

married sister. Her insight comes painfully on her "death day." Implicit is the suggestion that she has to be attuned to the wisdom she has left behind in her old homeland and must recover it through a painful struggle.

The concluding story in this collection, "Dusty Distance," is by Suniti Namjoshi, yet another diasporic writer. The desire of the Blue Donkey to be a writer is held in scorn by the male poet whose aggressiveness and magnificent confidence frighten her away. Next she encounters a Beautiful Lady who loves poetry but cannot understand "Blue Donkese" and although the Blue Donkey protests vehemently that she writes in English the Lady insists that their two worlds are very different—"What have a Lady and a donkey in common?" and the donkey turns away ruefully into the "dusty distance."

This fable serves as a comment on *The Inner Courtyard*. These voices—all Indian, all women, speaking in multitudinous tongues, articulating manifold experiences, might not belong to the Highway road of the "Poet" or the "immaculate woods" of the "Beautiful Lady". Yet—whether, they speak English or "Blue Donkese", these writers will not "sadly retrace" their steps into the "dusty distance." Instead, they will speak insistently *from* that distance, whether or not they are heeded.

<sup>1</sup>The Naxalite Movement was a peasant uprising in 1972 at Naxalbari in Bengal. It was supported by communist revolutionaries, and was followed by similar uprisings elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup>*Chauti Ka Jaura* is the dress worn on the fourth day of wedding celebrations. It was believed that during the preparation of the trousseau, if even one piece of the elaborate dress was cut inexactly, something would go wrong with the marriage.

## GENDER AND TRIBE: WOMEN, LAND AND FORESTS IN JHARKHAND

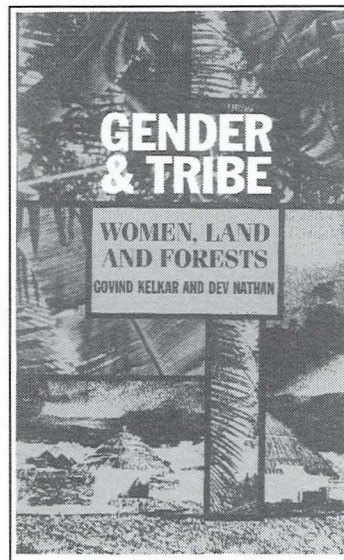
Govind Kelkar & Dev Nathan. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991.

by *Sujata Ramachandran*

This interesting study documents the gen-

der role transformations that occur in a tribal society, and the formation of patriarchy in the present context: the continuing loss of control over land and forests on the part of the Jharkhand *adivasis* (tribals). It further looks at their resistance to this change in the form of a political movement for a Jharkhand state. The authors contrast the greater political and management participation of women in foraging tribes (as the Birhor) with the lesser position of women in the mainly agriculturalist tribes (as Santhal, Ho, Munda and Oraon). Kelkar and Nathan argue that the introduction of settled agriculture within the tribal situation had led to the propertylessness of women, and ensured patrilocality and the political marginalization of tribal women.

They claim that the origins of male



dominance are connected with the struggle to control women's labour and the products of women's labour, not necessarily the labour of reproduction, but women's labour as a whole. Thus, the subordination of women precedes the formation of class society, in the conventional sense. The seeds of gender inequality have been present in *adivasi* society, although not in a developed form of full control over all aspects of a woman's existence as found in caste/class society. It is, however, in the interaction of Jharkhandi society with state formations of the plains—initially with the Mughal Raj and much more so with British colonialism—that this society has evolved in the direction of patriarchy. In this context, the evolution of patrilineal

rights and the rise of various taboos against women's participation in some key types of labour such as ploughing are discussed. The study also considers the growing phenomenon of witch hunting as an attempt to establish the authority of men. Gender inequality has gradually extended to general social life and the authors cite the example of the following joke to reflect prevalent attitudes. "Why do women use both hands to wash their face and men only one?" The answer is, "Because women have two lords, singabonga and their husbands."

As yet, women in these tribes have not been completely devalued. The alienation of women's labour within the family is still partial, owing to the continuation of forms of communal property in land, the importance of gathering, and women's control over consumption and income. However, further development along the same patriarchal lines, the introduction of capitalism, and the rapid destruction of natural resources in the Jharkhand region would destroy the existing rights of the *adivasi* women and result in a situation no different from that which comes about in "mainstream" society. The authors conclude that if the ecological balance of the region is to be maintained and the patriarchal intent checked, then economic and other activities have to be organized on the basis of the community, and land rights given to individual women, as well as men, through allocation of means of production.

