1

Nationalism: Dynamics of the Discourse and Women

[S]he remains inseparable from the work or act of man, notably in so far as he defines her and creates *his* identity with her as his starting point or, correlative, with this determination of her being.

(Irigaray 1993:10).

The Indian nationalist movement established its own narrative of self definition to assert its claims in the conception of the nation. Its strategic formulations to represent its identity led to the regeneration of indigenous cultural forms to meet the demands of sovereignty and nationhood. The progress of women became an important aspect in claiming nationhood as a nation’s progress was related to the progress of women. During the social reform movement, the “women question” formed the central issue in some of the most controversial debates which revolved around issues like sati, widow re-marriage, women’s education, and child marriage. However, the political spirit was still very much that of collaboration with the colonial regime. Partha Chatterjee states that the strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in the spiritual domain is the point when nationalism emerged (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:6). The woman question came to be situated in the inner domain far removed from the interference of the colonial state. A new identity was consciously constructed by the intelligentsia in the figure of the “new women” and associated ideas of “femininity” and “motherhood”. The “new woman” could participate in the outside world without losing her essential feminine virtues (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:129). The heroic mother (*Shakti*) and the *Bharat Mata/motherland* were
constructed to articulate the claims of nationhood. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a constant attempt to recover tradition and re-adapt it to the needs of the time. Sangari and Vaid have shown that the main focus was always on "the recovery of traditional women," "her various shapes continuously re-adapt the external past to the needs of the contingent present" (Sangari and Vaid 1989:10). The colonial denigration of Hindu women was countered by focusing on the enduring heroism of virtuous women. A new identity was consciously constructed for Indian womanhood through the shaping of myths, legends, hagiography and history.

Feminist scholars have analyzed the gendered nature of nationalist discourses as they focus on the symbolic and ideological representations of women (Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias 1989), Sylvia Walby (1990), Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) and Glenda Sluga (1998). Yet, the central focus of the Indian nationalist discourse opened up new spaces for women as women began to conceive themselves as subjects. Thus, as per Jayewardene's affirmation, nationalism facilitated women's emancipation in third world countries like India and the rest, it was the nationalist fervour to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project that opened up new spaces for women. Women's emancipation movements were conducted in the context of nationalism as they were "acted out against a backdrop of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting a national identity, and modernizing society" (Jayewardene 1986:3).

Nationalism indirectly inspired a confidence amongst women which made them recognize themselves as active subjects. They felt the necessity to voice themselves as subjects and this is revealed in their urge to articulate which is best
reflected in their writings. Woman began to write her self, the act of writing can be seen as an emancipation of the self and a move towards personhood, she becomes transformed from subject matter to subject. Kailashbashini Devi (1837-1900) in her book *Hindu Mahilar Heenabastha* or *The Degraded Condition of Hindu Women* (1863) voiced her resentment against gender differences. She was the first to raise such a supplication in public. Swarnakumari Devi’s first novel *Deep Nirman* (1870) was widely acclaimed in Calcutta. Pandita Rambai’s precocity in the scriptures earned her the titles of “Pandita” and “Saraswati” from the Calcutta elites². Her book *The High Caste Hindu Women* (1887) is a critique of enforced widowhood and Brahminical practices of the time.

It was the social reform movement which introduced the question of women’s education. It was in 1818, that Rammohan Roy first raised his voice for women’s education (Sarkar 2002:163). After him, in each subsequent decade, fresh generations of reformers reiterated his claims: missionaries in the 1820s, the Young Bengal group in the 1840s, Vidyasagar in the 1840s and 1850s and Keshab Chandra Sen in 1880 (Sarkar 2002:163). Amongst many debates between the liberals and the conservatives, the idea of women’s education entered into the traditional society of Bengal³. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the women’s question came to be situated in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:117). Henceforth, this inner domain of nationalist cultures constituted in safeguarding the spiritual domain, and women, being the locus of the inner domain was given the new responsibility of safeguarding this inner sanctum from the eyes of the colonizer (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999: 121).
The stereotype of the effeminate Bengali came into being at different moments of colonial rule. Macaulay’s description of the Bengali, who is physically “feeble even to effeminacy” and mentally “weak, even to helplessness” is reproduced in many forms within official discourses (cited in Indira Chowdhury 2001:4). This gendered identification of the colonized male as “effeminate” came to be naturalized in the nineteenth century through repeated discursive constructions and reconstructions. It was thus essential for the nationalists to project women in a new light to rescue them from oblivion. Images of the mother which were very much rooted in tradition were constructed by the intelligentsia to contest the colonial discourse and fashion the claims of nationhood. These find expression in the different literary forms in the writings of men. The paper will briefly illustrate the different formulations of “motherhood” projected by such a discourse.

The “the nation as mother” emerged and evolved through three important stages in the writings of (1) Bankimchandra Chatterjee, (2) Rabindranath Tagore and (3) Gandhi. The writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee present the iconic representation of the mother. A more secular form of the mother evolved in the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi. While Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Aurobindo Ghosh represented the aggressive aspects of the mother, Tagore perceived the feminine qualities in the mother figure which acted as a regenerative force in his novels. Gandhi’s speeches and writings valorize the qualities of suffering and endurance in the mother. Against these symbolical representations, the projects seeks to examine the real voices of women in the writings of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.
In taking up the discourse that surrounded the figure of the mother, in Indian nationalism, this chapter looks at women's exclusion from nationalism as it originated in the west. It shows how the western Enlightenment had been a major factor in situating women outside the public sphere. After a comparison between western and eastern nationalism, it points to the “emancipatory” aspects in Indian nationalism that were actually a subtle method of controlling women by the “new patriarchy” while retaining women as objects of the discourse. Yet, Indian nationalism opened new spaces for women, they could articulate their selves in their own way in the different literary genres which were used by men to formulate the discourse of nationalism. The eastern type of nationalism had been accompanied by an effort to “re-equip” the nation culturally in keeping with the standards of modernity (Chatterjee Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 1999:2). In the nationalism that developed in India, the intelligentsia sought to re-define the private sphere. As women were situated at the centre of the inner domain, it was necessary to re-define them as per the standards of modernity. As said earlier, new norms on femininity was constructed in the image of the “new woman”. The symbol of “mother as nation” was also constructed as a sign for nationalist culture. In western nationalism, however, they had little need to equip themselves culturally. Eastern nationalism, although it imitated models from the west, preserved its essential traditions. Thus, as Partha Chatterjee says in the case of nationalism in India, it appropriated the materialist domain but preserved its spiritual domain (Chatterjee Nation and its Fragments 1999:120). While in eastern nationalism, the symbol of women was important to assert its claims to modernity, in the case of western
nationalism, women were outside the nationalist concerns. Therefore, unlike in the east, women had to fight for their right to franchise in the west.

