Poetry: Altering Symbols, Representing Selves

Women ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy.

[Irigaray 1993:10]

The forms of imaginative literature are essential elements of cultural nationalism as they perceive the nation as a distinctive historical community. These forms served to develop and disseminate the discourse of nationalism and were important ideological forces in regenerating a common identity of the nation. The form of 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. The intelligentsia was engaged in the moral regeneration of the community and the creation of a national identity was important to assert the claims of nationhood. The affirmation of a martial spirit was an important way to conceive this national identity.

It became crucial “to reclaim honour and masculinity from negative representations in colonial discourse and claiming the right to control/protect ‘our’ women from the eyes of the colonizer” (Sinha 2006:331). The images of the suffering mother in a colonial situation was created by the discourse and she was to be rescued and protected by masculine prowess. Even in the iconic representation of the nation as mother it was the man who had to prove his martial valour to bring back her past glory. Poetry became an important form to re-assert masculine memories and re-masculinize a national culture. The evolving discourse of nationalism defined
this martial spirit. Therefore, a grand style is apparent in men’s poetry where it was necessary to valorize this martial spirit. A quintessential example is the song *Bande Mataram* from *Anandamath* where Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s aspiration to create a national identity through the sentiment of the mother nation is revealed.

Against this declamatory style of the male voice, a quietness marks women’s poetry. Women’s poetry reveals a woman’s limited experience away from involvement in the formation of the nation that men were engaged with. The ambiguity with which women responded to the new national identity finds expression in their poetry. Women’s tensions with the national identity – the strain of confirming to the feminine codes are implicitly felt within their subjective poetic mode. This chapter attempts to show how Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu responded to these national identities. Did the regeneration of national identities – ‘the figure of the mother as nation’ relate to their real lives, to their experiences and actions as they expressed themselves in their poetry? Women tried to subvert the mythical for the real by writing their own experiences into their poetry. The evasiveness, restlessness and excessive metaphoricity and irony of this form had been particularly enabling to reveal a self obliquely. Helene Cixous states that “poetry involves gaining strength through the unconsciousness,” because the unconscious is “the place where the repressed manage to survive” (Cixous 2000:261). The incredible quality of woman’s imagination engraved in her unconsciousness is expressed in her poetry. Toru Dutt lived in a time that marks the beginning of an incipient nationalism which was followed by its development into a major force during the time of Sarojini Naidu. The form of poetry gave these two women a space to respond to the exigencies of those varying time and express their subjective
experiences against the nationalist discourse. As a preliminary step towards identifying alternative features in their poetry, this chapter traces the construction of an identity for the nation in the poetry written by men. Such a design makes it necessary to survey early Indian English poetry to locate the emerging concepts of nationhood and national identity. This is the first stage of resistance and it is undertaken through a deliberate mimicry of British orientalist and romantic poetry. Slowly the writers gained confidence and an assertion of masculine national identity begins to sound in Bengali poetry. This developed into a major form when the nationalist movement began to gain momentum. Against these dominant themes in the poetry written by men, alternative features interwoven in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu are revealed. Their poetry subverts the stereotypical images of the discourse. The poetry of Toru Dutt shows a change from the grand narratives that surround the discourse of nationalism to a presentation of the real figure of women. Mythical figures in Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan are seen through her own experience as she gives a subjective interpretation to these characters. Her lyrics where her personal experiences are revealed more directly, give vent to her emotions and distort some of the ideological representations of the discourse. For instance, the figure of Sita pushes her towards a recollection of her childhood days when her mother used to tell her stories along with her siblings. Sarojini Naidu’s poetry reveals deeper undertone than the outward representation of the silent, mute figure of woman. Beneath these symbols of the passive woman, Sarojini Naidu expresses her inner conflicts in a “dualistic voice” which finds expression in her poem The Golden Threshold (1905) and Bird of Time (1912). These conflicting undertones find their full expression in the “Temple” group of poems in The Broken Wing (1917).
Although less discussed in comparison to the form of fiction, the form of poetry, with its emotional resonances, act as a powerful force in disseminating the ideas of the nation. In her affirmation of Derozio’s poetry as a part of public discourse, Rosinka Chaudhuri refers to James Thomson’s reflection of poetry as:

[A] useful ...indeed recommended – vehicle for commentaries on issues of great public significance for the nation and for society...Poetry including its lyrical forms, is not an exercise in inwardness but a viable and even vital way of moulding a public discourse


