Chapter 2

History, Nation, Representation

Works of fiction can act as a resource for ethnography, politics, history and culture. They admit critical perspectives that question, construct, reconfigure or merely reproduce categories of the nation, region, community, and help identify the cultural processes which determine the functional and ideological aspects of gender. This chapter proposes to contextualize the diverse structurings of female identities generated from within the nation. As part of the process, it seeks to locate literary depictions of women in the context of the changing imperatives of the nation and the respective historical formations.

Such an approach traces the confluences, fissions and ramifications within and between ideological ensembles that rearranged the co-ordinates of the cultural categories they traversed. With some circularity, this process also involved the appropriation and refiguration of ideological constellations by culture and its predicates. Certainly these discussions take place in the larger context of the political sphere and the notion of the nation-state. All narratives are inscribed in discourse. But fictional narratives bestraddled by the experiential and the imaginary domains render gender problematic due to the conflicts generated between discourses over the delineation of women. Therefore an analysis of the systemic configurations and concurrence of distinct historical circumstances, knowledge systems and their practices in the representation of women will help to ascertain subject-positions,
subject-identities and agencies. A historical approach presumes to provide a context for the various narratives, engages in a discriminative and comparative debate about the diversity of representations rather than attempting to establish their similarities. Of course, the discontinuities between historical blocks are an invariable factor to be taken into consideration.

British colonization of the Indian subcontinent marks a volatile juncture of asymmetrical historical trajectories unfolding simultaneously as confluences and disassociations in differing gradations at various levels. Ideological assemblages in circulation varied, interleaved or intersected in terms of the heterogeneity of their compound origins, the effective quality of their valences, gender differentiations, class divisions and permutations, intra-class discords, specific caste configurations and particular religious ascendancies. The different levels of change—economic, political and cultural—punctuating this period were neither temporally synchronous nor provincial, nor were they insulated from other constellations of values and significations governed by asymmetries of power relations, social locations and systems-formations. Instead there were extensive overlaps, uneasy juxtapositions, desultory layerings and subtle transitions.

Of the many anxieties generated with the establishment of the colonial state in the nineteenth century, three interrelated factors pertaining to male prerogatives in the new administrative, social and ideological dispensation are relevant here. One, the emergent self-consciousness of an as yet amorphous middle-class striving against its divisive composition of
caste affiliates and economic strata to set up a coherent system of principles, definitional language and conceptual devices, as well as its formative social grids and practices. Two, the contests and concurrences generated by the interactions and assertions of manifold patriarchal logics—local, bourgeois and mobile recombinations—in their negotiations of colonial patriarchies in the name of anticolonialism. Three, the reformation of the Indian male this imperialist intervention implied, which was sought to be disguised, condensed and displaced into the reconstitution of femaleness and womanhood qualified by the recovery and reproduction of renascent yet “eternal” values. In such a context caste, language and religious community became seemingly substantive foci around which new cohesions of loyalty converged, were refracted or inflected, even as a new national consciousness arose. It was to the precolonial past that both the colonizer and the colonized delved into in order to derive a continuity of readings of India. And this past was mainly textual in form, religious in origin, segregative in intent and instructional in content. It comprised the patriarchal legacy of the Dharmashastras, the Smritis and in fact even upgraded the status of a non-canonical text like Yāśka’s Nirukta (Nabar 196). Inevitably the assertions of continuity they endorsed were “traditions” extrapolated from and incorporated into the existing patterns of discrimination and the emerging forms of inequality. And given the discursive universe of such literature, their involvement in the production of ideologies in the furtherance of upper caste or élite group interests is unmistakable. For instance, socio-religious, upper caste leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and later Swami Vivekananda foregrounded elements from a past, enervated
"Aryan" Sanskritic tradition in formulating a unified Hindu masculine identity.

The reinduction of women through education into the discipline of tradition, in the proto-nationalist years of the 1840s and 1860s, demonstrates the limits of consensus developed between the dialectics of reform and preservation (Sangari104). Despite their polarized ideological positions, the two concepts often engaged a cognate set of pursuits involving selective re-presentation, substantiation and ascription of higher value to what was conceived as the ideal. This in turn had its origins in the historical exigencies of imperialist and colonialist expansion where transactions and teleologies on the colonized took place in the domain of Orientalist writings--histories, fictions, travelogues, exegeses--and translations, and ran concurrent with the embodiment of these literatures as knowledge-forms at the institutional sites of pedagogics and the domestic. The contradictory languages of preservation and innovation underpinning the ideological elevation of Sanskrit by the colonial Orientalists as the medium of instruction and invigoration of the indigent, forged a link between prescriptive Hindu religion and patriarchal arrangements. Indigenous negotiations and cultural interventions in the form of tracts, exegeses and fictions commissioned by independent sources or the colonial authorities themselves were occasionally part of the reformist programme. The textualization of the customary and religious domains has its beginnings at this juncture. Other binaries also coalesce here: tradition/modernity, colonial non-interference/altruism, private/public, sexuality/chastity, masculinity/femaleness, the domestic/the political, liberal
polity/conservative policies, western materiality/eastern spirituality, and they imbricated gender issues in different configurations at the confluence of material interests and variant ideological positions.

The struggles over describing women in the reshaping of patriarchies were hence in one sense inseparably tied to the discourse of literature. In keeping with the inconsistencies of colonial-indigenous interaction, it is not surprising that the essentialist characterization of women expressed in stridhāma (woman’s duty) and strīsvabhāv (woman’s essential nature) found resonances in both bourgeois and precapitalist claims on the question of women. It must be understood that bourgeois (Hindu) patriarchal practices while simulating European social and economic models clashed with mobile British middle class paternalist positions on women’s reforms. Reform from the (Bengal) middle class perspective not only signified return to an earlier, pure self, but additionally emphasized cultural or moral differences. Moreover, the locations of this ideological repertoire were uneven and extended over wide swathes of northern India, especially evident in Bengal in the 1840s and the United Provinces (UP) in the 1870s.

The nature of women’s initiation into literacy encoded a wide spectrum of female roles and significations which were not always certain or consistent. For the chaste Hindu woman subscribing to prescriptive Hinduism, female knowledge was demarcated quite exclusively within the domain of domestic services and translated into domesticity. Accordingly, she was construed as the source and preceptor of pedagogic authority itself. Woman’s locations and ritualistic functions within the Hindu life-cycle, at
the juncture of pro- and anti-literacy debates, invested her with properties of guardianship that on the one hand paradoxically validated specific misogynist patriarchal practices, and on the other constituted her as symbolic of a desired unified, composite, imagined Hindu continuity. The particular compendium of female literacy designed towards intensifying piety and consolidating domestic labour, elevated the vernacular as the medium of instruction over Sanskrit, the language of official power and “enlightenment,” organized women’s access to knowledge, and reduced the trajectories of their agency. Inherent to the tutelage of women into the principle of domesticity was the possibility of embourgeoisement or class mobility which was inextricably linked to the delegitimation of customary and popular practices and/or their regulation by scriptures.

The libidinous woman, a disturbing reminder of the intrinsic sexuality of women and on whom the colonial critique of the colonized was based, was henceforth excised from the private realm. Low caste, low class and tribal women were as a matter of course denied the discourse of authenticity on the basis of their assumed sexual promiscuity unsubject to patriarchal directives. Their indentured or waged labour which rendered them objects of control brought them in line with the exteriority of the public realm, disqualified them from female literacy and turned them into the other of middle and upper-class women. In yet another move which disguised the patriarchal underpinnings of woman’s implicit obedience and lack of choice, individual will concerning knowledge acquisition was conferred on her by proxy. Woman’s moral power likewise was only nominal, for relocated into a sphere of male “self-adjudication,” it served to assert male moral authority
and later nationalist claims to self-governance (Sangari 160). Any articulation of female agency as reformist, regulative and socializing, at this stage, could only be abstract, expressed within a given set of domestic parameters.

A number of stories in Hyder’s repertoire offer glimpses into the changing ideological trajectories and social constellations of gender redefinition. In “Memories of an Indian Childhood,” the new cultural awakening in Dalanwalla precipitated by a sudden realization of the “acute lack of culture in their lives” with the arrival of Mrs. Jogmaya Chatterjee of Calcutta (Sound 2), brings in its wake changes in specific community-oriented values and practices, and provides insights into the historical juncture that bears down upon these transformations. It should be recalled that Bengal then was a hotbed of cultural and political renaissance, intensified, especially, after its partition in 1905 along religious lines. Culture-rich Calcutta around this period was the nerve-centre of a fully-fledged nationalist movement—a powerful caucus of left-intellectuals, literati and the second wave of social reformers—as well as a “syncretic tradition...where the teachings of the bhakti poets and the sufis saints combined to give birth to a unique folk culture of its own” (Asaduddin 181). The respectability accorded to art forms like dance and music which till quite recently (the late nineteenth century) had been defining features of performing or occupational lower castes/classes, speaks of earlier occupational diversification and upward mobility concurrent with state-instituted changes in occupations and requalifications of classificatory schemas in the UP. A relative increase in literacy and prosperity among the
lower castes saw the upper caste brahmins and rajputs fall behind in what was now being revealed as unfixed social and economic hierarchical arrangements (Sangari 264).

*Mirasins*, originally occupational jesters in *zenanas*, were also hereditary musicians, having imbibed music from their menfolk and not trained by the *mirasi* who were hereditary teachers of music and dance. Generally considered well-bred, they did not give public performance but played only before high caste and upper-class women audiences. Muslim and non-Muslim *nats* were nomadic dancers and performers whose women also sang and danced in public. The prohibition of public spaces and performances to middle class and upper-caste women, and the re-emergence of these art forms under the principle of customary tutelage in the private domain of the home mediated by practitioners of the art—both men and women—now engaged as tutors, indicate altered class/caste configurations, spatial and artistic values, and economic relations (employer-employee/hire-wage system as opposed to feudal patronage).

Having acquired a standing divorced from their association to a tradition of probity, certain art forms were subsequently being de-affiliated from caste, community and/or religious functions and were getting increasingly systematized as independent genres. Divested of emotional and ideological contexts, they came to connote leisure, progress, refinement and ability, henceforth to be consciously cultivated and included into women's domestic education. Or as a character like Mrs. Jaswat Singh remarks: "I have even heard it said...that their [Bengalis'] daughters cannot get married unless they know music" (Hyder, *Sound* 2).
That the contents of women’s moral education were becoming “secular,” and that it drew on different existing or developing sanctions that cut across cultural boundaries within settled, fixed and disparate categories of the Hindu and the Muslim is echoed in Begum Faruqui’s announcement:

“We Muslims disapprove of decent girls singing and dancing. But times have changed...‘Our Rashida must learn how to play the harmonium’.... (Hyder, Sound 2)

Syncretic modernity appears to offer no self-conscious opposition to prescriptive instruction. Here the category Muslim is already detached from its earlier associations to a coherent community and stands for a specific set of existing and desired patriarchal, class, and caste relations under the rubric of religion. The apparent logics of religious pluralism and syncretism structuring this peri-urban community in colonial service in all probability subsumed the more reactive elements in religion. Nevertheless these logics had contradictory political potentials. They were being transformed into principles that could either be articulated in conflict or concurrence with communalization at a period when nationalist positions were committing to a conception of a heterogeneous culture.

