

CHAPTER 2

'A MOST OBJECTIONABLE CLASS OF PEOPLE': NATION-BUILDING AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE DEVADASI COMMUNITY

Which other woman of my kind has
felicitated scholars with gifts and money?
To which other woman of my kind have
epics been dedicated?
Which other woman of my kind has
won such acclaim in each of the arts?
You are incomparable,
Muddupalani, among your kind.

-- Muddupalani on herself,
Radhika Santwanam, late eighteenth century.

This Muddupalani is an adultress...Many parts of this book [Radhika Santwanam] are such that they should never be heard by a woman, let alone emerge from a woman's mouth. Using Sringara rasa as an excuse, she shamelessly fills her poems with crude descriptions of sex...She is born into a community of prostitutes and does not have the modesty natural to women.

- Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Andhra Kavula
Charitram. 1887.

...the fact that the Prevention of Dedication Bill...has received enthusiastic support from the entire public in this Presidency is a proof positive of the demand for the total abolition of this class of refined prostitutes ... who are a danger to society in general.

-- Muthulakshmi Reddi, Reply to a memorandum
against legislation written by the South
India Devadasi Association, 1939.

Between the composition of Muddupalani's sringara prabandham and Veeresalingam's diatribe on it, little more than a century had passed; and between that accomplished ganika's self-description and Muthulakshmi Reddi's denunciation of the devadasi community, less than two centuries. Two hundred years of decisive transformations: a period that witnessed the process by which a conglomeration of small territories and states first came under colonial domination and then set itself on the road to becoming a nation.

The British rulers in India displaced or transformed the irreducibly diverse, localized practices and knowledge systems of different regions by subjecting them to a standardizing administrative practice; the requirements of citizenship within the terms of the nation-in-the-making rendered these changes irreversible. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the agents of normalization were the missionaries, initially, and later, upper caste/middle class social reformers and nationalists who undertook the work of imagining and building the nation. While the latter were about this task, they also consolidated the power they had acquired as beneficiaries of British rule. As one might have expected, the features of the normative citizen, which became discernible as he emerged from the fog of tradition into the clear light of the national-modern, looked remarkably like those of the typical member of the class that produced him.

This chapter is an attempt to study the processes of displacement and normalization, unfolding over the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, by which the celebrated ganikaa of the princely courts and the devadasis attached to temples were re-imagined

as--and finally driven to **becoming--'a** community of **prostitutes,**' and by which upper caste social reformers and nationalists became the arbiters of '**Indian**' culture. What follows is an account of the destruction of the devadasis' world-view and way of life--both unwelcome under the new **order--** by the twin processes of nation-building and **class-definition.**

The Nineteenth Century:
the Prehistory of the Anti-Nautch **Movement**

Modernity was not, of course, welcomed with equal enthusiasm in every territory or by every community in South India. Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, what is striking is the unevenness, reflected in the fortunes of the devadasis and of sadir, of its effects. In the battle over the survival of sadir, the forces massed on either side of the **question--**individuals, communities, discourses and world-views--were fairly evenly matched, especially since the colonial government made it clear that it was not going to throw its administrative weight behind the anti-sadir camp.

Though there was a general falling away in the status of devadasis throughout this century, for reasons I will describe below, actual anti-nautch efforts were sluggish and purposeless, the successes unspectacular and far between. The lack of a consensus about the pernicious effects of sadir, and the persistence of a Hindu religious ethos which legitimized the lifestyle that went with this practice, helped the devadasi community stave off disaster until the 1890s.

With the launching of the official anti-nautch campaign in 1892-93, the anti-sadir forces finally prevailed. The pace of reform was stepped up and by 1947, when the Devadasi Act was

passed, Muthulakshmi **Reddi**, chief architect of the Act, could indulge in some justifiable **self-gratulation**: "...millions of our young girls have been saved from a life of degradation and have settled down in an honourable life. In these three decades, the Devadasis as a community have disappeared" (Autobiography, 73).

I have allowed the availability of material to dictate the shape of this chapter; thus the primary focus is the dense cluster of arguments set out by the reformers in the three crucial decades (1920 -1950) of the twentieth century. But I begin by describing the build-up to the controversies of this period, since it is impossible to understand the mood of the anti-nautch agitators without examining the pressures on them of colonial ideology and missionary evangelism.

1) The Inexplicable Lethargy of the Colonial **Government and** the Zeal of the Missionaries:

In the mid-nineteenth century, when Indian nationalist indignation about sadir had not yet come to a focus, the debate on the devadasis and their art situated itself in the field of antagonisms between the British administrators and the Christian missionaries in India. The relations between these two agents of Empire, for all their uneasy cooperation, were never quite smooth; the missionaries frequently deplored the impiety and opportunism of the administrators. In the case of sadir. they had reason to feel particularly bitter. For the better part of a century their appeals for sanctions against it fell on deaf ears. The government was so incorrigibly evasive that the **message** eventually got through to the conscience-stricken: they **would** have to rely on other, **non-administrative** resources to

eliminate nautch.

In the event, the case of sadir turned out not to be one of those from which the British administrators extracted ideological support for the perpetuation of their own rule in India. Legislation was reluctantly approved by the colonial government only at the end of a formidable campaign in which the missionaries joined forces with Hindu social reformers.

The British reluctance to get involved in the sadir question needs explaining, given that they intervened in several practices that had comparable social significance and 'religious' import for their Indian subjects. I think there were three reasons for this fact. The first reason has to do with the British approach to legal agency; the second, with the policy of non-intervention in religious affairs where this was, of course, compatible with liberal government; the third, with the colonizers' long-standing acceptance of—even affection for—nautch as a form of entertainment, and their inclination to count its practitioners among the sexual 'perks' of Empire.

Indigenous customary practices caught the eye of the colonial administration primarily when there was proof of abject victimization. In the case of sati, for instance, the possibility that widows might be forced to immolate themselves--a coercion tantamount to homicide--suggested to British officials the need for 'eyewitnesses' at the funeral ceremonies who could ensure that the satis were voluntary. The dedication of girls to temples as devadasis obviously did not have the blood-curdling aspect of practices like (forced) sati or child marriage.

If an official found it impossible to verify the agency of

devadasis in the matter of their being dedicated or of performing sadir, he would in all likelihood have turned to one of the well-known accounts, embodying the imperialists' knowledge-building effort, of Indian religious and cultural practices. If he had consulted the Abbe **Dubois's** monumental Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, for instance, he would have found that "no shame whatever [was] attached to parents whose daughters **adopt[ed]** this career" (593). Edgar Thurston, using the Census reports at the turn of the century, is more **explicit:**

At the present day they [the devadasis] form a regular caste, having its own customs and rules of etiquette, and its own **panchayats....and** thus hold a position, which is perhaps without a parallel in any other country ... Among the Dasis, sons and daughters inherit equally, contrary to ordinary Hindu usage.... (127)

Thurston records that devadasis are "the only class of women, who are, under Hindu law as administered in the British Courts, allowed to adopt girls to themselves" (151).

Most observers in the nineteenth century noted with some astonishment that devadasi girls were exceptionally well-educated, given the norms for Hindu women. The Rev. M. Philips remarks in his document on Hindu culture that "the dancing girls are the most accomplished women among the Hindus. They read, write, sing and play as well as dance." And any follower of the proceedings of the law courts, British or

Indian, could not have failed to notice that the **devadasis** took their rights seriously enough to be among the most litigious women in Hindu **society**.

Despite all these proofs of the skill, grace and independence with which the devadasis conducted their lives, the missionaries repeatedly urged that it was the moral duty of the colonial administration to '**rescue**' them. Assenting in a half-hearted way, the government made some provisions to ensure that minor girls were not adopted by devadasis for the purposes of dedication. The devadasi community had been traditionally exempt from the enforcement of Sections 372 and 373 of the Indian Penal Code, which restrained "the **transformation** of minor girls for immoral purposes" (Sundar **Raj**, 230); in 1878, the Secretary of State for India directed the Governor General in Council to bring them under the purview of these sections. This strategy did not work very well; devadasis simply moved outside British territory to perform the adoption and dedication ceremonies, or adopted majors instead of minors.

Since legal agency was the point at issue, the British also allowed devadasis to petition for permission to be dedicated, if they could prove that they were not being coerced. This resulted in curious documents like the following, recorded by Thurston (it is addressed to the Superintendent of Police and to a European Magistrate):

Petition of two **girls**, aged 17 to 19.

Our father and mother are dead. Now we wish to be like prostitutes, as we are not willing to be married, and thus establish our house-name. Our mother also was of this

profession. We now request permission to be prostitutes according to our religion, after we are sent before the Medical **Officer.** (qtd. in Thurston 134)

Technically, the appellants had to prove that they were not being inducted into 'immoral traffic'; but it seems that in practice the Courts recognized the validity of petitions such as the above.

Such evidence that the devadasis were agents in their own right added to the colonial government's determination to apply here the rule of **non-interference** in specifically 'religious' questions. Even in a fairly clear case like that of sati the administration felt some scruples on this score; in the case of the dedication of girls and of sadir, whose effects were certainly not as drastic as those of sati, intervention did not seem warranted.

Missionaries and reformers in the nineteenth century, irritated by the studied indifference of the administration to the Nautch Question, accused the colonial officials of having a hidden motive: a desire to actively encourage this 'vice,' a result of their own weakness for the kind of entertainment the devadasis provided. This perception may well have been accurate. Nautch was patronized by colonial visitors, non-official settlers and administrators, in their official capacities as well as during their leisure hours; there is also reason to believe that some members at least of the devadasi community were favoured as companions and concubines by colonial officials. I will **briefly** describe both these investments (the official and the submerged) in the devadasi's art and body.

At the time when sadir was ubiquitous in South India, it was a favourite source of entertainment for British officials who had exhausted what the '**little England**' style of employing leisure could offer (hunting, bowling, riding, picnics). "To see a nautch was something like attending the ballet in Europe," Percival Spear writes, "with the difference that the troop always came to a private house" (35). "Hart in 1775 speaks of 'six or seven black girls being brought in after **dinner,**' when 'they sang and danced well,' and in 1778 they were still 'much admired by the European gentlemen'" (Spear, 35). The popularity of nautch among the official class remained **undiminished** even after enough European women began to arrive in India to make European dancing feasible.

Sadir performances **figured** prominently in the establishment of goodwill between wealthy Indians and British officials or visitors, until they eventually became a mandatory aspect of aristocratic Indian hospitality. They could be used, for instance, to demonstrate the esteem a princely court felt for the Crown: the repertoire of the dancers in the Thanjavur court included a version of "God Save the King," taught them by an English music master who was also an employee of the court. When the Prince of Wales visited India in **1875**, he was entertained **with** a nautch performance; so was his son, Prince Albert Victor, **in** 1890, though on this occasion there were protests.

Nautch was also introduced very early into colonial public **ceremony**. Here is the order, for instance, of the parade held to **commemorate** the Inauguration of the New Charter in Madras in

Major John Roach on horseback at the head of a Company of Foot.

Soldiers, and Kettledrums, Trumpets and other music.

The Dancing Girls and the Country Music...

and so on, with several important dignitaries following, until the "Chief Gentry in the town" bring up the rear (Spear, 21-22). Musically infelicitous as this arrangement must have been, it expressed something of the naturalization of sadir as a mode of symbolic exchange in colonial life.

Within the ranks of the colonial administrators, class position determined, to some extent, the flexibility of attitudes to sadir. The middle class officials were the ones most prone to be scandalized by the dance. The Tommies took all kinds of sexual liaisons with Indian women in their stride, and the aristocrats who occupied the higher administrative ranks and who considered 'nautch parties' a substitute for the theatre disdained to scrutinize the morals of the performers too closely. The British upper classes were, after all, familiar with the sexual licence granted to men and women who went on the stage in their home country; to expect chastity from Indian performers seemed to smack of intolerance and **puritanism**. Asked to respond to the launching of the official anti-nautch movement as late as 1893, Lord Wenlock, Governor of Madras, wrote to the Governor General, Lord Lansdowne: "I am rather puzzled as to **what** the best answer should be to these people, and of course I **am** not prepared to be more virtuous than you **are**.'" If such Puritanical principles applied in England, "'...**we** shall not be **able** to attend any theatrical performance till we have **satisfied** ourselves as to the moral character of all the **performers**'"

(qtd. in Ballhatchet 158). Even the starchy Lord Curzon, well known for his insistence that the colonial **officials** set a moral example to the subject race, recorded his indifference to the morals of devadasis: "The Viceroy is not himself interested in these performances; but he hardly thinks the matter is one on which he is called upon to make any pronouncements or to take any **action**'" (qtd. in Ballhatchet 159).

"It is their languishing glances, wanton smiles and attitudes not quite consistent with decency, which are so much admired," one Mrs. Kinderby writes of the devadasis in the **mid-eighteenth** century.⁸ In the private realm, devadasis were clearly part of the libidinal economy of empire. Though not all devadasis had the freedom to cohabit with white men (since many were restrained by ritual proscriptions regarding sexual partners); and though the custom of concubinage or marriage to a 'native' woman abruptly fell into disuse around the end of the eighteenth century, the effects of these relationships lingered.

Sexual adventure, as Ronald **Hyam** and Kenneth Ballhatchet have pointed out, was always one of the hidden motives of
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 colonization. The fantasy of Oriental sexuality was particularly attractive to those who were considered sexual deviants in their own countries. Homosexuals, pederasts, libertines, sadists, inveterate experimenters all headed East to indulge their forbidden tastes. A certain sexual licence, therefore, was always tacitly understood to be part of the experience of Empire, and devadasis, along with camp followers, young boys, native servants, minor girls and others, were objects of desire who fuelled what Ronald Hyam calls **the** 'sexual energy of Empire.' Morals in general being rather **lax** in the early years

of colonization, liaisons with devadasis would have merely been reckoned among the many venial sins of colonial adventurers.

During the phase in which the East India Company and the colonial government actively encouraged liaisons between Indian women and European men, with a view to establishing a Eurasian community, devadasis were highly prized concubines. **Hyam** offers the examples of Captain Edward Sellon, writing in the 1830s and 1840s, who praised the "cleanliness, the sumptuous dress, the temperance, ability to sing and dance" of the 'nautch **girl**' (qtd. 88); and of a Dr. J. Shortt who writes in the 1860s that the dancing girls of South India were attractive enough to "meet the admiration of the greatest connoisseur" (qtd. 89). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, open concubinage was no longer considered necessary or acceptable. The Company had prospered, official policy changed; new administrators felt that their prestige depended on keeping their social distance from the native population; improved living conditions allowed European women to sojourn in India; the Haitian rebellion and much later, the Indian Revolt of 1857, appeared to be warnings against miscegenation. So while actual sexual relationships between British officials and devadasis moved out of public view, there can be no doubt that such relationships remained possible. In any case, the interactions with devadasis as performers of sadir were not affected until the end of the nineteenth century.

When even these interactions were threatened by the gathering forces of adverse public opinion, the **reform-oriented** section of the vernacular press joined the missionaries in expressing a grim satisfaction with the fact that colonial administrators would now suffer some deprivation. One

commentator (in the **Sasilekha** of November 1894) approves of the decision of "some ladies and gentlemen of England" to "ensure non-attendance of Governors and other Government officials at **nautch** parties." He adds, resentfully, "that in the **mofussil** [,] people, unable to resist the bullying of the Collectors, entertain them at nautches at great expense and trouble to themselves. And the Governors ... go forth on tours through the districts seemingly to inspect the country, but really to gratify themselves with the singing and dancing of these fallen women; but their days of enjoyment and pleasure are numbered" (NNR 22, 1894: 426).

