Conclusion

This study has tried to assert the existence of a separate women’s voice, in the writings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and a rationale for it in the nationalist struggle. Besides the formation of the nation, which was central in all the literary forms practiced by men during that time, women’s use of these genres reveals a different voice. Women’s distinct mode of articulation in their writings and speeches makes it obvious that the method of writing or speaking adopted by the dominant discourse of nationalism cannot act as a representative model for studying women’s voices. The ideologies which shape the discourse of nationalism, as reflected in the commanding and elite male voice tends to submerge marginal voices under its totalizing umbrella. Women are reified as “Goddess” and “models of sacrifice” in the mother image which dominates the discourse of nationalism, their real selves are lost in the midst of these cultural identifications. The dissertation makes an attempt to hear women’s own voices and affirm their agency in their writings. Their writings become an act of claiming subjectivity in spite of the prevailing social sanctions. This brings a new epoch to woman’s poetry, letters, fiction and speeches written or delivered during the period of the nationalist struggle.

The project represents women’s voices in the writings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. It obliterates the hierarchical structure of the Cartesian subject-object relationship and tries to establish a balance between the mind and the body instead of affirming one against the other. Dutt’s and Naidu’s feminine selves, which emerge from their biological difference give expression to the qualities of love, care and sympathy and this is reflected in their writings, in the literary forms of poetry, fiction and speech, which became popular during the period of the nationalist
struggle. The project has tried to show how the expression of their feminine selves through specific literary forms makes their voices different from the voices of men.

As against the trope of the “mother” which was used as a major rhetorical device in men’s use of these forms, Dutt and Naidu used these forms to reveal the reality of their own experiences. They subverted the epistemological and ethical perspectives of the discourse by speaking “in a different voice” – a voice which is closely related with their experiences as women. Their use of these literary forms affirmed women’s position as subjects, contrary to the representations of women as objects of worship or love in the writings of men. The symbolic roles allotted to women in the novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore and in the speeches of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had facilitated the development of women’s subjectivity. The other four chapters have shown how such growth as female subjects helped them to express themselves in the literary forms – in the form of poetry and letters as used by both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, in the fictional form as used by Toru Dutt and in the mode of speech as used by Sarojini Naidu. A distinct woman’s voice can be heard in their choice of topic and in the styles of writing they adopted in these forms.

The concept of ‘the nation as mother’ emerged and evolved during the period of the nationalist struggle. The iconic representation of the mother in the writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Aurobindo Ghosh was used as an empowering symbol to retrieve and define the glorious past and to combat the colonial discourse. Rabindranath Tagore directed his interest towards images of the real woman while Gandhi added a new perspective by conceiving of women’s enduring influence in the identity of the nation. However, these very constructions
proved obstructive in giving expression to a woman’s own self and the reality of her experience. It is in their distinctive use of literary forms that women successfully expressed their selfhood and the value of their private experiences.

In sharp contrast to the evocative martial strains in the poetry of the nation, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu wrote poems that reveal their womanly selves. Unenthused by masculine memories and the masculinization of national culture that was presented to counter the colonial representation of the Bengalis as “effeminate,” and against the grand and declamatory style through which the martial spirit was valorized, Dutt and Naidu adopted the quiet, reflective lyric voice. The ambiguity with which Toru Dutt responded to a new national identity finds expression in her collection of poems *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* where her tensions with social strictures—especially the strain of conforming to the feminine codes—are implicitly felt. In *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, she subverts the myths with the reality of her own experiences. Mythical tales in this collection of poems are retold through the individual experience of hearing these stories told by her mother during her childhood. The feminine roles are valorized but in a different way from that of the dominant strain of nationalism. Dutt focuses on Savitri’s role as a wife—her qualities of providing “comfort” and “help” to others emphasizing Savitri’s qualities of both the head and the heart, showing her recognition of body and mind as existing in a neat balance, and not as a hierarchy. The feminine principle of sympathy and the recognition of a female cosmos in the natural world is focused in Toru Dutt’s retelling of some of the poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. In the poem “Buttoo” where she narrates the Ekalavya episode from the Mahabharata, her sympathy for the wronged “Buttoo” is more
poignant than the general interpretation of the story as a parable of devotion and virtue. The feminine qualities of love, care and sympathy for the other are reflected in her retellings of “The Hind and the Panther”. It is the voice of care which is emphasized in Toru Dutt’s selection of a poem like “The Hind and the Panther” as she sets aside the scientific view in favour of consciousness in her retelling of the legends. In all these narrative poems, it is the feminine voice which is implicit.

