CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND ANXIETY: A MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE POSTMODERN

Representation: The Basic Thrust

In the preceding analysis of some of the works of Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha I have tried to locate their discursive position within the First-World academia. In spite of the many and consistent critiques of their works, it cannot be denied that they have considerably influenced the study of literary and social theory in their own ways. An analysis of their writings also reveals a process of development of their respective positions within the existent theoretical paradigm.

Although Said had based a part of his critique on Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci to a large extent, he also had pronounced humanist influences such as Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach. Thus, in a way, Said was one of those already dwindling group of intellectuals who, although they were moving into the problematics (and therefore the necessity) of the politics of representation, still believed in the existence of a unitary consensus somewhere, a dichotomic sense of right and wrong, or virtue and vice. The movement away was perhaps inevitable and necessary as well, but Said has never been apologetic about the
sometimes contradictory positions that he has assumed. In the ‘Afterword’ to his book *Orientalism* Said has raised and discussed this point succinctly:

Yet among American and British academics of a decidedly rigorous and unyielding stripe, *Orientalism*, and indeed all of my other work, has come in for disapproving attacks because of its residual “humanism”, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental, treatment of agency. I am glad that it has! *Orientalism* is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine…What I tried to preserve in my analysis of Orientalism was its combination of consistency and inconsistency, its play, so to speak, which can only be rendered by preserving for oneself as writer and critic the right to some emotional force, the right to be moved, angered, surprised and even delighted.2

What is most interesting, however, about Said’s ‘humanism’ is in the manner in which he has endorsed the growing out of it into a dialectical post-structuralist position that his successors have assumed. On the one hand, he feels the need for a humanist ‘emotional force’ that is part of his critical self; while on the other hand he realizes how the arbitrary position of his successors is perhaps a necessity to counter the rigorous and essentialist theoretical machinery that is still used by the Western academy:
the work of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Ashis Nandy, predicated on the sometimes dizzying subjective relationships engendered by colonialism, cannot be gainsaid for its contribution to our understanding of the humanistic traps laid by systems such as Orientalism.³

One might therefore say that the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 was a defining moment in more ways than one. It is unnecessary to discuss here the impact that the book had on anti-essentialist agenda throughout the world. The more relevant point is how Said’s work, in its mixture of humanism and anti-humanism, laid open a space where other intellectuals from the Third World could sow and reap. Said’s book acted as a catalyst in making these intellectuals realize that they had a valid, cogent voice that could even be subjectively representative. The implicit subjectivity that we consistently discover in both Spivak and Bhabha is perhaps a continuation of the humanist spirit that Said had generated; whereas the theoretically sound yet arbitrary nature of their work is born out of a confidence in their respective representative values which engendered a post-structuralist transcendence that goes beyond Said. I have already discussed how Said’s approach to the problem of representation was very different from some of his predecessors such as A.L. Tibawi, Syed Hussein Alatas, Anouar Abdel-Malek who had initially analyzed the problem. He was also considerably removed from later scholars such as Abdullah Laroui or Talal Asad or K.N. Pannikar. The primary difference lay in the fact that Said moved beyond the basic problematic of the representation of Islam, into the larger one of the
representation of the East as a whole. He was opening up new disciplinary possibilities in Third-World representation. It is this systematic approach practised by Said that was picked up by the later scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

However, as already mentioned, there was a striking difference between Said and his two able contemporaries. While Said was trying to reconcile his two critical selves—the humanist scholar on the one hand and the anti-humanist critic of Western essentialism on the other—both Spivak and Bhabha had moved into different categories of representation. By the time either of these two intellectuals had really addressed the problem of representation, anti-humanist modes of theorizing were already in fashion. In order that they might get a foothold in the American academia, they had to take up and practise these new critical methods. Thus although both of them had great admiration and respect for Edward Said, and considered him to be one of their major influences they gradually moved into newer and more fashionable forms of representation (or non-representation). This is of course not to say that they were inclined towards particular forms of theorizing only because these were in vogue. This was a conscious choice, I presume, after much deliberation, as anti-humanism threw up many possibilities of representation that could not have been imagined by Said when he had begun to write.
The Departure from Edward Said: A Crucial Moment

The departure from conventional modes of critiquing by these new icons of postcolonial theorizing came under much scrutiny both from the West and the East. This was obviously an interesting location. Homi Bhabha has spoken about hybridity. Theirs is a hybrid, median location that is criticized by both sides of the divide. Particularly interesting is the way in which Arif Dirlik attacks this new breed of intellectuals by re-defining the word ‘postcolonial’:

I wondered…whether there might have been a postcolonial consciousness, by which I mean the consciousness that postcolonial intellectuals claim as hallmark of their intellectual endeavours, even before it was so labelled. Probably there was, although it was invisible because subsumed under the category Third World. Now that postcoloniality has been released from the fixity of Third World location, the identity of the postcolonial is no longer structural but discursive. Postcolonial in this perspective represents an attempt to regroup intellectuals of uncertain location under the banner of postcolonial discourse. Intellectuals in the flesh may produce the themes that constitute postcolonial discourse, but it is participation in the discourse that defines them as postcolonial intellectuals. Hence it is important to delineate the discourse so as to identify postcolonial intellectuals themselves.\textsuperscript{4}
The phrase ‘uncertain location’, used by Dirlik, is a qualifier that needs special attention. This is the point of departure of the new breed of postcolonial intellectuals. For Marxist practitioners like Dirlik, this uncertainty is most unnerving. In fact, the acerbic tone that is evident in the above extract is an insinuation towards the insincerity of these postcolonial intellectuals. He easily relates their diffuse presence with the strategies of global capitalism and clever First-World politicking, and is deeply angered by the very term ‘postcolonial’.

The uncertainty that is symptomatic of such a hybrid group of thinkers and theorists makes Dirlik wonder about the possibility of a representative agenda that can form the basis of a so-called postcolonial movement. He looks at the entire postcolonial agenda less as a consolidated protest movement than as a convenient policy of survival of these intellectuals within the First-World academy. He finds it absurd that the politics of postcoloniality should club together such politically disparate intellectuals as Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Lata Mani. Dirlik categorically expresses his strong distrust in the very possibility of conceptualization of such a term as ‘postcolonial’:

…the popularity that the term postcolonial has achieved in the last few years has less to do with its rigorousness as a concept or with the new vistas it has opened up for critical inquiry that it does with the increased visibility of academic intellectuals of Third World origin as pacesetters in cultural criticism…it was only from the mid-1980s [that] these so-called
postcolonial intellectuals seemed to acquire an academic respectability that they did not have before.⁶

That is to say he views the entire postcolonial project as a process of the Third-World intellectual gaining political and academic (and, Dirlik does not forget to mention, economic) mileage in the First World. To rub his point in he even refers to a 1985 interview of Gayatri Spivak where she had insisted how she did not belong to the ‘top level of the United States academy’ because she taught in the South and the Southwest rather than in the North-eastern seaboard or the West coast which were for the elite.⁷ In his endnote Dirlik does not forget to add that since then Spivak had moved to Columbia University.

This debate, however, cannot be reduced to the simplistic argument about privileged locations and/or economic advantages. Neither is this a case of trying to shove off a fellow academic who is suddenly and undeservedly making it big in the profession. Dirlik’s attack on the agenda of postcolonial critical practice is one that is born out of a deep-seated theoretical scepticism. It is a repudiation of post-foundational history from the perspective of a Marxist, foundational practitioner of theory. Dirlik’s critique comes out of a certain sense of insecurity and the despondency at the sudden success of a post-foundationalist bias in the study and practice of literary and cultural theory. He finds this insincere and fails to comprehend the possibility of the existence of such rootless theorizing. Indeed, if we view things from his perspective there is little chance of success of
postcolonial theory in its attempts at resisting essentialist strategies of the West, and hence his dismissive tone. We shall come back to this discussion once again, as arguments and counter-arguments on this will form the backbone of this chapter. But before that let me put both Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha in perspective vis-à-vis the current debate.

