Chapter Two

The sexual subject in pleasure/pain
“where is room, excuse
or even need for love
for isn’t each embrace a complete thing, a finished jigsaw
when mouth on mouth, I lie,
ignoring my poor moody mind
while pleasure with deliberate gaiety trumpets harshly
into the silence of the room”


“In the male system, women are sex: sex is the whore. The whore is porne, the lowest whore, the whore who belongs to all male citizens: the slut, the cunt.”


The historicisation of the rape case of Mysore in its legal, political and social processes forms the substantive content of chapter 1. In this chapter, I engage with a theoretical discussion of Gungamma’s sexual subjectivity, of the possibility of reconstructing her as a sexual subject from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

For, Gungamma in this case is quite literally the dead subject, the metaphorical lack, who is filled in by male discursive imaginations of pleasure and pain, guilt and shame. Confronted as we are with her silence, how do we as postcolonial feminists today resurrect the dead Gungamma? How do we fill in the lack that she symbolizes? What theoretical apparatuses, what frames of reference have we developed to invest her with voice? An engagement with theory becomes necessary to fill in the silences of history. Especially, as Gayatri Spivak says, in the imperialist theater where we do not hear subaltern women speak. Yet, as Spivak argues, the postcolonial feminist who attempts this reconstruction is herself located in derived Western academic discourses of theory. Can the subaltern, therefore, really speak?
In this chapter, I draw on theory, both postcolonial and feminist, to fill in the silences of history and theorize a possible imagination of Gungamma's voice which contests the binaries of pleasure and pain. I locate such subjectivity in a diffuse experience of pleasure/ pain, where neither is separate and neither is fluid. This large theoretical discussion also negotiates the temporal and spatial particularity of historical phenomena: i.e. the context of the case and discourses of sexuality in late 19th century colonial India. Through this negotiation, I hope to examine the insights that history, in turn, can bring to the large theoretical paradigms of contemporary theory, both feminist and postcolonial.

Section I: The dichotomy of pleasure and pain

In the rape case of Mysore, the judges imagined Gungamma as an agent-in-pleasure who invited intercourse with the accused by splashing water on him, or as a victim in pain whose gesture was merely accidental and who was violated against her will. Consent and unconsent translated into the idiom of pleasure and pain in the court’s language of guilty/ not guilty and the accused was acquitted of the rape charge. Recent Western feminist theoretical perspectives on sexuality have, in my reading, reproduced the either/ or dichotomy of pleasure and pain that is present in the judges’ reconstructions of Gungamma’s sexual subjectivity. Contemporary feminist perspectives have varied from theorizing heterosexuality as a construction that is objectifying of women and, therefore, inherently violent, to positing a politics of female sexual agency and pleasure as a strategy to counter the negative narratives of objectification, violence and victimization. The former is a radical-feminist position, best elaborated in recent times by Catherine MacKinnon.

I would, at the outset, define sexual violence as any expression of sexuality that is unidirectional and that, therefore, denies selfhood to the other. In MacKinnon’s argument, the linear construction of women by male desire inheres in and is heterosexual. Since this construction is linear, it is also, as I term it, unidirectional, and violence, as MacKinnon argues, is inherent in heterosexuality. The male subject constructs the female sexual object in a dichotomy that is re-enacted in every notion of
gender. Women experience their identities through their sexuality and their sexuality is something that is external to them, constructed as it is by men and experienced through the male gaze. Thus, there is no possibility of female consent or agency within this construction.\(^1\)

MacKinnon's questioning of the very existence of female consent within the male construction of heterosexual desire has been critiqued in Western feminist scholarship, and theorists such as Carole Vance have shifted the emphasis to speaking of sexual pleasure in order to counter the negative stress on violence and danger in speaking of engagements with female sexuality. An over-emphasis on aspects of danger for women in domains of sexuality, it is argued, lends itself to be co-opted by conservative, protectionist arguments that 'naturalize' male sexual aggression and female vulnerability on the one hand, and, therefore, morally police women on the other.\(^2\) Moreover, the sexual judgments inherent in a feminist politics that identifies erotic institutions and practices as good or bad, free or coerced, are observed to feed into a reactionary moralism regarding sex itself, and the intolerance therein of eroticisms, such as sadomasochism, pornography and prostitution, that deviate from the heterosexual monogamous marital norm.\(^3\)

Postcolonial theory adds a further dimension to this debate of pleasure / pain, by challenging the gender essentialism that inheres in locating the common experience of all women in oppression and violence. MacKinnon's grand theory of pain has been contested by non-white women—women of colour, Third World women—for ignoring the imbrication of axes of power other than sexuality, such as race and class, in the construction of womanhood.\(^4\) In a seminal article that contests that assumptions of Western feminism, Chandra Talpade Mohanty questions the homogenizing move by which Western feminism produces its subject—the Woman—a unitary site identified by a shared experience of cross-cultural oppression and victimization. The same move by which Western feminism flattens out heterogeneity of experiences to set up its own subject as the universal referent that represents cultural Others—that same move, in Mohanty's argument, produces the monolith of Third World difference, which in
Western feminist knowledge-production makes the monolithic Third World woman more oppressed, ignorant, illiterate, sexually abused, in relation to the less oppressed, independent, sexually autonomous subject-women of the West. This narrative of oppression, therefore, allows Western feminists to write themselves as agents when compared to their more oppressed sisters in the east, and, therefore, re-inscribes the imperialist/Orientalist script whereby the Orient is feminized in relation to the West.

Ratna Kapur observes similar effects resulting from the victimization rhetoric of the international women’s human rights movement, which has identified violence against women as the common ground of women’s experience and thus made the abject victim-subject the symbol of women’s demand for human rights. The cultural universalism of this victimization rhetoric has elicited responses of cultural specificity from Third World women. Cultural specificity has, unfortunately, often translated as cultural essentialism, where cultures are made to seem uniform and monolithic. This has further reified cultural stereotypes. For, the identification of the victim-subject as the symbol of a coherent cross-cultural group identity among women by the international human rights movement, coupled with a sensitivity to cultural specificity, has served to make women of some cultures seem more authentic victims than others. In this, some cultures are also made to seem more barbaric than others. This feeds the archetype of the Third World woman as impoverished, malnourished, uneducated and sexually abused —a victim of her culture—as against the autonomous Western woman.

