INTRODUCTION

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, ...it is time for her to dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers....

(Cixous 2000: 268).

The discourse of nationalism developed around ideas and concepts that initiated and contributed to the formation of the nation in an organized way. The expression of these ideas and concepts resulted in the emergence of several literary forms that facilitated the making of the nation. This project focuses on the literary forms, which were among the important elements in formulating the discourse of nationalism. It was an elite male intelligentsia that gave shape to the nationalist discourse through these forms.

Empowered by the light of education in the later half of the nineteenth century and the early half of the twentieth century, women from the elite class also came to experiment with these literary modes which were used by men during the period of nationalist struggle. Nationalism thus offered them a space to articulate their selves and this resulted in the emergence of women’s voices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This project is concerned with the alternative discourses that emerged with women’s use of these literary forms. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) used some of the forms which became popular during the time of nationalism to articulate their selves. The fact that they wrote in English was an advantage as expressing themselves in a different language gave them considerable freedom in a nineteenth century social structure that constrained them in many ways. However, the scope of the proposed study does not take into account these flexibilities of expression in different languages. The fact
remains that even if Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu wrote in the language of the colonizer, (Toru Dutt also wrote in French) these two women articulated and made themselves heard in the nineteenth century through some of the literary forms. This project concentrates on these two women’s voices in the various genres that formed the discourse of nationalism. In opposition to the nationalist concerns, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu found in the literary forms a space to articulate their selves. What evolves from their works is an alternative discourse inextricably related to their feminine selves.

Benedict Anderson had said that it was “print capitalism” which provided the new institutional space for the development of national identity. It facilitated nationalist consciousness as it became easy to comprehend one another via print and paper (Anderson 1983:44). In mid-nineteenth century India, the upper caste elite families, which formed the intelligentsia, felt it necessary to develop their mother tongue as a standard language. Thus, an entire institutional network of printing presses and publishing houses were created to give shape to the vernacular languages. In the process, writers came to experiment with different forms of literature that facilitated the formation of a national identity. This project looks at the situation in Bengal where the intelligentsia was engaged in experimenting with various forms of literature, and where these two women writers, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu found an enabling creative space.

Most of the writers from Bengal had an English education and belonged to the upper caste. Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” (1835) had strengthened English studies in India. But even before Macaulay, many Indians in Calcutta were enthusiastically pursuing English studies at Hindu College which was established in
1817, at the initiative taken by some of the elite families to give their sons an English education. Derozio had attained fame as a teacher of Hindu College from 1828-1831 and his contemporaries formed a group called “Young Bengal”.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1834-1894), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) and Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) started their careers in English, but soon shifted to Bengali. Yet, even after they had stopped their creative writing in English, much of their personal correspondence continued in the language (Mukherjee 2000:9). The early Indian novelists in Bengali and English belonged to the same social segment of the upper class elites. While Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Romesh Chunder Dutt shifted to a career in Bengali, Govin Chunder Dutt, Toru Dutt’s father and Shoshee Chunder Dutt, her uncle, preferred English. The Dutts brought out their compiled verses in the Dutt Family Album which they published from Bengal in 1870. A majority of their poems focused on glorifying the history of India as they were inspired by the orientalist scholars William Jones, H.T. Colebrooke, and H.H Wilson. The literature written in Bengali – novels, plays and poetry – was also engaged with historical themes. These writers looked back upon the history of a glorious India as unravelled to them by the orientalists. This project limits itself to the various genres of literature that developed with the discourse of nationalism. Therefore, it is not concerned with the intricacies of language and themes that demarcated the Indian English writers from the Bengali writers. It concentrates on the forms of literature through which the writers tried to perceive the nation as a distinctive, historical community. Against this background when these various forms were emerging, this project studies two women’s voices – that of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. Toru Dutt belonged to the
mid-nineteenth century when nationalist feeling was just beginning to develop, while Sarojini Naidu lived in a period when the national movement had gained momentum.

In Toru Dutt’s time, the idea of the nation was just beginning to take shape in the minds of the intelligentsia. Calcutta was the hub of intellectual life; it was here that the publishing houses were being established and writers were pursuing their literary careers. It was the centre from where evolved a consciousness of nationalism and the various forms of literature began to shape a public discourse. By the time Sarojini Naidu entered the national arena, there was a kind of “pan Indian” response to nationalism as the nationalist movement had expanded beyond its regional limitations. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, apart from their pioneering roles in the nationalist movement also attained fame as writers.

As it was important to create a sense of national identity, the urgency of the moment required a public form of expression which had to reach out to the people, who were the subjects of the “imagined nation”. In poetry, it was the more public forms that served the intelligentsia’s need to construct the nation with its imaginative power. Poetry with its imaginative and inspirational quality was able to create a sense of emotional attachment in the people to a sense of shared national identity. For instance, the rousing poetic rhetoric of “Bandemataram” was able to motivate the people to this common goal. The genre of poetry had an important place in the evolving of a national identity. Hence, a public form of narrative poetry became popular during the time of nationalism. Even the private forms of autobiographical writings – diaries, letters and autobiographies tended to have a public dimension as the writer’s private self was inextricably linked with the life of
the nation. It was the formation of the nation which was central to the writers; all private expressions were directed at the visualization of the nation. The autobiographical form of the letter became an important mode of expression during the time of nationalism as it gave shape to the ideas and imagination that went into the formulation of the nation. It was a space where the writers shaped the nation and contributed to a reinvented nationalist consciousness. The novel too was an important form through which the intelligentsia fashioned a new national identity. It was the question of nationhood which was the focus in the fictions written during this time. The trope of the “mother as nation” appeared as an important rhetorical device. The genre of speech was relevant for mobilizing the audience generating the public support that helped in the making of a mass movement. It created awareness in the minds of the people about qualities required to make the nation.

