We can be sisters united by shared interest and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity... (hooks 1997:500)

Woman’s speech in public is one of the most important symbols of her entry into the public sphere. As a mode of expression, speech by women came much later than the other forms as the discipline of speech privileged the speaking of men. Women’s public speaking evolved from women speaking to a group on important public occasions, where the audience comprised mostly of women. On such occasions, women spoke from their lives and experiences about their rights and opportunities. This interaction between the speaker and the hearer resulted in the sharing of experiences in a subject-subject relationship where the hearers also felt empowered and re-discovered their selves. In the process of interaction, a feeling of oneness was created and this helped in developing a bond of sisterhood.

The sharing of individual feelings and emotions with a group provided new meanings to the inchoate experiences of women. Drawing on Naomi Schemen’s interpretations of Alice in Toni Morrison’s novel “Beloved”, Satya P Mohanty refers to how a “conscious raising group” served to re-interpret Alice’s personal experience of “anger” in a new light (Mohanty 2000:34). Mohanty shows how by sharing her emotion of “anger” with others in the group, Alice is able to recognize her feeling of anger as “legitimate and justifiable” and a common experience for women (Mohanty 2000:34). Thus, the consciousness raising group gives a “political re-description” to women’s anger. This instance of the part played by the black conscious raising group, in giving a commonality to woman’s experience can also be
applied in the context of woman’s speech where the speaker tries to share her experiences with the hearers and thus establish a bond of sisterhood amongst women.

Assuming this framework of re-interpretation and self discovery of woman’s experiences in a group, this chapter will take up the public speech as a form where woman in the act of public speaking builds up a bond of sisterhood with her female hearers. Drawing a general idea from instances of women speaking in public, it will attempt to see the speech as a medium through which women can create a bond with other women. I will examine Sarojini Naidu’s speeches as two groups: one, her speeches addressed to male audiences, and two, her speeches delivered to female audiences. I will also try to point to the difference in the communicative styles in her speeches addressed to these two separate audiences. As a counterpoint, this chapter will also draw on Gandhi’s speeches to emphasize the difference in speeches made by men and women, especially since many of his speeches to women also focused on the importance of women’s roles.

Public occasions were important platforms for women to speak. In the early years of the women’s movement, women came out and spoke at conventions. These conventions offered important platforms where women found a space to speak in public and voice their private experiences from a public forum. In the keynote address delivered by Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the Seneca Falls, New York on July 19, 1848, she uses the public forum to demand equal rights for women, without losing their essential identities:

We have met here today to discuss our rights and wrongs, civil and political, and not, as some have supposed, to go into the detail of social life alone. We do not propose to petition the legislature to make our husbands
just, generous, and courteous, to seat every man at the head of a cradle, and
to clothe every woman in male attire. None of these points, however
important they may be considered by leading men, will be touched in this
convention. As to their costume, the gentlemen need feel no fear of our
imitating that, for we think it in violation of every principle of taste, beauty,
and dignity; notwithstanding all the contempt cast upon our loose, flowing
garments, we still admire the graceful folds, and consider our costume far
more artistic than theirs (Stanton 2008).

In her famous speech “Ain’t I a woman” delivered on the occasion of the
1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth (an ex-slave)
shows her sense of release and empowerment by speaking of her experiences as a
slave and a woman from a public platform. She uses the occasion to speak of her
emotions and experience as a woman and this act of sharing with the hearers helped
in the dissemination of new ideas about women’s experiences. The following
extract from her speech shows how she evoked the interest of her hearers with her
day-to-day experiences:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, lifted
over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me
into carriages or over mud puddles, or give me any best place! And Ain’t I a
woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and
gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman! I
could work as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it and bear
the lash as well – and Ain’t I a woman? And when I cried out with my
mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me. And Ain’t I a woman (Truth

Through these two excerpts from speeches delivered by two very different
kinds of women at women’s conventions, certain features of women’s speeches can
be assumed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s keynote address which starts with ‘we’
defines this sense of sharing and female bonding. Through this sense of identification, she speaks more intimately to her hearers. The act of public speaking became an effective concern for women to create a separate women’s culture, through the sentiments of collectivity and solidarity that emerged as women felt the sense of other women who were hearing them. Sojourner Truth, in her speech seeks to share her daily experiences with the hearers. In the process, the hearers also identify their selves with her experiences and a common bond is established. The “I” in her speech is not the authoritative “I” but represents the commonality of experiences that her class shared and one that echoes their aspirations.

In India, the nationalist movement offered women a space to speak in public. Women came to speak in public under the aegis of the nationalist movement, finding platforms to voice their own issues of rights and empowerment, along with the issues of nationalism. This saw the emergence of an articulate female elite in the beginning of the twentieth century. Partha Chatterjee explains that the “Women Question” ceased to become an issue for the nationalist discourse by the end of the nineteenth century because of the nationalist refusal to make the issue of women an item of negotiation with the colonial state (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments*: 1999:117). However, the women’s question was expanded by some of the elite women of the time who tried to re-define the significance of the domestic sphere in the public life of the nation. Women like Sarojini Naidu re-figured the private domain into an area that came to be seen as crucial to the nationalist cause. The nationalist movement provided the occasion for women to speak in public. The report of the 1889 Congress Session in Bombay notes that no less than ten women delegates graced the assembly. Among these ten women were Europeans, Christians
(presumably natives), one Parsi, one orthodox Hindu and three Brahmos. Pandita Ramabai was one of the delegates in this session (Kumar 1993:34). The women delegates, although allowed to sit on the platforms were not allowed to speak or vote on resolutions. However, Pandita Ramabai was not content to be merely a non-speaking delegate. She made a forceful speech on the resolution about the practice of cutting off the hair of widowed women:

You men are demanding the rights of representation in British parliament, so that you can voice the opinions of Indians. You have been crying hoarse in this very pandal for freedom of expression. Then why don’t you give the same freedom to women in your families. Why do you force a woman to become ugly and dependent as soon she becomes a widow? Does a widower do that? He has the freedom to do whatever he wants. Then why not the women? (Panandiker 2002: 37-38).

