

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Women, Identity and Representation*

“Mythology is apparently coeval with mankind. As far back, that is to say, as we have been able to follow the broken, scattered, earliest evidences of the emergence of our species, signs have been found which indicate that mythological aims and concerns were already shaping the arts and world of Homo Sapiens”, said Joseph Campbell (*Myths to Live By* 19). Myths are stories that allow mankind to make sense of a harsh, meaningless world. They are shared dreams that sustain our dialogue with the past. The moral equilibrium established by myths forms the weft and warp that knit the fabric of a society together. Freud believed that myths, like dreams, had escaped the monitoring of the conscious (*The Denial of Woman’s Identity in Myth* 3), and symbolism related to the unconscious imagination was found in a developed condition in folklore, myths and legends (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 114). Myths, thus, are a text written on the dreamscape of the vast unconscious, the great storehouse of cultural memories. *The Mahabharata*, the magnum opus of Maharshi Veda Vyasa, is one such repository of the cultural memories of the people of the time.

*The Mahabharata* conjures up a full-blooded, vigorous society whose vitality came from its firm belief in ‘Dharma’. Dharma, as the epic says, was subtle and contextual, to the extent that there was ‘Apaddharma’- the Dharma of exigencies, where rules were bent because survival was at stake. *The Mahabharata* was a chronicle of complex humanity, warts in place. It never meant to portray the ideal, perfect world inhabited by flawless beings. Unlike the ideal world of *The Ramayana*, the grand epic of the Bharatas showed us a mirror which reflected the many faces that we chose to wear. The uncanny ability of the Indic myths to survive the test of times is evident in the versions and recensions that have been passed down the ages. *The*

*Mahabharata*, in its three redactions, *The Jaya*, *The Bharata* and *The Mahabharata* (BORI 1:1:61, 81), has grown from a fratricidal internecine conflict to the behemoth that carries the weight of Indian Tradition. The cyclic nature of Indic myths not only tells us who we are, but also where we are going. When Mark Twain called India the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition, he had the sacred books of India in mind (*Following the Equator* 197). Hildebeital points out that there is something in *The Mahabharata*, once considered a "literary nothing", a "monstrous chaos", a "gigantesque potlatch" or a "work in progress" (*Rethinking the Mahabharata: 2*), that makes scholars and researchers come back to the text. "*The Mahabharata* has been subsequently mined for Indo-European myths, Indo-European epics, Indo-European goddesses, non-Indo-European goddesses, an oral epic, a prior epic cycle, a pre-Brahman-Kshatriya tradition, a historical kernel, a textual kernel, the old narrative" beneath the final written surface," says Hildebeital (ibid).

Translated in every single Indian language, *The Mahabharata* has knit the country together through its multiple identity-relevant narratives which dominate our cultural landscape. The longevity of *The Mahabharata* lies in its ability to adapt, adopt and re-fashion the narrative, keeping the perspective fluid, giving infinite opportunities to initiate debate. The epic characters were deliberately kept only too human to be perfect. Flawed and fallible, they were created to pass on the message that there was always the scope for improvement. The storyline changed with the times, reflecting the changing ethos and worldview. The epic makes us ask certain pertinent questions: Was Draupadi right in her ironical laughter, insulting Duryodhana and initiating a chain reaction that brought about the great war? Were the Kauravas correct in their molestation and attempt to disrobe Draupadi, even if she did laugh at them? Was the community of elders so helpless that it could not prevent the dastardly development? Were the Pandavas impotent in their cowardly reaction to Draupadi's disrobing?

Was the action of putting one's wife at stake in a game of dice ethical? Like Dhritarashtra, were Bhishma and Drona also blind that they could not see the outcome of their supporting Duryodhana 'adharmic'(unethical) actions? Just because one gets paid / is sustained by someone, should one, like Bhishma, close one's eyes to injustice? What is the outcome if one does just that? Was Kunti so self-centred that despite being a victim herself, she pushed her daughter-in-law Draupadi in the same hell of unfulfilled desires, dreams and aspirations? Was it the case of a victim subconsciously victimizing another? What was the role of Krishna in *The Mahabharata*? In the internecine war both sides transgressed, so who was on the side of Dharma? This thesis attempts to answer these questions by initiating a thorough reading of the selective 'Other' in *The Mahabharata*. The aim is to problematize the gender-normative hierarchical perceptions in the Indic myths and explore the space which trades essentialism with contextual relations, to prove that the grand narrative, by design, encouraged the erasure of binaries, and inspired the gendered subaltern to seize a place of its own.

