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Saurabh Dube. *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. xv + 259 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3337-1; $84.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3325-8.

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Fabric Woven, Stitched, and Torn

In the decades since Antonio Gramsci defined the subaltern classes as those subordinated by hegemony and excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power, scholars have continued to tweak and expand his theories. In the late 1970s, a group of South Asian scholars expanded "subaltern" to signify not merely class, but also race, nationality, gender, and, indeed, any means of excluding individuals from meaningful power. Postcolonial scholars have used the theories of Gramsci and the succeeding Subaltern Studies group to shift the kaleidoscope of historiography to reveal hitherto untapped points of view. Subaltern Studies has entwined itself with late-twentieth-century repudiations of, and fascination with, imperialism and colonialism. Subaltern Studies asks us to listen to the multitudes whose voices were buried not only by colonial and imperial projects, but also by class and gender structures. It asks us to discover those voices for the first time, by bringing new readings to old works and by uncovering hitherto un-read documents that give those voices subjectivity. Moreover, as Saurabh Dube notes in his densely written work, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles*, these relationships are reflected in the hegemonies of scholarly endeavors as well as in the objects of those studies.

Dube examines vernacular modernities in conjunction with colonial structures in order "to track the incessant entanglements between power and difference" (p. xii). He rejects the "immaculate conception" (p. 31) of the colonial gaze, instead viewing the multiple sides of colonial encounters as inextricably linked. Power and difference cannot exist apart from each other, and, as the book's title suggests, the central metaphor of fabric woven, stitched, and torn expresses the fundamental connectedness of subject and object. This conceit appears both literally and figuratively in Dube's development of his subject: for example, clothing (and food) take on important cultural significance, the links between "text" and "texture" gain resonance ("fables were spun" [p. 95]), and, of course, the trope of weaving lends itself well to concepts of colonial hybridity. Moreover, Dube applies the metaphor to scholarly activities as well ("subaltern studies has unraveled as an intellectual undertaking" [p. 163]). Indeed, when Dube slips into another metaphor ("the beast of postcoloniality is a curious creature" [p. 181]), it is disconcerting to lose the thread (as it were) of the central image.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, "Colonial Textures," describes several encounters between and among Indians during colonial rule, based on fieldwork in India and archival research in the United States and India. The second, "Postcolonial Tangles," critiques Subaltern Studies scholarship, with specific attention to writings by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and others, and examines the production and reception of recent Hindu nationalist histories in modern India in the context of modernity and the imperial past.

The "Colonial Textures" section offers the kind of multi-faceted history that, when it works, demonstrates how spectacular postcolonial scholarship can be. Here, Dube interrogates missionary and Indian writings to provide a rich counterpoint of voices and to explore the rhetorical path leading away from these encounters into modern post-colonial India.

Chapter 1, "Traveling Light," describes a missionary project in which cultural enlightenment was meant to accompany the spiritual, and shows how the Satnamis, a monotheistic group in the central Indian region of Chhattisgarh, engaged, in various ways, with missionary authority and Protestant theology. Writings by "native" catechists (local converts trained to be the front line of Christian proselytism and teaching) show how they adapted and expanded upon missionary teachings, and at the same time navigated the "idioms of dominance" (p. 38) embedded within the missionary culture. Thus, when conflict arose among the proselytes, they demanded that

the church enforce its own rules, even as church officials demurred.

Dube's documents unwrap the complex dynamic of religious and cultural conversion, in which the proselyte both acquires a new faith and adapts it to correspond with his/her own embedded cultural heritage. While, as Dube notes, the "missionaries participated, wittingly and unwittingly, in the construction of colonial mythologies of racial supremacy, the establishment of structures of paternalist authority, and the reinforcement of colonial rule" (p. 39), pre-colonial constructions of race and class also shaped the local reception and practice of Christianity. Traditional constructions of race and class, supported by mythological infusions, infiltrated the new religious practices, often disconcerting the missionaries.

Dube acknowledges that the rhetorics of colonial discourse and the missionary idiom together created a construction of "Westernism" that reinforced the colonial order and its accompanying projects of modernization, but his examination of how this "native" Christian discourse adapted itself to include the new "enlightenment" along with traditional structures of race and mythology reveals an important angle on the project of modernization in a colonial setting. The converted Christians so thoroughly claimed possession of the missionary discourse that they assumed rhetorical positions that ultimately challenged the church's governance. The catechists' daybooks, Dube shows, illustrate a "transformation of Western worlds" and reveal "rearrangements, including alternative articulations, of Christian doctrines" that are "closely bound to the catechists' constructions of Hinduism, Islam, and popular religions" (p. 44). Rather than Christianity radically altering the social fabric, as the missionaries hoped and expected, local society molded Christianity to its own environment.

