

# Nations and Silences: Specters of Subaltern Space

ŠARŪNAS PAUNKSNIS

*Vytautas Magnus University*

**Abstract.** *This article analyzes the initial steps in nationalist project in India – the creation of national space and time, which help to lay foundations of a Nation. What is being analyzed here in the case of India prior the independence, and the space which is not a traditional one, but not modern either. This space is displaced from the active nationalist discourse, but at the same time it is needed on the unconscious level. Homi K. Bhabha's Third space theory can help grasping the spatial configurations of nationalist space, and the effects of nationalist imagination on the subaltern, provided that such space is not a hybrid one. It can be called a non-space, located in no-time. Deepa Mehta's film "Water" is taken as providing a critique of nationalist subalternization of society. The aim of the article is to show the subalternization process as on the one hand necessary for the forging of a nation, and on the other – as demonstrating the ambivalence of this ideology in the face of idealism and reality. The article shows how nationalism encodes the past and gives roles to its subject, especially the subaltern subjects. In analyzing this initial step of nationalism it is possible to create a strategy for the critique of this deeply ambiguous ideology.*

**Keywords:** *nationalism, the subaltern, Third space, Deepa Mehta, India.*

**Raktažodžiai:** *nacionalizmas, subalternas, Trečioji erdvė, Deepa Mehta, Indija.*

## Introduction

Although nationalism has the supposed emancipation embedded in its discourse and understanding from the very beginning, this emancipation means nothing more than emancipation of a certain class or ethnic group by elevating it into a superior position while vilifying, denigrating, and racializing the rest of what comes to be known as "Nation." The divisions between "good" and "bad" nationalisms also have deep problems and serious limitations. Does a "good" one become a "bad" one? If so, how? How do we know that a celebrated "good" nationalism is not a "bad" one in disguise? Here theory reaches a dead-end where only a variety of speculations can be possible. McClintock's (1995, 352) description is illuminating in this case: "all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous – dangerous not in Eric Hobsbawm's sense of

having to be opposed, but in a sense that they represent relations to political power and to technologies of violence.”

This essay is not concerned with the technologies of violence – something that is coded in the ideology of nationalism and comes later on in its development, but the very initial discourse of nationalism, when the ideology is trying to distill its vision out of many possible options. One of the key ingredients for nationalism is the formation of a certain space that is outside its discourse, but provides a fundamental ground for constructing a new nation on something that becomes a “tradition.” Building upon Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the Third Space, this article assumes that this space is already a conscious space where the technologies of violence can be implemented. The non-space in this article is something that comes before it – a space that can be many things at the same time – a repository of nation’s past, a space that needs to be saved and civilized, so that all the subjects enjoy pleasures of a modern and sophisticated life.

The aim of this article is to trace the emergence of the repressed space into a nationalist space, in order to demonstrate both the tragic consequences of this act for the emergent, and the incapability of nationalism to accommodate the emergent into its discourse.

India-born Canadian film director Deepa Mehta has traced the ambiguities of nationalism in her work. This essay deals with her film “Water,” which perfectly reconstructs and exposes this early phase of nationalist ideology, basing itself on a life of a subaltern, of a forgotten, of a woman, and on a space that is nowhere, but trying to be part of the emancipation only to learn the cynicism of it.

## Deepa Mehta’s “Water”: Text and Context

First of all I would like to distance myself from the historical perspectives of widow remarriage debate while analyzing this film. Though the film indeed depicts the life of widows in pre-independence India, going into the arguments pro et contra in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, and contemporary postcolonial readings through the feminist perspective is not my aim.

However, a slight touching upon historical matters is inevitable. Whatever the case may be, historical context for me is but a background, a sort of canvas on which I am putting my argument. My reading of the film, and the context are different from what the conventional reading might be.

Mehta’s “Water” introduces us to troubled characters that can be viewed as representing certain ideas and ideologies. The story focuses on lives of women in a widow ashram<sup>1</sup>, and their hapless existence. As I will explain later in the

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<sup>1</sup> Though too often translated as “monastery,” “ashram” here has a meaning more of an “asylum.”

text, the ashram itself functions as a symptom of the emergence of the duality of nationalism – a strive for emancipation through the construction of a *pastness* as a pre-condition for both the national consciousness, and the justification of nationalism as such.

