Chapter 5

Maternal Dilemmas and the Political Imaginary

The enduring myth of the mother as nation, in as much as it is a derivative of the notion of ideal motherhood, is a crucial factor in the continuing delimitation of woman’s choice of identities. This chapter reads Anandamath, a seminal work that delineates the mother-nation concept in juxtaposition with narratives by women in order to trace the changing discourse of motherhood and to locate spaces of female agential possibility within a revised notion of the nation-state.

Woman in India, historically, has always embodied her highest office when she fulfills the traditional role of the mother. This is primarily because the female is considered the originary source of all creation, the primeval force venerated as the nurturer and ensurer of plenitude, and hence divine. Commenting on the perception of motherhood as a moral, religious and artistic ideal, Sudhir Kakar observes:

...[The] absolute and all-encompassing social importance of motherhood, the ubiquitous variety of motherhood myths, and the function of offspring in ritual and religious (not to mention economic) life of all give to motherhood in Indian culture a particular incontrovertible legitimacy. (67)

Moreover, the Renaissance, when it took root in India around the second half of the nineteenth century, apart from being an irregular phenomenon arguably confined to urban centres and constricted by class and caste
factors, upheld the traditional icons and ideals of woman in its philosophy and art. This was concurrent with the land's exposure to new exciting Western social theories and the possibilities it held out for the realization of the aspirations of a colonized community. It is at this conjuncture of the traditional and the modern that the image of the mother was recruited by nationalism to define the contours of the emerging nation.

Literature replicates the interconnected grids of histories, traditions and politics, creates and mobilizes legitimacy for new discourses, while reaffirming the validity of prevalent forms and delegitimizing those that have become dysfunctional. In other words, works of literature influence the generation and direction of opinions, playing one ideological system against another and manipulating responses to contradictory or irrelevant norms existing in the polity, imposing an interested logic on ambiguity and chaos. And it was in the creative consciousness of literature that the discourse of the mother was originally linked to the modern concept of statehood, affecting a psychological and emotional identification with the emergent political economy of the nation.

The Bengali Writer Bankim Chandra Chatterji (Chattopadhyay) (1838-94) was the first to introduce into nineteenth century India's political consciousness the theme of the great Mother, superimposing the image on to the burgeoning idea of the nation in his novel Anandamath (circa 1881). A romantic nationalist historiography, this work occupies a unique position in Bengal's literary renaissance. It was part of Bankim's undertaking to refashion language and literature in order to counter Britan's cultural
imperialism, and to re-orient them towards the expression and development
of a nationalist spirit. The project was impelled by Western colonial
criticism against the cultural poverty of the natives with express reference
to the intellectual, aesthetic and literary crudity, and artificiality of their
fictional narratives. Bankim’s efforts to raise a new consciousness at the
juncture of a changing social ethos was deeply influenced by the Victorian
social philosophy of progress and order, which he sought to translate into a
native vocabulary located in a Hindu past, thereby establishing a case of
historical precedent and a formula for national selfhood. In his assessment,
the epics of Sanskrit literature prefigured these aspirations in a nativist
idiom which was then brought to apply to nationalist imaginings of
aesthetics and power. As a result, Bankim’s engagement in the evolution of
the Bengali novel incorporates the heroic sweep of the traditional epic
narratives, its employment in an eloquent analysis of society and in the
engineering of a political philosophy for the reconstruction of the nation.

Set in the eighteenth century, Anandamath is the narrative of a
sanyasi rebellion against British colonial rule in a remote region of Bengal.
Bankim’s attempt to forge a supposed relation between a “Hindu ethical
ideal” and the rationalization of a people’s socio-political life was heavily
reliant on the qualities of woman as mother (P. Chatterjee, Nationalist 58).
His women protagonists, Kalyani and Shanti, demonstrate different aspects
of maternity. Kalyani, kshatriya by caste and zamindar by class, is the
epitome of wifely devotion and fidelity, adhering to patriarchal codes of
defence that forbid her even to utter the name of her husband Mahendra,
and to gendered principles of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. Her suicide
on the assumed death of her daughter conforms to her role as her
"husband's co-religionist" (B. Chatterji 96) and is a step towards helping
him "serve Mother India" thus enabling him to fulfill his "dharma" (B.
Chatterji 49). The quality of motherhood is most evident in Kalyani’s ability
to nurture a moral spirit in Mahendra as well as in Bhavan who desires her,
and to preserve the sanctity of the family unit through the threat of its
disintegration. Shanti’s devotedness to Jiban is matched in its intensity by
her dedication to the cause of freedom. In securing his wealth and joining
him in his struggle, she effortlessly combines the role of both wife and
mother:

“I am your wife by faith...It is my religious duty to help you
in the performance of your duties....I am roaming in these
jungles so that you and I together may serve Mother India to
the best of our ability. I want to fortify you in the discharge of
your duties as a child.” (B. Chatterji 92)

The simultaneous production of value and duty thus tied willed female
renunciation to nationalist instrumentality, and established woman as the
bearer of cultural authenticity in the political unconscious.

Bankim’s indigenist rhetoric obscures its own patriarchal and
religious categories, sexual politics and class/caste affiliations in framing a
(national) culture for opposing colonial intervention. The conflation of the
political with the sacred inflated nationalism and invested it with a
collective purpose that was tempered with personal heroism. This heroism
is however denied to woman whose entry into the public domain was
contingent on the agency ascribed or proffered to her as custodian of particular values and social relations, or else on the denial of her sexuality. And it is at this interface that the similarities between Shanti and Kalyani end. Shanti is brahmin by caste, versed in Sanskrit grammar and literature (unlike Kalyani who restricts herself to reading the scriptures), and exercises unprecedented female self-determination, initiative and skill in argument. Brought up among the male students of her father’s academy, her marriage to Jihan does not deter her from continuing to dress like a boy, or associating with male company. Disinclined to comply with the gendered restrictions imposed on her in the marital home, she leaves the house and joins a group of sanyasis disguised as a man, becoming adept in gymnastics and the use of arms. Constant to her vows of marriage, she nevertheless settles down to the role of a wife, only to resort to disguise once again in order to gain access to the Order of the Children. When challenged by the Mahatma that she is her “husband’s helpmate only in household duties and not in heroic deeds,” Shanti reasserts her place in the Order as a brahmacharini who shares with her husband the ideals and aims of the rebellious ascetics (B. Chatterji 81). The desire shaped in the domestic sphere, for Shanti ultimately seeks to be reconciled with Jiban, can only be named as an abstraction free of self-interest correlative with the nationalist, modernizing desire for similar discipline and unity in the public sphere, that is for a rule of law enforced by a future state. Her gender transgressions however go beyond the flattened depiction of typical female characters, creates a tension in a transition generic formula that combined
the epic and the novel, and makes narrative closure appear forced and contrived.