I

Most modern theorists of nationalism trace its origin in the west to the early part of the nineteenth century (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1991; Kedourie 1993). The idea of liberation associated with the western type of nationalism owes its influence to the Enlightenment where the subject is autonomous and rational. In this assumption of the subject, women had no space in the public life of the nation. Nationalism in the west fundamentally centred on the public/political sphere where women had no access, while nationalism in the east was essentially cultural, where the focus was on the re-definition of the private sphere, the domain where women were at the centre. Hans Kohn says that nationalism in the west arose in an effort to build a nation in keeping with political reality, without too much sentimental regard for the past. He says that this type of nationalism unlike later nationalism in Central Europe and in Asia is connected with “the concepts of individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism” of the eighteenth century (Kohn 2000:67). In its essential aspects nationalism in the west came to “actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress” which can be traced to the Enlightenment (Chatterjee Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 1999:2). As nationalism in the west shared the same material and intellectual premises of the European Enlightenment, women were completely excluded as subjects.

The developments arising from the Enlightenment had far-reaching political ramifications. Even if nationalism is related with the idea of “fraternity” as Kedourie
defines the idea of collective self determination of nations, it inevitably follows from the “autonomy of the self” which in the collective sense becomes the autonomy of national self consciousness. Kedourie says that nationalist self determination is in the final analysis a “determination of the will” which is fashioned as “the will of the nation” (Kedourie 2000:257). Kant’s doctrine made the individual the centre, arbiter and the sovereign in the universe. Kedourie points out that the concept of the autonomous self opened the way for the central perspective on nationalism, the idea that nations have the right to self determination. Linking nationalism with individualism via the notion of self determination, he goes on to quote Fichte’s statement in reference to the German nation that “nations are individuals with particular talents” (Fichte in Kedourie 2000:257-258). Fichte points to the importance of education in moulding the Germans into a corporate body and thus fashioning “in man a reliable and infallible goodwill” (Kedourie 2000:259). He says that the purpose of education was “to bend the will of the young to the will of the nation” (Kedourie 2000:259). Women had no place in the educational policy of the nation as she was denied a “will”, while in the case of men it was fashioned as the “will of the nation”. Thus, it was the public men who were termed as citizens and women were erased from public roles and identities and kept within the confines of domesticity. Even if she was given education, it was a specific strategy to train her into domesticity.

The struggle for national self determination was a struggle against oppression, against domination, against social and political systems which prevented both nations and its individuals from being free. Yet these concepts and assumptions of “self determination” and “freedom” have seemed problematic for women as they
exclude the experiences of women. Women are invisible in the theories and definitions of nationalism as the major theorists have taken nationalism as a masculine phenomenon. Although these theorists have shown that members of the nation share a common culture and consciously recognize each other as belonging to the same nation, they are divided along the lines of gender and class. The subject in all these theories of nationalism is the male, rational, free subject. The Enlightenment's insistence on the rational self and its negation of the affective self influenced the theorists of nationalism who saw the concept of nation and nationalism as a male terrain. Kohn traces the origin of nationalism in Western Europe where a new political power in the form of the absolute kings assumed sovereign power (Kohn 2000: 65). He explains that this system of absolute monarchy was destabilized during the French Revolution which infused the growth of a national consciousness and a sense of shared identity amongst the citizens of the state. It was this sense of shared identity which integrated the masses into the nation. Kohn asserts that:

With the advent of nationalism, the masses were no longer in the nation but of the nation. They identified themselves with the nation, civilization with national civilization, their life and survival with the life and survival of the nationality. Nationalism thenceforth dominated the impulses and attitudes of the masses, and at the same time served as the justification for the authority of the state and the legitimization of its use of force, both against its own citizens and against the other states.


Kohn’s reference to “masses” and “citizens” perpetuates a male centred construct that is unreflective about women. Again, his assertion that “nationalism is a state of the mind” excludes women as conscious subjects of the nation. Although
the members of a nation are shown to be homogenous by the major theorists, to the
extent that they share a "common national culture" and consequently recognize as
belonging to the same nation, they exclude women as subjects in the national
imaginings (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Smith 1983). Gellner's theory of
nationalism ignores women when he refers to the association of nationalism with the
modern concept of the division of labour. He suggests that nationalism arises from
the functional requirements of a newly mobile, industrial society with a more
complex division of labour. Women are erased in the whole process of division of
labour as she is situated outside the realm of economic activity. Gellner states that
the requirements of industrial society ushers in the need for a homogenous cultural
identity which leads to the emergence of nationalism. Thus Gellner's development
of nationalism which is related to a modernization fails to take into account women
in the homogenous cultural identity.

Anderson states that the spread of mass education and culture through "print
capitalism" makes possible national imaginings (Anderson 1991). His concept of the
nation as an "imagined community" brought about by "print capitalism" re-enforces
the role of the metropolitan elites in the formation of the nation. It was this class of
metropolitan elites who were the agents in disseminating the nationalist ideas
through print culture. Thus, the core nationalist ideas were generated and a national
identity emerged through the stories of the nation told by a section of the people in
the form of print. This way of imagining the community through the initiative of a
small section of the community tends to restrict the interests of the larger
community. In fact, women were subsumed into the nostalgia of the community not
as subjects but as objects.
All these approaches to nationalism tend towards a reified view of nations with an assumption that its elements are shared by all its members and that all individuals within a given nation are shaped or moulded by what is taken to be the nation's cultural identity. A key idea here has been that of a "common culture" understood and shared by the members of a given nation, perhaps the most common articulated justification for the existence of a given national identity. However, it is necessary to recognize that the entire community did not always hold on to the key elements of this culture.