In the ashram we have an eight-year old child-widow Chuyia (Sarala Kariyawasam), who, after the death of her elderly husband, is taken to the ashram by her father. Chuyia befriends Kalyani (Lisa Ray), another widow who spends her days at the ashram, and during the nights is forced by the head of the ashram Madhumati (Manorama) to work as a prostitute with the pretext of “financial support” for the running of the ashram. And then there is Narayan (John Abraham), a student, a son of a wealthy landowner, and a follower of Gandhi. Narayan accidentally encounters Chuyia and Kalyani, befriends them, and falls in love with Kalyani.

And though on the surface the film might be perceived as a critique of austere Hindu orthodoxy that in fact masks exploitation of women based on entirely material objectives, deep inside it presents us with distorted imagination, a false hope and uncovers the ambiguity of beliefs in a possible emancipation, modern values and generalized, simplified nationalism. Having in mind that chronologically this is the departure point for Mehta, it presents a critique of nationalist imagination, and its positioning of a woman, as flawed and distorted from the beginning, but with a hope that change is on the way – as we can see in the last scene of the film, where Chuyia, as a symbol of a new India, is given to the followers of Gandhi at the railway station so they could take her away. A metaphorical “taking away” from the stubborn past into a bright future, into a sort of heaven of freedom, into which India is about to awake.

Kalyani and her affair with Narayan should be considered as a central narrative. Kalyani here is, on one hand, a typical victimized woman without a voice that needs to be saved, but, on the other hand, after meeting Narayan, she gets caught in an in-between space – not between tradition (read: oppression) and modernity (read: liberation) as conflicting opposites, but in a space where the re-constructed past and equally ambivalent present in the process of construction overlap. It is not a hybrid space, at least not in a conventional understanding, and not yet. Although it is a kind of Bhabha’s Third Space of enunciation, here it is used in a different sense, and I will elaborate on this shortly. The whole ashram is functioning in this space. Nationalism steps in to place the Woman on a solid ground of its march towards emancipation and liberation, succeeding only in its own logic that dictates a perpetual need of victims that could be saved not for the benefit of the victims, but for the internal legitimization and self-justification of a modern state as such. On the other hand, we have real women and real problems, and for that reason I will not reduce the whole discourse to philosophical elaborations on the meaning of ashram and its place in the nationalist discourse. Though it is a major topic, we must not forget the other side of the story, a rather main side of the

story, that is, the story of a woman, for whom the ashram is only an ashram, and a hope to escape it once and for all is not a political statement, but deeply personal affair.

## Ashram as a Non-Space in No-Time

The means employed to wage a successful struggle are the internal structures for resistance, where culture comes as the most important one. Fanon has demonstrated this very well both in terms of general psychology of anti-colonial struggle, and in terms of the so-called “women’s question” (Fanon 2000, 206–248; 1994, 35–68). Culture and the cultural revivalism come to define a nation in the process of creation. The problem of the invention of the past as a homogenous time, and its employment for the formation of national consciousness is disrupted in what Bhabha calls the space of enunciation (Bhabha 1994, 55). Precisely here the Past breaks-off as something natural and continuous, and it is possible to see another space, a Third Space. Let me put it into an example. Narayan’s arrival disrupts the defined and orderly space of ashram. By not even setting a foot into the house for the whole duration of the film, Narayan, and most importantly the ideas that are transmitted *through* Narayan – namely widow remarriage – makes Kalyani want to transgress the prescribed eternal widowhood as a definition of a woman whose husband is dead this way challenging not only the concepts of purity and devotion, but the very structure of society. In addition, the transmission of ideas makes Shakuntala (Seema Biswas) question the widowhood, and shatters a harsh but comfortable life of Madhumati who is embedded in widowhood to the extent that all questioning and all change whatsoever is not in her interest. At the beginning of the film the ashram does not exist in the Past or the Present – it is located in a *no-time*, a kind of a temporal limbo. The only reference to the period portrayed we get is a small heading at the start of the film, indicating that it is indeed 1938. But only with the arrival of Narayan we get the feeling of time from his talks on Gandhi and passive resistance with his friend Rabindra, a “brown Englishman,” and a very symbolic hanging of a photo of Gandhi on his wall. But in what kind of time Narayan is located and most importantly – into what time does he locate the ashram and its widows?

