Dismantling Theory? Agency and the Subaltern Woman in Mahasweta Deviôs ñDraupadiò

The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read

> The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ówomanô as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.
>
> Gayatri Spivak.[1]

Thus asserts Gayatri Spivak in her essay ñCan the Subalterns Speak?ò According to the general thrust of Spivakôs argument in this essay, her final assertion that the ñsubaltern cannot speakò denies the gendered subaltern the ability to represent herself and achieve voice agency. Spivakôs contention that ñthe subaltern as female cannot be heard or readò also precludes the possibility of others re-presenting the subaltern woman save as a blank or empty space. Hence the ñcircumscribed taskò Spivak envisions for the female intellectual is to merely foreground the ñspaceò or ñabsenceò that according to Spivak, is the subaltern woman in discourseð Colonial, Western or Native Elite. This presentation of the gendered subaltern as completely inaccessible, and more crucially, incapable of agency or resistance leads to a problematic conclusion: colonialism in collusion with (native) patriarchy effected a complete ñerasureò of the (subaltern) woman. This is however a clearly untenable proposition (Mani 1992: 403). The 1889 description of the plight of the Hindu widow written by a widow and a potential sati herself,[2] as Ania Loomba points out, is testimony to the fact that subaltern women, such as the figure of sati that Spivak alludes to, did in fact ñspeakò (1998:237). I would therefore like to argue that the subaltern woman can be re-presented[3] in imaginative writing and further, that she can be portrayed as an ñagentò[4] particularly at certain specific historical junctures.

The depiction of the gendered subaltern as ñan (empty) space, an inaccessible blanknessò (Moore Gilbert 1997:102) is problematic on several counts. As Bart Moore Gilbert demonstrates ñthe more the subaltern is seen as *wholly* other, the more Spivak seems to construct the subalternôs identity neither relationally nor differentially, but in essentialist termsò (1997:102). Ironically, through this representation she replicates a failure of the Subaltern Studies Scholars for which she critiqued them: the failure to consider the subaltern in relation to the other social groups around them. Further, Spivakôs presentation of the gendered subaltern creates a complete victim and in turn makes the oppressor an all-powerful force. A conception of the subaltern woman as ñan (empty) space, an inaccessible blankness,ò also implies a notion of identity as fixed and unchangeable.[5]

The text that I have chosen for analysis, Mahasweta Deviôs revisionary feminist short story ñDraupadiò (1988), captures the experiences of a subaltern woman within the context of the historical juncture of the ñinterregnum.ò[6] The central character Draupadi or Dopdi, as she is often referred to in the text, is involved in a social movementð the Naxalite movement in India. While Dopdi is presented as a strong woman from the outset, it is at the very moment that she should become the ñsilenced victimò according to traditional schema that she instead emerges as an agent. In this essay I will discuss the way in which this re-presentation of ñcoming to agencyò constitutes a dismantling of the subaltern theory propounded by Spivak in her essay ñCan the Subaltern Speak?ò

Transgression, Agency and the Interregnum.

ñIn the interregnum between the state as they know it and the anticipated state they struggle for,ò states Neloufer de Mel, ñnormalcy is suspended and prevailing rules do not apply. This state of emergency encourages transgressionò (2001:18). As pointed out by her, the suspension of normalcy in a conflict situation, for instance, a resistance movement struggling for social justice as in the case of the Naxalite movement in ñDraupadi,ò promotes transgressions as the prevailing norms and rules no longer pertain. Such ñtransgressiveò moments according to de Mel, often result in a re-invention of tradition and a re-inscription of the ascribed social roles particularly of women. These transformations could then result in womenôs agency and empowerment. It is therefore important to examine the short story in the light of these assertions in order to ascertain how they impact on the re-presentation of the subaltern woman as an agent in the text