Thomson’s definition of poetry is centred on the role of poetry in shaping a public discourse and is applicable to men’s poetry (written around the time of nationalism) which moulded public discourse; however, it makes no mention of the personal and private experiences of women. As Thomson said, poetry written during the time of nationalism was a deliberate attempt to shape a public discourse; it was a conscious effort to create a ‘national identity’ for the nation but it was a national identity built on the spirit of masculinity. The poetry that came to be written during the nationalist upsurge concentrated on retrieving the martial spirit as an attribute of the imagined nation. The regeneration of a national identity through the spirit of martial Indianness resurrected from the past was an important thrust in poetry written by men. Hence men’s poetry with its power of mobilization became an important tool in shaping the public discourse. This excluded the poetry written by women from the mainstream as women expressed their subjective experiences differently, of a tangent from the public discourse that shaped men’s poetry.
Poetry became the marker of a changing sensibility of a nation trying to assert its identity in the middle of the nineteenth century. The valorization of the martial races was a key element in fashioning a 'modern national identity' which could contest the colonial discourses. The martial spirit was an important element in national identity for its association with strength, power and conquest. These aspects as Uma Chakravarti says were to be seen in relation to the negative qualities of an effete, unmanly, slothful people as shown by European writers on India (Chakravarti 1989:47). This characterization although applicable to all 'natives' was particularly associated with the Bengalis. It was to challenge this picture of 'effeteness' that the forging of a new identity was necessary for the imagined nation. Therefore, there was a constant attempt to project the martial qualities that were associated with particular regions and groups of people such as Marathas, Rajputs and Sikhs (Chakravarti 1989:47). These groups were categorized as martial races for purpose of recruitment in the army. The publication of the detailed works of British writers, Grant Duff on the Marathas, Todd on the Rajputs and Cunningham on the Sikhs helped the intelligentsia in identifying the martial spirit. The nationalists adapted the notion of martial races to resist a foreign rule. The form of poetry, with its capacity to conjure up the imagination with nostalgia for the past heroic spirit, played an important role in the formation of a national identity. Men's poetry is characterized by a declamatory style, a loud, clear and confident voice that can be distinguished from the quietness of the female voice. The spirit of martial Indianness in mobilizing the nation came to be resurrected several times in the poetry written by men in the period.
The Indians also came to be aware of their golden past through the works of the British Orientalists, who engaged themselves in unraveling the history of India. The publication of the works by William Jones relating to Hindu antiquities, literature, and mythology opened a new awareness in the minds of the subject population. The historical poetry written by Indians in English in the nineteenth century was influenced by Orientalist scholarship. William Jones’s translation of Kalidasa’s *Sakuntala* or Wilson’s translation of *Meghduta*, made a profound impression on Indians concerning their literary heritage, finding frequent mention in notes to the poems of Henry Derozio, Kasiprasad Ghosh or Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Rosinka Chaudhuri comments that Orientalist poetry of nineteenth century India opened the way for the emergence of an incipient nationalism. Rosinka Choudhuri traces the beginning of the concepts of nation and national identity to Derozio (Derozio 2008:xxx). Derozio’s sonnet written to the pupils of Hindu College which was later titled *To India My Native Land* was translated by Dwijendranath Tagore for his friend Rajnarain Bose’s book *Sekal Aar Ekaal* or *Past and Present* (Derozio 2008:xxiv). It provides evidence of an Indian English poem making an impact on the Bengali mind in defining a feeling of national unity.

Derozio’s sonnet *The Harp of India* sings passionately about the former glories of the country and bemoans its present situation. In celebrating the past glories of the nation, he regenerates a sense of national identity:

    O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
    Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
    And many a wreath for them did fame entwine
    Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel’s grave (Derozio 2008:96).
He contrasts the past with the present:

Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain? —
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain! (Derozio 2008:96).

And in the following lines he echoes an incipient nationalism when he says:

Those hands are cold – but if thy notes divine
May be by moral wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain! (Derozio 2008:97).

For the first time there is a sense of national identity felt by an Indian writer as is evident in his use of the words “my country”. In his poem “Enchantress of the Cave,” Derozio gives a picture of the heroic past. Derozio had been influenced by Henry Colebrooke who in On The Vedas had depicted a glorious Hindu race. As he writes in this poem:

O for the heroic hearts of old
To fire he souls that are now cold,
To lead them on to deeds of worth,
And raise their glory yet on earth! (Derozio 2008:131).

A sense of nationhood defines itself against the Muslim invaders in this poem. The Muslims are used as a trope for the foreigner as Derozio depicts a Hindu-Muslim conflict here. The praise of mythical heroism and valour here are Indian in its moorings. As Rosinka Chaudhuri says, “Derozio’s poems were markers of a new consciousness that was beginning to emerge with the ideas of the nation” (Derozio 2008: xxxi).
Kasiprasad Ghosh (1809-1873) who was a student of Hindu College from 1821-1827 wrote his first poem towards the end of his student career. At that time English education had just become operational in Hindu College and Kasiprasad Ghosh wrote his poems in English. Kasiprasad Ghosh also adopted the method of writing footnotes against Indian words as William Jones and other Oriental scholars did. His poem “Dusahara” contains a short sentence explaining the origin of the festival, “Ganga Puja”. It has a subheading – “Ganga Puja”, and a reference to the mythological story of the birth of the river. This shows Kasiprasad Ghosh’s urge to connect his culture to the ancient Hindu past and his attempts to invent a national identity, through such a link:

Glorious river! thee of yore
Siva on his tresses bore,
When thou didst thy rapid flow
Take unto this world below,
From the peak of Himalay,
Where thy lucid waters stray,
Dispensing to the gods above
Purity and holy love (Ghosh 1918:1).

In his foreword to Dunn’s The Bengali Book of English Verse, Rabindranath Tagore demonstrates the creative response of the Bengali to the ideas of the west:

The West, which at first drew us on to itself, has forcibly flung us back upon an intense consciousness of our personality. The breath of inspiration, coming from the West, has kindled the original spark in us into a flame that lay smothered in the ashes of dead habits and rigidity of traditional forms. This has been illustrated by the course our literature has taken, almost completely abandoning its earlier foreign bed, finding its natural channel in the mother tongue. The following collection of English poems written by Bengali authors also proves it, in which the earlier writings are timorously
imitative, while the later ones boldly burn with their own fire, daring to challenge time's judgment with their claim of immortality.

(Tagore 1918:xiii).

These words prove that the new ideas of the west were infused with new vigour by the creativity of the Bengali mind. The west with its new ideas stirred the latent qualities of the east, which had become dormant because of the rigidity of customs and traditions. Tagore felt that this response to the call of the west through literature was unique in the history of the modern world and this would be an important channel in the amalgamation of the east and the west. This made the Bengalis active agents in creating their identity, a fact about colonized cultures that Said ignores in *Orientalism*.