The objective of the proposed research is to examine the hegemonic interpretation of Indic myths and to explore the possibility of applying diverse methods to question such construal. We have tried to investigate whether *The Mahabharata*, a dialogic text rich in dilemmas, gives a voice to the marginal. The attempt is to ascertain the same by utilising alternative methods of analysis and interpretation based on post-structuralist and post-modern perspectives. Our endeavour is to identify the uniqueness of the 'Indian' ethos, value system, character and beliefs as embedded in the great epic. The aim is to bring into focus unheard voices in *The Mahabharata*, and proffer an alternative interpretation of accepted myths and legends.

## *The Festival of Meanings*

Dilemmas were deliberately woven in the fabric of *The Mahabharata*. Being a dialogic discourse, it encouraged participants to take opposite sides, thereby inviting varied interpretations. The aim was to unsettle the status quo and create new meanings which were compatible to the Dharma of the given situation. There was no attempt to gloss over anything, because *The Mahabharata* represented life in all its glorious imperfection. Boundaries were established and violated, only to be resurrected again, depending on the need of the hour. We see Kunti condemning polyandry, and then recommending the same for her daughter-in-law Draupadi. We find men sworn to chivalry allowing a woman to be stripped in full public view. A young warrior, a mere child, Abhimanyu was trapped and killed by his kin. Every action was contingent. The idea was to show what greed is capable of, and what denial of representation can lead to. In the country of Lord Rama and his ideal brother Bharata, we have the Kauravas and the Pandavas engaged in an internecine war of annihilation. This was because *The Mahabharata*, in a way, was *The Ramayana* inverted, to create a burlesque act, a parody and a caricature, reflecting faithfully all that it saw happening around it.

Hence as opposed to Sita who was a one-man-woman and a mother figure, we have Draupadi who was portrayed as a femme fatale, though both were sufferers in the hands of patriarchy, doubted, subjected to violence, and ultimately cast away as unwanted. Sita chose to die rather than bear the shame of being accused of infidelity, whereas, in sharp contrast, the Naga Princess Ulupi, the wife of Arjuna, got him killed in a battle, only to revive him subsequently, establishing her worth and appropriating her place in the scheme of things (*BORI* 14:81:9). *The Ramayana* was an epic with larger than life personas, whereas *The Mahabharata* was peopled with believable characters – sages who had issues with anger-management, gods who coveted another person's wife, a guru who would seek the gift of a thumb. The roster of crooks and criminals was long, edifying the common man with negative examples as well as

positive. The intended audience was not monochromatic – they were nuanced, and hence instructed through anomalies. Instead of a bland, pedantic, undifferentiated fare, *The Mahabharata* offered a veritable feast, a smorgasbord of offerings. The aim was to make the reader synthesize his own truth.

In his work, ‘*The Methodology for Human Sciences*’, Bakhtin (1986) proclaimed, “Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival” (170). The meanings that *The Mahabharata* allowed and encouraged us to derive are celebrating their homecoming festival even today. The grand epic is a living testimony of the fluidity of the Indian culture, immensely successful in its task of providing answers to the questions that tradition posed to modernity, to keep the dialogue on. The Indic myths are not static accounts of things gone by. They are part of a living tradition that continues to authenticate and re-establish itself with every passing generation. The vitality and longevity of *The Mahabharata* is evident in the host of literature that has taken birth from the main narrative. This thesis aims to compare the shift in the position of women and other gendered subaltern in the re-tellings and hybrid narratives vis-a vis the dominant discourse in the Indic myths.