In the battle of attrition between the aristocratic heads of British government in India and the missionaries whom these administrators considered intolerant and moralistic, it was the missionaries who eventually won all the moral victories. Their disapproval was great and their stamina proverbial, carrying all before it. In 1914, J.N. Farquhar writes: "Missionaries have long protested in the name of morality and decency against the whole system [the **devadasis'**] gestures ...are lewd and suggestive; and their songs are immoral and obscene. Many a man has spoken of the dire results such exhibitions have on the young" (410).

Farquhar's vocabulary recalls the Abbe Dubois and his strictures: there is a **remarkable** similarity in the choice of adjectives. The Abbe describes the practice of dedication and the temple rituals in which the devadasis participated with admirable exactitude, but he also ventures comment:

These lewd women who make a public traffic of their charms, are consecrated in a special manner to the worship of the divinities of India. They dance and sing within the temple morning and evening. The first they execute with sufficient grace although their attitudes are lascivious and their gestures indecorous. Their singing is almost always confined to obscene verses describing some licentious episode in the history of their gods. All the time they have to spare in the interests of the various ceremonies is devoted to infinitely more shameful practices.... (Dubois 592)

Already, in this earliest of missionary accounts, we see the **transformation** of an aesthetic confusion into a moral problem: the Abbe's obvious ignorance of the conventions of Sringara translates into accusations of '**lewdness**' and '**lasciviousness.**' '**Lewdness,**' '**obscenity**' and '**indecorousness**' occur frequently in subsequent missionary discourse: the Abbe Dubois obviously started a trend of response that the **missionaries** did not want to relinquish even in its finest detail. Here is another missionary description of sadir. this time in 1893: "A Nautch dance is performed by Hindu prostitutes, who usually sing songs of the most lascivious character, accompanied by gestures and movements of the body having an obscene meaning." (qtd. in Ballhatchet, 157). The odd thing about this particular vocabulary of condemnation is that certain sections of the Indian upper castes, without doubt familiar with

the erotic-religious significance of bhakti literature and with the concept and conventions of sringara, so completely took it over, along with the collapsing of the aesthetic into the moral that typified it.

The Abbe Dubois (c.a. 1770-1848) himself belonged to the first generation of European missionaries in India--the orientalist missionaries to whom we owe dictionaries, grammars of several languages and documents about several Indian practices. He thought of himself, no doubt, as an ethnographer, meticulously recording his observations. His moral confusion is disguised by the documentary mode of his writings. At one level he is fascinated: "...it must be confessed that the quiet seductions which Hindu prostitutes know how to exercise with so much skill resemble in no way the disgraceful methods of the wretched beings who give themselves up to a similar profession in **Europe...**" (594); at another, horrified by his own admiration: "God forbid, however, that anyone should believe me to wish to say a word in defence of the comparative modesty and reserve of the dancing-girls of India!" (594).

The effect of Christian missionary teaching in general was to spread a perception of Hinduism as corrupt, barbaric, superstitious, backward. Obviously nothing short of an epistemic shift would make this view acceptable to large numbers of people; generally tolerated cultural practices had to take on the aspect of '**evils**' in the eyes of the very people steeped in that culture. The discursive groundwork for this shift had been laid throughout the nineteenth century by religious reform **movements** like the Arya Samaj and the **Brahmo** Samaj, by democratizing and non-brahmin movements like that of the

Satyashodaks in Maharashtra, and by Christian **missionaries**. The instruments of change included: the education of Indians in English, the translation of English texts into the vernaculars and vice versa, the institution of a periodical press that churned out cheap and accessible tracts, papers and journals, itinerant preachers at 'wayside **pulpits**,' public meetings and, of course, legislation in either the national or the state-level councils. An apparatus was set up which could instantly respond to and disseminate the new ideas, as well as register the crumbling of the orthodoxy.

By far the most effective medium for the transmission of missionary views during this period was the vernacular press. In the tracts and periodicals that flowed from **mission-established** presses all over the country, a strategic and potent combination of evangelical Christianity and post-Enlightenment concern with science, reason and political rights was mobilized for the promotion of the Christian faith. As Rosalind O'Hanlon points out, these deeply divergent strains in missionary discourse came together effectively enough to undermine Hindu belief. Here is the **Darpan**, a reform paper started by **Bal Shastri Jambhekar**, in 1832, entertaining visions of a transformed, Christianized press "chasing away the mists of error and ignorance which clouded men's minds and shedding over them the light of knowledge in which the people of Europe have advanced so far before the other nations of the world" (qtd. in O'Hanlon 91).

Nautch was bound to be singled out by such periodicals for special condemnation. In 1832, the **Darpan** launched an attack on nautch: "...with Mussulmans and Parsies, as well as with Hindoos, Nautches are considered necessary, wherever the expense

can be afforded, to the celebration of rites **most** solemn; and with **Hindoos**, even those which are accounted most sacred are profaned and mixed up with such exhibitions" (qtd. in O'Hanlon 92). Several **journals** were started in Madras Presidency by missionaries or Hindu reformers, expressly in order to spread the message of **reform**.

By the end of the nineteenth century the missionary crusade against sadir and the practice of dedication was well under way. There had been a split in the ranks of the Hindu social reformers in Madras, the conservative faction parting company with the Enlightenment faction on the Age of Consent Bill. In 1892, William Miller took the second faction under his wing, helping set up the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association, which renewed the campaign to put an end to sadir. In May **1893**, Miller chaired a public meeting which officially inaugurated the anti-nautch movement, "an episode," as G.A. Oddie remarks, "which marked one of the high points of missionary-Hindu co-operation, at least in the south" (103).

In the same year a signature campaign was launched to stir up public feeling against sadir, especially among Europeans. The missionaries were particularly concerned about the backsliding of their own countrymen, since this could cause discontent among potential converts. A memorial addressed to the Governor General of India was signed by several anti-nautch agitators. Lord Curzon, as I have noted above, sent them a lukewarm and distinctly scornful response. Anti-nautch hopes were then pinned on the efforts of "certain ladies and gentlemen in England who **have** set themselves to ensure non-attendance of ...Government officials at nautch-parties" (**NNR** 22, 1894). The Sasilekha of 16

Nov 1894 is reported to have said: "...when they have once undertaken the thing, the evil practices will soon be abolished" (NNR 22, 1894).

The missionary involvement with education gave them both an additional reason (apart from moral revulsion) and an opportunity to intervene in the lifestyle of devadasis. The education of the children of devadasis in mission schools was a subject of much controversy. Since '**respectable**' parents refused to place their female children in these schools, if it meant that they would have to share a classroom with devadasis, the taboos on female education were further reinforced, to the dismay of the **missionaries**. In fact the very idea of educating girls, associated as this was with devadasi culture, was repugnant to upper caste Indians. At the same time the mission-run schools and colleges became focal points from which anti-nautch discourse could spread. Miller, for example, was for many years Principal of the Madras Christian College and extended the college's goodwill and hospitality to the anti-nautch movement. This had a snowball effect. Raghupati Venkataratnam (1862-1939), who eventually helped launch the Social Purity campaign in Andhra, studied in the Madras Christian College during the Miller years and in turn taught at **Pachaiyappa's** College where he had a phenomenal influence on student opinion.

British women, some of them missionaries, also emerged as energetic anti-nautch spokespersons. Their role in India fitted into the larger effort being made at this time, in Britain, to **mobilize** women's philanthropy to solve the problems caused by Poverty and rapid industrialization. The list of problems women

were considered fit to handle included prostitution, naturally; but also the dismal condition of workhouses, poor public hygiene, **alcoholism**, single motherhood and so on. Women were believed to have a special part to play in rescuing other women; a dimly **proto-feminist** consciousness animated such efforts. Josephine Butler, one of **Reddi's** most important predecessors and role models, writes in a letter to her Countrywomen, "Dwelling in the Farmsteads and Cottages of England":

I daresay you all know that there are women, alas, thousands of women, in England who live by **sin**....**you** may have passed one such in the street and have shrunk aside, feeling it shame even to touch her; or perhaps, instead of scorn, a deep pity has filled your heart, and you have longed to take her hand, and to lead her back to a better and happier life. (151)

It has been argued that the experience middle class women gained in the course of these charitable works, and the political lessons they learnt, helped lay the groundwork for the Suffragette movement at the turn of the century. The notion of what was '**feminine**' came into play in the way women's '**missions**' operated--they had to display gentleness, endurance, self-control, modesty, and a certain amateurishness; but as Frank **Mort** points out, "**feminine**' and feminist appropriations of evangelical religious morality proved especially important in Providing women with the voice to resist male professionals" (8). **Muthulakshmi** Reddi's own authoritative voice echoes the

confidence in the voices of doctor predecessors like Elizabeth **Blackwell** and Mrs. Mansell who called upon their Christian faith and their medical expertise at one stroke as they delineated the evils resulting from prostitution. Lecturing to a group of women on "Rescue Work in Relation to Prostitution and Disease," Elizabeth Blackwell begins with her **qualifications**: "... as a physician acquainted with the physiological and pathological laws of the human frame, and as one who has lived through a generation of medical practice amongst all classes of the community, I can speak to you with a positive and practical knowledge rarely possessed by women" (101); and ends with a rousing call to her audience of "Christian women" to overcome "the deep practical heathenism of our society--the heathenism of tolerating and protecting mercenary promiscuous sexual intercourse" (109).

These philanthropic efforts made by women were, however, often vitiated by their own tendency to moralize and to interfere in the lives of those they sought to help. The campaigners tended to belong to the middle classes, while the objects of their charity were working class women; the campaigns were inevitably conducted in such a way as to normalize middle class, usually evangelical values. For instance, Harriet **Martineau**, who opposed the Contagious Diseases Acts to regulate prostitution in 1863, did so on the grounds that these Acts "sanctioned vice." "There can be no resistance to seduction, **Procuration**, brothels, disease, and methods of regulation, when once the original necessity [for sexual contact] is granted" (89). Martineau cautioned against the granting of public money for "patronising and petting a class of sinners and sufferers

already provided for under the visitation of their **retribution**"(79) .

It must be noted, however, that all the women campaigners who provided models for **Muthulakshmi** Reddi's anti-nautch **efforts--Martineau**, Elizabeth **Blackwell**, Josephine Butler, Annie Besant--appealed at the same time to liberal and democratic values when they opposed the Contagious Diseases Acts. For instance, Butler points to the violation of justice implicit in the Acts, since "that has been ruled to be a crime in women which is not to be considered a crime in men" ("An Appeal" 113). Besant castigates the legislators for their breach of the "Anglo Saxon principle of liberty"; "I assert that the sacred right of individual liberty is grossly and shamefully outraged by this interference of government, and that, therefore, every soldier of liberty is bound to rise in protest against the insult offered to her" ("Legalisation of Female Slavery" 95). This liberal discourse, on the whole was not mobilized in favour of prostitutes and devadasis in India. Evangelical campaigners in India, confronted by the devadasi murai, reacted with predictable shock and outrage, and immediately started cleaning operations but these operations did not allow fully human status to the objects of reform.

Ashoke Chatterjee records that an "Englishwoman, Miss Tenant, came particularly from England to lead a crusade against temple dancers, gathering pledges from upper-class Indians that they would have nothing whatever to do with this anti-social evil" (5). Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller writes at length in The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood (1900) on the evils of nautch: "...that a temple, intended as a place of worship, ...should be so

polluted, and that in the name of religion, is almost beyond belief; and that Indian boys should grow up to manhood, accustomed to see immorality shielded in these temples with a divine cloak makes our hearts grow sick and faint" (120). The Victorian middle class ideology of family life is mined for emotive effect in several missionary accounts as is obvious from titles like J. Murdoch's Nautch Women: An Appeal to English Ladies on Behalf of their Indian Sisters (1893).

The moral pressure exerted by the missionaries began to produce results by the end of the nineteenth century despite relatively tolerant administrators like Wenlock and Curzon. Already during the visit of Prince Albert Victor in 1890, there were vociferous protests against his attendance at a sadir party; by 1900 it had become impossible to entertain visiting dignitaries with sadir performances. In 1902, T.E. Slater says in a speech at a missionary conference: "It was a noteworthy fact that throughout the tour of the Viceroy [Lord Curzon] in South India at the end of 1900, he was nowhere greeted by the dancing-girls, who used to be everywhere on railway platforms, in processions and at durbars" (qtd. in Oddie 107). Another Prince of Wales visited Madras in 1905 and was entertained with a programme that included "Herculean feats by **Ramamurti** (the Indian Sandow)," and "Magic and Conjuring by Professor **Swaminatha** Sastriar" but no sadir (**Ballhatchet**, 159). In the same year the Collector of Trichinopoly sent circulars to all **his** Divisional Officers requesting them to stop attending or encouraging nautch performances (**Sundar Raj**, 235).

By the 1920s and **30s**, the vengeance of anti-nautch public opinion was complete: even visitors who wished to see sadir

performances for the most unexceptionable reasons were disappointed. "There are no schools of dancing in India and it is an art in which nobody is interested," writes Victor Dandre after the tour his wife Anna Pavlova made of South India in **1922** (qtd. in **Khokar** 102). The American dancers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn expressed a desire to see Indian dance "whenever our Hindu or Muslim hosts asked what they could do for **us...but** they were all embarrassed, and many said they had never seen any dancing in their lives" (qtd. in Khokar 102-03).

2) Loss of Patronage

Taking all these facts into consideration, then, it seems correct to say that the colonial government did not, until the early twentieth century, directly interfere with the lives of devadasis. Indeed one of the very few administrative measures taken against them in the nineteenth century appears to have been a half-baked plan to impose income tax on the devadasis of **Tirumangalam**, in view of "their excessive income" (**Sundar Raj**, 219). However no institution or practice in British-ruled India was entirely unaffected by colonial rule, and sadir was no exception. Its position in Hindu social life was indirectly weakened by colonial rule; this factor, along with the change in attitudes wrought by the anti-nautch rhetoric, made the dispersal and impoverishment of the devadasi community inevitable.

The devadasis who bore the brunt of the changes that followed the transfer of power from Indian rulers to the colonial government were those dependent on princely patronage. The system fell into desuetude in many of the earlier centres of

the arts, not so much as a result of direct colonial intervention as from the general decline of the fortunes of these native states. For one thing, the inland towns declined in importance after the British administration was centralized in port towns like Madras. For another, the princely states, drained of revenues by the colonial power, gradually withdrew their support to temples and to temple and court functionaries like devadasis. By 1799 the revenues of Thanjavur, for instance, went entirely to the British; with its formal annexation in 1856, one of the few surviving princely patrons of the arts was no longer in a position to offer a living or a platform to devadasi performers.

Smaller courts like Ettayapuram and Pudukottai, and relatively prosperous states like Mysore temporarily offered hospitality to displaced devadasis. but eventually themselves succumbed to the pressure of the anti-nautch movement and prohibited the performance of sadir and the rite of dedication. The Pudukottai Raja prohibited the performance of nautch in private homes in 1892 and enfranchised devadasi manjams in 1930, releasing their possessors from their ritual duties. The Mysore Maharaja "purified all the temples [in his state] by driving out the dancing girls attached to them" in 1893; though with magnificent disregard for consistency he presented his royal person at several sadir performances subsequently. As a reporter for the Karnataka Prakasika maliciously remarked: "...those who expected that the Diwan and His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore would countenance the anti-nautch movement must have been sorely disappointed because at the marriage that took place...at the Diwan's house a nautch party was held at which His Highness the

Maharaja was present. It is foolish on the part of the anti-nautch agitationists to invoke the aid of Government in matters in which they must depend on themselves for any reform" (NNR 1893, 159). But the nautch virtually died out in Mysore after an order in 1910 prohibiting devadasi service (Sundar Raj, 235).¹³

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, therefore, and with increased momentum in the early twentieth, devadasi families took the only feasible option left to them: they migrated to the port cities and the new metropolitan centres established by the colonial government. Patronage now had a wholly new face for these dispossessed devadasis. In place of the aristocratic, learned, deeply appreciative protection of scholar-princes like the **Marathas** (of Thanjavur) and the **Wodeyars** (of Mysore), they had to depend on a class of wealthy merchants, zamindars, and occasionally, **professionals**, who had no particular partiality or passion for the arts. What the devadasis lived through, in other words, was the loss of an entire support **system--an** ethos for learning and perpetuating an art that had once had unquestioned symbolic and ritual **significance--as** well as of an audience alive to the **semiotic** nuances of their **performances**.

