Preface

The contributions to this volume of *Subaltern Studies* are addressed to a wide range of topics extending in time from the Mughal period to the nineteen-seventies, in theme from communalism to industrial labour, and in manner from the descriptive to the conceptual. Taken together, they are witness to our concern to enlarge the scope of our project into all aspects of the subaltern condition, material as well as spiritual, past as well as present. For, with all their variety these writings are held together by a common emphasis on the primacy of the subaltern as the subject of historical and sociological enquiry.

Such an emphasis does not, however, commit the authors to any cast-iron identity of thinking on every detail of fact and approach. For it is not the aim of this volume, nor indeed of this series as a whole, to set up yet another little sect of seers with access to the ultimate truth about South Asian history and society. We claim no more than to speak for a new orientation within which many different styles, interests and discursive modes may find it possible to unite in their rejection of academic elitism and in their acknowledgement of the subaltern as the maker of his own history and the architect of his own destiny. As such we regard this and the other volumes of the series as one of a number of possible sites where intellectual practices which are all opposed to elitism may come together and engage in a mutually non-antagonistic but by no means mutually uncritical debate in order to learn from each other, correct each other, and through that very process enrich each other. The essays assembled here represent a small beginning in the direction of that convergence.

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