In ñDraupadi,ò when we first encounter our protagonist Dopdi, she is living in the Jharkhani forest with a group of Naxalite rebels referred to as the ñyoung gentlemen.ò The fact that such behaviour is unorthodox for a woman of the Santal tribe is brought out when Dopdi harkens back to times past with nostalgia and adoration: ñDopdi felt proud of her forefathers. They stood guard over their womenôs blood in black armorò(193). These reminiscences reveal several significant facts about the Santal tribe. Firstly, women were clearly ñprotectedò by the men of the tribe as the phrase ñstood guard over their womenôs bloodò implies. Secondly, as a group that expected and received such patriarchal ñprotection,ò the women seem not to have engaged in warfare for Dopdi does not mention foremothers in this regard. Thus the proud reference to the ñblack armourò of the forefathers is also significant, as this seems to indicate that the Santal men were perhaps (good) warriors. Clearly then Dopdiôs existence in the forest as a militant in the Naxalite movement, among strange men, bereft of the protection of her husband Dulna, is transgressive. The question then is, does she emerge as an agent? In order to answer this query an examination of Dopdiôs role in the movement is important.

The crucial role Dopdi plays in the movement is first brought out through the ñofficial reports.ò ñIn the first phase of the confrontation the fugitives, ignorant of the forestôs topography, are caught easilyò (190) we are told. However all this changes in the next phase for, according to the report, ñthey do not allow themselves to be captured in combat [é] Now it seems that they have found a trustworthy courier. Ten to one itôs Dopdiò (190). Hence, Dopdi seems of vital importance to the movement. It is Dopdi who goes in to the village in search of food (191) and to ñspyò on the activities of the police. For instance, ñDopdi has seen the new camp, she has sat in the *bus station* and passed the time of day, smoked a ôbidiô and found out how many *police convoys* had arrived, how many radio vans [é]ò (194). Blending in to the daily activities of the village, she is able to gather information about the new camp set up in the village, about the two hundred-rupee price on her head (191) and the preparations made to capture herself and the Naxalite insurgents. Further, as Dulna and Dopdi had ñworked at the house of virtually every landowner, they can efficiently inform the killers about their targets [é]ò (189). In the ñexpert opinionò of Senanayak and the *Army Handbook*, the insurgents have become a force to reckon with only through their involvement with Dopdi and her fellow tribals. This is amply illustrated when the superior ñfighting powerò of Dopdi and Dulna is analysed as follows:

> [...] the most despicable and repulsive style of fighting is guerrilla warfare with primitive weapons. [é] Dopdi and Dulna belong to the *category* of such fighters, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and

> arrow [é] their fighting power is greater than the gentlemenôs. Not all gentlemen become experts in the explosion of óchambersô; they think the power will come out of its own if the gun is held. But since Dulna and Dopdi are illiterate, their kind have practiced the use of weapons generation after generation (188).

While there is a certain amount of condescension in the way in which the superior fighting power of the two tribals is accounted for, there is also a healthy regard for their capabilities as combatants. Therefore, Senanayakôs philosophy is to respect the opposition in *theory* what ever his *practice* may be (189).[7] The respect and regard Senanayak has for Dopdiôs capabilities are justified when considering the manner in which she destroys Dukhiram, the soldiersô jungle scout and the man she holds responsible for Dulnaôs death (190). Moreover, Dopdi herself is aware of this difference between her and the ñgentlemenò and views it as a strength. For instance, when contemplating the way in which she should handle the policeman following her, she thinks of the ñbaby scytheò in her hand that so effectively killed Dukhiram and thinks ñThank God [she] is not a gentlemanò for she knows that the ñgentlemenò cannot have handled such a situation as efficiently and effectively as she can (190). Does this then mean that Dopdi emerges as an ñagentò?

