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CONDEMNATION AND COMMEMORATION:
(EN)GENDERING DALIT NARRATIVES OF 1857

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This paper is attempting to do two simultaneous things. Firstly, it examines ways in which contemporary debates and popular Hindi Dalit literature of north India have dealt with the role of Dalits in the freedom struggles of the colonial period, particularly the revolt of 1857. And secondly, it relates this specifically to the representations of Dalit women in 1857, and whether it symbolises a collusion or subversion of patriarchies. In the process, the paper wishes to interrogate conventional and historical writings on 1857, portrayals of Dalit women, and the contradictory Dalit perceptions of the revolt.

Ambiguous Dalit Genealogies of 1857

The recent festivities around 1857 have invoked heated debates regarding the position and participation of Dalits in it. We mainly get two responses. On the one hand, there is deep condemnation of 1857 from a Dalit perspective, and on the other, there is an assertion and commemoration of Dalit contribution, particularly that of Dalit *viranganas*, in it. Both these viewpoints however need to be placed in a larger context.

Various scholars have effectively argued that subaltern political actions and consciousness revealed a great degree of autonomy from mainstream nationalism.¹ Various scholars working on Dalits in colonial India particularly state that Dalits have had an ambivalent relationship with both Indian nationalism and colonialism, often contradictory with the views of dominant Hindu communities.² A Dalit intellectual argues that the British liberated the Dalit masses from the oppressions of Hindu society by abolishing the laws of Manu and by providing Dalits with the most important tool of liberation, which is access to education. Thus, British rule was good for the Dalits.³ In UP, many of the activists within the Dalit

movement had articulated similar ideas as early as the 1920s.⁴ Dalits were neither fully convinced of the Congress-led agenda of nationalism, nor did they share universally the Indian nationalists' opposition to colonialism. Their struggles and agendas pointed in different directions. For example, the Adi-Hindu movement and its leaders were keen to show their loyalty to the British Government, and adopted various resolutions in their meetings to this effect. They thanked the British for liberating them from Hindu domination, for establishing schools for them, and for instituting the 'rule of law'.⁵ In UP, the British government had set up 41 schools especially for the depressed classes, who were not allowed to enter the general schools by caste Hindus.⁶ Dalit activists, thinkers and intellectuals have thus often held positions at odds with those of mainstream caste Hindu historians, scholars, and political leaders. These positions and mentalities have had a basis in their material and social realities.

1857 too cannot be isolated from these positionings. The upper-caste modes of thought and anti-Dalit biases of 1857 are well documented. Thus proclaimed Birjis Qadr, who was raised to the throne of Awadh by the rebels on 5 July 1857, under the regency of his mother Hazrat Mahal:

All Hindus and Mussalmans know that four things are held dear by every human being: (1) religion and faith; (2) honour and esteem; (3) life of self and relation; (4) property. These four were protected under the rule of the Indians, under whose government no one interfered with religion; everyone followed his own faith and everyone's honour was protected in accordance with their position. No mean person (*paji*), for example, sweeper (*churha*), leather-worker (*chamar*), carder (*dhanuk*) or village watchman (*Pasi*) could claim equality with them.... But the English are the enemies of these four things.... They have brought the honour of the high classes on a level with that of the lower people – sweepers and leather workers. In fact, the English show preference to the lower castes over the higher classes. On the complaint of a sweeper or a leather-worker, they seize the person of even a Nawab and a Raja and disgrace him.⁷

The proclamation by Bahadur Shah on 25 August 1857 also read:

It is evident, that the British Government in making zemindary settlements have imposed exorbitant *Zumas*, and have disgraced and ruined several zemindars, by putting up their estates to public auction for arrears of rent, in as much as, that on the institution of a suit by a common Ryot, a maid servant or a slave, the respectable zemindars are summoned into court, arrested, put in gaol and disgraced.... Such extortions will have no manner of existence in the Badshahi government.⁸

These derogatory statements reflect deep contempt for the Dalits in 1857, and also symbolise the authoritarianisms of pre-colonial caste formations. These nostalgic yearnings for pre-British pasts have obviously not found any favour among the Dalits.⁹

Conventional and standardised histories of the revolt stress its upper caste character. According to nationalist historians like S. B. Chaudhuri, Tara Chand and R. C. Mazumdar, the social composition of 1857 consisted of the ruling class and the traditional elite of the society, who were the 'natural leaders' of the revolt. The elitist disposition of the revolt is highlighted by referring to it as a general movement of the Muslims and the Hindus -- princes, landholders, soldiers, scholars and theologians.¹⁰ Marxist scholars broadly fall within the same paradigm where they basically see the revolt as a last attempt of the elite medieval order to halt the process of its dissolution and recover its lost status. Thomas R. Metcalf too emphasises that it was not merely a mutiny nor a war of independence. For him 1857 was 'a traditionalist movement in which those who had the most to lose in the new sought the restoration of the old pre-British order.'¹¹ In his significant work, Eric Stokes, while highlighting the local background of the upsurge, also argues that it was the fear of the loss of an upper caste status due to the use of fat greased cartridges that precipitated the uprising. He shows how ashraf Muslims, Brahmins and Rajputs had secured a near monopoly over entry into the Bengal army and they were afraid of a loss to their status.¹² Many other contemporary accounts too emphasize the hurt and the fears of pollution felt up upper caste Hindus as an important reason for the revolt.

In fact, eminent scholars have reflected on the overwhelmingly upper caste composition and character of the Bengal Army to underscore the internal caste contradictions within Indian society. These upper caste soldiers were largely recruited from Awadh and Bihar, and carried with them their caste sentiments and prejudices, upholding divisions of caste in food, clothing and housing.¹³ As these high caste personal of the Bengal Army turned against the East India Company, the British mobilised a section of the low castes. The Awadh Police Force for example had a large component of Pasis, Bhungis, Chamars and Dhanuks, who participated in the suppression of the revolt.¹⁴ It thus appears that Dalits did not have much to gain and only something to loose by being active allies in the revolt. The purity/pollution ties

of the upper castes and classes, linked with the crossing of seas or biting of the flesh of the cow or the pig, did not fit in with Dalits. It is not surprising that Jyotiba Phule congratulated the Mahars for aiding the British in suppressing the 1857 revolt.¹⁵ In fact, from Phule to Ambedkar, a significant part of Dalit tradition has repeatedly celebrated the victory of British in 1857, which according to some Dalit intellectuals, was an antithesis of modernity, and was retrogressive and narcissistically upper caste.¹⁶

Dalit positionings thus point out to the limits of 1857, and by extension of nationalism. There is a political illegitimacy of 1857 from a certain Dalit perspective. A part of Dalit politics has thus refused to bow down to the more powerful and inclusive categories of nation and nationalism, and have maintained a separate identity, which still has its relevance in the lives of Dalits in north India.