Khemavati Raizada’s reflections in “The Exiles” (Hyder) are moulded in the transitional moments and around new situations presenting themselves in the indeterminate pre-Independence years of the 1900s. Hailing from an upper caste, middle class, conservative Kayastha clan, her self-identity is poised on the cusp of the private and the public spheres. Her widowed mother Hemavati demonstrates on her person the complexities of
such a location. Having married into a “modern’ family of Allahabad, who lived in the civil lines, ate with their shoes on, and interdined with Muslims,” she had adopted the “Angrezi fashion” (Hyder, Sound 20). However Hemavati still retained the tradition of *purdah*, “a curtain [being]...tied across the back seat of her tonga” when she went out (Hyder, Sound 22). *Purdah*, a sartorial form arising from the necessities of female seclusion and the internalization of the private-public divisions of roles, presents itself as a restitutive measure for the intrusions made by the public into the private space of the home in the case of the Hindu community. At once demonstrative of non-conformity to Western influences, it also functions as a religio-cultural marker and a practice compensating for an entire set of changes forced upon men by new conditions outside the home. The spirituality invested in women by the new patriarchy advocated by nationalism was evidenced in certain signs--dress, social mien, religious observances and adherence to eating habits (P. Chatterjee, “Nationalist” 247-48). An element of social discrimination between women however inhered in the logic of *purdah* which required consenting custodians of patriarchal values in order to be eligible for certain forms of protection and agency.

Khemavati’s relation to Kishwari Abbas and her comments on the Muslim community are mediated through a language of difference and othering. Exclusion and exclusivism assume the ideological co-ordinates of a teaching programme grounded in Hindu--Sanskrit and popular--literary traditions in schools set up for the education of Hindu girls towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century. If the expansion of educational institutions and printing presses in the UP in
the mid 1800s enabled the diffusion of religious texts, classical languages, and pedagogical literatures, it also permitted their vernacularization and allowed, with different degrees of mediation, for the re-emergence of popular oral and/or performing forms in print. A relevant corollary was the ideological regulation, re-production and performance of these texts or narratives under the new tutorial systems. The production, staging and enactment of plays based on mythologies, historicals and hagiologies within the surveillant confines of a pedagogic institution like a girl's school, its theatrical club appropriately named “Kanya Pathshala,” had specific edifying and coalescent functional values (Hyder, Sound 21). The inclusion of folk art forms like the Gujarati garba dances into its repertoire points to transnational ideological exchanges, appropriations and emerging social configurations. The dances, recently introduced into the North by Hindu-Right nationalists, were conceived as a unifying factor around which the homogeneous identity of a “Hindu” collective was sought to be reconstituted, and these would later be extended into the assertion of a Hindu chauvinist nationalism. For Khemevati nurtured and educated at variant public sites of domestic ideologies, the social purpose of domesticity transforms into politicized demands for Partition and the establishment of a purified, spiritual Hindu nation-state; events that are interestingly staged at the institutionalized centres of pedagogy--constituency colleges and the university. The frames within which the discursive figure of the zealotical Hindu nationalist woman is constituted however remain relatively the same following independence. It is composed of spatial differentiations, gendered anti-Muslim rhetoric and cultural-language based distinctions:
"You are a Pakistani, you should not say Namaste!" Khem said sarcastically [to Kishwari]. (Hyder, *Sound* 52)

In the case of the Muslims, the more liberal Muslim sections in the UP, induced by political and monetary expediencies, entered the configurations of colonial reformism in the 1860s and 70s. Their entry into English education, and the formation of social associations though were fitful and followed that of the Hindus by a time-lag of half a century. Ensuring the colonial regime limited access to forms of educational and socio-economic reforms not only secured for the colonists a degree of political legitimacy, but in a way also came to imply grudging loyalty from a community "historically" figured as recalcitrant. Religion, far from being a discrete sphere sequestered from colonial interference, consequently acquired the dimensions of a cultural space which selectively and intermittently colluded with the political domain. Women's "private" education in the circumstances were configured differently from that of Hindu women. Yet there were shared anxieties concerning the regulation of women's sexuality or chastity which were linked specifically to the corrupting influence of English and more generally to higher education. In "The Sound of Falling Leaves" the protagonist's sexual escapades provoke her fellow-students to comment: "No wonder people say girls should not go to college" (Hyder, *Sound* 74-75). The prohibitions imposed on women in the sphere of literacy are also considered imperative to the preservation of religion. So Chamma Begum in "The Exiles" declares in the majlis: "Dear Ladies, hark unto me. After learning English some people deny the existence of God" (Hyder, *Sound* 35).
The Mohammedan Literary Society established in 1863, campaigning for the education of women, criticizing their seclusion and the conservative religious dictums imposed on them, was one of the precursors in the field of social reform within the Muslim community. The Aligarh Movement of the late nineteenth century ushered in by Syed Ahmed also introduced reforms in social customs and religious ideas, encouraging rational and advanced thoughts as well as scientific knowledge of the West. When the Muslim reformers started their crusade for western education, the total number of Muslim graduates were only 26 as against 1,652 in the Hindu community (Majumdar 10:319). The number of women among these graduates can only be imagined, given the patriarchal reservations towards women’s literacy. Hyder’s depictions of educated women are not anachronistic overextensions of displaced desire, but are drawn from among an intimate circle of upper-caste/class acquaintances and family. Most of them were in fact closely associated with the reformist phase—in the capacity of either participants or advocates—and had played an active part in the nationalist project in different ways. Gail Minault observes that Muslim social reform was similar to Hindu social reform on account of its sheer reliance on male resolutions for “the need to stem religious and cultural decline, to define their culture according to a universally recognizable standard, and to preserve the family through raising the honour and dignity” of its backward and superstitious women (118).

However there was one area where reforms were particularly problematic for Muslims and this was in the realm of the purdah. The resurgence of the purdah at the end of the nineteenth century should be
viewed as the othering of an anxiety-ridden consensus on the exigencies of redefining a particular aspect of Muslim identity. It takes place within the ideological package of patriarchal transformations from old systems to new ones, the inevitability of reforms and the obligations of ensuring female seclusion both as religious custom as well as gendered private-public division of roles now acquiring the formula of class/caste relations. Except for a minute percentage of reformers, the majority were in favour of elevating women's minds rather than their social status within the community. In “The Exiles,” Kishwari’s father, a deputy commissioner and a nationalist, supports women’s seclusion and considers purdah to be the index of respectability even as he favours higher education for his daughter (Hyder, Sound 39). The reform movements of course rarely made inroads into the rural areas where the ulamas’ views and religious instruction were predominant. “Secular” education was not made available to young girls and women here, in contrast to the situation in urban and peri-urban regions.

The role played by the majlis or majalis in consolidating Muslim identity should not be underestimated. It is an assembly of women mostly organized to commemorate religious events and has its origins in the logics of purdah. As depicted in “The Exiles” it is a form which enable women’s sociability and reciprocity. In this domain, oral and textual traditions interacted with each other and were kept alive, continuously renewed in the enactment of religious and non-religious customs. And in the repetition of communal practices and renewal of relationships were forged the notion of community and the location of identity. Unlike Hindu womanhood, Muslim womanhood did not enter into a correlative with the ideological polemics of patriarchal
morals and/or women's literacy. Therefore it did not acquire analogous symbolic ascription of an uninterrupted continuity that could be employed to stage claims to ascendancy within wider social and political spheres, or postulated as a standard in the identification of a communal other.

Any transitional historical moment carries within itself a critical juncture fraught with systemic uncertainties. Here, woman's subjectivity, volition and agency unfold at manifold sites afforded by the interplay of a range of material factors, historical circumstances and ascriptive principles. But in the differentia of this moment, adjoining these sites are fractures that escape appropriation, regimentation and accountability. Dr. Zubeida Siddiqui in “Memories of an Indian Childhood” is a scientist who functions within the discipline of logic and empiricism. She is at the same time implicated in those parameters of patriarchy, namely religious dictates and customary practices that are crucial to defining her location as a woman within social arrangements: “England returned and all, and yet to [sic] modest and spiritual…” is the qualification she receives from the local women (Hyder, Sound 12). Volition and agency, here, are subject to male supervision and are determined within the opposing axial poles of reason and religion. They are regulated by forms of literacy and performance, contending between liberal, syncretic nationalist formation and determinate community structures, and are contingent on current female valences. It is precisely through the irreconcilabilities, inconsistencies, fissures and liminal areas between and within these ideological practices, that it becomes possible for an individual woman like the doctor to act independently. From being an adherent of obscurantist, non-scriptural practices, one who
desperately attempts to secure her inconstant fiancé's attentions, she becomes a recusant, marrying outside family, race and religion. Elements among the intellectuals and literate elite as propounders and activists of a new sensibility, disapproving prevalent exclusivisms are implicit in this representation.

The nationalist era oversaw the interpenetrations of the religious and the temporal realms into each other, as when the emerging popular art form of cinema appropriated to itself the *nauha* tunes of religious songs while the latter songs were set on "slightly altered New Theatre tunes" (Hyder, *Sound* 37). Considering the contradiction between the nature and the location of the *majlis* in (Indian) Islam, as a gendered complement and an extra-institutional space, this syncretization of religious forms and affective structures to some extent countered the rigidity that had set in with the process of Islamicization in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, popular culture which "mediates between restricted 'specialized' discourses and the commonsense" is complicit in the circulation of emergent knowledges" (Hennessy and Mohan 466). In doing so it shapes subjectivities, re-constructing a series of subjects and subject positions, engaging in the historical constitution of female knowledge, volition and agency necessitated by the regional and global rearrangements under way. For Kishwari Abbas ("The Exiles"), the spread of literacy, diversification of women's pedagogy and exposure to literary and popular art forms provide a normative model of desired self-image couched in a liberal idiom. It transforms received notions of conjugal life and gendered manners, reflected in enactments on the cinematic screen (Hyder, *Sound* 38) and paralleled in the shift from the
frothy romance of early Urdu literature to the social realism of writers like Krishan Chander (Hyder, *Sound* 37).¹

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* demonstrates that the culture of a nation emerging from colonialism evolves in response to and is determined by the prevailing dominant ideology (Tharu, “Tracing” 258). By the late nineteenth century, domestic ideologies became a highly contentious political locale. As nodal centres playing host to diverse ideological trajectories, they functioned in intensive and extensive agential capacities, highlighting, blurring and even homogenizing differences. And precisely due to their situational permutability and instrumental alterability as against the discourse of fixity, they came to occupy different political locations ranging from the secular to the communal especially during the nationalist years. To all intents and purposes the public and the private were neither mutually exclusive nor did they have static, hermetic boundaries. Nationalist programmes disengaged from denominational exclusivity or communal differentiation, and stripped down to its prescriptive core could secure, enlist or appropriate female domestic authority, substantially expand the scale of women’s participation and contribution, and yet place limits on their agency. By fixing women within the stable, monogamous, patriarchal family, or conjugal or caste units, overdeterminedly envisaged as metaphoric correlates of the nation, the many debates and reforms surrounding the women’s question unilaterally opposed female individuation in their social application. It also resolved the sensitive problems and threats posed by the issues of reform and its desirability.
Kamal Kumari, ("The Exiles"), a double graduate is denied the qualities of the rational and the objective--her husband’s reference to her “intellectual pretensions” is a pointer to this denial--conceived as mere appendages to her primary roles as wife and mother (Hyder, Sound 49). Intellectual aspirations and their manifestations in women are still a matter of male anxiety, dismissed and discouraged despite changing attitudes towards women’s education. The valences associated with woman as a domestic rendition of defensive nationalism persists over woman’s more substantial participation in an evolving intellectual tradition even in independent India.