Fox Genovese affirms in the context of the USA that the ideas arising from individualism subjected women to a more rigidly defined male authority within smaller families (Genovese 1991:121). Ernest Renan in his lecture at Sorbonne in 1882 views the rise of nationalism as the move from patriarchal tribalism to the construction of the nation state (Renan: 1990:12-13). He says that a majority of modern nations were made by a family of feudal origin. These pre-national tribes which later developed into nations were ruled by the male heads of the tribe and women had no place in these feudal societies.

Theorists and historians have frequently attempted to define the inclusive characteristics of political nationalism by defining the universal rights and popular sovereignty that came with the French revolution. However, feminist historiography has challenged the French revolution as an example of universal liberation. Glenda Sluga demonstrates that from its inception, the French revolution had distinguished the masculine and feminine forms of citizenship (Sluga 2000: 1542). The French revolution which codified the rights of liberty, equality and fraternity had been ambiguous in terms of bestowing these rights on women. Sluga shows how Olympe
de Gorges, in her attempt to make the nation “the union of both men and women” in “The Declaration of the Rights of Women” in 1791, just after the French revolution, had to meet with serious consequences (Sluga 2000:1545). Her guillotining in 1793 was an extreme example of the exclusion or the erasure of women from the body politic.

Jurgen Habermas’s idea of the public sphere consists of a body of “private persons assembled to discuss matters of public concern or common interest” (Habermas 1964:1). Thus, he affirms that the eighteenth century public sphere consisted of the bourgeois institutions of sociability which comprised of ‘private individuals’ who assembled to use their ‘reason’ to form a civil society. To Habermas the bourgeois zone is identified as the immediate terrain in which “the reasoning subject” has the ability and the opportunity to challenge the ruling authority. Joan Landes asserts that Habermas’s conception of a bourgeois public sphere excludes a more women-friendly salon culture that had developed in France during the old regime monarchy (Landes 1988:23). Landes contends that notwithstanding the patriarchal character of the Old Regime’s monarchical power, salon culture did exist in France where women participated and influenced court life outside the domestic space. It was the formation of the new republic after the collapse of old patriarchy that had excluded women from the public sphere (Landes 1988:2). Landes affirms that the public women who eschewed the domestic sphere for the public world of court and Parisian salons were silenced by those men who invented the bourgeois public sphere. Salon culture was stigmatized as “artificial, effeminate and aristocratic” against a “rational,” “virtuous” and “manly” bourgeois public sphere. Thus, as Habermas has stated, the possession of rationality was taken
to be the ultimate basis for the attribution of rights. Mary Wollstonecraft in her "Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792) made a case for the rights of women asserting the fact that women have the same capacity to reason as men. Thus, the concept of "universal rights" and "citizenship" have been problematic because the scope of the nation was ambiguous (Glenda Sluga 2000:1544). The increasing separation of the public and the private sphere accentuated the subordination of women as members of the nation – women being relegated to the domestic and men the sole members of the public sphere.

The radicalism of nineteenth century individualism was surrendered to emotion in the concept of the sentimental family envisioned by Rousseau. Rousseau saw an ideal household as a means to an ideal and disciplined society. Rousseau suggested that it was only through the cultivation of familial interests in the image of the social order that patriotism or loyalty to a larger community can be assured (Sluga 2000:1549). He says in his Second Discourse, *On the Origin of Inequality*:

The habit of living together gave birth to the sweetest sentiments the human species is acquainted with, conjugal and paternal love. Every family became a little society, so much the more firmly united, as a mutual attachment and liberty were the only bonds of it; and it was now that the sexes, whose way of life had been hitherto the same, began to adopt different manners and customs.

(Rousseau 2002:12).

The state thus becomes the fatherland, "patrie" and the family the microcosm of society. In Rousseau’s schema “the woman became more sedentary and accustomed themselves to stay at home and look after the children while the man rambled in quest of subsistence for the whole family” (Rousseau 2002:12). Women’s socially acceptable roles were delineated by Rousseau whose exclusion of
women from the public sphere was premised on the identification of “femininity” 
with the private sphere. Rousseau defines the differential virtues and functions for 
the two sexes and advises that females be trained for their particular role in the 
family. His upholding of the “General Will” denies the most elementary political 
rights to women. His conception of the “General Will” in “The Social Contract” is 
an ideal which is contingent upon a transformation of human nature where the moral 
and intelligent human must replace the instinct driven animal who though innocent, 
is enslaved by passion (Coole 1988:105). Landes states that “the very generality of 
the will is predicted on the silent but tacit consent of women” (Landes 1988:66). She 
maintains that Rousseau interpellated woman as a new kind of political and moral 
subject. In Emile we learn that participatory citizenship is to be a male prerogative 
and that Sophy’s education is to be quite at variance with that of her future spouse 
since it is designed to equip her for a very different role (Coole 1988:106). Thus 
Rousseau who sees in man a limitless drive to self improvement through 
development of his rational capacities, defines women according to natural functions 
which yield them moral and psychological qualities of a fixed and limited type.

By the end of the French Revolution, women in France, Britain and the 
United States found themselves more firmly excluded from the realm of the public. 
The socially constructed views of women have been moulded by the dominant 
discourse of the public and the private. Thus, the ideology of nationalism, which is 
based on asserting the collective self of a given community, is characterized by a 
simultaneous negation of its women.