Kapur also observes that in the domestic context of nation-states, the violence against women agenda of local feminisms has elicited a protectionist response from the state, which buttresses its power against that of non-state actors. Much of the sovereign state’s power lies in keeping its subjects in what Wendy Brown terms, “states of injury.”

Moreover, Kapur shows specifically in the Indian context, that the ‘violence against women’ agenda of Indian feminism has tended to be co-opted by the moralistic agenda of the Hindu Right, and also strengthened the claims of certain “feminist” positions of the right that do not produce an emancipatory politics for women. Kapur posits the politics
of a subjecthood in pleasure in place of a victim subjecthood in pain as a necessary challenge, both to the imperialist gaze of the west, and to the co-option of the feminist agenda by the conservative right. Developing on Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's insight that the experience of pain provides subjectivity and agency to the sati, the victim-subject at the point of death, Kapur argues for a subjectivity located in the experience of pleasure, the agency of the subaltern sexual subject at the point of orgasm. 

The politics of pleasure therefore challenges the politics of pain, and posits itself as an alternative feminist strategy. Pleasure as a foundation of feminist theory and praxis is significant because it contests the unquestionability of the foundations of dominant feminist understanding, those premises of pain, victimization and violence that have assumed universality as bases for most feminisms, thus excluding other foundations, other ways of thinking the subject of feminism.

Speaking of the female body in pleasure is also a subversion of the universal feminist trope of the female body in pain—the female body that is raped, battered, abused, burnt, bruised. This subversion, in effect, demonstrates how the materiality of sex, of male and female bodies is produced through discourses. Feminist anxieties have emphasized the necessity of presuming the materiality of women's bodies, the materiality of sex, as an essential, given foundation of feminist theory and praxis. The feminist espousal of the body in pleasure, in its very reversal of universal foundations, reveals how the materiality of sex, of women's bodies, is itself produced in and through feminist epistemologies, among other discourses.

And finally, in a postmodern, plural world where sexual subalterns are challenging the dominant ideology of heterosexual, monogamous, procreative sexuality—or "good sex"—and their contestations are often unapologetic assertions of pleasure, the feminist adherence to issues of sexual harassment and violence has been recognized for its effects in paralyzing heterosexual engagement in a mire of political correctness and sterility.
The agency of pleasure, therefore, posits itself in opposition to the victimization of pain and this emphasis on agency informs many contemporary subversive readings of prostitution, pornography and sadomasochism. However, the politics of agency begs the apparent question: How are we to explain and locate the co-ordinates of agency within dominant discourses that constitute us as heterosexual, masculine and feminine subjects?

Ratna Kapur’s argument, in locating pleasure on the subversive site of the sexual subaltern—the sex worker, the homosexual—elides the entire domain of normative heterosexuality and the negotiations of pleasure and pain in everyday heterosexual exchanges within the norm. As the rape case discussed earlier suggests, in such exchanges, female agency is all too easily co-opted within a phallocentric discourse. Gungamma’s agency is appropriated, first by the rapist, and then by the judges who try the case, to produce notions of female pleasure and consent.

In fact, if we were to historicize discourses of pleasure and pain in colonial India in the 19th century, we would find that the progressive/ regressive stances on pleasure/agency and pain/victimhood, would be reversed. For, in many of the social reform debates in 19th century colonial India such as sati and child marriage, an orthodox native intelligentsia espoused a politics of women’s pleasure and agency in order to oppose reform in women’s assigned cultural status. Consider sati. Sati was the rite by which a woman who had lost her husband ascended his funeral pyre and immolated herself upon it. Sati was debated in the public sphere in Bengal in the early 19th century, and the debates led to its abolition by the British colonial government in 1829. During those debates, there emerged erotic pictorial depictions of the sati as bending over her deceased husband whose head rested in her lap. The attitude was almost one of love- making. In this register of meaning, the sati represented the Hindu wife as agent-in-pleasure, who longed for sexual union with her husband, who burned with her own unfulfilled desires that only her husband could satiate and was finally overwhelmed and consumed by them.

Likewise, later on in the 19th century, when the issue of preventing the early consummation of child- marriages by raising the age of consent of child- wives in the law split the public sphere into opposing camps, the orthodox sections again employed the
argument of the child-bride’s pleasure and agency to oppose the legislation. The child-bride figured in some of their representations as the “little bit of a woman” who “breaks forth into ravishing smiles”, who “looks like a little doll”. Thus the Hindu child-bride, on the threshold of becoming the Hindu wife, was represented yet again as a desiring agent-in-pleasure. When Hindu orthodox anti-reformers were not representing the child-bride as a desiring agent, they were pointing to the lasciviousness of adolescent female children, which would lead them to depravity unless their sexual instincts were harnessed in marriage before they reached puberty.

Conversely, the native reformers who pressured the colonial state to legislate against these practices often deployed the idiom of pain and death in their arguments. The death of the child-wife Phulmonee who was raped to death by her husband in 1890, featured prominently in reformist debates and helped precipitate the Age of Consent legislation of 1891. Similarly, the pain and death of the sati, and the sexual and social death of the widow who lived, formed reiterated motifs in the arguments of the native reformers.

The reformers also made a conscious effort to erase pleasure and sexual awareness in their representations of the female child’s psyche in order to counter the apprehensive postures of the anti-reformers regarding the female child’s moral well being.