The discourse of othering, endorsed by the establishment of new axes of political differentiation and later the spatial co-ordinates of the Partition ideology, ignored the long history of coexistence, interaction and interconnection between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Inevitably there were structural similarities and corresponding practices due to the overlap of prevalent social systems. However these were produced and restricted within the domestic sphere. Inspite of obvious parallelisms this aspect escapes Kishwari, obscured as it is by the rhetorics of the Hindu-Muslim dialectic:
We had been good neighbours and good friends but still, basically we were *malichh* impure for them and could not enter their kitchen. My mother being an orthodox Shia, always “purified” every thing which was bought at a Hindu shop by dipping it thrice in water. The demand for partition is the logical conclusion. (Hyder, *Sound* 40)

The purification of the inner/private sphere indicates subscription to non-textual or non-theological practices that simultaneously acknowledge and proscribe the other. An element of understated mimicry qualifying the practices signifies the ideological concurrence of competing patriarchal systems. The customary, then, was mutually shaped and in many instances a patriarchal realm of consensuality, voicing paternalistic insecurities in addition to its aspirations. In a typically conservative mode, social customs thus strictly marked and maintained women’s self-definition within gradations of patriarchal exclusivity and stringency by pitting patriarchies against each other and thereby curtailed women’s access to other potentially syncretic identities.

The problematics of women’s literacy is replayed in “The Sound of Falling Leaves” closely interwoven with the dominant ideologies of class, gender and patriarchal compulsions. The change from constituency education at the Aligarh Muslim Girls’ College, the tiny rooms of whose hostel “had such an air of domesticity about them,” to the urban, multicultural eclecticism of Delhi reorients Tanveer Fatima’s sense of self (Hyder, *Sound* 70). It actuates her movement from community-imposed
seclusion into the dynamics of permissibility initiated by nationalist reforms and is the means by which her entitlement to social mobility is effected. Women’s education had conflicting outcome. Although its ideological delimitations regulated female desire within male structures, inhering in it was a proscribed but pragmatic logics that enabled female sexuality to operate in the mode of social alliances. Tanveer’s pre-marital relationships are defined by prevalent notions of racial superiority tethered to the dreams of bourgeois affluence. Religion is a determinant only where marriage is concerned. Thus her violent liaison with Major Khushwaqt Singh, a Chauhan Rajput cannot be conceived in terms of marriage:

I was a Syed’s daughter, my family was old and noble, how could I marry a jet-black Hindu and ruin my family’s name?...

I know how these Hindu-Muslim marriages always ended!

(Hyder, Sound 73)

But her affair with middle-aged, married Faruq, a millionaire-bourgeoisie who is not of the *ashraf* or genteel caste is formulated differently. Not only is social mobility ensured here, for her status as a “modern, educated girl” is a requisite for this particular aspect of the relation, but it is also “religiously” sanctioned due to the provision that allowed Muslim men to maintain four wives: “So there was nothing wrong” (Hyder, Sound 75).

Female self-interest and licence still has no sphere of social legitimization. Tanveer’s sexuality is threatening because it poses the danger of female upward mobility not subject to regulation by marriage, by conventional familial arrangements, or by community precepts. The violence
and gradual exhaustion of Tanveer's affairs forges a misogynist connection between illicit sexual pleasure and punishment or devaluation. At the same time, education and male reformism equip her for economic independence when the promise of conjugality fails to materialize. Her decision to stay at home following marriage to Viqar Saheb, a petty bourgeois person, however suggests her partial embourgeoisement, connoting the leisure of the bourgeoisie as opposed to the busy schedule of a working woman. Patriarchal compensation offered for the structuring of female desire is disguised as female volition here:

I have had offers of jobs from several colleges...But how can I find time for it? The house demands so much....I have never asked for much. (Hyder, *Sound* 81)

The protagonist's cognitive difficulty in comprehending her actions and in defining her ethical status arises from the significance of her new role in a bourgeois culture. For, the self must reposition itself and relegate its sites of origin and their conjunctural contradictions to the unconscious. And by the beginning of the twentieth century, the indeterminacy of the unconscious was being ahistorically systematized, "opened to various forms of determination, collectivization, scientific enquiry, and social control, as for example in the writings of Freud and Jung" (Sangari 86). All these find an echo in the several theories proposed in response to Tanveer's intelligent question, "Why do fairly reasonable, well-educated girls suddenly turn bad?"
One theory said, only girls with low I.Q.'s turn bad, intelligent ones don’t ruin themselves knowingly....A second theory proposed a host of reasons: excessive desire for fun, love of luxury, search for romance and adventures, sheer boredom, rebellion after a restricted childhood....They must all be true....

(Hyder, Sound 75)

Moreover notions of women's purity were undergoing radical changes, a sign of social instabilities released by a changing economy.

The inclusive dynamics of the Muslim community, despite the integrative tenor of reform, was problematic due to the identification of class status with caste difference. This was mainly observed by higher-caste patriarchy in the interests of stabilization and preservation against extraneous incursions. The Women's Movement with indigenous roots, an indirect outcome of socio-historical changes, aimed at equality for women in both the private and public spheres of life. Women leaders like Durgabai Deshmukh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Lady Magalammal Sadasiva Iyer, Cornelia Sorabjee, to name a few, projected the “free, strong and courageous image of Indian womanhood” (Kant 71). These women drawn from the urban elite and middle class families, however sought to partially level gender relations either without attaching class inequality or by positively affirming it, observes Sangari and Vaid (19).

The narrator's mother in “The Missing Photograph” is an early feminist and a famous novelist. An active opponent of bigamy (an imperative demand on the reformist agenda) she closely corresponds to Hyder's own
mother, Nazar Sajjad Hyder “who gave up purdah...and also became an
elegant sort of non-cooperator and wore especially printed Khadi saris”
(Hyder, Sound ix). Unlike the majority of the reformist movements, Gandhi’s
indigenous and indigent form of freedom struggle, the swadeshi campaign of
the 1920s and 30s, purposed to bring the poor, rural, illiterate and erring
women on par with the urban (upper and middle class) women. Existing
patriarchal resolutions and class logics nevertheless remained uncontested.
This is most evident in the task incumbent on women reformers from the
middle and upper strata, that is, of implementing the principles of swadeshi,
while the production or spinning of khadi was the arena of the rural women
in a nationalist configuration that attempted to rise above class
differentiation and caste and communal hierarchies. With women’s
reformation contained within the ideology of domesticity, these activists
appropriated to themselves the role of cultural enforcers. The refusal of the
protagonist’s mother to meet Dularey-cha’s bride, an actress, and therefore
a “fallen woman” sheds light on the limited effect and the inherent flaws of
the much lauded early twentieth century reformist operations (Hyder, Street
167). Her daughter’s incidental criticism that “[d]espite her liberation,
perhaps she, too, could not socially accept an actress” reveals the reluctance
of the upper classes/higher castes to accommodate in these operations
lower castes/petty bourgeois and working persons (Hyder, Street 167). As a
public entertainer, the woman was positioned outside the discourse of
morality and male protection and her marriage had broken the classificatory
rules of the system by which women are given in exchange by men to one
another. In this detail is a hint of the darker side of Hyder’s prosperous,
cosseted upper class world. It suggests an understanding of social inequalities that she is generally not given credit for.

The deprivation and poverty of rural India in “Housing Society,” its frustrations so vividly portrayed in sharp contrast to the “Arabian Nightish” (Hyder, Sound 134) extravagance and opulence of colonial officialdom, is a comment on the conjunctural politics of the possible and the denied marking that transitional period. Here the systematic inequalities of an oppressive feudal economy aggravated by disgruntled, de-possessed petty landlords who had taken up the gun after the selective abolition of zamindari, dovetailed into the political ambitions of capitalist economics. The indeterminacy of those economic and social spaces which were marginalized by the emerging ideological configurations consequently nurtured agrarian revolutions, and the rural-urban contacts at various levels filtered reformist projects and resolutions. For Jamshed Ali who negotiates these not quite disparate rural-urban regions, their changing dynamics make an impact upon him in the growing awareness of economic disparities, desire for social-economic mobility and allied conceptions of self-respect. However not everyone has access to these particular formulary ideologies of identity-constitution, Manzur-un-Nisa being one of them. In fact they virtually elude her cognitive structurings. The co-ordinates of her subject-identity are limited within the sphere of rural domesticity, predetermined by gender, community affiliations, social location and rural formation, and anticipated in the thoughts of her cousin and husband-to-be, Jamshed:
When Manzur-un-Nisa grows up, she would be tied to him and both of them would lead a white-collar, needy life in a dark, narrow lane in Cawnpore. (Hyder, Sound 134)

Education for lower-caste and/or class women, even more so than their counterparts from the upper stratas, generally signified some release from exploitation and/or class mobility. As wandering singers denied access to conventional modes of pedagogy, Rashke Qamar and Jamil-un-Nissa are offered relief from the templates of class/ caste through religious conversion. Christian (European) missionaries were among the first to undertake the vernacularization of English in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in order to expedite the imperialistic project of soul-making. Women’s domestic labour was intimately identified with piety and interchangeably linked to their education and conversion (Sangari 313). In line with this course, the two girls are taught “knitting and a little English” and proffered schooling and health care if compliant to conversion and the rendering of “Urdu hymns” during missionary activities (Hyder, Street 22). The fact that with conversion their “lives would be transformed,” and that they need not be destined for the hereditary profession (of courtesans) or for destitution is not lost on Jamila (Hyder, Street 22).

Rashke Qamar, descended from the lineage of veiled-courtesans or Khangies, strives to transcend the hereditary niches of her class and caste, the only means being subscription to a violent refiguration of identity along current concepts of honour, morality and protection. This is enabled through the mediatorial aegis of an authoritarian and patriarchal
establishment like the “Thinker's Club.” Fallen and/or plebian women like Rashke, Jamila and Motibai are the proscribed others who constitute challenging projects which will reaffirm in a twisted manner the paternalistic ambitions of reform. Their rehabilitation endows a sense of integrity on men like Agha Farhad and Narendra Verma, scions of feudalistic patriarchies, who run the literary association. Rashke’s initiation as an artiste of repute into the cultural circuits of Lucknow obscures the concomitant circumstances of her consent to becoming a mistress to Farhad, and re-entrenches her within caste history, as external to the ethical configurations of the period. From a less frequented angle, female consensus and male manipulation coincide with interrelated anxieties of male sexual regulation in view of the institutionalization of monogamous marriage and the repositioning of patriarchal obligations and desire it necessitated. It is significant that both Farhad and Verma give into maternal pressures, and marriage follows the undertaking of familial responsibilities coincident with the gradual relinquishment of extra-familial interests. Rashke’s consent to being an object of transference in a masculinist ethos, where she occupies a series of othered positions in a patriarchal arrangement like concubinage cannot be ascribed to licentiousness. Rather it shifts the focus to the continuing conservatism of reforms and the rigidity of typification that checked the lower-caste/class woman’s upward mobilization.