The answer to the question posed above lies in the following extract form the Stree Shakti Sanghatana recording of the experiences of women in the Telengana Peopleôs Struggle. According to them, the type of ñcontributoryò historiography seen in the above analysis where womenôs participation in militant groups is ñanalysed and judged not according to their value or importance for women, but according to their óuseô for the movement in questionò devalues the complex issues surrounding the female combatant (quoted in de Mel 2001: 229). Thus if Mahasweta Devi had limited herself to such a re-presentation of the subaltern womanôs role in the resistance movement, the subaltern woman would not have emerged as an agent. The word ñagentò is associated with notions of free will and of exerting power and authority. An assessment of Dopdiôs role in the resistance movement however reveals that although her contribution was crucial to the ñsuccessò of the movement, she is not in a position to ñexert power and authority.ò Her actions are governed by the instructions she receives from Arijit and she models her behaviour on and adheres faithfully to the traditions of the Santals handed down to her by her forefathers. She and Dulna initially join the movement more because circumstances force them to than through personal convictions and an ideological allegiance to its cause. As she mentally prepares herself for the confrontation with the policeman who follows her, she keeps recalling the instructions and pointers she has received from Arijit and the other ñgentlemen.ò It is Arijitôs voice that acts as a guide and dictates her actions through out the sequence where she deliberately leads the policeman astray. Thus, ñArijitôs voice. If anyone is caught, the others must catch the *timing* and *change* their *hideout*. If *comrade* Dopdi arrives late, we will not remain. There will be a sign of where we are gone. No *comrade* will let the others be destroyed for her own sakeò (Italics in original, 194). It is with these instructions in mind that Dopdi resolves to lead the policeman to the ñburning ghatòð as far away from the forest and their hideout as possible. Thus as Spivak points out, the decision makers are the educated, bourgeois young men and women who have ñ*orient*[*ed*] their book learning to the soil they live onò (191). These, according to the erudite Senanayak, are the ñcause of fearò (191). Apart from her loyalty to the movement and its leaders, Dopdi also remains faithful to the codes of conduct instilled in her through her tribal upbringing. She thus draws on and wishes to emulate Dulnaôs actions: ñDulna died, but, let me tell you, he didnôt lose anyone elseôs life. Because this was not in our heads to begin withò (194). The reason why this was never in their heads is that they still remain faithful to the traditions handed down to them by their forefathers for, ñcrow would eat crows flesh before Santal would betray Santalò (193). These factors according to Spivak make Dopdi a historically plausible character. Unfortunately however, it is these very loyalties that enable Senanayak to predict her behaviour and in the end apprehend her. Thus, within this context, although Dopdi is a strong, resilient female character, transgressing the gender and cultural norms of her society, she does not appear to be an ñagentò as yet.

Agency **After Rape?**

At a glance, there appears to be little connection between the words ñagencyò and ñrapeò save perhaps as antonyms. Where women are concerned, rape, with its connotations of violation, imposition of force, destructive violence perpetrated on the body and the psyche, is more commonly aligned with the status ñvictim.ò Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in her analysis of narratives with rape as a central theme states that the texts of male writers like Samuel Richardsonôs *Clarissa* and E.M Forsterôs *A Passage to India*, result in either the death of the raped woman as is the case in *Clarissa* or her ñdisappearanceò as happens in *A Passage to India*.[8] Thus *life* after rape is itself a unique feature of feminist fiction.[9] Sunder Rajan sees two marked differences in the presentation of rape in the two male-authored texts and the feminist texts discussed by her. The structural location of the rape, she maintains, is significant. Thus, in the three feminist texts the rape scene occurs at the beginning of the narrative and on the one hand pre-empts expectations of its later occurrence and on the other it is granted a purely functional purpose and narrative interest is placed instead on what follows rather than on the rape. Both strategies effectively diminish rape. In contrast, both Richardson and Forster place the scene of rape at the core of their narratives óso that the plots describe a graph of climax and anticlimax around that point. Although rape is thus placed at the centre of the narrative, neither novel actually presents the scene of rape. This absence results in a blurring of events, which gives *A Passage to India* its ñmystique.ò In *Clarissa*, the device ñabsolvesò both parties from the implications of rape for neither Clarissa nor Lovelace is properly conscious at the time. Further, this ñabsenceò also results in rape being treated as a ñfemale fictionò or ñfabricationò and consequentially doubts are cast on the credibility of the womenôs testimonies (1993: 71-74). A further problem in literary representations of rape is that there is always the danger of replicating the act in the narrative.[10] Sunder Rajanôs analysis of the scenes of rape, their positioning and their narrative implications are useful for an examination of the scenes of rape in ñDraupadiò and its significance for the question of ñagency.ò