Dunn's anthology shows the recurrence of orientalist themes in the writings of Kasiprasad Ghosh and other Indian poets writing in English. Although Dunn critiques the works of earlier poets as lacking in authenticity, these Indian English poets were agents in the formulation of a national identity through their unique interest in their own culture. In 1828, Kasiprasad Ghosh launched an attack on James Mill's *History of British India*. He countered Mills' indictment of the ancient Hindu policy and defended the Hindu chronological scheme as a method for astronomical calculations and not for historical purposes (Kopf 1969:263).

Most of these nineteenth century poets started their poetic career by first writing in English and then shifting to Bengali, the best examples being Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Romesh Chunder Dutt. They were using poetry as a form to disseminate a national identity and their Indian English poems were the first steps in fashioning this identity. Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Captive Lady* (1849) was based on an episode in medieval Indian history on the abduction by King Prithviraj
Chauhan of his beloved from her family house, and his subsequent defeat in battle at the hands of Muslim invaders (Dunn 1918:8). The long poem is built on the opposition between the Muslim invader and the Hindus; the Muslim invaders are represented as fearful while the Hindus are shown to be heroic and fighting for liberty and life. The second canto presents a detailed description of the battle between the Muslim invaders and the Hindus (Dunn 1918:14). The Captive Lady, contains many references to the Indian classics and epics In a letter to his friend, Gourmohun he writes: “Can’t you send me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabhrut by Cassidos as well as a ditto of the Ramayana, – Serampore edition. I am losing my Bengali faster than I can mention” (cited in Mukherjee 2000:10). This shows how these writers, in spite of their education in English, were consciously trying to fashion a national identity.

The mythical figures of the past were revived and a masculine national identity was conceived by the writers. The emphasis on revitalizing a masculine national identity was carried on in Madhusudan Dutt’s epic poems written in Bengali and themes from Indian history were directed at regenerating a national identity that was typically masculine.

The perception of the past which oriental scholarship was able to unfold to the Indians was an important achievement. The reconstruction of the past increasingly appeared in the poetry of the time. R.C. Dutt in The Epics and Lays of Ancient India (1894) had taken up the responsibility of introducing the ancient lays and epics from the legacy of the Orientalists. He says in his preface to The Epics and Lays of Ancient India: “I shall consider my labours amply rewarded if the present volume can take a humble place by the side of Wilson’s Theatre of the
Thus, the legacy of the British Orientalist Movement became virtually extinct after the announcement of Macaulay's *Minutes*, during the Bentinck administration, continued to be seen in Indian English. Drawing on Bhabha's reading of mimicry as resistance, Rosinka Chaudhuri points out that mimicry becomes an integral element in the evolution and definition of a colonized culture (Chaudhuri 2002: 16). The inspiration that the intelligentsia received from the Oriental scholars to reconstruct their own past, slowly enabled them to develop into active agents in the formulation of a national identity. It helped create a new feeling of 'nation-ness' as they felt a shared sense of identity. The redefinition of the past became crucial in the later half of the nineteenth century as a mode of resistance to colonialism. The need of the hour was to foreground the valour of the past, and the masculine identity thus constructed by the intelligentsia served to combat the colonial representation of the Bengalis as "effete". And as the poems of Michael Madhusudan Dutt reveal, adopted themes from Ancient Indian history for the formation of a national identity.

In his reference to the development of cultural nationalism in Bengal, David Kopf (1996) focuses on how the sensitivity to western dominance was followed by a search for nationalist identity in the later half of the nineteenth century. He states that the earliest expressions of a nationalist spirit and ideology in Bengal came to be manifested soon after the "Brahmo schism" of 1866. Rajnarain Bose was the earliest to challenge Keshab Chandra Sen's universalism when he put up a militant defense of his culture. He made a bold nationalist plan that aimed at rehabilitating the younger generation of a Bengali Hindu intelligentsia (Kopf 1996:179). Rajnarain Bose's schema opened a new phase of aggressiveness in cultural
nationalism which marked a sharp break from the universalism associated with Keshab Chandra Sen. He felt that a programme of generating Hindu youths was necessary which included physical training to "restore the manliness of Bengali youths and their long lost military prowess" (Kopf 1996:180). Although Rajnarain Bose's prospectus for starting a society for the development of nationalist feeling among the educated natives of Bengal did not materialize, it was conceivably the most radical proposal of its kind by any nationalist up to that time. The prospectus included a programme of regenerating Hindu youth which included:

Physical training "to restore the manliness of Bengali youth and their long lost military prowess"; the establishment of a school of Hindu music with the "composition of songs for moral, patriotic and martial enthusiasm. (Kopf 1996:180).

The prospectus with its promises of setting up new identities shows the assertion of a modern Indian identity which foregrounded the spirit of masculinity. As the association did not materialize, it was replaced by the celebration of the yearly national festival, the "Hindu Mela" or a "National Gathering" popularized by the Tagore family from 1870 where fervent nationalist poems and songs came to be composed and sung. The essential features promoted in the songs, poems and speeches of the mela were "progress, unity, and self reliance".

The nationalist society founded by Nabogopal Mitra also aimed to give physical training to the Hindu youth (Kopf 1996:185). These various aspects of cultural nationalism represented in the Hindu Mela, the National Society, and the associations of Rajnarain Bose and Nabagopal Mitra were trying to project national identity as a masculine enterprise that could lead the imagined nation to its goal. They were institutions for the nationalization of a modern Indian identity, and as
Partha Chatterjee says were located in a space which was “modern but national” (Chatterjee 1993: 277).