**Gayatri Spivak’s Strategy of Abrupt Intervention**

I have already discussed in my chapter on Gayatri Spivak how she attempts pluralistic re-negotiations of Western modes of essentialist readings. Through sophisticated textual strategies and linguistic tools like catachresis or reconstellation she tries to bring out aporias within hegemonic formations. No wonder, the study of history has always remained one of her chief concerns. It is through abrupt, interventionist procedures that Spivak tries to prise open the truth about history and its disciplinary formations. As a seasoned practitioner of deconstruction she has used its tools to perfection, although, as I have discussed, there are subtle differences between her strategy and those of the Anglo-American school of deconstruction per se. Time and again, Spivak has insisted on the necessity of the deconstructive mode of approach while negotiating identity. That is so because it is through a process of appropriating identity that a discursive historical model is usually set up by the power centre:
Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not an exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced.\(^8\)

Thus, gradually, she attempts at a disruption of all foundational models of knowledge—that include not only history and literature but questions about individual identity and subject positions. While consistently questioning location and its discursive parameters, Spivak incessantly relocates her self, and this continuous re-location is a way of evading essentialist identities. Since the expression ‘Third-World intellectuals’ has been applied to Spivak and her lot almost from the respective moments of their arrival in the First World, she has gradually grown sceptical about its use as well:

…although I certainly understand the political reasons for embracing the expression “Third World”, I also feel that it’s becoming too identitarian…So although I recognize the importance of solidarity, in the production of knowledge and the new narrativization of the older script it has to be treated with some caution. Perhaps even because, in the very locus of their struggle, they have an interest in dominant global capitalism.\(^9\)
This is very interesting. One does not fail to notice the self-reflexive overtone in the above lines. Solidarity is fine. But while on the one hand there is the possibility of labelling and essentialization, on the other hand there is the more alarming condition of the Third-World intellectual himself/herself succumbing willingly to the strategies of appropriation of the globalized academic market by using this label.

What strikes us immediately is the similarity between Spivak’s argument and Dirlik’s critique of their (Spivak and company) position in his essay. It is in this same context that Dirlik expressed his scepticism about the term postcolonial:

*Postcolonial* is the most recent entrant to achieve prominent visibility in the ranks of those ‘post’ marked words (seminal among them, *postmodernism*) that serves as signposts in(to) contemporary cultural criticism. Unlike other ‘post’ marked words, *postcolonial* claims as its special provenance the terrain that in an earlier day used to go by the name of Third World. It is intended, therefore, to achieve an authentic globalization of cultural discourses by the extension globally of intellectual concerns and orientations originating at the central sites of Euro-American cultural criticism and by the introduction into the latter of voices and subjectivities from the margins of earlier political and ideological colonialism that now demand a hearing at those very sites at the centre. 10
The point that Dirlik is perhaps missing is that the term ‘postcolonial’ will also be on its way out in terms of the strategy that Spivak or Bhabha have assumed. A follower of Jacques Derrida, Spivak will always try to move out of this fixated, closed, identitarian space and move out into the ambivalence of counter-essentialist strategies that refuse all labels or assume all of them at the same time. Writing becomes, for her, a self-separating project, where she continually displaces herself from the body writing, thereby continuously moving away from a representable subject-position. It is not so abstract or impossible as foundationalist theoreticians might believe. Spivak herself talks about Samuel Beckett in this context—about how the playwright distances himself from the mire of language. This is Beckett’s attempt, Spivak presumes, to ‘clear a space, step away, spit out the mother tongue, write in French’.¹¹ A movement away from one’s agenda, a suppression of one’s ‘individual’ or personal voice is a way of trying to avoid appropriation. The metaphors of identity and voice can easily be subsumed or essentialized—a careful strategy to suppress the agenda by celebrating the voice. This is why Spivak consciously and incessantly wriggles out of all attempts at identifying or locating her:

I have trouble with questions of identity or voice. I’m much more interested in questions of space, because identity and voice are such powerful concept-metaphors, that after a while you begin to believe that you are what you’re fighting for. In the long run, especially if your fight is
succeeding and there is a leading power-group, it can become oppressive, especially for women, whose identity is always up for grabs. Whereas, if you are clearing space, from where to create a perspective, it is a self-separating project, which has the same politics, is against territorial occupation, but need not bring in questions of identity, voice, what am I, all of which can become very individualistic also.\textsuperscript{12}

Spivak is thus incessantly slipping out of attempts at politicizing her location. What is her theoretical location? Is she a Marxist, or a feminist, or a deconstructionist? Is she postcolonial? Or, for that matter, Third World? These are questions she consistently evades—and she practises all of these at the same time. This is where Dirlik is perhaps mistaken in believing that all ‘post’ marked words are used to ‘achieve an authentic globalization of discourses’. Spivak moves out of this entire logic of ‘authenticity’, because the word itself presumes a discursive centre. There are no authentications or licences, but continuous space-shifts, quantum leaps across multiple planes of representation. We need to understand how it is also a movement out of narcissistic individualism, as Dirlik seems to think, into a hybrid, heterogeneous political space that perpetually eludes identity and representation.
Moving beyond Discipline

I have already discussed in the chapter on Spivak how she has grown increasingly impatient with feminists such as Julia Kristeva. Her primary argument against Anglo-American academic feminism has been the way it has allowed itself to be consumed by essentialist agency, by increasingly situating itself within the ambit of academic theorizing. The solid disciplinary foundations of academic feminism has given it some prestige within the university, but what it has compromised in the process is its quality of abrupt intervention and consequently the basic agenda of protest. Not surprisingly, Spivak blames bourgeois feminism ‘because of a blindness to the multinational theater’ and sees it being ‘fostered by the dominant ideology’. In this same essay Spivak elucidates how in its tendency to generalize, bourgeois feminism becomes complicit with exploitative and conspiratorial multinational agencies (she gives the example of *Control Data*), ultimately relegating the woman question to the background.

Spivak’s intention in critiquing bourgeois feminism is to show how a settlement into academic disciplines and framed parameters is to defeat the cause of representation. The homogeneity of a departmental categorization, a settlement in the plush corridors of polemical academia is symptomatic of allowing essences to devour you. The urge to generate ‘systems’ of thought, paradigms of development, a syllabus for academic pursuit are traps that lead to generalizations
and pervasive assumptions. In its stead is needed guerrilla intervention, a sudden spurting of aporetic knots that find the power centre surprised and vulnerable:

We must strive moment by moment to practise a taxonomy of different forms of understanding, different forms of change, dependent perhaps upon resemblance and seeming substitutability—figuration—rather than on the self-identical category of truth…[so that] the categories by which one understands, the qualities of plus and minus, [reveal] themselves as arbitrary, situational.14

This ‘moment by moment’ spatial vacillation is how Spivak proposes a movement beyond essences, even beyond the problem of representation; because representation as a political discourse is ultimately sucked within the paradigm of discipline. Here she discovers the usefulness of deconstructive practice, the reversal-displacement morphology of deconstruction that realizes the immediacy of the historical moment. Intervention at the moment is imperative in order that the discursive logic of disciplinary hegemony might be challenged:

It is… the deconstructive view that keeps me resisting an essentialist freezing of the concepts of gender, race, and class. I look rather at the repeated agenda of the situational production of those concepts and our complicity in such a production. This aspect of deconstruction will not allow the establishment of a hegemonic “global theory” of feminism.15
This is where the position of the female postcolonial intellectual vis-à-vis Western cultural theory becomes interesting. There is always the risk of complicity, and hence the strategy of moving beyond disciplines through deconstruction. Spivak was quick to realize how bourgeois feminism could easily seduce the non-Western academic into what might be blatantly Eurocentric values and assumptions. Thus what goes by the name of ‘International Feminism’ is actually nothing more than a patronizing mission of intervention of the West, and its discursive engagement with the Third-World woman. As Bart Moore-Gilbert writes:

Kristeva’s interest in the Oriental subaltern woman is, for Spivak, an example *par excellence* of the manner in which the involvement of First World intellectuals in the Third World actually functions self-interestedly as a process of self-constitution.\textsuperscript{16}

**The Subaltern Historians**

This is one of the reasons why Spivak perhaps praises the agenda of the Subaltern school of historians.\textsuperscript{17} In their attempt at revisionist historiography they have consistently highlighted the role of subaltern agency in bringing both colonial and national-bourgeois historiography to crisis. That is to say, that the Subaltern historians challenge the basic paradigm of ‘change’ that is symptomatic in the
study of history as a discipline. The history of colonialism in India is seen as a change from semi-feudalism to capitalist subjection, which in its turn is challenged by bourgeois-nationalism. Spivak sees in the Subaltern historians an attempt to bring the study of history out of this rather simplistic pattern of the mode-of-production narrative. This new theorization basically constitutes two things:

…first, that the moment(s) of change be pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition (they would thus be seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation rather than within the great modes-of-production narrative) and, second, that such changes are signalled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems. The most important functional change is from the religious to the militant…The most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the ‘subaltern’.  

