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Sex and Secularism: Indian Women and the Politics of Religious Discourse

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Forewords

Problems in the conjunction of sex and secularism are not of course unique to India. Secularity in the sense of a binary term tied to religion or the sacred is very much a "western" concern. If Gayatri Spivak is right, it is not only this; it is intimately connected with imperialism, in particular, the kind of secularism "which is structurally identical with Christianity laundered in the bleach of moral philosophy, [in which] the subject of ethics is faceless" (Spivak 1992a:192). The different formal meaning attached to State secularism in India (non-partiality towards any religion and respect and support for all) does not mean that the imputed imperial-secular has no investment. On the contrary.[1] It would be surprising if the Orientalist enterprise and its Indian responses, often seen as pertaining mainly to "religion", "tradition", "culture" did not involve equally the related and dependent oppositional concepts and practices (variously: rationalism, secularism, modernism). The implication of femaleness in sacred/secular discourse has always been present.[2]

But Who Can Speak about This? (Or: Rolling Out the Wrestling Mat)

Feminism and the politics of difference in terms of cultural specificities is now an area filled with tension, in part because of the difficulty of negotiating the impact of a powerful and sometimes angry post-colonial critique.[3] The urgency of a more mature exchange than what is presently in the West "bitter, partisan dispute" (Kirby 1993:20) is clear in Lata Mani's engagement with the contemporary context of the "*sati*"/murder of an Indian woman: the point at which "listening for and talking about our specificities" enters the desert of strategy without a political edge:

> There are political moments which pose limits to the possibility of conceiving of international feminist exchanges (whether between First and Third World women in the West or between Third World women cross-nationally) as negotiated dialogues which, while they may alternately diverge and intersect, are ultimately benign and noncontradictory (1990:32-33).

Ironically, it is speaking in the academic environment that is more often perceived in the West as the site of danger in the politics of difference.[4] Complicity in the violence of women's experience, particularly that which flows from academic worldviews, and occurs in brutal intervention (including feminist intervention) in others' lives may never be acknowledged. These sites of danger are located in both Western and indigenous economics and politics of development, literacy and health programs and the general manipulation of resources. Involved in these areas is the endless revisioning of "tradition" begun by colonial scholarship – "political moments" of real and widespread danger.[5]

Location: Asian Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies

Self-congratulation and righteous certainty are out of the question in relation to the contradictions and illusions involved in the intersection of these fields in which I teach. To name some of the problems: that Indology and Asian Studies have their origin in orientalism; that the very inadequate titles themselves reflect an assumed homogeneousness of the Other (Said 1966; Inden 1986) while the Self is infinitely varied, complex and valuable; that feminist theory and practice involve similar and related problems; and that "religion" as a category of subject-matter can be seen to be a classical example of the "codification of difference [which has occurred] through the naturalization of analytic categories which are supposed to have cross-cultural validity" (Mohanty 1992:75). In terms of the interaction between all these concerns: the probability that the textbook accounts of Indian religion are, put crudely, an "inven-

tion" of colonial and elite indigenous scholars,[6] and further, that anthropology/sociology, sometimes seen as the saviour of Indologists and historians obsessed with written texts, share exactly similar inventive and oppressive capabilities;[7] and that views of and about women are a crucial part of these invention games. All this may be sufficient challenge for the researcher safe in office or den with meals supplied; for the female teacher in the Australian context of "Asia literacy", Christian-hegemonic Religious Studies and "secular"-hegemonic Women's Studies, the classroom is the site of simultaneous deconstructive critique and passionate commitment to essentialism in the face of unreliable institutional support; each of these multi-disciplinary "Studies" (Asia, Religion, Women) is subject to marginalisation on the whim and vagaries of economic and political fashion to which Science and English literature, for instance, although contested within and sometimes starved of funds, are never susceptible.

I have neatly presented myself as a probable case of "Only the dominant self can be problematic: the self of the Other is authentic without a problem" (Spivak 1990b:66). Where the dominant self's problem is the acknowledgement of "imagining" rather than "knowing"[8] then the initiative for any success in the negotiation of problematised selves would seem to lie with the "other". Indology itself is under post-colonial sentence; those whom Spivak calls "India fanciers" (1990a:229) (and who can be absolutely excluded?), complicitous in the fiction she names "semitized Hinduism woven in the nineteenth century" (1989a:279), must engage with the challenge. It is only by "speaking" that relation of any kind is possible. Speaking in relation requires one to "listen".[9] And therein lie all the complexities of dominance and reduction of the other to formulaic representations of the self which pervade the hegemonic conversations of many English language texts.[10] This is not a game of "uninstructed good will" (Spivak 1992a:189) or even instructed empathy (Haraway 1989:293).

The stakes are both political and ethical, reflected in every fragment of that which Mohanty calls the "temporality of struggle" (1992[1987]:87). Speaking of translation from one language to another and language as "not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries", Gayatri Spivak takes us beyond the merely ethical. She uses the Freudian term "fraying" (Fr. *frayage*) to describe the process by which resistance to/against the other breaks down, where the "selvedges of the language-textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations (1992a:178)." Further,

> every act of reading or communication is a bit of this risky fraying ... [but] our stake in agency keeps the fraying down to a minimum except in the

> communication and reading of and in love. (What is the place of "love" in the ethical?) The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. The politics of translation from a non-European woman's text too often suppresses this possibility because the translator cannot engage with, or cares insufficiently for, the rhetoricity of the original (1992:178-179).

How can the agency of the (western) translator be held in check? Mary John's expansion of Chandra Mohanty's critique of "the institutional production and reproduction of the 'West' as an effective site of enunciation" (1989:70) and her recalling of Ashis Nandy's alert: "The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside in structures and in minds" (1989:52), are crucial warnings, as is Edward Said's insistence on the power of American scholarship to "block out the clamor of voices on the outside asking for their claims about empire and domination to be considered" (1989:219).

Naming this absolutely totalising power of the "West" as a phenomenon not able ever to be held in check, is perhaps to grant too much that is secretly pleasing to Western academic elites. As Mani notes:

> Despite India's economically dependent status in the world economy and its wilful exploitation by multinationals and agencies like the World Bank, "the West" as ideological and political presence articulates with such a density of indigenous institutions, discourses, histories and practices that its identity as "Western" is refracted and not always salient (1990:29).