The lyrics in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* offered Toru Dutt an opportunity to express her experiences freely. Here she writes of her own pleasure in listening to the ancient stories from her mother in the poem “Sita”, contemplates the beauty of her garden in the poem “Baugmaree,” reminisces of her childhood in “Casuarina Tree,” and speaks of her nostalgic memories of a kind woman in an alien place in the poem “Near Hastings”. Her description of the landscape of her garden at Baugmaree, instead of resorting to the stereotypical association of the land with woman is presented as a space that facilitates growth, maturity and understanding.

The trajectory of Sarojini Naidu’s poetic career is read against her personal experiences since an implicit relationship is apparent in her poetry. Her first volume of poems, *The Golden Threshold* (1905) is linked with the sequestered, domestic and contented life she experienced in her Hyderabad house, the Golden Threshold. The poems in this collection present pictures of woman in conventional social settings. The second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time* was published in 1912 when she had crossed the threshold of her home in Hyderabad to join a career in politics. It was at this time that she met the distinguished political leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The poems in this volume are, however, similar to the poems in *The
Golden Threshold, as there are representations of the same kind of passive and mute women. The third volume of poems, The Broken Wing was published in 1917 before her active participation in politics. This final volume culminates in the long poem “The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love” and it shows the affirmation of the female self unlike the poems in the earlier volumes. The early occasion to express her self may be seen as providing a foundation for the manner in which she perceived her self subsequently. Therefore, the poems in this collection replace the figure of the passive, silent woman with the assertive, aggressive one who gives expression to her unrestrained passions. Sarojini Naidu’s poetry shows a progression from the depersonalized voice to the subjective “I”. A diffident voice beneath this mask struggles to express itself in the form of questions, ellipses or gaps. The revelation of an authentic female self shatters the depersonalized mask in her third collection of poems. The poems in this collections manifest an aggressive assertion of her female self setting aside all the restraints imposed by society.

However, there was a limit to the directness and frankness of expressions in this volume as the public form of poetry did not allow her to reveal the identity of the addressee. The suggestiveness, evasiveness, and metaphorcity in this genre did not allow direct expression. The oblique expressions in the poems become more direct in the autobiographical form of the letter. The privateness of the epistolary mode was particularly accommodating to women. The informal and friendly correspondence with sympathetic hearers compensated for Toru Dutt’s feelings of loneliness and Sarojini Naidu’s feelings of love.

Although a very personal mode of expression, the private life of the individual merges with the public life of the nation in men’s letters written during
the period of nationalism. Contrarily, women’s letters were personal, important and useful outlets for venting emotion and experiences to a trusted friend or relative. Centred in the commonality of collective experiences with the addressee, the addresser discovers her self. Against the backdrop of the social strictures that were imposed on women, the letter offered a happy and free space. The sharing of experiences in the letters of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu show the importance of intersubjective exchanges in women’s letters. The authoritarian style in men’s letters is the result of a hierarchical conception of the subject-object relationship. In Gandhi’s and Tagore’s letters addressed to their friends, wives, siblings, relatives and children, the emotions are secondary, almost nonexistent. They are a continuation of the public discourse in the private and the representation of the self in the letters is not presented in isolation from the concerns of the nation. This is more evident in Gandhi’s letters where no area of his life was sacrosanct or private; everything was submitted to the cause of the nation. Against these public concerns in men’s letters, personal feelings and emotions crowd the letters of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, helping these women to fashion their selves.

