Conceptual and Historical Context of Study
CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF STUDY

Over the last decade we have witnessed how the flames of communalism have been ignited, sharpening the conflicts in the politics of identity. Organised violence against minorities has increasingly acquired legitimacy as the destruction of the Babri Masjid and events following 6 December 1992 have proved.

"Communalism today means the advocacy of violence" notes Pandey (1993:8). This raises the question how communalism operating with patriarchal structures of power, implies advocacy of violence, often sexual violence, towards women. Communal violence frequently resorts to violation of the others' women for, as Kamala Visweswaran (1990) reminds us, a women's modesty signifies the masculinity of her community Visweswaran "she becomes, writes, the symbol of violence as the sham and subjection of her community is represented in her". Ironically, the common denominator that cuts across all communities and often classes as well in South Asia, remains notion of female modesty. The sexual and moral codes imposed on women, codified and disseminated through hegmenoic patriarchal institutions and instruments such as state, law, religious tenets and their interpreters, the school the family etc., share many similarities despite their being categorised as Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and so on.

As several feminists have noted over the years, patriarchal discourses on the modesty of women are really about sexuality. Sexuality, which Michael Foucault posits as a "dense transfer point" for relations of power one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality is even more boldly defined as a vector of oppression by feminist Gayle Rubin who asserts that much of the oppression of women is "borne by, mediated through, and constructed with sexuality" (Rubin, 1984: 293). While many Euro-American feminists from the sixties onwards, have attempted to deconstruct the
patriarchal equation of sexuality with danger as well as to rediscover the pleasures of female sexuality, one cannot ignore the present escalation of sexually repressive practices and rhetoric in collocation with the heightening of communal consciousness. Such changes are frequently marked upon or through the women's body as an increasing number of young Muslim women adopt the veil in South Asia or widow immolation is revived in north India (Hasan, 1994: IX).

The synonymity of the nation/community or other "imagined communities" with these natural and given identities makes it possible to die in defence of them. The merging of the nation/community with the selfless mother/devout wife evokes the obvious and necessary response to come to her defence. The discourse of communalism/nationalism as well as fundamentalism therefore includes notions of honour and revenge for the "violation of our mothers and sisters".

One of the striking features of the contemporary scene is the overall growth of religious revivalism and fundamentalism both in India and elsewhere. Many of the movements flowing from this phenomenon define the place of women and assign to them a certain status within the community. In general, the social, cultural and political concerns of movements for religio-revivalism play a key part in legitimising gender differences embodied in traditional attitudes and perspectives on family and gender relations. The very language of traditional ideologies singles out women as the symbolic repository of group identity. Women by virtue of their positioning in the private domain are expected to live and abide by religious norms; their fidelity to religious values becomes the basis for the judgement of community identity as a whole. (Jayawardane, 1996)

The love of honour and praise was peculiar to humans, and it was that love which enabled one to endure dangers and privations. It seems that in medieval Indian history women were looked upon as an embodiment of
men's honour whether as wives, daughters or sisters. In the mutual struggles between men they symbolised the trophies 'vijay puruskar' which every powerful man sought to possess. Since a life of dishonour was not worth living, even when forced to submit men sought 'honourable capitulation' and 'honourable settlement'. That is why the defeated sometimes 'voluntarily' gave their daughters to the victors (Josh and Joshi, 1994: 129).

Caste and marriage, naturally came to be inextricably enmeshed with conceptions of sexuality, honour, and rank of power. To uphold the code of caste, i.e. to preserve honour and reputation, was at its core, a question of manliness. To guard one's power was basically to guard the sacredness and sanctity of one's blood. Shame was both humiliation and dishonour, and men could be branded with it. Even the passage of time could not wash away the stain of shame. It could be removed only by spilling blood, i.e. by taking revenge. But even here there was a catch. As folk wisdom tells us, a woman, a sword and a horse never come back to the original loser. Therefore, a reputation destroyed through the mode of losing a woman could possibly not be fully avenged. But still it could leave behind a permanent sense of impotent rage and helplessness. Perhaps, it could be partially retrieved by destroying the exaggerated sense of manliness of one's opponent, i.e. by letting out blood (Josh and Joshi, 1994: 223).

When we look at medieval Indian society, it becomes clear that here was a society which lived by the 'symbolic of blood'. Conceptions of 'blood' intervened in the matrix of power relations through considerations on custom, law, death, transgression and sovereignty. For a society in which the systems of alliance, the political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the values of descent lines were predominant; for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values. It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functioned in the order of signs (to have a certain blood, to be of the same
blood, to be prepared to risk one's blood), and also to its precariousness (easily spilled, too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted) (Foucault, 1978: P147).

The society which derived the sanctity of its social values from a woman's complete subjugation to man also indirectly raised her to a status where she became an autonomous symbol or carrier of social honour, and even an embodiment of the sovereignty of state, in case the woman belonged to the ruler or the ruling family. When placed in this context, she also became a 'name' that contestants for power attributed to a complex strategical situation. Her strategic centrality came to radiate power, whose effects pervaded the entire social body.

If politics was a 'war' pursued by other means then it was natural that the victor, real or potential, should have opted for this unique source of sovereignty to undermine or subordinate a ruler and through that, a social order. Such a woman, as a permanent, inert and self-reproducing centre of power could not but figure in various social hegemonies desiring to share and distribute power. Perhaps it was, in order to speak of its constantly shifting state of power that the popular imagination created the form of a romantic tale. Thus was born Malik Muhammad Jaisi's Padmavat capturing the 'power of romance and the romance of power' (Joshi and Josh, 1994: P252).

What was sought to be asserted and affirmed through the extoration of women was the virile character of the ruling group. Behind this was acting a very powerful assumption: Only virility has the divine right to rule. In the conception of mastery a man was supposed to make his manly qualities prevent not only within himself but also vis-a-vis the males of the opponent group. This was a way of commanding what needed commanding, of coercing those who were not willing to surrender. This mode of expression of
'sexual virility' became isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy and authority that one expected as a free man to establish over one's inferiors. In the masculine art of governing the 'ethical virility', 'sexual virility' and 'social virility' were fused together to constitute this specific discourse of lust and power (Joshi and Josh, 1994: P254).