At the same time, it would only be a partial reading to end here. There were much more complex and contradictory pulls at this time, and the multilayered character of 1857 cannot be denied. Thus remarked M. H. Court, Magistrate and Collector of Allahabad:

The poorer classes particularly amongst the Hindoos, are, I believe, indeed, I am certain, at heart favourable to us and would gladly see us confirmed in power but they believe our power is gone and acting on this belief they join in plundering and rebelling against the Government.¹⁷

Various scholars have also emphasized the popular and low caste basis of the revolt.¹⁸ Thus for example Rudrangshu Mukherjee focuses on Awadh and stresses the mutual dependence between peasantry and talukdars, which provided bases for common and united action at this tumultuous juncture. He thus links the seemingly disjointed and contradictory realms of the elite and the common masses.¹⁹ Tapti Roy too regards 1857 as a popular uprising, where sepoys, thakurs and the people came together to resist the British, even though their goals and visions differed.²⁰ Gautam Bhadra highlights the common leaders of the revolt.²¹ Though the attention here is not on the Dalits, the low caste and class basis of the revolt is recognised.

More important, post-independent India, particularly of the past three decades, coinciding with the meteoric rise of Dalit movements in north India, has seen a flourishing of popular Hindi Dalit literature, pamphlets and booklets. This literature is mass produced in thousands

and sold in large quantities through public rallies and *melas* of Dalits.²² Given the imperative political assertions by the Dalits in present times, there has been a need felt to declare and prove the nationalist credentials of the Dalits in a section of this literature.²³ Thus, some popular pamphlets and books on Dalit histories have come out with copious volumes on their contribution and role in the independence movement.²⁴ 1857 especially figures in a major way here, where there is a convergence of histories, myths, realities and retelling of the pasts.²⁵ There has been an appropriation and a differential interpretation of 1857 here. Given the circumstances which have generated this literature, many of these Dalit writers are attempting to look upon the mutiny as part of their struggle for freedom, and portray their histories as the real and comprehensive truth. In this literature, the revolt has taken on the character of a Dalit resistance, where alternative Dalit rebel heroes -- some constructed, some exaggerated, some 'discovered' -- are represented as the real symbols of 1857 in Dalit popular nationalist consciousness. In these accounts, the armies of soldiers against British consist largely of Dalits. The focus of this literature is no longer on the sepoys or the greased cartridges, but on Dalits groaning under foreign oppression. As the famous Dalit poet Bihari Lal Harit says regarding 1857:

nai, dhobi, kurmi, kachchi/bharbhuje bhaat kumhaar lare.
Lare khak rub mochi dhanak/sab daliton ke parivar lare.
 (Barbers, washermen, Kurmis, gardeners, grain-parchers, bards and potters fought.
 Cobblers rolling in dust and cotton-carders fought. All Dalit families fought.)²⁶

These Dalit narratives of 1857 deploy an impassioned language, and are written usually by Dalit men who are not trained historians. These writers are inspired by altogether different sentiments, and their writings reveal the inner dynamics of Dalit politics as well. They are writing history with a mission by claiming a past and using it for the furtherance of their future. One of their purposes in writing inspirational histories of this kind is to stimulate Dalit nationalism, Dalit patriotic sentiment, and their pride. They are rewriting history to provide dignity to the Dalits.²⁷ Thus they say:

dalit upekshit virvaron ka, hoga phir se nav samman,
samay chakra ki chaal karti – parivartan ka sabko gyan.
 (The neglected Dalit brave warriors will again gain new respect.
 As time passes, this change will be realised by all.)²⁸

Present day feelings are ascribed to Dalit heroes of 1857, and they are seen as teaching a moral lesson that the Dalits of today need to emulate the heroic deed of their past heroes, and fight for their rights now as well. It has an inspirational quality, an effective conviction, which signifies a present political importance. Thus the present circumstances have made new constructions and hitherto unimaginable imaginings possible for the Dalits. Through 1857, they are also seeking to win acceptance from the wider society by creating and legitimising a space for themselves within the nationalist narratives.²⁹

However, these histories are not just reinventions of the past or inspirational histories. They also reveal a deep impassioned plea to recognize the unsung heroes of the revolt, who were often illiterate and left no written records. Dalits claim to be overturning the inaccuracies and prejudices of mainstream historiography, be it nationalist, Marxist or western, by retrieving lost histories. As says one:

yatra-tatra sarvatra milegi, unki gaatha ki charcha.

kintu upekshit veervaron ka -- kabhi nahin chapta parcha.

(Here, there and everywhere, you will find discussions on their deeds, but the scorned [Dalit] heroes are never written about in papers.)³⁰

This literature is representative of a Dalit imagined nation in search of its own historical narration. However, even in its inspirational and celebratory mode, it has an inherent tension within it, as it constantly grapples with its ambiguous genealogies of 1857 and Dalit relationships to the very character of the Indian nation. It cannot help but denounce certain features of 1857 and it too stresses that Dalits had nothing much to lose in pre-British times, as their condition was miserable even then. It reflects on the high caste biases, partial presentations and prejudices in histories of 1857, and condemns the upper caste Hindus and Indian rulers, who only fought to restore their rule.³¹ I will elaborate this point later in the paper.

It is not possible to talk of a homogenous Dalit politics or nation. At the same time, it is significant that whether Dalits argue for an anti or a pro 1857 stance, the social constructions of the role played by Dalits in 1857 have been changed by the Dalits themselves in tandem with changing social and political conditions in specific historical moments within Dalit communities. 1857 provides a moment for negotiation of Dalit identities, where Dalits

themselves emerge as subjects involved in self-constitution, recognition and reflection. Their agendas and articulations dramatically depart from, and challenge, conventional histories, presenting a different perspective on 1857. They animate and alter received assumptions, and, as such, revise history. This underscores the disjuncture between a codified view of 1857 and its complex construction by Dalits.