No other words could describe more accurately the experience of this western woman (definitely "refracted" and practically never "salient") living in and around just a few Indian institutions, discourses, histories and practices, especially feminist ones.[11] This is not to assume however, an essentialising of difference and the non-permeability of cultural boundaries. The problem lies in the "translation", first in response to one's identity-certainty, then in the home classroom-academic text setting, typified by selective loss of memory (deciding against "hearing") and a desperate reduction to manageable and definitely not innocent "knowing".

A possibility not ever acknowledged, however, is that "India" also "invades and redefines the interiority" of Western minds (a qualified reversal of Ram 1991c:92) in ways recalled by Spivak's use of "fraying". This involves the risk of being interpreted as "bringing booty home from the colonies" (Ram 1992:609) on our own terms ("translatese"?) or worse, reverse ethnocentrism (Spivak 1988:307), an act of "the arrogance of the benevolent neocolonialist conscience" (Spivak 1989:281). Edward Said

is fairly hard-headed about "cultural translation" especially in the traditional humanities and social sciences, and Spivak agrees that, "paradoxically, it is not possible for us as ethical agents to imagine otherness or alterity maximally. We have to turn the other into something like the self in order to be ethical", but, "To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical" (1992a:181). Spivak herself does not include the notion of the erotic as a component of cultural translation in western classrooms, but speaks of

> our [classroom] task [being] to make people ready to listen ... attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions as between secular and nonsecular, national and subaltern, national and international, cultural and socio/political by teasing out their complicity (1989a:280).

From my position (as a teacher rather than a career academic in area studies research), whatever embodiment in translation of the resolutions and critiques is possible occurs in "the [erotic] politics of translation" (however susceptible of being interpreted as romantic idealism), the "love that permits fraying". In the possibility that ethics and erotics are not mutually exclusive categories (Spivak acknowledges this in a footnote to Irigaray), in the very possibility of a politicised "embodiment", unavoidable complicity in the textbook narratives one is challenging is made bearable.

Religion and the Temporality of Struggle in India[12]

Merely to speak of religious discourse is to invoke the hegemony of the "basic model of religion" which is the key to the Orientalist construction of Hinduism, the "facts themselves ... produced by an 'episteme' (a way of knowing that implies a particular view of existence)" (Inden 1986:401). These "facts" actually construct not only the understanding of the Indologist but in varying ways and to different extents that of the Indian feminist scholar and activist, even shaping the experience of the subaltern. It would be an onerous and redundant task to describe "Hinduism" in detail as understood in Indological texts; nor is this a unified body of knowledge. Central issues can be best described by noting some contemporary challenges to the constructions generally accepted in western tertiary institutions.

From a number of increasingly detailed critiques, I have chosen those of Ronald Inden, Romila Thapar, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Kalpana Ram, and Partha Chatterjee. Inden's well-supported contention is that the pervasive European understanding of India over the last 200 years and more, but especially since Hegel and the influential account of India by the historian James Mill (1773-1836), is that it is abso-

lutely different from, and the opposite of, the West. The "essence of Indian civilization is ... the 'irrational' (but rationalisable) institution of 'caste' and the Indological religion that accompanies it, Hinduism", supported by a belief that Indian thought is "inherently symbolic and mythical rather than rational and logical" (Inden 1986:402-403). Further, Indology constructs human agency in India as an "incoherent combination of societalism and individualism" by which "Indian actions are attributed to social groups – caste, village, linguistic region, religion, and joint family – because there are no individuals in India", but also (and in contradiction) to individuals, "in which Indians' acts are attributed to bad motives" (1986:403).

Kalpana Ram detects similar concepts in the history of anthropology and comparative sociology: a "logic of identity, in which the Indian subject does not enjoy independent status, and is made intelligible only in opposition to the fundamental or privileged values of Western modernity" (1992:589); hence the categories of "caste, kin and village" (tradition), these being the "key site in which several identities are simultaneously constructed: the modern Westerner, the derivative Indian, and the anthropologist (who compares the two)" (1992:591). The "derivative Indian" has no subjectivity other than that expressed in the social structure of caste (1992:594-595), bound in absolute hierarchy by abstract notions of purity and pollution and assumed to be incapable of either equality or "internal difference and contestation", caught within an "entirely religious frame of reference", the absolute opposite of Western egalitarianism and democracy (1992:602-604). That Ram uses some of Inden's own early (1970s) writing to illustrate her case (while acknowledging his later self-critique) shows the condensed timescale and dynamics of the coming to crisis of concepts of religion in India.

The historian Romila Thapar concentrates her critique on the use of supposed religious identities based on modern ideologies which rely for their "authenticity" on particular representations of the past (1989:209). She points out that "The modern description of Hinduism has been largely that of a *brāhmana*-dominated religion ... projected largely in terms of its philosophical ideas, iconology and rituals" (1989:210-211). Thapar notes the "Christian undertone" of text translation; the need of "some Orientalist scholarship anxious to fit the 'Hindu' process into a comprehensible whole based on a known model"; the nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements' attempts to "cleanse Indian religion of what they regarded as negative encrustations ... to find parallels with the Semitic model"; the colonial imposition of codified Brahmanic law on variant social observance and customary law

(1989:218); and the part played by "yet another nineteenth-century obsession, that of the theory of Aryan race" (1989:225). She concludes that:

> the particular construction of Hinduism in the last two centuries has an obvious historical causation ... The search for coherence and rational faith ... in terms of a perspective familiar to those who came from a Christian religious tradition ... [which] hardly reflected any attempt to understand the coherence of a different, indigenous religious tradition (1989:229).

Thapar puts forward alternative interpretations of the relation of Brahmanism to Śramanism, and of Hinduism to Islam, shaped by the "perceptions and motivations of social groups". She is (too?) optimistic that "research ... in a sense, is being gradually liberated from the polemics of the colonial age" (1989:231). Her approach is different from that of Inden who uses the history of ideas but with a refusal of essence,[13] "coherence" and unitariness, while Ram is concerned with the history of ideas in anthropology and the politics of identity and agency. All would agree in some measure that "what we regard as tradition today may in fact be something that was invented four or five generations ago" (Thapar 1987:3).

The Subaltern Studies historians have investigated many aspects of this invention (including its paradoxical continuity with pre-colonial India); their project is complex and not uncontested[14] but for the Indologist it opens up crucial fissures in the received dogma. Just one example: using Gramsci's theory of religion and the knowledge that "the religious beliefs and practices of subordinate caste groups are quite often based on principles that are contradictory to those of the Brahmanical religion" (1989a:167), Partha Chatterjee examines Louis Dumont's perception of caste as a system of identity and difference contained by the ideological principle of *dharma*. He suggests that:

> there is in popular beliefs and practices of caste an implicit critique which questions the claim of the dominant dharma to unify the particular jatis into a harmonious whole and which puts forward contrary claims (1989a:185).