These symbolic representations of masculinity and femininity are crucial to the process of identity creation. Communal consciousness arises insituation of insecurity and fear of the loss of social or economic status. Notions of 'izzat' (honour) and 'biradari' (brotherhood) are the main elements which link a family's public position is lost if the honour of the family's woman is lost (Hastings, 1988, 48). These notions get genderalised in the community and it becomes essential to show that men of that community have total control over their 'own women', Communal propaganda is full of the fall from greatness in the past, challenge of domination today, the need to prove strength, courage and manliness. What can be better way to prove manliness than by showing that your women are under our control. If the community is losing, its economic status, its social status, at least it still has one form or property within its reach. The fact that women are raped during communal riots is an expression of the same principle. Rape of the other man's woman is a way of humiliating him and showing access to his property (Chhachhi, 1989: 575).

In principle, women are always exposed to the consequences of war, Rape is not an aggressive expression of sexuality, but a sexual expression of aggression. In the perpetrator’s psyche, it does not fulfil sexual functions, but is a manifestation of anger, violence and humiliation (Stiefert, 1996). The Rape of women carries a message: a man to man communication, as it were, telling the other side that they are incapable of protecting "their" women and thus hurting their manly pride.
Wars, violent conflicts between people, as well as sexual attacks on women are historical. A look at following examples will provide insight that rape had been part of social process during collective violence. It should be borne in mind that the figures cited can only represent examples because atrocities committed against women have neither been recorded nor documented systematically.

In the Chinese city of Nanking in 1937, an estimated 20,000 women were raped, sexually tortured, and murdered during the first month of the Japanese occupation. Foreign missionaries reported independently of each other at least 10 cases of gang rape a day. In response to this, the term “Rape of Nanking” soon came into general use in the press. In 1943, Moroccan mercenaries serving in the remainder of the French Army were explicitly granted the right to rape and loot in conquered Italian territory. This resulted in widespread mass rapes. After the war, the victims were awarded a small pension by the Italian government (Waltzer, 1977: 133).

According to evidence presented at the Nuremberg war-crimes tribunal, the German command had opened a brothel in a hotel in the city of Smolensk into which women were forcibly driven. It also became known that it was usual practice to tattoo the legend “Whore for Hitler’s troops” on the bodies of captured partisan women and to use them accordingly. The French prosecutor at the Nuremberg tribunal produced evidence of mass rapes committed in retaliation for acts of the French Resistance. This proves that in some cases rape was employed as a means to achieve political-military ends. In Korea during World War II between 100,000 and 200,000 women (the “comfort women” who are now speaking out) were abducted to camps and raped or sexually tortured by the Japanese (Brownmiller, 1975). Figures on the number of women raped in the Greater Berline area in 1945 vary. According to conservative estimates, at least 120,000 women were raped. Less conservative estimates claim that up to 900,000 women were abused. Similar things happened in other parts of Germany. In southern Baden-Württemberg, for instance, rapes were committed on a massive scale by French soldiers (Burotto, 1994: 225).
An estimated 200,000 women were raped in Bangladesh in 1971. Many of these women were subsequently rejected by their husbands and families and ended up as a homeless, vagabond group. The government set up camps for these women but failed to furnish them with the basic facilities needed so that they soon turned into slums. Even today, more than 20 years later, there are women living in these camps. As regards the situation in Kuwait, according to official statistics at least 5,000 women are assumed to have become victims of rape during the Iraqi occupation of the country (Sasson, 1991).

And now the latest example is rape of Bosnian Muslim women the causality has gone up to 60,000 women. They have not only been raped but denied the rights to wipe the traces of violence through abortion which never happened before. They are impregnated and forced to bear the results of sexual violence to give birth to little chetniks (Drakulic, 1994: 180). Women are humiliated, impregnated and expelled from their country, then not only is their traditional cultural and religious integrity destroyed, but the productive potential of the entire nation is threatened.

Rape serves strategic purpose by inflicting sexual violence against women in wars and collective violence.

Sexual violence against women is likely to destroy a nation’s culture. In times of war, the women are the ones who hold the families and the community together. Their physical and emotional destruction aims at destroying social and cultural stability. Moreover, the psychological effects mass rapes have on the community concerned may lead to the devaluation and dissolution of the entire group. The destruction of women and/or their integrity affects overall cultural cohesion. Because societies derive their specific form, their self-image and their definition of reality from cultural cohesion, its destruction is of outstanding importance (Nordstrom, 1991).
theory is corroborated by observations concerning Serb strategy in the war in former Yugoslavia. It is reported that once an area or town has been invaded, a phased course of action was followed. The first step obviously consisted in destroying objects of cultural heritage.

Another aspect of this destruction of culture can be derived from the symbolic construction of the female body: In many cultures it embodies the nation as a whole and is so depicted in many works of art or national symbols such as the French "Marianne" personifying France, the United States Statue of Liberty, and the Bavarian national statue "Bavaria. In many societies woman represents the symbolic system of a group, the construction of the community being produced and made visible in her person, body, and life (Bentich, Bogdon. 1994). But this also means that violence committed against women is directed against the physical and personal integrity of a group. The rape of women of a community, culture, or nation can be regarded - and is so regarded - as a symbolic rape of the body of that community.

Moreover, the social construction of the feminine implies what (Adam, J. 1994) calls a "vulnerability to assault", something that the construction of masculinity does not include. This is shown by the well-known fact that women, even within their own society, culture, or nation, run a considerably greater risk of being bodily harmed than men. Also, communities tend to construct their rejection of strangers on the vulnerability of women. According to Wobbe, racism is frequently based on fantasies of injury inflicted on the female members of the "us" group. But this logic also works the other way round: The "Them" group can just as well be excluded in a particular way, or "sub-duced" as Wobbe puts it, by exerting violence against "their" women. The consequences of these cultural attributions to women can be observed in the aggression against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where mass rape and the sexual torture of women and girls are employed against the "Them" group as a strategy of destruction of culture and "ethnic cleansing." That strategy, however, is being practised on the
bodies of girls and women, in an unspeakably cruel way, in that women - whose own social and personal existence has been destroyed - are made to generate the future of that other community by extinguishing the present of their own community.

