



## Session 1: Discussion Highlights

**TAKAO TAKAHARA:** I would like to thank the discussants for their clarifying comments and questions. Before opening the floor for more exchanges among us, I would like to have Professor Sarkar respond to these specific comments and questions.

**TANIKA SARKAR:** I am very grateful to my extremely distinguished discussants for the very important questions and the queries they have raised. I cannot possibly take on all of them, maybe in the larger discussion, some of them will come back, and especially the question about the public sphere. I see Dr. Francesca Orsini here, who has just published a really major work on the development of the public sphere in Hindi speaking events, so some of the responses could also perhaps at some stage come from her.

As for Professor Nakazato's questions, I'll just take up some of the points you have raised, the very important points you have raised. No, there is no question of going back, recuperating the old left nationalist voice if only for the fact that our generation, we cut our critical teeth so to speak. Not on the right but on the left nationalist school of historiography, there was so many complacences, so much lack of self-reflexivity in their endeavour. Although there were attempts, there was a certain intrusiveness, a certain exercise of critical reason, a certain vision of benign nationalism, which we, at that point in time, did not sufficiently acknowledge, and that we are desperate to recuperate politically, at least if not historiographically, right now. We grew up with visions of a transformed society, a revolutionized society. And now we are simply struggling to retain our grasp over very minimal, basic bourgeois liberal values of universal citizenship rights. And even this seems too much to have, to retain, to possess. So the critique of the old left nationalist is sometimes difficult to recapitulate and recall, to have a total recall, but I do remember that one spent a year of one's life before the critique of later

Subaltern Studies developed.

And I would say that post-structuralism especially has done some great service by reminding us about the tentative and always contingent nature of our accounts, especially the literal aspects of historical representation by problematizing the whole order of representation, claims to representation, by a kind of a very important critique, although that did not just come from post-structuralism, it came from Althusser and other sources of a certain class empiricism, that a history of the past is the past itself, or the documents or sources of the past contain the real in themselves. That kind of, you know, sort of innocence, we cannot have or cannot afford to have anymore, and that is something that we do well to bid a good-bye to and to acknowledge the absolutely contingent open-ended flexural nature of our exercise.

The new interest in the public sphere, as I see it, is a contradictory space which allows for a great deal of democratization of discussion. It allows for an articulation of counter norms and at the same time through its very processes it sharpens and hardens mutual divisions to an unprecedented degree. Just as gender debates were going on, so were doctrinal debates as if they were doctrinal debates among Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in the process of which everyone had to regard the other as an antagonistic person, antagonistic being, and take up a stand accordingly. And that contradictory nature of the public sphere corresponds to the contradictory nature of modernity.

And my critique of Ashis Nandy and the later Subaltern Studies, or some aspects of later Subaltern Studies comes from the fact that the contradictoriness is forgotten. And we move from a kind of an oversimplified liberal notion of the tortures of Indian Renaissance to an equally oversimplified monolithic view of a complete regress under colonialism, a complete loss of self. And as I tried to argue rather controversially at the end of the paper, a certain loss of self, or a certain loosening of the anchored, embedded self is perhaps necessary to address issues of power, whether they would be of class power or caste power or gender power. So the public sphere was a

space where questions of power were articulated as never before. And through the debates, guardians of social power also consolidated their counter arguments, and rehearsed their extremely hardened stances.

I do not see the debates as about universal, ethical values as a given and finalized set of opinions that the colonial state somehow transmits and mediates and gives over to the Indians. I see both being actually, you know, growing up and coming into being. Both Hindu social norms, prescriptions and some notion of universalizability of certain ethical standards are all being constructed through debates in the public sphere. And as for the rise of Hindu nationalism, I do have a problem with Hindu nationalism because we use it about the Hindu Right today as much as we use it about the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the two are quite different. And nor would I at all associate Hinduism as a faith with either Hindu nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or with what the Hindu Right does.

We have, and I do not exaggerate, ethnic cleansing of minorities, such as Christians and Muslims, going on in Gujarat, which is a state much larger than any European state. It is systematically going on and we try to forget it as much as the concentration camps in the cities were forgotten, or were attempted to be forgotten. But at the same time, I think in the whole process Hinduism as a rich complex faith would be a diverse casualty in the hands of the Hindu Right because they are adding on features, cannibalistic features. They were transforming this complex religion into a total, you know, sort of revenge and sacrifice, human sacrifice laden sort of ideology that it never used to be, though I do not hold any particular grief for Hinduism or any other religion. So I think these distinctions are important and should be kept in mind.