Women’s exclusion from the public sphere has been filtered through the 
genealogy of western philosophy with its association of women with emotion and
men with the rational. Diana Coole while referring to the “dualistic” nature of western thought says that the polarity of men-women relationship in western thought establishes a hierarchical relationship between the two (Coole 1988:2). In a careful re-reading of the canonical texts of western philosophy, Genevieve Lloyd shows that there is a striking coincidence among the definitions, symbolisms and associations of masculinity and those of reason (Lloyd 2005:177). She says that this association between male as “rational” and female as “non rational” can be traced back to the Greek founding fathers of rationality where Aristotle asserts that it is through an intrinsic incapacity in “the lack of a principle soul” which associates female with the non-rational (Lloyd 2005:178). The Cartesian method of attaining knowledge is based on separating the emotional, the sensuous and the imaginative from what Descartes calls the “clear and distinct”. This polarization of “intellect versus the emotion”, “reason versus imagination” and “mind versus matter” emphasized the assumption that women are less rational than men (Lloyd 2005:180). Based on these assumptions women’s role was limited within the domestic to provide comfort, relief and entertainment to a “man of reason”. Simone d’Beauvoir argues that the contemporary constructions of gender treat masculinity as a positive norm and femininity as deviation from the masculine ideal thus compelling women to assume the place of the “Other” (Beauvoir 39:1997). She states that a man defines a woman not in her self but as relative to him – she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. Thus, seen in this light, the discourse of nationalism also interpellates women’s subjectivity – he is the subject, the absolute – she becomes the “Other” of a discourse which excludes her. The essentialist and reifying definition of “nation” and “nationalism” needs to be re-
conceptualized from the perspective of feminist epistemology. The initiative taken by women in re-defining a monolithic and patriarchal conception of nation from women’s own perspective will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

II

Hans Kohn affirms that while Western nationalism was in its origin connected with the concepts of individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism current in the eighteenth century, nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia easily tends towards a contrary development as is evident in the nationalisms that developed in Germany, Russia or India. Kohn points out that the nationalism that developed in these nations was more engaged with a spiritual fervour. He states:

The quest for the meaning of German, Russian or Indian nationalism, the musing about the soul or the mission of the nation, an endless discussion of its relation to the West, all that became characteristic of this new form of nationalism.

(Kohn 2000:67).

Kohn points out that these rising nationalisms, outside the western world, found their first expression in the cultural field. These forms of Eastern nationalism looked for their justification and differentiation to the heritage of the past, and extolled the primitive and ancient depths and peculiarities of tradition in contrast to Western rationalism. John Plamenatz also talks of two types of nationalism – one is the “western type” having primarily emerged in western Europe, and the other the “Eastern type” to be found in eastern Europe, in Asia and Africa and also in Latin America (cited in Chatterjee Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 1999:1). Chatterjee states that the eastern type of nationalism had been accompanied by an
effort to re-equip the nation culturally, to keep pace with the standards of progress. He states that eastern nationalism was engaged in the regeneration of a national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness. Thus, it retained its spiritual greatness and at the same time developed the standards of western modernization.

The Indian intelligentsia was engaged in shaping the idea of the nation through its poetry, art and fiction in order to amalgamate the nation into a coherent whole. It was consciously building the nation by alluding to its past which formed the “soul of the nation” to what Herder calls the volksgeist in the context of German nationalism. This gives the nation a definite identity which finds its spiritual expression in Ernest Renan’s speech delivered in 1882. Renan in his lecture delivered at the Sorbonne on 11th March, 1882, states, “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle” (Renan 1990:19).

Valorization of the past helped in the formation of a “national modernity” based on the regeneration of traditions. Set as an alternative to western modernity, it involved the redefinition of the private sphere. Dipesh Chakrabarty states that re-fashioning of the domestic becomes a central issue in the nationalist project (Chakrabarty 1994:58). As women were central to the private sphere, a regeneration of women’s status was crucial to assert the claims of nationhood.

It was the social reform movement in the early part of the nineteenth century which first sought to reform the private sphere by setting up controversial debates relating to women. In identifying the colonized tradition as “degenerate and barbaric” the colonial discourse presented the depraved condition of Indian women, basing its evidence on a body of scriptural canons and ritual practices. Lata Mani has
shown how the debates on sati were premised on the scriptural deliberations fashioned by a colonial discourse in alliance with the Brahmin pundits (Mani 1989: 114-115). The abolition of sati enacted by Lord William Bentinck in 1829 with the efforts of Rammohun Roy was specifically colonial as both the colonial officials, and Rammohun Roy deliberated the matter of sati in terms of the religious texts. Mani asserts that in this “doubly jointed alliance” between the Brahmin Pundits and the colonial officials, the widow herself becomes marginal, she is neither subject nor object, but rather the grounds of the discourse on sati. Thus, what becomes prominent is the marginality of women in the reform movements. Women were caught between a colonial discourse, which tried to represent the oppressed character of the Indian women, and a nationalist discourse, which sought to regulate her. She was the archetypal victim figure in both the representations.

During the social reform movement, the reformist took the help of the colonial rulers in implementing reforms. Partha Chatterjee states that the attitude of the intelligentsia was that of collaboration with the colonial regime. He states that the period of nationalism in India started with strong resistance from the intelligentsia to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting national culture (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:6). It was this period in the later half of the nineteenth century that “a new discourse, drawing from various sources,” came to be formed (Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments* 1999:124). The intelligentsia was engaged in fashioning a modernity which was distinctively Indian. A critique of western modernity coincided with a self understanding that became eventually nationalist in the full sense of the term (Kaviraj 1997:317). Critiquing of western modernity and undermining of the intellectual legitimacy of
the colonial power became a constituent part of nationalism. However, this, by itself as Kaviraj says, cannot constitute a mature nationalist ideology. Nationalist ideology must have a more positive directedness towards the conception of what nation is. The Indian woman became the contested site of appropriation when Indian nationalists sought to advance their claims of nationhood.