Here a further aspect of the destruction of the culture becomes obvious, that is, the idea of using rape as pollution of the enemy community. This idea was present in Bangladesh as well as in Berlin in 1945 (the idea of subverting the "pure race" Aryan project) and is an outspoken strategy of the Serbs in Bosnia who claim to imprint their identity on the Bosnian population by producing "little chetniks" or Serbs (Stiglmayer, 1993). Pollution is, thus, envisaged in two ways. First, there is a racist idea of contaminating the other community's blood and genes. Second, pollution also refers to dissolving a group's spirit and identity (Wing and Merchan 1994). It's clear that what they want to do to men, they do through women. Among civilized people and even more so among primitive people, it is always by working on the female spirit that they invade the family and the community.

If one thing has become clear over the past few years, it is the fact that caste and religious community are much stronger in women's lives than gender at least in situations of communal strife while patriarchal violence presents as crippling and at times, life threatening in daily life, the external threat of communal violence becomes overwhelming in times of conflict. In a communal riot, an individual identified as a Muslim, or Hindu or Sikh is a target for attack, irrespective of her/his religious convictions or political views. Thus, the present climate of heightened communal tension unavoidably strengthens patriarchal controls over women within the community. At the same time, the process of women embodying the vestiges of culture has its own internal logic of women's empowerment with patriarchal approval.
Women's link with caste and community underlines and is made via the family. One chief problem seems to be that the production of life itself has been taking place in patriarchal institutions. This not only pertains to producing children but has to the transmission of culture itself. This takes place not only at the intellectual and normative levels but through the details of daily organisation, food habits, pollution taboos who we eat and sleep with, how we dress, body language and so on. As women are crucial in the organisation of the home and the socialisation of children, cultural control over them is fundamental to the continuity, not only of the race, but tradition and communal identity itself. The production of life and cultural controls are thus intrinsically related. Engels views that inheritance of property was the key issue is only one aspect of the problem; feminists in the meantime have discovered the constitutive function of violence in establishing control. Without this control men's very access to children and the continuity of life is imperilled. Beyond the control over sexuality, fertility and labour, however, men's control over culture by constructing women as its vestiges, also need critical attention.

Women had been crucial not only as passive victims of violence, but also as a crucial lifeline not only for the continuity of life itself but also as a key to tradition and cultural identity. The South Indian concept of karpu (chastity) is founded on the real anxiety in men that if women's sexuality is not controlled, actual identities well change in unimaginable ways (Dietrich, 1994: 45).

IDEOLOGY OF MOTHERHOOD

As we well know, moments of violence are merely the tip of the iceberg, what lies submerged is a long history of complex human relationships imprecated in constantly shifting nexuses of power. This history is of pressing concern for feminists since Fundamentalism naturalises and sacralises the
family and sexualities and secludes women from the public sphere. Fundamentalism uses women's bodies as battlefield in its struggle to appropriate institutional power, and is therefore a political phenomenon.

The ideological base of identity politics and exclusivism is not new. It goes back a hundred years or so to a period of nationalist upsurge against both British rule and foreign religion (Christianity). During colonialism religious revivalism was a powerful opposition movement (Anderson, B. 1983). This revivalism involved an assertion of a national identity and a cultural/linguistic consciousness that was constructed in opposition to the identity/culture imposed on colonised peoples by their European rulers. The revivalism of the majority communities had adverse effects on minorities and women. Women's biological role, that of motherhood, was important for carrying out the revivalist national project. One powerful fix that codifies the ambiguity of women as powerful, yet under control, is the symbol of motherhood, which in many ways is cross cultural. Of course, there are great variations in the extent of patriarchal control. Nor is motherhood strictly speaking a religious ideology. It can occur in secular realm as well (Sarkar, 1990).

The link between motherhood ideology and nationalism came into sharp focus during the Hindu renaissance in Bengali. As Jasodhara Bagchi puts it: "Bengali mothers proverbially stood for unstinting affection, manifested in an undying spirit of self sacrifice for the family. The social reform era when there was vigorous protest against the overt oppression of women (child marriage perpetual widowhood for caste Hindu women, widow burning) considered motherhood in a way positive light mothers were justified by the greatness of their sons" (Bagchi, 1990).

Motherhood was also used by some nationalists to establish ideological control over women to keep them out of education and professions to reduce them to their reproductive roles. At the same time they
were glorified for their ability to sacrifice and conceptualized as mothers of the nation, as such, the benevolent powers of the goddess were ascribed to them. Revivalism, with its logic of totalizing the nation with a view to levelling out internal social differentiation and suppressing class/caste differences always targets women first. As many feminists have pointed out, women are constructed as ‘Mothers of the Nation’ and their biological role as reproducers of the nation was highlighted (Anderson, 1983 and Smith, 1991). This instrumentalizes women’s reproductive functions and their bodies in the interests of the state, the nationalist project, while drawing women out into the anti-imperialist struggle (addressing public meetings, running schools for girls, fighting for the right to vote, etc.). It simultaneously imposes a new agenda for women as cultural carriers of tradition.

While the basis for identity has shifted within each country, each ethnic group still has its myths of origin and its Golden Age in which women were “free”. They are situated and idealized within a broader framework of a ‘glorious’ mythical past in which social divisions are absent. The inheritors of this past were ‘Sons of Soil’ with claims to prior possession of the land. In such a context, the minorities were represented as invaders, outsiders or aliens who corrupted the pristine parity of majority (Jayawardena, 1996:X). They are accused of destroying ancient traditions and the old idyllic way of life and disrupting the political hegemony of a united polity most of all. They represented the threat of rape and thereby the possible ‘pollution’ of the ‘daughters of the soil’. Again women are reduced to their bodies, for as ‘women-mother’ they become (sex) objects in the possession of a male national collectivity. This is why the issue of rape takes on such a changed emotional aspect. As property of the national collective, the woman mother symbolism the saved inviolable borders of the nation (Jayawardena, 1996: XVI).
NATIONALISM AND WOMEN

Nationalism in South Asia was not solely oppressive. It also produced a liberal reformist agenda to 'cleanse' some of the social evils of society. While certain women played an important role in the early stages of the nationalist projects, it was often men who shaped the agenda of social reform. It is also interesting that the emphasis fell on the family as the key social institution and on motherhood as women's primary role. Attempts were made to educate women, abolish sati and other evils and discourage female seclusion. But the ultra nationalists resisted legislative and reformist changes as an unwanted intrusion by the colonial government and local reformers into the 'sacred' space of domestic life.

