

Reading Subaltern Studies

Critical History,
Contested Meaning, and the
Globalisation of South Asia

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Subalternity

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SUBALTERN STUDIES¹ began its impressive career in England at the end of the 1970s, when conversations on subaltern themes among a small group of English and Indian historians led to a proposal to launch a new journal in India. Oxford University Press in New Delhi agreed instead to publish three volumes of essays called *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. These appeared annually from 1982 and their success stimulated three more volumes in the next five years, all edited by Ranajit Guha. When he retired as editor in 1989, Ranajit Guha and eight collaborators² had written thirty-four of forty-seven essays in six *Subaltern Studies* volumes, as well as fifteen related books.³ By 1993, the group he remembers as originally being 'an assortment of marginalised academics'⁴ had sufficient international prestige for a Latin America Subaltern Studies Group to be inspired 'by this interdisciplinary organisation of South Asian scholars led by Ranajit Guha.'⁵ Today, eleven (and counting) *Subaltern Studies* volumes have appeared. They include essays by forty-four authors whose allied publications approach two hundred, including translations in several languages,⁶ yet the core group still includes eight founders⁷ and Ranajit Guha's 'intellectual driving force'⁸ is still visible.

Readings of *Subaltern Studies* began in India, where writing about Subaltern Studies began in book reviews. At first, each volume in the series was reviewed separately as a collection of essays, but by 1986

an accumulation of writing inside and outside the project had established a distinctive school of research whose adherents came to be called 'subalternists' or simply, 'subalterns.' Their seminal essays appeared in paperback in 1988, when *Selected Subaltern Studies* was published by Oxford University Press in New York and Oxford, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with a foreword by Edward Said. By 1990 the historian Burton Stein could cite the growing interest in Subaltern Studies as one sign that the 1980s were 'a decade of historical efflorescence' in South Asian studies.⁹ In the 1990s Subaltern Studies became a hot topic in academic circles on several continents: a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine, and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies.

I have compiled *Reading Subaltern Studies* to provide a non-subalternist introduction to Subaltern Studies.¹⁰ The book brings together a dozen essays published in South Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America, from 1983 to 1997. Authors of these essays have all made their mark on the intellectual history of subalternity, each in their own way, in their own place and time, outside Subaltern Studies. Each interprets subalternity contextually. In the introduction, my main task is to outline a history of contextuality at the intersection of Subaltern Studies and its readership, and in doing this I also indicate how the subject of subalternity has changed over the years. My goal is not to formulate a critique, to assess the merits, or to measure the contribution of Subaltern Studies—let alone to unravel the inner history of the project—but rather to inform reading and discussion.

Subaltern Studies does not mean today what it meant in 1982, 1985, 1989, or 1993. How did this change occur? Intellectual environments have changed too much to allow us to measure cause-and-effect in particular acts of writing and reading. Change has occurred inside the Subaltern Studies project, but ambiguously, as we will see, and how much internal change is cause or effect of external change is unknowable, because inside and outside, subaltern subjects have been reinvented disparately. When approaching the intellectual history of subalternity, it will not do to imagine that *Subaltern Studies*

dropped a weighty stone into a quiet pond, or to trace the influence of teachers and students, or to speculate that cutting-edge ideas have dispersed globally like news on the internet. This book proposes instead that a compact but complex history of reading and writing has constituted the subject of subalternity in a widening world of scholarship, where some readers accept and others reject the claim that Subaltern Studies represents the real substance of subalternity, even in India. The intellectual history of subalternity has emerged outside and in opposition to Subaltern Studies as much as inside it.

Academic work on subaltern themes quickly detached subalternity from its various inventors. Migrations of reading dispersed research on subaltern themes connected by circulating terminologies, arguments, and texts. As we will see, outside forces moulded the project itself, and its own institutional boundaries have always been permeable. Its internal coherence has been less intellectual than personal and more formal than substantive, being composed primarily by group loyalties and by invitations to join Subaltern Studies activities. Intellectual cohesiveness has never been a project priority, as the leaders often say, and it has appeared primarily in solidarity against critics. Outsiders have built outer walls for Subaltern Studies and landscaped its environment to dramatise its distinctiveness. Respondents, interlocutors, interpreters and translators have worked with Subaltern Studies material and redefined it by writing about it differently. Insiders have become outsiders. Outsiders have become insiders. Outsiders doing independent work on subaltern themes have embraced Subaltern Studies as a kindred project—for example, in a 1994 collection of essays in the *American Historical Review*.¹¹

This book provides a reference guide for reading Subaltern Studies in a world context, and most of that context is outside India, though *Subaltern Studies* and essays reprinted here primarily concern India. Subaltern Studies occupies a subject position inside India, but is written for readers everywhere. Outside India, it is often the only brand of Indian history that readers know by name, but other brands are more powerful. National narratives, orientalist images, ethnic stereotypes, and Hindu majoritarianism are vastly more influential.¹² In opposition to these, subalterns have made little headway. Readings of

the Indian history contained in Subaltern Studies are inflected variously by national contexts in the world of globalisation. Peter Gran argues, for instance, that in India, Subaltern Studies is *read against* liberalism, Marxism, and 'religious fascism,' whereas in the US, its 'principal novelty' is its ability to represent India by being *read into* ideologies of difference and otherness.¹³ Though globalisation circulates texts and ideas around the world, it nonetheless divides reading environments. In the US, readers are generally encouraged to think about cultures in essentialist terms, in the ethnographic present; to see colonialism and nationalism as cultural phenomena; to disdain Marxism; and to distance academic work from partisan politics, a separation that bolsters academic credibility. But in South Asia, cultural change preoccupies scholars and activists, colonialism includes capitalist imperialism (which is still at work in the world of globalisation), Marxism is alive, and most scholars embrace politics in one form or another as a professional responsibility of citizenship. Such contextual differences differentiate readings of subalternity. To map the whole world of contested meanings lies far beyond the scope of this book, which endeavours, more modestly, to locate Subaltern Studies in the context of relevant English language scholarship.