The private sphere had to be re-defined and made complementary to the new world outside. The idea of the “new women” and associated ideas of “femininity” and “motherhood” were constructed and popularized by the nationalist intelligentsia keeping in view these standards. A discourse on the figure of the mother as nation became popular amongst the intelligentsia. Women were the mothers of the race, the procreators, the nurturers, and trainers of future citizens and sons of the nation. Therefore, a whole discourse around the figure of the mother evolved in the various writings of the time. The figure of the mother was used as a rallying device by the nationalists to evoke the feeling of nation-ness. Benedict Anderson has claimed that language has the capacity to generate feelings of solidarity and belonging. He says that the quality of the political love within nationalism can be deciphered in terms of the ways in which languages describe the object. These objects have about them “a halo of disinterestedness” which inspires passionate patriotism amongst the people (Benedict Anderson 1983:143). As a mother-centred nationalist rhetoric grew in prominence, the Bande Mataram song evoked emotional resonances amongst the people. The image of the mother evoked a golden past embodied in the very essence of woman as a fertile ideological ground for the unveiling of a Hindu nation by the Hindu subject who is masculine and aggressive.
The figure of the mother assumes a new turn in the writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Two distinct representations of womanhood exemplifying a distinct Indian modernity are to be seen in the nationalist discourse. One is that popularized by Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Aurobindo Ghosh in whose representations the heroic women or “viranganas” offered a stark contrast to the British portrayal of Indian women as victimized, passive and helpless. The other is the more secular representation of the mother as the model of sacrifice and restraint as seen in the writings of Tagore and Gandhi. For Gandhi, women were the embodiments of self-sacrifice, love and tolerance. He believed that this spirit of innate suffering made them the repositories of morality and the true satyagrahis.

III

Bankimchandra Chatterjee clubs nationalism with a Hindu revivalism where he uses the iconic figures of Durga and Kali to valorize the colonial representation of Indian women. In *Anandamath* (1882), he uses the iconic figure of the mother to instill on the *santaans* or sons the spirit of patriotism. Yet, the mother who inspires the band of warriors or *santaans* is very different from the real women as we see in the “flesh and blood” characters of Shanti. The figure of the mother in the novel transcends her sexuality, as she is an abstraction; a figure who awakens the process of regeneration in her sons. The “Bande mataram” song is first sung in the novel in this context when for the first time Bhabananda brings Mahendra to the *math*, the place which sheltered the rebels and from where the military operations were carried out. Bhabananda seeing the latter distressed, sings the song to awaken Mahendra’s spirit of patriotism and initiates him into the band of *santaans* (Chattopadhyay 2008:25-26).
The “nation as the mother” here serves as a symbol to exhort this small band of her santaans to vanquish the enemy and bring back the honour of the motherland. The image of the mother here is potentially and ideally a life affirming principle, a source of nurture and plenty. The mother in the past was a glorious figure of abundance, peace and benevolence showering her love and gifts on the land and its people. This picture of the mother as the nurturer of her sons finds expression in the first two stanzas of the song:

\[ vandemataram /sujalam suphalam/ \]
\[ malayajasiitalam /sasyayamalam /mataram \]

Translation: I bow to thee, Mother / richly-watered, richly-fruited / cool with the winds of the south / dark with the crops of the harvests / The mother.

\[ subhrajyostnapulakitayaminim \]
\[ phullakusunitadrumadalasobhinim \]
\[ suhasinim sumadhurabhasinim \]
\[ sukhadam varadam mataram \]

Translation: Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight / her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in flowering bloom / sweet of laughter, sweet of speech / the mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss. (Trans. by Aurobindo Ghosh in Sarkar 2001:289).

The concept of shakti associated with the female cult infused strength and power in the patriotic mission. The mother figure in Bankimchandra Chatterjee evokes the sentiment and emotion for the land/ bhumi and it is this sentiment for the motherland, which inspires the subjects to fight collectively against the enemy.

The visualization of the past, present and future states of the mother are presented in three main iconographic sets in the novel. Satyananda, the leader of the
Santanaa shows Mahendra three images of the mother Goddess that represents the past, present and future. Satyananda shows the mother Goddess Kali in all her anger as the representation of the present:

Kali covered with darkness, who has lost everything. Within the country every place is like a burning ground. So angry mother crushed the demons and wore their head as skeleton – garland while unmindfully was crushing her husband, Lord Shiva, who wanted to pacify the Mother. Alas! Mother.

(Chattopadhyay 2008:32).

The representation of the future is visualized by Satyananda in the iconic figure of the ten armed Goddess Durga. Satyananda visualizes her thus:

This is the mother of the future. Ten hands are extended to ten directions. The various weapons in her hands denote various powers. The enemies are being crushed under her feet and the lion too has joined at their destruction.

(Chattopadhyay 2008: 32).

In Bankimchandra Chatterjee the iconic figure of the mother who exhorts her sons to strength does not exceed her symbolical representation; she remains an abstraction from the beginning to the end. The mother figure evokes the sentiment and emotion for the land and it is this sentiment for the “motherland,” which inspires the subjects to fight collectively against the enemy. The real woman, in spite of her heroic qualities cannot rise to the position of the goddess. For instance, even if Bankimchandra Chatterjee endows Shanti with extraordinary skills as a child, she is not able to transcend her sexuality.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee depicts Shanti with rare qualities that contrast with traditional gendered roles. Shanti’s father, a professor of Sanskrit allows his daughter to attend classes along with the other male students. The unusual way in
which she is brought up amidst male companions makes her wear men’s attire. She refuses to tie her hair and apply sandal paste on her forehead (Chattopadhyay 2008:53). She has memorized the stanzas of Raghu, Kumar and Naishadh and her father realizing her talent imparts the basics of Sanskrit literature to her (Chattopadhyay 2008:53). After her father’s death, Shanti is left an orphan and Jibananda, one of her father’s students, decides to take her home to his parents (Chattopadhyay 2008:54). Jibananda decides to take responsibility for her by marrying her but Shanti refuses. She refuses to dress as a woman even after marriage. Often she loiters in the nearby forest to watch deer and peacocks and collect valuable flowers and fruits (Chattopadhyay 2008:54). Her in-laws try to confine her to a room to put an end to all her ‘male adventures,’ but Shanti, unable to bear this constant surveillance, runs away (Chattopadhyay 2008:54). She disguises herself as a sanyasi and joins an ascetic group. She is trained in the use of arms and travels widely with the group, taking part in a number of skirmishes. However, Shanti in Bankimchandra Chatterjee cannot transcend her sexuality as the leader of the group of sanyasis seduces her; thus, she cannot rise to the figure of the goddess. It is the iconic image of the goddess and not the real flesh and blood image of the woman that becomes important in Bankimchandra Chatterjee.