In the nationalist universe of the novel, the reversal of gender helps Shanti to escape female frailty, gives her access to male power, and to the potent moral authority of the ascetic. The guise of the sanyasi has practical purposes too, and allows her a mobility normally denied to secluded high-caste women. It enables her not only to occupy public spaces but also to have a claim upon male privilege. Disguise, while signifying the social rigidity of classification, in addition is a signifier of changing valences for women brought about by a new ideological economy. The appropriation and exorcism of female sexuality in the name of conjugality, and in an extended sense of nationalism, is of particular interest here. The vows of celibacy taken by Shanti as the disguised ascetic Nabin during her/his initiation into the Order is part of the process of woman's desexualization and self-depreciation that now comes to redefine marital relationships. In fact, Shanti's preceptoral function within marriage reconstructs a sacred and moral male-centred universe with resonating eschatological implications for the wider public domain. As she explains to Jiban:

"Let us imagine that the earthly part of marriage was not meant to be ours. Our marriage is only for the life beyond death....But why speak of the supreme atonement?....You are my teacher. How can I teach you the way of the dharma? You are a hero; how can I teach you the duties of a hero? (B. Chatterji 92-3)
The sexual abstinence of Shanti can also be read as a generic device, the semiotics of which is one of concealing Jiban's desire for her from scrutiny by normalizing it, and then displacing it into the realm of renunciation and political activism, thereupon glossing it over with a sense of the heroic. Shanti's own transgression centres on unsettling boundaries through cross-dressing only to re-circumscribe herself within them once again. The incident of her confrontation with Captain Thomas is a case in point. During their chance encounter, she disarms him and removes her disguise to face him as a "ravishingly beautiful Hindu woman" (B. Chatterji 90). She however refuses to fight him, and instead engages him in an exchange that alternates between moral absolutism and sexual assertion. These manifest inconsistencies are merely a serial re-expression of the sexual woman's exemption from the category of heroism marking the limitation of her praxis, and her contested location within a nationalist discourse of accommodation and denial. And the association of the brahmin (Jiban-Shanti) and the kshatriya (Mahendra-Kalyani)--two disparate upper-strata castes wielding authority over the spaces and values of holiness and valour--in a narrative refiguration of social and racial equations points to the hidden politics of caste that underlies the novel.

The imagined country as the Mother forecloses all other human relationships. Depicted as a trinity in supernatural terms, the "almost...living" maps of India are sacralised and feminized, thereby effecting a disengagement from temporality (B. Chatterji 43). This construction of a specific concept in emotionally charged Hindu, gendered iconography implicates the attempt to rationalize the re-ordering of gender
relations, the re-assignment of power in both abstract and substantial terms and the revision of notions of duty and virtue in a recreated moral universe based on principles of nationalism. The cavern-like shrines accessible through tunnels, where the images of India are revealed to Mahendra simulates the maternal womb. Here, the semiotic promotes an as yet undistinguishable self in an undifferentiated state of pleasure and anxiety that elicits a patriotic community of persons who are then figured as the family. Tanika Sarkar in “Nationalist Iconography” interprets the images of Mother India as the trinity of Mother Goddesses. The mother in the past symbolised as Jagaddhatri, the nurturer of the world, evokes plenitude, peace and altruism, features marked by their denial and absence in the colonized nation. Kali as the mother in the present induces a sense of sacrifice and death, a commitment to the imminent emancipation of the land. She is represented as sterile, yet a fierce protector of justice. The goddess, Mahishasurmaridini Durga, the ten-armed warrior goddess, denotes the principles of strength and freedom in the future. The transfiguration of woman into Mother India however is conditional on a series of interpellations or enunciations in step with changing female valences. When Shanti’s deception is exposed, the Mahatma’s censure addresses her in a manner that underscores her immaturity and deceit: “Shame on you, little mother!” (B. Chatterji 79). The term “mother” here, is a common designation usually given to married women without children. The skill she exhibits in stringing the iron bow, a decisive test for her admission into the Order, however draws out this appellation from the astounded master: “What! are you a woman or goddess in disguise?” (B.
Chatterji 80). And finally, in a move which couples woman with the nation and makes incumbent on her the task of attaining, safeguarding and preserving freedom, the Mahatma bestows on her the title of mother:

"Hitherto I have addressed only my Mother India as mother, for we recognize no other mother than our Motherland...Today I address you as mother. So do honour your child’s request. Please do your very best to win victory—and—save Jiban’s life, and your own."  [B. Chatterji 102]

The semantic play on the concepts of mother and nation is subtle and functions interchangeably, cross-hatching the twin realms of the unconscious and the material.

Women writers in post-independence India bring fresh perspectives and critical insights to bear upon prevailing maternal ideologies. To an Indian woman, motherhood is but one of the designated phases in her life-cycle, an inevitable counterpart to her domestic function and pativrata dharma. Tied into the complex of hierarchical and lateral societal relationships, motherhood is a central constituent in fostering a sense of community and thus discourages individualism. It nevertheless enables role diversification within kinship structures and in a shift from the man-woman relationship, organizes future life around the more intimate and personal relations with one’s children. Niraja’s pride as the mother of a son is obvious and is clearly evident in the approbation of the neighbours: “Ah, your one son is equal to a hundred” (Devi, “Son” 46). The religious, economic and symbolic privileges accruing to the male child in a patriarchal
society like India serves to highlight a conceptual prejudice inhering in the notion of woman as mother. The distinct values invested with mothering is based on a sexual differentiation of the mother-child relation, with an insubstantial sense of self-fulfillment and power being endowed on the mother even as she is contained within the parameters set by a patricentric order.