For the most part, however, upto the early twentieth century, devadasis attached to the temples continued to perform their tasks uninterrupted and those who enjoyed steady secular patronage continued to do so. The elimination of devadasis from temple ritual took place at an uneven pace over different parts of South India, though more rapidly everywhere after the 1920s. Even as the devadasi tradition declined in places like

Thanjavur, it was strengthened in places like Thiruvavur and Cheyyur; indeed a famous scholar of the latter town, Cheyyur Chengalvaraya Sastri (1810-1900) actually developed a cycle of performance for the devadasia of the Cheyyur temple in the mid-nineteenth century. In most temples in Tamil Nadu devadasis continued to be called upon for traditional duties such as kumbha arathi (waving the pot-lamp), carrying consecrated water, inaugurating and offering ritual protection to temple processions, and so on.

In secular homes, devadasis continued to be important participants in social functions and rites of passage. Apart from giving sadir recitals on these occasions, devadasis in their role as nityasumangalis, performed such duties as stringing the bride's thali at weddings, singing or intoning certain ritually required verses; by their presence, they warded off the 'evil **eye**' and brought luck. Until the near disappearance of the ethos that sustained such ritual, devadasis were never quite redundant, and had their supporters right upto the time their community disintegrated.

Though the first signs of the decay of the devada3i community appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, there are also clear indications, around this time, of their continued power and prestige. I have mentioned one such indication above: the number of lawsuits in which devadasis prosecuted temple or secular authorities for the neglect of their '**rights.**' Customary rights and privileges had not been entirely eroded by the mobilisation of public opinion against the devadasi system; it was still expected that these rights would be respected and this expectation was still enforceable by law. Evidently these

devadasis were tenacious of their rights not merely because their incomes depended on them but also because they derived their social status and their pride in their independence from these rights. **Significantly**, some of them argued in a petition to the government that they did not want their maniam lands granted to them free: ". . .we venture to ask as to why our children and their children should be deprived of their means of honest living and reciprocal religious service" (G.O. 4079, 8, emphasis mine). Even at the turn of the century, then, many devadasis continued to be property-holders, and narratives about penurious devadasis who turned to prostitution (a favourite theme in later literature) were still very rare. The extent of their wealth can be inferred from the anxiety the devadasis themselves displayed (after the 1878 enforcement of **IPC** Sections 372-373) about the question of adoption. The anxiety had to do with inheritance; would devadasi lands which customarily passed down only in the female line revert to the Government if there were no female children?

Devadasis appear in the fiction of the late nineteenth century as seductresses and deceivers who siphon away the wealth of helpless men; in these representations they are more impoverishing than impoverished. More than one unscrupulous dancing-girl appears in **Krupabai Sattianadhan's** English novel Kamala (1894); one plot of the Tamil novel Dasigalin Mosavalai (The Trap of the Dasis) written in 1936 by **Ramanirtham Ammaiyar**, herself a devadasi, narrates the story of a foolish younger son of a wealthy **man** who is milked of his inheritance by a devadasi.

**The Twentieth Century: Nation Building,
Patriarchy and Class Formation**

1) Rescuing **the Wretches: National Self-Definition and The Woan Question**

Missionary polemics against sadir gave way to the rhetoric of social reform at the turn of the century, and the Nautch Question from this point onwards has to be seen within the problematic of national self-determination and reform; i.e., of the simultaneously occurring processes of nation-building and class-caste formation. The Nautch Question was a late developer as social issues went, becoming a full-blown controversy only in the 1890s; the nineteenth century was the era of social reform. The trajectories of debate on most issues, as I have suggested above, were fixed by the way the various reform movements had recast Hindu practices in this century, and to place the question of sadir in the context of reform, I want to backtrack a little, to the mid-nineteenth century.

Controversies erupted everywhere in the nineteenth century. The ferment of the times opened up the meanings of '**tradition**' and '**modernity**' for contestation in an unprecedented way. The revision of the meanings of these terms involved two tasks. First, a pan-Indian '**tradition**' in keeping with the norms of 'civilized societies' had to be invented, even if this meant displacing authentic--or at any rate, less dramatically **refashioned--traditions** that were still in place in pockets all over the country. Cultural and moral norms were redefined in accordance with the values of the class (upper caste/bourgeois) **most** closely identified with the colonizers; naturally, these norms chimed better with those of the British middle-class **than** **with** those of Hindu orthodoxy. Secondly, in a context in which

the unequal balance of power between colonizer and colonized **was** an inescapable reality, and in which the reified relations of commerce had begun to invade everyday life, a space had to be set aside where 'essential Indian **culture**' could be preserved inviolate. This space, as I shall explain below, was the domestic sphere. Cultural production itself was consecrated to the demarcation and safeguarding of this sphere, and was in a sense identified with it, as I suggested in the last chapter. Thus **Rukmini** Devi, for instance, making social reform and dance permeable to each other, symbolically positioned the dancer's body in the domestic space, as an aspect of its **beautification** or of the materialization of motherhood; mothering and the pursuit of beauty, conversely, were services to the nation.

The requirements of a pan-Indian tradition tended to coincide with those of a 'modern' nation in that both required a certain **standardization**. The process of classifying Indian populations and practices and standardizing public behaviour had, as everyone knows, been started under the pressures of colonial rule. Bringing an entire nation under a single juridical authority, which itself was dedicated to the protection of private property, required that diverse practices and lifestyles be described, documented and--often violently--slotted into manageable categories. The decennial Census was obviously one way of doing this. Practices that failed to mesh with the norms of citizenship in the modern nation-state had to be '**reformed**'; cultural differences tended to be ironed out. One of the problems that Census officials kept encountering in dealing with the **devadasis** was that of their 'marital status':

how was this to be described? Another problem was their ownership of property, which was perceived as irregular, since most Hindu women had no property rights. Regularization of these relationships and rights was part of the subtext of social reform.

It was impossible to stray near the borders of any nineteenth century controversy about culture or tradition without stumbling against 'the woman **question.**' As many writers have noted, the importance of this question to nationalists lay in the fact that it was the test case for the assertion of their cultural parity with the colonizers and, consequently, for the affirmation of national **self-sufficiency.** Relentlessly keeping the focus on certain highly restrictive, obscurantist and often brutal prohibitions and customs prevalent among the upper castes (**sati**, child marriage, enforced celibacy for widows, and so on), the woman question was a reminder, to both colonizers and their subjects, of the backwardness of the Hindus, of their unpreparedness for self-government and citizenship under a democratic order.

Like all the other '**issues**' that tested nationalist resources, the woman question had to be resolved in such a way that patriarchal power was not seriously threatened. The status of **women--or** of those women who were 'visible,' and the **devadasis** certainly fitted into this class, though for the wrong **reasons--had** to manifestly improve; but the authority of men had to be kept intact. When the status-of-women problem was placed alongside the problem of a viable tradition that would ensure the continuity of upper-caste male dominance, the result was the ideology of the domestic sphere. Thus the process of recasting

traditional patriarchal power for the purposes of modernity normalized **companionate** marriage and the domestic woman, and required the separation of the Home from the World. This crucial demarcation, and the conservation of the private realm as the space where the power of **colónized** men would remain unthreatened was an essential clause in the unspoken pact between the colonizers and the class that was both their collaborator and their enemy. To understand the enormous charge attached to the role of women in the symbolic order of nationalism, we need to place it in the context of this demarcation.

Since the woman-as-citizen was identified with the Home, the creation of the national-modern was a process that necessarily circumscribed the **role--and** the sexuality--of women. When the 'rational' ideal of the domestic woman as citizen was mobilized in tandem with the psychologically charged fantasy of nation-as-mother, it becomes obvious why female sexuality had to be controlled, regulated, reinscribed as motherhood or companionship, effaced from the public realm; and why asexual femininity had to be set up as exemplary.

The valorizing of chastity was also in accord with the gender ideology widely accepted in Britain in its own strongly nationalist phase during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. British anxieties about miscegenation, freshly formulated medical principles, and evangelical Christianity all reinforced this ideology. For instance: William Acton, who played a key role in building England's public health system between 1850 and 1870, took women's careers outside the home to **be** signs of abominable female recalcitrance. Women who work, he avers, have no time to be "soothers of man's woes," and cause

"the most acute sexual suffering" (65-66). He wonders aloud what British educators should do with women: "The ready answer is--**TEACH THEM HOUSEWIFERY**....The vanity of girls and mothers must, it is true, be overcome, but the greater economy of the proposed education would go some way to carry the day in its favour..." (48).

The good woman, on the authority of both the church and the medical **establishment**, was the domestic woman, the angel in the house. The Hindu social reformers accepted and reproduced this ideology in India, with mixed results for women. The Stri Dharma, official organ of the Women's India Association, and edited for many years by **Muthulakshmi Reddi**, printed in every issue a manifesto that exemplifies these mixed results. On the one hand, it set itself to secure equal education for female and male children, and to secure for women the vote on the same terms as it was granted to men; on the other hand, it stated its intention "to help Women to realise that the future of India lay largely, in their hands: for as wives and mothers they have the task of training, guiding and forming the character of the future rulers of India" (Stri Dharma 1932, 1; emphasis mine).

The twist added to the model of public and private spheres, when it was used by the **nationalists**, was the introduction of the element of a distinctly eastern '**spirituality**,' identified with the Home and with Woman. The importance of female sexual **Purity** was in direct proportion to the vehemence with which spirituality was alleged to be an essentially **Indian** trait, the feature most sharply distinguishing our culture from that of the **materialistic** West. And to the extent that spirituality was alleged to be not just a female trait, but a characteristically

Indian one, it gave positive value to the subject position of the colonized man as well, a subject position represented by the colonizers and psychologically experienced by colonized men as a feminine one.

The figure of the devadasi, of course, broke down the nationalist equation between home (essential India/woman/spirituality) and world (white man/deviant Indian woman/materiality). If the modern order depended on the creation of private and public spheres, with women being confined to, and representative of, the former, and being the repositories of spiritual values, then the devadasi committed offences against this order on three counts: a sexual transgression, since her sexual skills were publicly acknowledged and were even a matter of some pride; an economic transgression, since she was propertied and independent, thus taking over the function reserved for men in this order; and a religious transgression, since she was the remnant of a certain **this-worldly** approach to religion, centred on the temple as a replica of the royal court, which disturbed the **identification** between Indian spirituality and **other-worldliness**. Her presence was the site of the convergence of religion (Hindu agamic or cultic ritual), art (sadir, Carnatic music) and the economy (**feudal** patronage or concubinage). To counter this deplorable symbolic convergence, genealogies were written portraying her as a 'nun' in ancient times; the talk was always of the degradation of a practice that used to be **otherwise**.¹⁹

Since a reinvented Hindu culture was of considerable strategic importance in the struggle for cultural hegemony, the interface between Hindu religious practice and deviant female

sexuality, in the devadasi murai, made cultural nationalists particularly vulnerable to attack. In fact, reference to the disordered and retrograde sexualities of Hindus, as exemplified by the devadasi ethos, was as anxiety-producing for nationalists as the critique of practices like sati and child marriage. Both Christian missionaries and atheistic, rationalist Indian movements like the Suya Mariyathai Iyakkam constantly irritated this tender spot.

The debate on Katherine Mayo's Mother India, published in the crucial year 1927--the year in which Muthulakshmi Reddi brought in her first version of the Bill to prevent the dedication of girls to temples--is a case in point. Mayo, an American visitor to India, combined travel writing of a particularly sensational kind with sustained lampooning of Indian nationalist aspirations. Mother India was concerned with making what may be called the sexual argument for the continuance of empire: ostensibly an argument about the rampant sexual desire of Indian men and its horrible consequences--child abuse in marriage, gynaecological diseases, purdah, cruelty to women, unskilled midwifery. But at a deeper level, the book was a narrative about men who, debilitated by their own consuming desires and self-indulgence, had become too effeminate to save their languishing Mother India. "Inertia, helplessness, lack of initiative and originality, lack of staying power and sustained loyalties, sterility of enthusiasm, weakness of life-vigour itself--all are the traits that truly characterize the Indian not only to-day but of long past history," Mayo writes, "[h]is soul and body are indeed chained in slavery. But he himself wields and hugs his chains and defends them" (24).

Both sets of images—those depicting female suffering and those depicting male **impotence--were** intended to damage the nationalist cause, and as such were calculated to infuriate the nationalists in the context of the status-of-women debates. No fewer than half a dozen members of the Legislative Council in the November session of 1927 made references to '**Miss Mayo's** book' in the course of discussion on the anti-nautch Motion moved by **Muthulakshmi Reddi**. Mr. Syed Ibrahim suggests to his '**enlightened Hindu Brethren**' that it is only because

the institution of Devadasis is being tolerated by the Hindu society that the true Hindu religion is in danger of attack, not only by missionary religious bodies in this country, but also by mischievous non-entities hailing from far off countries, who pose as reformers of humanity. I am referring particularly to the attacks of Miss **Katherine Mayo****Unless** the Hindus with one voice rise and do away with this social canker and social leprosy of the institution of Devadasis, I am afraid the whole world, not merely a Miss Mayo, has got the right, nay, duty, to hold the finger of scorn against India, Hinduism and Hindus. (PMLC 1927, 523)

Mr. Ibrahim's Hindu brethren were already shrinking back from **the** finger of scorn: "Why should we sanctify vice by giving it

the cloak of a religious custom and allow persons like Miss Mayo to hold us up to ridicule...? " Mr. A.B. **Shetty--obviously** well schooled in missionary rhetoric--demanded of the Council (PMLC 1927, 519).

One obvious reason for the anxiety of the male legislators was Mayo's direct attack on their 'manhood,' against the background of a widely circulated belief that sexual excess meant loss of the virility of the entire race. No less a person than Annie Besant made such statements as the following: "National morality and national health go hand-in-hand; a vicious nation will be a weak **nation**...the wide prevalence of prostitution is ruinous to the physique of a nation" ("Legalisation of Female Slavery" 94-95). Many Hindu members of the Council registered cautious agreement with sentiments such as these. Muthulakshmi Reddi did not forget to mention Miss Mayo (PMLC 1927, 512), and the Women's India Association met in 1927 to condemn her unsubstantiated arguments.

The anger and defensiveness of the legislators are very interesting when one considers the fact that only about a page of Mother India is devoted specifically to the **devadasis**. The remainder of Mayo's purple prose is intended to highlight sexual abuse within married life, especially within the married life of upper caste Hindus. The anxious and apologetic reactions of the Legislative Council members, it is plain, exemplify a process of displacement: the discussion scapegoats the **devadasis**, repressing the entire question of the ethical dubiousness of all the other Hindu practices described by Miss Mayo. "The abolition of this custom will prevent the existence of at least one source of adverse comment from persons like Miss Mayo," says Mr.