Bengali poetry thus underwent a major transformation during this time. The effort to create a national identity by reminiscing the heroic past, and recalling the valour and martial qualities that were associated with the “martial races” – the Marathas, Rajputs and Sikhs were important steps in this process. The year 1858 may be regarded as a turning point in Bengali literature as new experiments in ‘high’ cultural forms came to shape Bengali literature (Dasgupta: 1969:25). A number of popular lyrical forms – kabi, tappa, yatra, panchali, dhap, kirtan, baul, devotional songs and love songs had given way to experiments with new forms of poetry that came to be written after 1858, with the emergence of an incipient nationalist consciousness (Dasgupta: 1969:25). Poetry was an important form which was used to express a national identity in the time of a national crisis. Rukmini Bhaya Nair in her discussion of poetry as an expression of national culture refers to the subterranean connections between political culture and poetic expression (Bhya Nair: 2003:128). This explains the close union of politics and poetry during the time of nationalism. Poetry was used for the regeneration of a new identity for the nation. The, intensely devotional songs of Ramprasad, the amoral poetry of Bharatchandra Ray and the skepticism of Ishwar Chandra Gupta had given way to the experimentation of high cultural forms in the poetry of the mid-nineteenth century. From 1858, the year of the death of Ishwar Gupta and the first appearance of Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s dramas Shormista (1859), Tilottama (1860), Nildaran (1861) and Meghnad Badh Kabya (1861) marked a transition in Bengali literature during which the intelligentsia was trying to assert its own identity by remodeling
the past to maintain the standards of the present brought about by western ideas (De 1962:4). Rangalal Banerjee’s preface to *Padmini Upakhyan* published in 1858 presented an adverse criticism of “the frivolous poetry” written in the past (Dasgupta: 1969: 24). His *Padmini Upakhyan* (1858) sought to reproduce the spirit of Rajput heroes in their love, chivalry and medieval tournaments (Dasgupta 1969:41). Rangalal Banerjee’s first venture was followed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s poetical romance *Tilottama* (1860) which saw a revival of Hindu mythology from English to Bengali. Thus there was a constant attempt to formulate a high culture based on the glorification of the heroic past.

The new poetry which emerged indicated a style and content that set them apart from popular cultural forms. Poetry was being engaged to re-define mythology and to create new standards of heroism. The revival of the past with its pristine masculinity finds its resonance in the poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Hemchandra Banerjee (1838-1904) and Nabin Chandra Sen (1847-1909). The fundamental postulate that the reader is called upon to assume in Dutt’s epic poem *Meghnad Badh* is the creation of a masculine heroic Bengali mind represented in the characters of Ravana and Meghnad. Thus, a submerged traditional Indian masculinity was made salient with the help of new cultural imagery and myths. Poetry became an important form to re-order these myths and imagery in keeping with the need of the times.

Nabin Chandra Sen’s *On the Battle of Plassey* (1876) kindled the patriotic spirit of the age. The projection of Sri Krishna in this epic trilogy was a cohesive devise to infuse into the degenerate Indian people a new strength and power; a subtle force which would unite the people into a whole (Dasgupta 1969:70). The
patriotic poem “Bharat Sangeet” (1870) written by Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay opened the way for a national and literary discourse in India (Dasguta 1969:75). Thus, the retrieval of a cultural past for national identity formation was heavily invested in tropes of masculinity. The formulation of this prescient image was fundamental in an anti-colonial context and the poetry of the period reflects the intimate relationship between masculinity and the political imagination of the nation. The dissemination of the heroic ideals of the past through these influential works induced the growth of a military nationalism in Bengal which finds the fullest expression in the works of Bankimchandra Chatterjee.

A new role was envisioned for the Indian women as component in the production of masculinity. The construction of the heroic woman or the virangana, and the sacrificial woman or the sahadharmini which became popular in the discourse resulted in the loss of identity of the real woman. The masculine project was uniformly oppressive of women as the woman’s real self remained trapped within these models. She also came to represent the motherland in nationalist imaginings. Tharu and Lalita comment that pedestals have a certain power only in the imagination; in reality they are extremely precarious positions (Tharu and Lalita 1991:172). In other words, these mythical representations of women undermined her real self. Julia Kristeva rejects the representations of the “feminine” by the gaze of the masculine subject. Actual women, she notes, have been largely excluded from the male discourses as they were outside the socio-symbolic contract. Her experiences were erased in these symbolical representations. These representations restrain the female self. As Kristeva shows in “Stabat Mater,” the universal cult of the virgin mother represses woman’s experience of motherhood (Kristeva 1986:...
160). She explains that women are identified as the archaic mother in an imaginary relationship which represses the actual woman.

II

The images of women in the discourse fail to conceive the reality of women's lives. In this scenario, poetry offered a specific space to voice her tensions against the limits imposed by the social moorings of the time. Therefore, a re-reading of women's poetry within the socio-political context becomes a necessary step towards locating woman's voice. The specific ways in which woman as a category represents and reconstructs the world through her words are seen in their writings. Women's writings recharge the focus on women as subjects. For instance, when freedom and independence are the central concepts, within the discourse, this application to women is crucial in the formation of women's voices. Prassannamoyee Devi in her poem "Parthana" associates "captivity" in a way which is different from the colonizer-colonized relationship (Gupta 1360 Saka:58). The implication of the idea of freedom is different for a woman and this contrary articulation depicts the experiences of the female self. The women poets of Bengal have tried to re-imagine the nation through their writings and Prassannamoyee Devi is an example. Beneath the surface texture of acquiescence to the discourse, there are voices which articulate the inner tensions of accepting an ideology hostile to them. Thus their poems converge, diverge or take different directions in the formation of women's voices.

Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu attempted to express their own living experiences through their poetry. The primary focus of their poetry had been in bringing living women to occupy the space of the mystic figure and empty icons of the discourse. Even in the projection of mythical and iconic figures, it is the reality
of woman – her self, which indirectly finds its way into the poems. Women in these writings have moved from being the objects in the discourse of identity to being its authors. The suffocations and struggles they underwent as women and the empathy with which they responded to women’s lives are implicitly expressed in their poetry. They write about women, as women, in the representations of women as iconic or symbolic by the nationalist discourse.

Toru Dutt’s first volume *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) is an anthology of French verses translated into English. They were published through the enthusiasm of her father at “Saptahik Sambad Press” in Bhowanipore, Calcutta. This project of translating some of the major French poets opened out a new intellectual world and facilitated recognition of her own voice.

Toru Dutt’s second collection of poems *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was published after her death by her father Govin Chunder Dutt. The retelling of the ancient ballads and legends to retrieve the past had been a part of the orientalist project that had also been adopted by the Indian English writers in their nationalist project. Toru Dutt’s use of these legends in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* would seem to place her within the same project and with a similar aspiration. Yet they are not a facile submission to the popular literary national design, but a retelling of the stories she had heard from her mother when she was a child. And although she retells the legends in narrative verse, she takes liberties with the originals by underlining her own views. In other words, she subjectively responds to the characters and infuses new meanings into them.

“Savitri,” the longest legend retold in the collection, is in five sections. It demonstrates the freedom and ability of Savitri, a critical departure from models
generally projected for this figure. In Aurobindo Ghosh's poem "Savitri", the figure of Savitri is projected as a conscious force which guides man from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life. Savitri in Toru Dutt is not the symbol of divine consciousness but a free woman. Against the acquiescent nationalist rhetoric that foregrounded the paradigmatic roles of Sita and Savitri, Toru Dutt retells the stories as personal and individual journeys of woman. Dutt's Savitri exercises her freedom of choice, pointing to Toru Dutt's awareness of a new patriarchy that was legitimized by the emerging nationalist ideology which divided the social space into the "outer and the inner" or the public and the private (Chatterjee 1999:120). Dutt deliberately blurs this distinction of the two spaces of the private and the public through a focus on Savitri as a free woman. "Savitri" is the representation of Dutt's repressed self, through which, as Susie Tharu says, she imagines her freedom and understands the limits of her habitable space (Susie Tharu 1989:260).

In the first section, Savitri's choice of Satyavan as her husband is seen by Toru Dutt as an exercise of free will, a privilege enjoyed by women in the past. Toru Dutt compares the limits set on her mobility in contrast to the figure of Savitri who "went whither she chose" with "young companions of her age". In Toru Dutt's poem, Savitri becomes a symbol of freedom with no restrictions on her mobility:

In those far off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas. On her ways
Savitri at her pleasure went
Whither she chose, - and hour by hour
With young companions of her age,
She roamed the woods for fruit or flower,
Or loitered in some hermitage,
For to Munis gray and old
Her presence was as sunshine glad
They taught her wonders manifold,
And gave her of the best they had (131).

“Freedom” attains a subjective quality in Toru Dutt’s “Savitri”. Her emphasis on
Savitri’s education in the woods of the Muni’s hermitage rebuts the secluded space
of the zenana education popular amongst the young girls of the upper class. The
lines which refer to her education under the ‘Munis’ subtly critiques the system in
the mid-nineteenth century. The schema of Education was essentially gendered in
the nineteenth century: whereas with boys, profit and power were of primary
concern, with girls, it was the training to become good wives and mothers. Savitri
enjoyed freedom of mobility which offered her easy access to mix with the people
of high and low social status: “Her father let her have her way/In all things, whether
high or low” (132). This counters the ‘bhadralok’ distinction of high and low culture
where women of the upper class were secluded inside the antahpurs or women’s
quarters (Karlekar 1991:7). Thus Toru Duttt expresses her discomfiture in these
restricted social spaces and looks on the figure of Savitri as a woman who had been
free from such restrictions.

Toru Dutt appears to have been conscious of the gendered implications of
the word ‘freedom;’ she associates the implication of freedom from restraint with
boys than girls. Her emphasis on Savitri’s freewill to choose her own husband
tacitly comments the absence of choice for a woman in the social structure of the
nineteenth century: “Savitri, may herself elect / Someday, her future Lord and
guide” (132). Savitri’s independent choice is a mark of agency in the fulfillment of
her desires. Her entry into the hut to gather information about the youth to whom
she was attracted shows her ability and commendable self-will. Savitri becomes the
embodiment of power as she shows extraordinary strength of mind in her actions. She remains steadfast to her decision even when Narad Muni predicts the fatal truth about Prince Satyavan’s fate. Her father’s repeated requests to change her mind and his warnings to her of the wretched life of a widow which she would have to face fails to have any impact on her. She remains committed to her resolution:

In the meek grace of virginhood
Unblanched her cheek, undimmed her eye,
Savitri, like a statue, stood,
Somewhat austere was her reply.
‘Once, and once only, all submit

Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once, and once only, can a sire
Upon his well loved daughter say
In presence of the witness fire,
I give thee to this man away (137).

She voices her unflinching determination by announcing to her father that she would remain “unwedded” to her “dying day” if she is not allowed to marry the youth she loves. Thus the figure of Savitri assumes a new subjectivity in Toru Dutt. The focus on these aspects of her personality is a deliberate attempt to transcend the “feminine” image upheld by the “new patriarchy”.

In the second section, Savitri’s wifely devotion is constantly shown by Toru Dutt as valorizing the tropes of domesticity. If in the first part Toru Dutt concentrates on Savitri’s transcendence of the feminine, the second section emphasizes her feminine qualities as sources of strength through which she could play a major role in the family:
Her conduct as a wife was such
As to illumine all the place;
She sickened not, nor sighed, nor pined;
But with simplicity and grace
Discharged each household duty kind.
Strong in all manual works, - and strong
To comfort, cherish, help and pray.... (140).