Verma’s defence of Rashke’s position as a poet against criticism of her dubitable moral character by other women poets reflects the dilemma of classifying mobile peripheral women:
"The History of Urdu-Literature bears witness to the fact that many famous courtesans, who were also talented poets, were highly respected by connoisseurs." (Hyder, Street 25)

His attempt to define her outside the ethical frame of liberalism through selective historicization exposes the vested interests of paternalism. The grounds of legitimacy it seeks to set up is compromised by an epistemic default which transposes the social ideologies of a past period on to the present.

Literacy, reading and writing, in pre-colonial, pre-capitalist India was restricted to the upper caste male and to women from certain castes/classes, among them the courtesans. Poetry composition, musical skills and the ability to engage in intelligent conversation were some of the traits cultivated for the pleasure of the patrons. The discursive shift initiated by cultural nationalism and the women’s movements in the definition of women as moral creatures however witnessed the “anti-nautch” campaigns in the early decades of the twentieth century (Tharu and Lalitha, “Empire” 211-12). Subsequently the art forms promoted by courtesans were devalued, their erudition overlooked and their persons degraded to the status of common, immoral prostitutes. What also ensued was a vulgar exposure of these women from what was previously a private and secluded sphere of feudal paternalism to the public capitalist arena, divesting them of a sense of personal dignity and the security of male patronage. There is no doubt of the psycho-social repercussions that such crusades might have had on a woman like Rashke Qarnar. With the campaign for women’s education taken
by various communities and a more accommodative literary scene, women emerged into the public sphere albeit under the mantle of morality and piety. It is this epistemic break Verma refuses, inadvertently or intentionally, to acknowledge.

The conjunctural alliances, antipathies and collisions between liberal syncretic nationalism and divisive religious nationalisms rendered complex the structure, formulation and objectives of the nationalist movement. Besides, the contentious appropriations of the Independence struggle had a disenabling effect in particular on the attempts to locate the Muslims within the land. In university campuses standard lectures become a forum for demanding revisionist histories and for the expression of hostilities between antagonistic communities. Veiled suggestions implying exclusion and discrimination assume spatial dimensions: “Why don’t you go back to Benares?” and territories comprising religious majority-minority populations prefigure the ongoing deliberations at the nodal political command centers (Hyder, Sound 43).²

In the pattern of the Indian past established by the colonists, sectarian strife was an important motif (Pandey 23). From its inception, the language of reform had been dependent on an essentializing and essentialistic difference in order to validate the logics of its discourse. Othering fitted into the larger scheme of imperial expansion based on biological theories of race and civilizing missions, and a political tactics of differentiating and dividing a populace along lines of loyalism, antiquity and compliancy as subjects and subordinates in state governance. The
exorbitant distortion of a Muslim interregnum to which could be traced the current degeneration and debilitation of an original Hindu civilization was a creation of the British in their pursuit of divisive policies. It was initially seized and appropriated by the radical and conservative elements among the Hindus who invested it with images of guilt and anxiety that were drawn into wide consensualities of values, devices of incitement that could be evoked at will and employed seamlessly at various political locations. The axes of communalization were multiple, yet in the post-1857 years the forms of communalism in circulation had by no means consolidated into a political ideology bracketed with definite concepts of the nation. For the Muslims, communal othering first emerged in the context of educational reforms together with the formation of associated literary organizations. The issue of competing vernaculars (Hindi and Urdu) and a bilingual (Anglo-Vernacular) education split a syncretic Urdu-speaking élite along religious and linguistic lines (in the UP) and lay at the heart of the matter. But communalization has its origins in the emergence of particular religious and/or caste and class consolidations, declensions, recombinations and upgradations occasioned by the logic of mobility and collateral value of landholdings (Sangari 194-95). Women became boundary markers of the community only at a later historical juncture when domestic ideologies acquired political overtones during the communalization of nationalism, either preceding or coinciding with emerging communal discourses.

For Kishwari, identity is constituted vis-à-vis the community. This community, although religious in its affiliations, was in practice determined by class cohesion. Caste in the case of Muslims cannot be abstracted from
class nor can it displace class with the argument of a shared culture. As the composition of the persons attending the *majlis* indicates—Syeds, mirasons, the cook who does not observe *purdah*—cross class/caste community bonding did allow for a certain levelling, but at the same time reinforced stratification within the community, evident in the forms of address and the ritual roles delegated to the women. Group familiarity at the same time discouraged individuation. When the community breaks up through extensive migrations with Partition, class mutualities undergo corollary alterations due to the transposition and/or withdrawal of class/caste services. It also creates conditions conducive to the possible emergence of the individual. The contrary demands for partition and for a single nation, moreover split the community into two and introduced a crisis of identity. The claims made upon independent India by the Hindu majority, rerouted identity-crisis into the dialectics of alienation and belonging. Kishwari's support to the Muslim League and her father's nationalist stand in favour of the One Nation Theory lose their import in the new dispensation. The community, now identified with religion, becomes the conscious other of the nation-state, and is therefore to be under constant surveillance since its loyalty is suspect. Organized searches of Deputy Saheb's house question his patriotism, and Kishwari's efforts at finding a job is rendered futile by the preferential treatment given to displaced "*sharnathi* girls," Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan (Hyder, *Sound* 46).

Identity perhaps can only be realized by a process of recollection and examination of a shared past, and the status of oneself in relation to others always implies an individual experience. It is then at once appropriate and
ironical that rehabilitation for Kishwari—from being a victim of specific historical uprooting—can only be conceived in the differentia of a foreign land, England. The arena of hybrid diasporas is always open to threats of disintegration. Here, the energy of critique and analysis arises from the hybridization of nation-states of origin and of residence as sites of self-definition and struggle. What this involves is the complex conflation of differing political and power relations, and ideological systems despite the risk of dissolution. The process of retrieval and recuperation is set in motion with the enunciation of the question: “But what are we going to do when we finish our studies here and go back home?” (emphasis added) (Hyder, Sound 53). There is regret at being party to sectarian politics, a definite transition from the orthodoxy of single religions to the cosmopolitanism of religious pluralism, the repudiation of dogmatic opinions, and the conviction of return and establishment of the self.

However, the grounds of reference and applicability of these avowals and resolutions are problematic due to the contradictions in the application of “universal” notions to the Indian context of colonization and independence. Additionally, Kishwari, from her hybrid and diasporic location, uncritically associates the syncretic universal/secular with a distinct Christian ethical universal that radically repositions the notion of individuation. According to Carole Pateman the modern individual is a patriarchal category (Chakrabarty 362). To speak of this individual is to automatically elicit the referential categories of citizenship, the modern state and the bourgeois family—structural co-ordinates of modernity. In the case of India this generates certain internal discrepancies due to other
constructions of the individual: the “private” self, as opposed to the “public” self, which is inalienably bound to a specific ethnic or caste or religious community. The key terms here, freedom, equality and rights previously articulated only in connection with the individual and the state now extend to incorporate the prerogatives of the community. Is the emergence of the female individual ever possible under the circumstances? Any attempt at embodying a unified self also falls apart due to the multiplicity of its contradictory locations. Kishwari’s identification with a community of secular citizen-subjects bound to the nation-state by reciprocal expectations and obligations, is an idealistic representation conceived by Hyder and generated in an ethos of epistemic ambitions. However despite the reaffirmation of faith in the viability of such a construct, it fails the rigours of critical scrutiny due to the paradoxes inhering in it.

In circumstances of male absence, a sequestered and privileged Shamshad Begum in Hyder’s “Honour,” is forced to manage the household within the gendered divisions of space and labour instituted in domestic ideologies. A discourse of paternalism which demands the denial of self-interest, and old world feudal largesse make it incumbent on her to maintain retainers and accommodate the perquisites of an extended family. Shamshad’s entrepreneurial skills in opening a school for the girls in her neighbourhood and taking in sewing to tide over financial crises, combines signs of an emergent capitalist economy with female “altruism” stipulated by the reform agenda (Sangari 198). When the community disperses, these altruistic activities which previously helped knit the community are directed into public spaces away from mandatory seclusion. So, Shamshad’s tutelage
in “Urdu, Arabic and Persian at home” transmutes into the supervisory, although nominal, role of a teacher and later that of a housekeeper (Hyder, Sound 111). But the limitations of proffered agential competency is demonstrated in her inability to comprehend the social implications of her position as a “Bua” (an appellative used to address maid-servants) in an urban, middle class establishment with dubious business interests. The commonness of labour instead is retrieved from its immediate association with livelihood and secured to the logics of religious precepts, so that the public arena becomes synonymous with religion:

“...There is no harm in working for one’s living.”

Shamshad Begum agreed. It suddenly occurred to her that when she grew old and died, there must be someone by her bedside to read the Quran and perform the last rites. (Hyder, Sound 116)

The 1950s and 1960s saw many of the authorities that had governed the lives of women in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries questioned and reconstructed. Literary writings abandoned their earlier positions of encounter, resistance to domination, and changing significations in the contexts of colonization and independence, community and nation, and moved to more universal themes of self-realization, individualism and the indeterminacy of identity. The social and the psychological were sites of intervention through which the self was rehabilitated. However these spaces were neither history-less nor secular. Hyder’s writings in particular reflect the changes in this phase, though the
works of other women writers in their singular creative signature explore the complexities of female subject-identity at different levels and to various degrees.

This change can be attributed mainly to the break-up of the Progressive Writer’s Association and the growing popularity of Modernism, with its claim to a universalist metaphysic, already well-established in western literary circles at the time. Also implicated is the resurgence of the Women’s Movement, which entered its second phase in the late 1960s and the early 70s. This was basically an activist phase with a large middle class membership. Attention was drawn to economic and social issues occasioned by the realization that women are predominantly marginalized through cultural institutions and religious ideologies.

Women’s differentiation along social and communal lines was consolidated with the rise of nationalism, so that their symbolic conscription as boundary markers of the newly created national spaces at the time of Partition was only one step away. The notion of women as bearers of culture, as central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collective (Yuval-Davis 26) is dealt with sensitivity in Rajee Seth’s “Yes Yours Only.” The spectre of Partition hanging over the lives of the parents, acquires concrete dimensions in the resolve of their son to marry Shammim, a girl from the adversary community:
Shammim. .she was certainly going to be a reminder – a chip of the community which had heaped calamity and bloodbaths on us, uprooted and exiled us...Having her in the house would not be facing a person, a woman or a daughter-in-law, it would be facing a page from sordid history...an echo of an era of deep denials and denials. (Seth, “Yes” 43)

Shammim becomes a signifier of a painful era of history, a depersonalized figure who triggers a resurgence of repressed memories. The father’s opposition to the marriage effaces the wife’s desire to accommodate historical prejudices, unexpressed “in a devout Hindu way,” although “[t]he political partition of the country was equally traumatic to her – part of her history” (Seth, “Yes” 41). Becoming a refugee is therefore, a gendered experience in many ways.