Many of the social reformers who were active in the revivalist/nationalist period focused on issues which would 'protect' women rather than on their rights which would enable them to be more active subjects in the public domain. B.G. Tilak, who was ironically called Lokmanya (Revered by the World) led a social crusade in India in the 1890s, a period when the site of struggle between reformists and traditionalists was the issue of raising the 'age of consent' for females from 10 to 12. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist ideologues at the turn of the century such as the Anagarika Dharmapala, advocated a "Return to Righteousness", denouncing the decline of Sinhala Buddhists and the creation of a nation of 'bastards' and 'hybrids', through western influence (MEL, de.N, 1996: 170).

The issue of symbolic and cultural representation was useful in opposing western political hegemony. Religious nationalism referred back to a better past in which women were a symbol of cultural purity. Women as a category were central in the recreation of community. This aspect of how they were viewed helps us to understand why constructions of the 'ideal woman' by revivalists from the early twentieth century onwards, were so frequent.
In South Asia, during colonial times, there was a particular notion of 'respectability'. Rules for 'respectable' women were laid down, traditions were invented, and the reconstructed ideal woman of the ethnic/religious middle class group was represented as a symbol of its purity. It is for this reason that gender and class become central to understanding ethnic and social exclusivism, religious fanaticism and identity politics. Religious nationalism conflated class differences in the appeal to a better past - shifting the struggle of different social groups of 'imagined' areas of conflict such as women's dress. One of the targets of nationalist discourse was practices representing westernisation, considered a trespass on cultural integrity. Religious nationalism offered an alternative to the supposed 'ills' of modern society. While religious revivalism treats women as passive subjects, women themselves may resist this and assert themselves as active subjects.

The liberal-left reformist tendencies of the anti-imperialist movement with its agenda of gender equity, secularism and democracy were not vigorously pursued in the post-independence era. National liberation, - which upheld the vision of a new age, free from foreign rule, with full rights for minorities and women, - once achieved, was followed by disruptions of the nation-state. Based on ultra nationalism and religious fanaticism, this fissuring resulted in challenges to some of women's earlier won rights. Thus, whereas national liberation struggles were often positive for women, post-colonial nationalism in South Asia took on a chauvinist hue, tinged with misogyny. Today, the struggles against both national chauvinism and male chauvinism are led by the women's movements of South Asia. They highlight atrocities like sati, dowry deaths and all forms of violence against women, as well as patriarchal religious fanaticism that tries to manipulate and control them. This is done through religious laws and codes of conduct that enforce subservience and subordination and even extend to the invention of rules on women's dress and behaviour. It is significant that a Bangladeshi woman, Taslima Nasreen came to fame and notoriety with her novel Lajja, symbolising the two oppressions in South Asian society today, the oppression of minorities and women.
In South Asia, once a forced hegemonic identity was established, of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, any deviation from this straight and narrow path became 'unpatriotic' and, therefore, subversive. Women who converted from or denied the religion of their birth, or married into another race or ethnic group were specially marked out as threats to the existing order.

Just as early liberal nationalists understood the importance of drawing women into the anti-imperialist struggle and the modernising process, post-colonial purveyors of fanaticism of various kinds are trying to incorporate women into their retrograde movements, based on a mythic religious and ethnic identity. All over South Asia we see the phenomenon of right-wing fanaticism highlighting women 'leaders' and giving them roles to propagate religious and social messages (Agnes, 1996. and Allen, 1993). They are the new 'mothers in the fatherland' and it would be unrealistic to discount the use made of women for such political agendas, and the appeal of such right wing charismatic movements for women. Perhaps this is a new version of "the heart of the heartless world" (Chhachhi 1994 and see Kakkar 1995). Thus ultra nationalist movements have used women as cultural representatives and constructed them in relation to western domination. Women are the carriers of authenticity; this puts them in a difficult position vis-a-vis their gender and religious identities. This dilemma needs to be recognised as it helps us to understand why some women accept their 'construction' in order to defend their culture.

The pressures of belonging to a minority discriminated community, for example, forced two Muslim women in India, Shehnaaz Sheikh and Shah Bano, to temporarily suspend taking up the issues of divorce and maintenance on secular ground, since the challenge to Muslim personal law was perceived as a threat to the identity of the Muslim community as a whole. This means that we need to locate identities within power relations and recognise that people have multiple identities (Asserting one's gender identity loses its appeal if it is located within a struggle for one's ethnic identity.)
Not all women accept the manipulation of their gender identity, however. Repression produces resistance, and in South Asia women's consciousness of the dangers of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism has also increased. One hopeful sign has been the growing resistance of women to these dangerous trends and the emergence of individual women who have spoken up in spite of death threats and harassment. In the 1970s and 1980s women in Pakistan were on the front-line of opposition to retrograde laws affecting women, such as the Hudood Ordinance. Inspite of organised mass hysteria women lawyers in Bangladesh and Pakistan have very bravely taken up the dangerous causes of Taslima Nasreen and Christian minorities, respectively. Feminists in Sri Lanka have, from the late 1970s, exposed the politics of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists and their double standards in respect of women and in India, vociferous women's groups have agitated on the Shah Bano case, sati, dowry deaths and the continuance of personal laws.

Despite the active role that women have played in challenging oppressive structures it is they who are the first to be marginalised, whether in the political or the social sphere. Linked to ultra-nationalist and revivalist ideologies has been the tendency, over the past hundred years, to demonise the emergent 'new woman' of South Asia. For example, Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist 'revivals' of the late nineteenth century - which were part of the nationalist project - spoke of the Aryan woman of Vedic times, the women in early Buddhism and women in the Koran as 'liberated' women. Women's decline was attributed to outside invasions in historical epochs, or to colonial rule and missionary influence. The spread of modern education, talk of 'women's rights' and the entry of women into professions in South Asia led ideologues of various religious traditions to denounce these women as foreign influenced, corrupt and immoral. Women were viewed as potential disrupters and it is their behaviour which became/becomes targeted for control.
Women's experience has been influenced by the rise of religious nationalist discourses. Nationalism attempts to legitimate the collective in time and space (Jayawardena, 1986: 15). Part of the appeal of nationalism is that it emerges in relation to an external threat to the collective. Activists in the nationalist project gain energy from an appeal to ethical resistance. Women are seen to be the repository of tradition and their 'inviolability' has been a powerful tool of cultural defence against modernisation and westernisation. Nonetheless the control of women's bodies as the symbolic space of the nation has often involved women's oppression (Kondiyoti, 1991). They have resisted this 'construction' as it has often been accompanied by their subordination.

