Conclusion: Beyond the Margin

This dissertation began with a reference to Spivak’s notion of “the marginalia,” a deconstructionist critique of the centre that is repressive. The close readings and textual analyses of the selected fictional works in the previous five chapters were exclusively employed for the illustration of this marginal problematic. It will be appropriate to conclude with another of Spivak’s concepts, that of “sanctioned ignorance.” While attempting a critique of the Western notions of subjectivity in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak says that even Foucault, who explicated the working of the discourses of power in European clinics and prisons from the dark ages onwards, could not identify the repressive genealogy of colonial violence existing in the early twentieth century. She calls this inability to identify gross injustice and oppression in one’s immediate contexts a fallacy of thought and an expression of Western metaphysics. Sanctioned ignorance is her term to denote this erasure involved in the selection of premises and prioritizing inequalities and oppressions.

Such a sanctioned ignorance can easily be identified in contemporary (fashionable) post-colonial debates taking place in India today regarding specific cultural questions of marginalization arising from gender and caste. The post colonial scholarship that furiously settles the accounts of
just under two centuries of the Raj, seems to be ignorant about the millennia old caste/gender hegemony of internal Brahmanic Hindu colonialism. The simple reason for this is that the academia and the humanities, as everything else in the country, are dominated by the indigenous elites, who have taken advantage of this historical inequality and have orchestrated and are still maintaining this internal caste empire and hegemony. Any epistemological effort at problematizing the discursive contexts of cultural subordination and hegemony in academics or from outside are immediately suppressed and silenced by the status-quoist groups from the top as an exercise of the sanctioned ignorance mentioned above. This becomes more explicit if we situate this hegemonic ignorance as an epistemological violence in the historic contexts of the emergence of the voice and agency of the people, the subaltern classes in the wake of British colonial intervention.

Ethical philosophers and feminist deconstructionists like Spivak call Western colonialism an enabling wound. Spivak acknowledges its modernizing and interventionist potential for the emancipation of the subaltern from Brahmanic caste patriarchy of thousands of years. Bahujan leaders like Phule, Narayana Guru and Ambedkar welcomed and critically acknowledged Western colonialism’s educational, legal and administrative reformism. Thus for the people of India two hundred years of British rule was an enabling break from the millennia old hegemony which the forces of sanctioned ignorance still perpetuate aborting the democratic politics of the
people implied by such developments as the Mandal recommendations. The over-enthusiasm and academic back-up given to post-colonial studies can be seen from the people’s perspective as a recent trope of these neo ignorant elites who unleashed twice-born riots in the 1990s against the inclusion of Bahujans who were excluded from the corridors of power for thousands of years. By foregrounding the two hundred years of ‘suffering’ by the nationalist Brahmanic elite they are erasing the struggles of the people from the ‘Vedic Aryan’ times to the present. This ancient hegemony that still survives as Hindu colonialism is perhaps the world’s oldest and still growing trajectory of cultural subordination and internal imperialism. Thus this epistemological attempt is not post-colonial in the “sanctioned ignorance” sense, since for the women and Dalit Bahujans the anti colonial struggle against this millennia old gender/caste hegemony and imperialism is not yet over. This is a counter hegemonic and counter colonial attempt against sustaining material inequality and repressive epistemological violence from the caste/gender margins of the meta-narratives of nationalism and “post-colonialism.” The discussion of texts like Rudali and Gramayan establishes this fact. The analysis of Thalamurakal is another complex process that problematizes the debate on the colonial/postcolonial. A view from below, from the people, from those who are in the margins of narratives, the Bahujan perspective is thus developed and utilized in the study to overcome the myopia of hegemonic consenses, that of sanctioned ignorance regarding
Brahmanic colonialism. That is why the methodology of reading and analysis is always subversive and deconstructive with a polemical ethic. The critique of the dialectics of modernity mentioned in the introduction should again be contextualized from this Bahujan standpoint.