Texts such as Seth’s expose the manner in which the women’s question has been contained hence rendering their interests at stake, and suggest causes for present day inter-community hostilities directed towards women. They act as powerful mediators through which the new requirements of the nation-state are rewritten. A nationalist woman figure like Muthulakshmi Reddy in the early years of the twentieth century did question the essentialism of the categories that operated behind legislative measures concerning women, emphasizing the double standards of men who promoted gender-based moral indices as the logic for the redefinition of sexuality and nature of reforms. Yet even she articulated the demands for women’s right in terms of their social roles as mothers and nurturers
(J. Nair 175). A probable cause was the membership of these women in the urban middle class, part of the emerging political élite, usually linked by birth or marriage to male Indian nationalists.

The persistent articulation of women with the nation even after independence suggests an underlying irreconcilability of differences, despite the constitution of the state as an integrative and unitary entity. Configurations of class processes and caste patterns, linguistic and regional specificities, religious distinctions and multiple patriarchies confound the state's regulatory and synchronizing efforts. However these component inconsistencies found common cause and consensus in the formulary combinations of secular and syncretic nationalisms. The same insistence on differences, paradoxically, also locked into an upper caste and middle class patriarchal Hinduism and created the conditions for the re-emergence of a chauvinistic Hindu nationalism at a later stage in Indian politics.

This is brought out with striking effect in Mahasweta Devi's "Breast-Giver." Haldarbabu is an upper caste Kayastha who "made his cash in the British era when Divide and Rule was the policy. Haldarbabu's mentality was constructed then" (Devi, Breast 44). A member of the Bengali middle class which was created as recently as the nineteenth century, the Kayastha community of traders were also new landowners who shared commercial interests and partnerships with Europeans. Politically, this class was loyalist in its affinities and argued for liberalization though not for the replacement of colonial rule (Sangari 102). But the recasting of their women in terms of morality and the private sphere under the aegis of reforms, it
must be recalled, was designed to lay claim to a certain exclusivity. Carried through into independent India, Haldarbabu’s provincialism arises from his interpellation by particularities of language, region, caste and religious community. Thus on a relative scale his village Harisal is more substantial than West Bengal, so much so that his “nationalism” derives from insular and religious ideological markers:

Haldarbabu is such a patriot that...he says to his employees. ‘Nonsense! why do they make ‘em read the lives of characters from Dhaka, Mymensingh, Jashore? Harisal is made of the bone of the martyr god. One day it will emerge that the Vedas and the Upanishads were also written in Harisal.’

(Devi, Breast 45)

The cross-hatch of these prescriptive texts with nationalist principles contained women, as nationalism’s symbolic component, within the definitive contours of this ideological miscegenation. In these indeterminate spaces of shifting semantics women’s sexuality was coterminous with their membership of the community and/or the nation.

Haldarbabu’s interpretation of the brahmin Jashoda’s dream in which the goddess appears as a midwife, accords the Lionseated with the double function of procreator and preserver: “I say, she creates as mother, and preserves as midwife” (Devi, Breast 44). Seen in the context of his desire to fill half of Calcutta with Haldars, and his wife’s sentiment that “[d]aughters-in-law will be mothers...as long as it is possible” (Devi, Breast 51), it lies within the range of possibility to extract a conspiracy between
reductionist readings of religion and insular, militant nationalism in the
determination of women’s roles, duties and agency. That women participate
in national processes as biological reproducers of ethnic collectivities only
goes to show the extent of corruption in their appropriation by nationalism.

The years after the Emergency were accompanied by the rise of a
powerful new middle class dissatisfied with the socialist policies of the
Nehruvian era and eager to reposition themselves in relation to the
economics of the world market. However on the social front, this largely
urban, industrialized class with heterogeneous caste and/or religious
affiliations sketched their identity through an idea of consolidating the
nation, drawing on the commonality of the nationalist sentiment in order to
reshape a social imaginary. But this nationalism was problematic. It
incorporated an identity that was specifically Indian (by supporting issues of
religious nature in the political sphere) with the cultural characteristics of
the bourgeoisie--individualism and materialist humanism.

Women’s writings of the 1970s are marked by the tension between
this new male-defined, middle class, conservative nationalism and the
egalitarian strains of bourgeois individualism converging in the logics of
representation. Caste and class ascriptions are toned down as authority is
attributed to personal ethics and strength, and perseverance derived from
tradition acquires new value in the face of adverse material circumstances.
Although the women depicted in these fictions appear to sanction and at
times celebrate the authoritativeness and legitimacy of their culture, there
exists an underlying friction generated at the interface of adherence to
tradition and attempts at individuation. It is in this context that they often lose all signs of caste or social difference and become symbolic of the national universe even as their personal worlds assume allegorical connotations.

The unnamed, middle class woman living in an urban landscape in Vaidehi's "A Day Scarred by a Kinsman," is outwardly self-assured and complacent with her life:

She would usually finish cooking and sit by herself, a queen before her husband came home for lunch. (Vaidehi, "Day" 239)

However the semiotic as a dormant psychosomatic symptom, a cold, betrays a vague restlessness and discontent that contradicts the feminine mystique of domesticity and gentle companionship. Her mechanical stillness rather is suggestive of the solitude and alienation experienced by the sensitive urban, the ontological anguish and ennui provoked by a new consciousness of supposed private space and time.

The arrival of the unknown old man who claims acquaintance with her husband, into this personal space, disconcerts her imagined sense of independence:

Now she sat in front of this man as if time had been pledged to a sense of duty. (Vaidehi, "Day" 239-40)

Post-Independence urban areas witnessed the recomposition and reconfiguration of ideological ensembles in terms of the formalization of heterogeneity, mixed urban economics, gender re/de-culturations, caste
redivisions or amalgamations, class mobilizations, social consolidations and/or associations and the potential trajectories and valences of agency these generated, subject to the demands of syncretisation. This in turn altered gender equations, relocated the sites of the private and public, and lay the groundwork for the individuation of the collective by proffering spatial, temporal and material co-ordinates for the establishment of the personal. Subsequent changes in cultural norms of interaction were based on the relative status of persons as individuals, their ensuing defamiliarization producing anxieties of the self. The state of heightened inexpectancy this elicited was compounded by ingrained and contending traditional images, forms of address, behaviour patterns and practices.

The old man's insistent command for attention and demands of sympathy challenge the protagonist's subjectivity and sense of self. It collapses under the strain of his increasingly misogynist narrative that awakens her to the fictionality of the private realm, its intersection by external forces, regulation by patriarchies and the gendered violence inhering in it:

The fever had raced to her head. Eyes filled with dread...drowning girls, hands flailing, endlessly beckoning, sucked in until only the fingertips showed...mouths open yet unable to call....eyes, dying behind window bars...(Vaidehi, "Day" 244)

The environment of this male-defined space is disturbing. The incapability to comprehend the subtle and abrupt shifts in power relations, and the
inability to recognize the increasingly irrelevant signs patriarchy has attached to familiar events lead to the protagonist’s frenzied discomfiture.

The transitional sector—the mid-way point between the traditional sectors of Indian economy and society, and the modern corporate and industrial sector—erodes and makes redundant traditional roles and skills. By the same economics of logics, it radically transforms the nature and sites of ethical value systems for those suddenly confronted with the spectre of loss of sustenance and social status. Under the circumstances, lack is often exteriorized as a person considered the embodiment of all that has been lost. Or, at times the sense of bereavement takes on symbolic overtones as in the death of a selfless, moral preceptor, like Amar’s mother in Seth’s “You too!”

The position of a wife in the Hindu tradition as moral reformer and enforcer, whose gendered traits of self-denial and virtuousness shaped and bequeathed by patriarchal ideologies are at once a foil and a complement to male (social and economic) domination, also carry agential possibilities. Women’s moral power rehearses social relations and is embedded in cognitive modes of male self-legitimation. Sarna, Amar’s wife, is introduced as a silent accomplice, averse to her husband’s underhand dealings in the struggle for economic stability. Her acts of disapproval are a claim to conscience within domestic ideology, appropriately enacted in the realm of religious obligations. And it is here that the potential for agency lies, for, the chastening power of her moral authority while it typically demonstrates her nominal individualism simultaneously refuses legitimacy to Amar’s selfhood by devaluing his primary role as provider. The gradual vitiation of Sarna’s
orthodox moral position under the influence of changing social structures, and the many distortions and responsibilities arising out of the new economic equations signify a shift in women's knowledge, from prescriptive forms to those situated in the materiality of lived experiences. Correlative to this is a radical change in the parameters of women's purity. The lapse in moral responsibility however not only deprives her of agential capability and discloses the insubstantiality of female selfhood, but it also leaves her susceptible to accusations of depravity, expressed in Amar's violent response:

“I could live with myself because of you...your goodness...and now...you too?” (Seth, Against 58)

A related and stereotypical image is that of the traditional Indian woman with the mental configuration of a “little girl” who demands male guardianship (Seth, Against 75). By this the text addresses the powerful unconscious, and the desire to possess in man, evident in patriarchal discourses (not only in culture in general but as depicted particularly by the Freudian “family romances”). Whereas woman’s role in maintaining stable family relationships through her managerial skills is undervalued in the urban ethos of market economics and consumer culture, man’s participation in the capacity of a career maker accordingly becomes imperative to the sustenance of this ethos. In no uncertain terms Raj Tilak in Seth’s “A Long Bridge” rates the role of a nurturer secondary to that of a wage earner. A discourse of misogyny is latent in this condemnation of his wife:
She's never earned anything how can she have the heart to spend. Her greatest concern is stretching today's leftovers to tomorrow! Expecting him to cheer her, laud her help in his struggle. (Seth, *Against* 75-76)

In a characteristically patriarchal move he indiscriminately blurs ideological categories, and genderizes the value of labour, overriding the burden of domestic work borne by women and their emotional investments in the family, appropriating the evaluative criterion of economics to a moral economics of domestic labour. Such a representation can connote either the changed economy of modern capitalism, or the contradictory demands made on women in post-Independence India. Ironically, the attributes of the wife correspond to the desired and normative female qualities instituted during the nationalist pre-Independence era.8

Devi's "The Son" elaborates the contrary interpellations of women through the conflicting interests of the mother Niraja and the daughter-in-law Ratna. Niraja's piety and selflessness are embodied knowledge, restrained within the bounds of domesticity in the roles of wife and mother. Identified with *stridharm*, she typifies the Sati-Savitri-Sita construct fashioned in another historical period for wider nationalist purposes:

"God, O God! Please do not make me die before he [husband Ramapati] dies. He is so helpless, and there's none to care for him." (Devi, "Son" 45)

Semi-literate yet endowed with moral power, she is set over against the educated, resourceful career-woman Ratna. The joint family is balanced
between two female power centres--two households with differing social locations and economies--which establish their respective legitimacies by making claims on patriarchal obligations and aspirations. Niraja’s moral claim is mediated by Ramapati who, directed by his obligation to insure her against future uncertainties and neglect, bequeaths the house to her. Ratna, in setting up a separate nuclear family unit, by contrast, exercises agency derived from economic autonomy, in concordance with the aspirations of her husband. Her mediation of the private and public spaces as a professional curtails the scope of patriarchy and repositions the co-ordinates of female identity external to domesticity and the discourse of morality. The power of female moral agency in making a claim to conscience (within the limits of domestic ideology) is nevertheless manifest in Shubro’s guilt-ridden anxiety about the ethical sustainability of the nuclear family. Strangely this suggests a contradiction, considering that the establishment of the nuclear family was a principle agenda of bourgeois reforms in the nineteenth century. These adverse representations of women emanate from their historical location at the intersection of discrepant ideological currents comprising of colonial left-overs, nationalist desires and post-Independence requirements, and are figurative of the renotation of the nation’s social imaginary.