In her scholarly work titled *Sacrificed wife/sacrificer's wife: Women, ritual, and hospitality in Ancient India*, Stephanie Jamison (1996) brings out the areas of anxiety about women in the Indic myths. The epic woman, says Stephanie Jamison, is “the bearer of all paradox” (17). Her infidelity, weakness and stupidity have been recorded: Women habitually indulge in falsehood (*The Mahabharata BORI* 1:68:72). Fickleness is synonymous with women (*BORI* 5:36:56). Women, impulsive people and non-Aryans cannot complete a task or a business (*BORI* 5:38:39). A country governed by women, children or a gambler is doomed (*BORI* 5:38:40). Women, cowards, thieves and ingrates are not trustworthy (*BORI* 5:39:59). Nothing else more wicked exists than women (*BORI* 13:38:12). Yet, says Jamison, the same text introduces us to strong, able women like Satyawati, Kunti, Shakuntala, Damayanti, Devayani,

Ganga and many others who take complete charge of the situation and dictate the course of events to come. “So, we have the spectacle of a culture that professes to believe women are weak and silly, embracing fictional females whose control of legal niceties or strategic planning far surpasses that of the men who surround them”, observes Jamison (17).

### *A Relational Notion of Gender*

The contradiction that exists in the portrayal of women in fiction has been emphasized upon by Virginia Woolf who regrets that women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time, yet this was the woman in fiction. Woolf says that in real life, a woman was treated like a captive - locked up, beaten and flung about the room. She identifies a very queer, composite being who, imaginatively, is of the highest importance, but practically is completely insignificant:

She pervades poetry from cover to cover. She dominates the lives of Kings and Conquerors in fiction; in fact, she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words and profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips, but in real life she could hardly read, scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (*A Room of One's Own* 64–66)

The subversive females of *The Mahabharata* – Draupadi, whose profound question about the nature of self could not be answered even by Drona and Bhishma, Sulabha, the wandering mendicant who edified King Janaka about the unity of Jiva and Brahma, Vidula, the fire-brand Queen-mother who trained her son Sanjaya in the intricacies of politics and war – make us stop and wonder – who was the real epic woman? Was she one who ‘could not be trusted with a task or a business (*BORI* 5:38:39), or was she like Savitri who fought against Yama, the God of Death, to accomplish the impossible task of bringing her husband back to life?

Stephanie Jamison questions the contradiction in the situation: “These fearsomely able women and the women who “don’t deserve independence” do not seem to inhabit the same conceptual planet. What is the source of the narrative pattern that contradicts the explicit doctrine of female weakness” (Jamison 15–16)? In her work titled *Arguments of a Queen: Draupadi’s views on Kingship*, Angelika Malinar studies this contradiction, applying a relational notion of gender which does not speak of “a binary opposition based on fixed attributes or intrinsic, essential properties ascribed to each sex, but with a hierarchical structure in which attributes depend on the relationships between the different actors, and this means that they can change according to context and situation” (Malinar 79). She argues that the relationship between Yudhisthira and Draupadi had become problematic because the partners “had been deprived of the chance to perform their inherited social roles” (ibid).

The dichotomy continues in the schizophrenic existence that women lead even today. Their quest for securing representation is age-old, their story still untold. Karthika Nair’s recent book of poems, aptly named *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata (2015)*, reminds us of the African adage – ‘Since the lion cannot write, the glory of the hunt will obviously go to the hunter’. Mary Daly, in her book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, argues that men have always tried to suppress women who are sacrificed to protect the interests of religion which is sado-spiritual in nature. Daly contends that the women need to be silenced to perform the sacrifice, which happens in multiple ways:

A basic pattern of these ways is Self-splitting, which is initiated by the patriarchally powerful and which the victims internalize and continue to practice within the caste of women. Women are silenced/split by the embedding of fears. These contrived and injected fears function in a manner analogous to electrodes implanted in the brain of a victim (“patient”), who can be managed by remote control. This is a kind of “silent” control. (*Gyn/Ecology* 17-18)

Pointing out that women must learn to recognize the totality of the lie that is patriarchy, Daly observes that it perpetrates its deception through mythic stories, so before studying myths we must examine the language they use (*Gyn/Ecology* 34). She refers to the everyday cliché often used: “It’s only a myth (or story, or fairy tale, or legend)”, and cautions against such belittling of the power of myth (*ibid*). “The child who is fed tales such as Snow White is not told that the tale itself is a poisonous apple, and the Wicked Queen (her mother/teacher), having herself been drugged by the same deadly diet throughout her lifetime (death-time), is unaware of her venomous part in the patriarchal plot”, says Daly (*ibid*). In a similar vein, the androcratic representation of Kunti initiating her daughter-in-law Draupadi in a mire of politics, fuelled by the ambition for the acquisition of the state of Hastinapur, reminds us of how women could be controlled by patriarchy to serve their needs.

