INTRODUCTION: A ROADMAP TO THE THESIS

This thesis began work on the premise that a feminist critique of science is possible, and necessary. It moved into an ambivalence, although not apology, regarding the conditions of such a possibility. It is this movement which I wish to mark in this introduction, with a stress on the contours of the *possibility* - neither a fiction nor a truth - that I have explored in the thesis.¹

Concentrating as I did on the actual world of the Indian situation, I was aware that a feminist response to science in India, as relative to the large volume of such a response elsewhere, was marked more by an absence, or at any rate a paralysis, than a presence or significant debate. Without getting into the ‘failure’ model here, or slipping into an easy reading of ‘difference’, I knew, however, that I needed to find an explanation for this too, if I were to contribute to the debate in any significant way. It is with this in mind that I made my formulations regarding the problem.

The original hypothesis was for a model of knowledge as situated and perspectival, where the perspectival is not equivalent to the conjectural. It had, as it stood, three claims – one about the validity of contextual criteria for knowledge-making, one about critique, and one about the relation between critique and knowledge-making. I proposed to use as allegorical resource the lived experiences of women, that had been dismissed in dominant understandings of scientific knowledge-making as inchoate, conjectural, and limited, to ask the question of what constituted valid criteria of knowledge, and to suggest a model of knowledge-making based on and beginning from such a place. Such a place would be, then, both a critique of

¹ Statements or propositions can be either necessary, possible, or contingent.
dominant models and a different model of knowledge-making. The formulation also anticipated a separation from dominant feminist turns to experience that spoke of bringing back the fully subjective, of recognizing the embodied woman as knower, and that, in so doing, either proposed relativist epistemologies or took an anti-epistemological turn. A feminist standpoint epistemology as proposed by the thesis would offer such a different contour of critique.

The hypothesis ran into two difficulties. For one, what was this ‘place to begin from’, this originary point for perspectival knowledge? What was the claim of the lived experiences of women as an originary point, if not intended as a one-among-many relativist claim? I will come back to this later, to try and sift through the various strands of feminism that talk of women’s experiences, or of experience as feminine. The other difficulty was – why critique? In proposing a feminist, or any critical response to science, the first task would be to understand why or whether such a response might be necessary or valid in the first place. I found that existing critiques of science in the Indian context, including postcolonial work,\(^2\) liberal historiographies, eco-feminist positions, and non-feminist gender work, posed such a necessity in their reading of Western science as a hegemonic entity that precluded experience. Experience has meant, in these critiques, one of the following – the experiences of an empirically excluded community or category of people, the excluded (disavowed) experience, or sometimes experience as a category excluded from knowledge-making, most often the first. There is a theory of exclusion here that informs the need for critique. The theory works with pre-existing categories, of subjects before knowledge,

\(^2\) I use the term postcolonial frequently throughout the thesis, and will therefore flag at the outset what I mean by the term. I refer to Indian histories of science, scientific controversies, biographies of scientists, that operate within an understanding of science as western, as inflected by modernity and the colonial impulse in its passage in India, and reading this passage through an understanding of colonial domination in the hybridity framework. I elaborate on this framework later in the introduction, and in detail in Chapter 3 of the thesis.
as it were, although, again and again, the exclusion is defined or described as “constitutive”. Postcolonial critiques of Western science, for instance, have described scientific knowledge as authoritarian, uninformed by ethico-political considerations, and as therefore putting outside or excluding, through its authoritarian character, those uninvolved in knowledge-making. The mechanism of exclusion is here understood as one of “At my heel, or outside” of subjects of knowledge, as Michelle Le Doueuff puts it. Giving voice, or bringing to light, thus producing a politics of, by and for the experiences of such excluded actors, then, has largely constituted the task of critique, and subsequently, of resistance. Obviously, easiest to pin down in this exercise have been scientific institutions, where power and hierarchies are visible and can be mapped onto actors. The intellectual Left in India after the reflexive turn in the 1980s has most often been the active agent in these moves.