Historical Origins: Insurgency, Nationalism, and Social Theory

In the last forty years, scholars have produced countless studies of societies, histories, and cultures 'from below' which have dispersed terms, methods, and bits of theory used in Subaltern Studies among countless academic sites. Reflecting this trend, the 1993 edition of *The new shorter Oxford English dictionary* included 'history' for the first time as a context for defining 'subaltern.' The word has a long past. In late-medieval English, it applied to vassals and peasants. By 1700, it denoted lower ranks in the military, suggesting peasant origins. By 1800, authors writing 'from a subaltern perspective' published novels and histories about military campaigns in India and America; and G.R. Gleig (1796–1888), who wrote biographies of Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and Thomas Munro, mastered this genre. The Great War provoked popular accounts of subaltern life

in published memoirs and diaries; and soon after the Russian Revolution, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) began to weave ideas about subaltern identity into theories of class struggle. Gramsci was not influential in the English-reading world, however, until Raymond Williams promoted his theory in 1977, well after translations of *The modern prince* (1957) and *Prison notebooks* (1966) had appeared.¹⁴ By 1982, Gramsci's ideas were in wide circulation.¹⁵ Ironically, though Gramsci himself was a communist activist whose prison notes were smuggled to Moscow for publication and translation, scholars outside or opposed to communist parties (and to Marxism) have most ardently embraced his English books (as well as those of the Frankfurt School).

Subaltern Studies deployed some of Gramsci's ideas¹⁶ at a critical juncture in historical studies. By the late 1970s, a rapid decline in state-centred historical research had already occurred and social history 'from below' was flourishing. E.P. Thompson's 1963 book, *The making of the English working class*,¹⁷ is often cited as an inspiration for the growing number of 'bottom up' studies of people whose history had been previously ignored.¹⁸ By 1979, women's history was popular enough in the US to merit source books and guides to research.¹⁹ In 1982, Eric Wolf published what can be called the first global history from below.²⁰ In South Asia, the history of subaltern groups was thriving, though they were not called that then.²¹ In the 1970s, two new journals featuring studies of South Asian peasants had begun publishing in the US and UK.²² Hundreds of titles on rural history had appeared.²³ In 1976, Eric Stokes announced the 'return of the peasant' to colonial history.²⁴ Guides to sources promoted more local research.²⁵

Insurgency attracted special attention. In India, the 1857 centenary had stimulated new histories of rebellion, some directly inspired by rebels like Kattabomman Nayakkar,²⁶ whose epic of resistance to British rule had been reproduced in many popular media, including cinema.²⁷ Romantic heroism attached to old rebel histories, but in addition, the 1960s and 1970s raised concern about revolution in the present. Even the Indian Home Ministry feared revolution.²⁸ In this context, more scholars took up studies of insurrection. N.G. Ranga and L. Natarajan pioneered this field, decades before,²⁹ and elements

of its intellectual history go back to the 1920s, when early Indian studies of Indian rebels sought to recuperate insurgent mentalities.³⁰ Indigenous Indian theories of peasant revolt had emerged in the 1930s, among communists and in the Kisan Sabha,³¹ but in the 1960s, the academic study of insurrection came into its own, when Hamza Alavi theorised peasant revolution,³² Stephen Fuchs explored tribal messianism,³³ J.C. Jha studied Kol rebellions,³⁴ and Muin-uddin Ahmad Khan studied early Fara'idi rebels in Bengal.³⁵ In the 1970s, the upward trend in research on popular insurgency accelerated: highlights include work by K.K. Sengupta, B.B. Chaudhuri, and S.K. Sen on rebels in Bengal;³⁶ V. Raghavaiah's work on tribal revolts (published by the Andhra Rastra Adimajati Sevak Sangh);³⁷ Ghanshyam Shah's early studies of Gujarat;³⁸ a flurry of work on Mappillai revolts in Malabar;³⁹ Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma's path-breaking *Imperialism and revolution in South Asia*;⁴⁰ and A.R. Desai's masterful collection, *Peasant struggles in India*.⁴¹

When the founders of Subaltern Studies first met in England at the end of the 1970s, they were surrounded by decades of research on history from below and on insurgency in colonial India. Sumit Sarkar used it to write a new kind of national history text with popular movements at centre stage; and his landmark 1983 book, *Modern India, 1885–1947*,⁴² also conveys the intensity of debates at the time by starting off with a thumping critique of historians (mostly at Cambridge University) who comprised the so-called Cambridge School of South Asian history. Following the appearance of Anil Seal's *The emergence of Indian nationalism: Competition and collaboration in the later nineteenth century*,⁴³ they had been hard at work unpacking the politics of Indian nationalism at the local, regional, and national levels.⁴⁴ In 1979, Tapan Raychaudhuri captured his critique of their work in the phrase, 'animal politics',⁴⁵ but we can now appreciate that Cambridge scholars had opened the historical study of political institutions in South Asia by exploring the agency of individuals, formation of cliques, and power of specific class interests inside political parties and factions.⁴⁶ They had also begun to integrate studies of politics *before and after* 1947. Their timing was critical, for a Cambridge 'school' developed around the study of Indian national politics just when disillusionment with India's national government was

deepening. A major transition in political culture was under way, which entailed new interpretations of the national past; and not only in India, as we will see. At the same time, the international expansion of historical studies fostered new schools of specialisation that defined themselves by opposition to one another.⁴⁷ Its critics actually named the Cambridge School and made it seem more a 'school' than it was. Provocation became its legacy. Nationality had become a pivotal subject of contention and Cambridge had sparked controversy about two questions that stood out above others: What is the role of culture in nationalism? and: What is the relationship between states and popular politics? On both questions, debates raged in the early days of the Iranian revolution, when Mujahedin fought Soviets in Afghanistan and Antonio Gramsci, Jurgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault were beginning to influence English writers. American historians castigated Cambridge inattention to Indian culture at a time when a 'cultural school' of Indian history was developing around Bernard S. Cohn at the University of Chicago.⁴⁸ Indian historians castigated Cambridge inattention to national ideals and popular forces. Cambridge had drained radicalism and national resurgence from Indian political history just when they were attracting more attention from scholars who were concerned to chart new national trajectories.

Similar academic oppositions occurred elsewhere. One telling debate concerned Southeast Asia, where James C. Scott argued that anti-colonial revolutions expressed an insurgent peasantry's moral economy and Samuel Popkin countered that rational calculations motivated competing rebel groups.⁴⁹ Scott's approach—adapted from E.P. Thompson and George Rude⁵⁰ and drawing liberally from theories of peasant struggles against global capitalism⁵¹—supported the idea that popular insurgency in British India emerged from enraged indigenous moral sensibilities. Sumit Sarkar argued on these lines to show that autonomous popular movements shaped Indian nationalism by provoking dialogue and tension with national leaders that produced various contingent outcomes. By contrast, Cambridge historians echoed Popkin and political anthropologist F.G. Bailey,⁵² who insisted that politics operate inside institutions that organise competition for power. From this theoretical perspective, class and other interest groups fought for power under the banner of nationalism at

every level of the colonial system, and after 1947, they continued to struggle from above and below inside national regimes.