The political implications of the gender/ethnicity divide relate why women choose communal identity to whether a unified women's movement is possible. Women's organisations may limit themselves to organising on the basis of ethnicity; this means that gender subordination takes second place in the context of an appeal to ethnic identity. This needs to be challenged since ethnic identification can lead to increasing conflict. As to the idealisation of women, the problem with the reification of the role of women is that it has conflated class/caste issues. This is one of the problems with nationalism — it seeks to homogenise. This may be possible in response to an external threat, but once the threat recedes, social and economic difference will reappear and expose the illusory nature of the homogeneous national self.

Plurality within society dislodges the myths of nationalists. This may be one reason why nationalist spend so much energy recreating the religious/ethnic enemy within whether it is Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Sinhala or Tamil. Creating an internal disrupter is the way nationalists try to transcend internal differentiation. For a nation-state with different ethnic groups this poses problems for continuity and peaceful co-existence. That is why it is important to deconstruct national/ethnic identity. Challenging
sexism may help to expose the illusory promises of nationalism. If women can understand their own oppression they will be better placed to understand other oppressions since they are linked and supported by similar social structures.

As we have observed construction of ethnic, race, gender, identity becomes important in times of crises. In such constructs of ethno-national identity and culture, the role of women has been, paradoxically fundamental. Despite her continuing marginalisation in patriarchal society her biological and historically social function of nurturing mother for instance, has imbued women with the notion of authenticity, permitting her to be used as a channel of culture and nation building. It follows that in times of war and socio-political insecurity the figure of the mother becomes the central signifier of racial and cultural values national pride and purity (Chhachhi, 1991: 165).

Our concern with communalism, operating within and through patriarchal structures of power, has particularly foregrounded its varied impositions on women's bodies, as it has legitimised the regulation of their sexuality, their interiorisation and silencing, and rationalised their commodification, their rape and immolation. Such embodied violence, be it overt or subtle, consensual or coercive, has nevertheless been continuously and spiritedly contested both by individual women as well as the women's movements in South Asia. While Pandita Ramabai denounced Hindu patriarchy in India in the 1880s, Taslima Nasrin received a death sentence for her outspoken comments about the persecution of Hindus and women in Bangladesh in the 1990s.

In the face of much slander and vituperation, the Women's Franchise Union in Ceylon championed the right of women from all classes and communities to be given the right to vote in 1927, while the Women's Action Forum in Pakistan has been at the forefront of challenges to the authority reposed in the repressive Hudood Ordinance, from the 1980s. Yet, what remains to be
seen is whether the women's movement will be strong enough to counter the increasing hegemony of fundamentalist and militant organisation's/parties over masses of women and providing a popular culture which can counter the false consciousness created by communalists.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF STUDY

The Partition of India in 1947 marked the end of British rule. It also prompted one of the largest mass movements of people ever seen as millions on the "wrong side" of the border fled to the newly created nation state of Pakistan (East and West) for Muslims and India for Hindu and Sikhs.

The partition of India took place in August 1947. The plan for division of India into Hindustan and Pakistan was announced on 3rd June 1947. According to it, a new political entity, Pakistan, was created, of which West Pakistan was to comprise the Muslim-majority province of Sind, the North West East Province and sixteen districts of Punjab; the remaining thirteen districts of undivided Punjab were to be part of India. As result of partition, there was exchange of population between the two newly created nations. Within a week of independence about eleven lakh Hindus and Sikhs had crossed over from West to East Punjab and in following days after partition another twenty five lakhs had collected in the refugee camps in West Punjab.

By November, 1947 nearly 29,000 refugees had been flown in both directions; about 673 refugee trains were run between 27 August and 6 November, transporting 23 lakh refugees inside India and across the border. Of these, 13,62,000 were Hindu and Sikhs and 9,39,000 were Muslims. Huge foot convoys, each 30-40,000 strong, were organised by the Military evacuation organisation and Liaison Agency to move the bulk of the rural population, especially those who still had their cattle and bullock carts with them. In nearly 42 days 24 non-Muslim foot columns, 8,49,000 strong, had crossed into India (Menon and Bhasin, 1996: p6). By the times migration was
finally over about eight million people had crossed the newly created boundaries of Punjab and Bengal, carrying with them memories of their harmonious past and traumatic present. The kind of violence that the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslim had visited upon each other are unmatched in scale, brutality and intensity.

As one of the earliest studies on this violence stated, a great upheaval that shook India from one end to the other during a period of about fifteen months commencing with 16 August, 1946 was an event of unprecedented magnitude and horror. History has not known fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded to the levels witnessed during the dark epoch when religious frenzy taking the shape of a heinous monster stalked through the cities, towns and countryside, taking toll a half of million innocent lives. Decrepit old men defenceless women, helpless young children, infants in arms, by the thousand were brutally done to death by Muslim, Hindu and Sikh families. Destruction and looting of property, kidnapping and ravishing of women, unspeakable atrocities, and indescribable inhumanities were perpetrated in the name of religion and patriotism (Khosla 1989: 3).