More important, the paradoxical Dalit perceptions of 1857 signify the genealogies of ambiguous nationalisms, where the Dalits, from their own viewpoint, play with restrictive lineages of historical pasts. The contradictory politics of exclusion and inclusion, censure and celebration shows that Dalits wish to be a part of the nation and yet cannot be. Dalits swing in their stances on 1857 because of their political compulsions about domains of power and nationalist assertions on the one hand and their autonomy and resistance to a dominant and hegemonic nation on the other. Their dilemmas reflect their wish to be integrated into the heroic deeds of 1857, but also have their distinct domain. They hope to claim 1857 but can never fully do so. Their discourse is thus marked by complicated, shifting and selective appropriations, in which they can only have an ambivalent, incomplete, partial and fragmentary relationship with 1857.

Dalit 'Viranganas' of 1857: Collusion or Subversion of Patriarchies?

1857 also emerges as a gendered arena from a Dalit perspective. Some of the scholars, while stressing the upper caste biases of 1857, have also accentuated how the revolt was an attempt to reinstate feudal patriarchies. Remarriage of widows and abolition of sati was condemned by many leaders of 1857.³² A different kind of gendered tension however is visible in the popular Hindi Dalit literature of 1857, to which I now turn. When it comes to women, the memory of 1857 is inevitably tied to that of Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, with celebration of her valour in poetry, ballad, folktale, drama, school text-books and comics.³³ A chief feature of the popular Dalit histories of 1857 though has been an emphasis on the participation of their own Dalit *viranganas* (heroic women), foreshadowing and marginalising Lakshmibai and Begum Hazrat Mahal. In many popular Dalit histories, Dalit *viranganas* are being reinvented as part of a movement to define Dalit identities. Thus

women like Jhalkari Bai of the Kori caste, Uda Devi, a Pasi, Avanti Bai, a Lodhi, Mahabiri Devi, a Bhangi, and Asha Devi, a Gurjari, all stated to be involved in the 1857 revolt, have become the symbols of bravery of particular Dalit castes and ultimately of all Dalits.³⁴

Thus for example, to take the case of Jhalkari Bai, there has been a proliferation of a vast number of popular tracts, written by various authors, and cultural invocations on her, including comics, poems, plays, novels, biographies, *nautankis*,³⁵ and even magazines and organisations in her name. To name just a few, there is the comic *Jhalkari Bai*; poems variously titled *Virangana Jhalkari Bai Kavya*, *Jhansi ki Sherni: Virangana Jhalkari Bai ka Jeevan Charitra* and *Virangana Jhalkari Bai Mahakavya*; plays and *nautankis* called *Virangana Jhalkari Bai* and *Achhut Virangana Nautanki*; novels and biographies like *Virangana Jhalkari Bai* and *Achhut Virangana*; and a magazine called *Jhalkari Sandesh*, published from Agra.³⁶ Various Dalit magazines have published articles on her.³⁷ Similarly, on Uda Devi, there are poems, plays, stories and magazines penned and narrated on various occasions.³⁸

These representations of Dalit women as *viranganas* can be an important source of insight into gender politics from a Dalit perspective, and a site of struggle over meanings of 1857. They indicate certain ways in which 1857 is remembered and retailed by the Dalits, its relationship to their social and political positioning, and sense of belonging to the nation.³⁹ By looking deep into the interior of constructions and projections of these Dalit *viranganas*, one can learn ways in which other realities of 1857 are conjugated. They also provide perspectives on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify Dalit women, giving them a shape, image and texture. While functioning as storytelling mechanisms, these representations of Dalit *viranganas* through multiple mediums help in circulating ideas about them. They are also symbols, struggling to impose definitions upon what is and what should be, often reflective of the hidden desires of the collective unconscious of Dalits. While highlighting the centrality of these women in the symbolic constitution of Dalit identity, this literature reveals a world turned upside down, and shows how resistance to dominant discourses about Dalit women has been coded and lived by various Dalits communities at different historical moments. Dalit women *viranganas* emerge here as not only visible, but as

conspicuous characters, and objects of adulation. While reading these representations, I have grown keenly aware that they signify contradictory voices, simultaneously asserting and subverting patriarchies. They can be read in multiple and different ways, stretching boundaries of both 1857 and images of Dalit women.⁴⁰

The various narratives go something like this. Jhalkari Bai is depicted as an immortal martyr of 1857, belonging to the Kori caste. She hailed from Jhansi and her husband was an ordinary soldier in the kingdom of Raja Gangadhar Rao. Jhalkari Bai is stated to be brave since her childhood and further got training from her husband in archery, wrestling, horse-riding and shooting. Her face and body structure is said to resemble Lakshmibai exactly. Slowly Jhalkari Bai and Lakshmibai become friends. Jhalkari was entrusted with the charge of leading the women's wing of the army, known as the 'Durga Dal'. When the 1857 revolt began, and the British besieged the fort of Jhansi, Jhalkari fought fiercely. She urged Rani Lakshmibai to escape from the palace and instead she herself took on the guise of the Rani. She killed many British, and managed to hoodwink them for a long time, before they discovered her true identity.⁴¹

Uda Devi is said to have been born in the village Ujriaon of Lucknow, and was married to Makka Pasi. She became an associate of Begum Hazrat Mahal, and formed a women's army, with herself as the commander. Her husband became a martyr in the battle at Chinhat and Uda decided to take revenge. When the British attacked Sikandar Bagh in Lucknow under Campbell, he was faced with an army of Dalit women:

koi unko habsin kehta, koi kehta neech achchut.

abla koi unhein batlaye, koi kahe unhe majboot.

