it also as an important opportunity to try and initiate a dialogue where no parameters or agendas have been laid out in advance. The challenge would be to try and rethink some of the assumptions that undergird Indian feminism and internationalism in the light of what Lavrin has to say about Latin American realities and problems. Amongst the many issues she touches upon are the strong international links developed by Latin American feminists from the turn of the century at home and abroad; the importance

of promoting "world peace" during the war-torn first half of the century; the increased pressure to attain universal suffrage after 1945; the rise of questions of development and poverty from women's perspectives beginning in the 1960s; the diversity of political regimes in Latin America; the unique interrogation of the terror of military rule by the Argentine Madres de la Plaza de Mayo along with many other less well-known mothers' groups in other countries during the 1970s; the "divisive," issues of class and race, and the universal problems of male domination.

Though her essay raises many pertinent questions, I would like to concentrate on the two which are of special comparative value for feminist debates in India: the prevalence of pluralism, and the legacy of colonialism. Significantly enough, the question of pluralism figures already on the first page and effectively sets the tone for the essay as a whole. Colonialism, in contrast, is only explicitly addressed at the end, and that too, in order to signal its experiential remoteness from most present-day problems.

This, then, is my point of entry for a possible dialogue. India may not be a continent; nevertheless, it too has had a long and complicated history of pluralisms, disparities and divisions. Such formative experiences (which the Indian state attempts to manage through proclamations of "unity in diversity") bring us in the vicinity of Latin American realities.

The question of colonialism, on the other hand, queers the pitch. It is not so much that colonialism still presses itself upon us (independence was won fifty years ago), but that its legacy is far from being settled. The question of the dominance or hegemony of colonial rule; the uneven transformation of modes of existence both economic and cultural; problems concerning ongoing or new dependencies -- Third World, neo-colonial, post-colonial; the reconstitution through colonial and Western frames of the very notions of pluralism and difference themselves -- all of these are live issues yet to be resolved.

Let me begin with how colonialism has been tackled in Indian feminism. The colonial legacy is nowhere more apparent than in the special "recasting" of gender, women's rights and feminism, beginning at least from the nineteenth century, but with resonances up to the present day. As we saw in the previous essay, middle class feminists can still be accused of betrayal and inauthenticity since their feminism becomes equated with westernization.

Preceded as it was by a century of social reform (involving specific relations of inequality among British officials, missionaries from various parts of the Western world, and Indians -- both men and women -- from different castes and regions of the country), "feminism" is first mentioned around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the wealth of scholarship on nineteenth century figures, debates and



controversies, the twentieth century unfortunately remains somewhat sparsely researched as yet.<sup>2</sup> This also means that the history of international feminist relations (such as those between the nationalist-feminists of the All India Women's Conference and British suffragettes during the 1920s) has yet to be written. There are glimpses, moreover, of alternate internationalisms during this time: The year 1931, for instance, was witness to a series of related feminist interventions -- the passing of the resolution on fundamental rights, including women's equality, by the Indian National Congress; the adoption of a similar resolution by the Communist Party of China; and a gathering in the same year of the Congress of Asian Women for Equality in Lahore (now in Pakistan).<sup>3</sup> Though more is known about Western connections, we still lack a nuanced sense of the commonalities and divergences undergirding Western women's agendas in India -- ranging from Katherine Mayo's infamous indictment of "Hindu barbarism" in her widely-circulated book *Mother India*, to the more "sympathetic" views of Annie Besant, Irish anti-imperialist campaigner based in Madras, whose vision of India's "future" was constructed through a nationalist and Brahmanical Hinduism.<sup>4</sup>

The period leading up to independence in 1947 was to witness the crisscrossing or blocking of numerous feminist concerns. The critical domains of reproduction, contraception and population control, which first gained ground during the 1920s and 1930s, illustrate how a "women's issue" could be caught in the cross-currents emanating from: the first Indian eugenics societies, the neo-Malthusian League, Gandhian nationalists, and the non-Brahmin movement, not to speak of Margaret Sanger from the United States and Marie Stopes from Britain.<sup>5</sup>

This historical background partly explains why Lavrin's claim that "Latin American feminists developed a strong vocation for internationalism" is echoed somewhat differently in India. The international relations of Indian feminists were fractured by the inequalities of colonialism, the contested priorities of the nationalist movement, and also by other conflicts.