Partition retains its pre-eminence even today, despite a couple of wars on the borders and wave after wave of communal violence. It marks a watershed as much in people's consciousness as in the lives of those who were uprooted and had to find themselves again, elsewhere. Chronologies are still qualified with 'before partition' or 'after partition'; personal histories are punctuated with references to it, so much so that it sometimes seems as if two quite distinct, rather than concurrent, events took place at independence and that partition and its effects are what have lingered on in collective memory. Each new eruption of hostility or expression of social relations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and each episode of brutality is measured against what was experienced then. The rending of the social and emotional fabric that took place in 1947 is still far from mended (Butalia, 1993).
Historical accounts of partition see it as the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics and as a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and valour. They have looked at the causes and consequences of the division of the country, analysed the details of the many 'mistakes' and miscalculations made, examined the genesis of the call for a Muslim Homeland and so on. But when we start looking for social histories or for accounts that try to piece together the fractured reality of the terms and of the event itself from non official perspective — a perspective from the margins as it were — we encounter a curious void. Perhaps it has been too painful too difficult to separate personal experience from corroborated fact, too hazardous, at least for those who tried to record it to claim 'objectivity'.

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE DURING PARTITION AND WOMEN

It is a well known fact the women came to be the locus of tension in incidents of collective violence. In communal riots, they are at receiving end of violence as its victim. The violence women experienced took particular forms, There are accounts of innumerable rapes, of women being stripped naked and paraded down streets, of their breast being cut off, and of their bodies being carved with religious symbols of the other community (Talib 1991). Poonam Joshi quotes one respondent she interviewed as saying:

"I saw myself the women whose breasts were cut off... "Pakistan Zindabad" (long live Pakistan) on their chest was written in but they were alive. I worked in the social services camp for refugees. [It was] terrible. Even when they were united with their own families, brothers and fathers weren't prepared to take them back.. and so the refugee camps were built for them." (Joshi, P. 1995).
Woman's body became a sign through which men communicated with each other. The lives of women were framed by the notion that they were to bear permanent witness to the violence of Partition. Many women were left hostages, abducted and converted during the upheaval. The fear of abduction, or of falling into the hands of the enemy compelled hundreds of women to take their own lives and equal numbers to be killed by their own families and literally thousands of others carried packets of poison on their persons in the eventuality that they might be captured. And many committed suicide after they were released by their captors for having been used and polluted (Das, V. 1995).

In community narratives on partition riots the heroic sacrifices made by women have a special place. By choosing violent death for themselves rather than submitting to sexual violence by mass of other communities, women are enshrined in these narratives as saviours of family honour. In the male versions of these narratives, the voluntary choice made by their women is emphasised. Sometimes, men narrated stories in which a woman was helped to die by a close kinsman to save the honour of the community. Here is an account from a survivor narrated to Butalia.

"In Gulab Singh's haveli 26 girls had been put aside first of all my father, Sant Raja Singh, when he brought his daughter he brought her into courtyard to kill her, first of all he prayed (he did ardaas) saying 'sache badshah', we have not allowed your 'Sikhi' to get stained, and in order to save it we are going to sacrifice our daughters, make them martyrs, please forgive us ... and like this these girls were killed, they were cut with the regular swing and hit of the kirpans (sword)" (Butalia, 1993: W25).

There are number of such stories of women offering themselves up for death or simply being killed in an attempt to protect the purity and sanctity of the religion, a martyr's death seemed to be the only option preferable to conversion to an other religion.
A second story from the Thoa khalsa village near Rawalpindi is about the drowning of 90 women in a well. This village was under attack from 6th to 13th March, 1947. The people had taken shelter in large houses and gurudwaras. Negotiations were on to return and release the villagers in exchange for money and arms. In Thoa khalsa in particular even during that time women and children were sheltering in Gurudwara and most of the men had been taken hostage but incident of killing 25 girls by Raja Sant Singh was known in the whole village. When these women were surrounded by Muslims they requested them to take them to well pretending they were thirsty. One of the women called Mata Lajwanti, on reaching the well offered a prayer saying: 'saccha badshah', it is to save 'sikhi' that we are offering up our lives... forgive us and accept our martyrdom...' and saying those words jumped into the well. Some eighty women followed her.

The place of honour is the same be it any community. In Thoa khalsa Sikh women were scared of Muslim men. They embraced death rather than fall a prey to Muslim captives. In a village of East Punjab, Muslim families were scared of Sikh men as told to Joshi by Hameeda:

“When the men came in a fury, they didn’t see that this is someone’s daughter or someone’s sister. All they would see is a Muslim. They would come in a mob and see that this is a Muslim village and these are the women of Muslims. The elders had said to us (the women), if a Sikh comes near you, you should kill yourselves. There were some girls so honourable, when the Sikhs came they died they did not care for their lives, 'Izzat' was more important than life" (Joshi, 1995: 106).

These acts of mass killing and mass drowning in narratives are seen as a violent one, because they were acting upon some kind of a perceived notion of the good of their community. That in doing so they shared, in some way the values of the men, that the honour of the community lies in protecting
its women from patriarchal violence (for example rape and sexual assault, or worse conversion) of the other community, that the natural protectors here are the patriarchs, the men, but at this particular historical juncture they are, surrounded as they are, unable to offer such protection.

The women thus, one can perhaps say, could well have consented to their own deaths in order to preserve the honour of the community. There is, as there must be in all such patriarchal consent on the part of women an element of choice. But while for some this may have been a choice, others must have felt compelled to die because of the particular circumstances of the situation. As we see in narratives, it is women who become the symbols of the honour of the family and community, and their act of offering themselves for death becomes an honourable one not only because they have saved themselves from conversion to the other religion but also because by doing so, they have saved the community from dishonour and dilution of its purity which could have happened only through them. This act can be located in the realm of victimhood.

In these narratives, we do not get any insight into how women actually felt about it. Whether they really wanted to commit suicide, or would they have felt happy with their abductors. Women who became victims of communal frenzy are never talked about. Only deeds of women who accepted death are highly eulogised in community narratives. Hameeda’s narration puts big question mark on the presumption that women acted voluntarily "The elders had said to us (the women). 'It a Sikh comes near you, you should kill yourselves. Thus, the question of choice does not arise. In fact for Sikh women purity of ‘Sikhi’ is more important and for Muslim women purity of ‘Din’ is more valued than life.

After the Partition, the Government of India set up a fact finding organisation on the communal violence. According to Fact finding organisation loss of life in both warring communities was between 2,00,000
and 2,50,000. Regarding women victim the causality was around close to 1,00,000 on both sides. These women victims included killed, raped and abducted. Constituent Assembly legislative debates, where it was stated on 15 Dec. 1949 that 33,000 Hindu or Sikh women had been abducted by Muslims and the that the Pakistan government claims 50,000 Muslim women had been abducted by Hindu or Sikh men (Randhawa, 1994).