I have stated that my formulations regarding a possible feminist response to science would attempt to address the existing poverty of debate. My explorations led me to two critical pillars on which feminist, and other gender critique, of science in India stood. One has to do with the legacies of feminism itself. By the time science critique enters feminist work in India, hierarchies between political standpoints have been established, and it is in this light that we might also look at the ways in which feminism in India turned to experience as a tool to resist the authoritarianism of knowledge. The turn to experience, for parts of feminism in India, was already a reactive response to the exclusionary character of first-order theories, like Marxism, whose central organizing category – class – failed to take into account other axes of inequality, or other entry points from which to view the world.³ Put this way, it also

³ This is true of all the varieties of Marxism that have populated Indian politics – whether class be understood in terms of property (ownership), power (authority), or the performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labor. The first two are generally seen as flowing from the relations
became a general anti-theoretical stance, a stance against conventional forms of theorizing, often expressed as a polemic of anti-epistemology. As the foundational premise of women’s studies courses and publications was the statement – “Women’s studies is a perspective, not a discipline.” While in part a resistance to the institutionalization and associated rigidities of the disciplines, this also reflected, in overwhelmingly Left environments that used class as the solely valid analytic tool to understand oppression, a solidarity with women’s movements outside of the space, as also perhaps a desire to carve a unique, and uniquely political, core for feminism in India – one different from the political core of Marxism, and one that could transform theory, including theory enshrined in the disciplines. Therefore, the strongest theoretical location would be inter-disciplinary. Another route was the attempt at “feminist knowledge production”, usually posited as an alternative knowledge drawing from “the well of women’s knowing (both experiential and intellectual), their collective gyana ...” (Jain 2007). I will return to this latter strand of feminist theorizing in a while, meanwhile flagging it as one other, usually less vocal, way in which the debate swung.

My exploration of this set of questions in Bengal complicated the premises of these general impressions somewhat, this exploration also following my own passage through the scientific institution, the conventional Marxist political space, and the spaces of institutionalized feminism in Bengal. These complications were – one,
about the nature of Marxism and Left practice, the other about the ‘failure’ theory of feminism in Bengal, the third about the turn to experience as a uniquely feminist move. Looking at histories of the women’s movement, women’s organizations, women’s studies departments, while trying to trace a contemporary collective journey of women and men “breaking out” of Marxism and Left practice in Bengal, and looking through the lens of the second wave, radical feminist slogan – the personal is the political – I found that the very possibility of “feminism” was not there. This statement, vis-à-vis the Bengal scenario, was already a familiar one. What I began to sense, however, was that the ‘failure’ model that was in place to explain this, needed perhaps to be complicated. Feminism, as we knew it, had connections, of whatever tenuous sort, with women. In somewhat straightforward extensions of this connection, women’s movements – or women in a movement – were somehow classified feminist in the failure theory. Issues – rape, domestic violence, dowry, water and fuel availability, sati – that merited the naming feminist on somewhat the same count, seemed to provide corroborative evidence of failure since they were not taken up in any serious sense in Bengal. These were not issues picked at random, but issues that referred to the possibility of (sexual) difference; issues that, in the raging debates in the autonomous women’s movements of the 80s, pointed to the non-acknowledgement of difference by dominant patriarchies. Nonetheless, to say that the absence of such issues in the Bengal context merited a demotion in the ranks of feminism meant, for one, a non-perusal of the combination of contingent circumstances that produced these debates in other parts of India in the first place. For another, it ignored the different contexts within which politics in Bengal operated.

5 I make, as I explain in Chapters 2 and 4, a distinction between Marx, Marxism, and what I have called Left practice. The burden of Chapter 2 has been to look at Left practice, as the phenomenon that shapes the political. Inasmuch as Marxism enters this discussion, and this activity, it has been flagged. Marx rarely figures in the activity, and therefore in my description of the actual worlds.
This statement is not only about the heavy-handedness of Left practice in Bengal or the Marxist analytic that disallowed difference, but also about global feminism – that constituted a different, and perhaps more significant kind of outside consciousness\(^6\) for “breaking out”\(^7\) than did the autonomous women’s movement in India or even Marxist theorizing.

Did that mean that feminism of a different kind could perhaps be found in these Left spaces? What was at stake in making such a claim? And what was the point in exploring, in ways that seemed local, to the extent of being isolated and parochial (confined to Bengal), this claim?