Here Pandita Ramabai uses the occasion of the Congress Session to voice her own grievance against the social injustice committed by men. Her speech focuses on some of the social injustice meted out to women by men. Thus by distancing men as 'you' she creates the feeling of 'we' amongst women.

It was in the 1890 Congress Session where one woman delegate (out of four present) was allowed to speak or rather present a vote of thanks to the president. In the sixteenth Congress Session in 1900, it was Kadambani Ganguli who presented the customary vote of thanks to the president (Kumar 1993:54). Thus it was in these Congress Sessions where women gradually felt empowered to speak in public. While working in Punjab, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani developed the idea of a women's association and organized the "Bharat Stree Mandal," an all India organization of women in 1910, long before the formation of the "Women's India Association" and the "All India Women's Conference". It was at the eighteenth
session of the Congress in December 1904, that Sarojini Naidu first stood up in public to recite her poem “Ode to India”.

I

Sarojini Naidu was first heard speaking in public in Calcutta in 1905 (Sengupta 1966:62). She used the occasion to focus on the importance of women’s roles in national life, and simultaneously imparts to the hearers the significance of women’s feminine roles. Her speeches addressed to men to assert the rights of women, are full of passionate intensity as she feels emotionally involved. Although very much a national figure, in her speeches, she distances herself from her male counterparts to identify with women. In Naidu’s speeches delivered to women, she develops a feeling of sisterhood by sharing the commonality of women’s maternal roles. This collective feeling organized woman into groups which later institutionalized into women’s organization.

It was Gandhi who first conceived of women’s difference as a strength. In his speeches addressed to women, he explains the significance of feminine roles in the life of the nation. Thus, women’s capacity for moral influence is given a central place in his speeches as he says, “Renunciation and non-violence come naturally to women” (Gandhi 43: 253). In a speech delivered at Nausari, on April 3, 1930, he says that women can play an important role in this non-violent struggle because they are the very embodiments of renunciation and compassion (Gandhi 43:173). Gandhi by linking the feminine with national life blurred the boundaries of the public and the private sphere. He conceived the indispensability of women’s roles and empowered them by bringing them to the public sphere. By asserting the importance of women’s roles, he gave them confidence and it was women like Sarojini Naidu
who disseminated this feeling of confidence amongst their hearers in a group. In his speech delivered to the sisters of Bhagini Samaj, Bombay, Gandhi states that the regeneration of women depends on women themselves as "men cannot bring the regeneration of women" (Gandhi 14:202). Gandhi believed for this a proper network was necessary where the more fortunate women could guide their less fortunate sisters. This was based on Gandhi's principle of self-help (Gandhi 14:203) as a corollary and he felt that women's organization could play a major role in the development of the community. Women from the elite section had taken initiative in serving his cause. Sarojini Naidu played a major role in the development of women's organizations in the first half of the twentieth century. In her speeches, she attempted to define the uniqueness of women's role and carve out a separate sphere for women. In the speeches specifically delivered to women, she tried to inculcate a collective feeling of sisterhood that paved the way for women's organizations in the first half of the twentieth century.

Sarojini Naidu's speeches which addressed the issues of women may be divided into two categories: one, where Naidu addressed men on public occasions and two, where Naidu spoke to an all-woman audience in women's clubs, schools and colleges. In the speeches delivered to male hearers, she reproaches the men of India for their injustice towards women. These speeches point out the importance of woman's role in defining the nation. In these speeches she separates the 'you' and the 'us', to show her attachment for the women of India and her distrust and fury at the men. She creates a discourse on women's rights to awaken in the male hearers a sense of the injustice done towards women. In the speeches delivered to women, Sarojini Naidu builds a bond with them by emphasizing the importance of women's
maternal roles and creating a feeling of sharing in the common experience of motherhood. By drawing link with the women of ancient India, she makes the hearers experience the importance of their lives. These exchanges developed the sense of a collectivity amongst women.

Woman’s speeches also serve as an occasion to consider gendered speaking styles. A feminine style is characterized by a personal tone, a reliance on personal experiences, an inductive structure, audience participation and a goal in empowerment (Foss and Griffin 2005:21). Luce Irigaray on conducting an empirical research on men and women’s language, brings out certain features in woman’s use of the language1 (Irigaray 2000:152). Woman’s speech is marked by a more frequent use of the “we” while it is the “I” which dominates man’s speech. Woman’s speech does not follow the male norms of linearity, precision, order and coherence.2 Naidu’s speeches show a sense of identification and likeness with other women. There is more of emotion than reasoning; metaphoric expressions accentuate her emotion. And the questioning style, the fables, the myths, the dreams and metaphors which Naidu weaves into her speech arise from woman’s supposed affinity to the world of the senses.