The decades following independence -- the '50s and '60s -- have acquired the somewhat misleading label of the "silent period" in the Indian women's movement. This is mainly because of the enormous hope and legitimacy vested in the Indian nation-state under Jawaharlal Nehru, a state explicitly committed to the ideals of democracy, socialism and non-alignment. Such a political climate seemed to relativise prior feminist initiatives; but the swift repression of left-wing oppositional struggles in which women were active (such as the Telangana struggle) was also a contributing factor. Whatever the real significance of the less-known decades of the '50s and '60s, there can be no doubt that a fresh phase of feminist activism began during the critical conjunctures of the 1970s, which witnessed the emergence of a range of rural and urban movements, often in direct confrontation with an increasingly centralised state.<sup>6</sup>

The Progressive Organisation of Women in the southern city of Hyderabad was one of the first militant women's groups to be formed during the early 1970s, followed by the mushrooming of various groups in different parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> International inspiration came as much from Maoism and the "speak bitterness" meetings of Chinese women as from Western socialist-feminisms and the early consciousness-raising campaigns. On the more academic side, the Committee on the Status of Women (set up at the initiative of the Department of Social Welfare of the Government of India in anticipation of the UN Women's Year of 1975), produced a remarkable document known as the Towards Equality report. Its wide-ranging findings proved that the living conditions of the vast majority of Indian women had actually deteriorated since independence -- a revelation that shattered the complacencies of a generation of feminists who had come of age in the post-independence period. Deeply nationalist in its framework and assumptions, this text' played a very significant role at the UN conference in Mexico City, and was ultimately more widely circulated abroad than at home.<sup>8</sup>

It is not easy to capture the range of activities undertaken by a newly resurgent movement during the 1970s and '80s -- including diverse campaigns against rape, "dowry deaths", hazardous contraceptives, bad working conditions, and so on; lobbying for changes in government policy and legislative reform; and the emergence of women's studies as the academic arm of the movement. While local problems and interventions were emphasized, the burden of accountability was seen as resting mostly on the state. Thus, international issues were not commonly invoked as a major focus or rallying point. Feminism was adopted as a self-description more easily by some than by others. Differences and lines of tension between women's groups were constitutive of this phase of the movement from its very inception. Such tensions were often those between organisations affiliated to political parties, especially those on the left, and others who claimed "autonomy" for themselves.

Nearer the present, the 1990s seem to be something of a watershed decade. On the one hand, the increasing international visibility of the movement and the growth of feminist scholarship from India have brought Indian debates into transnational fora of various kinds -- activist, academic, government, and NGO. Overshadowing this, however, has been another worrisome development -- the annexation and redeployment of feminist initiatives by the state, political parties and resurgent Hindu Right-wing forces in particular, and by international agencies, to mention the most important. Though some Indian feminists were relieved to see that the fifth world women's conference in Beijing and Huairou in 1995 appeared to reaffirm the vitality of women's movements worldwide (in contrast to explicit attempts at Nairobi in 1985 to deflect attention to "gender sensitisation" techniques at the expense of critiques of patriarchy and development), others were deeply concerned

over the more subtle but comprehensive influence of international donor agencies, from the very preparatory process for the conference and the selection of representatives, to ongoing attempts to mould agendas.<sup>9</sup>

The most disorienting aspect of contemporary developments, however, is that the more straightforward meanings attached to terms such as "local" and "global" no longer seem adequate. Thus, for instance, we are only beginning to recognise that the processes of globalisation (to which India is a relative latecomer) give birth not only to highly visible transnational movements and influences, but to equally significant transformations within national boundaries as well. As for conceptions of the local, doubts have been raised for some time about the problematic nature of the "Indian" or the "indigenous". For if "Hindu religion" and "caste" (to mention the two most common markers of a quintessential Indian identity) are constructs that have been -irreversibly transformed by the colonial encounter, then affirmations of Indian authenticity cannot claim immunity from the processes of modernity.