Beside general questions about the formation of the nation that these literary forms were addressing and around which the discourse of nationalism developed, it is important to see what women were saying through these forms. The spread of women’s education facilitated women’s response to these social changes. Towards the later part of the nineteenth century there had been a significant change in reference to women’s education. In his Second Report on the state of Education in Bengal, 1836, Adam refers to two separate orders of fears that were prevalent with reference to education. One was the impending threat of widowhood and the other was the fear of sexual intrigue\(^3\) (Sarkar 1999:76). But gradually in the mid-nineteenth century there was a growing need for female education and through the efforts of the missionaries, the radical iconoclasts of the Young Bengal movement and social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Radhakanta Deb, schools
for girls were established. The first separate school for girls of upper class Hindus was established under the name of the “Hindu Ballika Vidyalaya” on 7th May, 1849, through the efforts of J.E.D. Bethune (Sarkar 1999:92). However, attendance of girls from respectable families was negligible, as the upper classes did not like to send their daughters to a public space away from their homes. Hence the “zenana education” was introduced by the missionaries to dispel such fears so that the women remained securely in their inner space. As the supervision of education moved from central to provincial levels there was an expansion of higher educational facilities for girls and provisions for boarding schools for adult women. The Brahmo reformer Keshabchandra Sen set up a boarding school for grown women under the auspices of the “Bharat Sanskar Sabha” in 1871 (Sarkar 1999:106). In 1876 the “Bangla Mahila Vidyalay” began to provide facilities for the University Entrance Examinations. The year 1878 was a landmark as two Bengali girls Kadambani Bose and Channdramukhi Bose passed the degree examination and became eligible for the graduate course (Sarkar 1999:107). Thus, the expansion of higher education facilities for women gave them a sense of confidence.

Nationalism also indirectly facilitated the emergence of women’s voices. For nationalists, women served as the symbolic markers of cultural identity; as such, they were caught up in a web of symbols that defined their being. The symbol of the “mother as nation” was being subsumed into the discourse as it provided a self-representational vocabulary to imagine and describe the nation. The mother image posited a strategic set of relationships linking land, language, history and people to produce the pivotal terms, “motherland” or “mother India”. These symbolical
representations bequeathed a new sense of confidence to women and also opened up new spaces for them.

As this project concentrates on women's voices in nationalism through their writings, a study of the various literary forms through which they expressed their selves becomes relevant. Voice relates to the question of the speaker; it marks a distinction between "speaking as" and "speaking for". Woman's own writings help in retrieving her voice as here she speaks with authenticity, of her life and experiences. A discourse which intends to "speak for her" reduces her to an object, and her identity is erased by the normative structure of the discourse. In contrast, when she speaks "as a woman" she writes her own self and in the process creates an alternative discourse.

It is in this sense that I see women's voices as distinct from men's voices. The difference in women's voices is palpable in the various genres of literature she used during the period of an emergent nationalism. Woman's thinking which was seen as an impediment to masculine rationalization is challenged by feminists who have tried to redefine her thoughts. This has given a new thrust to the study of women's voices. This study which concentrates on women's voices in the discourse of nationalism goes against the symbolical representations of the discourse to unravel the reality of women's voices through her writings. This voice which identifies her female self is closely related to her life and experiences.

The difference in woman's voice can be located in, one, her biological difference and two, in her cultural difference manifested in the roles of care and nurture. In locating women's voices as a separate entity, the project draws on the works of the French feminists Luce Irigaray (1985; 1993; 2000) and Helene Cixous
(1994; 2000) who have focused on the biological difference of women from men as a source of her language. Irigaray’s concept of woman’s language which facilitates intersubjective communication unfolds new perspectives for the study of women’s voices.

Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and Sarah Ruddick have traced the difference in women’s voices to their cultural difference (all in Meyers 1997). They have tried to challenge the Cartesian dichotomy of the subject and object in order to emphasize the importance of the imagination in the formation of the subject. They have showed that maternal practice – the qualities of care, nurture, sympathy and preservation have led to the constitution of a new subject that subverts the enlightenment epistemology and its essentialism. Thus, they have sought a revaluation of epistemological and ethical perspectives, “in a different voice,” a voice which is identified as “feminine” (Bordo 1996:653).