Krishnan Nayar, hopefully, omitting to consider the dozen other abuses Miss Mayo lingers over so lovingly (PMLC 1927, 522).

Faced with the accusation, by a foreigner, of moral cowardice, the Council members came back with the mandatory references to ancient Indian spiritual traditions: "It is impossible to understand how this immorality is sanctioned in such a land, which can boast of innumerable saints, sages and rishisAre we, whose ancestors have practised the highest ideals of sexual purity which human nature is capable of and had attained the utmost height of spirituality, to be left behind and pointed out as a morally backward race?" (PMLC 1927, 516). Thus Muthulakshmi Reddi in an impassioned appeal to the Council.

Annie Besant had already prepared the ground for figuring the original devadasi as the Indian equivalent of the Roman vestal virgin or the Christian nun. Legislative Council members wishing to quell Miss Mayo eagerly seized upon and developed this interpretation. Muthulakshmi Reddi hints at the existence of "authentic records to prove these Dasi girls were pure virgins spending their time in religious study, meditation and devotional service akin to the Roman Catholic nun of the present **day**". During the 1927 session Mr. P. Anjaneyulu claims that the devadasis "were originally sent to be brought up in an atmosphere of purity and religion and innocence" (PMLC 1927, 518); and C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar seconds him: "I emphatically contend that our religion does not sanction this dedication to our temples of prostitutes. It is only a lately grown up custom... the Devadasis were originally maidens who took a vow **of** celibacy" (PMLC 1927, 521).

An ideology of gender that identified the spiritual with

the feminine and the domestic was both materially and psychically satisfying to upper caste, modernizing, mainstream nationalists, since it complemented their anxiety about caste 'purity.' The use of the giveaway term '**social** purity' to describe the goals of anti-sadir and anti-liquor lobbying in Andhra during the nineteenth century may be read as a sign of the overlapping interests and anxieties (about patriarchy, about ritual purity, about the potential for promiscuous or intercaste relationships in the wake of modernization, about colonial rule) that made brahmin nationalists so puritanical about public morals. As Raghupati Venkataratnam, father of the Social Purity movement, summed it up, "the maintenance of purity in the relations of the sexes is vital to national greatness and prosperity."

The requirements of purity were, predictably, much more rigid with regard to women than with regard to men, who were allowed the customary licence in these matters. The campaign therefore focused on the devadasis, as such social purges tend to do; though their male patrons were given stern admonitions, their privacy and livelihoods were not put at risk. The '**good**' women were clearly set apart from the 'bad' ones; there was no longer room for flexibility or confusion in this area.

The badness of '**bad**' women--the existence of deviants like the devadasis--remained to be accounted for in a way that did not jeopardize the picture of India as nourishing chastely spiritual ideals. The '**essentialist**' explanation involved outright rejection of the deviants: nothing was wrong with essentially Indian women. Those who followed primitive customs, or those who tolerated sexual promiscuity were not '**us**,' they

were '**others,**' repugnant even in 'our' eyes. Thus '**we,**' honest and virtuous Indian women, could be separated from 'them,' the rlevadasis (among others: tribal women, lower-caste women, erring women of all kinds), who barely deserved to be granted human status, who had to be made to learn the merest **fundamentals** of human self-esteem. The '**historical**' extension of this argument was, of course, that the much debated evils were introduced into a pristine and gracious Hindu ethos by barbarous invaders. Set in this narrative, the devadasis were represented as not **embodying** Indian tradition at all, but as aberrations engendered when foreign invasions caused a gradual corruption of their (once-holy, once-celibate) **order.**

Social reform as a mode (as I will suggest in the section on class formation below) allowed the reformers to take up the woman question while discursively maintaining their own distance from the culture that was being attacked, and emphasizing the otherness of the practices under siege. Child marriage, prostitution and other issues were considered the proper objects of campaigns intended to bring women into the fold of modernity. The anti-nautch ideologue Kandukuri Veeresalingam, by the end of the nineteenth century, and certainly **Muthulakshmi** Reddi by the beginning of the 1920s could assume, as they stirred up anti-sadir feeling, that everybody who mattered was familiar with the idea of '**social** evils,' especially in association with the status of women. Most of the anti-nautchers were seasoned campaigners in the battleground of reform: Veeresalingam in the anti-liquor and anti-nautch Social Purity movement in Andhra; Besant, in Britain, in the campaign for women's free access to contraception; Reddi in campaigns for women's suffrage,

education for girl children, medical reform in government hospitals, widow remarriage, the raising of the age of consent and so on.

In a sense, the term '**feminist,**' though it was seldom used as a self-description, might be applied retrospectively to the campaigners in these issues. By the early decades of the twentieth century, organizations like the Women's India Association, set up in Madras by Annie Besant and other Theosophists, and led by Muthulakshmi **Reddi** for many years, were self-consciously demanding the recognition of women's right to equality with men, and this is reminiscent of the demand that emerged around the time of the French revolution, for the extension of the sphere of rights to include women: a demand that, as **Olympe** de Gouges or Mary Wollstonecraft made it, inaugurated the feminist project in Europe. Another important model for **Reddi's** womanly evangelism on the nautch question was Josephine Butler's campaign, in mid-Victorian Britain, against the Contagious Diseases Acts. But as Cora Kaplan points out in Sea Changes, while at one level this feminism made audacious claims on women's behalf, it was also peculiarly class-bound, indelibly marked by its own middle class origin. **Wollstonecraft** addressed herself to the creation of the middle class heroine of the revolutionary age; Butler's involvement with the Chartist movement as well as with the Social Purity movement was paradigmatic; Besant and Reddi campaigned for women's right to the vote but in the name of middle class motherhood. 'Feminism' in the Indian instance was a stray cross-current in the otherwise well-regulated flow of social reform.

What set the devadasi issue apart from the other issues

covered by 'the woman **question**,' and even from the issue of prostitution, however, was the fact that the **victimhood** of the devadasi was in serious doubt. The kind of access to literacy, **skill**, self-government, property ownership and personal freedom the devadasis enjoyed until the beginning of the twentieth century, would not normally have called forth either pity or reformist zeal. Nor, within the precolonial social system, was there any reason to look upon the devadasi as '**degraded**': the institution of dedication marked her off from other women as worthy of special honour, both for her ritual status and for her art; she was sought after as a participant in temple rituals and in religious ceremonies in private homes. No blame attached to either partner in the devadasi-patron relationship; indeed, it was expected that men of a certain status would patronize both the devadasi and her dance, making of this relationship something normative rather than deviant. As far as the temple was concerned, the devadasi "acted as a conduit for honour, divine acceptance and competitive reward at the same time that she invited 'investment,' economic, political and spiritual in the deity" (Srinivasan, 1870).

Given the lack of agreement between the devadasis' epistemic horizon and our own one, and the opacity of their subjectivities to subjects socialized into the national-modern ethos, value judgements about their status and **self-perception** are virtually ruled out. But however one assesses the actual facts of their lives, the course of anti-nautch legislation itself, marked as it is by a certain slackness for many decades, suggests that the condition of the devadasis was at least not as **object** as that of satis, that of child widows or that of child

prostitutes. Though the first decades of the twentieth century saw measures being taken by the Imperial Legislative Council to curb the practice of dedication, each of the resolutions or Bills circulated on this subject was allowed to lapse. The outbreak of the First World War aborted one set of initiatives; lack of time ended another; a third faded away into oblivion in the hands of an inactive Select Committee. Most of the anti-nautch measures proposed by the government proved ineffective. Almost until 1940, there was opposition to the idea of an anti-nautch Act from certain prominent though isolated political figures who drew heavily on sastric injunctions to support their arguments, and on a conception of tradition that had become outmoded.

1927 was the year in which the nautch debate, moribund since the turn of the century, was **revived--this** time in the Madras Legislative Council. This body had already witnessed some desultory and inconclusive discussions on the Nautch Question; but members who were unconvinced by the anti-nautch arguments and those who wished to delay actual anti-nautch legislation had acted as a counterweight to those who, like Muthulakshmi **Reddi**, had been eager to see an anti-nautch Bill passed. Certain events of 1927 dramatically changed the mood of the Council and tipped the scale in favour of legislation: the launching of '**Periyar**' E.V. Ramaswami Naicker's Suya Mariyathai **Iyakkam** (**Self-Respect** Movement), and the publication of **Katherine Mayo's Mother India**; but probably more crucial than either of these, Muthulakshmi **Reddi's** sustained and ultimately successful effort to convince the Council that the **devadasis** **were** indeed unhappy victims of a cruel social system. Though

Reddi's Bill to prevent dedication became an Act only in 1947, its material effects began to show when the devadasis' ethos, already eroded by the loss of patronage and by the advent of capitalist relations, became a burning political question; when public opinion about the practice of dedication, still so divided between acceptance and condemnation in the 1920s, became, by the mid '30s, practically unanimous.

Public conscience was pricked into protest by Reddi's exceptionally effective use of the language of **victimhood** to describe the devadasis' lifestyles. She was not the first to use this language; its strategic importance had been evident to the missionaries, and later to the social reformers. Some labour went into the honing of the narrative of victimhood, since what most people might have seen as agency had to be recast as helplessness. Independent women who were workers in their own right could not be depicted as requiring 'rescue.' The polemicists, therefore, vehemently insisted that the daughters of devadasis were utterly unhappy and much put upon. This insistence was not entirely a matter of bad faith: both the medical discourse of the time and the ideology of the Victorian middle class held that sexual agency was incompatible with femininity. The fact that the devadasis as a community customarily invited sexual relationships (rather than acquiesced in them, as the far more abject upper-caste girl-bride was bound to do) had to be interpreted as sexual exploitation **by** men **of** the devadasis: once this was established, the devadasis could be saved by right-thinking people. Throughout the anti-nautch campaign, and especially in the speeches of **Muthulakshmi** Reddi, **we** have the recurrent motif of 'rescue': upper caste,

enlightened people saving the devadasis from priests, from patrons, from older women in their community, from disease, from sin, from themselves.

To stress the irony of this vocabulary of '**rescue**' is not to romanticise the devadasi, transforming her into a sexually liberated woman in the post-sixties sense, but to point out that arguments about agency, used against a group of women who were relatively independent of the familial, economic, legal and ideological constraints operating on upper caste women in general, are suspect, to say the least, especially in a context in which the free flow of sexual desire was not encouraged in any woman.²⁸

The use of the language of **victimhood**, the reiteration of the they-know-not-what-they-do message, was what brought the devadasi issue into alignment with other kinds of social evil. It was also a polite cover for the hostility that resulted from the forcible discursive **identification** of devadasis with prostitutes. Once the devadasi was identified with the '**common**' prostitute, she became not so much victim as social deviant, and the target of strong middle class hostility. The ostracism she faced was disguised **punishment**, therefore, for her **offence** against the moral order relevant to reform. This **identification** of devadasi with prostitute and the animus it mobilized was what actually accounted for the anti-nautch success story.

2) **From Devadasi to Prostitute: Medico-Moral Regulation**

When the devadasi was designated a 'prostitute,' her lifestyle came within the purview of the updated medical science of Victorian Britain as applied in India, **and** of **its** concrete

offshoot, the public health system. Throughout the nineteenth century, in Britain as well as in India, there were dramatic developments in the field of medical science, especially in the area of women's health. An enormous body of medical literature about women--about their reproductive physiology and sexual urges, their nervous susceptibilities, their psychological traits, their mental illnesses, their life-cycle **changes--was** being churned out by 'experts' of every description. This medical discourse engendered, alongside verifiable facts about female **biology**, a plethora of ridiculous and often pernicious myths about women and about sexual difference; but since it had the status of science, and since it was assimilated to the projects of modernity, the entire package was sacrosanct. There was no questioning its impartiality, truth or benevolence.

Sexology was a newly instituted branch of this medical literature. The nineteenth century sexologists may be seen as falling into two camps, one focusing on the connections between sexuality and culture (especially in the area of religious practice) and the other highlighting the public danger of sexual deviance. In the work of **Krafft-Ebing** and especially of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, religious feeling and mythology--even '**civilization**' itself--were seen as extensions, sublimations, or displacements of sexual drives. This set of connections was further reinforced by anthropologists and scholars of comparative mythology; they were set out most exhaustively, of course, in James Frazer's classic The Golden Bough. This body of theories to some extent naturalized what came to be called religious prostitution, by the accretion **of cross** cultural Parallels including the Egyptian and the Greek. Though these

sexologists defined normality through the description of deviance, they did perceive sexual drives as existing on a continuum from the normal to the abnormal, and their output tended to be tolerant of deviance.

It was, however, the apocalyptic discourse of public danger, irrevocable moral degeneration, venereal disease, and racial decrepitude as a result of unregulated prostitution that prevailed outside these circles, especially among medical professionals who advised the government on policy. The public health system was being regularized in Britain, under the supervision of William Acton, among others, and it was waiting for just such a discourse to justify its authority and interventionist!.

The colonial government in India tried to regulate the sexuality of 'common' prostitutes in the lal bazaars of cantonment towns, because there appeared to be some connection between the free flow of their favours and the startlingly high incidence of venereal disease in the British army. The connection was never quite established beyond dispute, but statistics flew back and forth between the colonial administrators and Her Majesty's government back in Britain. Some sort of decision had to be reached, since there was a matter of economics involved: the British army incurred vast expenditure, both within Britain and in the colonies, controlling venereal disease in the armed forces. The 'lock hospital' system was a hotly contested case in point: the **forzible** confinement of prostitutes was strongly urged by **Anglo-Indian** officials writing to the British Government; despatches **from Her** Majesty's government sometimes approved the measure and

sometimes pointed to the inhumanity of compulsory quarantining.

The themes of racial purity and social contamination by venereal disease were pretty thoroughly ventilated throughout this period from the medico-moral point of view and with reference to lal bazaar prostitutes. The rhetoric became especially persuasive when it became necessary to justify the Indian Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1868, to regulate the movements and bodies of such prostitutes. The Friend of India in 1870

provided unctuous reassurance. Those in charge of Lock hospitals were 'medical men, enthusiastic, sternly and gravely enthusiastic in their profession.' At the Calcutta Lock Hospital there could not be seen 'anything to call forth an improper thought or anything to degrade the women subject to the Act. There is cleanliness, fresh air, proper treatment, sometimes character raised, and very frequently life saved.' (Ballhatchet 44)

There was also compulsory medical examination, forcible confinement and treatment of women found to be infected, and **mandatory** registration of prostitutes and brothels. The talk of fresh air and soul-saving, however, presented medical science and medical legislation in an entirely altruistic and benevolent light; there was, it seemed, no application of force here--and **if** there was, it was so patently for the **benefit** of the fallen women that no one could object to it. Medical science's own

potential for malice and sexism was entirely unacknowledged.

Given these developments, Muthulakshmi Reddi could capitalize on her authority as a 'western' doctor when she used the racial purity and medical arguments against the devadasi community, and she could take it for granted that her audience knew and valued the benign influence of science. By the turn of the century, for the class she represented, 'education' meant a modern scientific education in English; Reddi herself was proud of her achievements and believed that education should reach all women. The traditional skills and scholarship of the devadasis were by now at such a low premium that Reddi could make a very effective contrast between the 'uneducated' devadasis and the "enlightened section of the aggrieved communities . . . whose rightly developed moral sense naturally revolts at the practice [of dedication]. . .; and [whose] . . . persuasive methods and educative propaganda work among those illiterate" required government support (PMLC 1927, 415). The suggestion that large sections of the devadasi community were 'illiterate' was particularly ironic when one recalls that devadasi girls were among the tiny number of female children who had any formal education in India.