Rapid urbanization and a competitive market economy contribute to the shrinkage of living space, a highly fragmented and excluding social sphere, the breakdown of the joint family security networks that result in the gradual transformation of traditional value systems and the realignment of familial and gender equations. Consequently, cultural prescripts on the temporal and sacred roles, duties and responsibilities of persons undergo revision or attenuation. Shubro's apparent disinclination and disinterest in matters pertaining to his parents' welfare is engendered within the altered priorities the new ideological dispensation requires. But as with most systemic mutations there is an instinctive consolidation of its conservative elements, a strategy aimed at preserving the essential core and one that finds expression in Niraja's silence and forbearance. These maternal attributes effortlessly interlock with the construct of a past sentimental nationalism in which female agency is defined as suffering and self-sacrifice. However, Niraja's ontologically pertinent question, "Why, why did women crave for sons?" initiates a process of recovering dignity and self-reliance, of unlearning gendered role expectations (Devi, "Son" 47). Her act of withholding benediction to Shubro marks the break with an entire religio-cultural tradition of maternal discourses. And the repudiation of
offered maternal agency re-organizes the “dominance-submission” paradigm and exacerbates the “shame-guilt” complex through which the woman in her role-status as mother wields influence especially over the male child whose duty it is to ensure the future existence of the mother (B. Ramanujan 48). For Shubro, this deviation from the “norm” is disconcerting and is of direct relevance to his sense of identity:

“And mother! A son, a son, every Indian woman craved for a son, and Niraja?” (Devi, “Son” 55)

It suggests an adverse resistance to any alteration in woman’s economy that may pose a challenge to the myth of the essential male. Starting out as the composite Indian mother, Niraja mobilizes and reclaims a significant degree of selfhood by relinquishing her claims of motherhood.

In “Mazha” (Joseph), we are given glimpses of maternal anger and victimization—the mother as victim and the child as victim. Padma’s love and resentment for her children suggests an unresolved maternal ambivalence generated by the ideology of motherhood that threatens the self and pushes her to the brink of insanity:

I feel I don’t love them, don’t truly love them...

You do, you don’t, you do; no you don’t.

...I love them more than I love my own life. But they deserve a far better mother. (Joseph, “Mazha” 566)

The semiotics underlying this emotional welter of affirmations and denials is one of evading the burden of maternal identity with its fossilized
obligations and sacred loyalty to the institution of the family. The law of the patriarchal nuclear family enforced through the authority of the father whose admonishment that “[c]hildren’ll always take the lead one gives” binds mothering to a code of ethics and aggravates self-contempt, further entrenching the notion of motherhood as inevitable (Joseph, “Mazha” 364). It only indicates how the physiological connection between the mother and the children, and the child’s dependence on the mother has been turned into the strongest moral obligation for the woman (Dube 38). Therefore a woman neglecting her children is guilty of violating the intrinsic and “natural” qualities of a mother. This form of ideological blackmail, in addition to conferring a very high value on the maternal role, also ironically denies the mother “social” right over her children, even as it discourages any assertion of the self. The channeling of rage towards “his” children (Joseph, “Mazha” 563) is a disguised protest against the limitations imposed on her as well as the projection of displaced animosity towards the father-figure.

Threat to the individuality and autonomy of the mother, in particular by children, and through the violence of patriarchal practices in general, account for the association of motherhood and death:

She lifted up her hands. “You will die,” she thought. My children! They have nobody! (Joseph, “Mazha” 566)

The socialization process whereby women as mothers are psychologically conditioned into feeling anxiety and guilt when they do not conform to orthodox definitions of their roles, is implicit here. And Padma’s
premonition of her death, a form of self-castigation, is a censure of the errant and reluctant mother that overrides any resistance to the maternal ideology.

The deliberate suppression of the sexual economy of the nuclear family in *Anandamath* implied through the separation of Mahendra, Kalyani and their daughter Sukumari, and the vows of chastity binding Jiban and Shanti foster a sense of *brotherhood* or *male* unity that is displaced into the sexual economy of the nation-state. Kalyani's demands to be reconciled with her child and later with her husband is the only tenuous evidence of the sexual mother. However, it is the portrayal of relations between women which is of special significance here. There is no attempt to create a community of women empathetic towards the concerns of each other. When women are brought together, it is in order to implement the larger patriarchal politics in which they are pitted not as adversaries, but rather as companions who open each others' agential possibilities. Their interaction, as when Shanti in the guise of a *sanyasi*, Nabin, embraces Kalyani in jest after rescuing her from assault, or when Kalyani places her arms around Shanti to untie the tiger's skin around her breast, is nevertheless momentarily marked by homo-erotic undertones. The suggestion of alternative sexualities for women outside the frame of male-female conjugality and roles only highlights the overwhelming politics of patricentric sexuality.

The depiction of the mother-daughter relation by women writers is of particular interest here. Michelle Boulois Walker is of the opinion that this
relationship is fraught with contradictions “of love and hate, of mutuality and estrangement, of anger and desire, of unity and separation” (162). The female stranger in Vaidehi’s “The Confession” is cast in the role of both daughter to the mother and “mother” to her ailing mother, an ambivalent pathological state that infects her psychological and social identities. The mother-daughter bond whereby “[d]aughters become mothers and mothers remember themselves as daughters in a process that blurs the stability of this distinction” renders woman’s identity ambiguous and complicated (Walker 160). Thus, the stranger’s recollection of the responsibilities and struggles of her mother as a single, adult female parent parallels her own experiences in mothering and the allied role as a wife. The tension arising from the mediations between role-identities, from the desire to individuate on the one hand, and the sense of inescapable embeddedness in relationships with others along with obligatory duties on the other, lead to psychological indeterminacy which promotes emotional and material exploitation. Narmada discerningly observes:

And behind this rushing about was the movement between two minds. A tired, worn-out woman who was like a link that couldn’t be severed from either this side or the other....

(Vaidchi, “Confession” 131)

Matricide under the circumstance seems to be the only politic “option” available. The materialities of an unscrupulous patriarchy in collusion with the ideologies of gender, economics and the social coalesce at the site of the mother’s murder. They engender a latent misogynist
discourse, pitting woman against woman in order to contain her agential possibilities within the domain of the nuclear family. Narmada acknowledges the appropriation and delimitation by male-female relations of those woman's tasks concerned with nurturance and caring:

"Other relationships come along, break, loosen, and they go looking for new relationships. But marriage is not like that. It goes on like this until death." (Vaidehi, "Confession" 129)

A psychological reading of this discourse of misogyny frames the killing of the mother as a self-destructive act, instrumental to the assertion of an autonomous self. But this self is insubstantial precisely due to the substantiality of the maternal ideologies that interpellate it through institutions, practices, belief systems and kinship structures. Indeed, matricide is the founding instance of a patriarchal imaginary, asserts Luce Irigaray (Walker 182). The burden of mothering is unavoidable and functions in conjunction with the anxiety and guilt of motherhood, inscribing itself on the body in eyes that evade focus and in the "obese" stomach which "would look like that always" (Vaidehi, "Confession" 130). The maternal body situates the rationalization of woman's oppression.