Toru Dutt found in the letters a space to share her experience of loneliness with her friend, Mary Martin. In the continuous communication, Toru Dutt found different ways to negotiate her loneliness and thereby also to reorient her ways of looking at the world. This rediscovery of her response to the world through friendly correspondence, fashioned various aspects of her self. The act of “sharing” evolves from woman’s body which express a feminine identity. This specific communication in women’s use of language is different from man’s use of the language. Thus even in the personal addresses in the letters of Tagore or Gandhi, it is they who dominate,
the addressee is a mere pretext but in the letters of Torn Dutt, her friend shares with her all her experiences. It is a solidarity which develops between her and her addressee. Therefore, in the process of sharing her experiences with Mary Martin, Toru Dutt is able to fashion her self. The reading experiences with her friend encouraged her onto further reading and this is how she discovered her literary self. It is this confidence that made her speak of herself as an authoress when the first census was taken in 1876, although her father did not comply with her request to be recognized as such in the census. The interpersonal relationship further developed her artistic sense as she gives to her friend an artistic representation of the landscape. Her cultural exchanges in the letters where Toru Dutt writes about her own land and the greatness of the women of ancient India, she is not only presenting her rich cultural heritage but also reclaiming a tradition for herself.

The letters addressed to Govindarajulu Naidu are a free expression of Naidu’s female desires. Sarojini Naidu expresses the growth of her poetic self in her letters addressed to Edmund Gosse. She describes how her first meeting with Edmund Gosse was a landmark in the development of her poetic self. In the personal correspondence with her daughters, Padmaja Naidu (Bebe) and Leilamani Naidu (Papi) there is a feeling of affection and closeness. These letters read like a diary where she jotted down all her public and private experiences, communicating to her daughters the events and experiences of her public life. The maternal feelings and affection is sustained throughout these letters from a mother to her daughters which unlike Jawaharlal Nehru’s letters from a father to a daughter, where the letter was a means to educate his daughter in world history, are a means through which affection, queries, concern are communicated.
The letter becomes the medium for expressing her intense passion and love for Govindarajulu Naidu, during her stay in England. Although her parents, possibly, sent her to England to put an end to her relationship with the young doctor, the letters to Dr. Naidu are manifestations of her repressed desires. The extremely private form of the letter made her renew her love for him. In England, her feeling of love for Dr Naidu redoubled and the letter became a medium to express the intensity of her love. This finds expression in the rapturous expression of desire in her letters addressed to Govindarajulu Naidu. To match her expression of love, the language also becomes repetitive, inchoate and fragmentary. Her day to day experiences in London and Cambridge – having a cup of tea or visiting a friend also find expression in her letters. These experiences that might appear ‘trivial’ in the male discourse of nationalist writers are not trivial in that of a woman.

Sarojini Naidu also used the letter form to express her development of a poetic self. It is here that she reveals how she gained new direction after coming in contact with Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons. In these letters the addressees become the subjects who help to shape her literary career. Thus, the addressee is also a subject in a woman’s letters whose imaginary presence helps to fashion the addresser’s self. In a man’s letter, the addressee is only an object on whom the addresser tries out his thoughts and ideas.

Although the epistolary form offered women scope for private expressions, the consciousness of an addressee, restricted the revelation of her female desires. The social restrictions did not allow Toru Dutt to express her feelings of love. Fiction offered her a space to express her self through her characters. Thus while it might have been indecorous for Toru Dutt to speak in the direct persona of her self
about female desire in her letters, the creation of fictionalized characters in the novels enforced a distance between her and the written text. The autonomous world of fiction was a convenient mode of self-expression for her since speaking through the fictionalized character resolved the tension and discomfiture of speaking in the first person. It provided her an outlet to articulate her specific experiences as a woman—her repressed desires, sad compromises and her frustrated anger. The fictional world could accommodate her feelings of desire. Fiction written during the time of nationalism gave a literary dimension to the idea of the nation as the narrative imagination forged a new identity for the nation. Against the narratives of the nation which this genre addressed, women wrote their own narratives in the fictional form as its relative impersonality gave them a space to reveal themselves. For a woman, love is inextricably related with her life, and fiction helped her to articulate her feelings of love. The fictions of Toru Dutt reveal her longing for love that she was unable to express through the other genres. Although the expression of her desires is very much restricted compared to the explicit expressions of sexual desire in the twentieth century woman novelist, yet, in the history of Indian English women's fiction, Toru Dutt's novels can be seen as early examples of woman's revelation of female desire.