Dali says that the practice of feet-binding in China gives us an exact picture of the way women have been forced into joining the nefarious agenda:

The footbound daughter was bound to repeat the same procedure of mutilation upon her own daughter, and the daughter upon her daughter. To visualize the procession of generations of crippled mothers and daughters, hobbling on three-inch long caricatures of feet, moving slowly, grotesquely, painfully in meaningless circles within the homes (prisons) of fathers and husbands - their owners - is to see the real state of women in patriarchy. (*Gyn/Ecology* 30)

Daly draws our attention to the fact that this horror is still going on, assuming sinister methods of mind-binding and spirit-binding. She considers rape as the “most basic and paradigmatic form of boundary violation”, and identifies “patriarchy as the Religion which legitimizes all kinds of boundary violation, which blesses the invasion of privacy and the violation of life itself by the metastasizing of a carcinogenic environment and the hideous weapons of modern warfare” (Daly 50). She regrets the “gynocidal intent endemic to



patriarchy, which exercises its control through the pre-possessors, who invade and occupy a woman, treating her as territory before she can achieve autonomous, self-centring process” (*Gyn/Ecology* 146). “A woman who obsessively examines herself in a mirror, is looking through male lenses, seeing herself as a parcel of protuberances, checking if her hair, eyebrows, lashes, lips, skin, breasts, buttocks, stomach, hips, legs, feet are “satisfactory”, observes Daly (146). The way women are described as commodities in patriarchal texts all over the world stems from this preoccupation which cuts across caste and class.

Daly finds it deplorable that the ‘being’ of women is truncated into certain sexualised parts of the body, because it is easy to manipulate such a shrunken woman. She finds patriarchy exercising this damaging force to displace the life-force of a woman, pushing her away from her centre, fragmenting her in the process. “These misinterpretations are magnified into a powerful symbol system which contains women, keeping them condensed and displaced, reducing them to replaceable replicas of the standardized Symbol: The Fragmented Woman, made and remade after the image,” posits Daly (208).

Referring to Jerzy Kosinski's novel, *The Painted Bird*, which contains the story of a man who “vents his sexual frustration upon birds by painting their feathers”, Daly points out that the painted bird is deemed a stranger by the other birds who gang up against her. “The image has undergone a reversal in patriarchy, for it is not the unusual woman who is The Painted Bird, the cosmeticized Freak - rather, this is the common condition of women under patriarchy”, observes Daly, warning that the painted, cosmeticized artefacts are the creatures created by phallocracy. She regrets that it is not the “man-painted bird-woman who is seen as ‘The Freak’ - rather it is the woman who sheds the paint and manifests her Original Moving Self who appears to be The Freak in the State of Total Tokenism, and is attacked by the mutants of her own kind, the man-made women” (209). She agrees with Thomas Szasz who writes: “The Painted Bird is the perfect symbol of the Other, the Stranger, the Scapegoat” (ibid).

Daly finds women being silenced by the implanting of fears: “These contrived and injected fears function in a manner analogous to electrodes implanted in the brain of a victim (‘patient’) who can be managed by remote control. This is a kind of ‘silent’ control” (*Gyn/Ecology* 243). Women the world over are tied by these fears that dominate their mind – the fear of not being good enough, the fear of not fitting the bill, the mould of which was created by patriarchy.

Drawing on Daly’s concept of the ‘fragmented’ women, this work studies the positionality of the gendered subaltern in *The Mahabharata* vis-à-vis the dominant discourse. The selected characters are examined to assess whether they give in to the fear and succumb to the patriarchal expectations, or resist the domination, breaking the mould created by the phallographic forces. Our attempt is to gauge if the woman in the epic was a ‘shrunk woman’, thus manipulable by patriarchy, or whether she was a survivor who managed to negotiate the margin and claim centre-stage for herself.