So, this pluralist approach and the condition of confrontational historicity releases history, at least partially, from disciplinary hegemony—both from the clutches of colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. On the other hand, the location of the subaltern as insurgent unsettles the set dimensions of history as an academic discipline, creating aporetic knots at the point of enunciation. It is in this kind of abrupt interventionism that Spivak sees the success of a
deconstructive approach—a complete relegation and dismissal of disciplinary formations.

Spivak gives us interesting examples of such deconstructive insurgency in the course of her discussion. At one point in the essay she discusses ‘rumour’ as a form of insurgent writing of history as explicated by Ranajit Guha. She argues that the mindset of the peasant is as likely to be guided by the oral tradition (sruti, or that which is heard) as the mindset of the historian by the phonocentrism of Western linguistics. There is no reason to privilege one over the other. Also, the functional immediacy of rumour as a spoken utterance makes it ‘plural’, not belonging to any one voice-consciousness:

Rumor evokes comradeship because it belongs to every “reader” or “transmitter”. No one is its origin or source. This rumor is not error but primordially (originally) errant, always in circulation with no assignable source. This illegitimacy makes it accessible to insurgency…Subaltern, elite authority, and critic of historiography become complicit here.

It is this kind of ‘writing’ that creates the necessary space for a non-discursive mapping of discipline. The presence of the subaltern consciousness engenders a dialectical fracture in the transitive manner of historical development dependent on the almost simplistic modes-of-production narrative. The deliberate validation of rumour as history is an interventionist strategy by the Subaltern historian to
establish the subaltern as the subject of history, a disturbing and problematic reinscription that persistently questions disciplinary formations:

What good does such a reinscription do? It acknowledges that the arena of the subaltern’s persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian.²¹

This aspect of the Subaltern Studies project, the heterogeneous counter-disciplinary movement of re-‘writing’ history interests Spivak as she finds in it her own strategy of affirmative deconstruction.

However, one cannot presume that Spivak is entirely happy with the group’s project of re-writing history. She sees in their attempt at restoring the subaltern voice a contextual dissociation which can be sustained if overdone. The Subaltern Studies historians locate the subaltern problematic in complete isolation from both the colonizing formation and other sectors of local society, such as the native elite, to which it is obviously, even if differentially linked. What they search for in their project is a ‘pure’ or ‘essential’ subalternity that can establish itself as a separate, independent and constitutive paradigm of historical agency. Their project seems to hint at or approach a ‘truth’ that can be reached independently of discursive colonial paradigms. This is the kind of epistemic fracture that Gayatri Spivak is sceptical about. This claim of an independent,
objective logic of authenticity and the incessant reinscription of the bourgeois humanist model of subaltern agency reveal how the group succumbs to the regime of knowledge and authority that is symptomatic of the logic of colonialism itself. The movement of these historians towards a positional certitude by negating both the colonial and the national, becomes for Spivak an alarming movement towards a closure, and thereby a validation of the discursive logic of discipline.

In spite of their doctrine of resistance, however, Spivak discovers reasons to stand by them. Although there are certain inherent and pronounced ‘cognitive failures’ in the work of these historians of the Subaltern, that I have already discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Spivak feels that they should be lauded in their efforts to explore the experience of the most marginal social groups, whereas nationalist historiography has been mostly concerned with writing the history of the local elite. The project of Western historiography has also been qualified by the important factor of accessibility—be it Marxist, or feminist, or liberalist. They have consistently arrived at sweeping essentialist conclusions with limited access to the Third World and limited regard to the interiority of the problem. It is in this context that Spivak regards the intervention by Subaltern historiographers so topical and necessary.

Interestingly, Spivak also discovers reasons to stand by the ‘pure’ or ‘essential’ form of historical agency that the Subaltern historians propose. She suggests that this idea of the ‘pure’ and accessible subaltern consciousness is a
necessary theoretical fiction that performs a critique of the hegemonic historical formations of colonial historiography on the one hand, and elite national-bourgeois historiography on the other. This she views as the ‘strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest’,—a piece of fictional construct that was also used by people like Marx, Gramsci, Foucault or Derrida:

Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain, I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and “situate” the effect of the subject as subaltern…This would put them in line with the Marx who locates fetishization…the Nietzsche who offers us genealogy in place of historiography, the Foucault who plots the construction of a “counter-memory”, the Barthes of semiotrophy, and the Derrida of “affirmative deconstruction”. This would allow them to use the critical force of anti-humanism, in other words, even as they share its constitutive paradox: that the essentializing moment, the object of their criticism, is irreducible.

Thus she views ‘subaltern consciousness’ as a synthetic whole, an imaginary construct that is necessary for warding off discursive domination. This becomes a clever strategy, she presumes, to counter the enterprise of inclusivity practised by either Western or national elite historiography. Spivak emphasizes how there are
plenty of indications within the writings of the Subaltern Studies Group that they are concerned with ‘consciousness not in general, but in [the] crucial narrow sense’.  

The Subaltern as ‘Space’

In the discourse of subalternity, therefore, Spivak searches for and discovers a wholly ‘othered’ consciousness that transcends the paradigms of a modes-of-production narrative. This narrow and fetishized consciousness that the Subaltern Studies Group approaches, frustrates the dynamics of appropriation of the ‘benevolent’ modern Western intellectual. What the Subaltern historian has basically tried to do is to push history to its limits, towards that moment of politics where the differential between theory and practice tends to zero. And within this ever-vacillating reference frame—an abstract, hydra-headed, heterogeneous moment of historicity—the disciplinary historian fails to narrativize history:

…the arena of the subaltern’s persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in his efforts in this awareness that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic. It is a hard lesson to learn, but not to learn it merely to nominate elegant solutions to be correct theoretical
practice. When has history ever contradicted that practice norms theory, as subaltern practice norms official historiography in this case?\textsuperscript{27}

This Spivak sees as the positive triumph of the Subaltern school. In the course of their practise of historiography they have been able to create, consciously (or unconsciously) an independent, alternative space that exists for and within itself. The subaltern logic sometimes seems not to be a part of the global economy at all. It speaks of a micrologized subject-position that is both the moment of theory and practice, neither more privileged than the other. It is this eclectic view of the moment of history that is crucial for the ultimate negation of the disciplinary, discursive parameters of conventional historicity.

Obviously, this moment of history has its own flaws. The very conception of such a moment is theoretical fiction as I have already explicated. A moment in history where discipline is thrown off-guard, where discursive narrativization is frozen is the ideal moment to transcend the power/knowledge dynamic. It is perhaps at this moment that Spivak conceives of the subaltern as ‘wholly Other’—as the radically different which reveals the horizon or limits of Western systems of knowledge. Although it is a moment of epistemic fracture, one must never forget that it is a well thought-out theoretical moment. It is not as if that all ‘otherness’es can be casually appended to this moment, in which case it loses its potency, its tremendous force of counter-discursivity. As Spivak writes:
Subalternity is the name I borrow for the space out of any serious touch with the logic of capitalism or socialism...Please do not confuse it with unorganized labour, women as such, the proletarian, the colonized, the object of ethnography, migrant labour, political refugees etc. Nothing useful comes out of this confusion.28

Thus, although this is a moment of theoretical intervention that might be fictional in conception, it is effective in its political import. It is both abrupt and exact at the moment of intervening into discursive historiography. At the same time it is history as the moment of difference.