The metaphor of fabric and sewing becomes literal in the chapter titled, "Evangelical Entanglements." Here we see that when German-American missionary Oscar Lohr asked his Satnami converts to remove their *janeu*, or sacred thread, to demonstrate their loyalty to the new faith, the converts recanted (p. 57). Until Lohr insisted on the sacred thread's removal, Dube argues, the Satnamis accepted Christianity as a "variation on a theme" within the community's belief system (p. 57). Lohr lost those converts, but later missionaries had success with Satnamis who were grateful for medical care received from the missionaries and who brought their large extended families into the mission fold. But in the twentieth century when the converts applied the lessons of the new faith, they ultimately rejected the missionaries for their "un-Christian character and bad behavior" (p. 67). In the 1930s, with revolution, freedom, and independence in the air, the converts challenged missionary paternalism and authority. Their rebellion, constructed in "evangelical idioms, nationalist rhetoric, and governmental enchantments" (p. 75) shows that they learned their lessons well, using the rhetoric of modernization and evangelism to demand the rights that they were taught to desire.

The chapters, "Telling Tales" and "Entitlements and Enmities," discuss the evangelized Indians' articulation of "the terms and textures of empire, nation, and modernity" (p. 75), delving into social and ethnographic detail to describe a series of legal and moral disputes. This section concludes with a discussion of South Asian "personhood" in the context of the theoretical debate and its evolution over the past forty years.

In the second section, "Postcolonial Tangles," a chapter on "Subaltern Subjects" continues the theoretical discussion, providing a useful overview of Subaltern Studies and asking how we are to use Subaltern Studies today. This chapter updates the definitions and practice of Subaltern Studies, and does salutary service in showing the continuous lines of historical thought, from E. P. Thompson's seminal work on popular culture to Eugene Genovese's study of African-American slave populations, to the "critical relationship with the terms of institutional power" (p. 136) that characterizes postcolonial studies. Dube notes a tendency towards "transnational historiographical" studies, or "people's history" (p. 131) since the 1960s, and "a shift of emphasis within the project from earlier constructions of the pasts of subordinate groups toward more recent interrogations of histories of the state and modernity" (p. 131). Dube plunges his reader into the Subaltern Studies conversation, engaging with works on peasant resistance written by Subaltern Studies group members such as Ramchandra Guha and Gyanedra Pandey (p. 138ff.). Dube suggests that even these pioneers of Subaltern Studies may have missed an important point. Pandey, for example, views events "in terms of the telos of a progressive peasantry forging its way toward the modern nation," but he ignores the "fact" that these initiatives were "not a radical transformation of peasant consciousness in the mirror of an imaginary modern but a reworking of peasant thought and action that involved complex renderings of ongoing traditions and contradictory articulations of a colonial modernity" (p. 140). The relationship between the subaltern and the nation is critical here, and Dube critiques works by Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty and others in an effort to more narrowly describe how the subaltern responds to the "homogenizing impulses of state, nation,

modernity" (p. 159) and how their historiography may "replicate some of the key categories at the core of the very taxonomies that they set out to question and criticize" (p. 159).

Chapter 6, "Pilgrims' Progress," continues the discussion of modernization in terms of rhetorical constructions of race and nation in the Hindu Right movement in India. This movement claims "timeless Hindu tradition" as the root of modern nationhood (p. 164); Dube argues the "intense mutual attraction" between "the homogenization of a singular history" and "the fetish of the modern nation" (pp. 164-165). In Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram and a place of pilgrimage, the renderings of "Ram as Rambo" and "the staging of science" as evidence of racial purity intersect with racialized nationalist interests. In his discussion of the long history of this place and its significance for Hindu identity and the "fetish of the nation" (p. 176), Dube shows that "the invocation of the eternal verities of the sacred space" is "actually a reinvention of Ayodhya" that "flattens all traces of the diversity, discontinuity, and difference that in fact characterize the pasts of this town" (p. 176).

The final chapter, "The Enchanted and the Modern," responds to the question raised at an academic conference, "Who speaks for Hinduism" or, indeed, for any other past outside of the "master blueprint" of European history (p. 181). Dube posits the concept of "a history without warranty" (p. 189) as a means of re-thinking the "singular modernity"; but he goes further than the political and invites his reader to question also the categories of the postcolonial, the nation, and the West.

As a scholarly theory, Subaltern Studies has proved brilliantly relevant to the post-colonial twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The idea of "history from below" is, of course, an enormously appealing concept to the changing demographics of academia, taking scholarship from the hands of outmoded white males and placing it into the hands of everyone else, including, one hopes, the white males who are still in the game. *Stitches on Time* is an important entry in the field of Subaltern Studies, and Dube's work suggests important ways in which scholars can expand the archives and re-shape arcane theoretical discussions by placing them in the context of new historical research. The extraordinary mixture of primary research and theoretical depth contained within *Stitches on Time* will appeal both to an academic audience already versed in the theoretical conversation (or "theoryland," as Dube puts it [p.131]) as well as to readers drawn to more traditional detailed historical narrative.

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