This study is a thematic analysis of the key concepts related to sexuality, gender and representation in *The Mahabharata*. It explores and analyses the instances of marginalization and the subsequent attempts to subversion initiated by the gendered subaltern, to understand the contextual relationship and the pattern of resistance that existed in the meta-narrative. By asking apposite questions, we try to infer how the great epic, in its timelessness, facilitates an in-built mechanism of myth-revision. *The Mahabharata* has been widely celebrated in the sub-continent and beyond as an all-encompassing text that raises and debates pertinent issues transcending time and space. This study looks at gender issues in *The Mahabharata* from a post-structuralist viewpoint, utilizing the Feminist theory, the Queer theory and the deconstructivist theory to understand the epic duality that deliberately gives rise to debate. By applying the so-called ‘Western’ theories to the myths drawn from *The Mahabharata*, we have attempted to see whether the text is universal in its dialogic nature. Our effort has been to

ascertain whether the issues related to the emancipation of the gendered subaltern espoused in the text are tied to geographical space, or, do they go beyond the restrictions of time and space.

### *Summary of Chapters*

This current chapter is the first chapter and the introduction, and it is titled ***Women, Identity and Representation***. It proposes to study selected myths from *The Mahabharata*, a repository of the cultural memories of the Hindus. We intend to read how the grand epic has knit the country together, through its multiple identity-relevant narratives which have dominated our cultural landscape. The longevity of *The Mahabharata* lies in its ability to adapt, adopt and re-fashion the account, keeping the perspective fluid, giving infinite opportunities to initiate debate. The epic characters were deliberately kept only too human to be perfect. Flawed and fallible, they were created to pass on the message that there was always scope for improvement. The storyline altered with the times, reflecting the changing ethos and worldview, giving rise to re-tellings which may abide by the meta-narrative, question it, criticize it, but ultimately fulfil the purpose of the grand epic - that of initiating a debate on issues that are timeless and universal.

The second chapter titled ***Writing the 'Other': En-gendered Resistance through 'Ecriture Féminine*** studies the new forms of resistance that are evident in the powerful texts written by feminist and queer writers who have dared to subvert the normative. It questions the immovable silhouettes of gender typecasting perpetrated in the name of mythology, reviews the existing literature on the marginalization of the gendered subaltern and examines the resistance of the marginal. It explores how the gendered subaltern survived in the 'interstices and the margins' of the text, revising the patriarch's rules and using them against him. New patterns that are difficult to accommodate in the traditional feminist paradigms emerge in the process, expanding the notion of gender-resistance and gender inter-play.

The third chapter titled *The Crocodilian Females of the Nari Tirtha: The Trauma and Silence in the Narratives of the 'Other'* studies the power differentials created by the intersection of gender, region, class and caste that governed the fate of the gendered subaltern in the myths drawn from *The Mahabharata*. It examines the positioning of the feminine 'chaos' against the masculine 'order', and studies the contrast between the language of myth ascribed to a male creator of content versus the silence of the under-represented female consumer of content. As opposed to the one-sided monologue positioned around gender, identity and purity, with patriarchy acting as the wall against which the male-centric discourse ricochets, we find a successful manoeuvring of positions and evidence of agency in the narratives of Ulupi, Hidimba, Renuka and the crocodilian females in the 'Nari Tirtha'. Castigated for two reasons: one, for being outside of "central politics", and two, for being the ones who initiated physical intimacy which was essentially a male prerogative, these warrior princesses were representatives of many others, like the women of the Balhikas and the Madrakas, who were sanctioned for being different.

The fourth chapter titled *Kunti and the Nishadin: Subverting the Patronymic Circuits of Guilt and Shame* studies Kunti, the Kshatriya Queen, a liminal figure caught between motherhood and mourning. It analyses Kunti, the woman, who was forced to hide behind the masks that were imposed by the hegemonic discourse. Kunti was part of the mainstream, in fact, the mainstay of the system that held up the 'Rajavritta', the Feudal-Patriarchal political edifice based on the exploitation of the subaltern. Yet we find that behind the façade of the power and glory she was just as vulnerable, her brave front disguising the pain of being used by the dominant discourse. Kunti's maternal body was subordinated to the 'cultural body', created by the expectations of the society that was transitioning from the symbiotic to the symbolic. This gives us the reason why Satyavati, the grandmother-in-law of Kunti, was allowed to acknowledge, even be proud of her pre-marital alliance and introduce her son to the

royal household in a very special role, where he got to sire sons with Amba and Ambalika, Satyawati's daughters-in-law, but Kunti had to set her new-born adrift, condemning him to certain death. A woman's body was gradually being relegated to an object, devoid of mind, not in her control. The Father's word decided what was legitimate and what was not. This loss of self was condoned by women who were made to believe that the law of the Father was eternal, and they would be digressing from the 'path' if they questioned it.