The South India Devadasi Association, by the 1930s, was itself persuaded to accept the distinction between the enlightened and the traditional sections of the community: "We beg to state that even amongst us, social improvements in the modern sense are dawning. . . . Many get married and get absorbed in Society as Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Reddi herself is an example for the same" (G.O. 3210, 16). Reddi, herself the daughter of a devadasi, may have had very personal anxieties about her origins

that were expressed in her strictures against the community; but integration into '**Society**' so generally signified a modern education and a regular marriage that no one thought of **Reddi** as overreacting to the irregularity of devadasi lifestyles.

Reddi's audience, at any rate, did not dream of questioning the medical side of her polemic:

...modern science has proved that continence is conducive to the health and well-being of the individual, the family, and the future race, and that sexual immorality just like any other antisocial habit like theft, drink, and murder is productive of much harm to the individual and to the community. Statistics in other civilized countries reveal that venereal disease, the produce of sexual promiscuity, is responsible for more than 50 per cent of the child blindness and deafness and for a large percentage of insanes and imbeciles in the country and for many of the disabling diseases such as paralysis, liver, kidney and heart disease in the old as well as in the young. In women it accounts for 50 to 75 per cent of abortions, miscarriages, sterility and is the chief cause of most of the gynec disorders of our family women. Above all it is a racial poison--capable of being

transmitted to one's children the second or even the third generation. (PMLC 1927, 515)

Muthulakshmi Reddi more than any other anti-nautch activist insisted that 'devadasi' was synonymous with '**prostitute,**' and she was undoubtedly conscious of the consequences of doing so. The repercussions this created for the devadasi community demonstrate the efficacy of the strategy. Apart from a general social revulsion from their cause, these consequences included, concretely, the abrupt cessation of legal and governmental leniency towards their community. By the 1930s, neither the colonial government nor the general public was willing to grant them the special status they had traditionally enjoyed. As long as they were considered as belonging in a class by themselves, they were not subject to the inimical **officiousness** of the public health authorities; once the public identified them, as they did 'common' prostitutes, with disease and with danger to public hygiene, they became vulnerable to the same level of interference as prostitutes. The government went ahead with legislation (discussed below) which assumed that devadasis were indeed prostitutes. The first consequence of this was the surveillance of devadasis under the Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1930. The police conducted raids on devadasi households, took some of their occupants away by force, confined them in '**homes**' and generally subjected this once **powerful** community of women to harassment and humiliation. "The Present state is so terrible," the devadasis pleaded, "that if **we** have a separate **place...to** colonize one would adopt the course. But we do not **want...to** leave the **Punya-Bhumi** or

Bharata-Bhumi of which we hope we still are the shining ornaments" (G.O. 3210, 8). And again: "We beg to **submit--Could** it be the intention of anyone to crush **us--to** wipe **us--completely** out of existence...?" (G.O. 3210, 12).

The **identification** of devadasis with prostitutes had to be carried through in direct contradiction to the devadasis' own self-descriptions and in defiance of many people's perceptions. The devadasis themselves were at pains to emphasize their distinctness from prostitutes. In the memorial that the South India Devadasi Association sent to the government in **1927**, they offered the following definition of their identity:

The community which dedicates their women to temple service are known as DEVADASIS. It is a compound of two words God and Devotee and means the devotee of God. Dasi is the feminine of the word Dasa occurring in such words as **Ramadasa**. Popularly our caste is styled by the name of dancing girls probably due to the reason that most of our caste women are experts in dancing and music. Such a hoary name is now **unfortunately** mingled up and associated with an immoral life. It would, we submit, be easily conceded by every one that the institution of dedicating one's life to a temple has nothing to do with prostitution. This is not merely our own **self-glorified opinion....**no less a person than **Mr. Justice Muthusamy Iyer...laid** down in a

case... 'that it should not... in the case of dancing girls be confounded with prostitution which is neither its essential condition nor necessary consequence.' (G.O. 4079, 2) ³³

"Hence," say the devadasis. "we make bold to question the implied identification of Devadasis with prostitutes" (G.O. 4079, 3). In the 1939 memorial they say again that they "...beg to emphasize that [they] are poles asunder from prostitutes and prostitution" (G.O. 3210, 14).

There were members of the Legislative Council who were willing to endorse the self-perception of the devadasis. In 1930, Rao Bahadur Natesa Mudaliar sardonically remarks:

However much we would like that it [the devadasi caste] has not come into existence, yet it has come into existence, and we have to regard it as a caste till it is wiped out by the exertions that Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi is making now. They are there, and they lead a respectable life. They take to a man for life and if he dies they observe widowhood; and sometimes they are more faithful than some of the married wives themselves. (Laughter). (PMLC 1930, 974)

Natesa Mudaliar's was not exactly a voice in the wilderness; Rao Bahadur A. P. Patro supports him: "They are women leading pure and honest lives. They may be under the protection of one man

only, but they are not the class of people which Dr. (Mrs) Muthulakshmi or Dr. James have in mind. Why do you disturb the social conditions of these people? " (PMLC 1930, 975-76).

Muthulakshmi Reddi appears to have prevailed in the end by dint of repetition. In the 1930 session of the Legislative Council, she observes: "The Devadasis may call themselves respectable. Of course I would not blame them, because they imagine that religion sanctions such a conduct on their part..." (PMLC 1930, 972). In response to the devadasi memorial of 1939 she writes:

In the first place it is well-known that the very word Devadasi has come to mean a prostitute. Therefore I cannot understand how a petition from an Association of such women could be countenanced and sent out for opinion from others. The fact that one or two devadasis out of hundreds and thousands have made a name in the world of music and dancing does not disprove that 999 out of 1000 are prostitutes and 1 in a 1000 the mistress of married men. (G.O. 3210, 21)

Obviously, if it was proved that devadasis were prostitutes, they were not entitled to so much as a bare hearing. No less an authority than Mahatma Gandhi believed that where devadasi appeals were concerned, "the opinion of the parties concerned in the immoral traffic cannot count, just as the opinions of keepers of opium dens will not count in favour of their

retention, if public opinion is otherwise against them."

The devadasis were conscious that their case was being judged on the basis of prejudice: "We want that we should be heard. The fundamental maxim of law and justice is that one should be heard before anything affecting him is passed and we therefore pray that we should be heard and full justice rendered to us" (G.O. 3210, 17). Not only did **Muthulakshmi Reddi** do her best to make sure that they were not heard, she also disingenuously represented them as eager to be reformed. At a conference of devadasis in Andhra in 1932 she remarks:

... I have had the joy of knowing some of the **Kalavanthulu** [devadasis] women who, having given up their traditional mode of easy and luxurious living have of their own choice taken up to a very simple but to an honourable mode of **life....I have found...that** they are as good and pure as any women could be but only **custom--wicked** custom has made them otherwise. I found them clean-hearted, earnest and anxious that their children should lead a different life from theirs and be made good, pure and respectable women. ("Andhradesa Kalavantulu Conference," 609)

This representation of the devadasis as desiring aid clearly contradicted their own response to government interference. For instance, at the time of the **Kumbakonam** Circle Temple Committee's resolution to stop the custom of dedication,

the Committee's President was asked about the views of the devadasis themselves. "The President quoted many letters from Devadasis and trustees of temples protesting against any such legislation, as it interfered with '**time-honoured** traditions and customs.'" And in the 1927 memorial, the devadasis registered that they "emphatically raise[d] [their] voice to **protest**...against any attempt at legislation which has for its object the stopping or prevention in any measure whatsoever of the dedication **of...young** women to Hindu **temples**" (G.O. 4079, 1). There is a certain pathos in these protests by the devadasis, since in retrospect it is evident that they were bound to go unheeded. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the powers arrayed against the devadasi ethos were no mean ones; they represented the relentless machinery of modernity. This machinery, when it began to work, ground exceeding small, and the effects were irreversible. Janaki Nair, commenting on a petition sent to the ruler of Mysore by the devadasis of **Nanjangud**, writes: "Between the tremulous signatures of the devadasi women affixed to a handwritten Kannada petition and the typed government orders ... in English lay a chasm that separated prevailing notions of **dharma** ... from the modalities of modernity..." (3162).

3) Tradition, Social Reform and Class/Caste Politics

The social reformers, struggling against colonial **as well** as indigenous powers, had to simultaneously prove the nation's right to exist and **their own right** to govern it. **They staked out** territory for their class within the reform movements; they used the impetus of these movements to displace traditionally

dominant (**feudal**) groups from the centres of power. In the process, they drastically affected the patterns of distribution of wealth and power, the place of religion in social life, the flow of desire, attitudes to science and technology, art and **culture**.

Did the reinscribing of tradition for nationalist purposes involve an epistemic 'rupture'? In a limited sense it did. Some of the practices that had buttressed feudal power in the earlier ethos resisted easy assimilation into the new cultural matrix, and had to be disavowed completely, even at the cost of the sense of cultural continuity. This tended to happen, for instance, to residues of **matrifocal** or matrilineal organization in some communities (like the devadasi community), and to other recalcitrant practices that clashed with national-modern values.

Some '**traditions**,' on the other hand, did not pose a threat to the nation-building effort, because they did not contest the **terrain--of** government, education, the press, cultural production; in brief, of the public **sphere--where** crucial issues of legitimacy were decided. These practices were allowed to subsist--in some occupational or geographical pockets of the country, still subsist--in the interstices of the changed ethos. Still other traditions, sometimes authentic, but mostly fabricated, actively aided the assumption of power by the emergent class, and the leaders of this class were naturally reluctant to discard them. Thus, though the **telos** of the social reformers was 'modernity,' it was not quite the '**modernity**' of Europe, but a curious amalgam, thought up by men who were hopeful of achieving something through scientific thinking, religious reform and egalitarian legislation, but, in the

absence of widespread consent to their views, worried that they would destabilize their own authority.

When one looks at the situation impartially, it becomes obvious that there was no good reason for either the colonizers or their subjects to wish for more comprehensive change in the process of modernization. Actually handing the discourses of Enlightenment over to the '**natives**' was no part of the colonizers' plans, since these resources could be deployed against them, casting a shadow on their own legitimacy. Nor did the rising middle class want to share too much of its new-found power. As far as this class was concerned, enough had to be borrowed from the discourses of modernity (science, reason, political rights, the nation as natural social unit) to support projects of reform among the '**backward,**' and perhaps to shake the imperial throne; but not enough to threaten the ground of its own power.

Power within the middle class tended to be concentrated in the hands of men, in spite of the fact that a significant number of the social reformers were middle and upper class women. The prominence of the women campaigners worked in an interestingly oblique way to reinforce patriarchy within the middle class. Many of these campaigners, both Indian and European, were highly educated; some of them were **professionals**. But given the middle class coding of almost all female professional aspirations and all female visibility in public life as deviant, women legislators, activists and **professionals** were constantly involved in a process of compensation which made them as conservative as their male counterparts. **Muthulakshmi Reddi**, for instance, though not a brahmin herself, emphatically endorsed

brahmin/middle class gender ideology in her speeches on the devadasi question. In other words, the ostensible class position of a woman who entered the public sphere had of necessity to be aligned with that of mainstream **nationalists**, no matter what the woman's own '**real**' position was.

The women campaigners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus became simultaneously symbols of freedom and self-determination (since most of **them** were highly educated and articulate) and norm-enforcing exemplars. They endorsed middle class and patriarchal values, though they spent much of their lives mobilizing sympathy or aid for non-middle class women. There is, consequently, a palpable tension between class and gender positions in most of the debates around the woman question, especially in the debates on prostitution and on the devadasis. The gender of the women campaigners allowed them --it was believed--to feel for the supposedly miserable devadasis; but since they were anchored to their superior caste/class position by their impeccable morals (which so usefully secured middle class cultural domination), this sympathy was prevented from becoming identification. The result was that their attitude to the objects of their altruism was invariably patronizing or censorious.

Both men and women of the class that was to rule independent India went about the work of ushering in modernity **with** an eye to the preservation of their own claim to leadership. Doing this meant carefully slotting issues into discursive frameworks. One might take '**the woman question**' as an example of an issue that required such a **classificatory** exercise. If the woman question were brought, with all its

ramificationa, into **the** realm of the political/public, if it were placed squarely in the discursive framework of democratic rights or of egalitarianism, gender relations would have to be reorganized on a grand scale. Caste/class relations, moreover, would be affected in their turn, since the logic of democracy would inevitably extend into inconvenient areas. On the other hand, if the woman question were situated in the framework of reform, with middle class altruism and middle class marriage as defining poles, the logic of democracy—invoked on behalf of women, in the issue of the vote, by the reformers themselves—would be prevented from infecting institutions and hierarchies that the mainstream, middle class nationalists jealously guarded.

This fact has had effects that are still in evidence in the functioning of independent India. Here, no doubt, is the origin of the mode of political thinking that recasts huge structural problems as issues. The kind of solution that would involve large-scale revamping of social structures is indefinitely evaded by this means; each problem arising from the persistence of social inequality on a massive scale (in the caste system, in class structures, in gender relations) is treated in isolation from all other related problems. Thus the nationalists, like present day governments in India, responded to the colossal problem of gender inequality by dealing with the 'issue' of sati or the 'issue' of devadasis. It was easier to explain away 'issues' like this as quirks of history, accidental effects of the Muslim invasions in India; by this means, essential India, Vedic India, or at any rate pre-Islamic India, could be shown to have enshrined 'civilized' values that were compatible with

those of nineteenth century Britain, or 'spiritual' values that were superior to the latter. By this means both patriarchy and class/caste hierarchies, vital to the dominance of the numerically disadvantaged brahmin intelligentsia, could be spared the effects of the changing juridical and political order.

In the crucial years (the 1920s) in which the fate of the devadasis was sealed, the celebration of India's 'spiritual' claims to civilization was not the only route to political self-assertion. The non-brahmin Justice Party, formed in 1916, in the context of the reforms that were partial concessions to Indian demands for self-government (from the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 onwards), had appropriated the discourse of democracy to demand something that was more egalitarian in intention and more concrete in its effects: 'communal' electorates for non-brahmins for Legislative Council seats and 'reservations' for brahmins in governmental offices (i.e., to limit their number). These demands arose from the Justice Party's feeling that communal representation was the only way to prevent brahmins from assuming power under the new constitutional regime to be inaugurated by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms announced in 1918. The government responded by providing for a reservation of seats in the Legislative Council for non-brahmins. which, though it was a distinct watering-down of the Justice Party's argument, nevertheless made a political step towards egalitarian reform on its terms.

Voted to the Legislature in 1920, the Justice Party had, during the years 1920 to 1926 made a concerted effort to acquire more administrative power. The party had used this power to

raise and resolve in favour of non-brahmins not only the question of communal representation, but also that of administrative control over the many temples and **mathams** in Madras Presidency.

The first two decades of the twentieth century also saw the development of a narrative of Dravidian supremacy and a Tamil cultural revival which provided ideological support for the Justice Party's political claims. Aided by Christian missionaries, non-brahmin scholars like **Arumugha** Navalar, **P.Sundaram** Pillai, **Kanagasabai** Pillai and others prepared printed versions of rediscovered palm-leaf texts, wrote histories reconstructing a Tamil golden age, explicated **Sangam** classics: efforts that helped promote a view of 'Aryan' brahmin/Sanskritic culture as inferior and of brahmins as culturally impoverished interlopers. These were, on the whole, bad years for brahmins in Madras Presidency.