Vaidehi's re-telling of the epic tale of Shakuntala in "An Afternoon with Shakuntala," introduces an element of uncertainty and inconsistency into the gendered demarcations of psychic and identity constitutions. Shakuntala's premature identification with her foster-father Kanva whose voice was "almost like one's inner voice" (emphasis added) (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 536), not only implies the phallocentric structurings of her
unconscious, but also its allied desire for the father in the "feeling that...[she] could not bear a separation" from him (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 536). The displacement of erotic desire from father to lover (Dushyanta) endows the desiring self with a false sense of independence and entirety: "It was as if my appetite fed on itself and grew, as if my thirst slaked on itself and begged for more..." (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 537). But this presumed autonomy is called into question by the intervention of the semiotic identified with that desire which escapes the orderings of patriarchy to momentarily return as a discomposure of the unconscious:

"Voices, nameless voices kept edging in. This voice was silken, warm, brimming with motherly care....The voices went on – discordant, disturbing that secure repose.” (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 537)

It assumes the form of the female child whose birth is foreclosed prematurely. Initially, expectant motherhood is linked with the palpable presence of this child:

"I could already feel the tender feet of my daughter, Daushyanti pushing against my womb.” (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 540)

But following its birth, the child is identified as Sarvadamana or Bharata of the root myth. This discrepancy betrays a tension between the inviolate classical version of the myth with its patriarchal demand for a male heir to the throne, and the hidden politics of desire that a feminist re-reading of the text elicits. The female-child of the pre-parturitive phase functions
ideologically: as a transmutation of desire that shifts the coherence of the
epic narrative from the patriarchal co-ordinates of primogeniture,
monarchy, non-contractual forms of marriage and female consensuality, to
the variable configuration of matriliny, non-reciprocal consensuality and
female agential possibilities that establish a praxis of choice. The
transgressive sense of liberation she experiences in relinquishing the son to
Dushyanta should thus be seen as an exercise of free-will rather than as
the fulfillment of responsibilities incumbent on motherhood:

"Bharata had found his home, and I felt unburdened. I
grew heavy-did I? Before I could say so. I became unburdened
and regained my peace...." (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 546)

A punitive measure like the denial of speech to the illegitimate
mother provides a point of departure for the re-examination of the nature of
the semiotic, considering the psycho-social configurations peculiar to the
Indian context. Speech is a requisite for the possibility of regeneration and
the institution of the self that motherhood signifies in this particular
instance: "I longed to talk...to release my old self and be reborn" (Vaidehi,
"Afternoon" 541). And the "enlightened person" in conversation with whom
she will resurrect her self is Kanva, her father (Vaidehi, "Afternoon" 541).
Ashis Nandy observes that in India saintliness and yogic accomplishments
have always been considered characteristics of psychological bisexuality (At
the 38). This is because the "private introspective" qualities associated with
the concept of authority in fact derives from supplanted "sexual potency
through abstinence and denial of one's sexual self" (Nandy, At 38). The
identification of intellectualism with suppressed sexuality blurs the
distinction between the categories of the male and the female. The figure of
the rishi or sanyasi then signifies a psychic bisexuality that rejects the
essentialistic dualism of sexual identities. For Shakuntala, the need to
converse with Kanva is inseparable from an undertaking to retrieve the self.
The metaphysics of bisexuality in this case closely approximates to an
epistemology of philosophy posited in the context of Western feminist
theory. Luce Irigaray contends that woman is constructed as the silent
foundation of philosophy through a metaphoric displacement of the
maternal body (Walker 12). Woman as womb is hence paradoxically the
silence that guarantees masculine/philosophical speech. The illegitimate
child accordingly recovers Shakuntala’s ability to wield language and to
express herself, resituates the (sexual) maternal body as the site of
subjectivity and the possible establishment of the self, and transforms
motherhood into a platform from where rebellion is staged:

“In the womb, a joy grew that spat defiance at the very
world...I learned to live. I would not desert my little darling in
the deep woods. I would not cry out for the earth to scream
and swallow me.” (Vaidehi, “Afternoon” 544)

Shakuntala demonstrates singular resolution in rejecting the sacrificial and
virtuous images of her Puranic counterparts. She refuses to evade the
consequences of being a single mother and of individual action. In the final
movement of the story, the female interlocutor's impression of Shakuntala
as “lover” or “yogin” corroborates the complex locale within which a
The call for a male child is an expression of a discriminative sexual economy typical of the patricentric and hierarchical institution of the family, and is aimed at ensuring its preservation and continuance: “Give me a son. My heir,” demands Prakasini’s lover (Joseph, “Prakasini’s” 110).
denying the paternity of the children and thus withholding the privileges accruing to the male-parent, she disengages motherhood from its ethical responsibilities, valences and configuration within the economics of the heterosexist family unit:

“They are the children of the sun,” she said lazily, leaning on him....“They are the children of this mountain, of the trees, of the rivers, of the seas, of the stars....”

Prakasini burst out laughing, “I alone can prove it.”

(Joseph, “Prakasini’s” 110)

The emphasis on maternal attributes like procreation and nurturance in this instance, should not be construed in essentialist terms. These gendered traits instead link woman with the life process and are projected as means of empowerment. Operating outside the context of gender and ideological expectations, they imply a cognitive autonomy that derives from a female-centred culture in which woman’s status is one of the principles of creation: “They are the children of Prakasini” (Joseph, “Prakasini’s” 111).

This conception of motherhood functions as an alternative to the debased image produced by the social disparities and economic insecurities of a market-driven economy and capitalist interventions in the socio-cultural spheres:
...mothers waited for their turn with empty tins, their faces covered with rags.

... The mothers pointed to rooms that had been reduced to ashes where hungry, weeping children lay heaped together. (Joseph, "Prakasini's" 107)

The demands made on woman as mother in the postcolonial dispensation of the nation effect a corruption of pre-Independence nationalism's maternal discourse of preservation and nurture. And the abdication of the nation-state from accountability for the depression of its female citizens underscores its participation in their repression. Questions pertaining to woman's right to her body, sexuality and fertility are part of the larger issues framing the narrative.