Why is gender a field of the exercise of critical reason unlike in Europe? This is a particularly important question which requires a large range of answers, but one of the answers is, because we had a colonized situation here in which there was very little space left immediately available for transformation within Indian society. The British made all the rules where economic relations were concerned, and where their political administrative

structures of power were concerned. So the self, the family, and domestic regulations were one space, which were given over to self-governance quite explicitly, so this was the field of the exercise of reason.

The other was, because India was colonized, self-determination emerged very early on as the critique of colonialism, as the major form of critique of colonialism. And that, as I said at the beginning, confronted the early nationalists with a huge problem that you know, how can you ask for self-determination in the public sphere if you do not allow it within the family. Also towards the end of the century, gender questions and the retreat of the exercise of critical reason from this sphere were entangled with certain challenges to class-caste power, which were getting more and more strident. So it was in, you know, the earlier period that the direct challenges or threats to class-caste power were not that overt or explicit.

For Professor Takenaka's very important points, I am sure I am leaving out much of value in your discussion and in her discussion. Colonial self-image as transformative, as modernizing, is something that was not quite so direct, because over the *sati* (Suttee) issue we find even James Mill who wrote an extremely racist history of India, the great utilitarian *guru*, Bentham, or the classically reformist Governor-General Bentinck, all asserting that they did not want a legal change, unless they found Hindu scripture sanctioning it. And Bentinck said "I want to rule like a Hindu prince, I do not want to rule as a modern prince," so to speak.

So there was no change of scripture that is allowed, even for the missionaries, and that is quite interesting because on the one hand the missionaries wanted to argue that Hinduism was a corrupt and savage primitive religion, on the other hand, they wanted *sati* to go. So they were themselves actually supporting arguments which say that *sati* is not allowed by scripture. So in a sense, their reformism was actually acting against their evangelical impulse because they were in a sense whitewashing Hindu scripture in order to get the Suttee laws passed. Both sides using women's issues to ascribe themselves to a progressive self-image. I think we need to go away a very little from personal intentions or gender ideological class

interests etc., because they were refracted through a lot of unintended, unimagined, unimaginable consequences. They were over-determined all the time. They were created by extremely multiple and contradictory changes, and everyone wanted to appear. And also I hate to do this being a feminist, but the liberal reformers, the male liberal reformers, were not working for self-empowerment, they were actually questioning masculine privileges to an extent never done before in our history, or other histories. So I think that ought to be kept in mind, you know, that their progressive image costed them something.

*Sati* is an issue in contemporary India. It might grow into a bigger issue. When Roop Kanwar's burning to death, and that was by every account a forced death, you know, there was no question of consent there because this girl, an 18 year old girl, had ran away from her husband a couple of times. And when she was burned, two and a half lakhs of people came out to watch the burning and later to erect a *sati* temple. And up to now the perpetrators of that incident have not been punished. So it might grow, and the valorisation of *sati* as an ideal is growing. At the same time you know, one should not underestimate the scope of *sati* in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were about a little less than a thousand *satis* a year and that number was growing. That is why the colonial state, sort of, ultimately pushed through a law. It dragged its feet. I would not agree that it was a moderator. It was a most reluctant, unwilling facilitator under great pressure. It became a facilitator under great internal pressure. And there were only these three laws that they sort of passed. There was so much that the reformers were talking about which they would not touch.

And on the whole I stick to my opinion, that there was a compact between religious orthodoxies within India and the colonial state. So the *sati* was growing and you know girls of eight to women of 85 were being sacrificed, but it was never even compulsive. So if it was not compulsory, then what was its point? If it was regarded as something extraordinary to which very few women would commit, then what was it all about? And I think it was a kind of sanction to an absolute, to relations of most absolute domination and subordination not only exemplified in gender relations but having wider

repercussions. Because if a widow burns herself willingly for a dead husband, what can she not do for a living husband? You know, it is the absolute sanction there. But it has wider repercussions because through the spectacle of *sati*, the most extreme and absolute of power relations are trans-valued as aesthetic principles, as principles of pleasure. So you subscribe or you submit to power out of love. And this is, you know, the sort of, the most extreme sanctioning of power that can be imagined, where power is translated as love. And *sati* does that. And as I said, it has implications beyond gender, and I am sorry I left out, I had to leave out a lot of valuable suggestions and criticisms.

**TAKAHARA:** Thank you Professor Sarkar. I hope we have time to come back to you again. I would like at this point open the floor to questions. So who would like to start?

**FRANCESCA ORSINI (Cambridge University):** Maybe I could contribute to Professor Nakazato's question about why the public sphere is a kind of attractive, useful, but also tricky concept to work with. And I think one could not deny that in fact one is taking it now, despite the fact that political leadership needed it, despite the fact that the book of Habermas on European public sphere came out 30 years ago, if not by chance.