By 1927, the watershed year for the anti-nautch movement, brahmins were no longer hopeful of securing the kind of power that had seemed within their grasp in the first two decades of the twentieth century. These decades had promised the **consolidation--through** the political intervention of the Home Rule League, powerfully backed by the 'Mylapore brahmin' clique--of the advantages brahmins had enjoyed under colonial rule. The brahmin presence in the Legislative Council had been steadily growing stronger with each election until 1919, the candidates using their educational **qualifications**, their virtual monopoly over the legal profession and therefore over public debate, their powerful hold over the press, and their extended and affluent family networks to put the non-brahmin contenders in

their place. Annie Besant, at the head of the Home Rule movement, had felt that upper caste Hindus in Madras Presidency should be considered "important majorities," and that the voting system should be organised to favour a sort of oligarchical rule by brahmins. She had taken her advocacy of brahmin rule seriously enough to campaign for it in her daily New India. By the early nineteen twenties, however, Annie Besant had dropped out of political life, and the Justice Party had made notable electoral gains.

In the years following this loss of political power, the brahmin intelligentsia fell back on the resources it did retain: accumulated over the centuries, considerable intellectual and cultural capital; a virtual monopoly over scholarship, whether in Sanskrit or in English, and a less secure, but reasonably powerful hold over the arts. The late 1920s and the 1930s, therefore, were the years in which major organized initiatives were taken by brahmin and other upper caste artists, performers and patrons to standardize, expand and hegemonize the arts. The Music Academy of Madras, started in 1928, belongs to this set of initiatives. In the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant and another Society member called Eleanor Elder were already experimenting with hybrid versions of Indian philosophy and dance, all of which would influence Rukmini Devi when she started the Kalakshetra in 1935.⁴³

By 1927, when caste conflict was out in the open and when brahmins had begun to feel the weakness of their political position, a new enemy had appeared on the scene: the rationalist Self Respect Movement whose affiliation to the politics of the Enlightenment was even stronger than that of the Justice Party.

Spearheading the Suya Marivathai Iyakkam's assault on tradition was a non-brahmin leader: Periyar (E.V. Ramaswami Naicker). Periyar had, between 1925 and 1927, grown disgusted with the Indian National Congress, under whose banner he had embarked on political activism some years earlier. He had been organizing the Self Respect Movement through speeches and meetings all over Tamil Nadu, initially as a sort of parallel activity alongside his work for the Congress. The idea central to the movement was that inequalities and injustices within Indian society had to be eliminated before the demand for freedom from the British could become valid. Superstitions, and distinctions based on birth, were to be resisted through the elimination of brahmin priests from social events and rituals, through the public staging of Self-Respect marriages, through the eradication of untouchability and, importantly for the nautch debate, through the granting of equality to women. Another dimension of the movement was the promotion of a specifically Tamil culture, language and identity, in opposition to both Sanskritic-brahmin and Congress versions of pan-Indianism. Periyar's radical views were publicised in a Tamil weekly he edited and published from Erode: the Kudi Arasu.

The contrast between the way upper caste political groups handled the nautch issue and the way the Self Respect Movement handled it is instructive, since it points to the distinctness of the ideological resources each group depended on. The relationship between upper caste nationalists and the much larger number of lower caste Indians was roughly analogous to that between the British rulers and their Indian subjects: that is, they could lay claim to superiority in certain areas of

public life, in the fields of education and the arts, on the basis of which they established a shaky and limited cultural dominance. The strength of their position was largely symbolic; it was based, among other things, on the correct sexuality of their women. When in the 1920s a group of prostitutes and devadasis decided to seek office in the Congress committees, the largely brahmin membership of this party was deeply affronted. Devadasis were called upon to be 'rescued' by right-thinking people, not to be participants in the political process; Gandhi himself, faced with this unexpected display of agency and decision from the devadasis. turned squeamish and wrote them a public letter in Young India rebuking them for making such embarrassing and impossible demands.

Some brahmin leaders of the Madras Congress, including C.Rajagopalachari and S. Satyamurthi formally registered their disapproval of the anti-nautch campaign, arguing that the devadasis were a ritual requirement for the perpetuation of the agamic Hindu temple tradition, and custodians of a valuable art form. Satyamurthi even recommended that devadasis train as many young girls in the art of dancing as possible; a position compatible with the cultural initiatives of the Congress, in the work of the Music Academy, for instance. But the dissenting voices in the Madras Congress were drowned out by the wave of anti-nautch sentiment expressed by the national party, and by the press, both local and national.

Devadasis were thus caught in a bind. On the one hand, Political parties and anti-nautch reformers urged that they leave their 'immoral' traditions behind; on the other, these very reformers and politicians disowned them once they had cut

themselves loose from their cultural moorings, proving that their '**corruption**' was essential rather than contingent, and usually belying every '**democratic**' ideal the party professed.

The Suya Mariyathai Iyakkam, uniquely among South Indian political organizations, offered devadasis who had left their '**profession**' a platform. This platform was to be used strictly for political purposes, of **course--Periyar** was an atheist and a rationalist, with little sympathy for either sadir or for the religious traditions that the devadasis cherished. On the other hand, he was outspoken on the issue of women's subjection and saw karpu (chastity: a concept associated with womanhood, and charged with affect) as the ideological force that kept women in bondage to men. He neither fetishized nor ignored the questions raised by female sexuality, and for the first time since anti-naught propaganda began to vilify the devadasis, they were given the option of politically and publicly commenting on their own history and its relation to the subordination of women.

The acceptance offered by the **Self-Respect** Movement, not only through public **representation** but also through the politically charged Self-Respect marriages the organization conducted, was clearly the best bargain the devadasis could get. Devadasis like Moovalur **Ramamirtham Ammaiyar** proved to be, in the event, among the most dedicated activists in the movement, becoming important decision-makers and close associates of Periyar.

The Self-Respect Movement organized several Women's Conferences (**from** 1930 onwards) convened, chaired and addressed by women, some of them devadasis. Devadasis who spoke at these conferences were, naturally, expected to denounce religion and

the exploitation of women, whatever their personal experience of either had been, and to present narratives of how they had freed themselves from the clutches of Hindu society. The expectation that they would renounce their professions was a very general one by this time, however; the fact that the movement was willing to absorb them and publicly acknowledge them as members already made it a far more attractive proposition than the Congress, for instance.

The Self Respect Movement was perceived by most brahmins and other upper caste leaders as radical, iconoclastic and threatening. It was also widely perceived as regionalist, since it promoted an exclusive Tamil identity, and as pro-British, since it withheld its support from the khaddar movement and from Congress nationalism. All this may have had a good deal to do with the abrupt swinging of upper caste public opinion away from the devadasis, who were now seen as under the patronage of this primarily lower caste movement.

If the rationalization of social relations as applied to the devadasis by the **Self-Respect** Movement benefited them, the advantages were offset by the effects on the devadasi castes of the rationalization of property laws. The resentment caused among the men by the wealth and status of the women of the community was sharpened by the general trend towards gender-based **regularization** of property relations.

As **Amrit** Srinivasan points out, there was always a certain amount of strife between the men and the women of this community. In the heyday of sadir, the female dancers of the community were conspicuously more powerful than their male counterparts, the nadaswaram players and temple functionaries.

"The artistic and monetary dominance of the female art form" was perceived as "the effect of an unfair advantage arising out of the natural attraction of women" (Srinivasan, 1871). Added to this 'disadvantage' the men suffered were two other facts that contributed to male resentment: one, that the devadasis were structurally unavailable to the men of their own community; two, that devadasi women had full control over their property, either gifted by patrons or enjoyed for life through the offices of the temple. In most fictional narratives involving devadasis, interestingly, a devadasi of the older generation, a mother or an aunt, is the actual focus of authorial hostility.⁹ The corruption of an innocent young woman by a scheming female relative who then 'manages' her life is a motif that recurs in several devadasi stories. The archetypal quality of this figure testifies to male aggression towards the older, powerful matriarchs of this community.

The South India Devadasi Association, protesting against Reddi's Bill of 1927, noted the operation of vested male interests in decisions on their future:

You are well aware that under the law of inheritance and succession as administered to us at the present day, a female succeeds in preference to a male; and hence a few male members of our community actuated by self interest are trying to sow dissension amongst us.... Hence any opposition from that quarter ought not to be considered against us. (G.O 4079, 11)

The fervour with which male members of the devadasi community denounced the morals of the sadir-performing section of the community was a sign of this 'self interest.' In 1906, for instance, in Andhra, men of the kalavanthulu community swore that they would no longer play the mridangam (drum) in accompaniment to dance recitals.

The castes from which the devadasis were traditionally drawn formed associations like the Sengunthar **Mahajana Sangam** in Coimbatore, the **Isai Vellalar Sangam** in **Thanjavur**, the Muthuraja Mahajana Sangam in **Thiruchirapalli**. A large number of these associations coalesced around **Muthulakshmi Reddi's** introduction of the 1927 Bill to prevent dedication in the Madras Legislative Assembly, and were used as platforms for the voicing of complaints. Tracts and pamphlets were published in which caste honour was shown to be jeopardised by the devadasis, and ways of saving this honour were explored. Men even took 'vows' to stop assisting the devadasis **professionally**. Conferences were held in which various castes formally disowned their devadasi members or denounced them for impeding caste progress.

Property management among the devadasis being what it was, the men of the community had everything to gain and nothing to lose from a changeover to a different, more 'regular' system. The process of converting hereditary rights to pattas proved tedious and costly to the devadasis; their own access to the legal status (through valid marriages, formal inheritance, **enfranchisement**) that would entitle them to own land was insecure. In the meantime, control over property passed from women's hands into those of the men.

The Devadasi Act of 1947

The years between **Muthulakshmi Reddi's** introduction of the Bill to prevent the dedication of girls to **temples** and the actual passing of the Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947 saw several scattered and abortive attempts to get the Legislative Council's approval for versions of Reddi's Bill. While the Bill was being debated, the devadasis came under the jurisdiction of the Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1930, which, as I have noted above, treated them as identical with prostitutes.

By October 1947, the stage was set for the Devadasi Act. The Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly by **P. Subbarayan**, and passed into a law with barely one or two dissenting voices. It declared that the dedication of a woman as a devadasi was unlawful, and that such dedication would no longer render her incapable of entering into a valid marriage; it also, **significantly**, applies the prohibition of nautch only to certain specified castes:

Any custom or usage prevailing in any Hindu community such as the **Bogum, Kalavanthalu, Sani, Nagavasalu, Devadasi and Kurmapulu**, that a woman of that community who gives or takes part in any **melam (nautch), dancing or music performance** in the course of any procession or otherwise **is** thereby regarded as **having** adopted a life of prostitution and becomes incapable of entering into a valid **marriage, and the performance of any**

ceremony or act in accordance with any such custom or usage, whether before or after the commencement of this Act and whether the woman concerned has consented to such performance or not, are hereby declared unlawful and void.

Significantly, brahmin women who had begun to appear in public performances of a reinvented **nautch--bharatanatyam--were**, by **implication**, exempt from the prohibition on dancing. That this was a deliberate omission on the part of the members of the Legislative Assembly, is suggested by the number of references to the 'glorious **heritage**' of dance, and the need to preserve it, made in the Assembly debates of 1947. In uncanny **symbolization** of the brahmin takeover, in the very same year a rising brahmin star called **Kamala** appeared as the sister of the protagonist and a young dancer in the A.V. Meiyappa Chettiar film Nam Iruvar. The film's theme was the return of the **prodigal**: a young man becomes corrupted by depraved (westernized) friends whom he picks up in the course of an adventure in--of all **things--film-making**; he loses all the money he steals from his brother (the male ideal) but is eventually received back into his family's gentle and incorruptible bosom. **Kamala's** dances include one ('Mahan Gandhiye Mahan') in adoration of a statue of Gandhi framed by an iconic painting of Mother India: a neat condensation of women's roles in the **symbology** of cultural **nationalism**.

When the Devadasi Bill became an Act in the same year, the **devadasis** lost what little was left of their public status. An intervention by a member makes it clear that by 1947 the

devadasis did not have very much to lose: "But why have this big stick to beat such a small **community**? After all, devadasis have faded out--I am asking the Honourable Leader of the House whether he **can** produce some devadasis here (Laughter)" (PMLC 1947, 646-47).

Modern Selves, Bodies and Spaces

The contesting of the ideological effects of the devadasi murai took place in the context of a changing perception of selves and bodies, and of the spaces these would occupy.

Selves for the nation: The matrix of discourses in which '**tradition**' was mobilised for the nationalist cause brought into being a new **exemplum** of selfhood. If the missionaries, the colonial administrators and the atheistic indigenous movements were united in representing Hinduism as a coercive religion, as denying human autonomy, one form of recuperation was to show the new individual as free agent, inserting himself or herself into the reinvented and vastly accommodating Hindu cultural matrix. By this device, the autonomy of the self stood revealed; at the same time, the milieu of the refashioned Hinduism was shown to have fortuitous continuities with the older feudal form. There was, in other words, either no essential conflict between tradition and modernity, or else it was an agon that ended in a happy resolution.

The modern self was capable of fashioning its own identity, but still held on to its traditional moorings, so that individual identities were also essentially Indian identities. **It** could assert its autonomy from religion in so far as this meant freedom from obscurantism and **superstition**, but it was not

the less '**spiritual**' for all that. The female version of the new self had its work cut out and it is not hard to guess what this was going to be: the maintenance of national '**honour**' by exemplary devotion to domestic, conjugal and maternal tasks, and thus, obliquely, by the embodying of the essence of Indian culture; the underwriting of the middle class's dominance, by becoming the embodiments of the morality of this class.

The process by which individuals '**found themselves**' somewhere along the continuum from tradition to modernity was dramatized in the fiction of the time. **Self-definition** in the modern ethos meant, among other things, an initiation into a sexual ethic of moderation and conjugal happiness, as the following example shows. The short story "Sense in Sex" (1948) by Panchapakesa Ayyar is about the education of Sadasiva, a young brahmin who lives happily with his wife until "... modern civilization [begins] to penetrate" his quiet village, bringing with it "sexual literature." This last consists of how-to-do-it manuals ("advocating sense in sex"), not, as the label might lead one to suppose, pornographic effusions. The books represent a modernity that is clearly coded as '**western.**' Sadasiva is at first 'ashamed' to read the book he has ordered, but then becomes 'excited' by it. In this frame of mind, and under the influence of a worldly-wise friend, he has a chance encounter with a devadasi, Anandi. He helps her find a straying cow, follows her home quite innocently, and is '**hooked.**'

In **Ayyar's** story **Anandi's** mother sets up the predictable sexual trap into which the hero (predictably) falls. His wife rejects him; he meditates on female fallibility, running over, in his mind, passages on the futility of jealousy from his book

on 'sense in **sex.**' He is in the throes of rebellion against the **classification** of people by birth: "'Anandi's only fault is that she belongs to the dancing-girl caste. Will it not be cruel if all decent men refused even the smallest help to people simply because, by the diabolical working of an unjust social system, they happen to belong to a degraded **caste?'**"(21). Some episodes later, Sadasiva comes to his senses, and effects a **reconciliation** with his wife. At which point he declares to Anandi: 'I consider the worst shrew of a wife to be heaven itself compared to such as you'"(25).

This sentiment is evidently shared by the author, who underlines the connection between '**modern**' ideas and moral degeneration with a marvellously heavy hand: "'Those wretched pamphlets advocating sense in sex were the cause of all this,' said he to himself. 'Their ridiculous exaggerations and pretensions have brought me all this misery and shame. I must burn these sinks of obscenity at **once'**"(27). Not wanting to keep the smallest part of the action from his reader's view, Ayyar invites us to watch as the sinks of obscenity go up in flames, Sadasiva's wife assisting **companionably**.