I will begin with the last question, since it has a bearing on my methodology; also in order to clarify the perhaps undue significance I otherwise seem to attribute to my familiarity with the Bengal space. Feminism as we knew it in India, in all its resistances to theory, including Marxism, needed to break out through an attention to difference, which had reportedly been singularly missing in Left and Marxist practice. Marxism, in the ways in which it has been indicted, has been considered guilty of not offering a place to women, of not taking into account women’s perspectives. To that end, the second wave slogan – the personal is the political – enacted the reversal; it insisted on an attention to the everyday, the lived experience. It may have also helped name the forgetting of knowledge of oppression in everyday sites like the domestic sphere. In this mode, feminism needed to be perspectival, attuned to experience, which was deemed the only form that could ‘get at’ the difference enshrined in the

\(^6\) Lenin’s concept of the “outside consciousness” that might put the match to revolution has been charged with vanguardist tendencies, as the ‘elite’ domain, and so on, in different critiques of Marxism. Ajit Chaudhury, in *Subaltern Studies V*, takes up this articulation, demonstrating that it is not an empirical category where the elite may be seen as having power over the subaltern (1987).

\(^7\) I am metaphorically referring here to the title of the feminist text *Breaking out: feminist consciousness and feminist research* that, in both its avatars, talked about breaking out of various affiliations that feminism had been urged to keep, including that to Marxism.
domestic, or the everyday. Put this way, it would seem that feminism in Bengal had ‘failed’ to appear. But a closer look at what was being talked about as Marxism created difficulties for this understanding. Marxist practice – in cultural work, in organizational dynamics, in party manifestos – seemed, in its ubiquity, a different order of beast. Here we might shift to another, more relevant naming for this ubiquity – masculinist Marxism – to reference an attitude leaning on and shored up by Marxism as theory, and not just Left practice as separate from or as a contaminated version of Marxist theory. Rather than pursuing equality in Leninist frames, masculinist Marxism seemed to require a complementary feminine perspective – that inchoate, limited, inner voice *that made the impossible case for difference*, the impossible case for the ethical within politics. In this sense, the feminine – as the sign of the ethical difference within the political – was constitutive of masculinist Marxism, and I suggest, in the thesis, that this was the form of Marxism that resides in Left spaces in Bengal. What comprised a Marxist standpoint for Left politics in Bengal, then, was such an attitude, and such an attitude was emphatically premised on difference.

There was also an epistemological claim in this case made for difference, one that was voiced with far greater ambivalence, but voiced nonetheless, in feminist positions. As I have mentioned in detailing the feminist attempt to transform disciplinary knowledges through a reference to ‘women’s ways of knowing’, a feminism that spoke for the feminine as perspectival also spoke for an organic community of women as representing this feminine. The “feminine perspective” here took on a deeper ontological status, producing for feminism a starting point, as it

---

8 This also had resonances with other feminist theorizing that, sometimes using psychoanalytic imagery, concentrated on the overlaps between the domestic and the “imaginary”, as sites of resistance to the patriarchal Symbolic.
were, to produce an “alternative knowledge system” that might be called “feminist knowledge”. Although the work done did not necessarily consolidate this position, it was one that definitely occupied the rhetorical practice of some strands of feminism.

It is in this context that I ask both questions – one of feminism as we knew it, the other of the possibility of feminism. As the powerful inner voice to the masculine political, as making the impossible case for difference, the feminine as perspectival was constitutive of masculinist Marxism. This Marxism was therefore already a placeholder for a version of feminism – a feminism that spoke for the feminine as perspectival, and for an organic community of women as representing this feminine. Although feminism in Left spaces was arguing for a place for women in the political on grounds usually approved therein, and that also agreed with notions of wholesome agency – the experience of oppression, of marginalization, of extreme adversity that produced resistance, there was also the epistemological claim. Both positions, however, continued to function in a frame of hierarchical sexual difference, wherein knowledge remained propositional and unmarked, and the alternatives – whether political or for a different system of knowledge – attempted either a reversal or an inclusion. My point is not to draw a homogenous picture of feminism in India, but merely to challenge the failure model, by suggesting that feminism as we knew it was certainly not absent in Bengal, despite regional and political specificities. The place in masculinist Marxism for the experienced but non-knowledgeable woman, then, served as adequate placeholder for feminist impulses as well.