The feminine roles are shown as significant qualities in asserting her dominance in the household. Dutt thus brings these humble aspects of woman’s work – “comfort, cherish, help and pray,” to prominence.

In the third section, Dutt emphasizes the mission undertaken by Savitri to bring her dead husband back to life. She transgresses all hurdles by following Yama, the God of death, and convinces him to redeem Satyavan. The whole conversation between Savitri and Yama is represented elaborately in the fourth section to demonstrate her ability to convince Yama to give back Satyavan’s life. When Satyavan regains his consciousness in the fifth and the last section, she leads him home safely through the thick forest clearing the way with a saw in her hand: “I’ll bear thy saw for our defense” (157). We see a subverted message of the “manly woman” in her retelling of the Savitri legend. Here again, Dutt deliberately attempts to transcend Savitri’s femininity by accentuating her ‘manly’ behaviour. When she sees Satyavan collapse she sheds no tears: “No tear drops had she shed but looked the Goddess of the land, / with her meek air of mild command” (146). It is evident, that Savitri could rise above her sexuality in times of crisis. She is shown as someone who could assert her command, the association of the word command with masculinity is quickly controlled by Dutt in her balancing it with the adjective “mild” to define her femininity. This makes her see femininity in a newer light in
comparison to the standards set by the new patriarchy. In her retelling of the “Savitri” legends in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the figure of devotion and sacrifice is given an active agency emphasizing the qualities of both the head and the heart. Toru Dutt ends the poem by foregounding both the qualities of the heart and the head:

As for Savitri, to this day
Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,
Be thou like her, in heart and head (158).

In this neat balance of emotion and intellect, Toru Dutt seem to foreshadow the epistemological shift noted by feminist thinkers of the body that acknowledges the redemptive step, following the recognition between body and mind, as one of balance of both and not a privileging of either one over the other.

The poem “Lakshman” opens with Sita’s appealing to Lakshman to go and help her husband Rama who she fears might be in danger when he goes to the forest to bring the golden deer for her. In her representation of Sita, Toru Dutt projects not the sacrificing Sita popularized by the discourse but the forceful Sita who pours her wrath on Lakshman and commands him to help Ram in his scuffle with Maris. Thus her focus on reversal in the representation of the mythical figure of Sita, the stereotypical qualities associated with Sita – her “gentleness”, “timidity” and “modesty” are reversed to subvert the versions of the feminine. Lakshman, stunned at her words, remarks:

Was this the gentle Sita? No.
Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,
The tears therein had ceased to flow (161).
Toru Dutt subverts the feminine image of the meek and mild figure of Sita when she accuses Lakshman of desiring Rama's death so that he may take possession of his wife and kingdom. Here there is nothing of the gentleness of Sita but the scathing attacks by a 'shrew' of her opponent:

What makes thee loth to leave this spot?
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide?
He perishes – well, let him die!
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within thy heart's most secret zone!
Search well and see! One brother takes
His kingdom, – one would take his wife! (160).

The whole poem presents an exchange where Sita accuses Laxman of not wanting to rescue Rama. Toru Dutt focuses on a different aspect of woman's behaviour, when a woman is enraged. By focusing on this aspect of Sita, Toru Dutt subverts the female quality of 'modesty' – where a woman can also fling abuses when she is angry. These radical representations express Toru Dutt's resentment with a discourse which refuses to see the authentic self of a woman.

Toru Dutt also reverses the iconic image of the Goddess Uma or Durga in her poem "Jogadhya Uma" by conceiving her in purely domestic terms. The poem narrates a specifically Bengali tale, centering upon a pair of white shells which a pedlar sells to a woman, and is told originally to Toru Dutt by an old family nurse, Suchee, "of whom all the children were very fond" (Dwivedi: 1998:74). Although the mother image had not yet established itself as a potent force, Toru Dutt was aware of the sentimental attachment of the Bengalis to the female deities of Uma/Durga and Kali. Her view of the goddess in her domestic form, shorn of outward
glory and valour, shows Torn Dutt's concentration on representing the goddess as an ordinary woman with simple desires.

Despite the poem's use of a rhetoric that imitates the English romantic poets, the setting, with the Pedlar's cry 'Shell-bracelets ho! Shell-bracelets ho' along the road "which ran straight to Khirogram," is typically Indian (163). The pedlar's cry fills the whole road till it reaches a "lake like tank" and on the fourth side of the Ghat he sees "a fair young woman with large eyes" who sits on the "broad stairs of marble white" (164). The woman agrees to buy a pair of white conch bracelets from the pedlar and stretches her hands for the pedlar to try the bangles on her. The bangles fit her perfectly but she is unable to pay the money for the bangles at that moment. She tells the pedlar that her father who was a priest in the temple would pay for the bangles. If her father said that he had no money, the pedlar should ask him to open a vermillion-streaked box near the shrine where the money would be found. Thus, Toru Dutt retells a folk tale in the natural setting of country life focusing on the purely domestic form of the goddess. Dutt here is not at all concerned with the larger Hindu ethos of Devi worship; she retells the story as a tribute to the woman who narrated her tale:

Absurd may be the tale I tell,
III – suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell.... (169).

Toru Dutt's retelling of the Bengali tale in "Jogadhya Uma" was to subvert the iconic figure of the goddess by placing her within a domestic space and equally to acknowledge the 'insignificant' woman who narrated the tale to her.