Questions relating to the local, the national and the global have thus become difficult and contentious issues, and a great deal hinges on the context and the particular standpoint from which they are deployed. In other words, these terms have not shed their older meanings, even though these are being renegotiated on many levels. India is not going through yet another period of transition, when very little holds still and the relationship of the past to the future appears particularly uncertain. Moreover, current pressures on the Indian nation-state are multi-dimensional to say the least. The policies of globalisation, liberalisation and the "opening up" of the economy to international market forces (after four decades of autarkically-planned, state-led development), have been accompanied by the political prominence of the Hindu Right, by growing caste cleavages and disparities, and by regional reassertions of various kinds. This also means that the paradigm inhabited by the nationalist feminism of earlier decades, in which urban middle class feminists with their largely unexamined default identity as upper-caste Hindus assumed the right to speak in the name of the majority and for their welfare, is no longer viable.

One of the more positive outcomes of all these developments is that we are being forced to take a fresh look at "pluralism" and "diversity", both within the nation and beyond. If feminism is not singular, neither is internationalism. It has become more important than ever to understand the different stakes involved in laying claim to local, national, and international arenas. Nationalism -- with an effectively upper caste Hindu slant has played a pre-eminent role vis-a-vis colonialism and Western domination in recent Indian history. It has therefore had the power to shape, further or hinder international links. But "foreign" influences may look very different when seen "from below", as the subaltern, predominantly lower caste locations and careers of Islam and Christianity in India might suggest. To take another more recent example, the increasingly visible gay and lesbian movements in India have drawn

sustenance both from their local ties to the Indian women's movement, and from their international connections to the identity politics of sexuality in the West.<sup>10</sup>

Taking pluralism more seriously than we have so far would involve reexamining the feminist concepts (such as patriarchy and gender) that we deploy in our respective contexts. Our notion of pluralism must respond to power-laden global and national realities -- it cannot be an abbreviation for the sort of relativism where hermetically sealed cultures and their discrete patriarchal arrangements coexist without friction. At least in recent history, our differently gendered contexts have evolved out of situations of contestation, through processes of mutual, if unequal, implication. The fact that the world today is not only divided, but is, by all accounts, heading towards increasing disparities between regions and peoples, has definite consequences for conceptualising gender relations. I am, therefore, genuinely unclear about Lavrin's "imperative" discussed towards the end of her essay, namely that "gender must remain a constant to preserve the political objectives of feminism". If there is a common condition that feminism must address, it is one of unequal patriarchies and disparate genders. The imperative, then, is to recognise how asymmetries and structures of privilege may have prevented solidarities; and to fight on many fronts to enable the development of more viable feminisms.

The failure of certain international feminisms from the West which had assumed the right to speak for all women everywhere is only too well-known, What alternate possibilities and fresh dangers might be in store for us, as Indian feminists address themselves to new international challenges? Let me conclude by briefly alluding to some fledgling efforts currently underway which have the potential -- yet to be realised -- of sharpening and giving new direction to local/global questions.

My first example is a project (in which I am also involved) of dialogic exchange and translation between a group of French and Indian feminists. Initiated a few years ago, the project aims to collectively produce two edited volumes, one on feminism in India for publication in France, and its twin, a collection on French feminisms for Indian readers.

As a venture falling within the ambit of academic "cultural exchange", it is possibly unique in its feminist origins and especially in its two-way structure. Contemporary inequalities between France and India are sustained as much by the weight of "high theory" that has come to stand in for French feminism, as by the otherness of India, still Orientatised and seen as a victim-nation of the "Third World". While essays have been selected with an eye to how well they might travel and be relevant for their new French/Indian addressee, we do not conceive of translation as an effort to try and "close the gap". Rather, translation involves making available to the "global" reader as much as possible of the "local" contexts, histories and debates that produced the original essays.

Rendering explicit those aspects of context which are usually taken for granted (and thus naturalised), and consciously cultivating a sensitivity to present problems, might not only enlarge our respective worlds, but no less significantly, encourage us to see ourselves remade in another language and, therefore, in a new light.

A different kind of regional internationalism has been gaining momentum during the last decade. This relates to the growing importance of South Asia as a supra-national region -- in government diplomacy and military strategy, as an economic zone for trade and investment, and for feminist engagement and coalition-building. Indeed, feminists have been at the forefront of the recent rediscovery of the Partition of British India in 1947.