---

9 This notion of the political harked back to Lukacs’ notions of proletarian standpoints.
This would further suggest that the turn to experience, here, was a Marxist rather than a uniquely feminist legacy.\footnote{Did this turn to experience work only for women? I have examined, in the thesis, the images of the ‘comrade communist man’ which, according to Rajarshi Dasgupta, moved from the warrior stereotype to one of ascetic masculinity, which was “constitutive of the very way one became a communist in Bengal” (Dasgupta 2005: 3). Complementary to the experienced but non-knowledgeable woman, then, was such a man.}

What of my other question, of the possibility of feminism? For some of the women and men breaking out of Left frames in Bengal, positioned peculiarly between anti-theoretical political stances on the one hand and ontological questions about ‘woman’ on the other, global, universalist feminism served as the ‘outside’ consciousness after masculinist Marxism had caught its hem on the spur of the aporetic\footnote{I use the word aporetic here and throughout the thesis to speak of the logically insoluble theoretical difficulty, the impasse. The French word *aporie* is ultimately derived from the Greek *aporia*, meaning difficulty, that which is impassable, especially “a radical contradiction in the import of a text or theory that is seen in deconstruction as inevitable” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*).} perspective that haunted these women and men.\footnote{I am using, here, a different meaning for perspective. I have highlighted these meanings in Chapter 2.} Such a perspective was not tied simply to women, seeking for them inclusion, nor ontologically to ‘woman’, seeking through her a reversal. It was perhaps a moment of possession, a haunting that afforded not new insights but a different, bizarre view of Marxism in Bengal from that available either to the autonomous women’s movement in other parts of India or to Marxist practitioners in Bengal. Such a fleeting moment, *constituted in the presence of global, universalist feminism* (that was hegemonic for feminism in general but an obvious interloper for Marxist spaces in Bengal – all the accusations of middle-classness and class enemies come to mind), offered a feminist possibility – the possibility of a feminist standpoint. This was not another variant of Marxist feminism, nor another radical or socialist feminism (all of which had been attempts at breaking out for Western feminism). This was a turning from within masculinist Marxism outward, building a story from that aporetic perspective shared by women-and-men—
in-and-out-of-Left-organisations as I have flagged in Chapter 2, a turning from attachment toward separation – attachment both to the dominant discourse – masculinist Marxism, and to the category of resistance – feminism. It was such an interpretation of perspective that was a possible feminist standpoint. It was such a possible world that was absent in Left spaces in Bengal.

I have indicated that it was this intensely local exploration that helped make such a connection. It also helped make clear that the presence of global feminism did not create, for those breaking out, yet another variant of a western feminist school. It is in this set of observations that I place my understanding of region, context, locality, or even parochialism – a complication of specificities and generalities. For continuing to articulate a feminism in Indian contexts, I have found this a useful approach.

I took this detour in order to describe one of the two arguments on which feminist critique of science in India, such as it is, stands – that of feminism as perspective. The other argument has to do with the framework of hybridity articulated by Homi Bhabha, engaged with in postcolonial theorizing, and taken up in nearly every document of resistance thereafter, including critiques of western science.

The two most influential effects of the work of postcolonial scholars, perhaps, were a commitment to difference and resistance, and an understanding of the ways in which both were related and occupied the heart of colonial dominance. Western science was clearly seen as an offshoot of colonialism, and the encounter with it in the colonial period therefore involved a similar process of articulating both difference and resistance. In sum, difference – anterior to the encounter – was seen as the vantage point of separation from and resistance to a powerful western science, and the basis of
critique. I will elaborate on the use of the hybridity framework in postcolonial analyses in order to understand the ways in which it inflected this work on science.

The separation postcolonial scholars working on histories of science made from earlier accounts of colonialism – accessing the term ‘post’ thereby – was to resist the earlier reading of colonialism as a triumphant narrative of domination or suppression, suggesting instead a resistance that lived at the very heart of domination. Drawing primarily on the work of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, the postcolonial school fine-tuned a framework of hybridity that seemed to offer better explanations of domination as hegemony, where, just as the dominant never achieved full control, the resistance offered was overdetermined by the same.

I have mentioned earlier that the intellectual Left in the 80s was responsible for much of the activity in this field. This is not to say that the methodologies employed were always Marxist. In fact, the framework of hybridity worked against the Marxist theme of revolution, against any notion of full domination, against a notion of simple coercion. Resistance itself was an ambivalent category, not empirically resoluble into a figure like the subaltern that the later Marxists employed, nor explicable in terms of full agency. It was this framework that postcolonial scholars adopted, as an explanation of colonialism, and of resistances thereto. Such a framework, however, with all its embedded resistances, had no possibilities for articulating a politics in a form even remotely familiar to the Marxist landscape. Here arose the difficulties with various forms of critique that the postcolonial scholars were also trying to voice vis-à-vis colonial rule and practices. With respect to the science space, it was clear that western science was not being defined as a homogenous entity by postcolonial scholars even as they referred to its centralized character; on the other
hand, the engagement with the nature of exclusion or dominance that might characterize western science in India was a slippery exercise at best. Was western science a tool of dominance, like education? Were its philosophical tenets so at odds with indigenous epistemes that dominance following on exclusion was an inevitability? Did its institutional practices produce a violent system that disallowed free learning? While each of these investigations were followed up to varying degrees in the postcolonial engagements with the science question, and while each might or might not have yielded a theory of exclusion that worked with the hybridity framework, the impulse of ‘resistance’ proved to be the knot in the investigations.