As elaborated above, the identification and critical explication of the internal colonialism in fictional representations is the major epistemological outcome of the study. The caste and gender oppression/marginalization is found to be established and sustained through a sense of hierarchy and desire across religious and transcendental discourses. Brahmanic patriarchy is the key conceptual category used to elaborate the arguments here. Fiction as a socially and politically significant narrative act was found to be influenced by the material and discursive contexts of caste and gender. Both the formal as well as thematic concerns of the novel in the Indian languages are found to be shaped and determined by the material realities and associated attitudes and worldviews of caste and gender hierarchy emanating from internal imperialism. All the texts used for the discussions represent the miseries and traumas of the margins. They address questions of inequality, exclusion and exploitation. They narrativize the torturous existence of the material margins, whose struggles for egalitarian dignity are articulated in some of the committed works like Rutlali. The analysis also reveals that works like Kanthapura evade and silence questions of inequality and exploitation using
the form of fiction. In general all the ten novels analyzed problematize and articulate the premises of marginalization in its complexity.

Indian fictional representations (as is contemporary Indian cinema) are determined, both in terms of the message and the medium by thousands of years of cultural elitism and subordination. The themes, imagery, narrative discourse, philosophical affiliation, characterization and even the form of Indian fiction are defined by cultural elitism. Popular narratives and the mainstream cinema are equally influenced by elitist and superiority discourses. In the historic contexts of hegemony even subaltern representations tend to indulge in a kind of ventriloquism. The cultural forms and genres in our society could be seen as manifestations of the secret politics of hierarchical caste/gender desires. Even the so called radical interventions turn out to be reiterations and reproductions of hegemonic articulations. Even popular cultural forms like mimicry and pop music reproduce hegemonic and elitist messages in Indian contexts.

This inability to come out of the hegemonic systems of representation and communication and the inadequacy of counter hegemonic significations that can subvert and resist hegemony at the micro political levels mark the general cultural crisis that overshadows writing in India today. In the light of the present study this problematic of resistance is all the more explicit. Though the ten texts chosen attempt intense critique of the gender question, the more profound and specific cultural question of caste
evades comprehension and critical understanding. Caste often escapes as the un-representable in narration as it is in conversion. The narratives turn blind when it comes to the question of writing and signifying the caste problematic. A general tone of resignation and helplessness, a lethal fatalism engulfs the narratives while confronting this unique discourse. The fictional texts find it difficult to deconstruct beyond a level its genealogy of phallogocentric ethnicity, hierarchized desire, sanctioned ignorance of inequality and knowledge/power monopolies. The cultural elitist discourses in the country that have their origin in Brahmanism and the Varna ideology play hide and seek in the narrative imagiNation and its representations. Perhaps another thousands of years of multilateral epistemological enquiry and rewriting from the Bahujan point of view would be needed for a democratic deconstruction of this hegemony.

An associated insight of this mode of enquiry is about the plurality of the margins. This is a result of the various regional manifestations of caste/gender hegemony. But across regions and linguistic/cultural terrains the Avarna communities, minority converts and women are specific targets of cultural and religious elitism throughout the peninsula. The evaluation of Song of the Loom given in the first chapter elaborates this point. Even minority religions are corrupted with the purity-pollution ideology of the Brahmanic Varna system. That is why we encounter upper caste elitism and gender hierarchy in Islam and Christianity in India. As the last chapter
demonstrates, the Syrian Christians of Kerala boast of their Brahmanic origins even two millennia after their conversion.

Another hypothetical consideration confirmed by the study is the inseparability of gender and caste in cultural study and critique in the historic contexts of Brahmanic patriarchy. The discussion of Rudali proves that caste is engendered and embodied in the woman’s body. The body is identified as the locus of culture and its distinctions. The body is the primal site of purity and pollution in the Indian imagiNation. It is a cultural signifier of immense semiological value in Hindu/Brahmanic colonial discursive contexts. The gaze and desire of caste/gender are focused on the body and more specifically on the phallus. The phallogocentric and ethnocentric discourses of Indian hegemony that has continued for millennia feed on the body and the governmentality of bio power. The chapter dealing with Samskara illustrates how internal imperialism invades the body of the sexed subaltern and eternally subordinates it as an elemental and iconic site of comprehensive control. The notorious sexual colonies of Brahmanism among Shudra women and its hegemonic functions along with the Manudharmasastras explain the anatomy of the psychosomatically targeted conquests.