Historians were dividing along schisms in social theory into opposing schools that separated society and culture from state institutions and political economy. *Subaltern Studies* dramatised this division. So did Benedict Anderson's book, first published in 1983, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*,⁵³ which abandoned class analysis, ignored state politics, and argued that cultural forces produced national identity and passion. By 1983, scholars were writing two kinds of national history: one, a people's history filled with native culture and popular insurgency; the other, an official history filled with élites and political parties. Nations and states were separating like oil and water. So were culture and political economy. A new kind of nationality was coalescing in a separate domain of popular experience, which was becoming increasingly isolated from state institutions and national élites.

But even so, when Ranajit Guha announced, in 1982, that 'the politics of the people . . . [form] . . . an autonomous domain',⁵⁴ even those who agreed with him—like Sumit Sarkar, who soon joined the project—still assumed that diverging domains of nationality were connected. After all, this connection sustained the possibility of radical change, even revolution. In the 1970s, this *possibility* had become a serious problem, because state institutions had remained substantially *unchanged* despite many decades of popular insurgency, nationalist agitation, and tumultuous independence not only in 1947 (India and Pakistan) and 1948 (Sri Lanka) but also in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Modern states did not prevent rebellion, but insurgency had not become revolution. Why did nationalism provoke revolution in China and Vietnam, but not India? How do oppressed people take over governments? How do nations redesign states? Why not revolution in South Asia? These were pressing questions.

Opposing theories served opposing schools. In 1966, Barrington Moore had explained the lack of revolution in British India by accepting the wisdom of Indology and social theory that India's caste culture and self-contained village societies made revolution impossible.⁵⁵ Traditionally localised social hierarchies formed a fragmented political base, impervious to class mobilisation, which the modern urban

bourgeoisie had incorporated into a national system of electoral representation.⁵⁶ Bolstering this argument, Louis Dumont's influential *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications* (published in English in 1966) presented a comprehensive model of Indian civilisation based on the logic of caste.⁵⁷ In this perspective, India's indigenous culture can sustain a diverse, fragmented, electoral democracy, but all insurgency is self-limiting. Class conflict could never engender revolutionary class solidarity. In fierce opposition to this line of argument, Hamza Alavi, A.R. Desai, Kathleen Gough and others asserted that theories of caste are ruling class ideology. High-caste élites had always needed coercive power to keep low castes, peasants, workers, and tribal groups in place. Élites needed states to suppress revolution. National politics had always included both popular insurgency and élite conservatism, struggling against one another, producing conflict-ridden political movements and state regimes. Despite the lack of revolution, significant social change, opposition to caste oppression, and class struggles by low-caste and untouchable (Dalit) workers did occur, and in places like Tanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, local struggles led by communists were potentially revolutionary.⁵⁸

Shifting Ground: Nations, Politics, and Globalisation

Subaltern Studies joined debates about insurgency and nationality⁵⁹ at the breach between popular unrest and state power. The breach was widening at the time, in part because, despite rampant crises, dominant state institutions had managed to survive as though secure inside a mountain fortress high above the plains.⁶⁰ Looking back from 1980 into the decades before 1947, historians were busy exploring *disconnections* between official nationalism and popular movements. Muslims had acquired a separate political history⁶¹ that became more prominent in the context of Hindu majoritarianism.⁶² Regional movements became prominent—and most thoroughly studied by Cambridge historians⁶³—after the 1956 reorganisation of Indian states along linguistic lines.⁶⁴ But communalism and regionalism did not attract Subaltern Studies,⁶⁵ which instead focused on the separation of political strata. D.N. Dhanagare, Majid Siddiqi, and Gyanendra

Pandey had already published books on splits between the Indian National Congress and peasant movements.⁶⁶ Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India* gave workers' and peasants' movements more autonomous political space than any history text had ever done before. Ranajit Guha's *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency* depicted tribal revolts as completely separate from nationalism, inside a subaltern space, below. *Subaltern Studies* entered the academic scene by asserting the complete autonomy of lower class insurgency.

The breach between popular and national history then expanded to vast proportions in the 1980s and 1990s. This changing intellectual climate has yet to be adequately historicised and can only be outlined here in the sketchiest manner. One key feature stands out when we recall that histories 'from below' had originally emerged inside an intellectual fusion of historical research and national politics. Books like A.R. Desai's *Peasant struggles in India* (1979) and *Agrarian struggles in India after independence* (1986) not only promoted the study of agrarian upheavals in the past, they also opposed the technocratic developmentalism of the Green Revolution and the *status quo* politics of cultural traditionalism.⁶⁷ In South Asia, this kind of scholarship goes back to the 1870s, when a nationalist *academic* critique of empire inspired national *politics and history* at the same time. It is easy to forget how radical the intellectual work of the early Indian nationalists was in its day.⁶⁸ A third generation of nationalists, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, built upon a long legacy of critical scholarship. Nehru used history to inform his politics, the way Gandhi used philosophy, and in 1930, when he became President of the All-India Congress Committee, Nehru announced an enduring theme in historical research by saying, 'the great poverty and misery of the Indian People are due not only to foreign exploitation in India but also to the economic structure of society, which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue.'⁶⁹ Such pronouncements at the apex of nationalism stimulated many histories from below, which engaged the past to inform national debates about land reform, planning, local democracy, farm finance, industrialisation, and other topics of hot dispute.⁷⁰ In this intellectual environment, history 'below' embraced history 'above.' Gaps and failures separating

levels and types of national activity seemed to be conjunctural problems to be overcome within a unified national history.

After 1980, an expanding gulf between the histories of peoples and states ripped many old bonds between academics and politics. Scholars who claimed to speak for people who had been left out of nationalism marched away from scholars who continued to fuse popular history with national politics. Ranajit Guha accounts for his own alienation from nationalism by citing the early seventies' 'drama of Naxalite clashes with the organs of the state and the violence of counterinsurgency measures.'⁷¹ But more importantly for many others, Indira Gandhi's Emergency in 1975 made the Indian state blatantly dictatorial.⁷² As new popular movements arose from many quarters in India—communal,⁷³ regional,⁷⁴ and expressing radical aspirations among women, peasants, workers, and tribal groups⁷⁵—old nationalism lost legitimacy and the Left and the Right fought for its legacy. Popular resistance to state power became a prominent academic theme in the 1980s. In 1986, James C. Scott's *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*⁷⁶ announced a broad move away from studies of revolution into the analysis of localised, personal resistance to the power of élites and states. Foucault's influence was spreading. By the 1990s, an array of scholars inside and outside Subaltern Studies had made everyday resistance a basic feature of life in South Asia.⁷⁷