The point that I am trying to make is that strategies of pleasure and agency are as likely to be co-opted by regressive and right-wing political stances as are arguments of pain and victimization. In this appropriation, they do not remain strategies, but become theories. Tied to this point is another suggestion: that notions of pleasure and pain themselves are discursive and can be historicized. For what effectively emerged in the 19th century in colonial Bengal was a reiterated discourse, or theory, of a sexuality that was uniquely, and monolithically, Hindu-Indian. Possibilities of pleasure and pain came to be bounded by this discourse that recurcd through the 19th century debates from sati to widow remarriage to infant marriage, and constituted the sexual dimension of the idiom of Hindu conjugality. Notions of pleasure and pain contained in this culturalist discourse were the sites where possibilities of female consent and unconsent were imagined.
Section II: The dead subject: Discourse and Agency

What else do these debates in 19th century colonial India tell us, apart from perhaps complicating our contemporary feminist assertions of pleasure and pain as strategies? What other insights do they have to offer to the postcolonial feminist academician, who aspires to theorize pleasure and pain from her own subject location? That the sentence: “White men are saving brown women from brown men”\(^1\) can be problematized historically. That brown men, as social reformers, were also saving brown women, often from other brown men. That in the late 19th-early 20th century, brown men often needed to pressurize white men to save brown women.\(^2\) And what of the brown women themselves? While the public sphere was thus rent by the voices of native reformers and anti-reformers, how do we listen to, locate the silences of Phulmonee, the sati, and of Gungamma? The subaltern woman in the imperialist theatre cannot speak, because often, in the 19th century, the subaltern woman is dead. It is, ironically, in death or while dying that these subaltern women have a voice. That they return to the public sphere of reform/culture as subjects, as material presences they were not when living, as dead protagonists embodying the need for reform.

To revert to the rape case with which this work began, how do we as postcolonial feminists today, resurrect the dead Gungamma? How do we fill in the lack that she metaphorically symbolizes, the absolute void that is filled in quite literally by male discursive and cultural imaginations of pleasure and pain, guilt and shame? What theoretical apparatuses, what frames of reference have we developed, within which to give her a voice? An engagement with theory, as I have mentioned earlier, becomes essential to fill in the silences of history.

To begin with, I would re-visit the dichotomy of pleasure and pain that is present in recent Western feminist approaches to sexuality. In the sex-is-violence argument of Catherine MacKinnon, there is no agency, for all female sexuality is always-already expropriated. Pleasure and pain are indistinguishable in the construction of heterosexuality. Against this formulation of the woman as object, as the passive end-product of the male subject’s construction is the assertion of woman as subject, as an
agent in pleasure. The first frame of reference does not explain how, in a construction so omni-potently violent, women still experience certain acts as sexual violence, or even as rape. The second does not consider that this capacity to recognize certain acts as violence, as rape, is also agency.

What accounts for this capacity of women to designate certain experiences as violence, for Gungamma to perhaps feel a sense of being violated, while the male judges and the alleged rapist don’t? Is there a zone of women’s sexuality that is different from a man’s, that therefore accounts for women’s experiences that do not correlate to a man’s? Or is women’s sexuality much the same as a man’s? The discussion of sameness/difference that has characterized much liberal debate in law and otherwise has left us with essentialist categories of both male and female sexualities, as it marks women’s sexuality as “same” or “different” against the assumed essential standard of a man’s.

Yet, feminist legal theorists, or even feminists, who draw from other intellectual traditions continue to find it difficult to move away from the centricity of the phallus in their academic and activist interventions. Carol Smart, for instance, argues that the law functions as a phallocentric episteme in the modern disciplinary regime, discursively defining those experiences that qualify as rape within the limits of its definitions. It thereby disqualifies those women’s experiences of rape that do not fit into its discursive limits.\(^\text{20}\) In this Carol Smart seems to assert that there are women’s experiences that phallocentric epistemologies—such as the law—inherently discredit. That women’s experiences are in excess of the letter of the law and the phallocentric discourses that inform them. Drucilla Cornell re-reads Lacan to similar effect when she says that because the “woman” is possible only as lack or as a negation in the symbolic order, she is impossible to define, and is therefore able to occupy innumerable positions in excess of the male imaginary.\(^\text{21}\) The woman as lack is always undefinable, always excess.

And therefore, if Gungamma had spoken, her material presence at the trial may not have effectively altered the judgment pronounced by the law and the judges, because her account of the incident of that afternoon may not have “fit” into the phallocentric
definitions of the rape law. (Indeed, Smart questions the recourse that feminists take to the law as if it were a pre-given authority that is able to provide the remedy to offences such as rape.\textsuperscript{22}) To read Gungamma’s case in light of Smart’s arguments may suggest that Gungamma’s testimony at the trial may have been her subjective account of pleasure and pain that would be in excess of the judges’ reconstructions, and thus, perhaps, have destabilized their phallocentrism and relocated her subjectivity at the center of the trial. Also, through Gungamma’s speech act, we as postcolonial feminists who do speak for silent Others would perhaps “learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman in the imperialist theatre.”\textsuperscript{23} In this we would unlearn our privilege to represent those silent “subjects” whom we objectify.

A belief in the speech act seems to inform both Carol Smart’s conviction that women’s speech would be different from men’s, and Gayatri Spivak’s suggestion that the subaltern woman’s speech would be in excess of the postcolonial feminist intellectual’s reconstructions of her. Both convictions also hinge on a notion of authenticity: that the woman’s speech would be the more authentic subject-version than the phallocentric definitions of victim-subjectivity in the rape law, and that the subaltern woman’s speech would be a more authentic self-representation than the postcolonial feminist intellectual’s representation of her in derived discourses of theory. This makes Gungamma’s status ‘iconic’, to borrow a term from Sara Suleri,\textsuperscript{24} because she is both woman and subaltern, and therefore the bearer of authentic truths—of a reality—that the male judges or the postcolonial feminist intellectual cannot divine.

As against this, I would like to ask: If Gungamma could speak, would her articulations of pleasure and pain be very different from those of the judges, and of Mooduveeria? After all, the judges and Mooduveeria, as well as Gungamma, are produced in a similar historical and political context, which is Mysore in the late 19th century. The social discourses which produced Gungamma and Mooduveeria would have even more in common, as they shared the same caste location and were even related. From where would Gungamma then derive her agency, her essential difference? Is agency something innate, a capacity that every subject possesses to be critical of her social situation, to
recognize harassment, violence and rape as such, even when dominant phallocentric definitions in social construction and law preclude them? Also, is this agency of the female subject an essential female difference, which enables her to assume multiple subjectivities in alterity to a phallus that is essentially fixed, as Cornell’s reading of Lacan seems to suggest.

Certain post-structuralist critiques would point out that such a conception of agency makes both the female subject and the phallus transcendental, almost Kantian, subjects, existing prior to the social relations that bring them into being. Gungamma, like Mooduveeria and the judges, does not exist outside the discourses that constitute her. She is constituted through the same discourses, and not situated, as it were, externally to them to be able to be critical of them. Is she, then, as a subject, metaphorically quite dead, incapable of displaying an alterity, or agency, of speaking except in the same voice as that of the rapist? Can Gungamma be constituted by discourses, without being determined by them?