In ñDraupadiò the ñsceneò of rape is presented not in a voyeuristic mode but from the point of view of the woman who was raped. Thus, after Senanayak leaves Dopdi following his unsuccessful ñquestioning session,ò with ñMake her. *Do the needful*ò (195), the narrative re-enacts Dopdiôs consciousness and loss of consciousness, opening and closing of eyes. The first rape sequence is not actually presented as Dopdi looses consciousness. It is rather Dopdiôs feelings that are offered. ñShaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moon light she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she had been made up rightô (195). There is however no room for doubt. The brutality of the rape is brought out in its stark reality through these ñimpressions.ò Since Dopdi regains consciousness after this, the second rape sequence is actually presented but it effectively avoids voyeurism. Sunder Rajan asserts that the location where the rape takes place is also significant. In *Clarissa* and *A Passage to India*, for instance, rape is enacted in private spaces (Clarissaôs bed chamber and the Marabar caves respectively), followed by a re-emergence of the raped woman in to the public eye (the ñlong and elaborate public spectacle of Clarissaôs deathô and the ôpublic trial of Aziz , which is equally [é] the trial of Adelaò). ñThe Succession of private ordeal by public dispayò sates Sunder Rajan, ñcould not be more pronounced and [é] more traumaticò (1993: 76). In stark contrast to these re-presentations, Mahasweta Devi in her depiction blurs and merges the lines between the public and the private. The private pain of Dopdiôs rape and the ñprivateò perversions of the police offices[11] are enacted in the very public space of the police camp. Thus, the private becomes the public and the political.

Unlike in the three womenôs texts discussed by Sunder Rajan,[12] the scene of rape in ñDraupadiò occurs at the end of the short story. However, instead of building up to it as a kind of climax, it proves to be a ñbeginning.ò[13] Thus, while the apprehension of Dopdi is viewed as her end ñDopdi Mejhen is about to be *apprehended*. Will be destroyedò(194), there is a sudden metamorphosis in Dopdi. Until this moment, when ñshe crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could *only happen to a woman*,ò she remains faithful to the patriarchal (moral) code of her tribe handed down to her by her forefathers and, as Spivak points out, to the Naxalite movement as an act of faith toward Dulna (Spivak 1988 b: 184). The voice of male authority also dictates how she should respond to the police questioning and torture. Thus, ñDopdi knows, has learned by *hearing* (italics mine) so often and so long, how one can come to terms with torture. If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue. That boy did itò (192). Dopdiôs training has taught her to sacrifice herself for the cause. Her standards of conduct are governed by the old code of the Santal tribe and that code dictates that one must never betray the members of oneôs tribe. Dopdiôs current ñtribeò consists also of her comrades in arms. Thus when she is captured and first questioned and later raped and tortured she adopts a mode of passive resistance, still holding on to the patriarchal traditions that inscribed her and the instructions imbibed through repeated listening. Although she has heard what it is to be tortured, ð ñwhen they counter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible woundòð in the final scene she realises that the experiences she went through are those uniquely female ones and it is at this point that Dopdi/Draupadi metamorphosises into a powerful agent.