They have retold the violent births of Pakistan, India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), by drawing from the hitherto suppressed perspectives of the millions of people, especially women, whose lives were disrupted under conditions of incredible uncertainty regarding their ultimate destination or homeland.<sup>11</sup>

Compared to my previous example of feminist collaboration across national frontiers, the geopolitics and ethnic conflicts of South Asia present very different challenges and difficulties. For example, the Indian authors of a volume on women's experiences of the Partition begin by acknowledging that their initial plans to work on a three country oral history of women's experiences had to be changed.<sup>12</sup> In the South Asian context, feminists from India also have to contend with India's dominance in the region, and the disproportionate influence wielded by Indian perspectives across our borders (wonder what possible lessons Latin American feminism might have to offer on analogous intra- regional, inter-national asymmetries.) This is not to detract, however, from the heightened awareness of the complicated pasts of the sub-continent, which has inspired more concerted attempts to question the claims and policies of the Indian state, whether on the role of the Indian army's "peace keeping forces" in Sri Lanka, or on the politically volatile claims about mass Bangladeshi "infiltration" into Indian border states and metropolitan cities.

Apart from the increased attention being paid to the South Asian region, "India" is also being evoked and mobilised across the globe by a newly emergent diaspora. Suddenly (or so it would seem), people from countries with such disparate historical connections to India as Britain, the United States, Canada, Trinidad, Guyana, Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa and Australia, are affirming the Indian within themselves. Repercussions on gender relations, especially in the form of women's unique roles in maintaining community identity are also apparent. Though the temptation to view these developments as derivative nationalisms and revivals of "Indian womanhood" is considerable, especially in view of the coordinated global activities of right-wing organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), this may have to be resisted. The specific political-cultural content of, and motivations behind,

invocations of "India" have to be examined in relation to the particular local circumstances that produced them -- in a bi-racial African and East Indian society like Trinidad; after the world-historic defeat of apartheid and under Nelson Mandela's Rainbow Coalition in South Africa; in relation to the new racism epitomised by the rise of the one Nation Party in Australia; or in the emergence of yet another "model minority" in the United States.<sup>13</sup> In this area too feminists have once again had to strain against dominant versions of nationalism and Indian patriarchy in order to make room for diasporic negotiations of gender, citizenship and identity.

This brings me to my final theme for the exploration of internationalist agendas: South- South relations and feminism. For all their importance, efforts along these lines have been particularly tenuous and difficult to sustain. The history of the making of the "Third World" (initially composed of the newly independent states of Africa and Asia, and subsequently joined by Latin America) has clearly left its imprint in feminist circles, as the ongoing, use of the phrase "Third World feminism" would attest. Feminists in India and elsewhere have been particularly active in building solidarity against the negative fallout of structural adjustment programmes initiated by the World Bank and the IMF since the 1980s, given all the evidence that it is poor women who would bear the brunt of the 'social cost' of such programmes.

However, alongside the recent redivision of the globe into North and South, a more subtle remapping of the Third World into zones of "Success" (South-East Asia), "failure" (Latin America) and "collapse" (sub-Saharan Africa) has been taking place. This is an important development that has not received the critical attention it deserves. As I have argued elsewhere, in globalising India, the image of being sandwiched between the two options of sub-Saharan Africa to the West and South-East Asia to the East, has become quite a potent one, even in development and progressive Circles.<sup>14</sup> This is why, in my view, the most effective response to globalisation and current proclamations about the "end of the Third World" would be the forging of alternative South-South linkages.

Comparative work across the South has the potential of displacing the hegemony of the West as our default frame of reference. Instead of looking for, or expecting to find, homogeneity in Third World places, feminist engagements can help lift the largely sub- terranean histories of lateral connections and influences above the threshold of visibility.

A fascinating potential case here would be the complex local mobilisations of -- and relationships between -- the Argentine Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (and similar mothers' struggles in other parts of Latin America), and the series of Mothers' Fronts which emerged in different regions of Sri Lanka from 1984 onwards to protest the "disappearance" of Sri Lankan men by the state.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to Lavrin's assumption,

therefore, it would seem that the "Madres" are not an idiosyncratic Latin American phenomenon; and I am sure that there are other relationships yet to be excavated.