As the Cold War came to an end, critical attacks on the public sector widened what many scholars began to see as a permanent rift between people and states. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher fought to 'get the state off our backs.' The World Bank and IMF forced structural adjustment on poor countries to open their markets. Global capitalism fought states for power over national resources.⁷⁸ Development theory sidelined governments and valorised non-governmental organisations. Socialist regimes died from various causes; what became known as their 'failure' came to symbolise state failure generally. In India, a new derogatory phrase entered political discourse, 'Nehruvian socialism.' Critics of state-led development stood up for the interests and cultures of the poor and marginalised.⁷⁹ Constraints exerted by state power—theorised most trenchantly by

Foucault—were discovered in development institutions once thought progressive.⁸⁰ James C. Scott's third book made 'seeing like a state' inefficient and implicitly oppressive.⁸¹ A critique of the modern logic supporting state authority ran through intellectual streams of globalisation as national boundaries were collapsing under transnational flows; as Indian economists pushed for India's liberalisation from Yale and Columbia; as supporters for Khalistan, Eelam, and Hindutva raised funds in England, Canada, and the US; and as global media produced glossy images of the Indian middle class for Indian consumption. Moishe Postone summarised the changing historical context by saying that a new historical phase began, sometime after 1973, 'apparently characterised by the weakening and partial dissolution of the institutions and centres of power that had been at the heart of the state-interventionist mode [of capitalist development]: national state bureaucracies, industrial labour unions, and physically centralised, state dependent capitalist firms.'

Those institutions have been undermined in two directions: by the emergence of a new plurality of social groupings, organisations, movements, parties, regions, and subcultures on the one hand and by a process of globalisation and concentration of capital on a new, very abstract level that is far removed from immediate experience and is apparently outside the effective control of the state machinery on the other.⁸²

In this new context, the nation was being reconfigured, reimagined, re-theorised. Subaltern Studies became an original site for a new kind of history from below, a people's history free of national constraints, a post-nationalist reimagining of the Indian nation on the underside, at the margins, outside nationalism. Subaltern India emerged in fragments during the 1980s and 1990s,⁸³ and it changed form, as we will see; but from the outset, it rejected official nationalism and developed transnationally, as did its readership and its critical appreciation. It is the first international collaboration to make a sustained impact on South Asian studies, and its ideas are intricately tangled in recent world trends. In 1982, Ranajit Guha's assertion that the Indian nation had failed 'to come into its own' evoked failed revolution, but by 1990, it had new connotations. The fragmentation of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans was widely said to be the failure of Marxism, communism, and socialism. Nehru's regime was

said to have failed the Indian nation. The failure of the modern state pervaded academic writing. New approaches to nationality came forward. In 1983, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined communities* sought to redress the failure of communists and Marxists to understand nationalism; and the rising prominence of his book in academic circles reflects a broad intellectual trend: political nationalism lost its grip on the historical imagination as nations were reinvented as 'imagined communities.'⁸⁴

Subaltern Studies also became entangled with efforts to reimagine history itself, which became more compelling at the Cold War's end. Thomas Haskell repeated a popular, typically hyperbolic, American cliché about this turning point for history when he said, 'The bloody contest between capitalism and socialism unexpectedly came to an end in 1989 after a struggle that gripped the world for a century and a half.'⁸⁵ Eric Hobsbawm called 1989 the end of 'the age of extremes' and said about the 1990s that 'citizens of the *fin de siècle* tapped their way through the global fog that surrounded them, into the third millennium . . . certain . . . that an era of history had ended.' But, he said, 'They knew very little else.'⁸⁶ Epistemologies and ways of knowing history came under scrutiny as social theory took a linguistic, literary turn. Cultural studies became increasingly prominent. Cultural criticism became cultural politics.⁸⁷ Discursively deconstructing cultural power and recuperating everyday resistance became compelling projects for scholars who discovered the failures and betrayals of modernity, positivism, and the Enlightenment. Old empirical certainties of modernisation, capitalist development, and national progress were disassembled in the radical newness of post-modern and post-colonial writing.⁸⁸ The politics of language, media, and representations came of age in a world of globalisation.

Inventing Originality: Rejection, Crossroads, and New Departures

The original substance of *Subaltern Studies* emerged from work-in-progress in the late 1970s. Eleven authors in the first three volumes—Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty, N.K. Chandra, Partha Chatterjee, Arvind N. Das, David Hardiman, Stephen Henningham, Gyanendra Pandey, and Sumit Sarkar—were

doing close empirical work in social, economic, and political history. The leader of the project, Ranajit Guha, was different. A 'difference of generations,' he says, 'sets me apart . . . by at least twenty-five years,'⁸⁹ but four other collaborators had also published books before 1982.⁹⁰ His academic work sets him apart as sharply. His first book, *A rule of property for Bengal: An essay on the idea of permanent settlement*,⁹¹ was an intellectual history of colonial land policy.⁹² His published work in the 1970s concerned intellectual trends surrounding one nineteenth-century text,⁹³ and his second monograph, *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency* distilled data from studies of peasant revolts in the colonial period to evoke a theory of subaltern resistance. Since 1982, his major publications have appeared first in *Subaltern Studies*, with which he is most personally identified. In his accumulated writings, colonialism appears to be a single, unified, discursive structure of power inside a vast ethnographic present; and state institutions, texts, personnel, and discourse, including those of the nationalist movement, stand in stark opposition to subaltern India and its indigenous culture from the first day of British rule down to the rupture of *Subaltern Studies*.⁹⁴ Ranajit Guha might be said to be the Louis Dumont of colonialism, which in his writing attains a comprehensive power like that of caste in *Homo hierarchicus*.