These "fragmented oppositions" (*not*, Chatterjee argues, held together by ideology but the social relations of power) are the basis of his project of constructing a "critique of Indian tradition which is at the same time a critique of bourgeois equality" (1989a:185). Dumont's interpretative framework of the opposition between hierarchy and equality he calls "false, essentialist, positing of an unresolvable antinomy" (1989a:208).

The oppositions between sameness and difference in hierarchy and equality are the very ones at the centre of contemporary feminist analysis and also the basis of much discussion of the nature of national de-

mocracy and its "success" or "failure" in India (can one fashion a democracy out of a hierarchical society?[15]). The work of the Subaltern Studies group acts as a creative irritant in the struggle for "new" speech, not so much, as Thapar sees it, a liberation *from* colonial polemics, but the acknowledgement of complicity in these and construction *by* them, and at the same time, contestation and hope for the coming into speech of voices previously unheard. Not only this, but as Said, like Chatterjee, points out (in relation to anthropology, but applicable to history, feminist theory and other scholarship in India), "the native point of view ... is in large measure a continuing, protracted, and sustained adversarial resistance to the discipline and the praxis" (1989:219-220).

Women's Resistance and the Religious as Secular

The implications of the rejection of the Enlightenment-Christian[16] model of Hinduism for Indian women are profound. Working critically with male scholars, both with and against the grain, women scholars are presently at what I would call a crisis point in their consideration of their location in the complex discourses about religions in India. Two recent epigrammatic comments by Indian scholars are my point of departure for the discussion which follows:

> Just as the personal is political, the religious is secular where women are concerned. (Indira Jaising 1987, quoted by Mani 1990:34).
>
> There is no secularity in sexuality/there is no such thing as secular sex .[17]

These are no distant theoretical deconstructive challenges to a well-known binary opposition, but immediate and heartfelt comments by those concerned not only with scholarship but embroiled in contemporary politics in India. The paradox is as effectively stated as in many pages of Derridean discussion, and dealing with it in the day-to-day lives of women is a matter of innumerable political moments which pose limits to the illusion of the benign and noncontradictory (Mani 1990:1). In the words of Edward Said, representation "becomes significant, not just as an academic or theoretical quandary but as a political choice" (1989:224).[18]

All the various phases and fractures of the Indian women's movement since the nineteenth century reflect the intransigence of the religious-secular dichotomy. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi (amongst others) note that "the association of women's emancipation [in India] with the influence of Western culture is still widely held in the West" (1986:7), an influence understood as the modernisation and secularisation of a "backward" tradition. They contest this assumption, as also do historians who

point out that the colonial power, in selecting sites and issues for intervention, did so, not primarily for the emancipation of women but for consolidation of rule, which depended on the idea that India was "unfit", a degraded and dependent society, as evidenced by the status of women. The creation of a professionalised middle class goes hand in hand, not with the full release of women's talents, but with complicity in the power of capital and accompanying class structures and associated ideals of "feminine" behaviours. The intersection of colonially framed ethnic and gender inferiority served to confine shares in the "good life" to a select male indigenous elite and their partners whose duty it was to present the new model of the "Hindu wife", intelligent but retiring, passive, virtuous (pure) and obedient, imagined as the "recovery of the 'traditional' woman" (Sangari and Vaid 1989:10). The freezing of custom into law meant the imposition of codified high-caste norms on all Hindu women, causing an enforced retreat from public space and popular culture previously open to the majority. Sangari and Vaid point out that:

> The formation of desired notions of spirituality and of womanhood is thus a part of the formation of the middle class itself, wherein hierarchies and patriarchies are sought to be maintained on both material and spiritual grounds (1989:10).

The common theme identified by contemporary Indian analysts is the part religion played in the "recasting" of women in both the earlier social reform movements and in the nationalist movement (Sangari and Vaid 1989), especially through the *Arya Samaj* and *Brahmo Samaj*. In the evocation of a Vedic Golden Age, rejection of ritual, glorification of Sita and Savitri as independent and free (but also suffering and self-sacrificial), these groups represented selective appropriation of the "Western modern". Their influence is still strong today in more recently formed groups in both India and other countries where Indian migrants have settled (Klostermaier 1989:chs. 27 and 28).

Liddle and Joshi speak of "Indian women's unique cultural heritage" (1986:50): the female power principle (*sakti*) and the struggle for its containment by male power, into which struggle is built continual resistance. The cost of resistance, however, is a seeming either-or unacceptable to many women: the adoption of the model of the male-rational (a colonising model) or the Liddle-Joshi pride in the female power principle and, by implication, pride in "tradition", which dangerously colludes with the manipulated model of the new Hindu woman. Where "secular" means modernity and "religious" means tradition, women find they either have no space at all, or, paradoxically occupy all spaces by exclu-

sion; as Spivak points out in relation to territoriality and power, woman "syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity" (1987:220).

The aphorisms which state that the religious *is* secular *is* sex cut across the everywhere-nowhere paradox and cry out for serious consideration by the elites of international feminism. Sangari and Vaid deftly capture the problem. In the frame of the critique of Indology, they decide that

> Both tradition and modernity are eminently colonial constructs. We think it is time to dismantle this opposition altogether and to look at cultural processes in their actual complexity (1989:17).

From a Western point of view, this is chilling. A colonial construct is not just neutral and geographical "western", not just the other side of an equally two-sided coin. We cannot lose sight of the fact that to be western at all is to be dependent on both an imperial past *and* an imperial/neo-colonial present in terms of epistemological hegemony, material resources and political power. It does not really matter that we have lost faith in our own grand narratives. The ones we risk questioning are carefully rationed outside the genuinely and globally political; otherwise there would be some soul-stirring action.[19] When the narratives of "new orientalism" (Spivak 1990a:222) are queried by the "post"-colonised,[20] both elite and subaltern, the violence shaping epistemological certainty, and thus the limits of epistemology, are seen as political moments in which the "death of the subject" (have we forgotten?) is not only a theoretical slogan.