Articulations of the political, therefore, fell back upon the wishful language of Marxist politics. Such a politics wishes to take on the task of revolution, i.e., a qualitative reversal of the fortunes of the hegemonic. It may be successfully argued that postcolonial theorizing in fact turned around the concept of the political, so that from centering around revolution, it now centered around resistance. In practice, it concentrated largely on the perceived “at my heel” authoritarianism of hegemonic structures, including western science, to demand inclusion for categories hitherto uninvolved, or to enact a physical reversal. In doing so, it achieved resistance – by which we may mean a physical reaction by the empirically excluded, the negotiations it makes with the powers-that-be, the indifference, even, that sometimes characterizes refusal. And it associated the empirically excluded as embedded, carrying the referent of, a past that, through repetition, carried the essence of difference.

In practice, the postcolonial school worked with the very empirical category of resistance and full agency developed and nuanced by the Subaltern Studies School of historians – the later Marxists. For postcolonial scholars and other work drawing from
them, this usually meant a resort to descriptions of micro-power and contingent negotiations with it as a means of marrying the two languages – the Marxist language of subalternity and the psychoanalytic one of hybridity. In this strange and somewhat incompatible admixture of resistance and revolution resided the postcolonial response to science. This was one of the chief questions that came out of my examination of existing scholarship on science in the Indian context.

What did this mean for the critique of science mounted by postcolonial scholars? The first thing to be noted is that Western science had, by this time, become equated with Western dominance, in this case colonialism. The thrust of the postcolonial promise was in questioning the history of colonialism’s triumphant progress, and this inhered in the historiographies of science, the history of the establishment of science institutions, or the trajectories of individual scientists, that demonstrated the ‘failure’ of western science in the colony. Alongside social histories of science in India that moved away from economic cause-effect analyses of colonialism and concentrated instead on the peculiarities of the transmission and journey of European science in the colony, and alongside liberal historiographies that underlined the value of inflecting history-writing with the socio-political, or of recognizing idea hybridizations at the periphery, thus bringing in context to produce a situated universality for science, this impulse in postcolonial thinking helped produce, through the hybridity exercise, a picture of resistance that challenged neat binaries of colonizer and colonized. As it stood, it primarily sought to change the parameters of history writing. Some of the stress on radicalizing history writing was also in accessing the past in ways different from the conventional. Thus social histories tried to access it as antiquity (presence of science in the past) rather than originality (presence of science in our past prior to the West), while postcolonial scholars tried to
access it as repetition, therefore saying something about the commonalities inherent in a culture across time, as also presenting a ruptured and discontinuous history rather than a straight narrative. At stake in this mode of history-writing therefore was a claim to anterior difference.

It is at this point that the postcolonial take on difference runs afoul of its avowed conceptual structure. Most of the scholarship on the science question in India concentrates on a difference that can be drawn upon to resist the hegemony of western science; while the psychoanalytic frame it operates within would make it possible to anticipate the production of such a difference, in practice, most of the work falls back on a difference that pre-dates the colonial encounter, and that produces an opposition, as it were, to the framework of modern western scientific knowledge. Such an anterior difference draws on multi-perspectival ways of knowing that are referred to in numerous historiographies of ancient science and medicine in India. To impute to these the classical oppositional stance, however, is what often characterized the postcolonial impulse, an impulse well challenged by Ashis Nandy in his observation of “the chaotic perspectives” that constituted Indian resistance – perspectives that would disallow any organized response.