These conquistadors who held the monopoly of religion and culture left nothing untouched. The critique of Mavelimantam breaks the prevalent idea that the Adivasis were left out by Brahmanism and its caste system. The fourth chapter deconstructs the tribalism and primitivism discourses that are
influential in the narration of the Adivasi question. The analysis also supports the sociological notions of ‘tribe into caste’ and the marginalization of defiant yet broken tribes into the peripheries of culture/civilization. The hegemonic nomenclature and the divide-and-rule strategies of internal imperialism are also critically identified as the key instruments of subordination. The mediating and resolving attempts of fiction and its narrativization of historic contexts are also critically analyzed here.

Another major finding of the study is the inference regarding the resurgence of hegemony in the post-independence period. The Mandal-Mandir politics and its aftermath are invoked and contextualized in the argument. The Bahujan movements and the politics of the historically marginalized are situated in the greater contexts of constitutional democracy. Democracy is hailed here as the politics of the emerging suppressed/marginalized subjectivities. The construction of Dalit Bahujan identity and subversive subjectivity is thus radically contextualized as the grass root level democratization of the society and polity. Thus the study contests the existing formulae of hegemonic reductionism and political castration implied by terms like ‘identity politics’ and Sanskritization.

The study distinguishes identity and subjectivity in theoretical terms. Identity is seen as the plurality of elements that includes birth, caste/gender/class, and other regional socio cultural factors that determine an individual or group. But subjectivity is viewed as the plurality that includes
the voice/language/discourse, speech/agency, mobility/potential, consciousness/unconscious, politics/ideology of the person or representative individual. In this premise subject formation is a political activity having immense implications for representation, ideology, ethics and democracy. The post-structuralist notion of decentered and plural subjectivity merges here with an element of the modernist, interventionist and consciously political subject.

The subject formation in the real sense is the politicization of the individual constitution of a being with consciousness, voice and agency, of course, in discursive contexts. And the politics of subjectivities is the democratic politics that upholds voice and agency. This democratic politics has nothing to do with mere projection and assertion of identity which is only the product of birth attributes that limit the agency and franchise of the individual. The prevalent term 'identity politics' is another perpetuation of the hegemonic groups that underrates and prevents the entry of the subaltern into political power. The term in effect erases the independent subject formation of the historically marginalized, the recognition of which is an immediate threat to hegemony. It also articulates the historical underrating of the subaltern by the dominant classes, suggesting that they could never enter into democratic politics with their collective movements that are only expressions of "identity politics."
This appropriation or hijacking effected by hegemonic nomenclature is what is sought to be exposed in the critique of Sanskritization in the context of *Thalamurakal*. According to the theory of Sanskritization that still holds currency in influential academic circles, the lower castes merely imitate the upper castes and try to go up in the hierarchical ladder. But the simple fact is that M N Srinivas’s conceptual framework could not explain mobility outside the Brahmanic Hindu caste system and its meta-referential structure. It failed to explain independent community formations outside the Hindu hierarchy (that it actually erased in order to prevent the possibility of subject formations and the democratic politics of the people). And politically it aborts any possibility of the formation of solidarity among the marginalized outside the Hindu fold as in the subaltern-minority alliance or the Dalit Bahujan-women-Adivasi-minority axis. This status quoist theorization in other words is an attempt to rescue the power elite from losing historical monopolies and is itself an extension of the Hinduization project at the epistemological level. Another instance of sanctioned ignorance and epistemological violence could also be identified in this Brahmanic theorization of empirical Bahujans.