And I would definitely support everything that Professor Sarkar has said about the kind of interest and usefulness of the mode of space that is public, with people from different backgrounds, different persuasions, who have to come to terms both with each other and also with the principle of publicity itself. Once you are called into question publicly, you cannot respond but publicly. On the other hand, I think it useful to think of the pitfalls of the problems of the difficulties that involved Indians who were believing or subscribing to a kind of public sphere of vision in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which I studied. At the same time, the question of institution poses two questions. One is the vision of universal institutions that the public sphere carries, that theoretically everybody can participate. If you want to publish a newspaper, or if you write a book, nobody is going to stop you. And then, of course, there is the question of actual exclusion. A vision of universal inclusion should not blind us from seeing actual exclusion.

Another striking feature of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in India was a great influence in the public sphere by writing. They thought that by writing books, by writing articles, by bringing out newspapers, they could have a power. It is very striking that almost every major writer of the nationalist period did bring out a newspaper or worked for one. So clearly, writing was not just a question of individual set of expression, but was also for participation as well as influence in the public sphere. But this promise of influence could be quite illusionary, in the sense of other powers at work. The limit of publishing newspapers, teaching or writing books was tended to be forgotten.

This, in my study, leads to a question of institution. Creating or working an institution is crucial for transmission or furthering information. Today you have been in control of the institutions of teaching and the institutional control is being taken away in an aggressive way. The question of institution leads to other question: the actual use of institution itself, like teaching history. You can have a proper textbook for school. Let me say about nationalism and the use of history. Discourse and slogans of patriotism and heroism were needed for everybody during the time of war and anti-colonial movements. Most radical voices of writers of nationalist movements came close to hate internationalism or secularism. Nobody was free from communalism and patriotism. When the war ended or the anti-colonial movements were over, the discourse of terrorism and revivalism came out of the institutional framework, but this comes up again as the right wing emerges.

**SARKAR:** Thank you very much. I agree with your point about the checks on the democratization of the public sphere, and in a country like India with very poor, largely illiterate population, the checks were conditioned by class and very squarely so. It is not by gender, and not so much even by caste, because certainly by the end of the century there was a flourishing body of “low caste” literature coming out here, but certainly by class. But certain aspects of the public sphere like the theatre, these were, you know, available. And what is very interesting is that it is not as if the audience was mute, because their reactions were picked up and reported by the newspapers, especially the less privileged audiences and how they reacted to the plays. And the audience’s

reactions crucially determined the reception of the plays and change of taste and fashion in public theatre, something that great playwrights bemoaned all the time. So there were certain aspects of the public sphere which were more open than others.

Institutional power of the left versus the right, you know, the left never ruled the country, so it was the Congress. And when the Congress was in power, before the emergence of the right, the greatest enemy of the left was the Congress, which is something very difficult to recall again but that was so. The Congress gave a certain amount of institutional power to certain historians, but not all left historians were equally privileged. At the same time, there were very important, great historians of the right like R. C. Majumdar, like K. M. Munshi, who were extremely important. Most of the archaeologists were very, very strong Hindu nationalists, and historians on ancient civilization like Altekar and so on. So there were lots of very right-wing historians who were nonetheless professionally good historians, successful historians who never lost their institutional space. So not all of the left was represented in the so-called left phase. The textbooks that were produced under some kind of leftist influence were more nationalist than left, I would argue. They were never leftist textbooks. And secondly the right was not completely excluded, and rightly so.

The exclusion was now complete, but worse than that, it was now being openly said that professional qualifications or criteria should not matter. You know, now the textbooks were to be submitted to heads of religious establishments for betting. So that was one minor difference. Yes, patriotic closures were there, and perhaps certain closures were empowering. Certain kinds of blocking of self-questioning were empowering, and the myth of the ancient glorious Hindu age, etc. was necessary when the whole of Indian culture was stigmatised by the colonial state. But when it comes to writing, and I am now sort of speaking in a somewhat elitist voice when it comes to professional history writing, I think these were constraints, and disciplinary constraints, again a very elitist conception, but we cannot take leave of them. That is why I began the presentation with the conflicts sometimes that arise between empathy and social commitments, and professional commitments. I



think these are more or less responses toward your questions. Thank you.

**RIHO ISAKA (The University of Tokyo):** I would like to ask about division between morality and legality, especially in a long term. I wonder if the 19<sup>th</sup> century movements to establish laws had some impact on morality, and if such movements could influence the human rights condition even with weak laws. Then, I would like to ask a question on how to write history. Of course, you can emphasize contradictions in movements, such that leaders of the movements were elite and they just wanted to protect their interests. But at the same time, they were conscious of social reform and so on. I think we should see the latter point, too. Otherwise, with too much emphasis on contradictions, it might become quite confusing for us to see the direction of history, for example, 'History of India'. How can we overcome this difficulty?