The fifth chapter titled '*Krishnaa' Draupadi: 'In Her Will Rise Many Fears!'*' studies Draupadi's body as a text inscribed by the rules of patriarchy. Powerful, strong, assertive, much-maligned, Draupadi is the pivot on which the saga of the internecine war rotates, yet her character is problematized in *The Mahabharata* for several reasons. Objectified and allocated like a commodity, caught in the web of the hyper-phallic enterprise of war and aggrandizement, silenced or made a spokesperson of the establishment, Draupadi loses her all, and then her sense of self when she is blamed by Yudhisthira of partisanship, and is left behind to die on their last journey up the Himalayas. The character of Draupadi in *The Mahabharata*, though a strong portrayal of female agency and initiative, has not come out of the marginalized status right till the end of her tragic life. She may have been the queen, but certainly a woman without a choice. We are troubled by Draupadi's silence at some very strategic junctures. This silence is broken in the re-reading of the epic which has led to the emancipation of Draupadi.

*The Mahabharata* has inspired a host of re-tellings and hybrid narratives, giving rise to the suspicion that the dominant discourse in the meta-narrative is ideologically flawed and essentially one-sided, which the hybrids seek to correct. While revising and re-interpreting the story of Draupadi, the hybrid narratives critically analyse the ideological underpinnings and investments, reshaping the discourse and restoring the balance. They see Draupadi as a queen who lived in the 'Palace of Illusions'. Trapped in a schizophrenic existence in Vyasa's textual universe, censured as a nymphomaniac and condemned as a warmonger, she managed to scale

the distance from being the victim of patriarchy, to a survivor who changed the course of the narrative.

The sixth chapter titled *Shikhandi who was Shikhandini and Yuvanashwa, the Pregnant King: 'Other' Stories from a Gender-fluid World* focuses on the Queer discourse in the Indic myths. *The Mahabharata* celebrates the liminality that was evident in the accounts of the gender-queer people found in the narrative. Two of the greatest gods of Hindu religion were gender-fluid. Shiva, the 'Mahadeva', was a composite figure of 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti'- Ardhanarishwara - the God who was half-male and half-female. The epic recounts delightful tales of Vishnu as Mohini, the enchanting female principle that governed creation. It is intriguing that while *The Mahabharata* brings forth such role-models from amongst the gender-fluid characters, there are numerous references steeped in hatred, contempt and condescension. This chapter attempts to understand this dichotomy by focusing on epic characters who exist in Liminality and on the threshold of Celebration/Condemnation - Shikhandi, the trans-gender prince of Panchala, Yuvanashwa, the pregnant King, Ila/Ilaa who swung between gendered identities, King Bhangashwan, who chose to remain a woman, and many others - opening spaces of conversation regarding queer sexuality, marginalization, resistance and empowerment, challenging the normative heterosexual order.

The **seventh chapter** concludes the thesis argument by bringing us to the realization that the great epic still casts a spell, painting in exquisite strokes on an enormous canvas, moving from the problems of an internecine strife, to gender-dynamics, to ethics, morality and other existential dilemmas. This has been amply utilized by the passionate feminist myth-revisionists who have connected the old to the new, continuing with the tradition of generating a debate on issues that matter. The Indic myths under the purview of our research reveal a saga of agency, empowerment and subversion, thereby giving the gendered marginal a voice. The research brings us to the conclusion that in a fluid text like *The Mahabharata*, there is ample

scope of contradiction and conformation, conflict and resolution, which gives the marginal an opportunity to document resistance. The divide deepens with each overlapping difference based on gender, class and other structures of authoritarian patriarchal culture, thereby giving birth to hegemonic relationships nurtured by the dominant discourse. Yet the uniqueness of the discourse is that it facilitates an in-built mechanism of subversion. We discover that the margin, in the case of the examples studied for this thesis, does not consist of a disempowered passivity, but a limitrophic space which encourages permeability. We find the dialogic text deliberately taking up conflicting positions - in Derridean terms, the act of privileging one against another (*Of Grammatology* 148), to keep the discourse going, giving the society a chance to look critically at itself.



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