By contrast, seven scholars listed by Ranajit Guha as members of the project since 1982 (Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, and Gyanendra Pandey) began their careers doing specialised research on Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu. Their continued collaboration has stabilised the project but they have worked separately and also published widely outside *Subaltern Studies*. They have not engaged in joint research or writing. A good metaphor would be a flock flying in formation, each author with his own compass, but all in tune. It would seem that over the years, their compass bearings have been set collectively in tune with Ranajit Guha's. They have flown collectively into currents of theory and research that were more his home territory than theirs when the project began. In addition to this close-knit group, the project includes an unruly band of thirty-six (and counting) other authors who have contributed essays to

Subaltern Studies. They collaborate loosely. They include outsiders who became Collective members, insiders who left the project, and students who came up through the ranks. Each brings something specific. To cite a few exemplars, Sumit Sarkar stands for the project's early commitment to social history; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak launched a literary turn in the mid-1980s (followed by Sudipta Kaviraj, Amitav Ghosh, Gyan Prakash, and others); and Julie Stephens, Susie Tharu, Kamala Visweswaran, Tejaswini Niranjana, among others, brought gender into view.⁹⁵

Subaltern Studies reinvented subalternity. In 1982, the term 'subaltern' had little meaning in South Asian studies. Its conceptual emptiness at the time was underlined when Ranajit Guha quoted the *Concise Oxford dictionary* on the first page of *Subaltern Studies I* and then remained silent on Gramsci's use of the term. Readers who responded to early volumes focused particularly on problems of defining 'subaltern' in relation to Gramsci, which led to lively discussions outside *Subaltern Studies*.⁹⁶ But the project actually made itself original by divorcing itself from Gramsci to invent a distinctively Indian subalternity.⁹⁷ Guha also opened *Subaltern Studies* by declaring a clean break with most Indian historians, announcing the project's ambition 'to rectify the élitist bias' in a field 'dominated by élitism—colonialist élitism and bourgeois-nationalist élitism.' He did not elaborate, but his colonial élitists surely came from Oxford and Cambridge and his bourgeois-nationalist élités must include almost everyone else. Where the Marxists fit into his picture is unclear, but his brief discussion indicates that he believed colonialism spawned all historical writing about India before the rupture announced by *Subaltern Studies*. He suggests the same thing in *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency*: it begins by asserting that, 'The historiography of peasant insurgency in colonial India is as old as colonialism itself' (p. 1); it then describes the 'discourse on peasant insurgency' as 'a discourse of power' under the Raj (p. 3); and it proceeds to cite interventions by Gramsci and Hobsbawm without mentioning Indian histories of peasant insurgency. *Subaltern Studies* launched itself with an act of rejection, denying South Asia's previous 'history from below.' The importance of this opening act is suggested by its

republishing in two anthologies of selected essays, in 1988 and 1997.⁹⁸ Subalternity thus became a novelty, invented *de novo* by Subaltern Studies, which gave old terms new meanings and marked a new beginning for historical studies. Domination, subordination, hegemony, resistance, revolt, and other old concepts could now be subalternised. By definition, subalternity had been ignored by all scholars in the past; thus, all the old research became élitist.⁹⁹

Even readers who applauded Subaltern Studies found two features troubling. First and foremost, the new substance of subalternity emerged only on the underside of a rigid theoretical barrier between 'élite' and 'subaltern,' which resembles a concrete slab separating upper and lower space in a two-storey building.¹⁰⁰ This hard dichotomy alienated subalternity from *social histories* that include more than two storeys or which move among them; and not only histories rendered through the lens of class analysis, because subaltern social mobility disappeared along with class differentiation. Second, because subaltern politics was confined theoretically to the lower storey, it could not threaten a political structure. This alienated subalternity from *political histories* of popular movements and alienated subaltern groups from organised, transformative politics, in the past and in the present.¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly, a rift soon opened between Subaltern Studies and Indian scholars committed to class analysis, political action, and popular histories of nationalism. Some critical responses appear in the first four reprints in this volume.

The project launched itself a second time, in 1985. David Hardiman (1986) called this critical juncture a 'crossroads.' Choices were made. In 1997, Brinda Bose alludes to it in her review of *Subaltern Studies IX*. Calling *Subaltern Studies* 'a touchstone for research in South Asian history, society and culture,' and reporting that 'each volume is ensured its loyal readership,' she says that readership 'has expanded beyond the horizons of students of (subaltern) history, which was where it all began many years back.'

In recognition of this shift—or broadening—the more recent volumes have brought together essays that are no longer confined to the discipline of history, displaying, as the editors of this collection describe it, the Collective's 'engagements with more contemporary problems and theoretical

formations.' This expansion of critical and theoretical scope has benefited the fast growing body of South Asian sociocultural studies, providing it with the (predictable, but) dependable subalternist slant, routed, usefully, through history.¹⁰²

Kate Currie called the move that Brinda Bose calls 'broadening' a shift away from studies of *subaltern politics* in the vein of E.P. Thompson and Antonio Gramsci, and towards cultural history, critical theory, and *representations of subaltern subjectivity* in the vein of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.¹⁰³ Politics and representation are two aspects of subalternity, which historians study in records of action and discourse. Two sides of one coin, they both evoke anti-hegemonic possibilities.¹⁰⁴ In the 1980s, the gaze of the project shifted from one side of the coin to the other; and Hardiman's report from the 'crossroads' notwithstanding, project members today see no discontinuity in this shift. Ranajit Guha indirectly confirmed that a second point departure did occur by saying the project began 'roughly' in 1986 and by omitting from his account of the early years two authors whose approaches were most clearly at odds in the mid-1980s—bright signposts at the crossroads—Sumit Sarkar and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.¹⁰⁵

We can suppose that before 1985 no consensus definition of subalternity had emerged in the project. Experiments were ongoing. Subalternity remained a fluid substance inside its two-storey structure. Then, in 1985, *Subaltern Studies IV* introduced the cultural perspectives of two prominent, US-based scholars, Bernard S. Cohn and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who explored the language and textuality of discursive power, which Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha, in particular, but also Dipesh Chakrabarty and some others had discussed in earlier volumes. *Subaltern Studies IV* also opened with a blunt statement of Ranajit Guha's annoyance with outside critics,¹⁰⁶ and ended with Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Invitation to a dialogue,' the first extended response to critics in the pages of *Subaltern Studies* (specifically, to *Singh et al. 1984). Thus it appears, as Hardiman indicates, that the project was forming its intellectual identity as the first three volumes of *Subaltern Studies* were leading into a second three. What outsiders wrote, particularly in some essays

reprinted here, seems to have added pressure and provided a focal point for oppositions that helped to resolve internal ambiguities. Dipesh Chakrabarty's closing essay in *Subaltern Studies IV* indicates the nature of this resolution by affirming their basic concern with 'the thorny question of "consciousness" ' and by defining subalternity as 'the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy.' This approximates an official definition, but Chakrabarty also says that members of the Editorial Collective 'are perhaps far more united in their rejection of certain academic positions and tendencies than in their acceptance of alternatives.'¹⁰⁷

Subaltern consciousness had always been a critical feature of subalternity; and in 1987, Ajit K. Chaudhury reiterated that, 'The focus of *Subaltern Studies* is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes, specifically peasants.'¹⁰⁸ But how is consciousness to be studied historically? What kinds of sources, methods, and reasoning should we use? Around these questions, a shift in orientation certainly occurred. In 1988, Edward Said's Foreword to *Selected Subaltern Studies* described an academic tendency outside India, in the world of global circulation, which was being embraced by the project, saying, 'this group of scholars is a self-conscious part of the vast post-colonial cultural and critical effort that would also include novelists like Salman Rushdie, Garcia Marquez,' and others, as well as 'poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Mahmud Darwish, Aime Cesaire, theoreticians and political philosophers . . . and a whole host of other figures. . . .' (pp. ix-x). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies: (from Subaltern Studies IV)* cites 'the colonial subject' as the basic concern of theorisation and says, 'The Subaltern Studies Collective . . . generally perceive their task as making a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specifically a theory of change' (p. 4). Post-colonial cultural criticism and literary theory had embraced Subaltern Studies.