In Spivak’s interpretation of Subaltern historiography it thus becomes very theoretical and sophisticated, a dialogic moment of difference that unsettles the structures of academic power. However, some Subaltern historians have not taken kindly to Spivak’s appropriation of this school of historical thinking and writing. Sumit Sarkar, one of the early practitioners of this school of thought, for example, is mildly but categorically disturbed by her ‘intervention’:

In the name of theory, then, a tendency emerged towards essentializing the categories of ‘subaltern’ and ‘autonomy’, in the sense of assigning to them more or less absolute, fixed, decontextualized meanings and qualities. That there had been such elements of ‘essentialism’, ‘teleology’ and epistemological naivete in the quest for the subaltern subject has naturally
not escaped the notice of recent postmodernistically inclined admirers. They tend, however, to blame such aberrations on Marxist residues…What is conveniently forgotten is that the problems do not disappear through a simple substitution of ‘class’ by ‘subaltern’ or ‘community’…The handling of the new concepts, further, may remain equally naïve. The intervention of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we shall see, has not changed things much in this respect for the bulk of later *Subaltern Studies* work, except in purely verbal terms.\(^{29}\)

From the point of view of the Marxist historian, Sarkar might have a point in his scepticism. The detachment of the subaltern condition from socio-economic contexts and determinants might well be a postmodern attempt at an erasure of economic reductionism. As Sarkar insists, reifying tendencies might be actually strengthened by this forced detachment. But the point that he perhaps misses is that this theoretical sophistication locates the subaltern condition at a moment beyond closure. What Spivak is attempting through the subaltern agency is an affirmative deconstruction of hegemonic historiography. She uses her strategy of abrupt intervention as an effective tool to subvert the logic of discourse, even if this is a certain movement towards the subversive dynamic of postmodernism.

The other relevant point is that, there is perhaps a deliberate movement towards reification on the part of the Third-World intellectuals like Spivak or Bhabha. The subaltern location can be seen as a metaphor (or metonymy) for the
location of these intellectuals in the US academia. Thus, at a more symbolic level than Sarkar can perhaps admit from his conventional Marxist position, the reification becomes a state of non-location—a state of perpetual ambivalence for the Third-World intellectual. Of course, this position is undeniably postmodern in its implication. As Spivak has noted, their representation of the underclass and consistent engagement with the themes of agency and exploitation on a level beyond the merely economic/cultural is a strategy of not being ‘confined within fantasmatic and divisive cultural boundaries’—that are essentialist traps laid by the First World.³⁰

**Homi Bhabha: A Consolidation of Postmodern Strategy**

Gayatri Spivak’s strategy of catachrestic intervention and a movement beyond disciplinary boundaries was taken up in right earnest by Homi Bhabha, and I have already laid out in the previous chapter, how he plans out his strategy of ‘negotiation’ by politicizing the moment of enunciation. The sophistication inherent in Bhabha’s strategies is symptomatic of the Third-World intellectual who has safely ‘arrived’ in the First World and is trying to revise and re-negotiate his position within the Western academia. Bhabha reeks of a confidence and deliberation that is a far cry from the newly arrived Third-World, non-White subject who finds, as Aijaz Ahmad has succinctly pointed out, the Western academy as ‘a place of desolation, even panic.’³¹ Bhabha is the seasoned
postcolonial subject, versed in theoretical strategies, ensconced safely in the First-World academy—interventionist and disruptive. He incessantly vacillates between positions, negating all notions of fixity, thereby thwarting any essentialist reference frame where the First World might try to situate him. In a way it might be said that Bhabha is the most successful postmodernist entrant into the First World from the Third. Of course there are very many powerful critiques of Bhabha’s position from his own part of the world, but before I go into that I would like to discuss the politics of Bhabha’s location.

**The Critique of Modernity**

The basic premise from which Bhabha’s theoretical enterprise takes off is the critique of Western modernity. The typical aspect of most of Bhabha’s writings is that he has tried to re-articulate postcolonialism through postmodernity and vice-versa. In order that he could successfully do this, his primary attempt was to segregate the enterprise of postmodernity from the discursive formations of modernity. There were basically two Western narratives of modernity. The first argued that a movement toward the postmodern was an inevitable fallout of the catastrophic events of the twentieth century, namely the two world wars. The project of modernity that was inaugurated by the Enlightenment had thus fizzled out midway to give way to a less deterministic postmodernism. The other narrative, promulgated chiefly by Richard Rorty (and of course Francis Fukuyama) talks about a successful completion of the project of modernity with
the global triumph of the Western models of social democracy and economic organization—and hence a smooth flow into the subsequent narrative of postmodernity.\textsuperscript{32}

Bhabha is deeply sceptical about such attempts at cognitive reductionism in the relation of the human being to the social world. He seems to be much more inclined to the way in which Jurgen Habermas, or Michel Foucault, or Jean-Francois Lyotard look at the problem. Bhabha writes:

My interest in the question of modernity resides in the influential discussion generated by the work of Habermas, Foucault, Lyotard and Lefort, amongst many others, that has generated a critical discourse around historical modernity as an epistemological structure. To put it succinctly, the question of ethical and cultural judgement, central to the processes of subject formation and the objectification of social knowledge, is challenged at its ‘cognitivist’ core.\textsuperscript{33}

This is not the same ‘cognition’ that Spivak talks about in her essay on the Subaltern historians. Their deliberate cognitive failure could have been a strategy against essentialism. This failure of cognition, or rather a movement toward objectification is less deliberate and more like an inertial discursive superiority that disturbs the Third-World intellectuals like Bhabha. In his essay Bhabha suggests that the contemporary world has not yet arrived at a new cultural
dispensation whereby we might assume that modernity has been epistemologically successful. This is most obvious in the way in which the social, political and economic structures promulgated by the West, along with its various forms of ideological ‘othering’ have continued within the paradigms of modernity. Bhabha notes with dismay how ‘the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of an anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic and refugee populations. Inevitably they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law’.34 This is of course a direct invective against assumptions of homogeneity about the non-West within the Western historiographic enterprise. Secondly, modernity cannot be assumed to be ‘complete’, and hence move into postmodernity, since the role of the non-Western world in the constitution of modernity has never been acknowledged. The foundational ideologues of ‘Western’ modernity—such as ‘Man’, ‘reason’, ‘progress’ or the ‘nation’ have consistently othered the non-West and treated it as ‘premodern’ and hence outside the purview of historiography.

**A Postmodern Postcoloniality**

Bhabha, therefore, was satisfied neither with the Enlightenment logic of incomplete modernity, nor Rorty’s argument of the completion of modernity, while moving into the logic of postmodernism. Bhabha sees the postmodern condition necessarily as a problematic of culture. His entire logic of ‘enunciation’
or ‘translation’ thus stems from his idea of ‘cultural difference’, and thus is, for him, the central concern of postmodernism. Modernism has always seen culture as ‘continuity’, an exchange between an authentic ‘past’ and a living ‘present’. Bhabha surreptitiously discovers an aporetic knot within this modernist logic by suggesting that culture is ‘an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival’. This is where the question of postcolonial agency comes in. On the one hand, culture is a complete semiotic system that speaks of diverse experiences like literature, art, music, ritual, life, death; on the other hand it has a trans-national dimension where it involve migration, diaspora, displacement, or relocation. The very complex fabric of culture should thus, according to Bhabha, resist the simplistic pattern of binary opposition between the Third World and the First World—an essentialist and holistic form of social explanation. The postcolonial perspective needs to emphasize the fluidity of cultural boundaries and the impossibility of fixed definitions. As Bhabha writes, culture is both transnational and translational:

It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourse are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the ‘middle passage’ of slavery and indenture, the ‘voyage out’ of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational
because such spatial histories of displacement—now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of ‘global’ media technologies—make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue.\textsuperscript{38}

It is in this context that Bhabha wants to examine the discursive conditions of agency, closure, intentionality, or totalization. Any counter-movement against these needs to be initiated in terms beyond modernity (and its sometimes simplistic assumptions), and this is why, perhaps, Bhabha’s postcolonial critique veers inevitably towards postmodernism.