Ashram functions, as I said, in a *no-time* – not a transitional time – but a time that is a by-product of the debate on widow remarriage, the rise of nationalism and the ambivalent anti-colonial struggle that at the same time manages to have women at the center of discourse, and also marginalized and forgotten in a dark unnamed lane of massive consolidation of a new consciousness. It is not yet a Third Space. In ashram nothing overlaps, there is no lack or partiality simply because the ashram has not yet arrived to this Space. This overlapping is precisely where Narayan is located. But at the same time it would

be wrong to assume that the ashram is in any fixed space at all – the very fact that at the beginning of the film there is no sense of time in the ashram suggests that it is in the limbo, in the transitional moment, and whatever happens to it in the future, it would be a random positioning, not influenced in any way by any conscious act or enunciation. The “*I want*” cannot be considered here as a possible option, as we shall see.

The only link the ashram has with the outside world, more precisely, the only link Madhumati has with the outside world is a hijra Gulabi (Raghuvir Yadav)<sup>2</sup>, who’s sole job is to take Kalyani across the river to the mansions of rich men for prostitution. By “link with the outside world” I do not mean that the widows are locked up – they can go out into town, of course. The link here means the experience of the reality of India, a kind of window from the temporal and spatial limbo in which the ashram is located. In an interesting scene Gulabi tells Madhumati about Gandhi, and Madhumati does not even know who he is, she asks “is that a new client?” Obviously, not each and every person in India had to know about Gandhi, and in a normal case it would not be surprising, but here we deal with symbols, and such ignorance is not just accidental, it shows the ashram’s dislocation not so much from the material reality, but from the process of enunciation. Again, the ashram is not locked in the past – it was taken to the sideways and forgotten there, as it was more convenient this way. Gradually it became a repository of things both desired and unwanted with a hope that they would stay there forever, and would not come back haunting the living – something Mehta did with this film. The ambivalence of ashram lies in its *unwantedness* and a desire-through-necessity for it. It is unwanted in a sense that the Past must form a basis for a modern nation – its active participation would have a disruptive impact on the living. In a way, in a double-time, the modern is masked with the archaic, and the emergence of the archaic, which is a construct having little to do with organic history, into modern reality could not contribute to the construction of (modern) national consciousness. *Its being in the background and its unconscious presence is where the nation’s soul dwells.* The second point, it is desired because it is a place *where the nation’s soul dwells*, and for that reason it has to be contained.

The ashram, not so much the whole film, marks the emergence from the limbo of those forgotten, of bodies and selves that come haunting those who moved on in a way of convenience. The emergence of the ashram as a nervous tick on the face of self-consolidating nation marks the appearance of the *undesired* on the scene, and its inclusion in a kind of Third Space. Whatever happened afterwards was a variety of negotiations culminating *elsewhere*, in exile, with a solution that was not so much a solution, but exposal of a problem, and the *problem’s* wish to be admitted as a rightful player of reality that was being tried to deny at all cost. What is necessary to understand is the transition from *nothingness* into the Third Space. Here we have to deal with Narayan,

<sup>2</sup> Hijra – transsexual.

the change he brings, the stepping out of Kalyani, and her attempt to *exist* as *speaking* out her desires.