Voice involves agency as it makes the subject active; a woman articulating her self through writing in a late nineteenth century milieu transforms her into an active agent. I see agency not in terms of Foucault’s process of subject construction where the negative moment of subject formation has been accorded privilege. The study locates a more rounded concept of agency to show how women have responded in a creative fashion and acted autonomously through their writings despite constricting social sanctions. I understand voice as a form of agency that involves the capacity of women to articulate their experiences in the face of social and cultural sanctions. Thus, the emphasis is not in the moment of subjection through resistance but in the fashioning of the self which makes the subject active. During the time of social reform in nineteenth century Bengal, women were mere
object of the discourse of nationalism. However, with education and the influence of fathers, husbands and brothers, some of these women belonging to elite society began to articulate their selves. This act of articulation or voice where women have sought to restructure gender relations becomes an important aspect of subject formation. The limited nature of this agency is, however, something to be noted as this literary articulation seems to have been available only to a small section of society.

Women’s writings show the active process of self-formation at work, the conscious self-stylization through which the “technologies of domination” may be resisted. This process of identity involves neither passive submission to external constraints nor willed adoption of dominant norms. Here the fashioning of the self takes place in women’s writings where they voice their experiences and form their own selves.

In a mid-nineteenth century milieu, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu tried to fashion their selves through their writings. They used some of the literary forms which became popular during the time of nationalism to articulate their selves. Their writings offered them an identity; in other words, it is through their writings that they created themselves as subjects rather than being created by the discourse. As Elleke Boehmer says, “To write is not only to speak for one’s place in the world”; “it is also to tell the story of oneself, to create an identity” (Boehmer 2005:93).

The trajectory of Toru Dutt’s literary career shows her precocity in various literary forms – poetry, novels and letters. She was born in the famous Dutt family of Calcutta in the year 1856. Her father Govin Chunder Dutt, had been a student of Hindu College and had published poems in the “Dutt Family Album”. He had been
converted to Christianity along with his family in 1861, when Toru Dutt, his second child, was six years of age. Toru Dutt’s mother, Khertramoni Dutt, also had to change her faith, with great reluctance, along with her husband. She was well versed in Bengali and Hindu mythology and later translated from English into Bengali, a book called the “Life of Jesus” which was published by the “Tract and Book Society of Calcutta”. The old songs and stories which her mother told her when she was a child formed in her an irresistible attraction towards them and this was to have a deep impression on her mind as she later retold some of these legends in her work *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. In 1865, Govin Chunder took the family to France and England and Toru and Aru became the first Indian girls to have “crossed the black water”. The family landed at Nice in France 1865 and went to England in 1871. In 1872, the family moved to Cambridge and it was here that Toru met Mary Martin, who was to have a life long influence on her. She learned French at a French pension and attended the Higher lectures for women at Cambridge University, and this was the only formal education she received. While in India, before leaving for Europe Toru Dutt along with her sister, Aru, received their early education under an English tutor, Babu Shiv Chunder Banerjee. Toru Dutt in one of her letters to Mary Martin writes that she along with her sister had learned the first and second book of *Paradise Lost* by heart (Das 1921: 254-255). She learned singing under a European mistress Mrs Sinaes and soon became proficient in it. After her return to India Toru Dutt began her literary career, and her facility with languages is evident in her translation of French poems into English, published in her collection *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876). Her keen study of Sanskrit with her father resulted in her translating and retelling some of the legends and
ballads of India which were posthumously published under the title, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. This volume is a presentation of various Hindu ballads and legends of Hindustan which she retold, altering their narrative lines and thematic concerns. After her return to Calcutta from her four year travel in Europe, she regularly communicated with her friend Mary Martin of England in the form of letters. This epistolary exchange fashioned different aspects of her self. Toru Dutt wrote two novels—*Bianca* in English and *The Diary of Mademoiselle d'Arvers* in French. The French novel, written in the form of a diary is peopled with French characters. Both these novels have autobiographical underpinnings.

Sarojini Naidu’s exposure to cultures other than her own took place in a somewhat different milieu. Born of Bengali parents, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varada Sundari, Sarojini Naidu was brought up in the Nizam’s Hyderabad in the atmosphere of Deccani Muslim culture. As per the wishes of her father who wanted her to pass the matriculation examination, Sarojini Naidu was sent to Madras where she passed her twelfth year in the first class, coming first in the Madras Presidency. But as her biographer Padmini Sengupta says, Sarojini Naidu was not interested in academic success and never appeared in any public examination after her matriculation (Sengupta 1966:23). At the age of fifteen Sarojini Naidu met and fell in love with Govindarajulu Naidu, a doctor and a widower ten year her senior. To defer what her father thought might be a hasty decision on her part, he sent her to England for higher studies. She spent three years there, first at King’s College in London and later at Girton College in Cambridge. But her love for the doctor remained constant and after her return to India in September 1898, she married him.
in December of the same year – breaking all conventions by entering into an inter-caste marriage.