There was a conviction amongst the nationalist leaders that “what women said was less important than how women spoke”3 (Visheswaran 1996:90). Sarojini Naidu’s biographer refers to an occasion when Pandit Motilal Nehru, after hearing an emotional and poetic presidential address delivered by Sarojini Naidu at Kanpur in 1925 commented thus: “But what did she say?” (Sengupta: 1966:338:) Sarojini Naidu’s speeches were often criticized by the male nationalists as they felt that, “though her language was perfect, constructive points were absent, and after a
speech, the audience came away bewildered with the sheer beauty of the language; but unable to realize what her points actually were” (Sengupta 1966:338). This critique of Naidu’s speech by male nationalists needs to be re-interpreted as a different style of communication. Against the authoritarian male voice, speeches by women tend to be more marked by their evocative content. Men’s speech tend to be more rational and discerning where the language serves to establish a hierarchical relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Irigaray asserts that a woman communicates through her senses in a subject-subject relationship. She shows that when a man speaks he interprets everything from his own perspective. He tries to enforce his thoughts on the other by applying his sense of rationality and logic. Thus, what he says is planned and organized: “Often, in his own tongue, man describes, narrates, states, collects or organizes” (Irigaray 1993:138). When a woman speaks, what she says is not planned and organized. Her speech evolves from her interaction with the other whom she also sees as a subject. Irigaray links these incoherent expressions to the plurality of female sexuality in opposition to the male body where pleasure is concentrated on one organ. The fact that she becomes the other in herself because of her own biological difference makes it difficult for her to express her self in a coherent, rational, linear language structure that defines the writing of man. Without a definite object of expression, her language becomes incoherent:

Women, for her part chats, tattles, gossips, weaves inventions, fables, myths. She exchanges the means of exchange without having any object. Or does she make statements without having any fixed stake in what she has stated?” (Irigaray 1993:138).
Thus, in women’s speech the communication becomes more important than the message itself. Without a definite object, what she says is not clear cut and univocal; she opens up and shares with the other her thoughts and it is this way of communication with the senses in a relationship with the other which is important in women’s language.

Cixous refers to the “torment” women face while speaking in public. To speak in public was an act of transgression for a woman, she breaks all restraints to “lay her self bare”:

In fact, she physically materializes what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she’s saying, because she doesn’t deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech even when “theoretical” or political is never simple, linear, or “objectified,” generalized: she draws her story into history (Cixous 2000: 263).

A woman, as Cixous points out in these lines, speaks though her body; this makes her speech more subjective and rapturous as she refuses to follow a linear sequence. The impassioned speech delivered by Sarojini Naidu to a group of male hearers, at the Indian Social Conference, Calcutta in 1906 shows how she gets emotionally involved in the act. An outburst of expression reveals itself in the extreme scorn with which she accuses the male hearers for their failure to implement any resolutions on women’s education. The ironical tone in the beginning turns into bitter castigation when she blames her hearers that in denying women education they have deprived women of their birthright. The subtle use of the “you” and the “we” makes her identify with women and distances her from men: “It is not you but we who are the true nation builders” (11).
Naidu questions the hearers in order to draw their attention to the subject of women’s education. Through an intersubjective communication in the form of questions, she holds man responsible for depriving women of their right to education:

Does one man dare to deprive another of his birthright to God’s pure air which nourishes his body? How, then, shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? And yet, my friends, man has so dared in the case of Indian women. That is why you men of India are to-day what you are: because your fathers, in depriving your mothers of that immemorial birthright, have robbed you, their sons, of your just inheritance (12-13).

Metaphorical expressions abound in Sarojini Naidu’s speech. For instance, the prospects of “liberty” and “life” that are opened up by the ennobling quality of education serves to break the stasis of “arbitrary limitations”. She states:

Neither can you say to the winds of Heaven “Blow not where ye list”, nor forbid the waves to cross their boundaries, nor yet the human soul to soar beyond the bounds of arbitrary limitations (12).

The metaphor of the waves dissolves all the bounds of “arbitrary limitations,” imposed on Indian womanhood. She pleads the cause of women’s education from the platform of the conference using the image of the maternal:

Educate your women and the nation will take care of itself, for it is as true today as it was yesterday and it will be to the end of human life that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world (13).

Addressing a large gathering of men at the Bombay Special Congress on September 1, 1918, Sarojini Naidu speaks on the primal right of women’s franchise. To speak about equal rights was a transgression on the part of women; therefore, a
nervous excitement marks this speech as she persuades men to provide women with equal rights:

I ask you, that does the duty of a woman ends with the physical agony that she endures for the sake of her sons? Are you not aware that in every Indian house, it is the woman that is the centre of life waiting for the dawn? She is the servant of the household, she is the daily sacrifice, every day of her life of her labours, of her love and devotion to the family. Then, being the servant of the family, being the high priestess of the home, being the true legislator of the destinies of India, is it logical I ask you, is it worthy for you to say that she shall face death with no courage to face life, that she shall sacrifice for the sustenance of the family within the wall of her home and yet be not afforded that primal right which is as much hers as it is yours because she is co-responsible with you for the honour and prosperity of your country? (199).

She directs a volley of questions at men to make them realize the role of women. The impetuous lines show how her personal experiences of frustration and anger as a woman, finds an outlet in speech. Her strong identification with the women of India becomes explicit in this speech as she tries to develop a separate woman's sphere by drawing attention to the role of women. The "I" changes into "we" as she identifies her self with this separate sphere. She defines the uniqueness of this sphere and states that its existence will not act as a hindrance to man:

I do not think that there need be any apprehension that in granting franchise to Indian womanhood Indian woman will wrench the power belonging to man. Never, never, for we realise that men and women have separate goals and separate destinies and that just as a man can never fulfill the responsibility of a woman, a woman cannot fulfill the responsibility of man. Unless she fulfils the responsibility within her horizon and becomes worthy and strong and brave, there can be no fullness and completeness of national life (200).
Gandhi also defined the distinctive role of women but Naidu's speech reveals her awareness of the need for a separate woman's public sphere or space:

The desire of participating in the public sphere was not to interfere with you in your public functions but rather that we might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps and instill them with the ideas of nationality (200).

Her solidarity with the women of India is emphasized through her use of the collective pronoun. In her identification with the cause of the women of India, she asserts their rights from the public platform.