The sureness of Narayan and his firm position of a rightful one is what draw attention first. His friend Rabindra, after listening to Narayan's patriotic *Gandhian* remarks exclaims that 'romantics make terrible nationalists.' This is a very interesting point, as without romanticism, without romanticizing the past nationalism would not be possible, provided we understand nationalism in its own terms. It is precisely nationalist idealism that drives Narayan to develop a desire for Kalyani-the-widow. Here it is very wrong to believe that emancipation is something that defines nationalism – on the contrary. Narayan embodies Gandhi's and Tagore's type of nationalism – non-violent, non-chauvinist, non-racist nationalism. However, Narayan exists as long as there is Kalyani, and here I'm not talking about some kind of romanticism. Kalyani is both an object of desire in terms of saving her, and both pre-condition and by-product of Narayan, if we see Narayan as Gandhi, Narayan as the sole messenger of nationalism in the space the film is creating. Bhabha (1990, 294) remarks on "...the awkward question of disjunctive representation of the social, in this double-time of the nation," and says that "It is indeed only in the disjunctive time of nation's modernity – as a knowledge disjunct between political rationality and its impasse, between the shreds and patches of cultural signification and the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy – that the question of nation as narration come to be posed."

The "widowness" as a battleground of colonial modernity, of emerging "brown Englishmen" was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century issue – the very fact of ashram's dislocation proves that it worked as an idea for a while only to be deposited out of sight. Kalyani's symbolic presence in the narrative unmasks the workings of nationalism – its search for a signifier of national archaic, its elevation to the center of the discourse, and subsequent abandonment once a certain point of national cohesion is reached. Nationalism as modernization is possible only when it is built on the Past, and the ashrams dislocation here signifies the very impossibility for the past to act as a solid ground for modernity. Kalyani steps out of the ashram upon encountering Narayan, that is, the archaic, the passive image of a nation, the guardian of its purity steps out upon seeing what point in time and space has the world reached. In the logic of the film, the archaic, the Past understands that *Itself* was not Past at all – it was constructed as Past, used and abandoned to act as a silent safeguard and the very condition for national unity, the creation of the People as One. And here the Someone who was used as such protests and demands to be included into the nation's Present. Hence Kalyani's desire to marry Narayan, and live happily ever after. A Widow who was camouflaged to be a 'repository of the national archaic' began to exercise her rightful agency. The brand of nationalism that was soon to evaporate gladly agreed to demolish the structure and to include the *subaltern widow* into a national Present. The archaic and the modernity of national culture that

constitute a nation do leave traces on the margins – and this *trace* in our case is the ashram.

No matter how *erased* the widows are in the ashram, on the margins, the ashram only ceases being a *safe* space once it starts moving towards this thirdness of Narayan-as-a-modern-nation. This angst, this alienation is perfectly illustrated by one of the oldest inhabitants of the ashram simply known as Aunty. She constantly talks about a taste of laddoo and gulab jamun<sup>3</sup> she remembers from her childhood, when she was still *not yet a widow* – memories here being semi-illusional, semi-fictional. Finally Chuyia brings her a laddoo from the bazaar. Instead of bringing happiness, a laddoo, a certain something from a forbidden reality, both lived and denied, this laddoo disrupts her mind and leads her to her death. Aunty died out of grief after eating a laddoo. She cried “I want a laddoo” and died. A touch of unsafe reality drives Aunty mad. But this unsafe reality is precisely what is denied – Aunty dies because she realizes her erasure, her denial of being encapsulated in a space that is a non-space in no-time. As Young (2009, 94) puts it, “this third space is space that is both physical and psychic at once, where the subject, who has been split, is beset by the angst of the vast caesura of modernity, of his or her drop into the void of misgiving, into a well-trying tired thirdness, neither the one nor the other, that is, neither I nor you – the moment when you face the loss of subjectivity altogether to become an alien, displaced third person.”

Not so much the Aunty, but the whole ashram started being a *displaced third person* when it realized what it has been denied. Its emergence in the Third Space, in a certain space where the overlapping began to be felt, caused a disruption, and also unveiled the face of national constructions.