This is a critique that has been made against the post-structuralist “determinism” of discourses; such critique questions whether subjects who are constituted by discourses—who do not exist outside of them as Kantian, transcendental subjects—can be capable of being critical of their own discursive subject-location. I will now discuss how critical capacity or agency has been theorized within post-structuralisms, by drawing on Judith Butler’s analysis in Bodies that Matter and link it up to discourses of sexual agency and subjectivity therein. Butler addresses the question of agency within what is read as the post-structuralist determinism of discourses, by invoking Foucault, for whom power produces dissensions by itself defining dissent: by demarcating the prohibited, it makes the discourse of the prohibited possible. In this, she argues, power (or the process that constructs), also provides agency.

Butler illustrates this notion of agency by demonstrating that “masculine” and “feminine” heterosexual subjects within the matrix of gender stray from the ideals of the lack and the phallus. Both the phallus and the lack are impossibilities that can exist only in the ideal
imaginary, and masculine and feminine subjects constructed in the matrix of gender always fall short of the ideals of lack and phallus. Thus, neither the masculine nor the feminine subject is fixed, monolithic or stable. This is because the process that constructs masculine and feminine subjects within the gendered matrix, in Butler’s argument, is not linear, but reiterative. Since the process that constructs is not linear, it does not begin and end conclusively with finished subjects and objects, but repeats itself, so that both subjects and construction form part of a process, being both its means and its end, and the process is power. The reiterative nature of the constructing process opens it up to endless re-significations, and it is in the possibilities of re-signification that Butler locates the agency of the subject. The subject who relays these re-significations is always unstable, always falling short of the demands of construction and always reiterating—and re-signifying—the norms of construction. In other words, repetition of the demands of construction, or reiteration, itself generates fissures in the subject that make the subject unstable, because of the inability of the subject to conform to the demands of construction. In this sense, agency as inability to conform or opposition to the demands of construction derives from construction itself. There is no agency that exists outside of, or prior to, construction. Disobedience to the command is tied to the command and has no existence outside of it.

From this conception of agency and subjectivity, two premises result. Neither the phallus nor the lack is fixed in the matrix of gender relations. Secondly, through reiteration, the process of construction is constantly challenged. Consequently, there can be no unidirectionality in power relations within the matrix of gender relations. Relations between men and women are thus too diffuse to be understood within the paradigm of structuralist analysis. Power itself is diffuse and is continuously contested.

What then happens to the category of unidirectionality, and therefore, to refresh definitions, of violence in such an analysis? On what do we base a feminist politics or praxis when both power and the phallus are in pieces? Feminist praxis and theory has long been founded on what Talpade Mohanty identifies as the received wisdom of an absolute gender difference, of phallocentrism, and of relations of absolute domination
and subordination. Of course, part of Butler’s larger post-structuralist enterprise is to question the unquestionability of foundations, to reveal their contingent nature. In this, Butler clarifies, she is not being anti-foundationalist, but merely leaving the site of the foundation, the universal premise, open to permanent contestation. At the same time, the category of violence does figure in Butler’s idiom as the exclusionary move by which the “universal”, the foundation and domain of the “subject” is defined. Butler sees the process that brings subjects into being as always being violent against those subjects that it disallows from coming into being.

I will now explore how this notion of exclusionary subjectivation links up to possibilities of sexual agency within discourses of gender. Exclusionary subjectivation occurs, in Butler’s argument, at two levels: one is the intra-psychic exclusion that produces subjects through differentiation, and the other is the inter-subjective exclusion that produces subjects at the expense of Others who are disallowed from becoming subjects. Intra-psychic exclusion, for instance, occurs through the normative binary exclusion that produces differentiated masculine and feminine subjects, as Self and Other, in the gendered matrix, by necessarily excluding the phallus from the lack. However, the falling short of the norm, the inability of masculine and feminine subjects to conform to the ideals of differentiation, produces the homosexual figures of the “phallicized dyke” and the “feminized fag”, those figures of abjection who are excluded from the heterosexual matrix. Through this inter-subjective exclusion, the feminized fag and the phallicized dyke represent also come to represent the threat of the symbolic order through which the law of the father is enforced—the threat of castration for the phallus and the threat of phallicization for the lack. The excluded homosexual is the Other of the heterosexual matrix, that helps to define its self.

The abject subject figures of the phallicized dyke and the feminized fag enact desires that fail to conform to the ideal heterosexual script of phallus and lack: the desire of a man to “be” the phallus and the desire of a woman to “have” the phallus that are prohibited in the symbolic order of differentiation. Butler draws from Freud and Lacan to show that sexual desire originates in prohibition. That which is prohibited and
excluded from the body returns to it as desire. That which is taboo is desirable, that which is prohibited and causes pain by its prohibition is pleasurable. It is thus that the pain of the exclusion of homosexual desires in heterosexual differentiation returns to the boundaries of exclusion as pleasure, to construct, conversely, the figures of the phallicized dyke and the feminized fag.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the point that I draw from Butler is even stronger. Since, as discussed before, mimetic identification is an impossibility for all masculine and feminine subjects, who necessarily fail to conform to the ideals of phallus and lack in the symbolic order, there can be no normative heterosexual desire in the matrix of heterosexual masculine and feminine subjects either. If desire originates in prohibition, then heterosexual desire, which is not prohibited but, on the contrary, compulsorily enforced, cannot exist. How does one then account for the existence of heterosexual desire in the matrix of gender relations? Does one look for an explanation in the host of desires that are prohibited from normative heterosexuality—incest, cross-generational eroticism, transvestism, sadomasochism, homosexuality—all those desires that would figure as “bad sex”, i.e. as morally unacceptable sex, within the dominant ideology of marital, procreative, monogamous heterosexuality? Does normative heterosexual exchange then bear the fetishistic marks of all these prohibitions, as excluded desires return to the boundaries to disrupt them? If so, does “normative” heterosexual exchange of lack and phallus exist at all?