The interesting thing about this narrative is that it aligns **companionate** marriage with '**tradition**' and sexual promiscuity with western modernity (books on sex), reversing the general understanding that **relationships** with devadasis were traditionally acceptable, but repugnant in the national-modern ethos. The devadasi's machinations are now synchronized with the corruption of young men by a new immorality set in place by colonialism. The happy resolution becomes possible only when the **misguided** upper **caste**, middle class hero, seeing the error of

his **ways--of** his attempt to undermine caste **structures--returns** to **his** 'traditional' marriage and his natural Indian spirituality. Even the devadasi knows **this. Anandi**, watching the books burn, remarks sotto voce : "'Even a fool can **find** happiness, provided he holds to his moorings'" (30).

Women were invoked in the discourse of nationalism either as emblems of chastity or as mothers. The correct sexuality of women was a much-debated subject in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both in Britain and in India. Christianity and science came together in the medico-moral discourse of the nineteenth century to pronounce on the nature of women's sexuality. Women, in their joint opinion, were essentially asexual creatures; William Acton, the **expert** whose opinions on female sexuality we have already had occasion to encounter, maintained that

...the best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little of or are careless about sexual indulgences. Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions they **feel....As** a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual **gratification** for herself. She submits to her husband's embraces, but principally to gratify him; and, were it not for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions.
(Acton 62)

As I have suggested above, entire cultures and communities

stood or fell by the chastity of their womenfolk; sexual 'purity' was of the essence both in the nationalist struggles against colonial cultural dominance and in struggles for caste/class hegemony. Every group stood to gain something from emphasizing the chastity of its women; and to the Hindu upper caste **nationalists**, poised between emulating the **colonizers'** culture and discrediting it, between negotiating with the colonizers' power and establishing their pre-eminence among the Indian castes, female sexuality was of urgent and abiding interest. Chastity, then, was the defining factor in the identity of the traditional female self, which embodied spiritual or ascetic ideals:

...we all know how sexual promiscuity, either in men or women is condemned by all religions and by all good people of any country or race, and in our own country, chastity in women has been looked upon as the supreme virtue of womanhood and even supernatural powers have been ascribed to such virtuous women by our poets and philosophers (Reddi, PMLC 1927, 515).

Muthulakshmi Reddi's history of virtuous womanhood was promptly and piously endorsed by **fellow-legislators** who gestured towards indispensable Sita and Savitri. By this time mythological figures were reflexively invoked to reinforce Hindu nationalist arguments about the status of women. Anjalai **Ammal**, for instance, claimed that India was "the land of Savitri, **Damayanti**, Nalayini and other great women." Deviations from the

mythic norms caused unanalysed **discomfort**: "The land that was such and has now come to this, women losing their chastity and taking low prof **essions**. . . if we see this we are sad." Anjalai Animal also felt that adult women ought to be barred from dancing and that since the cinema was becoming popular, moral standards should be maintained by legislating that nothing but Bhakti cinema be produced (**PMLC 1947, 650**).

Motherhood is the other acceptable role for women-citizens of the new nation, and it is as mothers that **Muthulakshmi Reddi** hails the devadasi community in her many speeches to its members: "I appeal to you who are mothers to make the future of your children bright, happy and glorious and make them respectable and useful citizens" ("Andhradesa **Kalavanthulu** Conference" 614). In speeches to the Legislative Council, she stresses the idea that the devadasis' maternal emotions were the most important motivating factors behind their desire for anti-nautch legislation. The bright side of the picture is that there is a concern, arising from a peculiarly modern conception of the sanctity of childhood, with the prolongation of the '**innocence**' of the devadasi; Reddi appeals to her compatriots on behalf of the 'helpless and innocent children' whose freedom to make their own life-choices was restricted by the practice of dedication.

But a sinister connection is also established between women's sexual conformity and their rights over their **own** children. When Reddi suggests that the children of devadasis, removed from the influence of their mothers, "would become virtuous and **loyal** wives, **affectionate mothers and useful** citizens" (**PMLC 1927, 417**), she is not only normalizing **the middle class family, but also advocating State intervention in**

motherhood where the biological mothers of children disqualified themselves from performing their natural roles by sexual delinquency. Reddi approvingly cites British governmental action in this direction: "I may point out in this connection that in England even before 1885, a mother who was living a life of immorality would not be entitled to the guardianship of her child" (PMLA 1927, 513).

Good mothering is class specific: the working class makes ungentle mothers, unfit for their task. A short story by Manjeri **Isvaran**, ("No Anklet Bells For Her") exemplifies the kind of middle class representation of working class motherhood that was calculated to evoke revulsion. Isvaran's story dramatizes a moment in the life of a child (Annakili) whose great desire is to be a dancer. The scene is set in the slum where she lives; it is populous with women, "some suckling babies, some picking lice from the head of one another and squashing them . . . same as monkeys do, chatting, gossiping, quarelling, cursing obscenely..." (1)

Annakili, finding a spring of creativity in herself even in this barely human environment, begins to dance. Her movements become frenzied as her imagination, stimulated by her reflection in the metal of a parked car, supplies the freedom and fantasy that her life denies her. The thread of her fantasy is abruptly broken by an **unmaternal** explosion:

Her mother's temper rose; sewer slang and brothel oaths tumbled and wriggled like maggots out of her mouth, and the world for **a frightful** instant seemed to have shrunk to such narrow proportions as to be

dominated by everything vile and coarse in the female of the species. "Come, you harlot, I shall peel the skin off your back. Want to be a dancing girl, do you? One day I'm sure you'll go on the streets."
(12)

As in **Muthulakshmi Reddi's** evocation of the **devadasi's** innocent child, Annakili's predicament, underscored by the contrast between her harmless delight and the shrill viciousness of the mother, engages our sympathy as much as the predicament of the mother repels it. Bad mothering, bad language, bad guidance: the natural consequence of these for the low caste child, the writer suggests, is the life of the prostitute.

Bodies: if we may see nationalist ideology as a form of war declared on colonialism, we might see why bodies had to be marked symbolically, as injury or killing marks them physically in war. The publicly visible, sexually defiant, performing body of the devadasi carried a weight of obscene significance in excess of its actual materiality. It was therefore stigmatized in anti-nautch discourse. Not only did the material presence of the devadasis as a community have to be counteracted, so that instruments of potential national **self-definition** (like religion or art) could be freed for use by nationalists; but the body Politic had to be exorcised of the historical **significations** of their individual bodies, so that the figure of **nation-as-mother** could do its emotive work as a trope for national rebirth, and so that the domestic **woman** could be set up as **the** universal norm.⁵⁵ As **Somnath** Zutshi suggests,

...the casting of woman in the role of nation resulted in ideological struggles being fought out on the terrain represented by woman. Though ostensibly the debates touched upon every aspect of a woman's being, the hidden agenda was always that of control. Behind this urge for control lay a fear of the powerful forces that lay buried within woman as well as nation--sexuality in the one case and the demand for social justice in the other.... Resolving the 'Woman **Question**' in this sense meant that control of the nation (the body politic) was linked to the control of woman (the female body). (85)

Thus, in the social reformer's imaginary, the desirable, seductive, auspicious dancer of temple or court was replaced by the diseased, physically corrupt prostitute. In practice the devadasis were subjected to physical control in an unprecedented way: the **paternalistic** State examined them **medically**, proscribed their public appearance, threatened to take over guardianship of their children.

While **Muthulakshmi** Reddi was recasting the devadasis as susceptible to reform because of their essential maternal feelings, **Rukmini** Devi was already identifying the true (brahmin) female artist as "she who mothers her nation" and conversely the mother as an artist:

Is there a greater artist than the artist who has deep understanding, who can bring happiness to the **world?....I** see women in modern life who take up different professions, carrying the personal motherhood they express in their home to the greater motherhood which they express to their country, to all the nations of the world. Such **compassion...creates** the greatest artist who is the mother, and such motherhood is the very soul and essence of womanhood. (Woman as Artist 7-8)

The space of the nation: spaces were redefined in the ethos of modernity. As feudal culture broke down, the art of the devadasi was no longer celebrated as an enactment of the power and presence of god or goddess and king. The devadasi was banished from the temples. But the desacralization of sadir did not mean that dance became a commodity under a new capitalist order, because bharatanatyam was symbolically assimilated into that other newly created space: the private realm, the domestic realm, defined as feminine. Bharatanatyam then became what girls of 'good families' did, at once bearing testimony to traditions several centuries old and displaying skills that were strictly ornamental, a hobby, the cultivation of '**Beauty.**' It was the artistic parallel to the kind of faith that flourished in the domestic space, sustained by the simple and demure rituals Performed by chaste upper-caste wives: no tantra here, no body-displaying evocations of god as lover, no demonic possession or other primitive and disreputable phenomena.

The devadasis' earlier unquestioned community privileges came into question and as certain forms of land tenure ended they no longer had a public role as propertied individuals. Control of wealth in the community passed to the men. The actual private space of the devadasi was invaded: their houses were raided, they were sent to reform 'homes' after being subjected to systematic police harassment.

As the controlling of public morals set individual desire in opposition to public welfare, the legal definition of the devadasi's status changed: legislation declared all irregular expressions of sexuality unacceptable. The conjugal bed was the only regular and legitimate **place**' for sexual intimacy. Legal change also reciprocally affected morality, so that the values of the middle class became applicable by law to all communities. The blurring under the feudal order of private and public spaces suddenly became archaic. While it was established that the domestic space represented the feminine essence of both family and nation, constraints on behaviour in the public sphere became more severe. The relationship between devadasi and patron/king/god, libidinal yet status-enhancing for both parties in the older order, now became an illicit one; there was no longer sanction for the kind of libidinal relationship that flouted the codes of public morality. The taboos in this sphere were, consequently, no longer exclusively those of caste and obligation; a sexual morality was set up that specifically opposed all individual desire to the public good, so that desire became something that needed to be continually regulated, by the State if need be. This tension between individual and collective desire is the characteristic condition of modern societies.

The devadasis forfeited the right to appear as performers in the masculinized public sphere. If women did appear in the public sphere, the sphere of the political, of citizenship, it was in capacities that were an extension of their roles in the home: as mothers, daughters, wives, goddesses. It seems as if symbolic space was filled and emptied according to a hydraulic model, as if the national-public could not stand the presence of both mothers and 'others.' If Rukmini Devi was being groomed by the Theosophical Society to be a World Mother, and the nation itself was a huge household, then the devadasi was the homebreaker, the much feared outsider who had to be prevented from upsetting this peaceful domestic economy.

By the 1950s, if even the shadow of the devadasi was suffered to fall across mainstream nationalist discourse, it was only to point a moral. In these two centuries of social reforms and other upheavals, **Muddupalani--poet**, singer, dancer, scholar, courtesan, philanthropist—became a mere '**prostitute**', a woman without shame; and the only socially approved woman, indeed the only 'natural' woman, to use **Veerasingam's** term, was one who could be identified by her 'modesty' or asexuality. In social reform tracts, in fiction, in countless film narratives, her **unregenerate** sister appears as the Other of, and a warning to, all the virtuous (domestic) heroines. Her scantily clad, grossly **material, vampish** body, against which the middle class heroine's **Presence** shines forth in all its (well-clad) spirituality, is a condensation of the horrors of **outsiderhood**.

My reading of the processes by which the devadasi community was discredited owes a great deal to Foucault's methodology, as I noted in the first chapter. I wanted to follow

the process by which the discursively produced devadasi moved towards, and finally merged with, the 'real' **devadasi**; but the weight of this series of events, as far as I am concerned, lay in the distance between the 'prostitutes' of the discourse and the interests and needs of the living community of women. Thus, sections of this chapter represented **un-Foucauldian** attempts to counter mainstream perceptions of devadasis with their own self-perceptions, which I have presented as more accurate than the former; they also refer to the material conditions which, as much as the narrativizing of the **devadasis**, inscribed the trajectory by which the discursive versions converged on the living ones.

By the 1950s, the practice of dedicating girls to temples died away in most parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra; the devadasis sought other professions, or were '**respectably**' married. The final irony of the whole exercise of legislation was that it drove many devadasis into penury and prostitution: a survey in **Kamatipura's** red light district, in Bombay, in the 1960s established that about a third of the residents were ex-devadasis . A proverb grew out of this in Tamil: "the devadasi who scorned the sacred rice of the temple now turns somersaults in the street for a beggar's rice."

NOTES

1. This text has, of course, been elaborately commented upon by Susie Tharu and **K. Lalita** in Women Writing in India Vol. 1. The passage (translated by B.V.L. Narayana Row) has been taken **from** this anthology (116), as has the quotation from **Veeresalingam's** Andhra Kavula Charitram (qtd. in Tharu and Lalita, Introduction 3). Muddupalani was a renowned and highly successful ganika in the **Maratha** court of **Pratapasimha** of Thanjavur, in the eighteenth century, and a contemporary of the brothers **Ponnaiah**, **Chinnaiah**, **Vadivelu** and **Sivanandam**.

2. To say this is not to attribute some evil design to this class; no doubt its members were, at one level, unaware of how the new order was going to prove advantageous to themselves and their posterity.

3. There was a corresponding reluctance to intervene in the absence of such strikingly obvious signs of cruelty or coercion. For the most part, British imperialists had no stake in disturbing the peace of indigenous patriarchs. Their relationship, as far as the run of issues was concerned, was one of collusion; it could even be one of active cooperation when it came to the dismantling of a matrifocal tradition (as in the case of marumakkathayam among the Nayers of Kerala).

4. The British response to sati was a blend of curiosity, admiration, horror and revulsion; the disinterested desire to ensure justice was probably not the only reason why the officials of the Raj foregathered at the pyre. Lata Mani (see, for instance, "Contentious Traditions," 90) notes that the administrative **investigations** of the scriptural position on sati set up exchanges between colonial officials and Hindu pandits; these exchanges enabled the British to question the very premises of Hinduism, and enabled the brahmins to redefine tradition in the process of redefining women's roles; Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak ("Can the Subaltern Speak?") observes that the trope of rescue--white men rescuing brown women from brown men--was used to considerable ideological advantage by British administrators.

5. This description is from **Philips's** Evolution of Hinduism, and is quoted by Thurston in Castes and Tribes of India. 131; details of the source are not given.

6. Thurston offers several examples of cases filed by **devadasis**; see pp. 145-50 of Castes and Tribes.

7. In the Legislative Council debate of 1930 **Muthulakshmi Reddy** complained that "...a large number of women adopt girls, take them to temples and make them undergo the ceremony of dedication, even after the age of 18. There is no religion. These women do it purposely, with a view to make those girls

lead an immoral life" (PMLC 1930, 992).

8. See Ballhatchet 149.

9. See Ronald **Hyam**, Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience and Kenneth Ballhatchet, Race, Sex and Class Under the **Raj**.

10. The devadasis were objects of fascination for western travellers many centuries before the advent of the missionaries. For example, Marco Polo's 1298 account of his travels in India contains a description, **significantly** unmarked by moral judgement, of devadasis as 'consecrated **damsels**.' The figure of the devadasi as nun or vestal virgin was schematically presented in several European paintings and illustrations for travelogues through the intervening centuries. The fanciful reconstructions by European artists of the devadasis' appearance involved no attempt at authenticity; they were frequently portrayed in the costumes of European nuns, which may account for Annie **Besant's** later references to their celibate past. See Partha Mitter, Much Maligned **Monsters**.