(Some called them Black African women, some untouchable. Some called them weak, others strong.)⁴²

At this point Uda Devi is said to have climbed over a *pipal* tree and shot dead, according to some accounts 32 and some 36, British soldiers, before she herself was shot dead.⁴³ Asha Devi Gurjari is portrayed as providing leadership to a large number of young girls and women and it is stated that on 8 May 1857, she along with a large number of other Dalit women attacked the British army and died while fighting.⁴⁴ Narratives on Avanti Bai claim that she was the queen of Ramgarh, and belonged to the Lodhi community. In 1857, she faced the oppression of the British and retaliated by fighting fiercely. When she was

surrounded by British soldiers, she decided to kill herself rather than surrender to them. Her last death wish was that British should leave the Indian soil and return to their country.⁴⁵ Mahabiri Devi belonged to the Bhangi caste and lived in the village Mundbhar in the district of Muzaffarnagar. In 1857, she made a group of 22 women, attacking and killing many British soldiers. Finally she herself was killed by them and along with her 22 other unknown women died.⁴⁶

As a historian, when I started working on these Dalit *viranganas* of 1857, what concerned me was the relative absence of ‘hard core’, ‘written’ historical evidence on them in the archives, and in the British official and nationalist narratives. I am here not making any claims for the validity of histories of these women as it must have happened. But are these historical fictions or fictive histories or something more? At one level, I am tempted to argue that anything that mesmerizes one is worth cherishing and the magic is ruined by questioning its ‘authenticity’. How real, exact and truthful in any case are the ‘official’, canonised histories of 1857, which are available to us through narrativisation of events? Scholars have questioned the possibility of any single authentic history or truth.⁴⁷ These glorified Dalit *virangana* centred histories hint at larger possibilities, as they thrive on culture-specific ideals engineered through myths and realities about the position of Dalits, their caste oppression and their marginalisation. They stand as persuasive accounts, reaching towards their own ‘realities’, and establish a coherence and consistency for the members of Dalit communities.⁴⁸ Carlo Ginzburg effectively shows how an early manifesto on history ‘from below’ appeared in the form of an ‘imaginary biography’, where the intention was to salvage through a symbolic character, a multitude of lives crushed by poverty and oppression. The mixture of imaginary biography and historical documents makes it possible even for these Dalit histories to leap at a single bound over a threefold obstacle: the lack of evidence; the lack of importance of the subject according to commonly accepted criteria; and the absence of stylistic models. A multitude of lives that have been cancelled, destined to count for nothing, find their symbolic redemption in the depiction of immortal characters.⁴⁹

But this is not enough. Dalits themselves are keen to prove the historical credibility of their *viranganas*, and constantly site sources from literary accounts, British narratives,

archaeology and oral histories. They claim their works to be ‘scientific’, ‘truthful’, ‘detailed’. Theirs is a conscious effort to suggest the existence of historical dimensions that are hidden, in part (but not only) owing to the difficulties of documentary access, where gaps are filled with the use of memories, folksongs, oral accounts, and elements taken from larger present contexts. As says one:

*aithihasik sandarbhon bhitari, ankit sari hai ghatna.
nahin kalpana se kalpit hai – amar humari yeh rachna.
(The whole incident is noted inside historical sources.
This immortal story of ours is not a figment of imagination.)*⁵⁰

These Dalit histories of 1857 take recourse to historical events and intermesh them with subaltern renderings. The dim boundary between the imaginary and the real is the home terrain of these writings. They impel us to recognize their validity, especially within a political and social context. They represent a practice of writing which neither disregards history nor, in its insistence on legitimacy, is completely oblivious of other myths and memories. The actual and the fictional, the myth and the history, coalesce here, pointing to further possibilities of ‘truths’ about 1857.

Scattered, often thin, evidence is sited and quoted by Dalits repeatedly. Thus on Jhalkari Bai, a constantly quoted source is Vrindavan Lal Varma’s *Jhansi ki Rani Lakshmibai*. It was published in 1946 after intense personal research and historical reflection, and it mentioned the dusky-complexioned newly wed Jhalkari Dulaiya of the Kori caste, who bore a striking resemblance to the Rani.⁵¹ Vishnu Rao Godse, who is said to have been present in the fort when the Rani had fought against General Rose, too had made a reference to Jhalkari in his Marathi book *Majha Pravas* (My Travels). Similarly on Uda Devi, Amritlal Nagar’s *Gadar ke Phool* and William Forbes-Mitchell’s *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny* are often cited.⁵² Other historical narratives sometimes substantiate these claims. Thus for example it is significant that W. Gordon-Alexander’s account of the storming of Sikandar Bagh by British troops states:

In addition... there were... even a few amazon negresses, amongst the slain. These amazons having no religious prejudices against the use of greased cartridges, whether of pigs’ or other animal fat, although doubtless professed Muhammadans, were armed with rifles, while the Hindu and Muhammadan East Indian rebels were all armed with musket; they fought like wild cats, and it was not till after they were killed that their sex was even suspected.⁵³

And today these stories stand as given, visible truths, with stamps issued in their name, many statues constructed, public rallies and meetings organised, celebrations and festivities conducted, and even colleges and medical institutions formed in their name. Thus for example a huge public rally and a *mela* is organised in Lucknow every year near the statue of Uda Devi at Sikandar Bagh on 16 November, the stated day of her martyrdom.⁵⁴ With constant evocation, these names have become inscribed in popular Dalit memories. Different political parties have repeatedly used these *viranganas* and made them an integral part of their electoral campaigns and mobilisation strategies, the most successful being the Bahujan Samaj Party, who have used them to build the image of Mayawati particularly.⁵⁵

These popular histories of Dalit *viranganas* are open to simultaneously persuasive, contradictory and competing readings. There are of course limitations of this literature as a historical source. Their representation of Dalit women too needs to be questioned. As the main narrative plots have become more elaborate with time, they have also become more 'sure' of themselves, connected to larger purposes of Dalit identity. Elements of exaggeration have further seeped into them. In the Jhalkari Bai story, one episode repeatedly narrated is of Jhalkari being blamed for killing a cow, which had actually been hidden by a Brahmin, but the truth is revealed.⁵⁶ This story maybe linked to challenging dominant colonial and Hindu narratives which have regarded Dalits, along with Muslims, as killers of the 'holy' cow. Or to take another example, Jhalkari and Uda start as subordinates of Lakshmibai and Hazrat Mahal respectively, functioning under their tutelage.⁵⁷ These have slowly given way to more authoritative and 'mature' Dalit histories, where Jhalkari and Uda have acquired larger than life status. Alongside, Lakshmibai, instead of a model nationalist ruler, appears as a weakling, as reluctant to fight the British.⁵⁸ In fact she is shown as a British supporter and agent. It is Jhalkari Bai who is the real martyr and *virangana*. It is her name that ought to be written in golden letters. She was a Dalit woman, with no kingdom, no palace, no expensive jewellery, and no silken clothes. She was neither a queen nor the daughter of a feudal lord, nor the wife of a *jagirdar*. She fought selflessly, only for the love of her country, and thus her sacrifice far surpasses anyone else's.⁵⁹ Amplification and admiration are a hallmark in these stories. Mitchell's account has formed the most important source for Uda Devi, but it is selectively appropriated. After describing how the woman was shot dead, he clearly states:

