Chapter One

Introduction: Print-Media and the Normative Subject

Not only have the Aryans cunningly taken over the press, they have also ensured that no one else is able to gain a foothold in that world and publish dailies of their own.
(E.V. Ramasami Naicker: 1946)

The accusation of the Dravidian movement's leader against the cunning "Aryans" is symptomatic of the intense and fascinating contests for control over the public sphere in Tamilnadu in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, this period, which is marked by the emergence of a number of non-Brahmin periodicals and women's journals, was also a time when the new politics of nationalism was on the rise. Like the vernacular novel, both the non-Brahmin journal as well as the women's journal were responses to this nationalism though in radically opposed ways. The former, shaped and nurtured as it was by E.V.Ramasami Naicker's Self-Respect movement, was intended as a Dravidian response to the cornering of the print media by upper-caste nationalists. Partly then, this dissertation is structured as a narrative of the different ways in which nationalists and the activists of the Self-Respect movement shaped the Tamil print media and used it to voice their very different and opposing concerns. The Tamil print media in early twentieth century Madras Presidency becomes a terrain of contest between the upper-caste, mostly Brahmin Tamilians (the "Aryans" of E.V.R's description) and the non-Brahmins, with the latter staking their claim for a specifically "Dravidian" public sphere. While such a claim underwrites the
emergence of a variety of "Tamil" cultural forms, "D.M.K cinema" being an obvious example, my focus will be on the journals which evolved with the ferment caused in Tamilnadu by the nationalist movement, on the one hand, and the Dravidian movement, especially in its Self-Respect phase, on the other.

Nationalism, argues Partha Chatterjee, "produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based" (1986: 30). In his more recent work, Chatterjee contends that nationalism achieves this by dividing its culture into the material and spiritual domains. In this spiritual domain, an inner domain of sovereignty and "Indianness" which nationalism produces in contesting imperial power, it locates women, religion, caste, peasants and the family (1993). While this domain was constructed as a pure space untouched by colonial influences, in the outer material domain constituted by it, nationalism was prepared to appropriate a western modernity. A new notion of "Indianness" was formed with the anti-imperialist struggle. As a result, oppressive structures of caste and patriarchy were sought to be maintained in the name of protecting the essence of Indian culture while a western modernity constituted by science, progress and rationality was available only to normative Indians, upper-caste, Hindu and male. At the same time, the construct of the nation itself was based on a series of exclusions so that lower castes and religious minorities, for instance, were placed on the margins of the new nation.

In a scathing critique of nationalism, the Dravidian move-
ment whose influence was wide-spread within the Madras Presidency, though perhaps strongest within the Tamil-speaking regions, questioned the ways in which the nation, as projected by the upper-castes, excluded the Dravidians or the non-Brahmins. Feeling the need for a public sphere which would adequately represent the interests of non-Brahmins, the Self-Respect leader E.V Ramasami Naicker or Periyar, as he was popularly known, systematically developed non-Brahmin periodicals, positioning them vis a vis the Brahmin public sphere. These journals present a striking ideological contrast to the journals they are meant to counter, journals with upper-caste/nationalist leanings. Chapter Four locates the rise of a Brahmin public sphere through two early twentieth century women's journals in Tamil, Sister Balammal's Chintamani and Vai.Mu.Kodainayaki Animal's Jaganmohini within an upper-caste nationalist matrix, a matrix which was marked by the emergence of a number of women's journals in the vernacular. The same chapter reads Kalki (R.Krishnamurthy), the Tamil novelist and editor of a Tamil journal bearing his name, as a paradigmatic upper-caste nationalist from Tamilnadu and analyses the resonances of his recovery of a glorious Tamil past (through his historical novels) and his attempts to fashion a modern Tamil for the enactment of a nationalist politics in a specifically Tamil context. The Self-Respect journals popularized by Periyar are clearly positioned against the upper-caste nationalist matrix represented by Kalki. Jaganmohini and Chintamani. Chapter Five locates the emergence of the Dravidian movement as a response to nationalism, describes its anchoring of a radical caste politics around notions of a Dravidian identity and a Dravidian
nation, examining in particular, E.V.Ramasami Naicker's contribution to the emergence of the non-Brahmin journal and his vision of a Dravidian press which would challenge the upper-caste, mainstream, nationalist press.

Informing this dissertation is another impetus: to analyze and put into question certain normative female subjectivities, to argue that female agency enabled by a neo-nationalist Hindutva and a new economic order should caution us against assuming the "natural" feminism of women. The concept of subject-formation is, therefore, central to this dissertation. The notion of the subject was developed as part of a critique of the humanist concept of the individual or a human essence that exists independently of and prior to the category of the social. The subject, according to Louis Althusser, is constitutive of ideology. With Althusser, there is an important shift in the Marxist conceptualization of ideology. The debate becomes increasingly focussed around its role in constructing people as subjects. In his seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser proposes that to study ideology is not to study ideas, but to study their workings in the material practices of certain Ideological State Apparatuses or ISAs (1977). Unlike the Repressive State Apparatuses (the army, the administration and the judiciary) which work by repression and force, these apparatuses, which consist of institutions like the church, the school, the family and literature, function through ideology. A class cannot hold onto state power over a long period of time, argues Althusser, without exercising its hegemony through the ISAs. However, the ISA is not merely the stake but also the site
of class struggle. The ISA then also offers the space for resistance from the exploited classes. The ruling class cannot lay down the law in the ISA as it can in the Repressive State Apparatuses. However, there can be no direct or easy challenge to the ISAs. Althusser goes on to argue that "there is no practice except by and in an ideology" and that "there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects" (1984: 44). We acquire our subject positions in class, caste and gender through the institutions of what Antonio Gramsci calls "civil society", a concept which overlaps to a large extent with the Althusserian notion of the ISAs (1971).