## The Saving of India

The non-space and ashram's subsequent emergence into *thirdness* act as a canvas for Mehta, and by presenting the conflict on this canvas, she shows the fundamental break in the nationalist discourse and the tragedy of idealism that uses real people in constructing its own history, and what is even more dramatic – starts believing in this history as timeless. To save the reality from the history is the next step, and this is called emancipation. This double movement of enslaving/saving is crucial for the functioning of nationalism and nation. Here Narayan steps in to save Kalyani, and his failure to do so uncovers the absurdity and danger of such a double movement. Here we have to touch upon the object of the saving, the object that was constructed as someone (something) in need of it – a Woman. Not a real woman, not someone in particular, but an object where a real woman and imagined one is blended into a single category, where distinguishing the two might pose a rather difficult challenge.

<sup>3</sup> Indian sweets.

It is widely agreed that in the feminist theory the nation itself is a gendered construct. Women are seen as “inherently atavistic – the conservative repository of the national archaic” (McClintock 1995, 359). A control of woman’s sexuality is sometimes considered to be central to the construction of national identity, where the role of women is understood as producers of sons for the nation (Kandiyoti 1991). In nationalist rhetoric nation is imagined as a woman that needs to be protected. The only thing is, having in mind Mehta, is that in imagery, together with the nation a woman’s symbol is also elevated to the divinity, while in reality these two elements split and become entirely different categories – except in the nationalist consciousness, where the image of a woman and the image of a nation go together, a woman becomes idolized, but only in imagination and in relation to the concept of the nation – the subjection of women in real life clearly transgresses the idealized image and stands as its opposite, in this way raising a question of validity of the ideal. Saving a woman and saving a nation indeed can become one and the same thing.

It is a fairly agreed that the saving forms a very important part in the civilizing missions<sup>4</sup>. What we are dealing with here is the internal saving, where a Woman needs to be saved not anymore by the civilized men, white men, but by the local nationalist elite. Here the nationalists are saving their own women while being silent at the same time that the victim in need of saving was constructed as such in the first place. As Spivak (1999, 235) notes in a different context,

...the British ignore the space of *Sati* as an ideological battleground, and construct the woman as an *object* of slaughter, the saving of which can mark the moment when not only a civil but a good society is born out of domestic chaos.

Precisely the desire for a *good society* born out of chaos marks the saving of Kalyani as a woman in need of emancipation. While the British ignored the space as an ideological battleground, as Spivak suggests, the nationalists had to forge the battleground so there would be someone whom they could save. Narayan appears in the story as a savior of Kalyani – from the ashram, from the widowhood, and also – as a feminine symbol of India from the ignorance of a not-yet space, where emancipation is *unknown*. Of course, the promotion of the emancipation of a nation-woman can only be done while dictating which elements/members of the society need to be or can be allowed to be emancipated.

We have to keep in mind that the image of a nation as a woman was created in the process of emancipation as its pre-condition. A real woman was locked into the basis of the idea this way cementing her into a no-time of non-space. Her desire to break free, if we assume that she consciously understands this condition, has to be carefully supervised by the same agent who locked

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<sup>4</sup> To a large extent this is one of the main lines of thought of postcolonial theory.

her in in the first place. It's the double movement I was talking about before. Narayan performs this unlocking, and in reality this unlocking, or the emergence of a real woman in the ambivalent space of nation-building is always, without any exception, presented as an achievement of national liberation. Deepa Mehta intervenes at the moment of emergence to show what a farce such emancipation is.

We also have to keep in mind the almost constant presence of Gandhi in the film. Narayan very overtly advocates passive resistance, talks about Gandhi, hangs his picture of his wall. Madhumati is informed about Gandhi by Gulabi, and they talk about his interventions while smoking ganja<sup>5</sup> – “before he came everything ran like an English clock.” The reality Mehta presents is anti-Gandhian. Everything stands in a stark contrast to Narayan's talks about emancipation. But that is precisely the ambiguity of nationalism. We have to be cautious to read the film as a conflict between the forces of ignorance and those of emancipation. In my opinion, the contrast presented by Mehta signifies the too-good-to-be-true world “out there” as impossibility, as a dream of emancipation, but not from the ignorance of *pastness*, but from the dream itself.