She was armed with a pair of heavy old-pattern cavalry pistols, one of which was in her belt still loaded, and her pouch was still about half full of ammunition, while from her perch in the tree, which had been carefully prepared before the attack, *she had killed more than half-a-dozen men.*⁶⁰ (*emphasis mine*)

However, all Dalit accounts of Uda Devi interestingly leave this out, and the number of soldiers killed by her has kept growing, ranging from 32 to 36!⁶¹ There are thus stresses and omissions, additions and subtractions in these tracts.

Reflecting the ambiguities of nationalisms, there is sometimes even a covert admiration for the British. It is said that realising the brave feat of Uda, even British officers like Campbell bowed their head on her dead body in respect.⁶² Mitchell is again quoted repeatedly when he says:

When Wallace saw that the person whom he shot was a woman, he burst into tears, exclaiming: “If I had known it was a woman, I would rather have died a thousand deaths than have harmed her.”⁶³

Mimicry becomes an important tool in these popular histories. Many of these *viranganas* appear to have the same features as reflected in popular memories of Lakshmibai, and they use a similar language, symbols and idioms. All of these Dalit *viranganas* are super brave. They are physically attractive in their appearance, ‘classic’ beauties, falling also into the stereotype of female beauty. There are descriptions of their beauty as being tall, with pointed nose and beautiful eyes.⁶⁴ In these stories, poems and songs occupy a central place. Again many of the narrative poems (*khand kavyas*) have cleverly appropriated the famous poem written by Subhadrakumari Chauhan on Lakshmibai. Thus goes one on Jhalkari Bai:

khub lari jhalkari tu tau, teri ek jawani thi.
dur firangi ko karne mein, veeron mein mardani thi.
har bolon ke much se sun hum teri yeh kahani thi.
rani ki tu saathin banker, jhansi fatah karani thi....
datiya fatah raund firangi, agge barh jhalkari thi.
kali roop bhayankar garjan, mano karak damini thi.
kou firangi aankh uthain, dhar se shish uteri thi.
harbolon ke much se sun ham, roop chandika pani thi.
(Jhalkari you really fought, your youthfulness was unique.
You were a man among the brave in ousting the British.
We heard your story from the mouth of warriors.
You pledged for Jhansi to be victorious by being a friend of the queen.
Jhalkari, you rode from the Datiya gate, trampling the British.
You were like the Kali, and your strike was like lightning.

As soon as a British raised his head, you struck immediately.
We heard your deeds from the warriors, reciting tales of your bravery.)⁶⁵

Most of these Dalit *viranganas* have Devi or Bai suffixed to their name. They are projected as super moral Dalit female subjects, who were very 'noble', besides being highly brave and fantastic nationalists. Many of the tracts appear didactic in their endorsement of certain patriarchal values as they are often replete with images of the obedient daughter, loyal wife and ideal mother, and of morally chaste, virtuous and 'ideal' women.⁶⁶ The moral language perhaps also allows Dalit men to police the behaviour of Dalit women in general. There is a fight against oppression, and yet certain hegemonic scripts get rewritten.

Almost all these popular histories of Dalit *viranganas* have male authors, catering in no small measure to masculinised political-public spaces. Very few Dalit women have penned these pamphlets. The gendered subaltern rarely speaks about herself in these histories, as the voices of Dalit *viranganas* usually remain faint discursive threads. It has been argued that modern political arenas have been the 'natural' homelands of masculinity.⁶⁷ The written and visual images of these *viranganas* in the texts itself and on the cover of these pamphlets spectacularise them as usually clad in 'masculine' attires, with their bodies all covered up, feeding into conceptions of masculinity. In all of them, they are expert in horse-riding, swimming, bow-arrow and sword fighting.⁶⁸ They are depicted as brave from their very childhood, and 1857 revolt becomes the turning point which sparks them to accomplish great deeds in face of high odds. The tracts are infused with militaristic versions of 1857, symbolised through these women, who have become symbols of glory and pride for mainly masculine political articulations. Through them, an embattled Dalit masculinity is asserting itself in the public-political sphere. It maybe argued that the leadership of Mayawati provides a corrective to this, but she too fits into the mould of masculinity. Further, Uda Devi for example has become a figure to mainly promote the political aspirations of Ramlakhan Pasi, who is stated to have 'discovered' her. He has established the 'Uda Devi Smarak Sansthan', which through its reverence to Uda Devi has emerged as a symbol of Pasi honour, dignity, pride, mobilisation and rights.⁶⁹ At the same time, it is utilised by Ramlakhan Pasi to appropriate political-public spaces, where there is as much praise of him as of Uda Devi.⁷⁰

Even as these Dalit *viranganas* are portrayed as ‘superwomen’, full of bravery, and doing ‘impossible’ acts, these glorifications and celebratory accounts do not extend to all Dalit women in general. While it is easy to be susceptible to the lure of such images, they offer a filtered vision, viewed through the eyes of the creators of these images. Victimhood is replaced by a new archetype of heroism. Jhalkari Bai is shown as even killing a tiger single-handedly.⁷¹ Although empowering, these images are not necessarily more representative of Dalit women. They often remain simplistic, rarely revealing the diversity, complexity, and dimensionality that make up Dalit women’s lives. They offer incomplete projections to which not many Dalit women can fully relate to.