Sarojini Naidu was inclined towards poetry from a very young age. She wrote several love poems to Govindarajulu Naidu during her stay in England. At Girton College, Cambridge, Sarojini Naidu met Edmund Gosse and gave him a manuscript of her early verses. She also came in contact with literary figures such as Arthur Symons, William Archer (who popularized Ibsen in England), and William Heinemann, her future publisher. It was Edmund Gosse who urged Sarojini Naidu to give up “English robins and skylarks for a more authentic presentation of the sights and sounds of the Indian landscape”. He advised her “to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid population of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province” (Cited in Sengupta 1969:29). Sarojini Naidu wrote three volumes of poems: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). The poems of all these collections were published in *The Sceptered Flute* (1958). Her first volume of poems *The Golden Threshold* appeared in 1905 when she was living a happy, contented, domestic life in the “Golden Threshold,” her house in Hyderabad. The second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time* was published in 1912 when she crossed the threshold of her home in Hyderabad to enter politics. The third volume of poems *The Broken Wing* was published in 1917 before her active participation in politics.

Sarojini Naidu also used the epistolary form to express her private self. During her stay in England, she had written love letters to her husband, Govindarajulu Naidu. Her poetic self finds expression in her letters written to her mentors, Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons. And even amidst an active public life,
she spared time to communicate with her daughters, Leilamani and Padmaja Naidu, through letters. Her brilliant career in politics is marked by her orations delivered in several institutional sites – schools, colleges, women’s clubs and social conferences. Through her vigorous and impassioned speeches, she affirmed women’s participation in public life as mothers of the nation. The evocative tone of many of these speeches helped establish a rapport with her hearers.

Both these women, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, form two different phases of the Indian freedom movement; their thoughts and feelings articulated in the different genres of literature that developed and fed the discourse of nationalism. This research project unfolds new perspectives on these women’s voices as expressed in various literary genres. Men used these literary genres as part of their continuous efforts to define the nation, while women used it to voice themselves. The project, therefore, also takes into consideration men’s use of these forms during the nationalist struggle to mark the distinctiveness of women’s voices as represented in the forms adopted by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. Built into this argument therefore is the suggestion that women’s writing – personal, and emerging out of a different perspective on public events – is resistant rather than collusive with the grand nationalist discourse.

Studies relating to women and nationalism have been more about women’s suppression; the idea of women as subjects was far from being an area of concern. Although women’s perceptions and participation in revolutionary movements have been studied, such studies mainly concentrate on the nationalist agitations of the twentieth century. Works that seek to locate women’s voices in nationalism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century are significantly fewer. They do not take
up the question of women speaking as women but address the ideological approaches which ‘speak for women’ in terms of symbolism. What is significant is that most of the works see women as actors in a symbolic role assigned to them by the patriarchal nationalists. The attempt of this project is to locate women’s voices as they fashion themselves as subjects and form an alternative discourse separate from the dominant discourse.

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias in *Women-Nation-State* (1989) sees women’s role in rebuilding the nation in terms of reproduction. They have focused five symbolic and ideological engagements of women: “as biological reproducers of the nation, as reproducers of national boundaries, as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity, as signifiers of ethnic/national differences and as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles” (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989:7). Deniz Kandiyoti in her article “Identity and its Discontents: Women and Nation” (1991) examines that the integration of women into nationalist projects was a subtle means to control them. Drawing illustrations from the Middle East and South, she shows that women by their participation in the nationalist projects, in fact “become hostages to such projects” (Kandiyoti 2000: 1491). Sylvia Walby in her article “Women and Nation” (1992) explores the different identifications and commitments of men and women into the nationalist project. She constructs a conceptual framework to analyze different forms of gender relations which affect the national project. Walby points out that the relation between gender and nationalism may be mediated through different relation of men and women to militarism (Walby 2000:1518). She states that it is this difference in attitude which results in different commitments of men
and women in the nationalist project. Glenda Sluga in her article “Identity, Gender, and the History of European Nations and Nationalisms” (1998) demonstrates that at its inception the French revolution discriminated masculine from feminine forms of citizenship. The body politic was emphatically male, and during the nineteenth century, the increasing separation of the public from the private spheres accentuated the subordination of women as members of the nation, with women being defined as nurturers and men being defined as heroes and soldiers (Sluga 2000:1542).

In Indian scholarship, Bengal has been a major area of study on the invention, imagination and narration of nation. Partha Chatterjee’s essay “The Nation and its Women” (1993) explains how nationalists fashioned a “new woman” controlled by a “new patriarchy”. He shows how the nationalist tried to resolve the women’s question by pushing it to the private sphere. Nationalism separated the domain of culture into two spheres – the material and the spiritual which was analogous to the *ghar* and the *bahir* or the inside and the outside. The entire phase of the nationalist struggle was to protect, preserve and strengthen the “inner sanctum” of national culture. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (2001) Tanika Sarkar traces the nationalist construction of women to its final resolution in the safe image of mother. She shows the iconic representation of the mother in Bengali literature where the mother assumes the role of the “virangana” or heroic woman in times of crisis and is reduced to her domestic role after the crisis is over.

The reconstruction and representation of patriarchy has been the determining theme in most of the writings on women and nationalism. In *Recasting Women* (1989) Sangari and Vaid have shown how women became objects in the process of reconstituting patriarchy. In *Re-writing History: the Life and Times of Pandita*
Ramabai (1988), Uma Chakravarti outlines the reconstitution of patriarchies in nineteenth century Maharashtra through an exploration of the life, work and times of Pandita Ramabai. In Engendering India (2000: 8) Sangeeta Ray shows that after 1857, the figure of the Hindu woman assumes importance in the discourse of imperialism. Ray analyses the discourses of gender and nation formation as represented in some of the novels and other narratives from this time. Thus, it is the representation of women as passive symbols and their subjection in the formation of the nation which has been important in these works.