The fine point to this argument seems to me to be that just as the intra-psychic binary prohibitions that exclude “he” from “she” to produce masculine and feminine subjects—Self and Other—within the gendered matrix are not neat and stable exclusions, so the inter-subjective exclusions of the homosexual from the heterosexual in the same gendered matrix are not neat exclusions either.\textsuperscript{34} In the resulting fluidity of Self and Other, the Other destabilizes the Self, as the Self destabilizes the Other.

Yet, if excluded Selves, excluded desires returned to the domain that excludes them to extend its boundaries, would those desires remain as desires within those extended
boundaries, when they are no longer prohibited? The disruptive and destabilizing return of prohibited desires to the normative heterosexual domain that excludes them would undo the very condition of their production, which is prohibition.

Butler clarifies that the ideal is not one of transforming all excluded identifications into inclusive features, all difference into unity, for that would mark the return to a Hegelian synthesis which has no exterior. The exterior of exclusion, in other words, remains essential as the foreclosure that institutes the subject, as the constraint that constitutes and destabilizes, that constructs and deconstructs. The exterior is essential to subjectivity. It is the condition of exteriority or exclusion that not only enables the articulation of subjectivity, of the Self, but also enables the recognition of the Other as subject, even as it decenters both Self and Other through this recognition.

In my reading, it is thus that while the need for reiteration/repeated interpellation indicates the instability of construction in Butler's matrix of gender relations, it also indicates the ability of the matrix to persist and perpetuate itself through reiteration. Therefore, while the subject itself becomes unstable in such an analysis, the discursive domain of subjecthood continues to hold, and accommodate contestation, and form alternative sites of dominance. In other words, the reiterative process deconstructs but, at the same time, is accommodated by the discursive process to form alternative sites of dominance. The alternative sites of dominance continue to perpetuate an exterior, which both institutes their subjectivity and destabilizes it. This is theoretically consistent and essential, for if contestation were to result in a more variegated synthesis of alternative sites, which do not also form sites of dominance, it would signify the end of power, and therefore of all further dissensions and agency, of politics itself.

This also ties in with Butler's larger political point, which is that the domain of the "subject" is always constituted as an exclusionary and universalizing move, and is therefore necessarily violent against excluded Others, those who occupy the domain of "deauthorized subjects, presubjects, figures of abjection, populations erased from view." The premise of, what I would like to term, the formation of alternative sites of
dominance, informs Butler's notion of feminist politics itself, as it enables a critique that leaves the site of feminism's "subject" always open to contestation, to exteriorized Others, and to the future which cannot be imagined or anticipated. 37

I would like to draw on the notion of the exterior that persists even when prohibitions are re-deployed to produce new erotic cultural forms, to argue that this recognition of the exterior should complicate our understanding of a female subjectivity in pleasure, as one which also is in negotiation with a subjectivity in pain, to nuance our notions of female sexual agency. I would like to posit that this negotiation cannot be overlooked in our feminist engagements with pleasure and pain, or even in our assertion of the redeployment of prohibitions to form alternative sites of dominance and pleasure, which assertion marks the subversive feminist readings of prostitution, pornography and sadomasochism. We cannot afford to ignore the exterior of pain that haunts a subjectivity in pleasure, and the exterior of pleasure that a subjectivity in pain excludes, and the tension across the boundary of exteriority that marks the decentered female sexual subject.

Gungamma in the Mysore case can be better understood as a subject-in-pleasure who is also a subject-in-pain, rather than solely as a sexual victim-in-pain, or sexual-agent-in-pleasure. The reconstructions of the Judges either erase her subjectivity in pleasure by assigning her a subjectivity in victimization, or erase her subjectivity in pain and a sense of violation by assigning her a subjectivity in pleasure. This denies that Gungamma can be both the agent in pleasure who desires sexual contact, as well as the victim-agent who feels violation and pain and kills herself. The either/or monolithic and stable dichotomy of the agency of pleasure vs. the victimization of pain denies the subjectivity and right of feeling violation to the subject in pleasure, and the right and subjectivity of feeling pleasure to the victim in pain. It is a dichotomy that, in fact, re-enacts male dichotomies of chaste and unchaste womanhood, of virgin and prostitute, and is ground for the unintelligibility of women's accounts in rape cases. A feminist politics of pleasure, agency and choice that that sets itself up too sharply in opposition to the politics of pain, and vice versa, are both regressive in their political effects. For they deny the possibility
of the articulation of a nuanced and decentered female sexual subjectivity within the
discursive domain of dominant subjectivities in gender relations.

Section III: The sexual subject in pleasure/ pain

This large statement raises certain obvious questions. How does one locate the
negotiation of pleasure and pain on the site of the decentered female sexual subject in
"everyday heterosexual exchange"? Do pleasure and pain form a continuum, which
would perhaps validate a claim such as "rape is pleasurable"? Is there a theoretical
possibility of imagining a negotiation between pleasure and pain that does not result in
collapsing pleasure and pain into indistinction? Is the only other theoretical option one of
counter-posing pleasure to pain? I would like to argue that pleasure and pain are exterior
to each other, even while each is made knowable by the other, and thus destabilized by
the other. The condition of exteriority that excludes each from the other is conceptually
akin to that which separates the phallus from the lack, and the homosexual from the
heterosexual subject in the matrix of gender.

To demonstrate this, experiences of pain, or intrusion and violence, are often made
knowable by the experience of consensual pleasure. Conversely, women also define
experiences of pleasure or consensual sexual spaces against their experiences of violence,
intrusion and objectification. Pleasure and pain are made knowable by each other;
however, they are also destabilized by the exteriorization. Raped women often mentally
re-visit their trauma and their obsessive re-visitations sometimes disrupt the experience of
pain with eroticism and guilt. It is also found that raped women find it difficult to relate
to consensual sexual intercourse, subsequent to the incident.38

Elizabeth Stanko, in narrativizing the experiences of American women, speaks of how
the threatening/ non-threatening signs intended by male sexual behaviour do not have the
same distinctness for women who receive these signs, for a woman’s diffuse experience
teaches her that what she may read as a non-threatening sign may result in threatening
male sexual behaviour. The line between consensuality and non-consensuality becomes
blurred in male discourse, because the sign to which the woman may be responding as a “non-threatening” sign may be meant by the man as a threatening sign.\textsuperscript{39}

I would like to expand on this to argue that sexual/ non-sexual male signs are themselves not distinct in women’s reception, which may have ambivalent implications for women’s agency in negotiating with these signs. Likewise, the signs that women send out can be received and read to unintended effects, as may have been the case in Gungamma’s rape, and their agency can often be misappropriated. What results is a rather diffuse experience of consent/ unconsent, pleasure/ pain in women’s experiences of eroticism.