It may thus be argued from a Dalit feminist perspective that the emergence of popular Dalit male literature on 1857 has not altered much the images of Dalit women. Though different in their scope, area, and portrayals, these presentations codify Dalit women in certain ways, and fail to offer a more intelligent, aware, and meaningful portrayal of them. Foucault writes that all representations are by their very nature insidious instruments of surveillance, oppression and control -- both tools and effects of power. Here too, save for who controls the representations, has anything much changed for the Dalit woman? As has been contended by bell hooks, this may apply a mere transference, without radical transformation.⁷²

At the same time, if we argue that representations of these Dalit *viranganas* are constructed only to support dominant modes of ideology, and that their aim is ultimately coercive, then how can we use this space also for confrontation? Does their representation also have the scope of carving out more contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistances?⁷³ Can they also provide counter-hegemonic and oppositional perspectives about Dalit women and about the 1857 revolt?

For example, in these stories, in the very act of speaking back, of mimicry, new interpretations and meanings are imparted. As remarks Homi Bhabha:

To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. Then the words of the master become the state of hybridity – the warlike, subaltern sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain.⁷⁴

Even the representation of Dalit *viranganas* on a high moral and heroic ground can be seen as an appropriation of respectability and ‘credibility’, imparting Dalit participation in past histories new meanings. Moral codes have a completely difference valance here. Through such portrayals, Dalits hope to garner greater respect, opportunity and dignity to these *viranganas*, and through them to all Dalits. Such portrayals thus acquire more layered meanings. They embody an inspiring picture, claiming to be centred around neglected Dalit women warriors of 1857, whose marginalisation cannot be tolerated by Dalits any longer.⁷⁵ These Dalit *viranganas* represent Dalits in service of freedom and Indian nationalism, also providing a powerful appeal for redeeming images of Dalit humiliation.

Their portrayal also covertly disrupts the usual dominant notions of Dalit female sexuality, and can be seen as a reaction to images of sexually immoral Dalit women. By shunning outward expressions of sexuality, Dalit women can also hope to build a space where they can wield more control over their bodies and gain dignity and respect within the dominant culture. In spite of various limitations, it also questions the hegemonic stereotypes of Dalit women, either negatively as *kutnis* (evil) and vamps, or as passive victims, powerless and subordinated, both of which deny Dalit women any agency of their own. Here Dalit women are actors and agents in their own right, are active and armed, and are transformed from victims to victors within the context of a narrative. They point to their power and strategies of resistance, even though penned largely by men.⁷⁶ Jhalkari Bai, Uda Devi, Mahabiri Devi, and along with them many other Dalit women, emerge as physically commanding and armed, infused with power, strength, bravery, activism and sacrifice, locked in violent conflict with the British. The fact that their narratives are seeped in militaristic feats and violence may also implicitly indicated the realities of Dalits that are marked by violence. Dalit women here are signifiers of Dalit identity. These are not just stories of brave Dalit women but of *all* Dalits, of their legacy, of their bravery, of their pride, of their sacrifice in service of the nation.

At places the achievements of these Dalit *viranganas* are juxtaposed to the pathetic conditions of Dalit women in general, blaming society at large and men as well, stating that in spite of having a brave past and being protectors of Dalit dignity, Dalit women have been

denied education, have been made slaves, have been oppressed by men.⁷⁷ Some Dalit women too are now trying to use these images to their maximum advantage. Besides ways in which these symbols have helped build up Mayawati, many have used these figures to question representations of Dalit women in general, as well as their oppression and exploitation in real life. Thus Meena Pasi stated, 'Uda Devi and Jhalkari Bai have shown to me that I too can resist all kinds of injustices. I do not have to take things lying down. These figures inspire me to question why I am getting less wages from the landlord, why I am beaten up by my husband when I do equal, if not more, work. I can look up to Uda Devi and say that nothing is impossible if one has the will to resist and fight'.⁷⁸ These representations of Dalit women *viranganas* may thus also be seen as 'positive engendering',⁷⁹ holding a certain appeal for Dalit women themselves. The centrality of the Dalit *viranganas* in 1857 provokes reflection on the enabling potential for women's real lives of ubiquitous icons of Dalit feminine power.⁸⁰

Thus the encounter with Dalit *viranganas* urges Dalits to produce a more critical and self-reflexive account of 1857, which reflects the limits but also the potentialities of gendered Dalit readings of the revolt.

Conclusion

What we are dealing with here are no ordinary, academic histories, but histories that wish to challenge conventional modes of thinking about 1857 and Dalit women. While they may not be inherently radical or transformative, they can be seen to represent alternative and dissident voices, coexisting with and simultaneously challenging dominant ideologies. They are a counterpoint to hegemony.⁸¹ They also reflect Bakhtin's notions of dialogics and heteroglossia,⁸² and Stuart Hall's concept of 'oppositional' decoding, challenging 'dominant-hegemonic' and 'negotiated' reading positions.⁸³ They may also be equated with Raymond William's useful paradigm of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' cultural practices, in constant interaction.⁸⁴

Dalits are negotiating the tensions of being both within and outside 1857 through a simultaneous process of positioning and repositioning, denunciation and glorification. They identify 1857 as an arena of Dalit suppression, of attempts to restore feudal patriarchies, of assertion of Dalit *viranganas*, of establishing masculinised Dalit political and public spaces. Their writings are caught in a dialectics of collusion with and subversion of notions of nationalism, and patriarchal and caste conceptions of 1857 and Dalit women. These simultaneously contradictory processes signify their multiplicity of identity positions and their dynamic relationships with the revolt. There is no single coherent story here, also marking differences in Dalit perceptions. It is a diological process that stands at the border between disavowal and designation, rejection and eulogisation. The spaces of Dalits in 1857 are lived, deciphered, negotiated and transformed repeatedly. Mainstream historiography of 1857 gives hardly any space to hierarchies of nationalism. However, the hybrid identifications of Dalits with 1857 signify the genealogies of ambiguous nationalisms, marking a third space, where the mutiny is concurrently transformed and recouped, and its boundaries expanded and exploded.

