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Hubel, Teresa. *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. Pp. x, 234. \$62.25, \$20.95 pb.

The reality of India, Hubel points out at the very outset, extends beyond its geographical presence and has an imaginative dimension. As a property of the imagination, India becomes a cultural, spiritual, political, social, and emotional construct. Hence, India may be "owned" by individuals or groups who write about it.

Since writing has the power to establish ownership, Hubel's study treats British imperialism and Indian nationalism in India *as if* ownership and its implicit authority are the dominant themes underlying this history. In the cross-cultural confrontation that occurred between the Indians and the English from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, the opportunity to stake one's claim to a construct-cum-place through writing was enormously empowering. Indeed, the British and Indian texts Hubel examines all seem to be intensely concerned with acquiring India, and so the issue of appropriation figures prominently in her analysis.

In her exploration of the notion of India as a property of the imagination, Hubel focuses on the Indian Nationalist Movement—for two reasons. First, the era of nationalism in India created a political moment when the cultures of India and Britain publicly collided; in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Indian resistance to British imperialism became organized and represented a profound threat; in response, there was an intensified articulation as well as justification by the British of their role in India. Second, the British-Indian confrontation over India's independence gave birth to contending constructs of India; since these constructs

were emotionally charged, they were capable of producing powerful changes in the social and political structures of a colonized country.

Hubel rightly points out that mainstream histories and fiction assume that British imperialism created a battleground in which only the ruling British and the dominant Indians meet. This panoramic view suggests that both national groups were homogeneous and subsumes class and gender categories into the larger dichotomy of Britain versus India. An examination of class and gender, therefore, challenges the standard views of this colonial confrontation and brings to the fore multiple perspectives of the British-Indian encounter. Naturally curious about these multiple perspectives, Hubel moves from an examination of the fiction and history of the rulers to the counter-discourse produced by the ruled, and then further to the writing of disadvantaged groups within the subject population—specifically high-caste Hindu women and untouchables, whose voices question the implicit assumptions in mainstream histories and fiction. In the interests of retrieving that multiplicity, Hubel chooses to study canonical texts alongside non-canonical ones, because they help to shape a nation's view of itself and sometimes advocate attitudes that are left out of mainstream narratives. Not surprisingly, her book foregrounds issues such as canonization and gender in order to confront boldly the politics of imperialism and nationalism in India.

The book is organized chronologically, yet the theme is developed systematically from chapter to chapter. Initially, there is an analysis of the conventional view of the British-Indian encounter. Then this view is questioned from the perspectives of Anglo-Indians, high-caste Hindu women, and untouchables, who have been elided or glossed over in mainstream histories and literary canons. By the end of the book, the traditional paradigm of Britain versus India has been challenged and re-examined. One experiences, therefore, a sense of completion rather than of exhaustion.

The first chapter analyzes the orthodox conception of the British/Indian encounter. It focuses on two of Rudyard Kipling's short stories and their contribution to the British understanding of the early nationalist movement. It argues that one of these stories, "The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P." (1893), serves to comfort Kipling's Anglo-Indian community by dispelling the threat of nationalism, while the other, "On the City Wall" (1895) makes the same attempt but does not succeed, for the narrator, who is supposed to provide the comfort by using his knowledge of India to contain Indian nationalism, inadvertently finds himself participating in a nationalist bid to overthrow the British government because of his immense attraction to an India he feminizes.

In her second chapter, Hubel deals with a similar feminization in Sara Jeannette Duncan's novel *The Burnt Offering* (1909). Duncan complicates her construction of femininity by undermining its patri-

archal origins and by introducing the politicized Indian woman, thus beginning the process of subverting the traditional British-Indian historical paradigm.

Hubel's third chapter interprets Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) as a vehicle for the liberal myth of imperialism, a way of seeing India which not only appropriates its nationalist movement but also neutralizes its capacity for change. In *A Passage to India*, all things feminine, including India, are emptied of their otherness in the interests of an ideal that exalts the cross-cultural connections between men.