Is this diffuse experience of pleasure and pain an essentially female experience, while the phallic discourse remains a constant, assumed given? Also, does this given male discourse, which \textit{knows} women’s experiences of pleasure/ pain, serve as the prism through which women vicariously experience, or know, their own diffuse eroticism? I have, through my discussion of Butler, deconstructed that monolith of “phallocentrism” to reveal the instability of both the phallus and the lack in the symbolic order: the intra-subjective exclusions that produce masculine and feminine subjects in the symbolic order are not neat, and the foreclosure or exterior that constitutes these subjects also destabilizes them.

Butler, as discussed before, links this failure of intra-subjective exclusion to a conception of sexual agency and desire, which, in turn, destabilizes the inter-subjective exclusions that differentiate homo- and hetero-sexual subjects. If sexual desire, as Freud argues, originates in prohibition—or, if power, in Foucauldian analysis, produces dissensions—then homosexuality can be theorized as the return of excluded desires to the unstably differentiated body as pleasure. However, if all desire originates in prohibition, then the heterosexual exchange of phallus and lack, which is compulsorily enforced in the symbolic order cannot produce desire. Do we then look for the springs of heterosexual desire that therefore cannot be, in those possibilities that are excluded from its limits: the desire of a man to be the phallus for another man/ woman, the desire of a woman to have the phallus for another woman, man, the desire of a man/ woman to both have and be the
phallus for other men/women? I would now like to take this further to ask how, then, can we locate rape within this conception of sexual desire? Where would rape, the negation of woman as lack by the assertion of the autonomous selfhood of the phallus and the ultimate violation of the Other's subjectivity and will, figure within such a notion of heterosexual eroticism?

If we were to derive from Freud, heterosexual exchange, which enacts prohibitions, like homosexual desire does, would always be a site of de-differentiation, an over-stepping of the sexual script of phallus and lack. And, therefore, experiment with a loss of the boundaries of the self—an experiment with death itself. Georges Bataille (as retold by Jessica Benjamin) makes a connection between sex and death in his Hegelian interpretation of eroticism. Bataille has read eroticism as the breaking of a fundamental taboo, that separating life from death. In the erotic encounter, the discontinuity between Self and Other, the discontinuity that is the condition of subjectivity, individuality, of the differentiated body, and of life itself, is violated to break into a transcendence of the Self, the loss of boundaries and a transgression into continuity, the continuity of death, the undifferentiated condition where each “individual” is merged with the rest in “as sea of non-differentiation”. Or thrown back to the primal womb. 40

It is interesting that many subversive religious cults experiment with sex as a means of achieving a state of unison with God, a state that transcends the limits of the living condition. The analogy of sex with “death” is quite overtly a philosophical tenet in some of these cults. Such cults are subversive in that they also make sex, which is condemned as dirty and polluting in most orthodox religions, a higher experience through which one knows oneself. Since the pollution of sex is often linked to the pollution associated with women, and to their erasure, therefore, from mainstream religions, these subversive sects are also sometimes linked with goddess worship, or with the relocation of the feminine in religion. 41 For instance, Tantra, an ancient Indian system of religious practices and philosophy whose origins differ from those of high Sanskritic Hinduism, has a tradition of Shakti worship, i.e. worship of the female creative energy. Ritual sex is a feature of tantric worship.
Bataille sees the erotic encounter as negotiating the tension between continuity and discontinuity, life and death. Interestingly, philosophy in most religions also locates the tension between continuity and discontinuity at the precipice between life and death. Most religions philosophies see the essential human condition as the soul’s aspiration to achieve continuity with the universe. The knowledge of the soul is the knowledge that all things are one. That the individual soul is one with the soul of the universe. That the individual soul is the soul of the universe. And in this contains the power of the universe. For some, this means that the universe is contained in a grain of sand. That all of creation is continuous with the rest, and to behold a grain of sand is to behold creation, and to behold the soul of the universe. In other philosophical traditions, such as that of advaita, it implies that there is no dualism, no difference between the Atman (the individual soul) and the Brahman (the soul of the universe). Since the Atman is the Brahman, the individual soul possesses the power of the universe, to make or unmake the universe. For, the universe as a manifestation that is external to the individual soul is as illusion. And when the atman makes or unmakes the universe, it makes/ unmakes not the universe, but itself.

The limit of the living condition is the boundary between the individual soul and the rest of the universe, the resistance to death, the politics of you and me. Or differentiation. The drive to repudiate transcendence and assert an autonomous difference. In this, the tension between transcendence and difference is the essential inter-personal/ inter-subjective dualistic condition. Thus it is also the intra-subjective condition, for the unstable subject who negotiates transcendence/ difference with the Other emerges by incompletely quelling the Other within the self.

I would locate the tension between transcendence and separation in the condition of exteriority. Exteriority, as I have illustrated earlier, is essential to subjectivity as the foreclosure that constitutes the subject and destabilizes it. What I would like to add now is that the fantasy of erotic domination and subordination, or the eroticism of sadomasochism, is located in this tension between continuity and discontinuity,
transcendence and separation, the recognition of sameness and the desire to be different. That is, in the notion of exteriority.

The sadomasochistic fantasy, in Jessica Benjamin’s discussion, is located in the failure of “true differentiation”. True differentiation would achieve the separation that is essential to subjectivity without negating the Other, by recognizing the transcendent sameness with the Other even while being separate. In the Butlerian argument, this tension between transcendence and separation, between Self and Other, is inherent in the condition of differentiation itself, as the reiterative nature of construction makes the differentiated subject unstable and fluid. Butler’s argument, therefore, does not allow for a failure of “true differentiation” as all differentiation is always-already “true”. It is thus that the notion of heterosexual exchange drawn on the basis of Butler’s argument does not allow for unidirectionality and cannot explain rape.