Ways of Dealing with "Tradition"

In the words of Spivak:

> The masterwords implicated in Indian decolonization offered four great legitimizing codes consolidated by the national bourgeoisie by way of the culture of imperialism: nationalism, internationalism, secularism, culturalism (1989a:269-270).

There seems to be no space "outside" these masterwords by which the Indian decolonised (as, in different ways, ourselves) can claim to be "constructed". The pivotal significance of women in social reform and nationalist movements in India led to the contradictions of new forms of patriarchy allied with the old, together with the promise of the individual freedoms and civil codes of the Nehruvian secular democracy. But, as Chatterjee notes,

> Ideas of freedom, equality and cultural refinement went hand in hand with a set of dichotomies which systematically excluded from the new life

> of the nation the vast masses of people whom the dominant elite would represent and lead, but who could never be culturally integrated with their leaders (1989b:251).

Chatterjee names among the "false essentialisms ... propagated by nationalist ideology" those of "home/world, spiritual/material, feminine/masculine" (1989b:252). The tensions between Gandhi and Nehru on the matter of sacred and secular have been well documented, particularly by the Subaltern Studies historians and Partha Chatterjee in depth (1986). There is no doubt that Nehru's secular "modernity" gave women's struggles for equality before the law an ideological base and a framework for the rejection of "tradition":

> ... the better type of modern mind, is practical and pragmatic, ethical and social, altruistic and humanitarian ... it has discarded to a large extent the philosophical approach of the ancients ... their search for ultimate reality, as well as the devotionalism and mysticism of the medieval period. Humanity is its god and social service its religion ...
>
> We have therefore to function in line with the highest ideals of the age we live in ... humanism and the scientific spirit (Nehru in Chatterjee 1986:138).

In relation to Gandhi, Nehru was appreciative of and grateful for (but also quite puzzled by) his ability to communicate with the "masses" and release so much political power; however, Gandhi was rejected in favour of rational, logical ideals of economic and social justice wherein "the consciousness of the peasantry lay in the domain of unreason" (Chatterjee 1986:153) and Gandhi's own "peasant" politics were reduced to the "metaphysical", "mystical", "pure religious" (1986:156). Madhu Kishwar writes movingly of Gandhi's "absolute and unequivocal insistence on their [women's] personal dignity and autonomy in the family and in society" (1986[1985]:4); but she also notes his assumption that equality in economics and politics was not relevant to women. It is easy to see that his reinvention of Sita and Draupadi[21] as strong, independent models for women was not so attractive to post-Independence middle class women in the face of Nehru's call to equality in modernity/secularity which served to cut across the valuing of tradition by educated urban women.

Reflections of the peasant consciousness as one of unreason and equivalent to "tradition", and the associated view that the "masses" of the ignorant should be lifted out of their traditional existences are commonplace in accounts of Indian women:

> The myths, customs and values that shape people's perception of and attitude toward women are too fossilized for any significant dent to be made to transform their lives for the better (Ghadially 1986:17).

Ghadially goes on to speak about the "essential condition of all women" framed in the themes of the (Indian) psychosocial realm of "the hold of traditional, religious and mythical ways of thinking about women" (1986:17), women having been reduced by men's power "to a state of child-like dependence and obedience" (1986:18). The extreme logic of this position is reflected in women's struggles to be heard during the Bodhgaya land reform movement in the late 1980s. At a women's camp, after much discussion, resolutions were passed which included "(3) Religious superstition and rituals weaken us; we will give them up" (Manimala in Kishwar and Vanita 1984:163). Efforts at changing marriage rituals ("harmful and unnecessary") were unsuccessful because, amongst other reasons, "not enough effort was put into it" (1984:164). It is instructive that this move against ritual was made as a result of "conscientization" by city activists who undertook to live among the poor of Bihar where the land reform struggle itself was centred around the corrupt ownership of land by a religious institution which used violence to prevent reform.

Suma Chitnis agrees that "the situation of women in India is in fact quite miserable and a great deal needs to be done on their behalf" (1986:82), but emphasises difference from the West rather than the sameness of women's "condition". She speaks of "their relative inability to tune in to the demands for equality and personal freedom", based on the very familiar idea that "The concept of equality, as a correlate of the concept of individual freedom, is alien to Indian society" (1986:83). But she argues that "several elements" of tradition

> can be developed towards establishing equality for women and towards a new assertion of the full dignity of their personhood ... feminists could work towards building new attitudes among women by highlighting the spiritedness, the intelligence and the resourcefulness of figures like Sita and Savitri (1986:91).

Other "all-Indian-women" theories are central to psychological analysis of traditional images and practices. These theoretical explanations are heavily dependent on the works of Freud and Jung and western social science research in India from Oscar Lewis to Jerome Bruner to Erik Erikson. The common theme is the strict relation of rigid interpretations of religious myth to male and female psyches and the identification of an essential Indian "tradition". The Indian mother as the despoiler of sons and victimiser of sons' wives is a key figure. The psychiatrist

Sudhir Kakar sees "the unconscious wishes and fears of men" (1986:45) expressed in religious myth and absorbed in the psyche of women and states categorically that "where and when tradition governs, an Indian woman does not stand alone; her identity is wholly defined by her relationships to others" (1986:44-45). The psychologist Ashis Nandy also analyses myth and ritual to explain that "the ultimate authority in the Indian mind has always been feminine" (1986:73), hence the propitiation of the "angry, incorporative, fickle mother" (1986:74) and the view that "even man's cruelty toward woman is no match for the cruelty of woman toward woman" (1986:71).

Accounts such as these are not absolutely "untrue" and women's resistance is noted, as well as the possibility of reinterpreting religious tradition at the same time as condemning it. But the reification of tradition as determiner of attitude and behaviour and as the absolute opposite of the modernist ideals of equality and scientific humanism cannot help be seen as continuing repetition of orientalist themes. This is especially so when characterised by attitudes towards lower caste/class Indian women which confirm them as ignorant, tradition-bound and helpless.[22] The ease with which such certainties about Indian women and religion become the text of truth in the west (particularly in tertiary women's studies) shows an ingrained familiarity with the metaphysical assumptions on which we base our view of the Other. We recognise ourselves only too well in our struggle against patriarchal forms of religious oppression. We may well decide that Ranke-Heinemann's brilliantly researched account of the Catholic church's understanding of sexuality is much more terrifying than any Hindu scripture, but we "know" that in a "traditional" society there is no hope at all. We know that our models are the only possibilities for analysis of the condition and hope for the salvation of "the" Hindu woman, the Indian mind and other fictional entities.

