

for the failure of French during the period 1666 to 1719 and the nature of policy changes which had stimulated the growth of the French trade in India in the subsequent decades. The decline of the Mughals certainly does not serve to explain the rise of the French; it is not even contingent, because there is no instance by which it could be convincingly argued that the Mughals had treated the French with any political apathy. What has happened was confined to the French engagement with the local authorities and the story is repetitive with reference to their archrivals, the British too. Ray attributes the success of the new Company to the system introduced by Jean Law; the official recognition of private trade of the employees in the year 1725 is also held by Ray as a mechanic to keep the Indo-European run for the Company through the coastal trade. While the author has developed a line of argument to explain the sources for the French accumulation of silver the more meaningful hints have been thrown about the frequency-distribution of the French trade till 1755. Ray wrote, 'Haudrere estimated that an average five million Livres were sent per year, often in bullion, to Asia between 1719 and 1730. The dispatch began to increase after 1730 and reached ten million Livres in 1740, after which it began to diminish for sometime. Between 1750 and 1755, it reached the highest peak of thirteen million Livres. Haudrere estimated that the French dispatch was one third of that of the English East India Company earlier but both became almost equal between 1735 and 1740. After 1755, the French dispatch began to fall in comparison to that of the English. While China absorbed 15% to 30% of the bullion, India took between 60% to 80%, leaving the rest for others.' I do not know how the statement can be reconciled with the figures given in Appendix 18 and drawn from Haudrere's *La Compagnie*, IV. 1196-99. Haudrere states that bullion import in India went up to 11.244 million in

1738-39 which is certainly more than the figure of ten million stated to have been imported in Asia in 1740. Presumably, if the figures mentioned in the Appendix 18 regarding purchase in India during the same finance year is correct, there is probably any Livre left for the Chinese investment, far less investing to the tune of 15 per cent to 30 per cent of the total Asian import of the bullion. And correspondingly if the figures quoted in the Appendix 18 with regard to import of bullion in India is held to be correct there must be some serious mistake in the calculation of total bullion import in Asia, as mentioned in the above statement. However, these minor discrepancies in statistical figures do not seriously undermine the importance of the study, nor does it invalidate other trade figures which may be fruitfully used for the construction of a reliable history of the French trade in India within the framework of a refined quantitative analysis. While there was a lacuna in the analysis of the French import in India during 1666 to 1719, as we have already mentioned, Ray took good care to draw the inventory of French imports in India in the subsequent period. He mentions wine from Bordeaux, Brandy (called *eau-de-vie* by the French). Madeira wine, wheat and even salted meat. Drapes, coral, woolen cloth and gold yarn were also imported regularly for sale in the Indian market for the consumption either of the European settlement in India, or for the upper echelon of the Indian society. It is indeed interesting to know that while emphasis was laid on pepper as an export commodity, the importance of cotton yarn and silk was not equally felt. One of the reasons visualized by Ray was the prohibitive custom restriction. Saltpetre appears to be an important import commodity and the total investment varied between 1,00,000 to 3,000,000 Livres, so also was the importance of *cauris* in which the investment had gone up to 3,00,000 Livres. What is significant is the conclusion of Haudrere's that

though there was profit all along in the eighteenth century but it was less than 5 per cent. Finally, on the basis of twenty appendices the author has not only qualified his position on the centrality of his arguments, but has also enabled the readers to get a glimpse of the kind of political transactions that took place between the Company officials and the Mughal government and the local authorities.

In the final analysis *The Merchant and the State: The French in India (1666-1739)* deserves to be treated as a very significant contribution in the contemporary colonial debate in India. In spite of the fact that the enormous quantity of archival information that Ray has augmented would overwhelm a reader of the book, the author has very considerately steered him/her through a narrative that has always been informed without being overbearing at any point.

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*Women and the Politics of Class*, by Johanna Brenner, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2006 (in agreement with Monthly Press Review, New York, 2000), pp. 330, Rs. 750/-

Feminists broadly agree that women are generally dominated and oppressed, and also agree on what such oppression consists of, but they disagree on how they explain the oppression, opined Caroline Ramazanoglu once, thus opening up the debate on direction, explanation and identification of issues pertaining to feminism. Feminism as a social theory has faced many divisions and dissensions, right from the issue of definition to the resolution of impasses created by ideology, institutionalization of feminism and its branching off in many a direction. Interestingly, the feminist thought itself questions the efficacy of believing the feminist thought/theory at all. And yet, the contenders agree that any effective

connection between feminism and women's liberation needs a convincing social theory.