Narayan should not be regarded just as a follower of Gandhi, or a supporter of reforms. He *is* Gandhi, he is Mehta's Gandhi while Kalyani is none other than India imprisoned in the ambiguity of the discourse she should be a symbol of. Narayan is trying to save Kalyani in a way that Gandhi is trying to “save” India, and in the film these two notions mingle into one. Gandhi's critique was of a moral nature. He criticized the lack of morality in Indians and spoke of moral crisis (Parekh 1989). Narayan stands as an idealized Indian and idealized man in general, this way giving an appearance of being high above reality. Even his looks give a clue about his nature – he is educated and modern, and at the same time, following Gandhianism, no doubt, is wearing a *jodhpuri* and a *dhoti*. The expressions on his face in various circumstances throughout the film also indicate his exceptional moral character, as does his love for poetry. In contrast to him we have a perverse immorality and cruelty as embodied by Madhumati, Gulabi and finally by Narayan's father. Indeed, these three characters illustrate what Gandhi talked about when he spoke about the need for a reform of a moral character. But the call for a reform, and Gandhi's “reincarnation” in Narayan are not possible without Kalyani.

## Subalternity and Emancipation

In a very interesting scene in “Water,” one of the women of the ashram, Shakuntala, asks the *pandit*<sup>6</sup> about their austere and ascetic widowhood, to which

<sup>5</sup> Marijuana.

<sup>6</sup> A Hindu cleric in this case.

pandit replies that widows are allowed to remarry by law, but only because “we ignore the laws that don’t benefit us” that the widows are subjected to the conditions they live in – an answer that leaves Shakuntala shocked. What is important in this scene and by extension in the whole film, is that a subaltern Woman, and even more – the subalternity as such (subalternity here is the ashram) is betrayed by the “saving,” as the latter is the exact opposite of what the term means – the whole meaning of “saving” is hidden behind the façade. A Woman, and Indian woman, and indigenous woman was and still is constantly saved – by the British whose *jouissance* dictated the liberation, by the nationalists whose *jouissance* in turn dictated the very same, only by different means, on a different level. As Guha (1982, 1) explains,

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonial elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism ... sharing the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness – nationalism – which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these *achievements* are credited to the British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas.

Narayan, as the sole spokesman of nationalism in the film, does the job of this achievement – he saves Kalyani from the ashram in a manner of raising her *desire* for being liberated. The fact that at the end of the film she drowns herself in the river upon losing hope of marrying Narayan (read: losing hope of liberation, where marriage for a widow means just that), and out of shame of exposal of her impurity (read: forced sexual slavery), shows the impossibility of any kind of emancipation if the emancipator is not a male nationalist. Again, the desire for reform, the active agency, the failures and distorted promises gone wrong are entirely elite’s contribution to the development of a Woman, and the development of a national consciousness, if we equate these two ideas. In Deepa Mehta’s vocabulary a nation and a Woman are one, but in a pathological way as to show the perverse workings of nationalism, elite, patriarchy, and ultimately – the flawed foundations on which the modern state was being forged. As she shows in her later films, precisely the flawed foundations are to blame for the nervous tick on the face of a modern state. And here I am not engaging into a lament of rosy promises gone astray in the decolonized wastelands – I am talking about modernity and a modern state as an idea emerging as causes and the very symptoms for oppression. Third Space and the engineered non-space of the ashram as a repository of a “*cultureandtradition*,” and the emergence of the latter into the former in the opposite of emancipation. The *comprehension* of oppression leaves little hope, as the shame and the only comprehension of dislocation and displacement leaves no choice but to speak

with a dead body rising from the water, as not even the depths of dark waters can hide that emancipation and development are only code words for lasting oppression and the destruction of any ability to act. Spivak (1999, 259) suggests that “it is in the shadow of this unfortunate marionette that the history of the unheeded subaltern must unfold.” She speaks here about the current attempts to save a Woman using another version of civilizing mission, a white-informed *development* UN style. In 1938 there was no UN, and white man’s burden and brown man’s burden (read: nationalist and Western-educated) was not yet translated into an aid agency’s burden. Kalyani’s desire to step outside, to become a subject of time and part of the narrative is washed away by a structure that favors a silent non-being outside of Present in engineered *pastness*. Kalyani becomes not only a victim of her own hopes, but the very pre-history of the marionette Spivak is talking about. She can be saved only by a nationalist who speaks for her.