Views from the West

In her latest assessment of "women in Hinduism", Katherine Young (1994) presents a lively up-to-date description of Indian feminist activism and debate, countering the victim clichés and presenting a down-to-earth view of problems of gender and religion in India. She examines the work of three women and theorises that *lokasangraha* (acting for the welfare of the world) and *satyāgraha* (Gandhi's "grasping of the truth") are useful "'swing' concepts that can bridge secular and religious realms" (1994:87). A problem occurs however in the treatment of the secular/religious and traditional/progressive oppositions in the categorisation of her three interviewees as either secular or religious: the secular is represented by

the call to "destroy the ancient traditions and make women free" (1994:88) from the Bombay based *Strī Mukti* movement, but also by Madhu Kishwar's world-view (elsewhere [1986:97] seen to be Gandhian); the "religious" is represented by Uma Bharati, the saffron-robed renouncer and proponent of anti-Muslim *Hindutva*.[23] In her discussion of Kishwar, Young conflates "any exercise of power on the part of the Hindu majority", as if this were a homogeneous entity, with the movement for a Hindu state, which events have proved much less electorally powerful than expected. She accuses Kishwar of not coming to grips with contemporary "Hinduism", being somehow locked in a selectively prejudiced historical view. In the same way, Young explores future possibilities for India as being either a "reformed secular state", a "conservative Hindu state" or a "liberal Hindu state", using the United States as the model for nationhood: "Unification need not be homogeneity. But it must be something that gives meaning, depth, and purpose to the majority of citizens" (1994:127). In the case of India, this "something" for Young is the spirit of liberal Hinduism/reformed secularism which seems to be a kind of secularised Hinduism modelled on the "civil Christianity" of North America. Young's retreat into western models of "nation" combined with various forms of a monolithic Hinduism and likewise secularism, whether "liberal" or otherwise, reflects an unexamined Indology which savagely undercuts her acceptance of the implied critique of Indology in her use of the work of Sudesh Vaid and others.

Klaus Klostermaier, on the other hand, speaks of a multiple-movement "political Hinduism" (1989:410) and critiques the assumption that US society and politics should be the standard model for analysis (1989:410-411). He places political Hinduism in the perspective of the long history of religious protest and queries the assumed dominance of dangerous militancy over "strong countermoves to universalize and spiritualize Hinduism" (1989:412). He argues that Hinduism could become "the dominant [world] religion of the twenty-first century", having "proved much more open than any other religion to new ideas, to scientific thought, and to social experimentation" (1989:413), a shock-reversal of the application of western models to the Indian situation. No doubt Indian feminism would find much to engage with in his vision, whether or not his understanding of the relation between *Śakti* and political power (1989:276) is seen as liberating!

It is interesting to compare these views with those of Gail Dietrich, who notes that "the relationship of the women's movement to genuine religious reform ... is a crucial question which has been ignored for far too long" (1986:157). She uses Christian "liberation" theology to propose some methodological principles which might be relevant to the

Indian context (1986:158-59) with a view to discovering "protest potential". Dietrich denounces "The strong attack on religion by rationalists and by parts of the women's movement" as "a self-defeating strategy", opts for the ideal of "enlightened religious tolerance" and sets out her ideal of "a truly humanist secular state" (1986:160).

It is clear from the recent history of Christian feminism that "the west" is having great difficulty developing feminist theory and practice in relation to religion and tradition as also in relation to "secular" feminism. We are also finding western secular democracies and nation states have their own major problems. Yet we do not hesitate in dictating particular "enlightened secular nation" models for post-colonial societies, rather than learn from their debate, especially in relation to the epistemology and practice of nationalism and "culturalism". Western feminists stand to learn from contemporary women's scholarship and activism in India, where there is a critique of the west not only from the standpoint of intimate knowledge of the west, but also from the point of view of the colonised where the critique is sharper, having been brought to crisis by colonial experience.

Indian Women's Groups, Feminisms and Religion

In her assessment of contemporary Indian feminism, Radha Kumar points out that the first theorising of women's oppression in the mid-1970s came from the Maoist far left, in which the issue was joined with the anti-caste movement, religious texts being the locus of critique of both, with the emphasis being on women's suffering. By the 1980s, the emphasis had changed towards reappropriation of restricted spaces "through attempts to reinterpret myths, epics and folktales; to critique mainstream religious and cultural texts or practices and search for alternative texts or practices" (1989:25). This was followed by research into oral history and the discovery of women's resistance in popular movements such as Telangana and Chipko, well before contemporary feminism. The emphasis changed to celebration of "courage, gaiety, inventiveness or strength in Indian women" (1989:25). This transition seems to have come about because of the growth of personal relationships among women who opted for crisis care and local-personal political action across caste and class boundaries. This "many flowers" stage of Indian feminism was not without tension, experiences of failure and difficulties in communication. It saw a variety of political approaches, from one-to-one assistance, to collectives among rural workers, trade unions, party-political and student activist groups, some of whom distanced themselves from urban crisis-care feminism.

Under the enormous stress of moving into all kinds of unfriendly spaces, division and bitterness developed, centred on questions of individual autonomy vs. collective public action, exacerbated by competition for development aid. Those who concentrated on individual support in matters of cases of dowry and other domestic violence, homelessness, police and judicial corruption found themselves the target of hostility from those who accused them of being too westernised in theory and practice. The critique centred on the question of rejection of tradition in the form of secular neglect of Hinduism in particular and from this point, communalist groups formed women's movements based on hard-line interpretations of religion and tradition which rejected feminist theory and practice.

Kumar is of the view that the Indian feminist movement became weak and ineffectual because of the lack of discussion between feminist theorists and activist groups. She notes that there has been "an enormous increase in women's studies in India, much of which is conducted by feminists, but seems less and less to inform feminist practice" (1989:29). These tensions are especially visible in the Shah Bano and Roop Kanwar cases,[24] in which Hindu communalists set themselves against feminist action, yet both at times found themselves arguing for the same goal (a uniform civil code) for different reasons. I have not the detailed contextual knowledge and expertise to assess analyses of these cases; what is important in my context is how feminists understand the issues and diagnose the outcomes. All are agreed that they found themselves caught in a space where being "pro-women" meant being "anti-Muslim" in the case of Shah Bano (Kishwar 1986) – in other words, any support for women who suffered because of particular applications of religious personal law could be interpreted as (and sometimes was) a communal attack on a minority religion and its adherents.