The Indian woman of the late twentieth century exceeds conventional definitions of the modern. In “Behind the Bodice: Choli Ke Pichhe” by Devi, Shital Mallya’s upper-class background, her liberated notions on gender, her cultural rootlessness and the marriage of convenience she shares with Upin Puri make for a complex personality that renders everything “problematic”
The dynamic of engagement is locked into a complex of ideological processes. Economic liberalization regulated by world markets in partnership with mega-developmental projects funded by global institutions compel the collapse of local and rural markets and industries. An oppressive, elitist state-power engenders new causes for rebellions. In appropriating cultural ethnicities, popular culture contributes to a peculiar alienation that increasingly makes the individual turn to the discursivities of religious revanchism and caste and/or communal revivalisms as alternative sources of self-definition. At the same time, the conjunction of a transnational “religious” culture and a homogenizing “secular” global culture proffer new, conflicting images of “womanhood.” The intersection of these several processes in varying combinations interpellate the self at multiple locations, so that identity is always differentially configured. Shital bears the traces of her historical moment:

Shital is supposed to be two people. Violent and aggressive Shital attacks the Himalayas again and again. Calm, soft Shital sits submerged in this water-tree-silence. (Devi, Breast 141)

The spatio-ontological aspects implicit in this delineation significantly accentuate the radical exclusion of the domestic sphere and its incumbencies. The contradictory moods mark personal and interior spaces that demonstrate individuation. With some circularity, individualism’s affective responses betray a restlessness emblematic of a disjunction that issues from the instability of shifting locations and configurational value-
arrangements within which the female self is constructed. Unconventional careers and redefined private leisure also converge at this locale.

Female agential potential shaped and enacted in these complex structurings may not necessarily challenge patriarchal power relations and/or institutions, and may instead concur with the normative values offered by them. Both Shital and Upin live apart pursuing their respective vocations with intense drive, ambition and singular dedication, neither willing to compromise their interests. Shital’s assertion of individualism in rejecting social conventions through the framework of a liberal marriage is not consistent though, for, it conflicts with her changing stand on conjugal marriage with its value-based principles of cohabitation and mutual obligations. This is evident in her desire to reside with her husband Upin in a “settled” fashion, and is captured in the thought that, “perhaps one will settle permanently in Kadamkuri someday” (Devi, Breast 143).

Concerns about sexuality extend into the anxiety of selfhood, manifest in a culture of the body with its surgically developed, liquid silicone-implant breasts. Disentangled from the functional requisites of domestic ideology, sexuality exceeds the wider paternalist project of nation-building that it was intended to mediate through a discourse of morality. The image of Shital’s “beautiful, firm and fit” body evokes revised notions of sexuality, of discarded inhibitions and a new candour about the sexual self (Devi, Breast 141). The observation of the intervening narratorial voice that, “[t]emperamentally Shital is a girl of 2094, or rather Shital’s century has not yet come,” suggests latent difficulties and resistances between the prevailing
ideological complexes constituting the nation-state in reconciling with this female construct (Devi, *Breast* 141).

For women from other ethnic and religious communities, the parameters of their subjectivities are determined more by the nature of the historical locations, affiliations, tensions and the incorporation of their respective communities and ethnicities into the comprehensive framework of the nation-state, than by the specific constellations of political, economic and social ambitions of the pre-Independence nationalist era. This is not to rule out patriarchal arrangements across denominations and ethnic groupings. Indian nationalism at the same time, it must be recalled, inhibits the expression of autonomy by attempting to pull a sheet of secularism, common history, national identity and syncretic culture over diverse sub-identities.

The personal crisis of the matriarchal figure in Sarah Joseph's "The Imminent Gospel" arises from the disjunctive tensions within the materialities of identity-configurations, between their affirmations and enactments, the historicity of their origins and submerged alternative histories, the consensus of the collective and the resisting individual. These factors emerge from the surprisingly consistent interplay of scriptural prescriptions with its ontological definition of a community, and the accommodative knowledge-forms and interpellative apparatuses of the nation-state. The protagonist's religious affiliations have their origins in a history of oral narratives that claim St. Thomas, a disciple of Christ, to have brought the Gospel to Kerala around the middle of the first century and
founded seven churches there. Contrary to an overdetermined view of Christianity in India as a legacy of colonialism, western evangelical missions in the East initially operated on a logics of imperialism and mercantilism. The establishment of Christianity in Kerala, in the early years accompanied commercial exchanges with the Arabs and was overseen by the churches of the Middle East. The later usurpation of trade by the Portugese and their growing colonial influence, saw a shift in ecclesiastical authority to the Church of Rome. Local oppositions and intra-church discords led to the disintegration of this highly volatile, unstable and contention-ridden church resulting in its division and separation into other independent churches that invariably traced their genealogy to Mesopotamia. Although the worship of the Church and the liturgical theology remain entirely esoteric, in social life and custom the Church is completely indigenous (Brown 3). Indigenisation is evident in the fashioning of the regional language Malayalam to accommodate the Christian faith, and in the religion's doctrinal adherence to being inclusive of all sections of society despite what was then a stringently stratified and oppressive social structure.

The freedom with which indigenous culture has been appropriated by the Christians, for all that, is confronted by an intransigentism to other religio-cultural interventions, with the core of their lives founded on the faith and worship of a monotheistic god (S. Viswanathan 1-2). The Indian Christian's response to faith is epistemological (regarding its origins, philosophy, creeds and codes) and historical in perspective (given the epistemic circumstances leading to the adoption of an extraneous faith, its establishment in a new land, its adaptation to and appropriation of local
traditions, and its sustainability in the present), observes Gauri Viswanathan (xiii). Incorporation into the national, secular realm like other religious communities involves a continuous negotiation between a "universal" system of ethics and values, and a definite religious belief system.

The old woman in Sarah Joseph's "The Imminent Gospel" is answerable to two patriarchal authorities. One, that of the prescriptive text, eternal and inviolable, the referential bedrock of a religion, and two, a community's social ideology, derived in part from the interpretation and cultural application of religion by patriarchy. Identity as members of a religious community fosters internal cohesion while simultaneously discriminating as others those who do not conform. Homogeneity and compliance are encouraged and expected here. It is the covert retention of caste differentiation by the Syrian Christian model of Christianity which however creates discrepancies between proffered social parity and membership of a spiritual community, and its transgression through the religion's appropriation of the social categories (Brown 303).9 Scriptural precepts like equality and social justice embodied in Christ who "was unafraid when he sat down with the outer castes for supper....Placing his hand upon the food he told them to love one another" (Joseph, "Imminent" 5), contradicts the caste-based interdictions of the community to which the old woman belongs:

"...[T]hey [the children-in-law] were persons on whom the relatives had pronounced judgment...." (Joseph, "Imminent" 6)
Inconsistencies in belief and practice are apparent here.

However, the protagonist's moral certainties are independent of her communal and societal ascriptions. She demonstrates individual purpose of thought and action, an agential trajectory carved from the structural co-ordinates of the modern Indian state--secularism, cultural multi-formity and syncretism--as well as liberal ideas of the individual--freedom, equality and rights. Therefore the conjunctural configurations of identity are fraught with tension and exist at the interface of state institutions and community and/or social systems, a secular and/or spiritual reading of the Scripture and the organized knowledge of Religion. The semiotic is one which advocates inclusivity and indigenist hybridization against the violent patriarchal ideology of purity and exclusiveness personified by the virile, possessed man. And this is figuratively asserted by the protagonist's daughter through Biblical imagery: "You were hewn from the olive tree of the forest. And grafted on to the olive of the farm land" (Joseph, "Imminent" 6).

The diasporization and/or political and economic decline of any community results in reinforced interiority accompanied by a simultaneous intensification of class/caste divisions. Women's involvement as practitioners in male discourse is critical not only to maintaining the unity of the community through networking but also in arranging alliances and securing the continuance of the community. Almas's upper class location, extensive webwork of social acquaintances and female familial relationships ensure that she has the edge on Peroza in winning over Khursheed Alam in Hyder's "The Barrier of Light." Belonging to the Parsi community, Peroza
Dustoor lacks not only the finances and the safety net of community relations, but is subject to a sense of alienation. On her return from studying music in Paris she “felt that she hadn’t returned to India. Her own community was fairly westernized, but years of study in Europe had made her conscious of her Indian-ness” (Hyder, “Barrier” 12). The sense of othering this suggests can be ascribed to two historical developments.

The first is an original migration occasioned by the religious persecution of her Parsi forebears from their native West (present day Iran), resulting in the community’s gradual assimilation into the cultural and social ethos of an eastern land. And the second displacement in the present, within independent India derives from the cosmopolitanism of Bombay; an urban culture which levels religious distinctions and caste exclusivities under the rubric of a liberal universalism, only to recreate them in the manner of reified popular rituals and cultural organizations that sponsor an aggressive politics of revanchism. Class configurations in a changing economics of liberalization in tune with global markets oversee the demise of a bourgeois class through its diversification into new, complex permutations of social orders. Peroza’s subjectivity is further compromised by her peripheral location in a culture of the nouveau-riche and the élite, where native languages are disregarded and western mannerisms and popular culture render moral categories inconsequential. For the subaltern it is a precarious un-natural location, one that cannot be maintained in these circumstances. Therefore, Peroza’s death is a prerequisite for her symbolic reinstatement into the social. Her philanthropism, evident in the donation of her eyes after death, carries moral import and contrasts with
Almas's "unethical" feminine wiles and financial authority over her husband. It is on this crux that she is resituated into the Alam household as a retributive memory through the eyes of the maid servant Tara Bai. The agential potentiality of the subaltern can only be indirect here, disguised as innocence and virtue.

With independence, and the end of the colonial era, there was a shift in the constitution and locale of the unconscious. The othering of pre-modern communities like the tribals was in many ways a continuation of the colonial semiotic of displacement and consolidation, now directed into a project of national integration and progress. And their incorporation into administrative categorization and exploitative economic structures is founded on an essentialistic anthropological reading of primitivism that delimits tribal identity and aligns it with the state process of appropriation, homogenization, standardization and monopolization. The professed inclusion of ethnic minorities as legitimate members and participants of the nation, then, is nominal only. The redesignation of the tribals as a monolithic group in a programme of economic development and selective modernization under the aegis of bureaucratic policies is inherently flawed. G.N. Devy observes:
It is necessary to recognize that all tribal communities are not alike, that they are products of different historical and social conditions and that they belong to four different language families and several different racial stocks and animistic moulds. Some of them belong to the primitive stock with a continuous cultural history, others have been pushed out of the mainstream and have been "drop-outs" of our main history, yet others are created by various legal and economic interventions in society. (6)

What he refers to in other words is the political construction of tribal identity, which is overwhelmed by its interpretation almost entirely in ethnic-social terms.