The real women characters in Anandamath, Shanti and Kalyani cannot transcend their female selves from the gaze of the male warriors or santaans. Shanti’s efforts to undermine her female self in the eyes of the male warriors, accentuate her sexuality more explicitly in the novel. For Bankimchandra Chatterjee the iconic figure of the mother is different from the real woman. Although Shanti possesses extraordinary heroic qualities, her female body does not permit her to be
equal with the male warriors. In Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the real woman is seen in terms of her biologically sexed category while the mother exceeds the limitations of the sexed body. Thus, while on the one hand, the mother figure can instil patriotism on her sons; the real woman cannot transcend her sexuality. The motherland is quite different from the figure of the wife and woman for the male warriors. Shanti is not able to divert the male gaze even after she claims for herself a new identity under the guise of Navinanda. Even when Jibananda knows about Navinanda's true identity, he does not see her as the motherland. When Shanti asks him as to what his duty would be if he had recognized her to be his wife, he at once replies that he would have disrobed her and made love to her (Chattopadhyay 2008:69).

Bankimchandra Chatterjee in *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884) invokes the supreme "Goddess Bhagabati" who comes down to earth in the image of Devi Chaudhurani (Chattopadhyay: 2002:732). Her words "I am not new. I am eternal" followed by the lines in invocation to Krishna in the *Gita* shows the enormity of the mission being laid on her (Chattopadhyay 2002: 761). The mother figure through her strength and calm arouses her sons but after the mission she returns to her prescribed roles within her household.

Aurobindo Ghosh too entwined nationalism with the revival of Hinduism and the female cults of *Durga* and *Kali* were used to mobilize the nation. The cult of the mother (*Kali*) was an important symbol in Aurobindo Ghosh's nationalist rhetoric which protested the decision to partition Bengal in 1905. The nation was regarded as an incarnation of the goddess *Kali* and the nationalists were considered her disciples. Aurobindo's perception of the mother draws on the Sakta philosophy
which glorifies the feminine principle as the executive force (Heehs 1989:133). The figure of Sakti, the mother, stands above all the world and bears the eternal consciousness of the Supreme Divine. She can herself harbour the absolute power and the truth that has to be manifested in the world (Ghosh 1928:26).

Ghosh was influenced by the German Romantics like Herder and Schlegel in their conception of the volksgeist or the “nation soul”. He believed that each nation had a set of characteristics proper to itself and the Indian or Hindu soul is the expression of the divine sakti. It is the divine sakti which acts like an armour in times of disaster (Ghosh 1928:11). Aurobindo Ghosh’s philosophy gave a powerful spiritual direction to the figure of the mother with violence as an associated characteristic.

IV

In Rabindranath Tagore’s concept we see a concept of the mother that is different from the “fierce self idolatry of nation-worship” given by Bankimchandra Chatterjee to the discourse. He was averse to the figure of sakti in its violent form mythicized in the deification of Durga and Kali by Bankimchandra Chatterjee before him. He believed that the deification of woman involved a denial of the woman’s status as a living human being. Thus while Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s conception of the mother was based on the heroic figure of the mother, Rabindranath Tagore constructed a more feminine image. Unlike Shanti, who cannot rise above her sexuality in the eyes of the male warriors, Bimala, in Ghare Baire/The Home and the World (1916) is very much loved and honoured by her husband, Nikhilesh. Bimala herself states in her autobiography: “My husband used to say quite often that both husband and wife have equal rights over each other” (Tagore 2009:10).
belief in giving his wife equal rights makes Nikhilesh educate his wife and introduce her to the outside world which is represented in the novel by Sandeep. Nikhilesh does not see his wife Bimala as a sexed object, he educates her and even offers to take her to Calcutta. When she refuses his proposal, Nikhilesh respects his wife’s decision (Tagore 2009:15-16).

The spirit of militant nationalism and its association of the nation with the mother advocated by Bankimchandra Chatterjee are severely criticised in The Home and the World. The image of the mother as sakti with which Bimala identifies herself on being incited by Sandip, prove to be disastrous. Tagore’s depiction of Ela in Char Adhaya/Four Chapters (1934) is a critique of the political women who go beyond “femininity” (Rabindranath Tagore 2002:28). Impressed by Ela’s strength of character, Indranath takes her to the outside world where she works in a school run by revolutionaries. She is projected as a mother figure to inspire the revolutionaries in the cause of the nation. Indranath dissuades her from marriage as it would jeopardize her commitment to the cause of the nation. In the end, Ela departs from the path of revolutionary nationalism to marry Atindra.