My purpose in discussing these examples of newly emergent internationalisms -- more egalitarian and dialogic Western collaborations, new perspectives on the South Asian region and the Indian diaspora, and attempts to rethink South-South relations -- is to try and provide specific content to the plural forms that feminist internationalisms can take. As we approach the twenty-first century in the global context of a uni-polar world order, struggles by women and by feminists have never been more critical for thinking about and working toward a more democratic and equal world. If there is no single universal method that will take all of us there, the specific paths being forged in particular locations must be our starting point. Taken together, both this and my previous essay have hopefully demonstrated how entangled yet apart our distinct histories have been, and how much more needs to be built as we struggle for and towards a less-unevenly shared -- a common -- future.

### *Notes*

1. Some general reviews of the 19th and 20th centuries are to be found in B.R. Nanda ed., *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity*, Delhi: Vikas, 1996 (1976); Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of the Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993; Susie Tharu and K.Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present, Volumes I and II*, New York: Feminist Press, and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991 and 1993; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, 1996. Recent studies of the 19th century include Mrinhalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995 and New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997; Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters: Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.
2. The important exception here is the figure of Gandhi, who has received considerable feminist attention over the years. See also Apama Basu, Mridula Sarabhai: *Rebel with a Cause*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
3. I am indebted to Vina Mazumdar for bringing this to my attention.
4. For a discussion of Annie Besant in the context of the non-Brahmin movement, see V.Geetha and S.V.Rajadurai, *From Iyothedass to Periyar: Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium*, Calcutta: Swanya, in press.
5. Barbara Ramusack, "Embattled Advocates: The Debate over Birth Control in India, 1920-40", *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 1, no.2, 1989; Anandhi S., "Reproductive Bodies and Regulated Sexuality: Birth Control Debates in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu," in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair eds., *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, in press.
6. Ilina Sen ed., *A Space Within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Struggles*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990; Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *The Issue of Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women,

- 1992, Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, "Changing terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.30, no.29, 1995.
7. K. Lalita, "Women in Revolt: A Historical Analysis of the Progressive Organisation: Gower, 1988. Andhra Pradesh," in *Women's Struggles and Strategies*, ed. Saskia Wieringa, Alderst it in India, 1970s.
  8. For further analysis of this report and others, see my essay, "Gender and Development 1990s: Some Reflections on the Constitutive Role of Contexts," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.31, no.47, 1996.
  9. Indu Agnihotri, "The Fourth World Conference on Women: A Report from China," *Indian Government.- Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol.3, no-1, 1996. Agnihotri points out that "for the first time the If an Inter-Agency Facilitating was forced to have a mediated relationship wit its own NGOs through and Coordinating Bureau, which itself is a creation of donor agencies." (p. 122)
  10. See, for instance, Sherry Joseph, "Gay and Lesbian Movement in India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.3 1, no.33, 1996.
  11. Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency During Par covery, Rupture Resistance: Indian State and abduction of Women during Partition, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.37, No.17, 1993.
  12. Ritu Menon and Kamia Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998, p.vi.
  13. For some examples of recent work, see Tejaswini Niranjana, "'Left to the Imagination': Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad," in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds. *A Question of Silence? The Sewal E-conomies of Modern India*; Kmnala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Apama Rayaprol, *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997. See also the forthcoming special issue of *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, on *Migrating Feminisms*.
  14. Mary. E. John, "Globalisation, Regionalisation and the Remapping of the Third World," paper presented at the conference on *Rethinking the Third World.- History Development Politics*, University of West Indies, Jamaica, December 1996.
  15. Malati de Alwis, "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka," in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and the Politicization of Religion in South Asia*, eds. Amrita Basu and Patricia Jeffrey, London and New York: Routiedge, 1997. International influences can also be used to rewrite local history in non-fortuitous ways. de Alwis discusses how the first Mothers' Fronts amongst minority Tainils in northern Sri Lanka were effectively erased from memory by some of the drganisers of the later Mothers' Fronts in the south of the island, who claimed inspiration from the Argentinian Madres alone.