Mahasweta Devi cites the exclusion of the Nagesias from the tribal category in the Bihar census as an instance of the administration’s complicity in withholding legitimate identity to indigenous people (Devi, "Untapped Resources" 16). Though her intervention might have led to an acknowledgement of the independent existence of the Nagesias, it brings little change to their official status. The segregation and exclusion of the subaltern from the process of nation-building, is all the more evident in descriptions of the 1961 census and the 1962 elections in Devi’s "Douloti the Bountiful."

Neglected by development projects and edged out from receiving benefits or relief accruing to them, the census pejoratively termed "body count," forebodes ill for the tribals as it is associated with disasters like
famine and congenital birth defects (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 31). (Devi’s semantic play on the words heightens the irony of the situation.) The subtle relation between the correlatives starvation, malnutrition and infantile abnormalities is lost on them, although the cause not entirely off the mark is attributed to the interventionary presence of outsiders. Their seeming cognitive inability stems from the concourse of diverse ideological processes: the sectoral development of capital in India often in conjunction with feudal economic practices and oppressive market forces, shifts in hereditary economies and means of livelihood, forced displacements, migrations and/or geographical isolation, and the intrusion of Hindu caste system into a non-hierarchical tribal society. Other factors like the imposition of “democratic” politics on an equitable and autonomous tribal political universe, a national discourse of tribal empowerment and preservation that is defective in its epistemological conception and its application due to systemic prejudices and systematic shortsightedness are equally significant.

The state’s belated “discovery” of tribal existence and the manner of their interpellation through citizenship in its agential aspect of enfranchisement, question the efficacy of the system and identify the precarious location of its most vulnerable subjects. Perceiving no visible change in the materialities of their lives, “[e]lection times are good times” when the tribals in “Salt” are each paid a rupee by Uttamchand the landlord to relinquish their representative vote to him as proxy (Devi, *Bitter* 126). Part of an effective democracy, political socialization and political participation as exercises in citizenship are unfamiliar to them as are the privileges and rights they are entitled to.
The history of the tribals' eviction and alienation from their land begin with the “scientific” system of forest management introduced by the British around 1865. Vast tracts of land belonging to indigenous peoples were thus appropriated as reserved forests and government land, under the Land Revenue Settlements legislation, foreclosing tribal rights and traditional links to the forests in the process. However to impute blame solely on imperialism is to condone the discrepancies and flaws in post-Independence socio-economic projects. Indian forest policy in the late 1980s was re-oriented towards “social forestry,” an act aimed at reconciling the conflicting demands of modern industry with the needs of a local populace dependent upon forests for their daily survival (Wenzel 127). What it led to in the end was the large-scale appropriation and abuse of forest resources for commercial purposes to the exclusion of those dependent on them. To a people unfamiliar with the idea of land ownership it was an assault on their very existence, a fact Devi emphasizes in “Salt”:

Adivasis then were as wary as they are today of accounts-document-deeds-laws. Hence the adivasis of Jhujhar don’t even know when they once owned their own land. (Devi, Imaginary 125)

Land for them is a communal possession, corroborated in their oral narratives and marked by the presence of their ancestors. They belong to the land rather than the land belonging to them, the autochthonous relation to the land being both ontological and spiritual.
The influx of people from the plains, due to the laxity of state legislations, further led to the disentitlement of the tribals and deprived them of the means of sustenance. Dispossession of land generates power struggles between indigenous groups and hegemonic caste and class communities that are most visible in the rejection of any initiative on the part of the tribals to integrate into the mainstream through class mobility, as narrated by the tribal Sarpanch in "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" (Devi, *Imaginary* 116). It also creates tensions within tribal communities that lead to their disintegration and gradual demise, changes gender equations, and inflicts additional burden upon the women owing to the inroads made by alien cultures. In such instances, there is violation of identity by both the nation (which is reductionist and excluding in its interpellative processes) and the tribals themselves (in a conscious denial forced by the compulsion to integrate into the nation).

The Block Development Officer's perception of the Aagariya tribals as "junglees" in "Little Ones," in opposition to "[t]he Hindus [who] live in decent spots (Devi, *Bitter* 3), and as "[a]nimals" (Devi, *Bitter* 10) bears the impress of official discourse based on theories of racial superiority and intelligence quotient. In the typical bureaucratic mode of shortsighted planning and complacency, he holds the tribals accountable for their poverty and backwardness. It fails to take into account those national and private projects that forcefully expropriate in the name of industrial development, land occupied by indigenous populations for centuries. Not only does this result in displacement, but also, as in the case of the Aagariyas, the abandoning of their hereditary occupations of mining and trade in iron for
an unsustainable practice like agriculture in a drought and famine-ridden place like Lohri.

“Identity narratives” of origin and destiny are crucial counterparts to the teleological notions of exclusion and damnation (Yuval-Davis 43). For the tribal Aagariyas in “Little Ones” their construction as the demonized other by prevailing ideologies is recorded and affirmed in their originary legend of the combat between the mythical Aagariya youth-hero Jwalamukhi and the sun god in which the latter curses the Aagariyas: “…[A]ll the wealth you earn from iron will turn to ashes” (Devi, Bitter 5). The Aagariyas profess to have become impoverished from that time onwards, further evidenced in the “disappearance” of the rebellious Aagariyas of Kubha and the destruction of their village by the police.

Tribal oppression within the brahminically ordained caste system is so ingrained in the collective psyche that the Nagesia folkloric myth pertaining to birth translates social devaluation into ontological depreciation. It also rationalizes and justifies reigning socio-economic practices which are discriminatory and defeatist in purpose. The cultural ascriptions of this discourse is maintained by dire economic conditions that force tribal communities to attach themselves peripherally to caste groups in various functional capacities despite the fact they are never assimilated by caste Hindu society. And with some circularity, the substantiation of the material and the religio-cultural ordering may be discerned in this worldview of Lord Fate in “Douloti the Bountiful”:
He will look like a head-shaved Brahman.

He will never enter the room with the Nagesia mother and child. He stands outside the shanty and writes with a thick pen in high-Hindi in the clothbound ledger. You will spend your life as you are born. You will never build a home better than a shanty. (Devi, *Imaginary* 22-23)

Brahminism with its monopoly of ritual is invested with the authority and ability to effect the ideological reduction of tribes to caste and “to turn itself into a better adjunct of the State” (Sen 89). In the process, the brahmin class acquires an exclusive sanctity, rewriting tradition to prove their own importance, or to claim special caste-class privileges. This in conjunction with the birth myth is echoed by Ganori Nagesia when he tautologically relates the concept of independence to high caste Brahmins and Rajputs like Paramananda Mishr and Munabar Singh respectively (Devi, *Imaginary* 44).

The culture of citizenship, freedom and rights is intrinsically associated with the upper-castes and/or classes as is their prerogative to governance.

The hidden contestations of hegemony within liberal ideology, and between the categories of citizenship and community are most pronounced in the validity that prescriptive texts retain over the state constitution. When the politics of religion subtly but deliberately displaces a democratic discourse of social politics through the suppression of one form of authority, it eternalizes a material system with configurations and institutions founded on race prejudices and privileges. The logics which sustains this universe, accordingly presume the depression of peripheral communities and gender
groups. Baijnath Mishir a brahmin brothel-owner tells the social workers: “Bondslavery is an ancient law. That is written in religious books” (Devi, Imaginary 84). More precise is Hanuman Misra, the brahmin priest who explains to Puranchand from the Gandhi Mission:

“The caste system and its differences are rules. You are taking the name of Rama the king of the Raghus, but didn’t he kill Shambuk? Shambuk was a Shudra. He killed him after all. Caste difference, untouchability – those are God’s rules....” (Devi, Imaginary 40)

In view of the fact that excluding divisions in India share certain ideological co-ordinates with the interstitial exclusions within liberal politics, the disregarded issue of granting full individuation and citizenship to women and the “othered” enforce ascription along the lines of race, gender and region. Thus the notion of “Mother India” put forward by the Gandhian Puranchand evades the cognition of Rajbi the washerwoman. The pre-Independence nationalist symbol around which the struggle for freedom from colonial rule was mobilized in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century acquires vulgar connotations in independent India with the sexual abuse of lower caste and tribal women and the economic exploitation of their illegitimate children. A sampling of the exchange will serve to further clarify the point:
"We are all offspring of the same mother."

"No Sadhuji, untrue untrue."

"Why?"

"If the offspring of the same mother, we are all brothers and sister yes?"

"Should be."

"But Munnabar doesn't know that. Munnabar's children in my room, Munnabar's children in Mukami Dusadin's place as well, and all these boys are bonded labour. Tell me how this can be."

"Sister, not that kind of mother, Mother India."

"Who is that?"

"Our country, India."

....

"Oh, Sadhuji, my place is Seora village....I don't know country. India is not the country." (Devi, *Imaginary 41*)

To speak of a Mother India in the present circumstances is purposeless, and condones questions of gender in real time and space. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out that the people least susceptible to the ideas of nationalism are the "subaltern as gendered subject, a subject position different from the subaltern as class-subject" ("Breast-Giver" 81).

A writer like Devi often figures class and caste discrepancies as a conflict between the marginalized rural and the political urban centres of the nation-state. The female protagonist from the lower-caste or tribal community is representative of the rural. Though thematically the stories
appear to be about social protest, unrest or repression, the rural with the opening up of its domestic market and the subsequent impoverishment and dislocation of the poor is rewritten into a multi-national world economy in which the Indian state is only a mediator. Simultaneously the national urban mainstream is re-articulated with the consolidation of a hegemonic upper-caste, middle class patriarchy.

The land settlements of the colonial period resulted in the re-empowerment of former landholding groups within the new economic dispensations of market economy and capitalism. In post-Independence India, despite regulatory land legislations, a feudal caste-based, hierarchical structure confronts capitalist economy, paradoxically conflating and sustaining each other to give rise to the agrarian élite. This is unambiguously delineated by Devi in “Seeds,” where Amarnath Misra, nephew of the local pujari, ex-henchman turned contractor of field labour imposes his services on Lachman Singh the upper-caste mahajan explaining that “[t]he seed capital for my services was provided by chachaji himself” (Devi, Bitter 45). Its detrimental impact upon tenants and peasant labourers, already affected by economic depression and reeling under caste prejudices and indifferent execution of land reforms further lead to their penury.

By the end of the 1960s the much acclaimed Nehruvian mixed economics with its scientific principles and centralized structure began to come apart. The emphasis on the development of heavy industry and capital-based agriculture created swathes of unequal development within the nation. This was especially manifest in the rural regions where these
spaces were demarcated along caste and/or ethnic lines. The pressure to accede to international trade policies at the cost of national interests and the requirements of an as yet unstable, incipient economy, left its mark on the high rate of urban poverty and unemployment. Already serious problems, these were aggravated by mass migrations of dispossessed rural poor to the urban centres. The situation was further compounded by a dying agrarian economy unable to keep pace with the rigorous demands of the market, the inflationary effects of drought and famine leading to starvation deaths in West Bengal and food-riots in parts of Bihar.