## Who Can Speak and Who Cannot?

In a way there is an echo of Spivak’s (1988) story of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri in “Water,” through the character of Kalyani. Bhubaneswari, a girl of sixteen or seventeen, hanged herself in her father’s house in Calcutta in 1926. While it was stated that it happened due to illicit love, in reality Bhubaneswari killed herself while being unable to carry out an assassination – a task given to her as a member of nationalist movement. Kalyani drowned herself in Ganga. Though the reasons and the circumstances are different, there is a parallel in both stories – both women were victims of patriarchy, and their deaths came as a sacrifices caused by their understanding that their histories could not be accommodated in the dominant discourse. There have been a lot of debates on why Spivak chose Bhubaneswari as her example to illustrate that “subaltern cannot speak.” Rajan (2010) suggests that only death made Bhubaneswari subaltern, while in reality she was an urban middle class girl. It is very ambiguous argument, because treating her suicide as a political statement dismisses the fact of a gender subjection and implied fact that a woman in her gendered position is voiceless per se – something that Spivak and Rajan admit. In her later elaboration on this, Spivak (1999, 246) explains that Bhubaneswari “wrote with her body, attempted to ‘speak’ across death.” Indeed, she wrote and tried to speak, only to confirm the fact of her muteness and the deaf ears of everyone around her. While creating a symbol/statement from Bhubaneswari’s death, we can do the same from Kalyani’s. Kalyani drowns herself out of shame and desperation, when Narayan finds out that she has been satisfying sexual wishes of his father. In assuming that their marriage plans were off (she perceived herself as a widow carrying a bad omen plus subsequently as a prostitute – an impossible match for a Brahmin man) and unable to bear the “shame” and implied hopelessness

of her position, she commits suicide. Kalyani dies because she *understands* her subalternity and muteness – the only way out of this is death. She crosses the threshold in two senses. First, she leaves the ashram to elope with Narayan, to get married knowing that after such a transgression she would not be admitted back if something goes wrong. Second, it signifies the transition I was talking about earlier – from a non-space to a Third Space, and because of the comprehension of former in the latter it is impossible to return to a previous state of mind of *unknowable*.

Spivak perceives Bhubaneswari's death as sanctioned suicide despite the fact that even in this case a suicide is transgressive and violates religious norms. Spivak treats this as a "subaltern rewriting of the social text of sati-suicide" (Spivak 1988, 282). Following this, Kalyani's suicide could be also treated as such. Sunder Rajan calls a widow who lives ascetic life "a widow who doesn't die," therefore implying the universality of sati as applicable to each and every case when a husband dies, and his wife, to her own misery, doesn't, and is "sanctioned" to die subsequently as someone who has no place (Rajan 2010, 129). As a Bengali saying which was popular during the call for widow remarriage in 19<sup>th</sup> century goes, "you cannot trust the woman till she is burnt to ashes and her ashes are scattered to the winds" (cited in Sarkar 2009, 138).

What happens after? After the emergence, after the break, after death? Chuyia is taken across the river to Narayan's father by Gulabi at Madhumati's request. Upon learning this, Shakuntala, horrified, takes her to the railway station where Gandhi is addressing his followers, and gives Chuyia to Narayan (he's leaving with Gandhi, travelling in the same compartment) saying "make sure she is in Gandhiji's care." Chuyia emerged from the ashram the way she got there – too young to understand what was going on. She was sold to Narayan's father for one night, and she was tried to be institutionalized in the same manner as Kalyani. The only difference was that the ashram was already dislocated, and silence and denial were not possible. She is taken away to Gandhi so he would take care of her. It may seem like a happy ending, albeit a traumatic one. I would say that the fact of Chuyia's engagement in prostitution, even though for one night, signifies that her liberation came for a price. If she was not taken to Narayan's father, it is unlikely that Shakuntala would have taken her out of ashram. Her liberation was possible only through a traumatic experience, through the loss of innocence and the loss of purity. That the film ends with the train leaving the station does not necessarily mean that she experienced an ultimate liberation.