Most of the anthologies of women's writings during the period of nationalism focus on the “negative forms of subjectivity” as they concern themselves with the representations of writings which go against the grain. Tharu and Lalita in their anthology Women Writing in India (1991) have shown how women's writings have been relevant in reading the implicit gestures of defiance and subversion against a dominant discourse. They have located women's subjectivity in their resistance to a dominant discourse. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has criticized the works of Tharu and Lalita for their “self assigned role” of “giving the subaltern a voice” like other post colonial critiques. She says, “In spite of their care and solicitude for their writers, Tharu and Lalita can never entirely avoid appearing as impresarios, never entirely abstaining from speaking for (other) women” (Sunder Rajan 1993: introd). A study of the “feminine literary voice” from the early part of the nineteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century is represented in Partha’s Chatterjee’s reading of five autobiographies of middle class women. In “The Nation and its Women” (1993) he shows that all these autobiographies were ventriloquised by a nationalist patriarchy which tried to appropriate different voices;
“the alternative sequences being suppressed and the marks of resistance erased” (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999: 156). Thus, the authentic self had been violently disrupted in the thematic content of their writings as these writers had to configure their lives in keeping with the frames of the discourse. Chatterjee affirms that this erases the possibilities of an autonomous subjectivity in their works.

Shifting from these works which accentuate women’s oppression in nationalism we come to another set of writings where there is an attempt to show how nationalism facilitated the growth of feminism in the third world. Kumari Jayewardene in her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986) shows that women’s movements for emancipation were acted out against a background of nationalist struggle aimed at achieving political independence, asserting a national identity and modernizing society. Nationalism is connected with feminism as nationalists and feminists frequently collaborated in the pursuit of a common goal. She shows the inseparable connection between an emergent nationalism and feminism in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century by taking the examples of Turkey, Egypt, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Vietnam and Korea. Her argument affirms that feminism was not imposed in the third world countries by the west, but the historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women in these countries.

Assuming Jayewardene’s argument as the starting point there had been an attempt to locate women as agents. Radha Kumar’s book *History of Doing* (1993) traces the history of the women’s movement in the pre-independence and post-independence period. It shows that the social reform movements that had been initiated by men in the first half of the nineteenth century have been continued by
their wives, sisters and daughters in the later half of the nineteenth century. This was followed by the formation of women's own organizations in the early twenties. There was a conceptual shift in the mother image – a change from its earlier symbolic significance to an argument for women's rights and emancipation. Thus, a different approach, which concerns itself with women creating a subjectivity have become relevant in studying women's voices. In her article "Women as Activists; Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement" (1993) Suruchi Thapar states that the nationalist movement saw the mass participation of women in many activities in both the inner and outer domains. She attributes this to the fact that the nationalist movement offered a change in the perspective of women as the nationalists constructed the ideas of the “new-woman,” “motherhood,” and “femininity”. Lois West's book *Feminism and Nationalism* (1997) notes how against the academic discourse on nationalism as a male enterprise, feminists have tried to situate women at the centre of a struggle for women's rights. She focuses on the feminist nationalist struggles in the past several decades to reconceptualize a feminist theory of nation and state.

Amongst other important works which show women's agency are Padma Anagol's *Women's Agency and Resistance* (2005) where she studies the complexities of an emerging feminism in Maharashtra in the context of nationalism in the later half of the nineteenth century and the early half of the twentieth century. Anagol sees this as a crucial development as it resulted in the growth of feminism in the later half of the nineteenth century. The work has attempted to construct and interpret the complex shape of women's subjectivities in the areas of religion and education and women’s entry into the public domain via feminist organizations.
Ranjoo Sadao Herr in “The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism” demonstrates “the potential of third world feminists for clearing new courses of nationalist discourse” (Herr 2003:136). She shows how third world feminists can play an important role as legitimate participants in ongoing nationalist projects “by rejecting the claim of the patriarchal nationalists to abandon a legacy which is rightly theirs” (Herr 2003:151).

Neeta Kumar’s *Women as Subjects* (1994) considers the changing identity and status of women in India.

Women’s active role in the nationalist movement are explored in Bharati Ray’s “Women of Bengal: Transformation in Ideas and Ideals” 1900-1947 (1991). Ray has demonstrated how groups and communities of women have asserted, resisted and made sense of their lives during the colonial period. She studies the major changes in the perceptions of women during this period. She examines this change in women’s own writings, especially in women’s journals. In their article “The Rani of Jhansi Regiment, 1943-1945” (1993), Carol Hill and David Silverman reveals how women’s growing confidence and power opened the way for military activism. In her book *Women in the Indian National Movement* (2006) Bjorkert shows how ordinary women responded to the national movement from their domestic lives. It seeks to examine women’s experience of the nationalist movement in the domestic domain. For this purpose she also includes oral narratives in her study to show the importance of their lives in the domestic sphere. Women’s domestic lives have also become relevant sites for studying women’s voices. Dipesh Chakravarty situates the domestic sphere in relation to the debates on modernity in colonial Bengal (Chakravarty 1994:52).
From women finding a voice in communities to individual women voicing themselves and writing their lives and experiences, in what these must be seen as significant personal narratives, we see an important movement. Malavika Karlekar in *Voices from Within* (1991) points to autobiographical writings as personal narratives where an elite section of women have questioned patriarchal constructs. Women’s voices and experiences were set against the backdrop of surging nationalism and reform in the twentieth century. Women have articulated themselves not through a resistance to patriarchy but through their lives and experiences.