In Seth's "Beyond the Blind Alley" expectant motherhood, the tangible sense of "[s]omething leap[ing] inside...clear, alive, irrefutable" is perceived by the protagonist as being restrictive and serving to further the cause of patriarchy (Seth, Against 20). Seduced by the ostensible elegance and ease of the upper class embodied in Misra, her employer, marriage to him enables her to escape the physical and emotional violence of her working-class life with Surjit. But the uncontested divorce, the restraints imposed by a life of privilege, and the invariable tedium of roles incumbent on a wife make her conscious of a certain expendability that confirms her object-status. A fusion of "coercion by legal and extralegal means with the creation of consent through socialization" and an undeniable susceptibility
to the material benefits of being a consenting victim ensure her participation in a callous and violent patriarchal system (Eisenstein 73).

Her continued dependence on men despite being subject to different forms of patriarchy—contingent on her shifting positions within the materialities of social stratification, division of labour and class configurations—and the painful realization that fulfillment of erotic desire is impossible (Misra fails to meet her fantasies of upper-class life) indicate her embeddedness in an ideological web of self-deception. She nevertheless is aware of a persistent lack in her desiring self:

Misra desired her, so he got her. Surjit did not so he abandoned her. What of her own desire? (Seth, Against 15)

It is in these circumstances that pregnancy poses a threat to the already silenced body, desire and self. Abortion in the sense of a calculated termination of pregnancy then signifies disguised hostility towards either motherhood viewed as complying with the reproductive responsibility invested with it by providing society the child it demands, or anticipatory motherhood perceived as a deterrent against autonomy and selfhood. Unfortunately, discussions on abortion more often than not prompt several ethical and political postures that obscure the primary issue of maternity and the “many complex issues regarding female sexuality, procreation, [and] the structure of the family...” says Nancy Davis (qtd. in Shrage 58). Whatever be the standpoint, ultimately, abortion engages the question of the availability of choice for women conceived in terms of individuality and independence. Abortion precludes the selective appropriation of the
maternal concept by patriarchy, the exploitation of the unnamed protagonist as the reproductive medium of its ideologies and institutions, and the violent repression of her self. Ascribing the pregnancy to rape, lays the groundwork--both legal and ethical--for legitimizing abortion. Rape images a violation of desire, the inscription of the protagonist in structures of guilt and self-deprecation, and the foreclosure of her right to exercise sexual and identity choices.

Woman's reproductive capacity elicits contradictory impressions of vulnerability and power. Reproduction as an aspect of motherhood attains bizarre proportions and acquires perverse significations through the character of Jashoda in Devi's "Breast-Giver." Jashoda's perception of reproduction and motherhood as sacred obligations is shaped by cultural and religio-mythical delineations of woman's roles. They also structure the rationalizations of Kangalicharan who "illuminated by the spirit of Brahma the Creator" prescribes the means by which she is to maintain her position as a wet-nurse in the Halcar household:

"You'll have milk in your breasts only if you have a child in your belly. Now you'll have to think of that and suffer." (Devi, Breast 51)

The suffering mother is one of the revered images of motherhood denoting the measure of a woman's devotion, her emotional and psychological investment in the family. Indeed, this ideal facilitates the association between productive and/or reproductive domestic labour and sacrificial domestic ideologies thereby producing social rationale for (forms of)
oppression. It also justifies Jashoda’s continuous pregnancies, condoning its sexually exploitative aspect and distorts the circumstances leading to her death by deflecting human responsibility and projecting it as preordained. Maternity promotes an “illusion of totality,” that acquires substantive dimensions through the establishment of gendered spaces and functions (Walker 146). Jashoda’s sense of self-sufficiency and self-aggrandisement is reinforced by her presiding role as “chief fruitful woman” (Devi, Breast 53) in the many women’s rituals—weddings, pre-confinement rites, naming ceremonies and sacred thread functions—within the domestic sphere, a “subsidiary religious realm of largely folk, or local, non-textual traditions” (Wadley 40). Nevertheless, her profession as a wet-nurse, as her family’s provider is devalued and displaced in importance by Kangalicharan’s pre-emptive claim as “professional father,” the principal male agent considered the source and actuator of her procreative ability.

Jashoda is the quintessential “Hindu” woman not only in terms of her cultural allegiances—the deification of maternity and familial values, her implicit faith in the primacy of the female duties of reproduction and nurturance as well as in the validity of patriarchal traditions and formations—but also by virtue of being born as an upper-caste brahmin. A close examination reveals that Jashoda’s location in the upper echelons of the caste system conceals the impoverishment of the class brahmin, and the exploitation and victimization of the subaltern, gendered brahmin. Women’s labour (reproductive and domestic in the case of the Haldar daughters-in-law, and reproductive and productive in Jashoda’s case) is pulled into a discourse of health, at this juncture, differentiated along class
and caste lines. The ill-health of the daughters-in-law and the grandchild contrasts with Jashoda’s profuse lactation and her healthy children. The onus of nursing the upper-class infants of the Haldar household, transferred from the daughters-in-law to the “fruitful Brahmin wife,” perpetuates Jashoda’s (self-)exploitation, for in a way she takes the responsibility of the entire womankind on herself (Devi, *Breast* 5). It enacts a selective liberation which is also caste-based since the Haldar women’s investments and gendered mobility in labour and leisure are dependent on Jashoda’s exploitation. (Yet Jashoda too gains a certain degree of class mobility.) However, the word liberation itself is spurious considering the denial of reproductive and sexual rights to these women:

“You’ll breed yearly and keep your body” (Devi, *Breast* 50) state their husbands, indicating the lack of control they have over their bodies and the ineluctability of maternity thrust on them. For the first generation of Haldar women, the undisguisedly patriarchal discourse of ethnicity that constructs the elder Haldar’s perception of nationalism at a particular conjuncture, directs their reproductive decisions. Jashoda’s caste status as a brahmin, the logics of which in the form of customs and practices she shares with the Mistress-Mother, specifically in terms of a woman’s *dharma*, paradoxically brings her within the ideology of a gendered market economy. When her reproductive value is lost, she is displaced into productive hired labour as the cook of the once joint Haldar household wherein her caste now makes no impact on her position within the class hierarchy. The shift from customary perquisites and caste relationships to
waged labour with the (bourgeois) autonomous family as the locus of labour generation as well as consumption, is a principal element in Jashoda's impoverishment. As for her own family, the loss of reproductive capacity renders her productivity redundant within it.