The failure of the existing political system to administer justice and to institute remedial steps for the restitution of rights was taken up by an increasing radicalism. Its intervention initiated a series of popular struggles and movements in different parts of the country mainly in response to the ruthless measures employed by the government against any form of protest. Students, youth, women's movements and rebel party cadres were at the forefront of these rebellions. Another major political engagement of the 1970s--the Emergency--also led to the generation of radical contestations and a new political consciousness. It marked a turning-point for the reassertion of rights and claims made on the nation, not only to the average middle class liberals but also for various marginalized and expropriated groups. Here local struggles--negligible pockets of resistance--may be treated as allegories for systemic ones.11

According to Sangari and Vaid, women's wide participation in peasant struggles in all probability arose from an awareness of the fact of their
individual and social lives being governed by “foreign” dictates (6). Dopdi Mejhen, the female protagonist in Devi’s “Draupadi” is a tribal-peasant guerilla of the violent Naxalbari movement in West Bengal, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her insurgency derives from a trajectory of socio-economic denials and injustices that function through a ruling collusion of state protectionism and upper-caste, middle class seignorality, a radical coalition between the bourgeoisie left intellectuals and the rural peasantry, and gender differentials. The landowning money lender’s response to the tribals’ demand for access to water resources, discloses the economic and material grounds of the rebellion:

“What is my profit in increasing cultivation with tax money?”

....

Get out of here. I don’t accept your Panchayat nonsense....

(Devi, Breast 29)

And Dopdi’s remarks register its gendered aspect:

“...His mouth watered when he looked at me. I’ll put out his eyes.” (Devi, Breast 30)

Initially it is “Arijit’s voice,” the filtered voice of the intellectual revolutionary, of male authority, which directs her to save her comrades at the risk to herself. When she finally acts for herself in a deliberate perversion of the position of violated victim by challenging the army officer to re-enact her “kounter” or (en)counter as unarmed, sexual object, Dopdi’s struggle within the revolution necessitates a shift in the historical constitution of agency as
one of male conferral, and in notions of the interpellated subject (Devi, *Breast* 37).

At times, women's participation in insurgent movements is viewed as correlative to their function as religio-cultural signifiers. Sharaju, one of the surviving rebels of the local peasant insurrection at a remote village, in Devi's "Water," has the role of the principal sacrificial object thrust upon her on the failure of the sharecroppers' mobilization. The change from female revolutionary to sacrificing agent, from investment in a socio-political cause to a retrogressive ritual involving female mutilation is problematic, expressed in Sharaju's thought of being "crucified" (Devi, *Breast* 178). The forms of agency proffered by the two equally violent "restitutive" modes in spite of their differences communicate an impression of seamlessness. This is due to a hidden (misogynist) consensus on women's symbolic valences, evolved within patriarchy, that exploits Sharaju's cognitive alienation to assume cognate links between her agential capacities in both the systems. Her initial sense of betrayal is thus overwhelmed by the burden of collective expectations and the obligation to act in the larger interests of the community. She is the site where agential notions are put to the test, and hence is denied the status of subject. At the end, the surviving members of the community are forced to migrate to the nearby town as dispossessed rural poor. If they are written out of the discourse of the nation with the political energy of protest having dissipated, their women are twice expunged from its membership. Resonances and parallels to a more ancient fertility cult, evident in the ritual practice of drawing blood from a woman's
breast in order to appease the god for rain, points to a historical tradition of male-mediated female agency.

To conclude, women’s identities in the Indian context are multiple and intricate due to their complex appropriations and refigurations by the categories of gender, class, and caste in conjunction with economic processes, and the imbrications, cross-hatchings and interweavings of these assemblages with the constellations of state, familial, community and or religious formations. Depending on the ascendancy of the prevalent ideology over others, and the formulary systems through which it constructs reality, women’s membership in affiliated groupings affect not only the status and power of some women versus others within groups, but also create contestations between the groupings they belong to.

Rekha Pappu’s observation that the idea of the nation is never conclusively fixed but that the nation or national identity among other things is discursively constituted, can be adopted to a definition of the discursive nature of identity itself. Self-conception here, is contingent on the constant negotiation of the other within a national or even regional framework where ideologies compete over the representation of women. What for some may be a particular reality of the nation, thus, is not so for others cohabiting the same historical time-frame. Reciprocally, the discursive mechanisms of the nation-state may lack the requisite vocabulary to accommodate and hence interpellate certain sections of women into citizenship. Apart from these, identity imagings may take place within the delimited immediate realms of the family, community or ethnicity,
consciously or unconsciously circumventing the determinations of the nation. For instance, the tribal peoples having remained by and large isolated from the mainstream of political and social processes in the country, are loyal to their basic group identity and racial community.

An examination of gender identity in India reveals a complex tapestry of influences—stratified, heterogeneous and plural in dimension. What is apparent is the continued maintenance of the gendered discourses of a singular epistemic cultural reorganization (especially in the northern regions of the nation) as it materialized with the rise of cultural nationalism coeval with pre-Independence political exigencies. Although recomposed in some measure to accommodate changing ideologies—political, economic and social—at subsequent phases in the development and establishment of secular India, the core elements of female knowledge and symbolic values comprising this discourse are still retained. Irrespective of the collectivities and religions involved, they mould state policies leading to the systematic subordination of women through the contemporaneity of tradition. In incorporating the functionings of such interpellating processes, these narratives attempt to draw attention to the cultural prevalence of the past in the present and lay the grounds for a critique of historical rhetorics that relegate women to the margins of the polity even as they insist on their centrality to the nation.

The narratives inscribed by and enabled in part by the body politic of the nation, cannot help but respond to these integral contradictions despite their differential ideological agendas, choices and positions. A writer like
Hyder, for example, consciously responds and attempts to construct the ideal citizen-subject. It however fails to achieve coherence due to the ideological limitations of the particular historical period that impinges on subject constitution. Therefore, the primary inscription of the narratives by the nation-state, etched in subject conception and formation dominates this reading, even though they envision a reconfiguration of women's identities that will reinstate them as equal participants in still-evolving national roles.
Notes

1 Early Urdu literature was didactic in tone and women characters nondescript, seldom developed to the level of living human characters. The cultural extension of leftist ideologies found expression in the socialist commitments of the Progressive Writer's Association in the early decades of the twentieth century. Its adherents drew much inspiration and energy from the anti-colonial and communist movements of the pre-Independence days. Krishan Chander, one of the most prominent writers belonging to this movement, created a new aesthetic influenced by Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis. His women characters were invested with a vibrant charm in the midst of indifferent circumstances, notes Balraj Komal in “The Image of Woman in Urdu Literature” (Bhat 156-57).

2 Benares was the hotbed of Congress socialism, just as resolutions condemning the Congress were passed by the Muslims of Lucknow, observes Majumdar (10:316). Spatial demarcation of social or religious differences is not a phenomenon that set in with communalization. As Gyanendra Pandey points out, a community in a pre-capitalist culture defines itself precisely by “its territoriality and at the same time by temporality” (110). The different sections of the local population may cohere around mutuality of interests, overlapping cultural domains and common residence. However with colonialism, the nature of changes impinging on pre-modern economic structures, social categories, political economies and knowledge-forms “brought a redoubled emphasis on these defining characteristics.”
entrenching the notion of rights over given territories along with exclusive claims to certain aspects of a once common heritage (Pandey 110).

“The Exiles” written by Hyder in 1953 is a recollection of events by Kishwari in England around the period following World War II. The years saw an influx of immigrants from East European countries shrouded by the iron curtain of communism, a Labour government in Britain, a disintegrating Empire in the process of withdrawing from its remaining colonies, and a society immersed in the twin philosophies of high modernity and market economy.

It is necessary to recognize the unevenness of the “universal” with the arrival of (post)Enlightenment thought: the polarizations, selectiveness, discriminations, and denials of both its application and reception in the colonized nations. Couched in the emancipatory idiom of liberal ideology, the egalitarian values it professed were a far cry from the economic and political logics that demanded the withdrawal of freedom, autonomy and the suppression of native cultures in the name of progress, rationality and modernity. The latent exclusions (women and the poor) and prejudices (racial, élitist and western superiority) structuring the universal dovetailed with existing exclusionary formations in colonial India. Their reciprocity engendered new forms of divisions and manners of discriminations which were eventually to find a corresponding vocabulary in the language of democracy.

Nira Yuval-Davis’s definition of citizenship runs thus:
[It is a]...set of normative expectations specifying the relationship between the nation-state and its individual members which procedurally establish the rights and obligations of members and a set of practices by which these expectations are realized. (69)

Women's interests in the initial phase of the movement were compromised by the preponderant goals of the freedom struggle. While the liberation of women from conventional social constraints and their participation in the public sphere as workforce or in education were part of the agenda, gender essentialisms thus remained unchallenged. Nor was individuation encouraged, or for that matter any paradigm of female consciousness proffered for emulation.

Jean Grimshaw in "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Tensions in Feminist Philosophy" points out that the notion of virtue is gendered (Sayers and Osborne 14). The differentiating factor for women and for men is dependent on the greater corrupting potential of female sensibility and the innately weak psychological characteristics which qualify women for a specifically "female" type of virtue, while simultaneously disqualifying them from that type thought appropriate to the male. So what may be considered execrable in women's behaviour may well be the norm for men.

They include the ability to maintain the unity of family life, the solidarity with the kin, a personal sense of responsibility and efficient management of the household within the limits of the "new physical and
economic conditions set by the outside world," according to Partha Chatterjee ("Nationalist" 247).

9This development in a societal rather than religious tangent is paralleled and reinforced in the political realm of Kerala by the communal (comprising of communities that are organized and which exert themselves on the basis of religion and caste) co-existing with the secular in governance (Mathew xi).

10A few adherents of Zoroastrianism fled persecution to the land on the west coast in Gujarat circa AD 973 and came to be known as Parsis or people from Persia. They began moving to small towns from the coastal villages of Gujarat, and were eventually invited by the officials of the East India Company in the eighteenth century to the commercial centre of Bombay to expand their entrepreneurial ventures and trade. In course of time, this flourishing and highly refined community was exposed to and adopted many of the colonizer's sensibilities mainly in the domain of fine arts, music and social etiquette while zealously guarding their peculiar religio-cultural customs and traditions. Independence and subsequent changes in economic spheres, both local and international, witnessed a largely debilitated community whose lived experience continued to occupy the inner border zones between the nation and the ex-empire (Anklesaria 3).

11Rebellions noted for the presence of women were the Srikakulam Movement in Andhra Pradesh from 1967 to 1969, in which armed tribal peasants revolted against the Indian state, and the Bodhgaya Land Struggle in Bihar led by the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (CYSV), a youth
organization that formed the vanguard of the Bihar movement. The CYSV emerged in January 1975 in an atmosphere of socio-economic upheavals and political repressions of the Emergency (Sen 82). The position it took on land rights for women during the struggle against the feudal rule of the Bodhgaya Math (the Shankar Math) was a product of this ferment (Sen 7).