11. The Hindu religious movements were themselves partly a response to the delegitimation of Hindu practices (more matters of attitude and lifestyle than '**religious**' practices) by Christian evangelists in India. See, for instance, J.N. **Farquhar's** Modern Religious Movements in India (1914). The author displays a certain complacency about the changes his own faith has wrought in the Indian religious scene.

The role of the press in the development of the non-brahmin movement in Maharashtra has been documented by Rosalind **O'Hanlon** in Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao **Phule** and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Western India (1985). Similar non-brahmin protests were taking place in Madras Presidency; Eugene Irschick gives an account of these in his Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s.

12. The Social Reform **Advocate**, the Indian Social **Reformer**, and, meant specially for women, the Indian Ladies' **Magazine**, and Stri **Dharma**, all published from Madras, are examples from the early 20th century.

13. The situation in princely states like Mysore, Travancore, **Pudukottai** was thus different from that of the colonially governed territories: the 'native' rulers of these states did **not** have to go through such tortuous negotiations with **Prevailing** customs as seemed necessary to the colonial power and could, if they wished, take shortcuts to modernity.

14. These rituals were intricate and complex, their correct performance being considered vital to **the** well-being of the

entire community of the village or town. See **Kersenboom-Story**, 87-127 for a detailed reconstruction of the devadasi's tasks and their **significance**.

15. Thurston mentions several such lawsuits as do **S.K. Singh**, (**Devadasi System in Ancient India**, p. 14) and **S. Ramakrishna** (**Social Reform in Andhra**: especially in the references to the Indian Law Review and to the Proceedings of the Bombay and Madras High Courts). Arjun Appadurai gives a detailed example of temple litigation in Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule. Under the British administration in India, and especially after the formation of the Board of Revenue in 1789, the government officials and later the law courts intervened in the affairs of temples when invited to do so, but without, on the whole, becoming involved in matters of ritual **significance**. Government control over temple administration gradually increased until roughly the mid-nineteenth century; after this, the work of arbitrating in temple property and other disputes was taken over by the judicial wing of the government. In 1817, for instance, the Collector of Madras was asked to intervene in a land dispute:

The land in question was assigned to a dancing girl attached to the temple, who, unable to perform her duty, had sold her land (and her right to a share of the dancing performance) to another dancing girl, who had in turn let the land out to some tenants. These were all seen to be legitimate transactions. But when the second dancing girl wished to build a house on the property and evict the tenants in accordance with the original agreement, the tenants not merely refused, but said they had applied for a notice of ejectment to the Supreme Court of Madras.... (Appadurai, Worship and Conflict 115)

The Collector was asked by the government to make sure that the dancing girl's land was restored to her.

16. See the elaboration of this argument in Partha **Chatterjee's** The Nation and its Fragments, especially "The Nation and its Women," (116-34) and "Women and the Nation" (135-57).

17. The Women's India Association was started by Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins in 1917, and **Muthulakshmi Reddi** was later **Vice-President** of the association.

18. See Ashis Nandy's argument in The Intimate Enemy, that Indian men were perceived as peculiarly effeminate by their colonial rulers; Gandhi's deployment of satyagraha mined this **feminization-effect** for ideological and political gains. See also Albert **Memmi's** The Colonizer and the Colonized.

19. The devadasis were also a material threat to the new hierarchy: as powerful people with markedly different values

from the nationalist ones, they could come in the way of the latter project. For instance, propertied devadasis wielded some power at the level of local government, a fact that was deeply resented by male administrators who had to accede to their wishes in some matters.

20. Gandhi is said to have called **Mayo's** book 'a drain-inspector's report.'

21. Mother India 52. Miss Mayo alleges that devadasis became the 'priest's own prostitutes' by the age of five, when they were considered most sexually desirable; and that on retirement, they were turned out to beg for their living after being branded with the name of their deity.

22. Janaki Nair calls attention to the Mysore government's attempts to research this matter and the subsequently included clause in the royal order concerning the devadasis there: celibacy, and not the mere performance of their ritual duties, was required of them in exchange for their continued enjoyment of temple grants (Nair, 3163).

23. For an idea of normative assumptions about women in Britain from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, there is no better source than the 'conduct' books which were written by both men and women to help women remodel and regulate their behaviour. The authors seldom mince their words. Here is Wetenhall Wilkes, author of A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady: "She who forfeits her chastity, withers by degrees into scorn and contrition; but she, who lives up to its rules, ever flourishes, like a rose in June, with all her virgin graces around him..." (qtd. in Jones, 301).

William Acton, whose medical text Prostitution Considered in Its Social and Sanitary Aspects (1870), which had an enormous impact on Victorian attitudes towards prostitution, writes: "What is a prostitute! She is a woman who gives for money that which she ought to give only for love....a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity" (Acton, 42).

Throughout this period, in Britain, novels of all kinds (see Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth, for instance), plays, magazine articles, pictorial depictions like lithographs, illustrations, oil paintings and so on, imaged the 'fallen woman,' that deviation from the domestic norm, as repenting of her sins and dying in some uncomfortable locale.

24. Venkataratnam, in "Social Purity and Anti Nautch Movement", quoted by V. Ramakrishna, 134. Details of source not given.

25. See Muthulakshmi Reddi's autobiography, for instance. V. Ramakrishna's Social Reform in Andhra documents the course of the Social Purity movement. There are obvious resonances with Purity movements elsewhere, in the United States of America, for instance, or in Britain. See The Sexuality Debates, ed. Sheila Jeffreys.

26. For instance, when the Madras Congress was voted to power in 1937, C.Rajagopalachari managed to stall legislation on the sadir issue (which appeared imminent at the time) for the period of his tenure as Chief Minister. See S. Anandhi, "Karuppu Pengal" and "Representing Devadasis."

27. The Legislative Assembly that year was a curious body, with a large number of members, including Muthulakshmi Reddi, nominated by the British Government. The Justice Party could not prove a majority in the House, and the Congress was internally divided about contesting the elections, since one faction within it felt that the party should boycott the electoral system until self-government was granted to Indians on a more comprehensive basis.

28. Amrit Srinivasan points out, for instance, that the devadasi, once she was dedicated, was not permitted to marry. Her sexual partner was chosen by 'arrangement,' and an older female relative usually had the veto on her choice. "Alliance with a Muslim, a Christian or a lower caste man was forbidden while a Brahmin or member of the landed and commercial elite was preferred for the good breeding and/or wealth he would bring into the family" (Srinivasan, 1869). S.Anandhi makes this point much more strongly when she claims that it was "not a free flow of the Devadasi's desire which marked out the system, but its almost exclusive control by the landed patrons" ("Representing Devadasis" 739). As feminists who endorse the freeing of sexual relationships from traditional regulations we might see the point of making the devadasis entirely free agents with respect to the choice of sexual partners. But it must be remembered that the reformers were not in favour of anything like this free agency for women in general, since it would also destroy the other hierarchies that they were anxious to preserve; they wanted the devadasis to renounce their non-conjugal, relatively free relations with their patrons so that they could be assimilated into a far more coercive, strictly regulated marital economy.

29. See Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality and its Discontents, however, for a consideration of the continuities between the work of the sexologists and the penal regimes set up by the discourse of public hygiene.

30. The Contagious Diseases Act was passed and repealed in Britain several times since 1864. As William Acton observes: "At length...the injury inflicted by this apathy on our soldiers and sailors, and the loss sustained by the public

purse, **seem** to have touched the conscience or the cupidity of the legislature, and in that year an act was **passed...** having for its object the remedy of the evils to which the army and navy are exposed" (49-50). This Act provided that women suspected to be prostitutes "be subject to a periodical medical examination by the visiting **surgeon...for** the purpose of **ascertaining...whether** she is affected with a contagious disease..." and that any woman "found on examination to be diseased, may either go herself, or will be apprehended and sent, to some hospital certified for the reception and detention of government patients" (50).

31. After the first Lock Hospital was established in Madras in 1805, the system was supported and abolished several times in succession, depending on whether the army spokesman was eloquent or not on the subject of the "misery" of the soldiers; whether the Civil Surgeon and the Medical Department were convinced or not of the link between deregulation of prostitution and epidemics of VD in the army; and whether or not the government was in a mood to legislate on the question. Eventually, there was some sense that a measure of **coercion--in** the form, usually, of publicly appointed 'matrons' and the police--was not incompatible with concern for the liberty and welfare of the prostitutes, and regulation came to stay, with the lock hospitals being revived from time to time during epidemic outbreaks of **VD**.

32. Indeed, to do her credit, she was worried about these consequences: she wanted, for instance, to make sure that the devadasis were integrated into society, and not ostracized; she was concerned about the possibility that they would lose incomes and lands through anti-nautch measures; and so on. However, in spite of all her reservations, she pushed the legislation through.

33. Such petitions were written up all over South India. Janaki Nair mentions one such "spirited challenge to the new situation from the 12 devadasis ..at Nanjangud [Mysore state].... [reminding] the sovereign of his duty towards protecting hereditary occupations such as theirs" (3162). These petitions, Nair points out, express considerable anxiety about the preservation of the art forms the devadasis **practised**.

34. See the Stri Dhanna 15.11 (1932): 613.

35. Quoted in News and Notes. Indian Ladies Magazine 4.1 (1930):44-45.

36. This is the gap Partha Chatterjee identifies between the thematic of the nationalists (the legitimating ethical and Political discourses of the Enlightenment) and the actual realization of these in the problematic of everyday practical

politics. The idea is elaborated in Chatterjee's Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?. One **might** also observe the operation, here, of what he calls "the rule of colonial difference" in The Nation and its Fragments: the differential entry into modernity of the metropolis and its colony.

37. In late eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, there was a widespread understanding that there was a special **moral** force in 'women's mission to **women**'. A number of women took up philanthropic work, such as the rescue of pro.-titutes or the amelioration of conditions in **workhouses**; private charity was believed to be gentler than the public welfare machine.

38. Responses to the problem of legitimation posed by the women's **qu**estion invariably appealed to Ancient India. Har **Bilas Sa:da**, author of the Sarda Age of Consent Bill, makes the following argument for Hindu Superiority in the scale of nations, in 1906: "In Ancient India, [women]... not only possessed equality of opportunities with men, but enjoyed certain rights and privileges not claimed by the male sex. The chivalrous treatment of women by Hindus is well known to all who know anything about Hindu society" (82). The authority he quotes most copiously in support of his argument is, amusingly, **Manu**.

39. The predominantly brahmin trustees (appointed by the operation of a nepotism that had already been the subject of adverse comment in the press) of the temples and mathams and their representatives in the Legislative Council resisted the Hindu Religious Endowments Bill, intended to drastically curtail their administrative powers and their control of temple **funds**. Nevertheless the Bill became an Act in 1927. The '**reservations**' issue was also resolved in a way that threatened brahmin hegemony in government service: in 1928 it was provided that out of every 12 government posts "five had to go to non-Brahmin Hindus, two to Brahmins, two to Muslims, two to Anglo-Indians or Christians, and one to the Depressed Classes (Harijans)" (G.O. 1129, December 15, 1928, Public Service Department).

40. The odd brahmin scholar like **U.V. Swaminatha Iyer** and the odd rebel figure like **Subramania Bharati** did help build up the discourse of Tamil superiority.

41. She was lampooned as an '**Irish brahmani**' in the non-brahmin press (see **Rajaraman** 58, 74).

42. The Tamil **Isai** Movement was one of the cultural offshoots of the non-brahmin movement and set itself to promote research and performance of a specifically Tamil music and dance in conscious opposition to the assumptions that informed brahmin deployment of cultural capital.

43. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, this brand of brahmin-identified cultural nationalism acquired definition and extended its effects in various arts and professions. For instance, David Lelyveld, documenting the broadcasting work of the All India Radio, draws attention to the influence of Dr. B.V. **Keskar**, brahmin Minister for Information and Broadcasting from 1950 to 1962, on the programming choices made by that government-controlled organization. **Keskar's** choices favoured the 'Hindu' stream of Hindustani music over the Muslim dominated styles that were taught in the traditional gharanas; the latter were associated, predictably, with loose morals and prostitution. Since the government had determined--when Vallabhai **Patel** became minister for information and broadcasting, in 1946--that such 'impure' elements would be eliminated from the classical music scene, it became necessary to check on the private morals of those who were employed by the AIR as public artists. A large number of the artists inducted into the staff of AIR during these decades were brahmins, products of voluntary associations to preserve music, or of government-established schools of music.

44. **Self-Respect** marriages went against caste and other taboos (on widow remarriages, for instance, or devadasi marriages). There were eight thousand such marriages between 1929 and 1932.

45. The exchange took place in Young India, in September 1921.

46. While a genuine desire to preserve the art may have certainly formed part of the motivation of this group, some critics have identified other, less disinterested motives for their support of the devadasi system. S.Anandhi, for instance, suggests that the fervent protection offered by conservative nationalists to 'essential Indian culture' as embodied in temple rituals was a result of their desire to preserve the brahmin priesthood, under attack by the **Self-Respecters** among others ("Representing Devadasis" 740).

47. V **Subramania** Aiyar, editor of The Hindu at the turn of the century, for instance, was fiercely opposed to the devadasi tradition and carried several articles in his paper condemning it. See **Rangaswami** Parthasarathy, A Hundred Years of the Hindu, 73-74.

48. Periyar had also decided to support the struggle of the 'untouchable' castes in Madras for political representation, and the proportion of the scheduled caste membership in his Party was notable at a time when even the non-brahmin Justice Party was reluctant to take up the question of untouchables. This may have been another reason why the party was portrayed as being outrageously radical.

49. See my summary of the short novel Devi the Dancer in chapter 3. Also see Kasturi Srinivasa Iyengar's novel of 1976, called **Devadaasi**. The unsympathetic figure of the devadasi mother is also a familiar fixture in any number of films.

50. Reported in the Krishna Patrika of April 5, 1906; cited in V. Ramakrishna, p. 143.

51. G.O. 23 1948, Law [legislative] Department.

52. **Kamala**, famous as a child artist ('**Baby Kamala**' and later '**Kumari Kamala**'; in adulthood, Kamala **Laxman**, and now Kamala Narayan) was a student of Vazhuvor **Ramaiah** Pillai. Her nritta or pure dance was highly acclaimed; more importantly, she was a figure with whom several brahmin girls of her generation identified strongly. See Sujata **Vijaraghavan**, "Kamala the **Dancer**."

53. The lyrics were poems by **Subrahmania** Bharati, Tamil Nadu's nationalist poet-hero. The songs from this film became state-wide hits, associating Kamala indelibly with the glory of achieved Independence.

54. Panchapakesa Ayyar, "Sense in Sex" in Sense in Sex and Other Stories of Indian Women 1-12.

55. Interestingly, the Kudi Arasu of December 18, 1927, which marked **Periyar's** decision to abandon Congress ideas, carried on its cover a picture of Mother India "standing beside a map of India on one side and a person weaving cloth by hand on the other. It also contained the motto, '**Long** live khaddar...'" (Irschick, 90). By the time the next issue came out, this kind of imagery and this kind of activism had both been rejected in favour of the more iconoclastic agendas of the later Iyyakkam. The image on the cover of Kudi Arasu was an obvious reference to the title of Katherine **Mayo's** 1927 book Mother India.

56. One might even see this imagery as arising from a sort of oedipal or sexual conflict between colonizer and colonized over the 'possession' of women. Many of the writings of this time represented the nation as a woman (Mother India) raped and humiliated by the usurping **father-figure** of the colonizer while her sons looked on impotently (see, for instance, Katherine Mayo's Mother India). Real women were, naturally, **urgently** required to demonstrate that they were entirely under the sexual control of men of their own caste, locality, race.

57. See A Study of Prostitutes in Bombay by S.D. Punekar, 12-