In her memorandum before the Joint Committee of the Lords and Commons on August 11, 1919, Sarojini Naidu makes an appeal for the women of India. She stated that she had come to appeal for woman's franchise and to refute the argument of women's franchise as premature and radical. She asserts the capacities and power of women when she says: “there is no summit to which she might not aspire or attain in any sphere of our national energy or enterprise unhampered save by the limitations of her own personal ambition and ability” (204).

In her reply to the address of the people of Guntur at AELM College Hall, on July 1915, she uses Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* as a metaphor. She says that as the “Seven Lamps of Architecture,” had illuminated western civilization, women of India had the ability to illuminate the nation with their seven hundred thousand lamps. She chastises men for having snuffed out these lights by failing to provide the daily oil and thus, holds them responsible for depriving women, blaming them for not giving women the opportunities to realise all the hidden virtues that lie within their souls (41).
Naidu says that beside the many lamps of gold, whose brilliance had remained hidden, she is only a clay lamp. She tries to persuade her hearers that given the opportunities, the seven hundred thousand “hidden” lamps have the potential for emitting brightness. By focusing on the spiritual role of women, she tries to give them a distinct identity. In this way, she attempts to visibilize the role of woman:

But believe me when I say that those who kept alive – that fire are not the men who go to earn money, the men who become a little blurred, as it were, in the clearness of vision for mere existence but rather it is their spiritual entity that they kept at home, that spiritual comradeship that stands at home and tends the family fire. And so it is to them that you must give the opportunity of so equipping themselves and make themselves capable of realizing their higher ideals and then it will certainly be never said that our women are backward (42).

The privileging of woman in her maternal aspects becomes an important devise of persuasion in her speeches addressed to men. Addressing the 1916 session of the Congress (under the presidency of Annie Besant), she made her appeal on the Arms Act not as a representative citizen of an imagined community but, in the accents of a mother demanding rights for a son intent upon winning or preserving his manhood:

It is suitable that I who represent the other sex, that is, the mothers of the men whom we wish to make men and not emasculated machines, should raise a voice on behalf of the future mothers of India to demand that the birthright of their sons should be given back to them (61).

Sarojini Naidu certainly made the appeal in the conventional and self-effacing accents of the maternal, which had come to trope woman’s identity in the public sphere in the early twentieth century. Her strong sense of identification with the
maternal expresses itself in this speech. She was influenced by Annie Beasant, who drew on Hindu traditions to advocate maternalist feminism which sought to apply the compassionate, personalized and humane spirit of motherhood to public life. The point of difference, as mothers of the nation was emphasized by Naidu as an argument for women’s right to education, emancipation and franchise.

In 1918, at the eighteenth session of the Bombay Provisional Council at Bijapur, Sarojini Naidu challenged the gendered exclusion of women from the public sphere. She introduced the resolution that was taken earlier by the Bombay Provisional Conference asking that the word “man” should also include “woman,” in discussing the rights of citizenship when the Congress-League scheme comes into existence (193). She asserts the growing sense of consciousness of women: “Meanwhile the other women of India by the score – by the hundred – felt awakened to their own responsibilities and to their own privileges in the great reconstruction to come” (195). She uses this slightly inflated rhetoric to make her hearers aware of the gradual consciousness in women of the need to participate in the public sphere which would contribute to the reconstruction of the nation. She clearly points to the growing consciousness of women about their rights as a reason for their recognition of their political capacities and the right to full franchise: “Their position is this, that so far from demanding a condescension of a partial franchise recommended by men, they are in a position to ask for full franchise on suitable conditions” (195). She questions men to evaluate the place of women in the life of the nation: “The question is whether in the reconstruction of the national life it will be possible for you to have a rich national life unless and until it is shared and supported by women who are the soul of citizenship and life of the Nation?” (195).
Sarojini Naidu emphasized the sustenance that women could give to the nationalist movement. In her highly charged prose addressing the 1917 Calcutta Congress on the subject of women’s activism she says:

I am only a woman, and I would like to say to you all, when your hour strikes, when you need torchbearers to lead you, when you need standard bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holders of your banner, and the sustainers of your strength. And if you die remember the spirit of Padmini Of Chittor is enshrined with the manhood of India (155).

Here the long, breathless sentences show how her identification with women make her totally involved and charged as, she even goes on to identify herself with the historical Padmini of Chittor. Thus in all her speeches addressed to predominately male audiences, it becomes evident that she quickly adopts a position – a position where she identifies her self with the Indian woman. This explains the impassioned expressions in her speeches. Like Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu also valorizes women’s traditional qualities of sacrifice and sustenance in family and community, but the intensity of expression represented in the long, impetuous sentences, marks a distinct feminine style of expression. All her speeches addressed to men on the subject of women are directed at visibilizing the role of women and making their identity felt in national life.

II

Naidu’s speeches to an all woman audience is marked by two intentions: (1) To emphasize the importance of women’s maternal role and to make her hearers share in this feeling. (2) To raise and share the confidence of the hearers by salvaging the liberty, agency and dignity of women. These positions point towards
an interactive mode that is different from Gandhi's authoritarian style. The collective pronoun "we" that she regularly uses in her speeches, is further accentuated by the address "you". For Sarojini Naidu, the hearers become her equals with whom she shares her feelings and emotions. Thus, a bond is established through this communicative process.

In the works of J.L Austin there has been a considerable impetus to consider the rhetorical meaning as the basis of linguistic meaning, rather than the utterance itself. The use of metaphors in women's speeches implicitly indicates a certain message on the hearers. Although the utterance is not explicitly stated, it is able to create an impact on the hearers. Austin identifies three distinct levels of action beyond the act of utterance itself. He distinguishes the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, and what one does by saying it, and dubs these the "locutionary", the "illocutionary" and the "perlocutionary" act, respectively (cited in Rabinowitz 2008:348-349). Perlocutionary act is the act of producing "certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or action of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons" (cited in Rabinowitz 2008:349). It follows from the act of speech as the meaning is implicitly stated. Women's speeches produce silent effects of subversion and counter discourse where the meaning reverberates on the hearers. This gives an agency to women's speeches where she is able to join the hearers in a collective unity.