After 1986, the substance of subalternity remained fluid and mixed, but it contained much less material drawn from struggles waged by particular subaltern groups in colonial India and much more literary evidence concerning colonial constructions of culture and power. In the first four volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, twenty essays treat peasant, worker, and tribal struggles; in the next six volumes, only five.

The 'subaltern classes, specifically peasants' gave way in practice to the textuality of colonialism and resistance. This coincided with a shift in the work of Subaltern Studies' collaborators who had begun their academic careers doing research on specific groups. The project's underlying theory may have remained constant, but constancy—in its increasingly global context—expanded the field of subalternity into the transnational study of colonialism. This was Ranajit Guha's academic home ground, and on it the intellectual continuity of the project was constructed. A starting point for the shift-in-continuity can be found in Guha's seminal essay, 'The prose of counter-insurgency' (*SSII*) which demonstrated how elite repression lurked in official accounts of popular struggles. Colonial representations had begun to overwhelm subaltern activity in his insistence that a critique of colonial discourse is the starting point for Subaltern Studies. Guha consolidates the continuity shift in his final essay for the last volume that he edited (*SSVI*), 'Dominance without hegemony and its historiography,' which provides a comprehensive template for Subaltern Studies under the discursive power of colonialism. In the interim, he had indicated in his introduction to a collection of essays by Bernard S. Cohn how Subaltern Studies would be wedded to anthropological history by an insistence on the primacy of opposition between 'indigenous' and 'colonial' knowledge.¹⁰⁹

The meaning of subalternity in Subaltern Studies shifted as the framework of study increasingly stressed the clash of unequal cultures under colonialism and the dominance of colonial modernity over India's resistant, indigenous culture. Subalterns in India became fragments of a nation; their identity and consciousness reflected India's colonial subjugation. This approach has organised an impressive collection of enduring scholarship on colonial texts, vernacular resistance, bureaucracy, police, factories, communalism, ethnography, prisons, medicine, ethnography, science, and related topics. It has also enabled Subaltern Studies to speak as India's subaltern voice. Methodologically, recuperating subaltern subjectivity entails the analytical and rhetorical liberation of Indian culture from its domination by the colonial archive and by modernity. Ingenious methods for uncovering fragments of subaltern nationality became the project's particular speciality. Critical readings of colonial texts, oral histories,

and ethnographic techniques are employed to reveal India's cultural roots in subaltern subjectivity. Subaltern Studies thus becomes a post-colonial critique of modern, European, and Enlightenment epistemologies. A new kind of cultural essence for India is found in iconic residues of hidden identities, expressions of difference, and misunderstood mentalities.

The originality of Subaltern Studies came to be its striving to rewrite the nation outside the state-centred national discourse that replicates colonial power/knowledge in a world of globalisation. This new kind of national history consists of dispersed moments and fragments, which subaltern historians seek in the ethnographic present of colonialism. Writing such history constitutes subversive cultural politics because it exposes forms of power/knowledge that oppress subaltern peoples and also because it provides liberating alternatives. In this project, historians and post-colonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern peoples, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalise them, documenting their past. A liberated imagined community can only come into its own, in this view, in subaltern language and memory, which historians can strive to recuperate, however partially and tentatively. For this project, historians need to shake themselves free of modernity's master narrative and from the shackles of chronological, linear time. Subaltern Studies' growing diversity of research now coheres like the new cultural history.¹¹⁰ Its search for hidden pasts evokes textual criticism, fragmentary testimonies, and lost moments, to restore the integrity of indigenous histories that appear naturally in non-linear, oral, symbolic, vernacular, and dramatic forms.¹¹¹

Reading Dialogically: Context, Assimilation, and Critique

Essays about Subaltern Studies reprinted here represent a small but useful sample. This book is only a starting place for reading subalternity historically. The two appendices list the contents of ten *Subaltern Studies* volumes and provide additional bibliography (to supplement

footnotes) drawn primarily from an excellent Subaltern Studies website.¹¹² With this material in hand, readers can explore Subaltern Studies and read it dialogically to find what is said and not said, visible and missing. I have organised readings into three groups to suggest one opening gambit for strategic reading.

The first group of essays—by Javeed Alam, Sangeeta Singh *et al.*, Ranajit Das Gupta, and Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri—indicates critical assimilation in India before 1986. Though reviews appeared outside India in the early years,¹¹³ most readings occurred in India, where reviewers were most concerned with the contribution of individual *Subaltern Studies* essays to Indian historical writing at the time. Problematic relations with Marxism, on the one hand, and national history, on the other, stand out. The political autonomy of subalternity was hotly contested as a general claim and in specific circumstances, but reviewers indicate that there was plenty of room for *Subaltern Studies* in the Indian historical profession, where its authors already had a place. Their intervention was in tune with contemporary concerns and most critical comments were more requests for clarification than hostile attacks. But at the crossroads of the project in the mid-1980s, harsh critics preoccupied the project, most of all, critics in *Social Scientist*, an influential Marxist journal. Critics' arguments that subaltern *political activity* could not be detached empirically or theoretically from 'élites'—even when detached from nationalist institutions—seem to have hit home; as apparently did critical quotes from authoritative Marxists like Gramsci and Rodney Hilton. These may have combined to irk Ranajit Guha and to induce Dipesh Chakrabarty to clarify that the Subaltern Studies' approach to 'the thorny question of "consciousness"' centred on 'the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy.'¹¹⁴ Since he made this clarification, Chakrabarty has remained the subalternist most concerned with Marxism. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri, the dean of agrarian historians in India, called his 'invitation to a dialogue' 'lucid' and 'convincing,' again indicating that major scholars concerned with subaltern themes made room for Subaltern Studies in India without accepting it whole cloth.