In Chapter Three, I argue that a new public sphere constituted by contemporary women's magazines, Femina and Woman's Era (in English) and Manaai and Mangayar Malar (in Tamil) are tied to the emergence of politically dangerous and conservative conceptions of female agency in recent years. Most feminisms assume a pre-given category of women, a category that is taken as self-explanatory. It is because of this assumption that other categories are assumed as well, the category of "women's issues", that of "women's culture" and so on. To take "women" as a unitary and universal category also means to miss the differences in their formation, differences which have to do with their subject positions in caste, class, race and so on. It is also to miss the crucial fact that female agency derives from these subject positions. Chapter Three also analyses the norming of the upper-caste Hindu woman and the woman of the new economic order. What this norming also achieves is the othering of the lower-caste (therefore caste-ed) and non-Hindu female subjects. It is my
contention that women who participated in the Self-Respect movement are the "others" of these normative subjects.

The Self-Respect women disturb the normative subject of feminism, a subject who has much in common both with the upper-caste Hindu woman and with the woman of the new economic order. Given the dominant construction of feminism as something that some "modern" upper-caste/upper class women do, given the prevalent assumption that lower-caste women will have little use for feminism, the Self-Respect woman is an especially important historical figure. Even as her presence disturbs the logic that ascribes feminist agency solely to upper-caste/upper-class women, it poses a challenge to the exclusions within dominant feminisms. The Self-Respect woman makes available to us a different and non-normative point of feminist identification, a subject who has to be invoked in the contexts of liberalization and Hindutva, contexts which are hostile, in different ways, to a progressive gender politics. Chapter Six makes an argument for the recovery of the Self-Respect woman's agency and reads some essays written by Self-Respect women in an attempt to analyze the ways in which they articulate gender issues. Most contemporary debates about gender and the Self-Respect movement are anchored around two opposing axes - one, the "anti-feminism" of the Self-Respect movement/the passivity of the Self-Respect woman/the gendering of the Tamil nation and language, and two, Periyar's "progressive" vision of gender equality stemming from his radical critique of Brahminism. The second is repeatedly invoked to address the first. I suggest that what gets lost when the debate is posed in such a manner is the agency of the Self-Respect woman.
Reflecting my preoccupation with the question of female subjectivity and its constitution by the print media, Chapter Two will attempt to map two of the most popular and influential feminist approaches to the study of women's literatures — the images of women mode of criticism which analyses texts for their "positive" or "negative" stereotypes of women and the Audience Research approach promoted in Cultural Studies, an approach which operates with a highly problematic notion of female agency. Even while both approaches appear radically different, they both take for granted the category of "women" whose representation (as image) or whose response to certain texts they analyze. In the same chapter, I also examine some current scholarship concerned with retrieving and tracing the history of the Tamil journal and document briefly the emergence of print technology in India and its reception in South India.

The notion of the subject and the issue of agency is crucial to feminist theory and praxis. Even as it is important to recognize the processes by which certain female subjectivities become normative, it is important to remain vigilant about who then become the normative subjects of feminism. My narrative begins with the nineties and deals, in large measure, with the caste-less subject of a popular and, for the lack of a better phrase, Westernized Indian culture, a subject who, I would like to suggest, overlaps in many ways with the paradigmatic subject of English Studies in India. For, as Madhava Prasad has suggested, what we confront today is not English as "high culture" but English in its manifestation as popular culture or "techno-cul-
ture" (1995). Prasad has argued that while Classical English Studies or English as "high culture" worked by producing a mystique around itself, hence remaining untranslatable, the expanding presence of English-as-technoculture has succeeded in demystifying English. Thus Hollywood's Indian market now relies on dubbing with several films being released in Tamil, Telugu and Hindu versions. The Star T.V viewer can now watch the American soaps *Santa Barbara* and *Bold and the Beautiful* in Hindi. English, argues Prasad, has become "eminently translatable" (1995). The women's magazines *Femina* and *Woman's Era* which are analyzed in Chapter Three are metaphors, in a sense, of this new form of English. The non-normative female and caste-ed subjectivities shaped by the Dravidian movement would disturb the normative subject of English Studies, of English as popular culture and of feminism itself. Recent shifts within the discipline of English Studies have lent a certain legitimacy to feminism and feminist theory so that it has actually become possible for the normative English Studies subject to be feminist, at least in the limited, liberal sense of the term. Even as it has coopted issues of gender and feminism however, the discipline continues to be resolutely indifferent and, often, resistant to questions of caste, region and community, to categories which have remained "non-modern" in a sense and which, consequently, threaten the secular-modern foundations of the discipline. To speak about "caste" and "regional specificity" from an English Studies space is an act of translation. It is a necessary act however, and one that will hopefully open up new critical spaces.
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