The silence of the mutilated mother, whose repressed, abused body serves as the unacknowledged base of the patriarchal family, is all the more accentuated by the deliberate essentialistic treatment of the breasts. While their objectification as “mammal projections” (Devi, Breast 49) whose “job is to hold milk” (Devi, Breast 73) renders them as disembodied entities far exceeding human value in terms of function, they occasion a simultaneous alienation in Jashoda who wonders on her death-bed:

“...[W]hy don’t the people who are helping her so much free her from the stinking presence of her chest?” (Devi, Breast 73)

If woman as mother is the suppressed matrix from which the masculine subject draws his reserves and resources of power, the reification of woman as breast and womb is paradoxically the silence that guarantees patriarchy’s speech. As nourisher and/or reproducer Jashoda is the reservoir of power, though she is incapable of translating her potentiality into praxis. This is reflected in her inability “to calculate if she could or could not bear motherhood” (Devi, Breast 39), to conceive of thought (as conscious knowledge of the self) outside those functionings of signification where identity is perceived in relation to historical and socio-economic practices and their formations. It is in these conditions that the breasts which had so far provided Jashoda with a defining template is transformed
into the site that hosts the cancer from where it “kept mocking her with a
hundred mouths, a hundred eyes” in response to her only “conscious” and
momentary rational judgement: “If you suckle you’re mother, all lies!” (Devi,
*Breast* 67). Given the reductionist construction of the body and its
biological circumscription, the cancer then is an embodiment of the excess
supplementary knowledge intrinsically bound to the body, expressing itself
from a position of arationality, and evading male inscriptions and
reconstructions. On the socio-cultural plane, the diseased breasts call the
naturalization and sanctification of motherhood into question. Articulating
from the centre of the besieged self, the cancer along with Jashoda’s drug-
dazed hallucination of “mil-k-sons” and filial duty weave the intimacies of
suppressed desire into larger cultural and political anxieties and
Imaginaries (Devi, *Breast* 74).

The space where Jashoda nourishes her cancer is inaccessible to the
discourses of “modern” India with its family-planning programmes, birth-
control campaigns and health-care facilities. She inhabits ideological spaces
and cognitive structures founded on the obscurantist logic of race
supremacy that sustains a scientific fallacy of racial hardiness and auto-
immunity. This “indigenist scientism” (Sangari xxix), developed in the
colonial era, ties the discourse of health to reproductive and domestic
labour. She accordingly remarks to the Mistress-Mother:

“A woman breeds, so here medicine, there blood-peshur, here
doc-tor’s visit...Look at me! I’ve become a year-breeder! So is
my body failing, or is my milk drying? (Devi, *Breast* 54)
The eldest Haldar son’s refusal to be vaccinated against smallpox is also based on a cognate reasoning that links the discourse of biology with caste:

...“Only the lower classes get smallpox. I don’t need to be vaccinated. An upper-caste family, respectful of gods and Brahmins, does not contact that disease.” (Devi, *Breast* 65)

And it is yoked to his offended reaction to the doctor’s recommendation for Jashoda’s hospitalization:

“I can’t send a Brahmin’s daughter to a hospital just on your word.” (Devi *Breast* 65)

It is in turn corroborated by Jashoda’s own contemptuous retort: “I can’t go to hospital. Ask me to croak instead” (Devi, *Breast* 65). Her gendered interests and rights are thus undermined and withheld not just by men but by upper-class/caste women as well.

Exposure and access to modern medical sciences through the progressive population policies of the state like family planning and voluntary birth-control, effect radical changes in inherited notions of woman’s roles as reproducer and nurturer within the community of mainly upper/middle class and upper-caste women in Vaidehi’s “Gulabi Talkies and Small Waves.” The constant presence of the children and the demands made by them on the women make no allowances for personal space and time in which to pursue or develop interests outside the domestic sphere. The implicit relation between forbidden thoughts concerning mothering and motherhood (“Why were they born at all?”) intruding into the self-introspections of Manjunathiah’s wife, and the sterilization the women
undergo clandestinely, indicate altered cognition of gender, sexuality, and their values concurrent with the socio-economic changes initiated with the advent of the cinema theatre in the obscure village. These changes of course find a context in the increasing demands for a review of the gender policies of the state, specifically the acknowledgement of women’s reproductive labour within the family. Consciously or unconsciously these women participate in the changing political Imaginary of the nation-state.

National policies like family planning when imposed indiscriminately and homogeneously on populations without taking into consideration social and economic structural disparities, threaten the very survival of certain fragile and marginalized communities. The economics of poverty dictates that the greater the members in a family, the greater is its potential for labour output leading to a direct increase in its net income. But contingent factors such as famine and ensuing starvation further endanger the barely sustaining economies within poverty, forcing the adoption of drastic emergency measures in order to maintain minimum survival levels. For the impoverished tribals of Pirtha in Devi’s “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha,” famine in combination with an inaccessible, procrastinating administration results in child mortality compelling the distress sale of children, especially of girls. This is turn imposes inordinate and unnatural pressure on the reproductive choices of the men and women, and especially leave rural women open to the heightened risk of complications related to pregnancy. Burdened with the necessity to ensure their communities’ viability, they are confronted by an intrusive nation-state that selectively
makes claims on their obligations as citizens, thereby overruling their reproductive rights:

“Modern India only gives them posters for family planning. The birth of children increases rather than decreases as a result of starvation, until the bodies of the man and woman go on strike permanently” (Devi, Imaginary 146)

observes Puran. This perceptive remark tinged with a vein of irony calls attention to the complicity of the state in the disempowerment of the tribals through “its assignment of productive and reproductive functions to women” (Sen 97-8). Population control and “reproductive engineering” are statist strategies of control that execute the transfer of “reproductive responsibility” from the people to the state effecting a change in power equations (Spivak, Afterword 201). For the subalterns--tribal men and women peripheral to mainstream society--these “progressive” measures rob them of dignity and deprive them of the right to their sexuality and fertility.