What of science? For one, the “at my heel” authoritarianism that was at the heart of the critique of science allowed resistance in the shape of full agency for the subaltern. Some of this critique was directed at scientific institutions, positing the ‘nationalist’ impulses of scientists in India as a response to western science. Detailed biographies of these scientists were produced to reveal the ambivalences that resistance presented as a mode of response. Later, in the shift to post-development can be seen most evidently the subaltern resistance argument, where even Gandhi is
drawn upon to pose a different knowledge system to the western, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4. It is in this frame that we have what I call the “terrors of technology” argument where science is equated with technology, technology is seen as the problem with science, modern technology is seen as instrumental to western dominance, such instrumentalism is seen as separate from the unique quality of humanness, and ‘everydayness’ or ‘pre-technology’ are seen as metaphors of subaltern resistance to technology. This is also where the case for a multi-perspectival form of knowing is brought in in the Indian context, as seen in early historiographies of science like that of D. Chattopadhyaya.\textsuperscript{13}

It is in this scenario, of the legacies of postcolonialism, Marxism, and global feminism, that we see a feminist response to science in the Indian context.

In the work on gender and science, or women and science, in the Indian context, we might identify several strands. Broadly, there is feminist work, and gender work that separates itself from feminist impulses clearly or implicitly. I have talked about the feminist turn to experience that must be seen, I submit, partly in the light of orthodox Marxist legacies. Such a turn soon took up the task of building an alternative narrative of experience, following the maxims of global feminism as much as its own

\textsuperscript{13} “A survey of Indian philosophy, in the way in which European philosophy is usually surveyed by its historians, is difficult if possible at all. This is largely because of the characteristic peculiarity of its development. In Europe, thinkers succeeded one another, often evolving a philosophy from a radically new standpoint, criticizing and rejecting their predecessors energetically. In India, however, the basis for a number of alternative philosophical views had their origin in a considerable antiquity and the subsequent philosophical activities had been - at least in intention - only the development of these original perspectives. … There was, in short, the simultaneous development of a number of alternative philosophies …” (Chattopadhyaya 1975: 1). This is of course part of the debate that came up in the context of whether or not Indian philosophies could be several or parts of one; historians like Chattopadhyaya himself would say that “the types remained the same”, while more rigid Marxist historians might read the suppression of materialist traditions by Vedantic philosophies. The same questions came up in the 1960s regarding the standardization of Ayurveda as a system, and as an alternative to western medicine.
legacies of Marxist and postcolonial work. The stances here had shifted from the classical women-in-science positions that influenced policy, and that espoused a politics of access (to the fruits of science and technology), inclusion (amendments to such technology in order to make it friendly to special constituencies, like women), presence (of greater numbers of women scientists), to a politics of third world women’s experience – a women-and-science position. It was clear by now that there needed to be an understanding of exclusion to which inclusion in terms of numbers could not be the answer. The ‘cause’ of women in the ‘third world’ was taken up on all fronts, including in global feminism, which, through the capabilities approach, asked for ‘an inclusion of women’s voices in their own development’. The slogan had changed, from the classical ‘I know, you do’ approach of so-called western prepositional models of scientific knowledge, to ‘We all know, together’. This was challenged easily enough, however, on the count of the universalist impulse of global feminism in articulating commonalities of experience for women everywhere, and feminists in the third world pointed to the absolute heterogeneity of experiences of women in the third world, where coalition could be achieved only on the basis of a commonality of struggle, not the nature of the ‘third world woman’ as had been stereotyped in global feminism. In opposition, the epistemological attempt at reversal took place but a certain stereotype continued to be perpetuated, especially in ecofeminist positions that attempted to recover the local. This kind of approach not only put together nature and women in the third world as ‘natural’ allies, it re-made the ‘third world woman’ as the embodied insider who could have knowledge. Such an embodiment was the classical oppositional stance – one of ‘I know mine, you know