In her recent expanded account of the movements for women's rights and feminism (1993), Kumar notes the espousal of "a classic liberal democratic view of secularism" used by all opponents of the validation of religious personal law in the case of Shah Bano: that religion "'should only govern the relationship between a human being and god, and should not govern the relationship between man and man or man and woman" (Feminist petition, Kumar 1993:170). But she does not examine the implications of these distinctions. In their discussion of Shah Bano, Pathak and Sunder Rajan pinpoint the feminist manoeuvre of displacing women's religious identities by highlighting their gender identities (1989:569). Although they are very doubtful about the civil code solution ("nothing more than a scenario of Westernisation, out of keeping with the complex historical reality of the situation in India today"

[1989:575]), they suggest that "the aim must be to close eventually the split between secular and religious law in the interests of legal equality" (1989:576). They recommend reforming religious law by means of "revisionary readings ... and 'interested' translations of religious texts ... to accommodate the reality of women's contemporary situation" (1989:576). These suggestions are not unlike Dietrich's "liberation theology" approach and contrast with the critique by Tharu and Lalita (below). Accommodating realities has its own inbuilt problems. Notoriously, realities are different colours, and "different" women, like black feminists in Britain, may "refuse salvation, whether by the state in the name of civilized modernity, by black men on behalf of tradition and community integrity, or by white feminists in the interest of ethnocentric versions of women's liberation" (Mani 1990:28).[25] Shah Bano eventually "refused salvation" in a very different context; Mani points out in relation to Roop Kanwar's death that it is safer to stress victimisation of women than argue about whether they have freedom to act, the danger being that feminist discourse of the "victim" kind can be one "which sets up women to be saved" (1990:38). We arrive full circle: Indian woman as lacking agency, always helpless victims, and worse, the implication that this is their own fault through apathy, ignorance, feminine cruelty and entrenchment in tradition.

Whereas Kumar sees the cross-talk of feminisms as dislocated and ineffectual, Pathak and Sunder Rajan view the achievement of the "feminist collectivity" which coalesced around Shah Bano's maintenance case as having "converted her resistance into a significant operation within a (collective) feminist politics" (1989:580). Mani's view is similar to Kumar's concerning Roop Kanwar: that feminist arguments were marginal in a debate where "The discursive space is principally being defined by conservatives and liberals" (1990:35). Thus, (as Pathak and Sunder Rajan and Mani note) cultural and religious identity (whether "invented" or not), was stressed in both cases at the expense of gender identity. Shah Bano eventually opted for her religious identity and Roop Kanwar had no choice but to die in the service of an invented religious identity.

The crisis experienced in Indian feminism can be seen as a struggle with the dominance of Indian religious discourse for which feminism has not developed a theory of engagement other than opting for the imperialist-secular. Mani queries the efficacy of feminist theory in relation to agency and notes its misfit in India, where "there does not exist a serious convention of representing Indian citizens as lacking agency, inhabiting a timeless zone, and immobilized by 'tradition'". A further problem she sees is the "persistent privileging of culture" especially in relation to colonialism, a problem that has "yet to be adequately thematized in

the literature on colonialism in India" (1990:32). Having taken part in the crisis surrounding the *sati* of Roop Kanwar, she re-examines the complexities of tradition and gender and finally decides that critiques of colonialism can have the unintended effect of encouraging patriarchy "in the name of 'tradition'". She argues this on the basis of the Indian feminist analysis: that the Roop Kanwar death was nothing to do with tradition or religion, and everything to do with recent political and economic developments in Rajasthan. Here the privileging of "culture" presents as a sham, but the same cannot be said as easily of Shah Bano. We are left with "tradition" intact and seemingly out of reach, for fear of colluding with patriarchy.

The problem seems to be this: if as a feminist one critiques orientalist cultural essentialisms, then cynicism about tradition/religion is likely to follow, especially if women suffer in the cause of these. Gender becomes critical and religion seen as a decoy. The "content" of religion is no longer "religious"; it is always something else, the secular/social/economic/political in Nehruvian terms. Conversely, sex (as in body, reproduction, nutrition, health) which was thought to be secular/etc. is not secular at all, but religious. We are returned to the aphorisms – in secularity, there is no escape from tradition.

Any stance in opposition to tradition can be interpreted by power groups of various kinds as rejection of all that is valuable in a society; feminism is seen as having sold out to western secularism with no respect or love for "India" and the life of temple, mosque and gurdwara. If feminism turns towards "tradition" with genuine respect, great difficulty is experienced in distancing itself from orientalist themes which are closely bound up with communalism and the stance of patriarchy east and west – it seems far too dangerous. Should feminists then "use" religion and tradition in its orientalist, patriarchal form as a strategy, to move dissemblingly closer to the enemy as it were, working for change from within?[26] This manoeuvre from "outside" would seem to be manipulative of those who do not see their religion as part of feminist strategy; the gap between the elite and subaltern opens up at every theoretical move.

Sex/Gender as Secular as Religious: Deconstructing the Oppositions

When Madhu Kishwar wrote in "defence of our *Dharma*" (1990), she may well have ruffled the certainty of assumptions about women and religion amongst the educated elite ("those who have deliberately promoted ignorance about Indian's rich heritage" [1990:15]).[27] In speaking

of "heritage" and "traditions" she came dangerously close to being seen as having sold out to orientalism. Many had forgotten that in India "Religious ideas have for long been the language of protest, innovation and expression of individuality and separate identity" (Rao 1984:xxiv). Kishwar's plea was for more knowledge which would "save religion from politicians" (1990:5), not as a strategy but to remedy a loss and enable participation in the critique and re-making of tradition. Depending on the contextual ideology, "knowledge" as such is not sufficient. The appearances of tradition and gender as "essences" in hierarchical relation need a great deal of critical attention if feminisms are to move beyond the religious/secular opposition in relation to gender.