Tagore’s idea of the nation was very different from Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s concept of the matribhumi based on the homogenization of a specific community – the Hindu upper caste – which constructs its identity from the past. Tagore points out in his book Nationalism that this misrepresentation of the past is responsible for developing a sense of narrow patriotism. He feels that educated Indians were trying to absorb lessons from history which were contrary to the lessons of their ancestors. Tagore looked back at some of the Indian traditions that worked for adjustment of the different races to acknowledge the real difference
between them and yet at the same time seek some “basis for unity”. He says that this basis for unity had “come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others through their preaching of one God to all races of India” (Tagore 1950:99). This attitude made him skeptical about geographical boundaries. David Kopf asserts that this “outlook of tolerance” was shaped by Tagore’s Brahmo background which was an outcome of Keshab Chandra Sen’s universalism (Kopf 1996:290). This spirit of tolerance results in a more secular representation of the mother in his writings as a thinking human being. Tagore’s secularism was influenced by Keshab Chandra Sen’s universalism. It was only for a short period of time that Tagore came under the influence of the Hindu traditionalism spearheaded by Bankimchandra Chatterjee (Kopf 1996:288). This period of Tagore’s temporary attraction for Hindu revivalism inspired him to take a leading part in the Swadeshi Movement. Later he was compelled to withdraw, being disillusioned by its violence and narrow patriotism. In 1908, Tagore had written a letter to his friend, Aurobindo Mohan Bose, expressing his resentment and disillusionment at the callous sense of patriotism transmitted by the movement:

Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual centre; my refuse is humanity I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live. I took a few steps down that road and stopped: for when I cannot retain my faith in universal man standing over and above my country, when patriotic prejudices overshadow my God, I feel inwardly starved.

(Tagore 2005:36:72).

In his novel *Gora* (1909), Gora’s changing outlook echoes Tagore’s own move from militant nationalism to universalism. Gora’s shift in the ideological position regarding women shows Tagore’s faith in woman as a thinking human
being as Gora slowly recognizes the feminine principle *prakriti* or nature in creation. Sucharita represents the primal forces of nature that Gora had never known before. After Gora's polemical discussion with Sucharita in Paresh Babu's house, Gora is able to recognize the forces of the feminine through her. As he walks in solitude homewards from her house, he is able to feel the presence of nature which was hitherto unknown to him:

Nature had never had the opportunity to draw Gora's attention. This evening however the sky above the river touched Gora's heart repeatedly ...Gora's mind and body were simultaneously occupied this evening by these huge and still aspects of nature. The massive darkness of the sky began throbbing in the same beat as Gora's heart. All his life Gora had relied on his own studies and intelligence, work and thoughts, to lead a independent existence – what happened to him today? At some point, he had acknowledged the presence of nature and as soon as he had done so, this deep black water, the dense river bank, that wide stable sky seemed to welcome and receive him. Tonight he had been conquered by nature.

(Tagore 1997: 139).

Tagore's novel *Gora* can be conceived in terms of the conflict he was facing at that time between the popular Hindu militant nationalism and his own faith in universalism. Against the heroic power and force represented in the iconic figures of the mother, Tagore sought to represent the feminine power of the mother. Sucharita in *Gora* represents femininity as a contrast to Gora's masculinity. Tagore's emphasis on her femininity makes her all that Gora is not. She is modest, shy and has a sense of self-restraint, and she upholds the ideals of the new women. The rhetoric of Tagore's narrative in the conversation between Gora and Sucharita is built on a contrast between Gora's masculinity and Sucharita's femininity; Gora's aggressiveness against her softness and his thinking with her feeling, "Her softly uttered question
sounded very sweet to Gora’s ears” (Tagore 2001:135). Tagore shows that Gora’s changed outlook which leads to his self realization is brought about by his recognition of the feminine principle. The feminine principle or *prakriti* – the image of the mother as the procreator and the nurturer slowly acquires importance in Gora’s mind.

For Tagore, nationalism meant not a political or commercial basis of unity but the spiritual unity of all human beings. Gora’s mother, Anandamoyee represents that feature of the nation which made constant adjustments to accommodate the different types of races. She is the mother who tactfully negotiates with her two sons – the fierce nationalism of Gora and the liberal mindedness of Mahim. Noting Gora’s religious bigotry, she advises him to adopt a liberal attitude towards her Christian maid Lachmiya, who nursed him when he was a child, an advice Gora chooses to ignore. At the end of the novel, Tagore shows Gora’s recognition of the need for tolerance when he accepts a glass of water from Lachmiya (Tagore 2001: 477).

V

Gandhi emphasized the feminine qualities of love, grace and sacrifice as the noble features of the mothers of the nation. He believed in the composite nature of nationalism and sought to mobilize class, caste, community and gender into a single cohesive political force. His form of nationalism was not designed for one section of the society; women were intricately connected with it. Gandhi asserted that it was this feminine strength which would act as a major political force to overpower the British (Patel: 2000:304). Gandhian ideology regarding women is based on reversing women’s weakness into strength, as he sees the essence of women as power and not as subordination. Gandhi’s philosophy rests on this moral *Swaraj*; in
his scheme it cannot be related to the western concept of the term “freedom”, as it signifies self restraint and not absence of restraint (Dalton: 1999:3). Gandhi’s concept of swaraj was related to his theory of non violence as he believed that “civil liberty consistent with the observance of non violence is the first step to Swaraj” (Gandhi 1930 43:890). The fact that women are pre-eminently suited to satyagraha make them play a greater role in the non violent struggle (Gandhi 1930 43:407). Thus, in Gandhian ideology women’s capacity for renunciation and compassion are intimately linked to the attainment of swaraj. Women’s strength, courage, patience and capacity for suffering make her a symbol of non violence, which he conceived as the first step to swaraj.

Gandhi’s idea of motherhood was perceived in terms of spiritual and moral strength. It is significant that he dismissed the goddess figures in favour of models of female submission and passivity derived from the mythological ‘Sita-Savitri’ paradigm. Gandhi was able to develop the idea that the spiritual and symbolic sustenance of the movement of non-co-operation lay vested in the hands of women: “If non violence is the law of our being, the future is with women” (Gandhi 1930 43: 219).

Gandhi felt that motherhood meant the “infinite capacity for suffering”. Gandhi makes visible the experiences of motherhood in women: her bearing and rearing of children, her nurture and care gives her a definite subjectivity. He attempts to direct these essentialist experiences of women to the public sphere, thus involving women in the life of the nation. By affirming the quality of sacrifice in motherhood and by extending it to the public sphere, he attempted to establish woman’s specific role in the life of the nation. Gandhi used the feminine qualities of
compassion and renunciation to define women's political participation through activities like picketing in front of shops selling liquor and foreign clothes (Gandhi 1930 43:252). These roles assigned to women stand as symbols representing abstract virtues, thereby making them the "best exemplars of a certain moral force in society" (Kishwar 1986:3).