Sarojini Naidu re-deployed the rhetoric of difference to politicize consciousness and to contribute to social transformation. The rhetoric of difference takes as one of its principle tasks the revaluation of women's role in the nurturing of life. The idea of difference is not in opposition to each other but supplements each
other. It is in the comradeship of the sexes that future Indians shall come out, men and women working hand in hand and supplementing each other. Through her speeches Sarojini Naidu extends women’s domestic status from being “the locus of the home” to becoming an independent citizen of the emerging nation state. She explains the intimate relation between women’s life and the progress of a nation: “Remember that woman does not merely keep the hearth fire of your homes burning but she keeps also the beacon fire of national life aflame” (175). By extending the imagery of “keeping the hearth fire burning” to “keeping the fire of national life burning” she makes her a political subject. Women’s traditional qualities of care, love, sacrifice and sustenance are extended to the public sphere as women are expected to participate in the public sphere by the virtue of these qualities – “it is she who keeps the soldier heart in time of battle and the priest heart at the time of peace” (175). They are to be considered as ideal political subjects by virtue of their nurturing functions, their moral resistance strategies and their meekness.

III

Sarojini Naidu’s speeches can be read against Gandhi’s as she was influenced by Gandhi. However, Gandhi’s speeches addressed to women show a difference in his communication style. I will refer to some of the speeches he addressed to women in different conferences and groups. These speeches emphatically state the gender based difference between men and women. He distinguishes both the roles of men and women and emphasizes the need for woman’s education. For instance, in a speech delivered at a women’s meeting in Bhagini Samaj he says:
Man is supreme in the outward activities and therefore it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge there of. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of women and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into water tight compartments or that some branches of knowledge should be divided into water tight compartments but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminatory appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of men and women cannot be developed (Gandhi 14:207).

The calm and controlled tone of his speech from the beginning to the end, appears like a sermon, and is in sharp contrast with Naidu's evocative tone. Unlike Naidu's speech, a one-way communication process is at work, as he does not seek an interaction with the hearer. He becomes the autonomous subject putting forward his views to the hearers; logic, linearity, precision, clarity and order marks his speech as he tries to convince to his hearers. He is the subject and his hearers are the object, thus, a subject-object relationship follows. As against the questions in Naidu's speech, assertive statements mark Gandhi's speech. The authoritarian voice or the sermonizing tone leaves very little scope for interaction. Therefore, the use of the "you" or "we" which makes the speaker either distance himself or identify with the hearer is very limited here and it is his enigmatic personality that keeps them spellbound. Thus in Gandhi's communicative style, there is a gap between the audience and the speaker whereas in Naidu, she is at one with the hearers.

The perlocutionary performance of Gandhi's speeches addressed to women was intended at reforming the community by assigning the spiritual responsibility on women. Gandhi's notion of nationalism was different from the western definition as it was spiritual in temper. He related "swaraj" with spiritual freedom and believed that non violence was the first step towards "swaraj". Gandhi believed that women
were the upholders of dharma and it was the duty of women to propagate dharma to the people. In a speech addressed at a women’s meeting at Kathlal, May 4, 1921, he says:

It is not in the hands of the Brahmins or of men to preserve dharma. It is entirely in the hands of women to do so. The foundation on which society rests in the home and dharma is to be cultivated in the home. A fragrance in the home will spend all over society. A city may have flourishing trade and a long population but if the home were not well kept, I would unhesitatingly say that the city was not good. Women are the presiding deities of the home. If they do not follow dharma, the people would be totally destroyed (Gandhi Vol. 20:63).

Gandhi’s speech follows a deductive structure as he uses arguments to support his point that women were the upholders of dharma. He believed that the home could inculcate spiritual values in its members, and with women being the locus of the home, they could infuse ‘dharma’ into its members. Gandhi felt that each woman had in her all the qualities of modesty necessary for the spiritual regeneration of the nation. As such, it was very important to inculcate these qualities amongst men in order to enhance the moral spirit of nationalism. Through his speeches Gandhi wanted to generate a moral and non violent community which was possible if women took the initiative. Thus, Gandhi’s speech is organized into a unified whole as he tries to disseminate his belief to the audience. Therefore, his speeches are definitely planned and organized unlike Naidu’s. In another speech at a Women’s Meeting in Poona, on November 16, 1920, Gandhi affirms that women can bring a spiritual regeneration of the nation by producing brave men. He says, “The country will produce brave men only when the women have courage in the heart, have bhakti and faith, when God has become the Lord of their heart and they
have learnt to fear Him alone, and to fear no men” (Gandhi 18: 440). There is a sense of directness in his speech as he tries to establish that the urgency of the moment demanded women practicing dharma. Gandhi’s logic in his speech follows the deductive pattern as he moves from the general to the particular. For instance, in the same speech he gives examples to show how in the past women consciously followed “dharma as Draupadi and Damayanti” (Gandhi 18: 440).

Thus, he affirms his belief that women could play a major role in the formation of the nation by their practice of dharma. He uses the paradigmatic figures of “Parvati”, “Kaushalya”, “Draupadi” and “Damayanti” to support his point. He states that in the present times, the “Bhagini Samaj” could set an example by developing their own network. In his address to the sisters of the Bhagini Samaj at Bombay, he entrusts them with the responsibility of bringing about a general development of women:

The Samaj is dedicated to the noble aim of women’s regeneration and in the same way that another tapascharyan and does not help one to ascend to heaven; men cannot bring about the regeneration of women. I do not mean to say that men do not desire it or that women would not want to have it through men’s help. I merely wish to place before you the principle that it is only self help that an individual or a race can rise (Gandhi 14: 202).