The process of theoretical engagement has actually already begun.[28] In their Introduction to the first volume of Indian women's writing, Tharu and Lalita address every issue crucial to the "new" tradition/gender enterprise: the uses to which literature was put in the colonial period, the way in which many indigenous writers disappear in the dichotomy "modern/traditional", and categories "which reduce the complex and heterogeneous forces at work to a simple dichotomy between the progressive and the reactionary" (1991:11). Their base is a strong critique of western assumptions about the "internationalism" of women's writing, especially "the concept of experience ... uncritically conflated with an empiricist privileging of experience as the authentic source of truth and meaning". What Tharu and Lalita are interested in is not the "authenticity" of female nature in female writing, but the "grain of these women's struggles" and "modes of resistance": "How did they avoid, question, play off, rewrite, transform, or even undermine the projects set out for them?", a "history, not of authority, but of contest and engagement"(1991:36). They point out that

> Only in the last decade or less have we had access to the kind of research that allows us to reread these writings [of late 19th century Indian women] not as shadows of a greater (male, Western) reality, or even of a Western feminist reality, but as texts that display the oblique and subtle dramas of these off-off-centre subjectivities (1991:154).

In the nineteenth century context, in which "the personal domain, newly constituted in exclusively religious terms, had complex and problematic connections with caste, tradition, Victorian norms of feminine propriety, and imperialist ambitions" (1991:158), the texts show that women initiated "slow but unmistakable and moving struggles for dignity and personhood outside the double-edged promises of the Enlightenment and the social reform movement" (1991:186). From the great *bhakta* poets to ritual and folksongs, popular stories, erotic poetry, let-

ters to the newspapers and extracts from novels, this great anthology of women's writing, much of it translated from a number of Indian languages, is itself what Sangari and Vaid desire: a challenge to the dreary essences of modernity and tradition and a window into "cultural processes in their actual complexity".

Kalpana Ram's approach in her representation of Catholic Mukkuvar women resonates with that of Tharu, Sangari, Vaid and others and responds powerfully to Mani's worry about the "persistent privileging of culture". The "marginality and ambiguity" (1991a:xiv) of the Mukkuvars gives Ram the opportunity to work with two (not entirely distinct) religious traditions. She argues for a view which works against the reification of "culture", but also places "culture and sexuality at the centre of capitalist transformation rather than reducing 'culture' to politics and economics". Further, culture is viewed as "a relatively fluid system of meanings, such that even those who are most constrained by the system can also selectively modify and re-interpret its hegemonic interpretations" (1991a:235). Thus Ram sees culture "as a field of conflict", not a timeless unity; conflict centres in the "dissonances" which come from within and between "the three conceptual fields of discourse, social relations and practice" which form "culturally constituted subjects" (1991a:236).

Where to Now?

This necessarily brief survey of some of the "new" feminist engagement with tradition does less than justice to the importance of the enterprise. In this framework, there can be no talk of the "religious/traditional" as if it is an entity which impinges from outside on "ordinary/secular" life; secularism and traditionalism cannot be set up as unitary opposites. Notions of the "enlightened modern" occupied by the self-defined elite cannot be imposed on the "unenlightened traditional" and the latter perversely blamed for their resistance. The often heard complaint that "secular" space has been stolen from Indian feminists can be transformed into the complex understanding that "the secular" as "not-religious" has been a divisive illusion all along, an alien colonising oppositional space in both India and the west. Madan has recently recalled that Enlightenment secularism was not "simply anti-religious" and that "we will have to abandon a narrow, crippling, view of secularism as anti-religion and we will have to overcome our distrust of India's indigenous religious traditions, which are, whether some people like it or not, members of one family". Like Klostermaier, Madan stresses "the strength of India's hermeneutic traditions" and that "these resources [need] to be turned into strength" (1983:696). It may not be realised by either of them that these will remain pious hopes unless the distrust of

women is taken seriously and some of the hermeneutics shaken by women's scholarship.

In my view, it is probable that because gender is critical in the boundary making of sacred and secular, and because India is the place to be for the unmaking of boundaries, Indian women scholars will contribute most to crossing them, as well as those which are seen to divide "scholarship" from "activism". This does not mean obliterating difference in a new "unity" or "credo", but exercising agency in the realm of "fluid meanings". Imperial-Western feminisms which see the traditional-nonsecular as Other and the rational-secular as Our Own, will have to think again, resisting "our stake in agency" to listen to the voices of Indian women. Feminism does after all have teeth enough to approach the tiger's lair of tradition; not to kill the tiger, lock it up as the loathed "other" or use it to turn it on its own kind, but to engage with it as already at home in many disguises on our own hearth. This tiger can be tamed.

Notes

1 For a detailed discussion of the distinctive features of secularism in India and the west, and their relevance to the sacred-secular opposition, see T N Madan (1987; 1993) and for a contrary view, see Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya (1992).

2 See Penelope Magee (forthcoming 1994), "Disputing the sacred: some theoretical problems in gender and religion" in *New Perspectives on Gender and Religion*, edited by Ursula King, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

3 For the core of feminist post-colonial scholarship see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Mary John, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Susie Tharu, Thi Minh-Ha Trinh, Kalpana Ram, Irvin Cemil Schick. Lata Mani (1990:27) speaks of the "abiding presence in the U.S.A. and Britain of 'colonial' or Eurocentric discourses on India" and includes scholarly writing in these discourses which "circulate such notions as the centrality of religion ... the antiquity of Indian 'culture', and the victimization of women" ... ideas which are "truly oppressive". They are not countered by "witnessing and confessional authenticity" (Kirby 1993:29), which further reinforces the blatant ethno-/academic feminist centrisms which remain today at the border of allowed access to the naming "intellectual". History of Religions (in particular comparative, cross-cultural studies) and hence, Indology and anthropology, all have a heavy investment in these discourses.

4 For instance, in her paragraph as frontispiece to the most recent edited collection on the "politics of difference" (Gunew and Yeatman 1993), Elizabeth Grosz speaks of the enterprise as "courageous", "brave and dangerous".

5 See Amrita Chhachhi (1988) for a discussion of the violence involved in state sponsored religious fundamentalism in South Asia.

6 Cf. Ronald Inden (1986), Romila Thapar (1987; 1989), Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1989). Needless to say, gender is not always given weight in post-colonial critique, although the best Indian scholarship reflects the complexity of ongoing exchange across gendered positions which is as yet hardly understood by mainstream western feminisms. For a recent example of the depiction by a western feminist scholar of the cross-cultural comparative study of religion as yielding "a basic model of religion that works more or less well for all religions from every time and place", see Rita M. Gross (1993:309).

7 See Ursula King (1989); Kalpana Ram (1991a; 1992).

8 Cf. Jane Flax' concept of "the end of innocence" (1992).

9 *Pace* the often misunderstood rhetoric of Spivak (1987; 1988), the subaltern speaks volumes; it is just that no-one is "listening". Even such speech as Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's "rewriting of the social text of *sati*-suicide" (Spivak 1988:308), coming from the silence of a decades-ago death, can be heard if someone like Spivak is interested in listening.

