Editor’s Note

It has been difficult to make a selection out of the uniformly exciting work of the Subaltern Studies collective. We are particularly sorry to exclude David Hardiman’s “The Indian ‘Faction’” from Volume I and Sumit Sarkar’s “The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Mility” from Volume III. In making our choice, we have tried to keep a presumed audience in mind: not necessarily Indianist, but interested enough in the critique of imperialism to follow through the heterogeneity of the resistance to authority, coming from what Antonio Gramsci calls “the subaltern,” during the colonial period in India.

Ranajit Guha is the general editor of all five volumes of *Subaltern Studies*. His “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency” has become the classic statement of the principle of their work. A revised version of my review of Subaltern Studies serves as introduction to this book.

The analysis of the construction of Mahatma Gandhi as a signifier for subaltern mobilization is an important achievement of the group. Shahid Amin’s “Gandhi as Mahatma,” and Gyan Pandey’s “Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism” are examples of this. These pieces go into meticulous detail to make visible the problem with reading Gandhi as a monolithic figure in the seamless narrative of Indian nationalism.

The difference between indigenous subaltern perception of struggle and authoritative accounts thereof is a pervasive concern of the group. Gautam Bhadra’s “Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven” and Gyan Pandey’s “Encounters and Calamities” illustrate this. The first gives us an account of four subaltern participants in the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The second offers evidence of the contrast between subaltern and elite (colonial) narrativization of the “same” history,
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thus supplementing Guha's point in "The Prose of Counter-In-
surgency."

The somewhat intransigent question of Western methods for Third
World material is often posed in the generalized area of the critique
of imperialism in the United States. In that context, it is useful to
observe how Marxian and Foucauldian theories are transformed,
modified, and augmented in Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Conditions for
Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions," Partha Chatterjee's
"More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry," and David Arnold's
"Touching the Body;" often in terms of alternate structures and an
alternative narrative of legitimation in the subcontinental context. I
have already mentioned that nearly all the work of the group is an
expansion and enrichment of Antonio Gramsci's notion of the sub-
altern. The heterogeneity that they present can be discovered only
when the subaltern is seen in the subject-position. And in the final
analysis, they make us ponder the fragility of the notion of nation
and democracy when the elite, foreign and indigenous alike, inter-
vene against the emergence of a demos.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

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