## WESTERN WOMEN AND IMPERIALISM: COMPLICITY AND RESISTANCE

Edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992

by *Davina Bhandar*

*Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, is a diverse collection of essays detailing the

colonial experiences and relationships of *western* women in European colonies during the middle to late nineteenth century. Because this collection of essays is quite various, I will attempt merely to provide general impressions of the collection on the whole, rather than commenting on specific debates and issues.

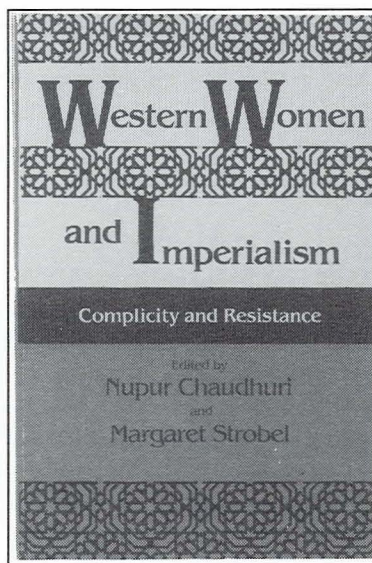
In the introduction to the essays, the editors begin by stating that the collection focuses on the “interactions between gender, race and class.” Yet, in my reading, it is exactly this naturalized or unproblematical use of the terms of “gender, race and class” that provides me with my first opportunity to challenge criticism based on such first premises, and thus provides me with a point of intervention into this collection.

My fundamental point of contention is that the process through which the relationships between gender, race and class are analyzed is not made explicit. That is, the methodology underlying the analysis of the colonial relationships between “western” women and colonized subjects is one that is not fully explored in many of the essays. This lack of a clear methodological perspective leaves many of the essays devoid of a critical strength that would have been necessary in order to fulfil the laudable purpose outlined in the introduction of the collection. According to the introduction, the essays “juxtapose feminists and social reformers of varying stripes and pro-imperialist women of different levels of consciousness and thereby offer the reader many important insights into the workings of race and class ideologies within imperialism.”

As a student who is interested in both anti-imperialism and feminism, I have found it difficult to discover much work that involves an integrated approach to these issues. While it is true that within the past ten to fifteen years there has been a growing number of publications spotlighting the category of imperialism and feminist studies, it is also true that the construction and discourse of race is often—paradoxically—left intact. In this collection, I found that the lack of a critical examination of the power of colonialism, whether male or female, in relation to the histories which are presented as *verité* or authentic, was very problematic. I found that the category of “woman” remained unproblematically “white” due to the fail-

ure to cast a critical eye towards the construction of race through the articulation of this history. That is, the notions of “western,” “female,” and “other” have once again remained entrenched as perfectly organic and theoretically operant terms. Instead I was left wondering what the underlying politics of such a re-presentation of colonization actually sought. In present academic and political circles where “voices of multiplicity” are making some intervention, I find this representation of a “woman’s” history to be disappointing and dangerous.

In conclusion, I would have to reiterate that although the articulation of difference amongst the western colonizer is the purpose of this project, the result of the homogenization or outright silencing of the “other” colonized subject, which is



implicitly a part of this process, only reestablishes imperial structures of power. I also feel that any critical project of imperialism and gender must do more than simply analyze the “difference” between male and female “white” authority; it should seek to examine this fundamental category of “white” as a point of beginning.

## WE WERE MAKING HISTORY: LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN IN THE TELANGANA PEOPLE’S STRUGGLE

Stree Shakti Shanghatana. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.

by Shirin Kudchedkar

The whole place was surrounded by hundreds of military police.... All the women were whispering loudly—she is going to be arrested; she fed the communists. So I left with the clothes I was wearing.... I had to go into the forests.... Over there was a madiga (untouchable caste) house.... I jumped across the wall and hid in the niche where the cowdung cakes lay.... In the evening again Razakars (fundamentalist para-military forces in the Nizam’s time) came.... The madiga said that bitch is not in this house or even in this village—and all the time I was hiding in his very house.... Then the squad came and I left with them.

Dudala Salamma, whose account is quoted above, is one of the women who ‘were making history’ through their participation in the peasant movement in Telangana, the Telugu-speaking area of the former Hyderabad State in South India, now part of Andhra Pradesh. A team of six women belonging to the women’s organization, Stree Shakti Sanghatana interviewed women who had taken part in this struggle—peasant women in remote forest villages, middle class women, even some women born in landlords’ families—and used sixteen of the interviews to make this book.

The introduction provides a background to the story, detailing the land ownership system in the princely state of Hyderabad, the forms of oppression—forced labour, bonded labour, the feudal right of the first night—and the stages of the people’s movement. Via the nationalist movement, the women’s movement and the communist movement, the women were led to join the anti-landlord struggle. After Independence, the Communist Party sought to bring about a revolution through armed