ABDUCTED WOMEN

It is difficult to present a profile of the abducted women during that upheaval. From the limited data that is available it is quite clear that the majority of women recovered were below the age of 35 and primarily from the rural areas. The circumstances of their "abduction" varied widely: some were left behind as hostages for the safe passage of their families, others were separated from their group or families while escaping, still others were initially given protection and incorporated into the host family.

Anis Kidwai, who had worked with abducted women, sums up the dilemma of many of these women poignantly. She states:

"In all of this, sometimes a girl would be killed or she would be wounded. The good 'maal' would be shared among the police and the army, the second rate stuff would go to everyone else. And then these girls would go from one hand to another and then another and after several hours would turn up in hotels to grace their decor, or they would be handed over to police officers in some place to please them".

And every single one of these girls, because she had been the victim of a saazish, she would begin to look upon her 'rescuer' perforce as an angel of mercy. And when this man would cover her naked body (whose cloths had become the loot of another thief) with his own loincloth or banian, when he
would put these on her, at that moment she would forget her mother's slit throat, her father's bloody body, her husband's trembling corpse. She would forget all this and instead thank the man who had saved her. And why should she not do this? Rescuing her from beasts, this good man had brought her to his home. He was giving her respect, he offered to marry her. How could she not become his slave for life?

It is only much later that realisation drowned that this man alone could not have been the innocent among the looters and the police, that he could not have been the gentlemen. But by the time this realisation came, it was too late. Now there was nowhere for her to go. By this time she was about to become a mother or she has been through several hands. After seeing so many men's faces, how could she ever dare to look at the face of her parents and her husband (Anis Kidwai, 1990).

Patel wrote that there are many accounts of abducted women who did not want to come back to their original house. One account illustrates the dilemma faced by recovered women:

“There were many women who were recovered and sent back but were not able to adjust to these families and had committed suicide. In one case in which the family was willing to acknowledge that a female relative who had been reported lost by her husband was recovered via government agencies. This particular man had registered his wife as lost after the recovery procedures initiated by the government of the two Dominions were implemented. In this case the woman was discovered to have been married to one of the Muslim men of the village, a family friend who had married her in order to save her from the hands of other men. By the time she was traced by officials, she had borne a son to this Muslim man. She was 'recovered' by social workers and because she and her son came under the definition of an abducted person, they were both 'restored' to her husband in India.
This reunion with her first husband and their two children did not last long. The family members said she did no get along well with her husband and so committed suicide after two years" (Patel. 1985: 68).

There is another account of Shanta, Punjabi woman from Mirpur (in Azad Kashmir). She was abducted at the age of 15 years and was recovered in 1956 on the insistence of her brother. She was married to a man in police service in Pakistan and had three children, two girls and a boy from this man. Shanta was returned to India against her wishes. She came along with her children and refused to meet her brother. She never spoke of her life in Pakistan except to say that she had been well treated and was content, and that her children were well looked after. In the ashram she educated herself, took a degree in Hindi Visharad, started to teach in a local school, and retired as its headmistress. She now lives in a house that she built herself, with her widowed daughter and her son and daughter-in-law.

Shanta was eloquent about her present life spoke with pride about having been able to stand on her own feet and of being helped greatly by the ashram and the women there but absolutely refused to speak of her past. "Dafa karo", she kept saying. "hun ki yaad karna hai Dafa Karo: Main sab bhula ditta hai. Hun main izzat nal rah rahin aan main kyon puranie gallon yaad karniyan ne. Mere bacheyon nu vi nahin pata. Hun sudhar nahin ho sakda kuj nahin ho sakda" (leave it what use it recalling the past? forget about it i've banished it all from my mind. I lead a respectable life now, why look back to past even my children don't know anything about it. Nothing can be done now. It can't be resolved) for years she believed in no religion and no god, till very recently when she joined a Radha Swami sect (Menon and Bhasin. 1996: 14).

Still another account by Kamalaben, (1985) who was actively associated in capacity of social worker in the process of recovery of abducted women, runs as follows.
"Some time in 1950 I was required to escort 21 Muslim women who had been recovered to Pakistan. They did not want to return but the tribunal had decided that they had to go. They were Muslim women married to sardars, they were determined to stay back because they were very happy. We had to use real force to compel them to go back.

The girls were desperate, the news got around and I received two anonymous letters saying if you take our women away to Pakistan we will kidnap you too. Those women cursed me all the way to Amritsar, loudly and continuously - they kept saying why are you destroying our lives? Who are you to meddle in our lives? We do not know you, what business is it of yours?"

Kamlaben goes on to describe how hefty Sikh men with flowing beards would come to the transit camp where Muslim woman recovered from their homes were being kept before being transported to Pakistan. They would beg the social workers to return their women to them. They would cry and sob and say the women had been converted to Sikhism by tasting of holy amrit and were now wedded wives. Kamlaben adds how convoys of men would follow them to Wagh border, and how women would make repeated attempts to escape from police escort in order to get back to the men with whom they had been living.

Kidwai narrates an account of one another women who refused to join her father who came to take her back: "K was 16 and had gone to visit her grandparents in village Hattiyan Dupatta (Muzaffarbad Distt. of Azad Kashmir), when she was picked up by the Kabailis (tribals). She passed from one man to another, tried to commit suicide by throwing herself off the roof of her captor's house, but was caught and taken away by a zaildar. She was rescued by her parents" erstwhile neighbour, a patwari (village headman who keeps all land records), who kept her in his house for some time before he persuaded her, for her own safety, to marry his son who was in fact younger than her.
“Her father went to Lahore, stayed there for three months and tried to trace her through the Red Cross, but failed. When they finally managed to make contact with her, he went again to Pakistan and tried hard to persuade her to return. She did indeed journey to Lahore to meet him, but refused to go back because she was carrying her husband's first child. Her father returned, heart-broken and minus his daughter, and died shortly thereafter.