- ¹ This has been a major project of Subaltern Studies. For a more recent analysis, see David Hardiman, *Histories for the Subordinated*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2006.
- ² Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998.
- ³ Chandrabhan Prasad.
- ⁴ *Police Abstracts of Intelligence of UP Government (PAI)*, 14 January, 28 January, 1922.
- ⁵ Report of the All-India Adi-Hindu conference, dated 7 January 1928, submitted by the Mahasabha to the Simon Commission. Appendix: List of Memoranda, Evidence—UP/427, Report on United Provinces (3 Vols), Indian Statutory (Simon) Commission.
- ⁶ S. K. Gupta, *The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics: Their Emergence as a Modern Power*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1985, p. 118.
- ⁷ Foreign Secret Consultation, No. 68-69, 25 June 1858, National Archives of India (NAI), quoted in Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India: Volume II*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967, p. 46.
- ⁸ This famous proclamation of Bahadur Shah is from S. A. A. Rizvi and M. L. Bhargava (eds), *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, Volume I: 1857-59: Nature and Origin*, Publications Bureau, Information Department, Uttar Pradesh, 1957, pp. 455-58.
- ⁹ Virendra Yadav, '1857 ka Mithak aur Viraasat: Ek Punarpaath', *Tadbhav*, 15, January 2007, pp. 125-54.
- ¹⁰ S. B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutiny*, World Press, Calcutta, 1957; R. C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1963; Tara Chand, *History of Freedom Movement in India, Vol. II*, Government of India, Delhi, 1967, pp. 42-3.
- ¹¹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt -- India, 1857-1870*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1964, pp. xiii-iv.
- ¹² Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: Indian Revolt of 1857*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 50-1.
- ¹³ For details, see Douglas Peers, 'The Habitual Nobility of Being: British Officers and the Social Construction of the Bengal Army in the Early 19th Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, 3, 1991, pp. 551-52; Kaushik Roy, 'Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army, 1859-1939', *IESHR*, 14, 1997, pp. 345-46; Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830*, OUP, Delhi, 1995, p. 51; Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*, CUP, Cambridge, 1990.
- ¹⁴ Kaushik Roy, 'The Beginning of "People's War" in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42, 19, 12 May 2007, p. 1725.
- ¹⁵ Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, CUP, Cambridge, 1985.
- ¹⁶ Vibhutarayan Rai, 'Kalkatiya Paltan ke Bahane 1857 ka Dalit Bhashya', *Vartman Sahitya*, Year 23, November-December 2006, pp. 25-31; Kanval Bharti, '1857 ka Bahujan Drishtikon', *Vartman Sahitya*, Year 23, November-December 2006, pp. 79-83; Mudrarakshas, 'Azadi ke Purvagrah', *Rashtriya Sahara*, 25 February 2007; Yadav, '1857 ka Mithak'.
- ¹⁷ M. H. Court, writing to C. Chester, Commissioner, Allahabad Division in a letter dated 21 July 1857, quoted in Rizvi and Bhargava (eds), *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, p. 478.
- ¹⁸ Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858: A Study in Popular Resistance*, OUP, Delhi, 1984; Tapti Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*, OUP, New York, 1994.
- ¹⁹ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*, pp. ix-x.
- ²⁰ Roy, *Politics of a Popular Uprising*, pp. 17, 258.
- ²¹ Gautam Bhadra, 'Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, OUP, Delhi, 1985, pp. 229-75.
- ²² Badrinarayan, *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contested Memories and Dalit Political Discourse*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2001, pp. 104-12; Badri Narayan and A. R. Misra, *Multiple Marginalities: An Anthology of Identified Dalit Writings*, Manohar, Delhi, 2004, pp. 13-36; R. K. Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders*, MD Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, pp. 74, 135-6, 346-7; Charu Gupta, 'Dalit "Viranganas" and Reinvention of 1857', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42, 19, 12 May 2007, pp. 1739-45.

- ²³ See for example, D. C. Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram mein Achchuton ka Yogdan*, Triveni Press, Lucknow, 1990, 2nd edn; Mohandas Naimisharay, *Swatantrata Sangram ke Dalit Krantikari*, Nilkanth Prakashan, New Delhi, 1999.
- ²⁴ Badri Narayan, 'National Past and Political Present', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 31, 31 July 2004, pp. 3533-40.
- ²⁵ Badri Narayan, 'Inventing Caste History: Dalit Mobilisation and Nationalist Past', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 38, Nos 1&2, 2004, p. 199.
- ²⁶ Quoted in Rajni Disodiya, 'Virangana Jhansi ki Jhalkaribai', *Apeksha*, Year 3, No. 9, October-December 2004, (Special issue on Bihari Lal Harit), p. 89.
- ²⁷ Ram Dayal Verma, *Virangana Uda Devi*, Mahendra Printing Press, Hardoi, 1996; idem, *San 1857 ki Amar Shaheed Virangana Uda Devi (Khand Kavya)*, Manoj Printers, Hardoi, 2nd edn, 2004, p. 15. Henceforth, I will be using this second edition. The writer is a Pasi.
- ²⁸ Verma, *San 1857*, p. 15.
- ²⁹ Badrinarayan, 'Inventing Caste History', p. 201.
- ³⁰ Verma, *San 1857*, p. 13.
- ³¹ Mohandas Naimisharay, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*, Radhakrishna, Delhi, 2003, p. 5; Thamman Singh 'Saras', *Avantibai Lodhi: 1857 ki Amar Balidani*, Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1995, p. 8.
- ³² Yadav, '1857 ka Mithak'.
- ³³ For details see Joyce Lebra-Chapman, *The Rani of Jhansi: A Study of Female Heroism in India*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1986.
- ³⁴ Scholar Badri Narayan in his recent book *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics* (Sage, Delhi, 2006) has provided a comprehensive analysis on this subject from a contemporary angle. However, his emphasis is more on how these Dalit women heroes are being used by the Bahujan Samaj Party to build the image of its leader, Mayawati. I am on the other hand interested in how we view History from a Dalit feminist perspective and in that how we analyse the role of these Dalit *viranganas*.
- ³⁵ In the colonial period too, there were *nautankis* staged around *viranganas* (but not Dalit ones), combining myths and histories. See Kathryn Hansen, 'The Virangana in North Indian History: Myth & Popular Culture', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XXII, No. 18, 30 April 1988, pp. 25-33.
- ³⁶ To name a few, Ansuya 'Anu', *Jhalkari Bai*, Publications Division, Indian Government, Delhi, 1993; Bihari Lal Harit, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai Kavya*; Mata Prasad Mitra, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*; Naimishray, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*; Chokhelal Nirmal, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai Mahakavya*; Radheshyam, *Jhalkari Bai*; Mata Prasad Raj Vaidya Sagar, *Achhut Virangana Nautanki*; Mata Prasad Sagar, *Achhut Virangana*, Cultural Publishers, Lucknow, 1987; Jagannath Prasad Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni: Virangana Jhalkari Bai ka Jeevan Charitra*, Mukesh Printers, Gwalior, 1999; Bhavani Shankar Visharad, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*, Anand Sahitya Sadan, Aligarh, 1988 [A translation of this in English is available in Narayan and Misra (eds), *Multiple Marginalities*, pp. 131-52]; *Jhalkari Sandesh*, Agra.
- ³⁷ For example, Sheelbodh, 'Jhalkaribai: Ek Aitihāsik Karvat', *Apeksha*, Year 3, No. 11, April-June 2005, pp. 85-9.
- ³⁸ Verma, *San 1857*.
- ³⁹ Shahid Amin, 'Representing the Musalman: Then and Now, Now and Then', in Shail Mayaram, M.S.S. Pandian and Ajay Skaria (eds), *Subaltern Studies XII: Muslims, Dalits and the Fabrications of History*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005, p. 2.
- ⁴⁰ Further, remarks Stuart Hall, different groups from different social circumstances perceive the same representations differently. Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, Methuen, London, 1980, pp. 128-38.
- ⁴¹ Naimisharay, *Swatantrata Sangram*, pp. 133-7; Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram*, pp. 21-5.
- ⁴² Verma, *San 1857*, p. 36.
- ⁴³ Raj Kumar Pasi, *Pasi Samaj ka Swatantrata Sangram Mein Yogdan*, Pasi Shodh Evam Sanskritik Sansthan, Lucknow, 1998, pp. 7-20; Verma, *San 1857*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁴ P. S. Verma (ed.), *Dalit (Swatantrata) Pira*, Vimukt Jati Trading Private Limited, New Delhi, 1992, p. 18.
- ⁴⁵ 'Saras', *Avantibai Lodhi*; Naimisharay, *Swatantrata Sangram*, p. 142.
- ⁴⁶ Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram*, p. 26.
- ⁴⁷ Edward Said, 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1989, pp. 217, 225. Hayden White, *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical*