Toru Dutt's two novels *Bianca* written in English and *Le Journal Mademoiselle d'Arvers* written in French were secretly written after her return from England and France to India, i.e. between 1874 and her premature death in 1877. The first stirrings of love that Toru Dutt might have felt as a young girl form the theme of both these novels. A female mode of identity, which is inseparable from her body, is what is reflected in Toru Dutt's two fictions. In *Bianca*, Toru Dutt
gives expression to her desires through the character of Bianca whose sexuality is revealed against the dominant social codes. Bianca’s ecstasy at her first experience of kissing and the consequences thereafter forms an important aspect in the novel. The “strange feeling” of pleasure which Bianca enjoys after Lord Moore kisses her on the mouth is articulated clearly in the novel. The failed loves and sad endings in the two novels resemble Toru Dutt’s own tragic life. The outdoor activities in both the novels serve as a compensation for the social restraints on her mobility. Toru Dutt also gives a new perspective to female friendships in the relationship between Marguerite and Sister Veronique in *Le Journal Mademoiselle d’Arvers*.

In all these three forms—poetry, letters and fiction—these women found a space to write their selves. The act of writing gave woman a sense of confidence and it was necessary to share this feeling in a collective way. This demanded the use of an oral and more direct form of expression. This fourth form was the speech or lecture, which was widely employed by men to disseminate the sense of nationalism. It was difficult for a woman to speak in public as the domain of speech seemed tacitly reserved for man. It was a kind of transgression for a woman to speak in public as it required tremendous confidence on the part of the speaker. Therefore, woman’s use of this mode comes at a later stage when she establishes herself as a subject. The fifth chapter hence tride to examine the mode of speeches of Sarojini Naidu to show how she used speech as a medium to interact with her hearers and to establish a bond of sisterhood with them.

Women’s speech in public is one of the most important symbols of women’s entry into the public sphere. 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. The 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 establishing a bond of sisterhood. In India, the nationalist movement offered women a space to speak in public, and gave them a platform 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. Sarojini Naidu’s speeches in the context of the national movement served not only the nationalist interest but also concentrated on woman’s issues with a view to awaken her hearer’s attention. Her speeches had far reaching impact in organizing women into a collective unity. Sarojini Naidu used speech as a medium to emphasize the importance of the feminine – the relevance of love, care and nurture in national life. She valorizes these feminine qualities to point to the importance of women’s roles for her male hearers. In her speeches addressed to women, Sarojini Naidu developed a feeling of sisterhood by sharing in the common cause of motherhood and thus locating agency in their feminine selves. She imparts confidence to the hearers, building on their moral superiority by citing the status of Indian women in history. Thus, she uses speech to empower women and organize them into a collective unity. Gandhi also gave a new definition to woman’s feminine roles. However, an authoritarian tone marks Gandhi’s speeches while Sarojini Naidu’s speeches demonstrate a feeling of identification and likeness.
Thus, this dissertation examines woman’s voices in all the genres that were primarily used by men during the nationalist struggle. It emphasizes the relevance of women’s lives and experiences in their works. The study encourages a proliferation of voices, from which alternative discourses can evolve, instead of the monopoly of one dominant voice, which prevails in the discourse of nationalism. However, the project is very much limited to the voices of elite women as both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu belonged to the elite section of the society. Nevertheless, the roles played by elite women is the starting point from which other voices emerge. In relation to the elite male of the times, women’s position was that of the “subaltern”. Thus, this project on women’s voices unravels these ‘discordant’ voices of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu in the literary forms. This is an area that can be studied further and in much greater detail.

The stand that the project takes to locate the distinctiveness in woman’s voices, from the point of her biological difference, risks becoming essentialist. However, a certain element of the essentialist cannot be avoided in this kind of study that seeks to examine a distinctive woman’s voice. Accepting this as a necessary premise, this work looks forward to women’s voices in the twentieth century where the indirect presentation of love and desire in Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu’s explicit expressions of herself, develop into more direct and explicit expression, finding an overt presence in the growing literature of the body, produced by women writers in the twentieth century.