**TOSHIE AWAYA (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies):** I would like to go back to the issue of the age of consent for marriage controversy. I read materials on a debate on this theme in 1891 and it was embarrassingly naked debate on sex, sexual organs and sexual chastity, etc. To our contemporary mind, it is too straightforward, and not decent. I was always wondering why. The debaters were intellectuals, foreigners and reformers, who should try to give reasonable explanations for their argument. I think that such a debate was clearly in the public sphere. These figures, however, talked more from self-conviction, self-performance and self-encouragement rather than persuading others. That was difficult for me to understand.

**TAKAHARA:** Thank you very much, and Professor Sarkar, please respond, but briefly.

**SARKAR:** Thank you, Riho. What does this fracture between morality and legality do, and what impact does it have on morality? As you know, religion makes all the laws before for domestic regulations. Debates actually force unethical self-justification. It is not enough to say that *Manu* prescribes, or that the widows have it so. It has to be amplified, so I think they rendered morality post-conventional, that is, command is not enough. And you have to devise arguments based on some ethical standard and the division of fracture

is important. It is not as if laws are ethically neutral. They are referring to certain other standards. They are also referring to religious reinterpretations. But they are arguing on certain ethical standards which are universalizable. So it is a kind of an interface between two sets of ethical confederations, which is important. I do not see it as something to be pessimistic about, because all the ethical norms need not come from religion or religious sources.

Yes, it is very important to remember the non–elite side. Probably they require some enabling narratives. And I am sorry, but I have sort of missed the drift of the question. I think you were making a point between the non–elite leadership of histories and their sort of floundering amidst a mass of contradictory historical narratives, which might be truer to the profession but confusing. And it is a very genuine question and I do not really know the answer to that. And every historian probably writes simultaneously for two levels within even the same book, and problematizes the somewhat simplified conclusions as he or she goes along, leaving a space open for the questioning of her or his very own conclusions. I do not know, what is the answer and how one gets off from one set of simplifications slightly more, but somewhere we have to begin with a notion of history which is over–determined, dialectical and hence confusing. There is no getting away from that.

Dr. Awaya, I think that is a very important and interesting point – the embarrassingly, horrifically explicit nature of debates in the public sphere. And we always say that the Indian intellectuals were made over by Victorian morality and Puritanism, and perhaps that is not as complete as we like to believe. Public vocabulary is not so sanitised. And I was quite surprised to see that even an extremely ethereal sort of a writer like Rabindranath Tagor was explicit when it came to the age of consent debate. One reason is that it is unavoidable, because it relates to the notion of the right development of the girl’s sexual organs, to when cohabitation can occur without serious damage to herself. So those clinical details are unavoidable. Secondly, I think that the counterarguments were based on this ritual notion of *Garbadhan* ceremony, on one of the ten lifecycle rites. And if the girl has to cohabit with her husband before or as soon as puberty set in, or at the very moment puberty sets in, and

if she has not been married off before that, then there is no husband to cohabit with. And the *Shastra* (ancient texts of religious norms and laws in India) say that her womb was then impure, and her children cannot make ancestral offerings. And once you allow marriage in the pre-pubertal phase, and puberty sets in very early in Bengal, how then do you absolutely legislate against cohabitation without a legislative ban against it?

And that brings us to the question of the political weight put on chastity, as you know. One is that the conservatives are saying we are the sons of chaste women, indicating also that their mothers got married at the ritually pure age. And they have therefore the right to make ancestral offerings. They are not making polluted offerings. Secondly, chastity, you are quite right to point out it, had tremendous political weight in the 19<sup>th</sup> century debates, because that was the great distinction between Hindus and everybody else, that Hindu women were required to be more chaste than other women. You know there is no remarriage. There is no, you know, no way of remarrying even after the husband is dead. There is no question of remarrying even if the marriage has not been consummated. So I think in other religious systems, that exact kind of weight on chastity, on the woman's absolute chastity is not there, normatively speaking. And the Hindu nationalists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century used this great distinction to put forward a greater moral claim to self-governance. So it was a more political weight that went beyond domesticity, and that linked up with nationalist concerns.

**TAKAHARA:** Thank you very much for being very brief. We are already over the expected time. I am sorry but let us close now. I would like to thank our speaker and the discussants for their very educative and interesting inputs to our symposium. Could we have a round of applause?