Thus, Gandhi's writings and speeches assert the existence of the "feminine" as an important component in the life of the nation. He emphasized the private sphere of the home and child-bearing as an integral part of the national. Analysing Gandhian ideology, Sujata Patel says that in Gandhian ideology 'woman' was an essentialist formulation as it emphasized the distinction between the separate spheres of home and the nation (Patel 2000:318). He gave her a new space in public life but this was circumscribed within the space of the domestic. She states that the spinning wheel was used as a political symbol and it became an instrument for the women in the home to participate in political life (Patel 2000:295). The woman as mother became the symbol of non violence and it was she who would free the nation from colonial rule (Patel 2000:295). Thus, Patel affirms that through the various constructions and re-constructions of women, Gandhi emphasised the essential distinctions between masculinity and femininity (Patel 2008:318). However, Gandhi gave a new thrust to her essentialist roles by aligning the feminine roles with the life of the nation. Gandhi valorized these roles and made them visible in the public sphere.

Feminists have asserted the importance of feeling, emotion and intuition and have thus valorized woman's true nature which is integrally connected with love and care. Gandhi's ideas on women as Vina Mazumdar states are "remarkably similar to
those voiced by the women’s liberation movement all over the world” (Cited in Patel 2000: 288). Gandhi, unlike other nationalists before him, saw a permanent force in motherhood. Unlike Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s conception of the mother who returned to her domestic world within the four walls of the home after the period of crisis, in Gandhi’s conception the mother had a distinct and permanent role in the claiming of nationhood. For him women were the instruments of power, potential agents who would act as a permanent force in the regeneration of the nation.

Women’s essentialist roles of “nurture” and “care” that restricted her to the private sphere were infused with new strength and meaning after Gandhi’s entrance into the national arena. The valorization of these roles made women a significant force in the public sphere – they could find new meanings in their life and perceive themselves as distinct subjects of the imagined nation. Thus, it enabled them to see their ‘weaknesses’ as strengths. This widened their horizon and generated a new thought process that later helped in the institutionalization of the women’s movement.

Thus, the discourse of nationalism had scripted its own constructions of the mother figure through a set of ideas expressed by these writers. The quintessential rhetoric of the mother as nation was configured to define the claims of nationhood. The iconic representation of the mother in the writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Aurobindo Ghosh had been an empowering symbol to define the glorious past and to combat colonialism. Rabindranath Tagore’s re-visioning of the mother figure in the image of the feminine brought a new perspective in the conception of the ‘real woman.’ Gandhi tried to see women in a new light by conceiving the enduring influence of motherhood in the identification of the nation.
However, all these cultural constructs in the writings of the intelligentsia suppressed women's voices, their real selves being subsumed under these homogenous representations. Women as women are invisible in these cultural representations and in the fixed and reified form of the nationalist narrative. As Kristeva says that female sensibility is not in agreement with the idea of an "eternal Europe" and perhaps not even with that of a "modern Europe" (Kristeva 1997: 863-864). ‘Women’ in the Indian nationalist discourse, is primarily a male construct and not consistent with women’s own experiences. This response is best represented in the literary forms, which they adopted from men during the period of nationalist struggle.

In these literary forms, women created themselves as subjects, rejecting their creation as objects by a discourse, which contained them within symbolic roles. In the backdrop of this discourse, the succeeding chapters will take the case of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu – their aspirations and experiences as expressed in their writings and speeches. An investigation into the various genres of writing of these two women and an examination of Sarojini Naidu’s role as a public speaker are ways to perceive how women fashioned and created themselves as subjects. Their writings show a very different representation of women than that found in the discourse of men. The symbol of the mother as nation evoked a feeling of patriotism which inspired the nationalists to write martial poetry. The imaginative power of poetry enabled the writers to invent a masculine identity to counter a colonial discourse and make a claim towards nationhood. The next chapter will offer an exploration of the kind of poetry which women sought to write against this dominating matrix of cultural representations.
Notes

1. These writers have looked at nationalism as an oppression for women. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davies have shown how the discourses around women’s primary roles as biological reproducers, cultural transmitters or as participants in political and military struggles are strategies adopted by the state to control and exploit them (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2000: 480-1481). Kandiyoti refers to the fact that national identity are forms of control over women and this infringes upon their rights as enfranchised citizens. In bearing the burden of “mothers of the nation,” women are constrained by the nation. Although the nationalist movement invited women to participate in the national life as mothers, educators, workers and fighters, yet, they exerted pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by the nationalist discourse (Kandiyoti 2000:1493).

2. Pandita Ramabai visited Calcutta with her brother Srinvas. Ramabai and Srinivas performed “Harikatha” in one of the temples. The news of the young woman’s knowledge of scriptures and her oratory spread like wild fire in the city. She was given the title of “Pandita” and “Saraswati” in a meeting held at the famous Senate Hall of Calcutta (Panandiker 2003:41).

3. In the case of education, debates departed somewhat from the usual division between liberals and the orthodox. The orthodoxy did not oppose the concepts of “strisiksha” as such but their fear was related more to the activity of sending girls to school (Sarkar 2002:164). Radhakanta Deb suggested that while schools should continue to teach the poor, the girls of the upper class should be taught at home. Radhakanta Deb, in spite of being an orthodox and a great campaigner in support of widow immolation believed in women’s education (Sarkar 2002:165).

4. Partha Chatterjee refers to the elite class as the new patriarchy. The “new patriarchy” conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility as they associated women’s emancipation with the claims of nationhood (Chatterjee Nation and its Fragments 1999:130).

5. Susan Hekman observes that several writers have traced the maleness of rational thought back to the Greeks. She cites Luce Irigaray’s brilliant analysis of Plato’s allegory of the cave where she shows that the masculine definition of the concepts of truth and rationality are central to Plato’s concept of knowledge (Hekman 1994:54).
Works Cited