Susan Bordo points out that the seventeenth century philosophers saw the spiritual and the corporeal as two distinct substances which are defined in opposition
to the other. “Consciousness” which referred to a feminine consciousness of the world “was purged from the dominant intellectual culture, through the Cartesian rebirthing and restructuring of knowledge and world as masculine” (Bordo 1996: 641). She points out that the concept of the natural world as mothered was destroyed by the seventeenth century philosophical thought. She states that if the key terms in the Cartesian hierarchy of epistemological values are clarity and distinctiveness, the key terms in this alternative scheme of values might be designated as sympathy (Bordo 1996:643).

The feminine principle of sympathy and the recognition of a female cosmos in the natural world is focused in Toru Dutt’s retelling of some of the poems in Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. In the poem “Buttoo” where she narrates the Ekalavya episode from the Mahabharata, her sympathy for the wronged “Buttoo” is more poignant than the general interpretation of the story as a parable of devotion and virtue. After Buttoo is refused by Dronacharyya as his pupil on account of his low birth, he goes to the deep forest and makes a statue of Dronacharyya in order to practice archery in front of his guru. It is nature which inspires and guides him in his mission. In these lines Toru Dutt presents a beautiful integration between his self and nature:

So thinking, on and on he went,
Till he attained the forests’s verge,
The garish day was well-nigh spent,
Birds had already raised it dirge.
Oh what a scene! How sweet and calm
Is soothed at once his wounded pride,
And on his spirits shed a balm
That all its yearnings purified (178).
The last stanza brings out her feeling of sympathy for Buttoo:

| Glanced the sharp knife one moment high,     |
| The severed thumb was on the sod,            |
| There was no tear in Buttoo's eyes           |
| He left the matter with his God (184).       |

The feminine qualities of love, care, and sympathy for the other is reflected in her retelling of the ancient legend “The Hind and the Panther”. Carol Gilligan seeks to demonstrate that women’s moral capacities focus on ‘care’ (Gilligan 1997:591). According to Gilligan, autonomous moral reflections and judgments are possible within the ethics of care. Women see themselves as fundamentally connected with other people and they see attachment to others as a value. This voice of care is focused in Toru Dutt’s selection of a poem like “The Hind and the Panther”. Gilligan says that woman’s “perception of the self is so much more tenaciously embedded in relationships with others” (Gilligan 1997:550). Toru Dutt was impressed by the legend of king Bharata who abdicated his throne in order to spend his time in meditation in the forest. While in the forest after his renunciation, Bharata came across a baby hind which had fallen into the river. Seeing the mother hind die in fright and pain at the incident, Bharata sought to rescue the baby hind. Toru Dutt focuses on the compassion which makes the king rescue the hind:

| He drew the newborn creature from the wave; |
| 'Twas panting fast, but life was in it still. |
| Now, as he saw its luckless mother dead,     |
| He would not leave it in the woods alone,    |
| But with the tenderest pity brought it home. |
| There, in his leafy hut, he gave it food,    |
| And daily nourished it with patient care,    |
After retelling the poem, Toru Dutt goes on to justify Bharata’s feeling of sympathy. She repudiates the ascetic philosophy of non-attachment with its advocacy of “stoic pride,” “ascetic rites” or “penance” and severely criticizes the moral taught by the Brahmin sages that it was a sin to have loved the little hind after forsaking the desire to love or render affection for any particular creature:

And therefore little can we sympathize
With what the Brahmin sage would fain imply
As the concluding moral of his tale,
That for the hermit-king it was a sin
To love his nurseling (172).

Toru Dutt stresses the importance of consciousness and sets apart the scientific mind in favour of consciousness in her retelling of the legends. In “Prehlad”, Toru Dutt refers to the kind of education imparted on the four sons of king Heerun Kasyapu by teacher Sonda Marco as per the instructions of the king. She says:

And Sonda Marco, – such is name, –
Took home the four fair boys to teach
All knowledge that their years became,
Science, and war, and modes of speech,
But he was told, if death he feared,
Never to tell them of the soul,
Of vows, and prayers, and rites revered,
And of the gods who all control (196).
Of all the four sons, Prehlad, the most devoted to God, refused to accept this type of education as his conscience did not direct him to do so. He is directed by his own conscience and Dutt valorizes conscience or heart over the intellect as he says: “But I shall follow what my heart / Tells me is right...”. (197-198).

The lyrics in Toru Dutt’s collection of poems Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan offered her the opportunity to express her experiences with considerable liberty. In the lyrical mode, she had the liberty to talk of so many experiences — her listening to the ancient stories from her mother, having a view of her garden at Baugmaree, reminiscing of her childhood, cherishing the memories of a kind woman in an alien place etc. In “Near Hastings,” Dutt remembers her meeting with an unknown woman near Hastings in France, whose tender love continued to inspire her. It suggests a sense of female bonding where a woman says some kind words to another woman in an alien place. It is this significant aspect of female bonding across cultures which Toru Dutt makes memorable in this poem. Dutt narrates her meeting with this unknown woman thus:

She past us, — then she came again,
Observing at a glance
That we were strangers; one in pain, —
Then asked, — Were we from France?
We talked awhile, — some roses red
That seemed as wet with tears,
She gave my sister, and she said
‘God bless you both, my dears!’ (206).

However, Dutt does not identify her self with this woman. She is very much aware of her Indian identity and glorifies the distinctiveness of her own land as she says:
Sweet were the roses, -- sweet and full,
And large as Lotus flowers
That in our own wide tank we cull
To deck our Indian bowers (206. Emphasis mind).

The lyrical mode allowed her to express her feelings for another woman and the long lasting impact it had on her:

The lady’s name I do not know,
Her face no more may see,
But yet, oh yet I love her so!
Blest, happy, may she be!
Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade.
Still bloom her roses in my heart!
And they shall never fade! (207).