Dimag’s wife provides a glaring example of the unethical association between market-economics and reproduction. Having sold a child for a few sacks of grain, she is still burdened with the responsibility for a three-year old child and an unborn child. Her objection to the unwarranted publicity of the tribals’ condition draws attention first to the little known, invisible links between the population policies pursued by the state administration apathetic to the living conditions of its weakest target population and the international standards as well as the recommendations of various expert economic organizations or institutions the state is obliged to meet and
adhere to as a member of the world order. Secondly, it also brings to notice the paradoxical reassertion of exploitative relations within a hierarchical social structure which displays features of both pre-capitalist feudalism and neo-imperialist capitalism. Thirdly, the diversion of both material and human resources to meet population targets laid down by the government reveals the lack of a total, inclusive vision and leads to the ineffectual implementation of vital programmes and schemes concerning women’s reproductive healthcare like the “Integrated Mother and Child Care Project” (Devi, Imaginary 191). And the inevitable, adverse effects these have on women’s psychological and physical health are obvious:

“...Why are you calling me Motia’s Ma? Where is Motia? Take a film again, people will come again...tur-rucks will come. They’ll take all the children away.” (Devi, Imaginary 168)

Any population policy must take into consideration the political and social context of the community and so be liable to modification and change. This raises important questions relating to the family planning programme, and the political and economic propaganda to limit the size of the family which contests the logic of reservation and representation by number. Women are especially susceptible “targets” and objects of these projects devised by men. The regulation of motherhood whether part of the larger dynamic of polity or an adaptive response to patriarchal derivatives of the polity, infringes on gendered personal space. The moral dilemmas it generates along with illiteracy and poverty render women passive members, deprived of rights in their state-sponsored cycle of oppression and exploitation. And
the gendered subaltern as mother elicits no emotional or symbolic equivalence with the nation.

If there is any modern-day representation that closely corresponds to *Anandamath*’s female ideal of Shanti, it is Dopdi in Devi’s “Draupadi.” However, in spite of the particular historical conjunctures in which the identities of both women are constituted, they differ from each other in terms of their racial and class affiliations (brahmin caste-middle class/Santhal tribe-subaltern class), the location of their social constellations relative to the imagined or independent nation (internal/external), the political nature of their struggles (nationalist and anti-colonial/partisan and anti-establishment), the ideological domains from where their actions derive legitimacy (Hindu religion/Maoist activism), and the expression of individual female praxis within their respective organizations (disguised as male but sublimated into an ethical notion of motherhood/as an undifferentiated component of the movement). Despite the temporal distance of the two historical contexts, the two women’s political ideologies are shaped in comparable environments. The sanyasi rebellions in *Anandamath* are staged in reaction to the despotism of British colonial governance during a period of severe famine. References to increase in land revenue by ten percent (B. Chatterji 24) and of native wealth being shipped to England (B. Chatterji 40) come from actual events in eighteenth-century Bengal where “[t]ax collections rose even as millions died of man-made famines” (Sainath 10). In “Draupadi” it is prolonged lower-caste and tribal oppression by the upper castes/classes under an indifferent administration which abets an exploitative socio-economic system
combining feudal patterns with capitalism that sows the seeds of the insurgency. It acquires impetus during a period of drought when denial of water to the villagers of Elakuli leads to the murder of the landowning moneylender Surja Sahu. Not only do Shanti and Dopdi adhere to the principle of “unselfish militancy” propounded by Bankim, but they also share similarities in terms of the restrictions placed on women’s sexuality within organized revolutionary movements (B. Chatterji13).

Shanti and Jiban embrace asceticism as members of the Order of Children in the larger cause of freedom from foreign occupation. After attaining their goal, they decide to withdraw from society and lead a life of religious piety while maintaining the sanctity of their vows. Dopdi’s relinquishment of maternity in contrast, is neither encumbered by the discipline of asceticism nor by the moral politics of motherhood. Unlike Shanti, Dopdi does not take the initiative in decision-making:

Dulna had explained to Dopdi, Dear this is best! We won’t get family and children this way. But who knows? Landowner and moneylender and policemen might one day be wiped out!

(Devi, Breast 30)

As a comrade-in-arms sharing strong, common ideological bonds with her fellow fighters, Dopdi is under obligation to function in the interests of the cause that also includes a concern for gender equity. Her obvious deference to Dulna, underscored by the absence of any individual perspective on the issue of parenthood, raises questions about the nature of woman’s membership in non-official political groups and the commitment of these
often rebel formations towards accommodating women's concerns. In a
study on the Telengana People's Struggle, Stree Shakti Sanghatana records
that there are "instances where the [unaddressed] problem of children and
of reproduction of women, by the male leaders...prevent women from
participating more organizedly and in an effective way" (23). In a related
vein, Nira Yuval-Davis, speaking on national liberation armies, makes out a
case for women's emancipation as symbolically representing the
emancipation of people as a whole (101). These views direct attention to the
fact that anti-establishment organizations too are not quite able to cope
with issues of women's sexuality and motherhood. Dopdi's choice (if ever
there was one to begin with) suggests the subtext of limits imposed on
women's participation by the prioritisation of certain ideological goals over
others. Such a premise strengthens the supposition that the rejection of
maternity here is a mode of circumventing gender constraints in order to
remain within the ranks of the struggle. If the proscription on women's
reproductive capacity within revolutionary movements--despite their
professed equity and attempt to transcend some of the tensions brought
about by gender inequality--is a precautionary measure to thwart any
threat to an inherently latent "male bonding," to consciously reject
motherhood then is to be still inscribed in the patriarchal order (Yuval-
Davis 108).

The mother's initial rejection of her new-born son in Seth's "Yes,
Yours Only" amounts to attempted infanticide:
She would lie with her back to the newly born till his hungry
wails disturbed her forced peace. (Seth, “Yes” 42)

The child born amid the Partition, embodies its deprivations and the
consequent struggle for survival brought about by changes in identities,
spaces and histories. Motherhood aggravates the vulnerability and violence
she experiences, whether in the form of the husband’s bitter resentment
and ingratitude, or the prevailing social and political upheavals impinging
on the private sphere—events that threaten her desires, discompose her
sense of selfhood and lead to self-devaluation:

The foetus had drawn the blood that was already scanty.
There were hidden pains that no one could share. Lack of
food, rest and care equally took their toll. She seemed to have
survived to see father alive. (Seth, “Yes” 42)

The victim-mother’s neurosis is a psychological reaction aimed at self-
preservation, as it is also a subliminal attempt to counteract patriarchal
repression through an act of parricide. For, in the demands made on her
physical, emotional and ontological capacities as woman, wife and mother
by an ascendant patriarchy, the male child is perceived to be an extension
of the phallic (husband) father-figure.