Bharati Ray has given a biographical account of the life and works of two women – Rokeya Shekhawat Hossain and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani who lived in the nineteenth century and early half of the twentieth century in her book *Early Feminists of Colonial India* (1997). Antoinette Burton (2003) demonstrates how women have articulated themselves as subjects from the private space of the home. She shows how the domestic space of the home forms an archival source for recording women’s own experiences. These voices from the private spaces are important in revealing the dichotomies of discourse as within this space women have figured their lived experiences.

The nationalist emphasis on women’s education to counter a colonial discourse resulted in the spread of women’s education to the elite section, even though the overt motive was to train her in domesticity by laying stress on certain subjects. The elite women had better access to education as they had the privilege of learning from their fathers or husbands. This shows that women, belonging to these sections of the society were slowly recasting themselves rather than being recast and
were creating roles for themselves that were different from the ideological structures of the time.

A study of how women assert their own voices in the backdrop of nationalism not simply by resistance but by creating themselves as subjects is specially relevant in studying women’s agency. This study proposes to locate Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu’s voices against the backdrop of nationalism. It seeks to study all their works with a view to record their voices and place their writings as alternative narratives against the dominant discourse of nationalism. Earlier works on Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu are largely analytical, restrict themselves to their poetry, and are seen as imitations of the west and are based on traditional studies.

Edmund Gosse in his introductory memoir to *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* eulogizes the extraordinary potential of Toru Dutt. He writes about the little incident which made him discover this young talent. Toru Dutt’s first volume, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876), a 200 page anthology of French verse in English was sent for review to London by the sheer enthusiasm of her father. This shabby looking orange book was otherwise destined for the waste paper basket in the editorial office of *The Examiner* in London, had it not have fallen into the hands of Edmund Gosse, who was amazed to see the brilliance of the promising writer. He writes, “When poetry is as good as this it does not much matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore” (Gosse 1885:x). Thus, it was Edmund Gosse who for the first time recognized her talent in poetry.

A.N Dwivedi in *Toru Dutt: A Literary Profile* (1998) provides a detailed analysis of her works, although the major focus is on her poetry. The French
translation of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* is studied in detail and a note is attached to each of the poems. Similarly, the second chapter, which deals with the legends and ballads of ancient India, is also a comment on the poems with reference to themes and language. His chapter on the novels offers only a summary of the two novels. Although the letters are included in the study, there is only a casual reference to them and there is no detailed discussion of any of the letters. Izzat Yar Khan in his work *Sarojini Naidu: The Poet* (1983) gives an analysis of her poems from a traditional perspective. He comments and analyses each of the poems and categorizes them under subheadings like mysticism and lyricism.

Biographical studies have been significant in studying Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. Harihar Das's *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* (1921) traces the lineage of the renowned Dutt family of Rambagan in which Toru Dutt was born. He shows how the young Toru was influenced by the family’s conversion to Christianity and her mother’s singing of the old legends. It records her life and the little formal education she had in France and Cambridge. The work presents all the letters of Toru Dutt—the letters that she had written to her friend Mary Martin of England after her return to India from a four year sojourn in Europe, the letters written to her cousins Omesh Chunder Dutt, Romesh Chunder Dutt from Europe and a letter written in Bengali to her very young cousin Muktamala. Her last letter written in French to the French historian, Clarissa Bader, seeking permission to translate her book *La Femme dans L’Inde Antique/Women of India* into English also finds a space in this book. Padmini Senguta’s (1966) biography which presents a detailed record of the life and works of Sarojini Naidu, has been a very useful work in unravelling her life. This work is an important study of one woman by another woman. She presents a
biographical sketch of Naidu from her own personal experience of being in close touch with her. It records Naidu’s life and experiences as a woman. Thus, along with the representation of Naidu’s poetical and political career, Sengupta focuses on Naidu’s personal experiences. In contrast to Sengupta is the biography written by Vishwanath S. Naravane, *Sarojini Naidu: An Introduction to Her Life, Works and Poetry* (1980) which sketches her life and works, linking it with the personalities and public events of the time. It is also a close study of her life written from the personal relationship of the author with his subject. On the one hand, he refers to her public life – her meetings with political leaders of the time – Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Gokhale and public events like the Satyagraha, Home Rule Movement, Partition and Independence. On the other hand, he describes her poetical world – her contacts with Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons. Her personal life – her parents, brothers, sisters, husband and children are also given a place in the book. However, her private self is outside the perspective of his work. Hasi Banerjee’s *Sarojini Naidu: The Traditional Feminist* (1998) is a historical perspective on Sarojini Naidu’s active role in the field of politics and social service. It focuses on Naidu’s participation in the nationalist movement with special reference to her role in the women’s suffragist movement. All these works offer an analysis of the poetry of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu without contextualizing their works with reference to the time in which they lived. Thus, they are largely appreciations of their works with comments and descriptions without situating them within their socio-cultural contexts.