At this intersection stands Johanna Brenner's book under review, *Women and the Politics of Class*. Taking up a socialist stance, the author argues in favour of a strategic turn in feminist politics towards coalitions centred on the interests of working-class women. As a feminist thinker, writer and political activist and member of 'Solidarity' (a socialist organization), she looks at the women's issue from different angles—economic, political and familial. Her concern is, as she tells us, not only to bring socialism into feminism but also to carry feminism into socialist thought so that the economic exploitation of women as a class gets attention.

The essays contained in the book are not, thus, an armchair view of women's problems built up on hypothesis; these are the product of a lifetime of activism and efforts to understand the issues at the grassroots level. She explores concerns like social production and reproduction, class relations, social and cultural life and women's labour that is under-paid and unrecognized. The essays written over a period of two decades provide a holistic view and are able to show the march of feminism from its call for equality to the resistance it is offering of late. Feminism has gained a lot, no doubt, but then there still are impasses; but that does not deter activists like Johanna who see possibilities of a renewed fight till the goal be achieved.

At the outset, the author focuses attention on the subtle difference between Marxist-feminism and socialist-feminism. In her first chapter entitled 'Re-thinking Women's Oppression', Brenner undertakes a revaluation of Marxist-feminist theory through an analysis of Michele Barrett's views. Marxist-feminist's first concern has always been to locate women's oppression in the class structure. Many theorists emphasize that the relations of production and the relations of control

over people, their labour, and the products of their labour are instrumental in maintaining patriarchy and masculinity. Brenner argues that the questions that Marxists-feminists have been asking are: to what degree women's oppression is due to the operation of capitalist society; and how much of women's oppression is located only at the level of ideology? Any critique of women's oppression is linked with women's labour and women's labour primarily means domestic labour. This material reality determines women's status both in the sphere of home and the labour market. While household work goes unrecognized and unpaid, the labour market accepts them as low-wages workers. This material reality cannot be solved by ideology or theory because once ideology is 'severed from material reality, it no longer has any analytical usefulness....' (p. 13)

In spite of her strong contestations of Michele Barrett's theory, Johanna Brenner's approach is open-minded. She avers that the nineteenth century men's struggle for limiting working hours was not detrimental to women's interest. Similarly, the capitalist and Victorian view of women as ideal and 'passionless' proved helpful in correcting the picture of woman as sex object. But the various movements and counter-movements went on to strengthen the ideology of domesticity. Likewise, the relations between production and the biological facts of reproduction reiterated the family-household system in which women's subordination, not her equality became the factual position. Even in the twentieth century, the capitalist philosophy tends to maintain the status quo because the sexual division of labour and gender inequality benefits the capitalist system. The essay written in 1984, strongly advocates a renewal of feminist movement with a vision.

Women's movement has given rise to other concerns. For instance, since woman has become a breadwinner because of divorce, separation and the

concept of single-parent family, the question of quality childcare assumes significance. Second, there is no respite for a woman: a working woman even today has to slog on two fronts, home and work place. Third, if in the urban setting, standard of living is enhanced, she has to buy out of her domestic work. These factors perpetuate in subtle ways women's marginalization because both capitalism and patriarchy reinforce women's dependence on men. Brenner calls it 'dual-systems' of oppression.

In the chapter 'Gender and the State' she, and her co-author Barbara Laslett, record the process of gender division in a welfare state. The approach of the writers is historical-materialist, and they assert that the gender division of labour has forestalled women's self-organization and limited their ability to challenge the working-class men and the middle-class women who dominated the political movements. The dual system has hampered women's organizing capacity. The authors advocate a single-system of socialist-feminist analysis. The essay systematically traces the various landmarks in the feminist struggle and the State.

The central focus of the book under review being the working class woman and its approach, socialist-feminist, the author takes cognizance of poverty as a social reality. Despite what feminists have achieved, economic inequalities continue to be the major problem. Women's work is devalued and at its root is the cultural bias against women and women's activities. The various surveys and job evaluation schemes conducted in the USA show how in administrative and managerial jobs women are kept at low-level positions while for the middle and high-level jobs, men are preferred. The discrimination is so deep rooted that no radical framework can remove the disparity. Only political will and strong implementation programmes can correct this feminization of poverty to an extent.