K had two sons and four daughters, commanded great respect in her family and community and according to the accounts of those who visited her, lived well and with great dignity. She had complete freedom, we were told, didn't believe in Islam, was not obliged to read the Koran or say her namaaz. The common description of her was that she was like a dervesh whose words had almost oracular importance. She never moved out without a pistol (is supposed to have shot dead three intruders who entered her house when she was alone), always kept a lathi by her side, was quite militant - and wrote reams of mystic poetry”.

K's brother, said she was filled with longing for her family after she met her father, and wrote and wrote and wrote, letters that spoke heartrendingly of the wall of separation that had come between them, of the misfortune that divided them forever.

Who has aimed these arrows of separation?
Neither you, nor me
He has released these arrows of separation
That forever divides you and me.

When her brother wrote once that for them she was forever lost, she responded with, “How can you talk of purity and honour? How can you denounce me for what was no fault of mine?” When he visited her 40 years
later, she sat guard by his bedside, all night, every night, for the two months that he stayed with her. But she did not visit them in India even once, nor did she ever return to their ancestral village in Muzzafarabad” (Kidwai, 1990).

These three narratives (as well as the disputed cases heard by the Tribunal, and the several stories of women who had managed to escape from the transit camps on both sides), offer clear clues regarding the particular circumstances of abducted women’s lives and the individual adjustments they made in order to achieve a degree of equilibrium that would enable them to take up the threads of living again. At the same time they are an indication of the strong resistance by, and often refusal of, many women to conform to the demands of either their own families or their governments, to fall in line with their notions of what was legitimate and acceptable.

Some women who resisted returning to their countries resorted to hunger strikes, others refused to change out of the clothes they had been wearing either when they were recovered or when they had been abducted. Their protest could be powerful and searing. One young recovered girl confronted Mridula Sarabhai thus:

"You say abduction is immoral and so you are trying to save us. Well, now it is too late. One marries only once - willingly or by force. We are now married - what are you going to do with us? Ask us to get married again? Is that not immoral? What happened to our relatives when we were abducted? Where were they?... You may do your worst if you insist, but remember, you can kill us, but we will not go” (Basu, 1985).

For those who were recovered against their wishes, the choice was not only painful but bitter. Abducted as Hindus, converted and married as Muslims, recovered as Hindu but required to relinquish their children because they were born of Muslim father. There was no acceptance of Muslim fathers and disowned as 'impure' and ineligible for membership.
within their erstwhile family and community, their identities were in a continual state of construction and reconstruction, making them as one woman said to us 'permanent refugee'. Many women who had been abandoned by their families and subsequently recovered from Pakistan, simply refused to return to their homes, preferring the anonymity and relative autonomy of the ashram to a now alien family (Das 1995: 127).

In accounts of these abducted women we see that state was confronted with a situation of crises. The state had made no provision of choice so women were left with only one option: to resist recovery. The state came under severe criticism from various fronts for its over enthusiasm for the recovery of abducted women. In fact, the very act which was considered to be humanitarian and welfarist turned out to inhuman and it provided least happiness to abducted women.

The question of religion nationality and control of sexuality, dictated the nature of the whole enterprise. The women were Hindus and Muslims and they had to brought back to their Hindu and Muslim nations. There are close parallels in the notions of honour as defined by the community and family on the one hand and the state on the other for the survivors among communities and families where women were 'martyred' or those to become 'martyrs'. They (the women) were taking upon themselves the task of preserving the 'honour' of the community, perhaps the biggest blow to which would have been forcible conversion, a transgression or a blatant violation of the boundaries and spaces delineated for themselves by the two communities Hindus (and Sikhs) and Muslims and equally importantly for the spaces delineated for the women by each of the communities.

These family codes were paralleled by the codes of the state where the women themselves did not by and large necessarily take on the task of holding up the honour of the 'nation' (or if they did we have no record of it). But the state invested them with this, their rescue or recovery was seen as a
'humanitarian' task, an 'honourable' enterprises and soon. Thus the patriarchal family and the patriarchal state both came close in their perception of women's role. While women carry the honour; they do not have a choice. The identity of women was firmly fixed as either Muslim or Hindus. As far as the Indian state was concerned, the task of flushing out Muslim women from Hindus or Sikhs home as constructed as duty by which Hindu men would regain purity. While the task of bringing back Hindu women from Pakistan was seen in terms of honour of the new nation.

By becoming the father patriarch, the state found itself reinforcing official kinship relations by discrediting, and in fact declaring illegal those practical arrangements that had in the meantime come in to being, and were functional and accepted. Community practices with regard to marriage adoption and the fostering of children were at the level of practical kinship flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of behaviour. the state's more abstract construction of purity and honour brought women under a far stricter control than that exercised by the family.

It was, after all, widespread sexual violence and abduction which had propelled women outside their normal spheres of family and kinship. However, in the face of collective disaster the same community showed a wide variety of strategic practices were available to cushion them from the consequences of this disaster. Others families had left young children in care of Muslim neighbours while fleeing.

All such women and children now came under a single category of abducted. They had to be returned to their respective countries, depending upon their religion. As Abduction was not only criminal but it transgressed prescribed norms in every respect. This was why such alliance could neither be socially acknowledged nor granted legal sanction and the children born by them would forever be illegitimate.
This reinforcement of legitimate family required the dismembering of the illegal one by physically removing the woman/wife mother from its offending embrace and relocating her where she could be adequately protected. It also entailed representing the woman as ill treated and humiliated, without violation or choice most importantly without any rights the might allow her to intervene in this reconstruction of her identity and her life. Only thus could social and moral order be restored and community and National honour, vindicated.

There are not many account of how many actually wanted to be rescued, how many were ready to face second trauma, second discourse of dislocation, and what their feeling were about this whole this discourse which was concerned with their lives the. The stories of partition are retrieved through oral testimonies of survivors or from the memories of that period. Otherwise all those who experienced the trauma, they rarely talk again due to fear of society as we have no social space for stories of sexual violence and women who as victims always feel shameful and humiliated as our socialization process pushes them in due to silence.

The stories narrated here are a very small fragment of history but they point out that in periods of collective violence, such as war, insurgency and widespread communal riots, women can come to the centre of consciousness as an abstract category and the regulation of their sexuality and reproductive functions can become visibly a matter of state. The quest for justice on behalf of abducted women and children led ironically to new kinds of suffering imposed upon them.
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