He assigns the task of regenerating women to women themselves. He persuades the hearers by his logic. In the same speech, he motivates the sisters of the Bhagini Samaj to impart the basic knowledge on health and hygiene to the women of the community. Here we have more use of the “you” as here he instructs the sisters to follow his principles:
In practical terms this means that you should spare as much time as you can to visit the most backward localities. If you have joined men in their religious, political and social activities, acquaint them with these. If you have gained any special knowledge about the bringing up of children, impart it to them. If you have studied and realized in your experience the benefits of clear air, clear water, clear and simple food and exercise, tell these women about them too. In this way you will raise yourselves and them (Gandhi 14:206).

Gandhi believed in the regeneration of the private sphere and this was possible only through women. Gandhi’s speech is based on a practical approach where these sisters could work for the upliftment of women by helping their less fortunate sisters. In a speech addressed by Gandhi at a women’s conference in Dandi on April 30, 1930, Gandhi states that there are certain activities that are meant only for women. Prohibition and boycott of foreign cloth are such activities; which unless women take up, will never be accomplished. This speech is motivated to utilize the qualities of women in the development of the nation. He persuades his hearers to take the initiative in performing these rudimentary roles in order to set examples to the society (Gandhi 43. 253). All his arguments point in one direction – to make his hearers participate in the life of the nation by making them realize the importance of their roles. Like Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu used the form of speech to emphasize the feminine qualities of sacrifice and sustenance as significant to national life. However, unlike the one argument that sustains from the beginning to the end in Gandhi’s speech, various deviations mark Naidu’s speech. Her speeches are in the form of dialogues where she freely interacts with the hearers. Unplanned and disorganized, they do not follow the “male” structure of linearity. Thus, a distinct
feminine style characterizes her speech and this activated a feeling of sisterhood amongst her hearers.

IV

In this section, I return to Sarojini Naidu’s speeches delivered to all women audience as I had mentioned in the second section. As a woman speaking to other women in women’s conferences, clubs, schools and colleges, Sarojini Naidu’s speeches are marked by a more frequent use of the ‘we’ to show her identification and bonding with the women of India. Her presidential address delivered at the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) in Bombay in 1930 creates a feeling of unity where she shares the experiences of women with her hearers. She says:

We are not weak, timid and meek women. We hold the courageous Savitri as our ideal; we know how Sita defied those who entertained those suspicious of her ability to keep her chastity. We possess the spirit of creative energy to legislate the moral of the world (cited in Chaudhuri 2004).

A bond is created where the hearers are able to conceive the greatness of their roles. Her address reverses the rhetoric of oppression into strength. The stereotypical virtues of Sita and Savitri are subverted to make them repositories of power and strength. She demonstrates both Sita’s determination to call upon mother earth to avenge the challenge to her honour and Savitri’s determination to bring back her husband from the realms of death, thereby proving their capability while standing as models of empowerment for Indian women. She believed that the sustaining power of tradition was necessary for this realization. Hindu revivalism of this kind which foregrounded the indigenous came to be explicitly linked with feminist activities by Annie Besant (Kumar 1993:55).
The primary intention in Gandhi's speeches was to generate a judgment in the hearer. In Gandhi's speeches addressed to women in public gatherings what is heard is a single authoritarian voice—a voice which is set apart from the crowd. In contrast, Sarojini Naidu's speeches addressed to women show a close identification of the speaker with the crowd. She developed an intrinsic relation to the crowd before whom she spoke. In the 22nd Annual Social gathering of the Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club at the Chanda Ramji Hindu Girls' High School, in Bombay, on January 10, 1916, Naidu begins by sharing her feelings about the club and goes on to speak on women's units and ends by upholding the bonds of sisterhood and motherhood (58). Unlike the scorn in her speeches addressed to men, here she has a friendly rapport with the hearers. She begins on a note of reverence and gratefulness to the founder of the club, Mrs. Ramabai Ranade for her arduous efforts in sustaining the club. She quickly develops a line of communication with her hearers by sharing the pains and sufferings of womanhood. This is obvious in her use of plural: "Knowing our social conditions and traditions—we are suffering for centuries—you will know what determination must have been necessary for the founders of this club in its early days" (58).

Setting a common goal, she makes the hearers empathize with the founders of the club and thus collectively work for the cause of womanhood. She encourages them to participate in the mental and artistic activities fostered by the club and makes them aware that the progress of the nation depended on its women. The tacit urge to disseminate the cause of women's issues which later institutionalized into women's organizations expresses itself at the end where she asserts her faith in the sisterhood of women:
Now the time has come to recognize the sisterhood of women of all 
religions and nations. Women are not as different from one another as man 
is from one another. Women may form a sisterhood more easily because 
they are bound to every woman in the world by the common divine quality 
of motherhood. We must remember that one individual may not do great 
things alone but by unity in this Club we may do service to all. The need to 
motivate women with new consciousness of their regenerative roles 
depends upon women's units (60).

She distinguishes between relationship amongst men and those amongst 
women on the grounds that in the latter a collective feeling is aroused on the basis of 
common experiences. Thus, she distinguishes the subject-subject relationship of 
woman with the subject-object relationship of man. In this speech her use of the 
words “sisterhood”, “bound”, “motherhood”, “common”, “units” show how she 
atttempts to create a powerful bond amongst women. Her speech is directed to focus 
on the all-important role of “women’s units” in inspiring women to a common 
cause. She creates a discourse about women’s units as organization which can 
uphold and strengthen the progress of women. Thus, the members of the social and 
literary club are inspired with new directions to strengthen their cause.