Johanna Brenner looks at the working class woman's problem as a socialist-

feminist and also as a woman. She is quick to detect the 'ifs' and 'buts' existing in the feminist movement and the forces and counter-forces that have fragmented it, branching it into various movements. As a socialist-feminist, Johanna had to face many challenges, impasses and hurdles. 'Being a socialist-feminist activist has never been easy,' she says. (p. 201) It was like standing on a 'stony ground' between the heady appeal of radical feminism and the popularity of liberal feminism. Chapter 9, 'Meeting the Challenges of the Political Right', makes an interesting reading as the author gives a birds eye-view of the feminist struggle and subtly explains the difference between socialist-feminism and Marxist-feminism. The chapter is by no means a repetition of the history of feminism; its strength lies in its evaluative and analytical stance.

Over the years feminism has become an institutionalized movement with its leadership coming from the well-educated class. This powerful group relegates the interest of the working class woman to the periphery. The author agrees that many of the issues are identical for all women but many are class specific. For this it is necessary to give more representation to working-class woman and also to consider the restructuring of economy. The problem becomes acute when politics intrudes and feminist organizations work out a reactionary backlash holding back working-class woman's interest. Another marginalized class is cropping up: the Asian and Latino communities coming to the fore in the USA, with globalization. These have their own internal power structures and their community-based organizations are fighting for justice.

The book foresees renewed contestations because the job-based organizations, the feminist organizations and the community-based organizations are taking up fights from different angles. Brenner does not reduce activism to a strategy; she situates the problem in the

political and economic context of a society dominated by the imperatives of capitalism and builds up her thesis that there is a possibility of developing a feminist coalitional aesthetics in which gender, race, class and nationality can interact.

Feminism has made inroads into many fields but the challenges and the impasses outweigh the gains. The picture is not grim, though. Johanna Brenner resolves not to give in to 'what the powerful intend' but to give resistance to oppression and to continue the struggle for justice.

The book has a flow that is not interrupted despite quotations. The author shows an uncanny ability to probe deeper into the problem, carry forward the discussion and reach a conclusion. Beautifully brought out and designed, the work is a significant addition to the reading list of any feminist even if one does not subscribe to the socialist, Marxist views.

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*Kathak—The World of Shovana Narayan*  
by Kamal K. Mishra, Kanishka Publishers,  
New Delhi, 2005, Rs. 995

The artiste Padma Sri Shovana Narayan is a living legend in the classical dance form of Kathak. The book on her world of Kathak presents an intensive and holistic study of the dance form, its origin and development along with the analysis of dancer's psyche, motivations and personality. Thus, the personality of the artiste is juxtaposed with the choreographed dance-forms of Kathak, representing every mood of human life through *abhinaya*, techniques and accompaniments of the dance form. The study of dance-form with these objectives in view is the most challenging task. The justification of the study is that among all fine arts, dance is the only form where the artist and the form of art are

synthesized in totality. It is in the body of the artiste that the form evolves and presents rhythm, movement and *abhinaya* in time and space. Secondly, this form of dance had its origin in folk ballads and narrative traditions. These have risen to the heights of classical dance encompassing *nritta*, *nriya* and *sangeeta* representing all the characteristics of the *patra*, the cup, through which the aesthetic emotion of *rasa* is offered to the *sahridaya rasika* for *asvada*. In this way, Kathak is imbued with *rasa*, *abhinaya*, *dharmi*, *vritti*, *pravritti*, *siddhi*, *svara*, *atodya*, *guna* and *rasa*. It is notable that dance and music are the only forms among all fine arts which have retained their classical nature and purity of form through the passage of time, while painting, architecture, sculpture and literature have undergone tremendous changes, evolving and reacting to the modern political and social milieu. The classical forms of dances such as Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, etc., as well as music still maintain their purity and are practiced according to the *sastriya* injunctions in matters of techniques, format, elements and principles. Moreover, dance is a form of art wherein a synthesis of space, time, rhythm and movement is presented in the form of the dancer itself. Hence, it is more complex than other arts where the artist creates the form representing rhythm and movement in time and space. For instance, in painting rhythm, movement, volume, etc., are created in the pictorial space through different forms or music where words and sounds create rhythmic forms in time. But in dance the body of the dancer evolves and depicts movement and rhythm in time and space and the emotions are expressed through gestures, postures and rhythmic movement. Hence, the art form and the artiste become complementary to each other. If the art form has endowed the artist with a personality, artiste also provides worldwide publicity and new dimensions of growth by the creative talent. The dance form of Kathak was prevalent in the courts of the princely states of