The neurosis-induced silence of the mother under the circumstances
finds expression in the exploited body, specifically the gendered breasts.
The breasts, endowed with the distinctive maternal quality of nurturance,
reflect the psycho-social trauma of the mother in their reluctance to
perform their biological function:
Feeding him was visibly without emotion. She would push her not-too-generous teat in his mouth and feel free to get back into the ever-present depression. (Seth, "Yes" 42)

Protest is implicit in the obvious functional inadequacy of the breasts, and in the evocation of a certain disembodiment which "voices" the emotional and psychological alienation motherhood entails for woman. Childbirth and child rearing—indices of motherhood—are seen to be painful and burdensome experiences.

Hyder does not seem overtly concerned with the issues of motherhood or the concept of the mother as such in her depictions of women. If and when the image of the mother appears in the narratives it is inextricably tied to the duties incumbent on the maternal construct, mainly relating to the socialization and the marriage of the female child. And as a reminder of the precarious existence of woman as mother in society is the pervasive presence of the Partition framing the backdrop of many a narrative. This is especially perceptible in "The Street Singers of Lucknow" in which Rashke Qamar's journey to Pakistan in search of her illegitimate daughter Mahpara's birth-father, following the political aftermath of the Partition, exposes a certain congruence between the social-historical constitution of the legitimate (nuclear) family and the socio-psychic construct of mothering (not quite unlike the manner of Freudian psychoanalysis but with associative significances exclusive to the Indian context). The absence of the father-mother-child psychic correlative in the social, due to an epistemic inability that renders the establishment of this
particular family impossible, heightens Qamar's urgency to meet the socio-cultural requirements the mother is expected to oversee. Here it is the indoctrination of Mahpara and her subsequent induction into the discourse of legitimacy through marriage, that acquire primacy. Mahpara's death, or the "death of motherhood" as Seth phrases it in "The Bridge," deprives Qamar of the only legitimate identity-status she occupies in society (Seth, *Against* 148). From a prescriptive viewpoint, this may be perceived as a paradigmatic representation of the "bad" mother who must be punished for her various omissions. However, the insanity she slips into does not correspond with this form of disciplining, nor does it allude to a semiotic of the undifferentiated (female) self. The mad woman is instead transformed into the image of the destroyer goddess of Hindu religio-mythology:

All of a sudden she started whirling like one possessed. Her long thick hair were flying about as she lolled her tongue out and swirled in a frenzy. She was Kali dancing in the crematorium of life. (Hyder, *Street* 41)

The subtle alternations between possession and dispossession, psychological disassociation and the interpellative politics of an emergent nation-state indicate a tension between the material and the discursive; or a departure which marks a possible redefinition of the notion of woman as mother. Alf Hiltebeitel observes in connection with his study on the Draupadi cult, that the all-powerful mother Goddess, embodiment of supreme *Shakti*, although metaphorically associated with motherhood, is inevitably virginal, threatening and ultimately barren (232). This further
introduces an element of discrepancy into the maternal underpinnings of the social and the political Imaginaries.

To sum up the arguments, the friction between the re-interpretation of motherhood by women writers and the attempt to address the nation through the creative process denotes an understated competition between notions of the mother and the representational politics of the nation. The struggle to recant the association of woman and nation as pre-ordained and inextricable from the allied concept of sacrosanctity, involves dismantling the frames of reference within which mothering and motherhood are legitimized, and coincides with the demand to reconsider the rationale of nationhood and nationalism with their foundational investments in the emotionally-charged category of maternal iconography. In doing so, the narratives come up against the political ideology of a post-Independence, postcolonial India witnessing the gradual incursion of its democratic fabric by a neo-nationalism defined along religio-cultural lines. It is here that the texts serve as points of departure where established ideologies are refuted, thus opening up possibilities for the reordering of gender relations. They draw attention to the inherent flaws of the system, call for a review of woman's location in society and suggest what social rearrangements are necessary or are under way.

The depiction of women's antagonisms towards maternal idealizations, or the conceptual revision of this ideal provide insights into the connection between the material and the discursive as they impress both offered ideologies and transgressive agencies. The inner, private
struggles visualized within the domestic realm correspond in a subtle yet thematically overwhelming manner to the ideological contests over the gendered notion of the nation that structure the materialities of political and social life. Women's aversion to maternity or its displacement outside of conjugality and the heterosexist domestic establishment enact a criticism of state policies. Implicit are proposals for the fundamental reformulation of the patricentric institution of the family in a liberatory project of social change, the severance of woman's identity from the obligatory role of motherhood through economic, social and psychological support-systems, and the right to one's sexuality and fertility disengaged from a discourse of ethics and morals. The complicity of the state and organized groups or movements in restricting women's political participation by evading questions of female reproduction and sexual control are part of the critique. Other issues are latent here as well: the extended problems of rape, prostitution and female infanticide.

As for the short fictions, they do not aspire to portray in epic dimensions like Bankim's novel, the concept of either nationhood or of statehood. They instead exploit the stylistic economy of the form to centre on a single critical juncture culminating in a striking moment of revelation and perception. Here the strategic recall of maternal notions and ideals, although formulated predominantly within the subjective realm, has reverberating effects on the gendered, metaphysical origins of the Indian nation. Logical sequence and temporal continuity are often disregarded, especially in instances where conceptual renditions acquire psychological significances. A corresponding aspect is the recurrent pattern of
narratological alienation and inconsistency in the composition of such texts. The conscious rejection of systematic frames of order forces a reconsideration of hegemonic discursive forms and discourses. This move also marks the end of privileging centres, of partisan politics and patriarchal economics that determine the nation-state, and the emergence of the gendered individual's position.

The issue of authorial gender is equally pertinent here, when viewed especially in juxtaposition to that male-authored, seminal discourse which yoked the ideas of the nation and statehood to the themes of the mother and motherhood. The locations from where the writers address their concerns intimate their interests, purposes and motives in altering the political and social imaginaries of the nation-state. Devi's social activism, Joseph's espousal of women's and environmental causes, Seth's erudite explorations into the complexities of the human psyche, and Vaidehi's insightful deliberations on the interface between the gendered individual and the community signify particular positions and perspectives generated in the course of each writer's intellectual and emotional interaction with her socio-political milieu. Transgression of the traditional discourse of maternity constituting the culture of nationhood is part of the strategy of recording their opinion, registering their presence, and carving out a space within the nation both as writers and as women.