The growing need to organize women was felt in the early half of the 
twentieth century. The decade 1910-1920, reveals the “first attempts at setting up all 
India Woman’s organizations”. Sarojini Naidu attempts to forge a unity amongst 
women by the ennobling and sustaining powers of motherhood. The reiteration of 
the common bond of sisterhood generates a feeling of the growing need to organize 
women’s networks.

In another speech addressed on the occasion of the opening of a women’s 
school in Mylapore, on July 10, 1918 Sarojini Naidu, uses the metaphor of sowing
to speak about school education. Naidu shares with her hearers the effort that had to be put into women’s education as it involved the training and fostering of life. She states that the new life sown should be an inheritance of the past and not alien from the past. Thus, Naidu makes the hearers aware that the education of women should be based on past ideals. The metaphorical statements, the reference to her personal experience of reading and the pauses and breaks, develops a kind of rapport with the hearers.

On the occasion of the prize distribution ceremony at the Kanya Mahavidyalay, Jullunder, on March 31, 1918, Sarojini Naidu begins her speech with the metaphor of the wandering singer who wanders from city to city with two bundles tied onto the two ends of his stick:

My Punjabee friends, You have all seen in your cities, it is very common sight in India, the wandering singer with a stick on the shoulder with two bundles tied on its each end going from city to city, singing his songs. I stand before you today as a wandering singer like that with all my possessions carried in my two bundles of hopes. These are the only things which I have in this world. Exactly like a wandering singer I too, am going from city to city and like him too I have always something to dream about every new city that I visit. My dreams have not always proved shattered illusions but have come some time as realised hopes too. Today we in India stand upon the verge of destiny, a glorious destiny. This is no more nightmare, no mere poet’s dream, but the dawn is already in sight, the glorious dawn that would lit up the eastern sky and fill it with light (171).

The reference to her dreams, her hopes, and her songs show how she tries to share her personal feelings with the girls of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya. The abundance of metaphors emphasize her distinct style of expressing personal experiences and emotion. She develops an emotional attachment with the hearers as
she states: “The women of the Punjab who are to be the redemption of this land of the five rivers, greeted me first of the Punjab and I would never forget their kindness and their welcome” (173). Slowly she goes on to speak about the standards of women’s education and emphasizes the true capacity of Indian women. It is here that she propagates the rights of women: “But I will say this that man ought to share with women all his rights. He should remember the immutable principle that women have equal rights with man. Her right is slumbering – is almost in a moribund condition, but it has to be revived” (62). A thematic analysis of the speech shows an inductive structure where she generalizes the capacities and rights of women after expressing her personal experiences. In the first part she talks of her personal experiences – her dream and travels, and then goes on to talk about women in general. This style of sharing her experiences and of taking the hearers into confidence makes the process of women’s lives a journey undertaken together.

Sarojini Naidu, in proposing a resolution on the subject of women’s education in the Indian Social Conference held at Bombay on December 30, 1915, delivered a speech to a mixed group, comprising both men and women. She shares her affinity with the women hearers and takes the liberty to even reproach them as she says, “My reproach is to the women of India, and though I make it in their presence I do it as a woman speaking to women…”(54).

She ends her speech by identifying herself with the women of India:

We ask for nothing that is foreign to our ideals, rather we ask for a restoration of those rights, the rights that are the ‘immortal treasures.’ We ask only that we may be given the chance to develop our body and spirit and mind in that evolution that will re-establish for you ideal woman-hood, not an impossible womanhood such as poets may dream of, but an ideal
womanhood that will make noble wives who are helpmates, strong mothers, brave mothers teaching their sons their first lesson of national service (57).

Here she expands the role of woman and connects it with the nation as the future progeny of the nation depend on her. She drew on the image of the country as mother popularized by the nationalists and transformed it for the empowerment of ordinary women. Representations of the mother as “defenders of civilization” were popularized through the media and through the speeches and writings of Sarojini Naidu. She used these symbols to develop solidarity amongst women. Often pamphlets were also distributed to motivate women students to join the movement. The iconic representation of Durga is utilized to unite women in a common cause. The widespread acceptance, even valorization of positive constructions of femininity through the mother figure served as an ennobling model for women. Naidu mobilized women by relating this mother figure, the repository of power and strength, to Indian womanhood. The idea of motherhood came to encompass spiritual and moral influence as well as domestic nurturance. Women’s maternal role served to draw the domestic/private sphere closer to the public sphere. She emphasizes the power of maternal influence to shape the character of future generations.

As such, woman’s specific moral activities are given a central place in her speeches. The experience of nurture which goes with the maternal is connected with national life to increase the visibility of woman’s sphere. Sarojini Naidu valorizes these traditional feminine qualities as a strategy to empower her women hearers and to locate agency in these acts.

The position of difference as mothers is celebrated in feminist assertion of maternal power by such women as Sarojini Naidu and Madam Cama in the early
The role of nurturance was seen as a sense of strength. With a view to valorize this difference, Naidu shows the centrality of the domestic space in shaping the life of the nation. On being elected as the first Indian woman president of the National Congress in 1935, Sarojini Naidu declared that:

Mine as becomes a woman, is a most modest, domestic programme: merely to restore India to her true position as supreme mistress in her own home; sole guardian of her vast resources, and sole dispenser of her own rich hospitalities as a loyal daughter of Bharat Mata. Therefore it will be my lovely, though difficult, task through the coming year to try to set my mother's house in order (cited in Chaudhuri 2004: xx).