14 An approach elucidated in the work of Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, the capabilities approach talks about looking at each individual as an end in her own right, and endeavours towards promoting “central human functional capabilities”, that is, capabilities that deliver readiness to make (certain) choices regarding functioning in ‘multiply realizable’ ways that are “truly human” (Nussbaum 2000: 72). I go into the details of the capabilities approach in Chapter 5.
yours, there can be no dialogue’. For those rethinking Marxism,\(^\text{15}\) this had enough resonances with ‘epistemologies of the oppressed’ to allow marginality – third-worldness – to act as a point of origin for knowledge-making, and post-development positions took this up in earnest. Thus far, the battle had been about ideology. In later, other analyses that I have called global gender work, however, the ‘problem of ideology’ seems to have been dealt with. Avowedly drawing upon hybridity frameworks, and at the same time distancing itself from feminism as an ideology, global gender work talks of the multiple negotiations women in the third world make with scientific institutions. Power here is disaggregated, and must be negotiated as such. Science too is not necessarily a dominant entity that can entirely efface resistance; in fact, it is negotiated and accessed alongside other knowledges in ways that are influenced more by economic considerations than those of resistance to knowledge forms. This is also work that purportedly steps away from all essentialisms, including cultural, by a reading that accesses culture-in-the-making – a reading of women’s practices that follow no set norms, nor are constrained by them. Another question – of whether such a description of science did justice to the object of critique – inspires the attempt both at profiling science in India as a disaggregated entity, and talk of micro-negotiations – work in the interstices – that can help attack its power. The new anthropologies of childbirth starting in the 1990s, like that of Cecilia Van Hollen (2003), are a case in point. Avowedly hybridity is being accessed here as the mode of understanding dominance – a putting together of options, a coming together of worlds, that produces a different reality from something pure or original. The framework of hybridity, however, is not about these empirical negotiations, or the multi-faceted reality they produce. In that sense, global gender

\(^{15}\) I refer to the near-global phenomenon of rejuvenated versions of Marxist practice, and sometimes theory.
work not only dilutes the framework, it actually steps away from it into an expanded liberalism that might do better to be called by its proper name.

It was clear, therefore, that the turn to experience as has been voiced in existing critiques of science did not suggest a satisfactory answer. Apart from the fact that they seemed to persist in promoting the language of revolution while working on resistance, they had not explored accurately the role of experience in Western scientific knowledge-making itself. I had to return, therefore, to what might be the fundamental questions of critique. If hybridity, inclusion, resistance, did not constitute satisfactory answers, what might be the more satisfactory ones? What might critique mean? What might be a need for critique? Is it an element of knowledge-making itself, and if so, what would be the contours of such a model of knowledge-making? And what could be the contours of a possible critique that took into account or had a theory of exclusion to which inclusion in simple terms could not be the answer?

This thesis therefore moves through the following steps. It tries to trace a genealogy of critique and its particular use of experience as has populated feminist and postcolonial responses to science largely in the Indian context. It finds, through a use of perspective, its own tools of critique that offer a better picture, perhaps, of the hegemonic. In doing so, it proposes a turn to experience that is not, cannot be, an anti-epistemological turn, as also a turn to epistemology that cannot be an anti-political stance.

In proposing a better picture of the hegemonic, I am acutely aware that I need to understand here science, or western science, in a manner better than has been posited so far in critiques of science. To that extent, I attempt, in the first chapter, to look at the object that is in question, as also to re-examine the need for critique.
Finally, I attempt to give a clearer picture of my own model of critique. In such a model, inversion is the act that offers a view of the hegemonic, a model of critique, a link between politics and epistemology. This inversion is made possible through a perspective that is neither information – the seeing of that which had not been seen before, nor testimony – the voicing of that which had not been voiced before, but the seeing, differently, of that which was already visible, already in sight. In the light of the four turns to experience that I see in feminist and gender moves, that challenge the epistemological,¹⁶ I propose a re-turn, not to a narrative or to the chaos of experience, but to its aporeticity, and further an interpretation of such an aporetic perspective that will constitute a standpoint. This is a small contribution the thesis attempts to make to feminism. To science, as also to its critique, I proffer a far more ambivalent response.

¹⁶ The four turns to experience are – The global universalist approach that concerns itself with gender and the local, believes in development logic but is concerned with its accurate rendition, and actually names the ‘third world woman’ as allegory of the local; the political reproach to universalist feminism that is in absolute opposition to such a position, relies on the absolute heterogeneity of experiences of women in the third world that disallow any naming of ‘third world woman’, points to the exclusions inherent in such a naming, and takes instead the commonality of struggle that might offer the only basis for coalition; the local, soliloquous approach which is also in opposition to the global position, and, in an act of recovering the local, takes modern science to be by definition violent, reductionist, capitalist, with an exclusionary attitude to the experiences of women in the third world, and therefore advocates a return to the women-nature combine as a response; global gender work disdaining the universalist approach that works toward identifying contingent moments of resistance in women’s lives. This work is in alignment with postcolonial approaches that propose a framework of hybridity-in-process. The turn from experience identifies, correctly, the problems of the turns towards it, but prefers to keep alive the disjunction between politics and epistemology, suggesting instead either a recognition of fresh epistemological content for feminism, or a recognition of its irrelevance as a philosophy. I have flagged the turns to experience in Chapters 4 and 5.