
Sangeeta Ray. *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000. Pp. vii,198. \$49.95, \$17.95.

Sangeeta Ray's *En-Gendering India* is an important contribution to postcolonial, feminist, cultural and Asian studies. In her study, Ray challenges "the androcentric bias of most modern national imaginings," specifically "the assumptions behind the masculinist, heterosexual economy hitherto governing the cultural matrix through which an Indian national identity has become intelligible" (3-4). Between the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 and India's independence and partition in 1947, "the figure of the 'native' woman as upper-class Hindu woman becomes the crucial site through which Indian nationalism consolidates its identification with Hinduism" (7). This figure also becomes the site through which British imperialist discourse justifies its presence in India. The result is that "the discourses of imperialism and nationalism bec[ome] increasingly intertwined as each s[eeks] to gain control over the representations of the Indian woman" (8). Or as Teresa Hubel writes, expressing the same notion in *Whose India?*, the figure of the high-caste Hindu woman "becomes one of the most contested figures in colonial India" (109).

In *En-Gendering India*, Ray studies the discourses of nationalism, imperialism and gender construction in South Asian and British literary texts (for the most part the novel), written during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Her goal is to "examine the rival and shifting representations of the Indian woman in British imperial and Indian colonial and postcolonial writings after 1857" and to "theorize the enunciation of an 'authentic woman' of India in texts that are equally committed to the production of a national space called 'India'" (9-10).

Chapter 1 focusses on Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* (1882) and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884) – two novels that are "engaged in the production of a particular Indian Hindu identity during the initial moments of the empire's consolidation of its presence in the colony" (18). Chapter 2 examines Harriet Martineau's *British Rule in India* (1857), Meadow Taylor's *Seeta* (1872), and Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), and is "an exploration of the various ways in which sati as sedimented effect of representational reiteration becomes the Hindu woman in three Victorian texts" (50). Chapters 3 and 4 move from "the Indian woman as sati to the 'new' woman whose desire to participate in the nationalist movement comes at a tremendous price" (89). Chapter 3 begins with a discussion

of Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1915) and concludes with Ray's analysis of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905). Chapter 4 takes as its texts Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1991), set in Delhi and Lahore, respectively. In this chapter, Ray shows how these two novels "offer a critique of the nationalist agenda that led to the partition" (21), and explore "the manner in which a number of contemporary theorists of postcolonial literature and nationalism continue to evade or elide the myriad namings of 'woman' in narratives of nation formation" (125).

Ray accomplishes well the first part of her goal. Her analysis of the figure of the upper-class Hindu woman in these works is detailed and insightful. I am not sure that she is equally successful with the second part, her theorizing of "the enunciation of an 'authentic woman' of India" in the texts in question. It is not clear to me, for instance, how the texts Ray has chosen to examine are "equally committed to the production of a national space called 'India.'" As well, neither in individual chapters nor in her epilogue does Ray push past her readings of individual texts and theorists to draw out explicitly the implications of the "intimate connections between nation building, narration, and the novel" (155) that her analysis of these texts and theorists establishes. That said, by raising "the specter of the Hindu right" in her epilogue and by suggesting that even today "gender ideology [is] being recast and manipulated to aid the growth" of Hindu nationalism in an era of globalization, Ray leaves her readers with much to ponder.

Still, I am puzzled as to why Ray, a writer who clearly accepts that both British colonialism and Indian nationalism are classist, male hegemonic narratives that exclude the voices of the subaltern and women, would herself exclude the voice of the high-caste Hindu woman whose representation by British imperial and Indian colonial and postcolonial writers is the subject of her book. The addition of a chapter in which Ray analyzed the self-representation of women writers of the indigenous elite in texts such as Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati's study *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) and Swarnakumari Devi Ghosal's novel *An Unfinished Song* (1913) would have enriched *En-Gendering India* immeasurably.

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Work Cited

Hubel, Teresa. *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 1996.