For Benjamin, the fantasy of erotic domination, where pleasure and pain negotiate, is an attempt to deny the Other as an autonomous subject, on whose recognition the Self depends. The sadist achieves this by exteriorizing the Other, by denying sameness with the Other, and at the same time by interiorizing the Other’s will, which is also the Other’s selfhood, by subordinating and possessing the Other through violation. Violation resolves the “problem” of the Other, i.e. the need to recognize the Other as a separate subject, by violating her subjectivity or will, or her consent. Violation also effectively denies the dependency on the Other, the need for the Other’s consent, in order to be recognized oneself. In “true differentiation” the Other would not exist as a “problem” because the boundaries between Self and Other would be less rigid, less isolating. The Self produced through true differentiation would be strong enough to define itself not only through separateness but also through commonality with other subjects, whom it would also be able to recognize.

While Benjamin sees the fantasy of sadomasochism as a motif enacted by both men and women, where women also sometimes enact the fantasy of sadism, she observes that its most common manifestation is in the fantasy of male violation of women. She locates the
roots of this fantasy in the failure of true differentiation in infancy, as the mother, who recognizes her children and is their first Other, effaces her selfhood by obliterating her own interests and thus becomes simply an object, who does not exist outside of the child’s self. The Oedipal triad is completed by the father, who becomes the strong Other for whose recognition the male child strives, while trying to distance himself from the mother, to exteriorize her from himself, thereby objectifying her and asserting his own boundaries.

Reading in this vein, Benjamin concludes that the fantasy of erotic domination re-enacts this assertion of independence and denial of the Other. It seeks to resist a return to the proverbial womb—the loss of self, the risk of discontinuity—in the erotic encounter. It is located in the paradox of autonomy and dependence, for it requires that the Other’s will be subjugated, without the Other being destroyed. For if the Other is wholly consumed and ceases to exist, the Self cannot assert its independence of her, make her will the object of its will. In this tension, the relationship of erotic domination is similar to that of master and slave. The slave who accepts defeat can no longer give the master-conqueror the satisfaction of recognition that he desires. What results is a form of controlled violence where the Other’s will is violated in such a rational, objectified manner that the sadist does not become dependent on her, like the master becomes dependent on the slave. What interposes between them, sadist and masochist, as the barrier that prevents identification and dependency, is the phallus, the symbol of separate subjectivity, and mastery.

Women who participate in the fantasy of erotic domination as masochists, who voluntarily submit to the sadist’s mastery, do so as their identification is with the mother, who effaces her self. Subordination to the sadist is a symbolic loss of self, the experience of subjectivity through pain and objectification, through transcendence of one’s boundaries, and recognition of the Other. Finally, the pleasure for both partners lies in the tension between the loss of control and of boundaries in the one, and the assertion of control, of maintaining a separate boundary, in the other. If both partners were to give up boundaries and control, the result would be total undifferentiation, or psychic death. This
is why erotic domination, or the negotiation of pleasure and pain, is a feature of all eroticism, which is a point that Benjamin also makes. In addition, it is the condition of exteriority in all relationships where “true differentiation” has not been achieved.

Is the choice we are confronted with, then, one of reading all heterosexual eroticism as violence, if we concede that differentiation in the symbolic order is phallocentric and “not true”, or being left with no unidirectionality, almost no feminist praxis, if we are to deconstruct all differentiation as always-already true? Is the sadomasochistic collapsing of pleasure and pain, of rape and consent, the only possible manner of understanding women’s sexual agency within dominant discourses informed by phallocentrism?

It would be useful now to consider some statements about rape given by convicted rapists themselves:

Rape gave me the power to do what I wanted to do without feeling I had to please a partner or respond to a partner. I felt in control; dominant. Rape was the ability to have sex without caring about the woman’s response. I was totally dominant.

Rape is a man’s right. If a women (sic) does not want to give it, the man should take it. Women have no right to say no. Women are made to have sex. It’s all they are good for.


It is interesting that the articulations of these rapists echo the desire to negate the autonomy of the female subject, the autonomy that the woman exercises in saying “no”, through erotic domination. They are simultaneously an assertion of their phallic autonomy, independent of the recognition of the female Other, or consent. Carol Smart’s discussion of rape and the law, from where I derive these quotations, also observes that the sign of the mother figures in a “phallocentric” discourse as the identification that prevents daughters from asserting their autonomy in desire, from wanting sex, or admitting their own desires and engaging with them. That is, the mother is the root of woman’s lack of subjectivity or autonomy, equivocated with sameness with men and male pleasures, resulting in her saying “no” to men. In other words, since their mother’s
voices echo in women's heads, women don't know themselves, their own subjectivity and their desires. Thus, their "no" is not a self-aware—subjective—"no" Since women themselves do not know what is good for them, men's initiatives are justified and women's accounts are dismissed as reflecting their capricious sexual nature in rape cases in the law. There is also the apprehension that women, though thus lacking in subjectivity, are potentially capable of castrating men emotionally. The fear of castration is the fear of mutual recognition, of dependence on the Other that disallows the myth of phallic autonomy and is therefore castrating. Rape evades this fear and asserts the autonomy of the phallus: it is the act of the "unemotional but highly proficient (hetero)sexual stud."

There is an almost one-to-one correspondence between Jessica Benjamin's discussion of women's voluntary submission in sadomasochistic eroticism and the understanding of women's nebulous sexuality in rape cases—the identification of the woman with the self-effacing mother and the resultant subjectivity of women as lack, as providing recognition by a negation of their selfhood, the assertion of male independence and autonomy in a violation of the Other's consent that repudiates the "emotional traps" of mutual recognition. Given this correspondence, how do we locate the agency of the female sexual subject, the voice that differs from that of the rapist? How do we distinguish rape from heterosexual eroticism if the latter essentially enacts the fantasy of erotic domination for both men and women? How do we locate Gungamma's subjectivity, which is negated first by the rapist in erotic domination, and then by the judges who reconstruct and know her and thus possess and interiorize her, make her no different from them?