The speech also valorizes women's maternal role. The image of the "maternal home" and the recourse to a domestic imagery to signify the nation and the responsibility of keeping the "maternal house in order" not only extends the task of shaping the nation but also circumscribes it within the familiar. Here Naidu figured India as a home and the Indian woman as the mother on whose capacity to maintain orderliness the life of the nation depended. The rhetoric of the feminine - 'modest' and 'domestic' are expanded to make woman the focal point of power - the "supreme mistress" in her own home. The centrality of her role in the private sphere is further stretched to the public sphere to make her the "sole guardian of her vast resources" at the same time not excluding her traditional role as "sole dispenser of her rich hospitalities". The rhetoric of magnitude - "supreme mistress", "sole guardian" and "sole dispenser" are built up to expand and empower the traditional roles of woman so as to confirm her competence in the public sphere, while at the same time maintaining the distinctiveness of her role as loyal daughter of "Bharat Mata". Antoinette Burton has shown how in relating the home to the nation, the
twentieth century feminists have re-appropriated the discourse of house and home as upheld by male Indian nationalists since the nineteenth century and refigured it as a new subject of public political discourse (Burton 2003:9-10). Women's maternal role served to draw the domestic/private sphere closer to the public sphere. This blurring of private and public domains served to expand the boundaries of the domestic sphere.

Blurring of the boundaries of the public and the private also opened the prospects of rights into the private sphere. The point of difference as mothers of the nation was emphasized by women themselves as an argument for women's right to education, emancipation and franchise. This consciousness brought about the putatively discrete spheres into a substantial commerce with each other, facilitating Indian women's participation in nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sarojini Naidu in her speech on the occasion of the prize distribution of the Kanya Mahavidyalay, Jullandar, 1918 explicitly states that "the old partition between the Mardana and Zenana is broken down forever" (176). The consciousness of women as political subjects led to the "zenana erosion" between 1910-1920s which subsequently became more obvious with Gandhian activities in the 1930s (cited in Burton 2003:12).

Sarojini Naidu through her speeches explained the notions of freedom in the Indian context. Her notion of freedom was not in opposition to men but in acceptance of the "difference" between men and women. She knew that the tone of western feminism which was relentlessly critical of male oppression was inconsistent with the ethos of Indian lives. She accepted the value systems in Indian societies where men and women have functioned under rigid hierarchies within the
family. Her realization of a distinct personhood of women was based on a mutual trust between men and women. She states like Gandhi that women's entry into the public sphere is an extension of her domestic roles assigned to her. Speaking about women's franchise to men she says in a public meeting that women's desire to participate in the public sphere was not to interfere with men in their public functions but "rather that women might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps and instill them with the ideas of nationality" (200). In changing the contours of the domestic sphere, Sarojini Naidu focuses on the need for women's franchise. She raised the question of franchise with the indignant surprise, "that she shall sacrifice for the sustenance of the family within the walls of her home and yet not afforded that primal right which is co responsible for you for the honour and prosperity of the country?" (199). She looks at the notions of freedom as they apply to women, and her demand for freedom which includes franchise is significant because it is linked with the formation of woman's self and identity.

In her speech delivered in Urdu, before a large gathering of students of the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, at Jullundur on March 30, 1918, Sarojini Naidu says that it was narrow-minded people who condemned women's education (168). She focuses on legendary women like Savitri, Chand Bibi and Ahalya Bai who accompanied their husbands in "the wars and the wilderness of the jungles" (169) to criticize the purdah system and the restraints put on women's mobility. She claims that if women are allowed their freedom, men would be immensely rewarded as women would support them in times of desolation and darkness. She tries to convince men that
unless women are free, the nation will not be able to claim its freedom: “liberty of
the soul will be India's share only when woman is free” (171).

In asserting the rights of women not in opposition to men but by making
them conscious of the half of the population who could also participate in public life
through collaboration with men, Sarojini Naidu valorized difference in women. The
home based qualities of nurture and care were given visibility and aligned to the
public sphere. This inspired women to exert their influence beyond the boundaries of
the domestic sphere and kindled a feeling of solidarity amongst them. Such
consciousness facilitated the emergence of an articulate female elite who organized
themselves to form women's associations in the early half of the twentieth century.
The notions of freedom also brought in awareness of rights and responsibilities as
well as of problems. The knowledge that responsibility for awakening women
belonged to women alone also helped to forge a bond of sisterhood. In the
beginning, the women's organizations were started by men but gradually the
leadership of these movements was taken up by women. Issues and questions were
raised from the perspective of women rather than that of men. Journals and
magazines came to be published exclusively by women. Sarojini Naidu was a
regular contributor to the Indian Lady's Magazine published by Kamla Satthianadan.
Since she identified herself so closely with the cause of women, her speeches show
a genuine concern for women's issues which she addressed by transcending the
boundaries of class and caste.
Notes


1. Irigaray states that, “women and men are more different than Black and White, Catholic and Moslem European and Oriental”. In order to highlight these differences, she conducted research on the ways in which women and men speak (Irigaray 2000:152).

2. The plurality of female sexuality, the fact that she is indefinitely other in herself has its effect on her language in which she “sets off in all directions leaving him unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words somewhat made from the standpoint of reason …”. (Irigaray 1985:29).

3. Visweswaran points out that the impact of women’s speech was denied its importance; it was felt that women did not speak at all, but rather made noise. This can be explained through woman’s affinity with the world of the senses.

4. Perlocutionary act is different from locutionary and illocutionary act as this is the performance of an act by saying something as opposed to the locutionary acts of saying something or illocutionary act in saying something (Rabinowitz 2008:349).

5. A message from Sarojini Naidu in one such pamphlet says: “Till now we have been spectators, but now we have to do something. What your duties are you all know. You have to displace the throne of Britain. Do you think of yourself as small girls. You are powerful Durgas in disguise. You shall sing the nationalist songs wherever you go. You shall cut the chain of bondage. And free your country. Forget about the earth. You shall move the skies” (cited in Thapar 2006:86).
Works cited