The sense of a cultural community evoked in such modernist ideas as ‘cultural diversity’ is more often than not a cunning ploy to hide historical ironies, or disjunctive temporalities or representational aporia that are symptomatic of the development of a modern West. The history of colonialism, or bourgeois nationalism throughout the world is replete with such callous essentializations that modernism has, in a way, endorsed. For example, in his essay ‘The Nation and its Peasants’, Partha Chatterjee has discussed the relation between the Indian nation and its peasantry during the anti-colonial struggle. Although this is not strictly a question of culture, the basic gap between the elite and the subaltern consciousness is evident in the analysis. Chatterjee analyses how the dynamics of the involvement of the peasant force in the anti-colonial struggles was not governed either by the Indian elite or by the nationalist consciousness aroused by the
Congress leadership of the times. The mass movement of the peasants had a sense of arbitrariness about it:

A coming together of two domains of politics seems to have occurred. On the one hand was the domain of the formally organized political parties and associations, moving within the institutional processes of the bourgeois state forms introduced by colonial rule and seeking to use their representative power over the mass of the people to replace the colonial state by a bourgeois nation-state. On the other hand was the domain of peasant politics where beliefs and actions did not fit into the grid of ‘interests’ and ‘aggregation of interests’ that constituted the world of bourgeois representative politics. Seen from the former domain, the latter could appear only as the realm of spontaneity, which was of course nothing more than the acknowledgement that the specific determinants of the domain of peasant political activity remained incomprehensible from the standpoint of bourgeois politics.

This is the point that Bhabha is also trying to make. The development of modernity and its paradigms of agency, either colonialist or national-bourgeois are essentially collusive in nature. What they leave out (consciously or unconsciously) are aporetic knots carefully picked up and explored by postmodernism. The results that these explorations reveal are more interesting than they were perhaps meant to be. They show how the collusion between the
colonialist and the national-bourgeois in relegating the peasant (or the subaltern) breaks down in times of expatriation or forced migration. There is little or no difference between the bourgeois-nationalist and the subaltern in such times, and the entire modernist logic of cultural diversity and its acceptance suddenly fall flat. Bhabha writes:

…the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law.41

It is at this point that Bhabha tries to posit his idea of a postcolonial contramodernity that seeks to negotiate a ‘new collaborative dimension both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples’.42 By using poststructuralist tools Bhabha tries to show in his postcolonial theorizations how the idea of an authoritarian ‘West’ and its assumptions of colonial modernity completely break down in the face of subaltern history, and the more complicated problems of expatriation and diasporic conditions.43 While using postmodernism as a tool in postcolonialism, Bhabha generally confines himself to socio-political assumptions and rarely moves into sophisticated and complex discussions on the failure of logocentrism. In this context, at least, Bhabha cannot be accused of obscurantism, and deliberate
obfuscation of the politics of representation. In fact, he has used this ploy quite deliberately in terms of theorizing the location of the Third-World intellectual in the First World.

**Beyond Theory: Enunciation ‘Outside the Sentence’**

One might notice in Bhabha’s movement toward the representation of the Third World, a parallel movement toward postmodernity. I have already discussed in the last chapter how Bhabha sees the point of enunciation as the moment of politics—where all representation is always/already contingent and differential. Although, this might seem to be rather obscure, it is strategically effective in terms of subverting all discursive assumptions of the power-centre. It is also noteworthy, that Bhabha does not see this strategy always as a deliberate ploy on the part of the subaltern, Third-World subject, but notices its automatic presence within the complex paradigm of representation. Given this, one might admit, that Bhabha’s postmodern assumptions are not always theoretically complex.

Bhabha’s chief purpose in trying to theorize an enunciative moment is to provide for the ‘other’ a chance for the articulation of his/her culture. The culture of the native or the subaltern has always been seen in Western pedagogy as an objectified presence, an exotic ‘other’ (Kristeva’s Chinese women), a textbook presence in terms of statistical sample surveys or social science syllabi. Bhabha’s intention was to make the Third World aware of their subjecthood, to turn them
into subjects of their own history and experience. He tries to make them keenly aware of their ‘subject’ presence in the historical moment, not as totems or symbols that are homogenized into concept-metaphors of slavery, or laziness, or magic, or anything else for that matter. Bhabha looks at history almost as a performance—as a way of constituting one’s self at the moment. This might be through community activities like singing, or dancing, or acting—where each individual subject is keenly aware of his/her own presence within the moment in history.\textsuperscript{44} This moment of enunciation need not be registered in conventional historiography, but the throbbing sense of the self, the awareness of one’s presence only helps in countering hegemonic historiography. These individual moments create such multiple subjectivities that the simplistic logic of binary opposition does not hold good.

Thus, the conclusiveness of the discipline of cultural history is contested by these multi-accentual and disjunctive moments of heterogeneous individuality. Bhabha chooses these moments to move beyond theory. The pervasive absence of closure, the creation of innumerable reference points within the rubric of history frustrates theorization, and this is where the theory-practice polarity breaks down:

This ‘beyond theory’ is itself a liminal form of signification that creates a space for the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social ‘experience’ that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities.\textsuperscript{45}
This is the cultural space that Roland Barthes describes as ‘outside the sentence’, that confounds all the constitutive paradigms of Western historiography or pedagogy. Through this movement beyond theory and outside the sentence Bhabha suggests a movement towards an indeterminism that is essentially postmodern. Noticeably, this movement entails the end of opposition, the end of the politics of polarity into a moment that is dialogic and inevitably contingent:

It is the question of agency, as it emerges in relation to the indeterminate and the contingent, that I want to explore ‘outside the sentence’. However, I want to preserve, at all times, that menacing sense in which the non-sentence is contiguous with the sentence, near but different, not simply its anarchic disruption.

What all this entails is the creation of a catachrestic space where the postcolonial subject can re-claim his/her identity through a re-working of the hegemonic concept-metaphors of the West. The agential thrust of the non-sentence or ‘outside the sentence’ is thus to create free floating signifiers, that are free from the shackles of humanist truth, meaning, and sociality. The contingency of all these float ambivalently on the borderlines of the sentence and ‘outside the sentence’, so that positionality is always arbitrary—located beyond closure. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has also taken a note of this situation:
Claiming catachresis from a space that one cannot not want to inhabit, yet must criticize is then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial.49

Thus, the contingent conditions of agency and enunciative formations of meaning and/or presence create a heteroglossial space where a balance of power is automatically engendered. As Bhabha clearly suggests the strategy of postcolonial reading: ‘reading between the lines, taking neither him at his word nor me fully at mine’.50 All negotiations thus take place in an intersubjective realm where the agent always, inevitably remains outside the sentence. While speaking about the narrative of social causality, Hannah Arendt also discusses the uncertain nature of political matters that arises out of the indeterministic but contiguous relationship between the ‘who’ (the agent) and the ‘what’ (the intersubjective realm).51 We might conclude this section by saying that Bhabha’s use of postmodernism was a way of relocating and reinscribing postcolonial agency (that includes the agency of the Third-World intellectual in the First) through an emphasis on a disjunctive present, ‘outside the sentence’. His development of this theoretical form of political agency emphasizes the movement beyond binaries into a historical movement toward hybridity. The basic thrust in his postmodern argument is the instability of truth and the strategic use of historical contingency.
The Attack on Foundational Historiography

The location of the Third-World intellectual in the First World, particularly in the last few years of the twentieth century, saw an increasing rise in the universities across the West, of the study and development of post-foundational modes of thought. A chief reason for this was the failure of agential thrust, on the part of foundational modes of theorizing protest, and a consequent inability to move out of the narratives of power. At the beginning of this chapter I have discussed the troubled waters such terms as ‘postcolonialism’ and the ‘subaltern’ had to wade through before they could be accepted. The primary reason for this were some foundational habits of theoretical agency, and mechanisms of protest could not see beyond these few ways of registering their presence. In one of his essays the historian Gyan Prakash argues how counter-theorizations of nationalism, or Marxism, or anthropology/area studies could not move out of certain vices that are so symptomatic of foundational historiography. As a result all of these methods of protest could be easily essentialized and hence subsumed by Western hegemony.