The second set of essays, all published outside India, represents a

decade when readers incorporated Subaltern Studies into what I call, for lack of a better phrase, 'the global academy,' represented here by academic institutions in the English-reading world. Subaltern globalisation took off at the project's second point of departure. In 1986, Rosalind O'Hanlon discussed the project at a Cambridge workshop on popular culture, a field in which Subaltern Studies was rapidly embraced. Her reprinted essay first appeared in 1988, the same year that Edward Said introduced the project to 'the Western reader,'¹¹⁵ calling it a collection of post-colonial histories,¹¹⁶ to flag another new audience. Interestingly, O'Hanlon's essay, one of the first major review articles of Subaltern Studies outside India,¹¹⁷ appeared in *Modern Asian Studies*, the venerable house journal of the Cambridge School. Having said that 'it is widely accepted that the project of *Subaltern Studies* has provided the most provocative and interesting intervention in recent years,' she goes on to consider both the project and its critics. Thus putting insiders and outsiders into one Indian intellectual space, she locates the origin of their 'confused' dialogue in a shared Marxist heritage, which she implies imparted to 'the dichotomy between domination and resistance . . . all the marks of dominant discourse, in its insistence that resistance itself should necessarily take the virile form of a deliberate and violent onslaught.' She prefers Foucault's approach to power and echoes Scott's *Weapons of the weak* by exhorting historians 'to look for resistances . . . dispersed in fields that we do not conventionally associate with the political.' She thus points in the very direction that Subaltern Studies was moving in at the time, in tune with a broad academic shift into studies of everyday struggles, where gender assumed special significance—though women were then missing in Subaltern Studies, as she noted. O'Hanlon introduced the project to readers as a step in the right direction towards post-Marxist studies of popular culture that take power and resistance seriously.

A few years later, Jim Masselos had all six volumes edited by Ranajit Guha in front of him when he set out to criticise subalternity as a condition of rebellion and resistant victimisation. The subaltern seemed to him a stereotype of real subaltern people, though he valued

the Indian history in Subaltern Studies. Like O'Hanlon, he pitched his arguments to an audience of readers broader than Indian historians. Subaltern Studies called for such treatment, as other schools of Indian history had not. Masselos expressed discomfort with the idea that power and resistance inhabit every nook and cranny of social existence which had become familiar during Foucault's rising popularity. He calls 'the subaltern . . . a creation, a reification of historians,' which 'combines a polarised social category with the mentality of opposition,' and which he distinguishes from real subaltern people, in the real world, like those studied by French historians of mentalities, with whom he approvingly associates Sumit Sarkar. He rejects Subaltern Studies' theoretical identification of subordinate social status with mentalities of resistance and literary penchant for dramatising class opposition, both of which he traces to 'the activist world of the late 1960s and early 1970s.' What he dislikes in Subaltern Studies he also dislikes in Marx, Gramsci, and other Marxists. In reality, he says, subaltern 'acts of resistance link up with, interact with, intersect with what is happening around them.' In his view, any theory of subaltern autonomy would tend to erase real subalterns from history.

I would say that Subaltern Studies arrived in the global mainstream in 1993, after Ranajit Guha's alignment with Bernard S. Cohn had made the project's cultural critique of colonialism an elixir of new vitality for American-style cultural history. In 1992, heated exchanges followed a programmatic assertion by Gyan Prakash that Subaltern Studies had superseded older modes of history writing by pursuing post-colonial theory into the Indian past.¹¹⁸ Then controversy subsided. The project came to mean different but relatively uncontroversial things to different kinds of people (especially on the Leftish end of the political spectrum) in various disciplines. A boom also occurred in the number of international publications by core collaborators, including many reprints from *Subaltern Studies*; and more new authors contributed to *Subaltern Studies*, expanding its disciplinary range (as noticed by Brinda Bose). K. Sivaramakrishnan notes the dimming of the past at the start of his essay. He then uses both the

project and its critics to discuss the disciplinary intersection of history and anthropology, where Bernard S. Cohn had been a pioneer and Sivaramakrishnan represents a new generation of scholars who want to bring material concerns with the environment and political economy back into the picture.¹¹⁹ Frederick Cooper wrote his essay for a forum in the *American Historical Review*, which called for him to read Subaltern Studies in the context of African history. That assignment itself indicates an arrival of sorts, but Cooper makes Subaltern Studies work for him as a vehicle for discussing distinctive features of Africa's historical scholarship. Florencia Mallon did the same for Latin America. Thus academic contexts for global reading were becoming more diverse; and readings, more detached from the history of the project, Subalternity was becoming multicultural.

Henry Schwarz leads back to India, where the project remained firmly grounded; and in India, he points to a specific, literary context: cultural history as composed by Calcutta intellectuals. In the book chapter reprinted here, he considers Ranajit Guha as an author in and of Indian cultural history; and in this double context, he gives subalternity yet another new meaning, as metaphor. In Guha's 'Dominance without hegemony and its historiography,' this metaphor evokes a cultural imperative to recover a truly indigenous history, a native paradigm, 'which has perpetually lain unrecognised beneath the veneer of historiographical appropriation, whether by outright colonists or by well-intentioned inheritors of colonialist thought.' We can thus read the two-storey structure of subalternity as being essentially that of colonialism, because colonialism sustained and separated two paradigms, two modes of being, one Indian and one foreign. Between these two, the double consciousness of India's middle class was formed; and between these two, politically engaged intellectuals were torn—a formulation that recalls Ashis Nandy's influential book, *The intimate enemy: Loss and recovery of self under colonialism*, published in 1983.¹²⁰ Guha's prose thus becomes a literary moment inside a cultural predicament, and at the crossroads of Subaltern Studies in the mid-1980s, choices were made: the otherness of subalternity became a place on a bifurcated metaphorical map, a home for identity and

solidarity against the permanence of colonialism in the world of globalisation.

The last group of essays indicates that inside India other subalternities developed in other struggles. K. Balagopal is one of many scholar-activists who focus research on everyday subaltern politics. His essay considers events in the late 1980s in Adilabad district, in Andhra Pradesh, and in this context, he considers the work of David Hardiman, one subalternist who stayed close to the ground in his research on tribal groups and moneylenders in Gujarat.¹²¹ Even so, Balagopal finds that Hardiman's subaltern autonomy is unrealistic because it ignores leadership and the need for intellectual tools that cross elite-subaltern divisions. Naxalite communists remain prominent in Andhra agrarian politics, where conflict at the intersection of tribal self-assertion and state coercion recalls the work of Kathleen Gough and her colleagues in the 1970s rather than supporting ideas about autonomous subaltern 'moral outrage.' Vinay Bahl extends and elaborates basic elements of this critique on a world stage. Again she questions the utility of Subaltern Studies for scholars concerned with social justice. Her central target is cultural definitions of 'difference.' Women and Dalits are not 'different' from élites as cultural groups and thus in the same boat as other subaltern subjects; rather, she says, they participate politically in differences produced by material inequalities and collective activities that also differentiate subaltern groups. In addition, she argues for the need to locate subalternity inside the history of global capitalism. From this perspective, it becomes possible to reread 'colonial constructions' and 'élite paradigms' as ideological elements that do not describe structures of power even under colonialism; and to see power structures changing after independence, in the Cold War, and during recent globalisation, along with changes in world capitalism. In this view, approaching subalternity merely through a cultural critique of colonialism stultifies Indian history as it stymies subaltern politics.