10 Especially the familiar figure of the transcendental knower, for instance: "Those lacking the outsider's academic accuracy often misrepresent and whitewash aspects of their tradition that they find unpalatable. They also often lack historical accuracy and willingness to critically evaluate their tradition. As a practising academician and comparative scholar of religion, I find such omissions unacceptable." (Gross 1993:13).

11 The India accessible to me is necessarily limited, first to mainly urban North India (Delhi, Varanasi and surrounds) where I have lived for periods up to six months, secondly, to English-language texts produced by indigenous and diasporic Indian intellectuals and non-Indian scholars and to Sanskrit texts at a very basic level.

12 Although "the" women's movement in India includes women who are Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsee, possibly even Buddhist and also women who reject such categorisations, I have confined my attention to "Hinduism", with the exception of brief discussion of the Muslim Shah Bano case in which Hindus were strongly implicated.

13 In the sense of "essentialism" (cf. Spivak 1989c).

14 See Veena Das' critique of the centrality of "man as rational actor" in the Subaltern Studies school of history (1989). Gayatri Spivak (1987) selects a major theme of the group as "functional change in sign-systems" most importantly that from "the religious to the militant" (1987:197) and sees their "collusion" with humanism as "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism" (1987:205), showing "the limits of the critique of humanism as produced in the West" (1987:209), but notes also "indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence of the woman as crucial

instrument" (1987:216). Spivak points out that "'femininity' is as important a discursive field for the predominantly male insurgents [Indian peasants] as 'religion'" (1987:215); in doing so, she approaches the question of sex/gender and religion, but the implications are not examined.

15 See the discussion on "the future of equality" in Rudolph and Rudolph (1967:103ff.), and cf. Girdner (1987).

16 A more accurate tag I would argue than "semitic". Jewish and Islamic intellectual traditions as such not only did not contribute to the "basic model" of religion used by history of religions, but to a great extent, and despite the scholarship of some individuals, the model was derived on the basis of exclusion and subordination of these traditions.

17 Ritu Menon and Sandra Buckley (1993) post-paper discussion, July 16, 1993, "The State, Sexuality and Reproduction in Asia and the Pacific" Conference, Gender Relations Project, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, July 16-18, 1993. The paper under discussion: Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1993).

18 In a move one would not have foreseen a short time ago, Gayatri Spivak is currently studying Hindu ethics: "Workers in cultural politics and its connections to a new ethical philosophy have to be interested in religion in the production of ethical subjects. There is much room for feminist work here because western feminists have not so far been aware of religion as a cultural instrument rather than a mark of cultural difference". She speaks of an ethics that emerges from something other than the historically secularist ideal – "an ethics of sexual differences ... an ethics that can confront the emergence of fundamentalisms without apology or dismissal in the name of the Enlightenment" (1992a:192).

19 For instance, it would not be possible to hear some female anthropologists go unchallenged at conferences on gender when they speak of "my village", "my informant"; or read the praise on cover and in frontispiece of a work (Bumiller 1990) about "the powerlessness of Indian women" by "a western writer who has actually discovered India" or even "had indeed been an Indian woman in her previous birth". To choose just a few validations of the orientalist grand narrative: that "most [Indian] actresses ... were not as self-aware ... they were culturally still very Indian" (1990:200), or that "India was still so sensitive to its colonial past" (1990:129), and, "what freedom did an Indian woman have to decide anything in her life?" (1990:74).

20 The espousal of a "colonised" subjectivity by many feminists in the west is interesting, interacting as it does with the stressing of differential status by aboriginal, coloured, migrant, lesbian and poor women *vis-à-vis* middle class AngloCeltic women (the Celts in Ireland and England do not of course accept the transparency of "AngloCeltic"; see Rossiter 1992). Particular claims of oppressed status in relation to other women have been drowned in the generic claim that women as a global group are colonised.

Kalpana Ram blames certain "poststructuralist reading conventions" for the invisibility of distinctions between exiled white women colonisers and indigenous women which she notices in discourse on postcoloniality (1993:11-12). Rather than homogenise and vilify "poststructuralism" as absolute anti-humanism or the new grand narrative of the absolutely decentred subject (which it conveniently can be when shortcuts are taken), it might be more productive to engage with the feminist/deconstruction problematic, its troublesomeness illustrated by Gayatri Spivak's regular return to the fray (1983; 1987; 1989; 1992), and examine the selectivity at work in deconstructive critique when framed in the invisibility of the colonised.

21 See also Geraldine H Forbes' account of Sarojini Naidu's tussle with Nehru about the composition of women's groups and Naidu's insistence that the modern *is* traditional – the new strong woman modelled on the traditional symbols of the Goddess. Forbes notes that "in terms of ideology, this was not a radical [too traditional?] movement" (1984:379).

22 This is a very different characterisation from that of suffering from extreme poverty, lack of support from the State and ill-treatment within families, especially that linked with current economic developments.

23 Defined by the founder of the Hindu Mahasabhā as "Hindudom as the unifying socio-cultural background of all Hindus" (Klostermaier 1989:403).

24 Details and various interpretative views of the Shah Bano case of 1985 (a Muslim maintenance-after-divorce matter) can be found in Asghar Ali Engineer (1987), Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1989), Madhu Kishwar (1986). The Roop Kanwar crisis concerned *sati* as murder/suicide in a Rajasthani village in 1987; see the discussion in *Seminar*, 342, Special issue on *Sati* (1988), Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1987), Lata Mani (1990).

25 Cf. Gita Sahgal (1992).

26 Recent reports from Pakistan explain this feminist strategy (personal discussion 1993).

27 See Katharine Young (1994:95-96).

28 In issues of the widely read and influential *Economic and Political Weekly*, an ever-increasing amount of feminist scholarship, for example, Sangari's detailed analysis of women and *bhakti*; in the Tenth Anniversary issue of *Manushi* (1989) which celebrated women *bhakta* poets; in one of the most stunning contributions to Indian scholarship, *Women Writing in India*, edited by Susie Tharu and K Lalita, Vol 1; and in recent anthropology, Kalpana Ram's *Mukkovar Women* (see extract in this volume). New publications planned by *Kali for Women* include at least four major works dealing with gender and religion, Fatima Mernissi; Zoya Hasan; Kamla Bhasin, Nighat Said and Ritu Menon (eds); Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds).

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