I would like to posit that women's subjectivity is located in the negotiation between pleasure and pain, in an ambivalence that defies neat categorizations of pleasure and pain both in feminist theory and in the rape law. I would like to posit that this language of ambivalence, deployed as the language of the female sexual subject in the rape trial, would be a necessary counter to the binarism of consent and unconsent, translated as pleasure and pain, in the court's language of guilty/ not guilty. It would also be a
language that appropriates and counters, i.e. subverts, the unsaid, understood women's attributes of caprice and mendacity in male discourse, even while it speaks in a similar and derived, but not same, discourse of diffuse ambiguity. It is a language in which Gungamma can claim that she splashed water on Mooduveeria, without inviting intercourse, and in which she can bring a rape charge against a relative. It is a language that is located in the ambivalent reception of sexual/ non-sexual, threatening/ non-threatening sexual signs in everyday heterosexual exchange, and women's assumption of guilt for their misreading of them. And for their misrecognition of conventions of appreciative/ degrading prejudices. I would like to posit this ambivalence as a theory and as a strategy.

NOTES:


8 Ratna Kapur, op. cit.


11 Gayle Rubin uses the term "good sex" to denote sex that is considered morally acceptable within what she sees as the stratification of sexual practices. "Good sex" is the sex between heterosexual, married, monogamous couples carried out for the purpose of procreation. Other sexual preferences occupy different levels of inferiority in this hierarchical system of sexual stratification. See Rubin, op. cit.

12 Tanika Sarkar made this observation about the pictorial representations of the sati in her essay (unpublished) entitled, "Desiring and Desirable Satis: Debates in the Public Sphere in 19th century Bengal", which was presented at the seminar on Postcolonialism, Sexuality and Law, organized by the Centre for Feminist Legal Research, New Delhi at New Delhi in July, 2003.

In addition to Indian representations of the sati as an agent-in-pleasure, there were British representations which echoed this motif as well. For instance, in the thick of the sati debates, there were erotic pictorial depictions of the sati, as bending over her deceased husband whose head rested in her lap, in an attitude almost of love-making, as Dr. Tanika Sarkar observed in her essay (unpublished), "Desiring and Desirable Satis: Debates in the Public Sphere in 19th century Bengal", which was presented at the seminar on Postcolonialism, Sexuality and Law, organized by the Centre for Feminist Legal Research, New Delhi at New Delhi in July, 2003.

14 Arguments of protecting the moral well-being of female children were often evoked by anti-reformers, in response to the reformers' anxieties for the physical health of child-wives and child-mothers. These arguments were raised in the debates in the Legislative Assembly, especially during the years 1927-1929, when the Hindu Child Marriage Bill was being considered for legislation. The Bill was passed as the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929. (Legislative Assembly Debates, Delhi: Government of India Press, 1927-1929, at the National Archives of India, New Delhi and at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.)

15 Phulmonee Das was an immature 11-year-old child, who died of the injuries sustained by a coition forced on her by her husband, Hari Mohan Mahanti, aged 35. The case of Phulmonee, which received much public attention, gave an impetus to reformist arguments and helped precipitate the enactment of the Age of Consent Bill of 1891. The resulting Act raised the age of consent within marriage from ten in the Indian Penal Code of 1860, to twelve.

16 Rammohun Roy, who played an instrumental role in the passing of the act that abolished sati in 1829 argued, for instance, "What is a matter of regret is that the fact of witnessing with your own eyes women who have thus suffered much sadness and domination, does not arouse even a small amount of compassion in you so that the forcible burning (of widows) may be stopped...you are unmercifully resolved to commit the sin of female murder...when women are suffering the pains of death, you feel for them no sense of compassion." (As quoted by Dipesh Chakravarty in Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 122-3.)

17 For example, Dr Mahendra Lal Sircar, in an article published in the Calcutta Journal of Medicine, July 1871, wrote, "The development of the sexual instinct, in the human subject, is not immediately consequent on the physical signs of puberty. The development is, to a great extent, dependent upon moral training or education, and may be delayed or hastened for a considerable time after or before the menstrual function declares itself... We have seen children, who have been born and bred in scenes of sexual immorality, manifest the instinct at an age long anterior to the first menstruation, and we have seen grown-up females, who have been born of parents jealous of their children's morals, remain unconscious of it long after the attainment of physical puberty." He was addressing the issues of age of puberty and the nascent sexuality of pubescent female children that the age of consent controversy concerned itself with in the late 19th century in Bengal. (The article is from C. Y. Chintamani (ed.), Indian Social Reform, Madras: Minerva Press, 1901, accessed at the National Archives of India, New Delhi.)

19 I am indebted to Dr. Tanika Sarkar for clarifying this point. For a detailed discussion of native participation in the sati debate in early 19th century Bengal, see Tanika Sarkar's essay in Paul Cauntwright (ed.), *Hindu Marriages*, Emory: Emory University Press, 2005.


22 Carol Smart, op. cit.

23 Gayatri Chakrvarty Spivak, op. cit.


25 The exchange between Seyla Benhabib (“Feminism and Postmodernism”, “Subjectivity, Historiography, and Politics”) and Judith Butler (“Contingent Foundations”, “For a Careful Reading”) in *Feminist Contentions* brings up many of these questions about the conception of agency or critical capacity of subjects.


29 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, op. cit.


32 The female sexed position in the specular relation reflects the male sexed position's "having" the phallus by her own lack. She has the power to "offer or withdraw that guarantee", and therefore she "is" the phallus. The male sexed position "has" the phallus, and fears the threat of losing it, of castration. The phallus is the signifier for both positions in this relation, and is re-signified in the figures of the woman who "has" the phallus and the man who "is" it: the figures of the phallicized dyke and the feminized fag. Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, p. 103.


34 See Butler's discussion of identity politics in "Political Affiliation Beyond the Logic of Repudiation", *Bodies that Matter*, pp. 111-118.


39 Stanko, op. cit.


41 A striking example of this in contemporary India is the late god-man Osho Rajneesh's spiritual cult, where sex is practiced as a means of attaining transcendental unison with a higher self. Osho Rajneesh's book is appropriately titled, "Sambhog se Samadhi Ki Aur" (Poona: The Rebel, 1995), i.e. "Death/Salvation through Copulation". More ancient Indian practices and philosophies that deviate from the puritanical traditions of high Sanskritism include *Tantra*, which has a tradition of *Shakti* worship, i.e. the worship of the female creative energy. Ritual sex is a feature of tantric worship as well. Sanskritic
philosophy relegates tantric traditions to the left and designates its own puritanical practices as the path on the right.


44 Ibid. p. 30.

45 Ibid. p. 30