The last reprint is by Sumit Sarkar, a turncoat subaltern who, like Ramachandra Guha (though they have little else in common), left the project to become its critic. Here he recounts its history and clarifies

reasons for his departure and dissent. I have tried to minimise redundancies in this introduction, so my account of the project ended where he puts his emphasis, at the time when Partha Chatterjee began to author its 'most lucid and comprehensive' statements of (what he calls) 'redirection.' He also pays special attention to contested meanings of Subaltern Studies in a time of rising Hindu majoritarianism (Hindutva), to which I allude briefly above. He describes immeasurably better than I or any other foreigner could ever do what it can feel like as an Indian scholar working in India to have India spoken for by Subaltern Studies so authoritatively in the wide world of globalisation.

To conclude, it is important to stress that the bulk of research on subaltern subjects has always escaped Subaltern Studies. Two recent books provide a good opportunity for controlled comparison of contemporary historical theory and method inside and outside the project as applied to the study of tribal peoples in Western India.¹²² They diverge especially on questions of autonomy, consciousness, and colonialism. They indicate rightly that historians outside the project tend to locate subalterns more carefully in changing environments that include economic, political, ecological, technological, and social history;¹²³ and in this perspective, they tend to see colonialism as a diverse, changing bundle of historical forces rather than as a comprehensive structure.¹²⁴ The borders between Subaltern Studies and its Others are vague, shifting, and contested, however, and there is much smuggling and border crossing, authorised and otherwise. Anthologies abound with essays from both sides. The very existence of an inside and outside is today questionable as the project diversifies internally and merges externally with comparative colonialism,¹²⁵ cultural studies,¹²⁶ historical anthropology,¹²⁷ and post-colonial studies.¹²⁸ Many authors use Subaltern Studies but also draw on other sources, and hybrid research is now most prominent in *Subaltern Studies*. Internally, the project continues to be creative, adaptive, and malleable. Dispersion and convergence, migration and assimilation, have made subalternity a moveable feast with jumbled tracks leading in many directions.

There is no one intellectual history of subalternity and never could

be, because it lives on local ground in disparate readings. Geographical patterns may exist, however, because, in the world of globalisation that makes Subaltern Studies what it is today, disparities have patterns. South Asian sites are extremely diverse and diverge along national lines. Readers in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka might tend to read Subaltern Studies as an Indian national project, not their own. South Asian readers far from big city universities and research centres might feel most distant from the global academy and might tend to value the project's global success inversely to its local credibility. But locality is shifting: Brinda Bose and K. Balagopal represent two equally real, totally different, and equally local South Asian sites, in cultural studies and human rights, respectively, which also have global dimensions. Readers outside South Asia would be more likely to encounter South Asia in media, abstractly. In the global academy, moreover, venerable ideas constitute India as a singular, unitary, South Asian space, so readers can imagine the national 'fragments' in Subaltern Studies quite literally, because debates in South Asia about multiple, shifting, contested nationalities do not interfere with this reading. Globally, India also has a theoretical location inside binary oppositions between West and East, First and Third World, Europe and Non-Europe, modernity and tradition, colonisers and colonised, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, privileged and downtrodden, and so on. Because India stands for South Asia in the second term in each binary pair, Subaltern Studies fit neatly into prevalent ideas about India's place in the world. Indian subalterns can thus represent India metonymically. Readers who identify strongly with the first term in each binary pair might tend to embrace the claim that someone from the other side can speak for it. Speaking for (Indian) subalternity as (Indian) subaltern could thus become a professional academic niche. We could expect Subaltern Studies to attain authority as an authentic voice of the post-colonial East in self-consciously Western academic localities which have been shaped intellectually by Orientalism, area studies, and Cold War anti-communism, where scholars mobilise to oppose colonial forms of knowledge with post-orientalist critical theory, global cultural studies, and post-Marxist, post-colonial literary criticism. Essays in this volume

and citations in the bibliography indicate many more reading possibilities. In years to come, we can expect a continued profusion of reading disparities in diverging local circumstances.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In this essay, the italicised phrase *Subaltern Studies* refers to the series of edited volumes that appear under the full title, *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian history and society* (vol. VIII is subtitled *Essays in honour of Ranajit Guha*), published by Oxford University Press, from 1982 until 1999. Without italics, *Subaltern Studies* refers to all the texts inside and outside *Subaltern Studies* by authors in *Subaltern Studies*. 'The project' refers to the organised activity of the core group in *Subaltern Studies*, primarily its Editorial Collective, to develop *Subaltern Studies* as a body of knowledge. In the footnotes, *Subaltern Studies* volumes are abbreviated as *SSI*, *SSII*, etc. Their contents are listed in Appendix 1. Abbreviated author-date references with asterisks—e.g. Cooper *1994—indicate reprints in this book; without asterisks, they refer to bibliographic citations in Appendix 2. Spellings have been standardised to Indian academic usage for the sake of uniformity.
2. For *SS* volumes 1–7, the editorial team included Shahid Amin (1–7), David Arnold (1–7), Gautam Bhadra (2–7), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2–7), Partha Chatterjee (1–7), Ranajit Guha (1–7), David Hardiman (1–7), Gyanendra Pandey (1–7), and Sumit Sarkar (3–7). Change in the Collective after 1989 is indicated in prefatory citations and also by the editorship of later *SS* volumes.
3. In the following list of books by editorial team members, the number of articles that they contributed to *SSVI* appears in parentheses: Shahid Amin (3): *Sugarcane and sugar in Gorakhpur: An inquiry into peasant production for capitalist enterprise in colonial India* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); David Arnold (4): *Police power and colonial rule, Madras, 1859–1947* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Gautam Bhadra (3); Dipesh Chakrabarty (3): *Rethinking working-class history: Bengal, 1890–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Partha Chatterjee (4): *Bengal, 1920–1947: The land question* (Calcutta: Published for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences by K.P. Bagchi, 1984), and *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Ranajit Guha (4): *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), and *An Indian historiography of India: A nineteenth-century*