Hubel shifts her emphasis from British to Indian literary texts in the fourth chapter, which marks the moment of internal transition in this study. Although it refers to two non-fiction books written by English women, this chapter is principally concerned with the writings by Indian women of the colonial period. It juxtaposes Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati's *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (1887), a treatise on the status of the nineteenth-century high-caste Hindu woman, with Swamakumari Devi Ghosal's little-known but fascinating novel in English, *An Unfinished Song* (1913). By locating female voices with Indian nationalist aspirations, this chapter charts the double subordination of high-caste women in India, and scrutinizes the extent of their protest against both imperialism and indigenous patriarchy.

The fifth chapter looks at another group which was exploited during India's struggle for independence: India's untouchables. Using Anand's famous *Untouchable* (1935) as the basis for discussion, this chapter describes two opposing views on untouchability current in India throughout the 1930s and 1940s, when Gandhi's idea of trusteeship and upper-caste reparation was set against the belief of untouchable leader B. R. Ambedkar that the members of his community needed to experience empowerment personally and not through the efforts of those who had traditionally oppressed them. Both attitudes are present in Anand's work, but the novel ends by supporting Gandhi's ideal of upper-caste leadership.

The final chapter investigates the nostalgia that was frequently a feature of British and Indian fiction and nonfiction about the Empire, particularly around 1947, when Britain and India were about to go on their separate political ways. For example, Philip Mason's *The Wild Sweet Witch* (1947), an Anglo-Indian novel, is a lament for Britain's lost power in India, while Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), is an Indo-Anglian novel which expresses the nostalgic desire for an age of simple morality and effective action, neither of which was much in evidence during the chaotic, violence-ridden months during which the novel was written. Nostalgia in both texts depends on the exclusion of certain problematic issues such as the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre (in Mason's novel) and the Muslim perspective (in Bhattacharya's novel).

One cannot but admire the frankness and the courage with which Hubel delineates her critical stance. A self-confessed postcolonialist

and feminist, she underscores the fact that she is neither British nor Indian. She is conscious of her privilege as a white woman in a Canadian academic institution that has powerful ties to the middle class and whatever authority it has. She is also conscious of the fact that she has chosen to write about subjects—India, Anglo-Indians, and Indians—which have been marginalized within the academic context. She sees herself, therefore, occupying a position midway between the centre and the periphery. She wishes to make the centre more aware of the periphery, for to ignore it or to relegate it to the edges is to repeat the illusions of imperialism and nationalism.

She brings skill and sensitivity to her investigation of a provocative thesis: the imaginative appropriation/ownership of India during the Independence struggle in British and Indian history/fiction and the marginalization in mainstream British and Indian histories/fiction of the discourses of high-caste Hindu women and untouchables. Her arguments are persuasive, especially since she uses the vocabulary of deconstructive/feminist criticism sparingly, so that one is informed rather than overwhelmed by her expertise. She displays sound critical acumen in her selection and analysis of canonical as well as non-canonical British/Indian texts. She does “yeoman service” to Indian women studies by unearthing and highlighting long-forgotten texts such as Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati’s *The High-caste Hindu Woman* (1887) and Swarnakumari Devi Ghosal’s *An Unfinished Song* (1913).

One wishes that Hubel had thrown some light on the role of Subhas Chandra Bose’s (1897-1945) Indian National Army in the Indian Independence struggle—a subject which is often marginalized in mainstream narratives. Also, one notices that she has focused exclusively on North Indian Hindu perspectives on the status of women. One cannot but wonder at the total absence of South Indian/Muslim/Christian/Untouchable perspectives. On the whole, however, Hubel’s book *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History* is lucid and convincing. It provides an essential and timely postcolonialist feminist perspective to British imperialism and Indian nationalism. It is a welcome addition to the growing corpus of critical works on the Indian Independence struggle.

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