To understand her transformation, it is important to go back to Dopdiôs plan to kill the policeman who follows her. At this point, when she knows that she is in danger of being captured she thinks, ñThis area is quiet enough. Itôs like a maze, [é] Dopdi will lead the cop to the burning óghatô. Patitpaban of Saranda had been sacrificed in the name of Kali of the Burning Ghatsò (194). Thus, when Dopdi needs to call upon her own strength, and interestingly, there are no ñinstructionsò from the voice of male authority she can follow, she thinks of Kali.[14] In the last sequence of events when she enters what Spivak calls the ñarea of lunar flux and sexual differenceò (1988 b: 184) she realizes that responding to these experiences calls for a reinscription of her identityð an identity that she had retained, as a loyal and loving wife like the mythical Draupadi and a pure blooded Santal, even during her time in the forest when there was a transgression of gender and social codes. Thus, when she is asked to come to Senanayakôs tent for further questioning the next morning, Dopdi/Draupadi refuses to wash herself and thereby erase the signs of the nightôs brutality. She also refuses to allow the policemen to clothe her. She challenges them with ñWhat is the use of clothes? You can strip me but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? [é] There isnôt a man here that I should be ashamedò (196). Here she challenges and derides their ñmasculinity.ò This is a reworking of the scene of humiliation in the *Mahabharata* where the mythical Draupadi was ñsavedò from the humiliating experience of being stripped, through divine intervention. Dopdi/Draupadi re-writes this script. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out, ñDopdi does not let her nakedness shame her, her torture intimidate her, or her rape diminish herò (1999: 352). But, Sunder Rajan cautions, this should not be read as a ñtranscendence of suffering, or even simply as heroismò (1999: 352). It is instead she states, ñsimultaneously a deliberate refusal of a shared sign-system (the meanings assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss) and an ironic deployment of the same semiotics to create disconcerting counter-effects of shame, confusion and terror in the enemyò (1999: 352-3). By thus refusing to share the sign system, she also becomes unpredictable. This is significant for her emergence as an agent because, for the first time, Senanayak with all his theoretical knowledge of the tribals, even about information storage in their brain cells, fails to anticipate her moves. The refusal to share the sign system also involves the articulation of an alternative identity. Thus the Draupadi identity that she has been saddled with due to the name given to her by Surja Sahuôs wife in what Spivak calls the ñusual mood of benevolence felt by the oppressorôs wife toward the tribal bond servantò (1988 b: 183) is replaced with one based on the Goddess Kali. The fact that Dopdi models herself on Kali is significant for Kali, traditionally depicted as standing on top of Shiva, symbolises female power. Significantly therefore, the description of Dopdi/Draupadi in the last scene is very similar to traditional depictions of Kali.[15] ñDraupadiôs black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes her blood on her palmò and issues a challenge to Senanayak and his armed force ñI will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on *counter* meò (196). This last metamorphosis baffles even the all-knowing Senanayak and ñfor the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraidò (196).

The reversal of traditional gender and authority roles is complete. Senanayak and the army, the dominant males, the tormentors and authority figures, now ñstand beforeò Dopdi as though before an almighty and powerful force. Her refusal and indeed her challenge to the men ñto put [her] cloth onò is a powerful refusal to revert back to the accepted status quo and to hide or blur her new identity as a primeval female force. For, unlike Draupadi of the Mahabharata, Dopdi cannot escape her fate through divine intervention. But something much more dramatic happens. She survives the ordeal triumphantly and is thereby empowered to ñbecomeò the goddess. Her tormentors are now ñterribly afraid.ò

In the analysis of Mahasweta Deviôs re-presentation of Dopdi as an agent, several significant factors about agency, the subaltern woman and the ñinterregnumò period emerge. The interregnum period, also a period of rebellion encourages a reconstitution of gender as well as caste, class and cultural identities and a transgression of existing norms, values and codes of conduct. Such a period can and does have a powerful impact on women. However, where the re-presentation of subaltern women as agents in such ñmomentsò is concerned, it is not merely sufficient to place the subaltern woman character within the context of such an interregnum period and in the guise of a militant. This will not always result in the empowerment of the subaltern as female as we saw in the first part of this essay. It is rather, when the personal is inextricably mixed with the political, as was the case with Dopdi at the end of the short story that she becomes an agent through a dramatic re-articulation of her identity. Such a refashioning of identity requires a definition of identity as not immutable and fixed but as something that is contingent and variable.[16] Thus, the crucial factor in the transformation of Dopdi in to an agent is her coming to terms with the fact that contingencies, such as the ones that she is faced with, call for a radical departure from the identity fashioned and inscribed by patriarchy and (male) authority and the appropriation of a powerful female identity.

The re-presentation of Dopdi proves two undeniable facts: the subaltern woman can be re-presented in imaginative writing and she can be re-presented as an ñagent.ò In this sense Mahasweta Deviôs short story effectively dismantles Spivakôs contention in her essay ñCan the Subaltern Speakò that the ñsubaltern as female cannot be heard or readò (1994: 104). In Dopdi, we have a subaltern woman who speaks, speaks loudlyð literally and metaphorically, for, her óvoice [é] is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululationô(196)ð and makes herself heard.