Important works which present the writings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu by situating them within the exigencies of the times are Susie Tharu’s “Tracing
Savitri’s Pedigree” (1989), Malashri Lai’s “Toru Dutt’s Lost Novel Bianca” and “The Golden Threshold of Sarojini Naidu” (1995), Meenakshi Mukherjee’s “Hearing Her Own Voice” (2000) and Meena Alexander’s “Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance” (2000). Though these works are important in studying their subjects in the context of the nineteenth century, they mostly concentrate on one particular form, i.e., poetry with the exception of Malashri Lai’s work on Bianca which seeks to recover Toru Dutt's novel. Lai sees Dutt’s unfinished novel Bianca as “a fascinating blend of autobiography and fantasies about the self” (Lai 1995:37). It mirrors the conflicts and struggles Dutt had to face because of her cultural displacements. In “Tracing Savitri’s Pedigree,” Susie Tharu locates Toru Dutt’s and Sarojini Naidu’s works in relation to a western world. She sees Toru Dutt’s Savitri as a model of “virtuous Victorians”. In her attempt to situate the works of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as imitations of the west, the subjective aspects of their writings remain unexamined. In a significant essay on Toru Dutt’s and Sarojini Naidu’s poetry, “Hearing Her Own Voice,” Meenakshi Mukherjee shows how both the dominant and resistant impulses in a colonial situation made the rendering of women’s voices difficult as “the issues of gender, language, identity and nation get tangled in knots” in their poetry (Mukherjee 2001:89). In a bid to show these impulses, she fails to retrieve the individual voices in their writings. In her article titled “Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance,” Meena Alexander seeks to study the romantic and the resistant aspects in Sarojini Naidu’s works. The romantic figure of the passive woman with all the codes of the “feminine,” is represented in Naidu’s early poems. In contrast, she shows the “Temple” group of poems as characterized by their eroticism and showing a resistance to the dominant discourse.
She points out that after Naidu joined politics in 1917, the confident and assertive voice becomes more obvious and this is represented in her speeches. Rosinka Chaudhuri gives a place to Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu in her book *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal* (2002). She finds an individual voice in Toru Dutt’s poetry significantly different from the Indian English poetry of her predecessors – Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kasiprasad Ghosh and Derozio. She affirms that the personal experiences in poems like “Our Casuarina Tree” and “Sita” make us conscious of her strong individual style. Chaudhuri locates the colourful images of an exotic India transmitted to the west in Sarojini Naidu’s poems. She shows her following Edmund Gosse’s advice to set her poems “firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples” and introducing to the west “the vivid population of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province”. Firdous Azim in “Women and Freedom” (2002) studies Toru Dutt along with the character of Bimala in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora* to locate them against the background of nationalism. It looks at the various responses to freedom by women in the nineteenth century against the dominant notions of freedom that were part of the struggle for nationhood. It shows how for Toru Dutt the word ‘freedom’ had different meanings in contrast to the nationalist interpretation of the word. Taking the case of Toru Dutt’s “Savitri,” she looks at her poetry as a way of defining freedom in her own terms in contrast to the discourse of nationalism. Except for Meena Alexander and Malashri Lal, these works make little attempts to relate the writings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu with their personal lives.

In their “Introduction” to the anthology, *Women’s Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Indian Writings in English* (2003), Eunice
D’ Souza and Lindsay Pereira refer to some of the extraordinary women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century who had written about their lives and experiences in a variety of forms – letters, tracts, diaries, magazines, articles, speeches, autobiographies, short stories, novels and biographies. In an attempt to offer a re-assessment of some of these writers, they focus on some of the forms which had been unnoticed hitherto. Thus, they give a place to Toru Dutt’s and Sarojini Naidu’s letters in their anthologies instead of the usual practice of anthologizing their poetry. Smita Agarwal’s “Toru Dutt: A Reappraisal” (2004) attempts to retrieve Toru Dutt from the image of a “Nineteenth Century Songbird” or the “Fragile Exotic Blossom of Songs” (Agarwal 2004:82). It looks at her letters, poetry and novels as articulations of an extraordinary intellect.

The present study seeks to re-assess the works of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu by placing them in the context of nationalism. It examines the literary forms used by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu in order to locate their voices against the background of nationalism. It attempts to trace new aspects in their works which help in unravelling the feminine voice against the backdrop of nationalism. The chapters shows the distinctiveness of women’s voices from those of the male nationalists.