Some conclusions, some patterns for future developments can be drawn from *what happened in the ashram*, or perhaps, *what did not happen* there. We can look at Kalyani and Chuyia in terms of stages of inclusion of the repressed national archaic and its silent demand to be included into not so much a national discourse or active participation, but into acknowledgement of its existence. We can recall Guha's ideas on elitism of nationalism, and say that the

*iconization* of a Woman is the evidence of the decisions from above, resulting in the exclusion. Also, an important point to stress is the need of the ashram as an object of desire, an object that always has to be out there in order to save it, to reform it and to emancipate it. Here the ashram as a symbol of national archaic serves its dual purpose. It is needed to be *there*, and it is needed to be dislocated. Without the ashram as such the formation of national consciousness is not possible, and its constant containment on the margins is a perpetual motivation for a nationalist mission. For without anyone to save there would not be any need for saviors.

## Conclusion

Nationalism is far too ambiguous category to be looked at uncritically. It has been celebrated since its inception, but ever since it has caused very deep ruptures in societies all over the world. In the case of India, after deep engagement with nationalism's histories and effects for those not privileged enough to have access to the state apparatus, this ideology was too disruptive to call it emancipatory in any meaningful way. Nationalism's forgeries and imaginary identities undermine the very declarative aim it claims to be fighting for – freedom. Several points emerge after this: first, in order to be launched effectively, nationalism has to create a certain space for itself – a space for the national unconscious, where the archaic would be located; second, this pre-condition is both sought to be forgotten as nationalism declares marching towards modernity, and is constantly desired, as the unconscious space acts as a constant legitimizer for nationalism in terms of saving it from its backwardness; third, as the archaic almost universally is a Woman, her emergence is often greeted in a romantic fashion undermining the facts that such emergence is engineered, and that a woman rarely has a voice; fourth, the emergent cannot be possibly accommodated into the nationalist discourse, as the reason for its displacement is precisely the impossibility for it to act consciously – the inclusion would only mean the disruption for the nationalist discourse. Overall, a nation cannot exist, cannot be forged without its silent shadow, where its legitimacy rests. The possibility for the inclusion of the emergent that tries to find its voice is impossible, as nation's existence rests on its silence.

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## Tautos ir tylos: subalterninės erdvės spektrai

### Santrauka

Šis straipsnis analizuoja pirminį nacionalizmo raidos etapą – tautos laiko ir erdvės formavimą, kuris padeda pagrindą tautos sąvokimui. Analizuojamas Indijos atvejis, žvelgiant į laikmetį prieš nepriklausomybę, ir kalbama apie erdvę, kuri jau nebėra tradicinė, tačiau dar ir ne moderni. Tai erdvė, išstumta iš aktyvaus nacionalizmo diskurso, bet jos buvimas yra būtinas diskursui pašonės lygmeniu. Išėjties tašku imama Homi K. Bhabha Trečiosios erdvės teorija ir modifikuojama taip, kad atveria galimybę pažvelgti į erdvės formaciją prieš susiformuojant Trečiajai (hibridinei) erdvei. Straipsnio tikslas – atskleisti nacionalistinės ideologijos vykdomą visuomeninių grupių subalternizaciją, kaip, viena vertus, privalomą tautos tapimo elementą, kita vertus, atskleidžiančią tos ideologijos ambivalentiškumą deklaruojamo idealizmo ir realybės akivaizdoje. Šie procesai nagrinėjami pasitelkus indų kilmės Kanados režisierės Deepa Mehta 2005 metų filmą „Vanduo“, kuris labai griežtai kritikuoja deklaratyvią nacionalizmo emancipaciją ir nacionalizmo kaip ideologijos destruktivumą. Straipsnis atveria tai, kaip nacionalizmas koduoja praeitį ir nustato vaidmenis savo subjektams, ypač subalternams. Analizuojant šį pirminį nacionalizmo etapą, galima kurti nacionalizmo, kaip giliai dviprasmiškos ideologijos, kritikos strategiją.