Notes

[1] Gayatri Spivak, (1994) ñCan the subaltern Speak?ò in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 104.
[2] In Susie Tharu, and K. Lalita (eds.). 1991.*Women Writing in India* Vol 1, Delhi: Oxford UP, 359-63.
[3] I use the word ñre-presentedò in the sense of literary depiction to distinguish it from representation in the sense of ñappearing on behalf of anotherò within other contexts like parliamentary representation.
[4] I use the word ñagencyò interchangeably with ñvoiceò because I agree with Bart Moore Gilbert when he says that subaltern ñvoiceò for Spivak ñfigures will and agencyò (Moore Gilbert:1997: 104).
[5] Interestingly however, Spivakôs views on subaltern agency change quite significantly in her later work. Thus in her essay ñA Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Womanôs Text From the Third Worldò she remarks on the possibility of *representing* the subaltern. In a similar vein in her ñMore on Power and Knowledgeò she asserts that the ñspace Mahaswetaôs fiction inhabits is rather specialò as ñit is the space of the subaltern.ò Thus my proposition that the subaltern woman can be given a ñvoiceò within imaginative writing contests Spivakôs conclusion in ñCan the Subaltern Speakò but appears to be in alignment with her later work. Bart Moore Gilbert however points out what appears to be a contradiction in Spivakôs stance with regard to the subalternôs ability to ñspeakò: while Spivak has forbidden the inclusion of ñCan the Subaltern Speak?ò in *The Spivak Reader* on the grounds that it will be revisioned, she has also declared that the conclusion will remain substantially unchanged.
[6] Neloufer de Mel (2001), identifies the significance of the moment in history she identifies as the interregnum: ñA society in transition, particularly at moments of struggle over colonial rule or political or cultural representation in the post-independence nation state, is inevitably in a state of emergency. Its revolutionary language, hegemonic anticipations, shifting constructions of ethnic, class, caste and cultural economics, the stateôs counter-moves [é] make it a state of contestation [é] such an interregnum in which normalcy is suspended has a particular bearing on womenò (12-13).

[7] Here I paraphrase the narratorôs description of Senanayak and his attitude towards the opposition. I therefore retained the italics present in the original text.

[8] Sunder Rajan states that Clarissaôs cry ñI am but a cipher,ò expresses a raped womanôs perception of a total annihilation of self following upon the physical subjugation, coercion of will and psychological humiliation that she has been subjected to. (Sunder Rajan 1993: 71).

[9] Sunder Rajan refers to Alice Walkerôs *Color Purple* and Maya Angelouôs *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as novels that defy this common model for in these texts the raped women are able to fashion a ñselfò after the rape (1993: 74).

[10] Sunder Rajan points to the ñThe structuring of private and public fictional spaces: the intrusive, voyeuristic aspect of novel reading; the pleasure of mastery and possession over the ópassiveô text in reading; narrativeôs very trajectory, its movement toward closure which traverses the feminine as object, obstacle or space[é]ò as features in narativity that pose the danger of replicating the act in the narrative. According to her these are the ñinscriptions of desire/guilt in narrativity that itself which are negotiated in a feminist reconstitution of the female subject of rapeò (1993: 76).

[11] The fact that the policemen prefer to keep their acts of brutality ñprivateò and secret comes out at various points in the narrative. One clear pointer to the fact is that they wish to wash and clothe Dopdi before she is taken for further questioning in the morning.

[12] Alice Walkerôs *Colour Purple*, Maya Angelouôs *I know why the Caged Bird Sings*, and Anuradha Ramananôs ñPrison.ò

[13] Sundar Rajan makes a similar observation about *Color Purple* and *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* where the ñdevelopment of the female subjectsô óselfô begins after the rape and occupies the entire length of the narrativeò (1993: 73).

[14] The invocation of Kali at this point is particularly apt as Kali is a goddess of the alternative pantheon of Hindu gods and, according to David Kinsley, tribal and low-caste people worship her (Kinsley: 1998: 116-8). She is also seen as a popular icon representing female rage and empowerment.

[15] Kali is ñdepicted variously with long ragged locks, fang like teeth [é] lips smeared or dripping with blood, claw like hands with long nails [é] often half naked with black skin.ò (*The Encyclopaedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*).

[16] Lata Maniôs concept of the ñmultiple articulationsò of identity is a useful tool of analysis in this respect. Carol Boyce Davisôs concept of the ñMigratory Subjectivityò to suggest both the fluidity and agency of (black) femininity is also useful (Mani 1992; Boyce Davis 1994).

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