Prakash argues how Indian nationalist historiography—something that supposedly countered Orientalism’s pervasive generalizations—basically succumbed to an identical logic. There is a lot of sense in this argument, as what the nationalist historians basically did was to transform India as an object of
knowledge—from passive to active. Otherwise the basic layout of the study of history remained the same. As Prakash writes:

Nationalist historiographers accepted the patterns set for them by British scholarship. They accepted the periodization of Indian history into the Hindu, Muslim and British periods, later addressed as the ancient, medieval and modern eras; relegated caste to sections on ‘Society’, that is, with the history of society with politics left out; and reiterated the long and unchanging existence of Sanskritic Indic civilization.\(^{53}\)

That is to say, the only agenda of nationalist historiography was to prove that everything good in India, like spirituality, art or political ideas, had indigenous origins. Otherwise, they had no problems with the framework of the study of history as a discipline. What resulted was the lack of problematization in nationalist historiography. The nationalist historians also saw India as an undivided subject capable of sovereignty and autonomy. The promulgation of this logic of a unitary self and identical will of the Indian nation was also a gross essentialism that this new history could not override. They questioned the authority of Orientalist essentialism using the same paradigms of essentialist assumptions without the least regard for individual subject-position of the Indian citizen. This post-Orientalist nationalist historiography thus subscribed to the same binary categorizations of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and these historians wrote longish essays about the drain of wealth from India to Britain, the British industrial
policies in India that led to the drying up of Indian industries, and the
impoverishment of the Indian economy. This was how India was being
transformed from a passive to an active subject of history—according to the
nationalist historians—through a complete rejection of the Orientalist canon. This,
they thought, was how the Third World was writing its own history, and a
renewed sense of empowerment accompanied the writing of these nationalist
histories. This is where, however, in their ‘reasoned’ revival of ancient Indian
history, in their frantic efforts to argue an ontological presence of India
independent of Western representations, that the nationalist historians were falling
back to the post-Enlightenment regime of Reason that is ideologically
Orientalist. Little surprise this, as most of the Indian nationalist historians were
Western educated elites riding on the wave of modernity.

Homi Bhabha’s critique of modernity goes well with this as he argues how
nationalist discourses have persistently tried to produce the idea of the nation as a
continuous narrative of national progress. He finds within such history the same
grim language of power that it tends to criticize in Orientalist historiography. The
consistent use of Orientalist assumptions tries Bhabha as he realizes the implicit
ambivalence that is so symptomatic of the emergence of any nation:

It is ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the
certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of
the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.\textsuperscript{56}

Bhabha insists that it is more important to emphasize ‘social life’ than ‘social polity’ to realize the inherent ambivalence within a nation. He agrees with Hannah Arendt’s view that the modern nation is a hybrid realm where the private and the public easily flow into each other, making the definition, or the idea of a ‘nation’ contingent.\textsuperscript{57} He insists on the transitional nature of history and its conceptual indeterminacy, and resists tendencies to read the idea of the ‘nation’ restrictively—either ‘as the ideological apparatus of state power, somewhat redefined by a hasty, functionalist reading of Foucault or Bakhtin; or, in a more utopian inversion, as the incipient or emergent expression of the “national-popular” sentiment preserved in a radical memory’.\textsuperscript{58} This is the reason why he frequently refers to Tom Nairn’s description of the nation as ‘the modern Janus’ where there is both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality—that is to say a natural ambivalence.\textsuperscript{59} The post-modernist in Bhabha resists any attempt at a ‘closure’ within the idea of a nation as he sees the nation-space as perpetually evolving, in medias res, at the moment of enunciation. As he clearly expresses in his introduction to Nation and Narration, his chief intention as the editor of this anthology has been to reveal the ambivalent margin of the nation-space:
To reveal such a margin is, in the first instance, to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the ‘old’ post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on the behalf of the ‘new’, independent nations of the periphery.\textsuperscript{60}

In this contention Bhabha has moved a step beyond his theorization of mimicry elaborated in the previous chapter. In mimicry there were still implicit connotations of the sense of nationalism from the perspective of the native subject. But here Bhabha is not talking of a celebratory self-marginalization. This is a more substantial intervention into the very justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism—that rationalize the authoritarian tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest. The ambivalent, ever-evolving notion of the nation will blur boundaries and allow an interplay of meanings, whereby cultural identities will become resistant to hegemonic formations. The resultant cultural contamination will initiate a process of cultural production outside the strategies of colonial modernity.

**Anthropology and Area Studies**

If we move out of the questions of historiography and culture into those of anthropology and area studies we shall notice a similar development in terms of their foundationalist tendencies. Edward Said had initiated this argument in his book *Culture and Imperialism*. While talking about the inter-dependence of
various histories and cultures, and the interaction of contemporary societies with one another, Said seems to be highly critical of the inflated sense of the West about its exclusivity and superiority. He refers to an interesting debate that took place in Stanford University about the modification of their curriculum to include non-European texts in their syllabus. Said notes Bernard Lewis’ reaction to this, which was published in *The Wall Street Journal* on May 2, 1989. Said writes:

…Lewis’s argument…lumbered forward with the remarkable proposition that since modifications in the reading list would be equivalent to the demise of Western culture, such subjects (he named them specifically) as the restoration of slavery, polygamy, and child marriage would ensue. To this amazing thesis Lewis added that ‘curiosity about other cultures’, which he believes is unique to the West, would also come to an end.\(^{61}\)

This paradigm of Western superiority, Said suggests, has continued into modern intellectual history in the development of dominant discourses and disciplinary traditions of science, culture, and sociology. He even criticizes the genealogical discoveries of Michel Foucault or Raymond Williams suggesting how they generally overlooked the imperial experience and its implications while developing their theories.\(^{62}\) This might be one of the reasons why, in spite of his deep admiration of Foucault, he rejects Foucault’s theorizations in the later part of his career.
But his deepest dissatisfaction perhaps is the failure of the project of area studies, something that had all the promises of becoming a democratic field of work at its outset. A project that had been initiated by the German thinkers Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer, modelled on Goethe’s idea of *Weltliteratur*, soon proved vulnerable to the pressures of Western hegemony. The reason for this Said attributes to the striking rise of nationalism in Europe and America during the two centuries between 1745 and 1945. He writes:

…when most European thinkers celebrated humanity or culture they were principally celebrating ideas and values they ascribed to their own national culture, or to Europe as distinct from the Orient, Africa, and even the Americas. What partly animated my study of Orientalism was my critique of the way in which the alleged universalism of fields such as the classics (not to mention historiography, anthropology, and sociology) was Eurocentric in the extreme, as if other literatures and societies had either an inferior or a transcended value.

Erich Auerbach had initiated a mission of civilizational survival in his book *Mimesis*, written while he was in Istanbul, exiled from Nazi Germany. In a sincere effort, Auerbach wanted to examine the complex evolution of European literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf. Said suggests how, in spite of being praised throughout the Western world, the essential spirit of the book—the dialectical development of literatures across the world—was lost, and along with it the
possibility of the development of a tradition of comparative literature. What emerged, ultimately, was the elaboration of the power of the Western world. The development of area studies, something that could initiate a process of secular interpretation of the history of civilization remained confined within a discursive academia, and was consequently essentialized. Anthropology, history, philology—disciplines that could successfully develop a secular problematic—unfortunately became allies in the imperial or neo-imperial enterprise. However, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, although Said was aware of the complexities of overlapping territories and intertwined histories, he ultimately understood the politics of representation in terms of binaries. His ideas of resistance or contrapuntality were based on a counter-discourse that understood the entire problem in terms of domination and freedom, as the logic of postmodernism was still only evolving. Although he could not immediately show a way out, Said had successfully problematized the politics of area studies.