While Sarojini Naidu has been regularly called ‘the nightingale of India,’ it is as Eunice D’Souza says, her “somewhat more discordant notes which are more interesting” (D’Souza 2003 xiii). Therefore, apart from their poetry, a study of all the literary forms through which Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu articulated themselves becomes significant in retrieving their distinct voices. Contrary to the ideology of the nationalist discourse which is reflected in the various literary forms
used by men, these works try to discover what women were saying in the shadows of nationalism. The project does not look for women’s responses to nationalism but concentrates on how the genres popular in the time of nationalism were used by women to express their own selves. This demands an investigation of the different literary forms, keeping in view the difference in practice in man’s and woman’s use of them and locating women’s responses to their times.

Chapter 1 shows the gendered nature of the nationalist discourse. It seeks to trace the polarization of the public and the private domains to the enlightenment and locates women’s absence in the theories and discourses of nationalism in the west. In contrast to the west, it seeks to show that the Indian nationalist discourse has shown an excessive concentration on the figure of the woman as “mother of the nation” accentuating the fact that woman has been circumscribed as symbols in the discourse. The following chapters seek to establish the fact that nationalism opened the possibilities of new spaces for women. The project examines women’s voices in the genres which had been used by men to form the discourse of nationalism.

Chapter 2 sees the lyrical modes more common in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu against the public modes more popular in men’s poetry.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the private lives and experiences of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as expressed in their letters. In the context of nationalism when the personal form of the letter merged with the public form of the nation in men’s writings, women’s letters tend to be more personal and intimate as evident from the letters of Tou Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.

Chapter 4 focuses on the repressed emotions and desires in Toru Dutt’s fictions against the prevalent fictional modes which imagined the nation in terms
of a historical community. When the fictional form was used as a common trope in the national imagining, women used this mode to express her more intimate desires.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Sarojini Naidu's speeches facilitated the bond of sisterhood in a context of nationalism where speech disseminated a sense of national identity. It studies the subject-subject relationship which women's speech seeks to inculcate in contrast to men's speech which is directed at a subject-object relationship.

Notes

1. A group of students at the Hindu College in the late 1820s and early 1830s formed an organization called the "Young Bengal". They were radicals who challenged Hindu orthodoxy on the basis of progressive western thought. Originally nurtured by Derozio during his brief but influential tenure in Hindu College, the group came to practice a tradition of extreme westernization and accompanying cultural alienation. It sought to revitalize Indian culture by regeneration of traditions (Kopf 1969: 253). The youths of this group led hitherto unthinkable attacks on the conventions of traditional Hinduism (Rosinka Chaudhuri 2002:25).

2. Meenakshi Mukherjee says that Sarojini Naidu was drawn to a pan Indian nationalism by her English writings as it brought her close to a pan Indian arena (Mukherjee 2000:101). Her public image as a poet also worked to bring her closer to this arena. In fact it may be said that Naidu, after her entry into the nationalist movement had come to attain a "pan Indian image," leaving behind her regional moorings.

3. In his Second Report on the state of Education in Bengal, William Adam wrote in 1836: "A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by women and not discouraged by men, that a girl taught to write and read will soon become a widow". There was a mixed response to the idea of education for girls amongst the reformers. They were worried about certain unwelcome consequences that would follow from her literacy – the "pernicious" habit of reading illicit love stories that the new "Battala publishers" were bringing out (Sarkar 1999:89).
4. Wood’s Educational Dispatch of 1854 had made an explicit reference to this as an area of government responsibility and from 1857, Lt Governor Halliday had already submitted a minute on a broad based education system. Between Nov 1857 and May 1858, he set up about thirty five schools, with a population of nearly 1,300. Since schools were a public place away from homes, it was unthinkable for most orthodox families to send their daughters outside the home. To allay such fears missionaries had turned to the “zenana” education to teach women within the confines of the home (Sarkar 1999:85).

5. I take this phrase from Carol Gilligan’s essay “In a Different Voice” (Gilligan 1997:549-582). The difference in women’s concepts of self and morality arise from women’s own thinking and this does not impede their development but gives them a distinctive voice. This difference in woman’s way of thinking emerges from the fact that both men and women have been brought up differently. Nancy Chodorow argues that one’s sense of identity and agency arises as a result of internalizing early nurturing relationship. She explains the difference in man’s and woman’s conception of the self to the difference in their growing process. While a mother identifies herself with her daughter, she nurtures her son more as an “other”. Therefore, a son’s male core gender identity develops away from his mother and he begins to assume a separate self while the daughter feels a sense of oneness with her mother (Chodorow 1997:16). This difference in growing up leads to difference in conceptions of the self /other relation in men and women.

6. This process explores the different ways in which the identity of dominant groups had been maintained through the exclusion and derogation of marginal groups and liminal experiences (MacNay 2000:8). It leaves unexplained the capabilities of the individual to respond to difference in a more creative fashion and tends to think of the action mainly through “the residual categories of resistance to or dislocation of dominant norms” (MacNay 2000:3-4). This process of subject construction through the negative paradigm becomes a form of determinism because it is based on the assumption of the subject as passive. MacNay says that in his final work, Foucault sets out the idea of “technologies of the self,” a practice through which individuals actively fashion their own identity (MacNay 2000: 9). Yet this provides a limited account of agency. It leaves unexplained about how the individual goes against the cultural constraints in the process of subject formation.

Works Cited