Representation, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1987; Rumina Sethi, *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 180-85; Joyce Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth about History*, W. W. Norton, New York and London, 1994.

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin (eds), *Myths and Nationhood*, Hurst and Company, London, 1997.

⁴⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentieth-Century Miscarriage of Justice*, trans. Antony Shugaar, Verso, London and New York, 1999, pp. 111-14.

⁵⁰ Verma, *San 1857*, pp. 13-16.

⁵¹ Vrindavan Lal Varma, *Jhansi ki Rani Lakshmibai*, Mayur Prakashan, Jhansi, 1987 (1946), pp. 92-5, 324. For an analysis of this work see Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 215-24.

⁵² William Forbes-Mitchell, *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny 1857-59: including the relief, siege, and capture of Lucknow, and the campaigns in Rohilcund and Oude*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1893, pp. 57-8. Quoted in for example, Pasi, *Pasi Samaj*, pp. 8-11; Verma, *San 1857*, p. 8.

⁵³ W. Gordon-Alexander, *Recollections of A Highland Subaltern: During the Campaigns of the 93rd Highlanders in India, under Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde in 1857, 1858 and 1859*, Edward Arnold, London, 1898, p. 104.

⁵⁴ I was present in the *mela* held in 2005. It is organised by an organisation called 'Virangana Uda Devi Smarak Sansthan'. Every year they take out a 'Smarika' on the occasion. See *Smarika: Virangana Uda Devi Pasi Shaheed Diwas*, Lucknow, Virangana Uda Devi, Smarak Sansthan, Lucknow, 16 November 2005.

⁵⁵ Badrinarayan, *Documenting Dissent*, pp. 138-54; Badri Narayan, *Women Heroes*.

⁵⁶ Naimisharay, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*; Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni*, pp. 16-27.

⁵⁷ Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni*.

⁵⁸ Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram*, p. 21. Dinkar quotes S. N. Sen, *1857*, pp. 267-296, to prove the point about 1857 revolt beginning against Lakshmibai's wishes.

⁵⁹ Naimisharay, *Viranganan Jhalkari Bai*, p. 5; Dinkar, *Swatantrata Sangram*, pp. 21-5; Naimisharay, *Swatantrata Sangram*, p. 136, Verma, *San 1857*, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Forbes-Mitchell, *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny*, p. 58.

⁶¹ Pasi, *Pasi Samaj*, pp. 10-11.

⁶² Pasi, *Pasi Samaj*, pp. 7-20; Verma, *San 1857*, p. 20.

⁶³ Forbes-Mitchell, *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny*, pp. 57-8.

⁶⁴ Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni*, pp. 2, 6; Verma, *San 1857*, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni*, pp. 1, 44.

⁶⁶ Shakya, *Jhansi ki Sherni*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, Manchester University Press, New York, 2004.

⁶⁸ Verma, *San 1857*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Narayan, 'Inventing Caste History', pp. 193-220.

⁷⁰ For example, a number of poems and write ups in *Smarika: Virangana Uda Devi* are actually devoted to Ramlakhan Pasi.

⁷¹ Naimisharay, *Virangana Jhalkari Bai*.

⁷² bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End Press, Boston, 1992, p. 126.

⁷³ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London & New York, 1993, pp. 11, 129.

⁷⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, p. 121.

⁷⁵ Verma, *San 1857*, pp. 5, 17.

⁷⁶ Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, Chapter 9; Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'Introduction: Feminism and the Politics of Resistance', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2000, pp. 153-65.

⁷⁷ Verma, *San 1857*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Personal interview with Meena Pasi on 16 November 2005 at Lucknow. She, along with many other women, was a participant in the celebration of 'Uda Devi Shaheed Diwas' on that day.

⁷⁹ For elaboration, see Vidya Daheja, 'Issues of Spectatorship and Representation', in Vidya Daheja (ed.), *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 1-21.

⁸⁰ This reminds us of ways in which images of female goddesses too have been seen as having an enabling potential sometimes, or even to go the other way. See for example, Nilima Chitgopekar (ed.), *Invoking*

Goddesses: Gender Politics in Indian Religion, Shakti Books, New Delhi, 2002; Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom and Margaret A. Mills (eds), *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991.

⁸¹ For the concept of hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

⁸² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981.

⁸³ Hall, *Encoding/Decoding*.

⁸⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, pp. 203-5.