The interest in area studies gained much popularity in the United States in the 1950s, and in the next two decades this euphoria also spread to the Third World. With the end of colonial rule, the tropes of nationalism now focused on discovering the authentic history and culture of India. Anthropological studies and theories of culture formulated a new ‘traditional’ Indian that was caste specific. Representative figures in anthropology like Louis Dumont argued that the essence of India was hidden in its caste system, and that a thorough knowledge of the caste divisions of India would reveal the true Indian spirit. His formulation that
ritual hierarchy defines India is still popular among social theorists and anthropologists in both parts of the world. What followed from all these formulations was the inevitable essentialization of India in terms of caste. Anthropology as a discipline soon degenerated into an Orientalist trope and the Indian sociologists unwittingly consented to this project. Riding on the new and euphoric wave of developmentalism the Third-World intellectual fell into the selfsame trap of colonial modernity that now used ‘caste’ as a tool for neo-Orientalist purposes.

There were also certain inherent difficulties in promoting caste as the essence of Indianness. Although, the existence of the caste-system made the Indian society essentially different from the Western, thereby creating the idea of an independent and authentic India, the very concept of casteism goes against a modern and just society. The nationalists however argued that ideally the caste system was an attempt at a stable and harmonious social order and thus could not be segregated from the idea of modernity. The ideal fourfold scheme of varna (the brahmin, the kshatriya, the vaisya and the sudra) was intended as a non-competitive functional division of labour and did not imply a hierarchy or privilege. Even Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan emphasized the varna scheme as a universal form of organic solidarity of the individual and the social order. Mahatma Gandhi had also asserted that caste division was not divisive in terms of any moral order and that it had nothing to do with religion. Inspired by such thinkers as these the nationalist historians and sociologists developed volumes of
ethnographic material that tried to prove conclusively that the caste system was fundamental to the character of the Indian society. What they did not realize, however, was that unconsciously they were once again succumbing to the tropes of Orientalism and colonial modernity. However, this is not to reduce the emergent fields of anthropology, development studies and area studies to some crude political determination. Indeed, they helped in exploding the older myths about the unchangeability of the caste system and linked it to methodological developments in economy and polity.

**Marxism as Foundational**

The slippage of the area-studies programmes into the paradigms of the caste-system obviously re-instated the binary logic of opposition between Orientalism and native historiography; but at the same time both of them might be held guilty of generalization and essentialism. The Marxist critique of nationalism starts off from this premise, and the Marxists argue how nationalism was structurally incapable of performing the tasks of modernization of colonized Third-World societies. The reason for this was the fact that nationalism promoted the notion of an undivided India—unitary in its conception and opposition—to an identically undivided notion of Europe. Even the division performed in terms of the caste-system was viewed in terms of a unitary structure that rendered a smooth functioning of the societal and communitarian functions. It was not meant as a divisive mechanism that cut the society into many heterogeneous parts. This
superstructural development is dismissed summarily by the Marxists as ideological. They also insist on the basically divisive nature of the caste-system, and the kind of political unrest it is capable of creating. In fact they consider this sense of unity promulgated by the casteists as false consciousness. As Sumit Sarkar, the Marxist historian notes:

Historiographical elision has been most powerful of all in respect of caste, and yet it is precisely this dimension that has shot into unexpected prominence in recent years, with the lower caste rally around the Mandal proposals and the Ayodhya Mandir campaign confronting each other, and BJP leader Advani’s Rath-yatra of autumn 1990 having an obvious relationship with high-caste hysteria over reservations.72

The Marxists, rather, tried to write the history of the Third World in terms of the modes of production narrative and from the perspective of political economy. This is the reason why they emphasized the writing of class histories—so that a heterogeneous perspective might be acquired to explode both the Orientalist and the nationalist myths of an undivided India. Obviously, this class based writing of history was more modern than the caste based version. By its refusal to ascribe any fundamental significance to caste, the Marxist argument was able to uphold, without qualification, the legal-political principles of the modern state, and to boldly advocate the cultural project of modernity. They insisted that the writing of non-class histories would suppress the history of the oppressed, and accused
nationalist historiography of elitist essentialism. The Marxist historians rather wrote histories of movements and rebellions and tried to link these histories with the modes of production narrative. In these histories they tried to rupture the myth of the unitary nation by revealing class conflicts, heterogeneity and resistance that were always an intrinsic part of Indian history.

Albeit these valid claims of superiority of Marxist historiography over the nationalist and the casteist, there still remains the problem of representation and representability. In their looking into the histories of oppression and rebellion Marxist historians have indeed laid out a thematic pattern of class struggle and structural conflict that is heterogeneous in nature. Even then, however specific their composition of class, the subject-position of the individual is inevitably compromised. A class or a structure is ultimately resistant to further heterogeneity, and here Marxist historiography succumbs to the claims of foundationalism. My intention here is not to dismiss Marxist historiography by calling it essentialist. What I am trying to suggest is that a class-based or structure-based historiography cannot ultimately represent the claims of a contingent, ever-vacillating subject-position. The theoretical structure of Marxism cannot sustain such locational arbitrariness and this is where it has to give way to post-foundational strategies of reading. One of the focal points of my thesis is the location of the Third-World intellectual in the First World, and as I have already explicated, in order to survive in the midst of pervasive essentialisms, the Third-World intellectual has to assume arbitrary and contingent roles that slip away.
from all attempts at fixing them to reference frames. Neither nationalism, nor area-studies, nor Marxism can represent their unrepresentability, and hence the obvious preference for postmodernism.

**Post-Foundational Historiography: A Possible Way Out**

In the above discussion I have tried to establish how neither nationalism, nor Marxism or area studies could successfully historicize the growth and/or development of a truly modern, colonial-capitalist Third World, as they could not ultimately displace the paradigmatic frameworks within which colonialism or Orientalism worked. The need therefore was to move out of all these reference frames and rethink the approach to historiography, so that a sovereign, independent representation of the Third World could be made possible. Such a scheme could only come through if this entire politics of identitarianism could be unsettled. This was one of the chief thrusts of the Subaltern Studies group of historians, whose aim was to recover the history of the marginal groups. These historians, mostly trained in the First World, advocated the ‘history-from-below’ approach that unsettled the nationalist historiography on the one hand by exploding the myth of a unified India; and the Marxist account of history on the other, which see these histories from below as the preludes to the emergence of a full-fledged class consciousness. The Subaltern Group of historians replace the Marxist idea of class by their concept of subalternity. This subalternity is manifested through a variety of means—social, cultural, linguistic, and economic.
Thus, the monolithic idea of history as caste or history as class is deconstructed, and history is narrativized as the unfolding of power relations in terms of society, or culture, or language, or economic considerations. The project of subalternity, therefore, tries to see the discipline of history writing not as homogeneous, but as differential and contestatory, where each subject position is defined on its own terms. Thus the margin (or even beyond) is rescued from the hegemonic essentializations of both the colonialist and the nationalist bourgeois. As Gyan Prakash writes:

…the significance of their project lies in the writing of histories freed from the will of the colonial and national elites. It is this project of resisting the colonial and nationalist discursive hegemonies, through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference, which makes the work of these scholars a significant intervention in third-world historiography.