The present study also critiques the Subaltern Studies project of Partha Chatterjee and his colleagues. Even though they counter the nationalist historiography, they want to rehabilitate the struggles of the people at the heart of the nationalist anti-colonial struggles. This again is an
attempt to elaborate the narrative of the nation which is dominated by the Savarna elite. The present study, in contra-distinction to this nationalist affiliation of the subaltern studies project has attempted to deconstruct this imagiNation and its discourses. It is less interested in the two hundred years of British colonialism and the Raj, and is more concerned about the thousands of years of the caste-swaraj of Brahmanic colonialism that constitute the historical discursive context of subalternity. In the study the term subaltern has additional implications. The subaltern is understood not merely as the victims of British colonialism (as testified to by Phule and Ambedkar, they were the beneficiaries of it), but of the regime of patriarchy and caste. That is why Spivak’s notions of “the new subaltern” and “the gendered subaltern” are widely exploited and extended by the study to address further and profounder questions of embodied and engendered modes of subordination in Brahmanic patriarchy.

Sanskritization and other Hindu hegemonic modes of co-optive appropriations are overruled from the peoples’ perspective, from the radical democratic view from below. Deconstructive, democratic and decentering modes of praxes including communitization and Dalitization along with the spirit of Mandalization are scrutinized. Communitization is only seen as the first stage of the formation of a human community that can co-exist with difference and diversity. The dissertation defines Communitization as a process of internal democratization that alleviates sub caste distinctions to
form a greater egalitarian community. Further studies must be done to verify its potential to mobilize a larger human communitization process.

Dalitization again is a radical levelling process involving the decolonization of the mind and culture/language from the millennia old hegemonic life practices enforced by Brahmanic colonialism. It is an egalitarian praxis that upholds self respect and ethical acknowledgement of the other. It values human dignity and the gravity of historical exclusion. It radically reverses the upward thrust of the Brahmanic caste desire and initiates an ethical vantage from below. It is downward oriented democratic decentering opposed to the concept of 'Sanskritization.' At the epistemological level it is a refashioning of the humanities and literary/cultural historiography for a subaltern hermeneutics of history and culture. All these processes are also contextualized in the broader democratization of our society, culture, human sciences, epistemology and polity.

The study itself is part of such radical democratization of epistemology and knowledge practices, especially from within the academia. This is all the more significant in a society where neo nationalist and pro fascist fundamentalism is growing and increasingly mobilizing and victimizing the people not merely through revivalist propaganda but through bloody pogroms and genocides. The sanctioned ignorance that rules the epistemological practices, as has been pointed out above, operates along with other kinds of reductionism. Economism or economic determinism is
another hegemonic fashion that has suppressed the caste/gender problematic of Indian society and culture for decades. The high priests of veiled Brahmanism and their subservient Savarna camaraderie in the Left and in the academia/media are behind this ‘universalistic’ class analyses. But fortunately these foot soldiers of hegemony are now in a confessional mood and are ready to recognize caste/gender as the key categories of socio cultural analysis in a traditional society devoured by Varna patriarchy.

The study has revealed, fiction as a cultural artifact evolving across the sub continent in various languages (from the early 1930s to the late 1990s) that reflects the emergency of this cultural crisis related to the marginalization of the people on caste/gender grounds. This in itself testifies to and validates the cultural implications of the study. The questions of hegemony materialized through caste/gender equations as represented in Godan and Kanthapura continue with greater force in The God of Small Things. Even at the close of the twentieth century O V Vijayan had to write a novel connecting the caste question with the greater ethnocentric dilemmas of the world, especially that of racism in the West. We had to wait till the twenty first century to see the first generation Dalit autobiographical narratives and fiction as in Limbale. The growing inequalities and the withdrawal of the state from constitutional liabilities in a conventional society like ours, especially in the context of neo liberalism and economic globalization intensify the miseries and struggles of the marginalized. In an
increasingly unequal world which boasts of making poverty (created by Western imperialism) history, and says nothing about the race/gender inequalities and its regional manifestations like the Indian caste system that has existed from the origin of civilizations, the ethical deconstruction of epistemology and writing back from the peripheries have only just begun from the perspective of the historically marginalized. The subversive subjectivities are still in the making and the democratic cultural politics and solidarities of the people are also anticipated by this humble epistemological effort, since knowledge is power and it is subversive in the plural sense.