This interventionist, counter-hegemonic approach was quite well liked by the Third-World intellectuals in the First World. Continuously negotiating with their own subject-position within the First-World academia, they realized how they could very well use their history-from-below approach to negotiate their identity. The contingent nature of the subalternist position would also help them politically in terms of positional shifts that might now be theoretically consolidated. This enthusiasm in the project of the Subaltern historians perhaps led to the
publication, in 1988, of a selection of essays of the Subaltern school with a foreword by Edward Said and an editorial note by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.76

This enthusiasm of intellectuals such as Said and Spivak in the Subaltern project was not, however, kindly accepted by Marxist historians of the likes of Sumit Sarkar or Aijaz Ahmad. They still liked to view the Subaltern project as a continuation of a Marxist logic, whereby the paradigm of a pan-Indian nationalism could be successfully subverted. The Marxist historians saw in the Subaltern project possibilities of writing micro-histories that would question or contest discursive domination.77 But these micro-histories would be contextual where both ‘fragment’ and ‘community’ would walk hand in hand. History would thus become both contingent and located, and unlike postmodernism will not succumb completely to scepticism and relativism. What the Marxist historians sadly noted was that the entire project of writing Subaltern history was in its turn being essentialized by these Third-World intellectuals in the First World. In their anxiety to discover a location for themselves within the Western academy they were overdoing the fetish of the subject as fragment, and thereby the entire project was veering towards postmodernism. Sumit Sarkar, for example, does not hide his irritation in the following jibe at Edward Said:

For Subaltern Studies, however, located by its subject matter in a country that has been a postcolonial nation-state for more than four decades, an oppositional stance towards existing forms of nationalism has been felt to
be necessary from the beginning. The situation was rather different from that facing a member of a Palestinian diaspora still in quest of independent nationhood. This opposition was reconciled with the Saidian framework through the assumption that the postcolonial nation-state was no more than a continuation of the original, Western, Enlightenment project imposed through colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{78}

Although such a logic cannot be dismissed summarily as the traditional Marxist’s distaste for postmodern uncertainty, there is ample scope to critique such a proposition. First, what these Third-World writers in the First World have been trying to do is to problematize the space of the subject-position of the subordinated. Who is subordinated? How is he/she subordinated? Whether there can be many kinds of subordinations (including their own)? These are the questions that these intellectuals have tried to address through their ideas of contrapuntal reading (Edward Said), or catachresis (Gayatri Spivak), or hybridity (Homi Bhabha). The Marxist historians have readily embraced the subject-position of the subaltern because of their prolonged experience as subordinated subjects. What they failed to realize was the fact that even the experiences or expressions of subordination are also discursively formulated. The attempts made by Said or Spivak or Bhabha have been to try and see how this logic of subordination can be unsettled through the creation of a contingent and ever-evolving and discontinuous Third Space.
Secondly, the presence of these intellectuals in the First World has had far reaching consequences. Let us admit that their credibility as intellectuals and their scholarship are beyond doubt. Their location in the First World and the consequent addressing of the question of agency has opened up newer spaces of negotiation between the Third and the First Worlds, which would have remained unforeseen otherwise. The insistent emphasis on the problems of representation and subject-position have aroused and incited the subordinated others in the First World. Minority voices of the socialists, the feminists, the radicals have mingled with these voices from the Third World, thereby internationalizing the problem of subordination and opening up multiple spaces for negotiating identity. The engagement with these minority voices in the First World has thus pluralized the possibilities of writing post-Orientalist histories; also, the coming together of multiple disciplines has led to consistent counter-hegemonic movements that have created a space beyond discipline. This conjunctural condition of postmodernity created by people like Spivak or Bhabha moves beyond any gesture toward classification and distillation. This post-foundational democratic space insists on a politics of difference where cultures and identities arrested by hegemonic essentializations can be successfully released. Gyan Prakash puts this very pithily:

…India and the West—can no longer be unquestionably accepted as entirely separate and fixed. After all, if Gandhi’s saintliness and non-violence—those quintessential ‘Indian’ qualities—had counterparts in the ‘West’ (albeit marginalized); if the Brown Sahib’s imitation of the British
was an ‘Indian’ strategy of survival and even resistance; and if, in spite of its clear-headed realpolitik, modern, anti-colonial Indian nationalism fell prey to a ‘second colonization’; then what is left of the neatly separated ‘India’ and the ‘West’? Such destabilization of identities and crossing of carefully policed boundaries promise a new third-world historiography that will resist both nativist romanticization and Orientalist distancing. This post-foundational move, implicit in the emerging writings, affiliates the new third-world historiography with post-structuralism, and together they both echo the postmodernist decentering of unitary subjects and hegemonic histories.  

To conclude, therefore, I feel that in spite of certain critiques of their location, the Third-World intellectuals in the First World have been successfully able to problematize the politics of representation. This is both in terms of representing the Third World, as well as the problematics of their own location. The resistance to all ‘closures’, although extremely postmodern (to the dislike of many), has at least made possible the idea of exchange without the active involvement of power. Representational contingency, vacillating reference points, a movement beyond disciplinary paradigms have all added up to the consolidation of this resistance to closure. The proliferation of narratives, many and varied versions of history, and their provisional nature have consistently refused the erections of new foundations in history, culture and knowledge. Herein lies the success of these intellectuals from the Third World (primarily the three I have
discussed in detail in this thesis) in creating a basis of post-foundational historiography where the possibilities for negotiation multiply every moment. The writing of history, therefore, becomes a contestatory act that engages all the possible relations of domination and counter-domination in one massive action of textuality. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha should thus be attributed their rightful place in history (or the dismantling of certain kinds of history). In their own ways they have negotiated the representation of the Third World in the First, through intricate and commendable theoretical methodology. Their works have indeed opened up newer theoretical spaces where even such canonical distinctions as the Third World and the First World can be revised and re-thought. It is difficult here and now to predict whether their enterprise will ultimately succeed in the long run, but it suffices to say that in their own individual ways they have left indelible marks on the study of social theory and historiography. Simply put, there can be (and should be) many critiques of their works, but the three of them have indeed revolutionized the way the Third World (and parts of the First) thinks today. Edward Said died while I was working on this thesis, but the other two are still writing. We eagerly wait to see where they lead us to in terms of the politics of representation.
NOTES AND REFERENCES:


3. Ibid., p.341.


5. Ibid., p.301.

6. Ibid., pp.294-5.


12. Ibid., p.21.


15. Ibid., p.62.


18. Ibid., p.205.


22. Gayatri Spivak scathingly analyses some ‘elite’ historiographic approaches of the Western world with the textual help of Mahasweta Devi’s short story ‘Stanadayini’. For her analysis of these reductionist approaches see, Gayatri Spivak, ‘A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman’s Text from


25. Ibid., p.214.


27. Ibid., p.217.


30. See Spivak, ‘Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors’ in *Selected Works*, p.296.


35. For a discussion on Bhabha’s ideas of ‘translation’, ‘enunciation’ and ‘cultural difference’ see the previous chapter.


37. For a discussion on the postcolonial Third-World intellectual’s engagement with the metropolitan First World and the question of agency see Edward W.


42. Ibid., pp.251-2.

43. Stuart Hall has comprehensively discussed how the ideological sign is always multi-accentual and how its articulation is always contingent and differential. See, Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso, 1988).

44. Paul Gilroy has discussed how the Blacks search for their identity through the dialogic, performative ‘community’ of black music—like rap, dub, scratching etc.—through which they constitute the sense of selfhood. See, Paul Gilroy,
45. Bhabha, ‘The Postcolonial and the Postmodern’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.257.


47. Bhabha, ‘The Postcolonial and the Postmodern’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.261.

48. It is interesting to see how the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton also takes note of such a situation while critiquing the libertarian pessimism of post-structuralism. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London : Verso, 1991).


50. Bhabha, ‘The Postcolonial and the Postmodern’ in *The Location of Culture*, p.269.


53. Ibid., p.168.

55. A discussion on this can be found in Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Cunning of Reason’ in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, pp.167-71 as collected in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).


57. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

58. Bhabha, ‘Introduction: Narrating the Nation’ in *Nation and Narration*, p.3.


60. Bhabha, ‘Introduction: Narrating the Nation’ in *Nation and Narration*, p.4.


62. See ibid., p.47.


71. Partha Chatterjee calls this ‘Oriental exceptionalism’. For his fascinating critique of the concept of caste (a miniscule part of which I have tried to elaborate here) see Chatterjee, ‘The Nation and its Outcasts’ in *The Nation*


75. Prakash, ‘Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography’ in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, pp.180-1.


79. Prakash, ‘Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography’ in Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, p.185.