The magnificent Casuarina Tree in Toru Dutt’s house becomes the site for fond memories of her childhood. It evokes in her poignant memories of her childhood when she used to play with her brother Abju and sister Aru who predeceased her. In her poem “Casuarina Tree” it is these memories of her childhood days where she used to play under the magnificent tree which she brings to life:

Beneath it we have played; through years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense.
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind my eyes! (211).

The stories narrated to her and her siblings by her mother in her childhood formed the context in Toru Dutt’s lyric “Sita”. The tale of the abandoned Sita in the
forest evoked in her a sense of sympathy for Sita. Toru Dutt's childhood imagination made her envisage the picture of Sita weeping in the forest. Through the poem, Toru Dutt also gives permanence to the nostalgic moment when she and her siblings, Abju and Aru, who had predeceased her, had gathered around their mother at the eventide to listen to their stories: "When shall those children by their mother's side / Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide" (205). Thus, Toru Dutt's poem "Sita", is not a representation of the figure of Sita as the nationalist discourse depicted her. Here we have a different voice, a subjective attachment around the tales of Sita. The figure of the abandoned Sita becomes a site for recollection of the sweet memories of her childhood days when she along with her siblings sat in the evening to hear stories from their mother.

The nationalist discourse was engaged in creating a feeling of "self-sufficiency" to resist the civilizing mission of the colonial discourse. The nationalist writers were typically involved in cultural and geographical imaging to mobilize the masses with new sentiments and attachment for the land. The association of the land with women was stereotypical in the discourses of nationalism. In contrast, Toru Dutt, gives a description of the landscape from her own garden space at Baugmaree. The representation of her garden in her poem "Baugmaree" is not in terms of acquiescence to a nationalist rhetoric but an expression of her artistic self (210). It shows her sensitivity to the world of colours; it is her response to the world of nature which reveals itself in this sonnet.

The sonnet "Lotus" is also subjective as it represents a cultural conflict between her allurement for the west and her bonding with her native place. Although Toru Dutt desires to go back to England after her four year travel in
Europe, yet she is naturally tied to her native land, the roots of which she cannot disconnect. In the sonnet, it is the lotus, the Indian flower, which wins its place as the unrivalled queen of flowers in a contest amongst the rose, lotus, and the lily. This is a subjective and personal note in her representation of the Lotus, the Indian flower, different from its use as a cultural symbol.

III

Sarojini Naidu used the poetical form from a very early age. While in England she had used it to express her love for Govindarajulu Naidu. It was here that she came in contact with Edmund Gosse, the renowned critic from England. As per Edmund Gosses’s advice, Sarojini Naidu tried to conjure up a romantic and exotic India for the west in her poems. Sarojini Naidu’s poetry appears to celebrate the inertness and passivity of women, a prism through which the west preferred to look at the east. However, a re-reading of her poetry marks an inner tension beneath the surface contentment – a tension between maintaining feminine decorum and the suffocation in its observance. The surface contentment of the poems is a conscious effort to mask this tension. As Malashri Lal says, “Sarojini Naidu spoke with a dual voice which marks the conflict of her inner consciousness” (Lal: 1995:63). It is the recovery of this unique voice which is neither a deliberate experiment with the orientalist project nor a facile submission to the nationalist project, which the study will try to locate in her poems. This unique voice is intricately woven with her personal experiences. In the poem “Nilambuja”, Sarojini Naidu fuses her own experiences with the dreams and fancies of the young girl, Nilambuja (Sengupta 1969:37). Nilambuja’s tale, where the young girl is not content in a life of luxury
and comfort matches Naidu's depiction of experiences in the "Golden Threshold," her house in Hyderabad.

*The Golden Threshold* is also the title of Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems. The restrained feminine figure of "Nilambuja," seeking to reach out to the world beyond, and Naidu's experiences in the Golden Threshold serve as important cues in explaining the archetypal passive figure which resurrects itself again and again in her poems. The space in the Golden Threshold was consecrated; it was a "world within a world" guarded from the profanities of the outside world. Sarojini Naidu lived a blissfully contented life in the protected world of the "Golden Threshold" but "there were longings within her which she could not satisfy" (Sengupta 1966:35). Besides the exuberance in the "Golden Threshold" – fulfillment of marriage, the joy of motherhood and the pride of housekeeping, she desired something more – an ardent desire to transcend the four walls of the domestic home. Her volume of poems *The Golden Threshold* was an attempt to reveal her ambiguous experience behind the apparent bliss. An effort to locate this ambiguity helps in revealing the muted subject which lies under the visible surface of her poems. This involves a close reading of her poems. When the first volume, *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 Sarojini Naidu was twenty six years of age, married to Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu and mother of four children. Her biographer Padmini Sengupta writes:

> During the first years of her married life, Sarojini lived in a world steeped in romance and indulged in flights of fantasy which led her into fantastic world of idealism. She was at this time almost a mystic, seeing visions of splendour in halls of gold, but also often and paradoxically, despairing of an inner joy. Always there was a longing, a desire for something higher than
what the world could give. Her ivory tower was draped in purple and gold. But a young woman looked out of the trellized window – wanting what?
(Sengupta 1969:37).

As her biographer suggests in these lines, Sarojini Naidu’s first few years of conjugal life provided her with a vision of splendour and yet a feeling of suffocation disturbed her. This feeling finds expression in the poems of the collection. Her response to the outward splendour of an “ornamental” and “sequestered” domestic life in The Golden Threshold are found in the figure of the passive women. The traditional roles of a wife and a mother of four children, inside the four walls of her house, failed to please her and this was marked by an inner tension, which she finally overcomes after joining politics. Following adoption of a career in active politics, she gave up writing.

The trajectory of Sarojini Naidu’s poetic career needs to be examined against her personal experiences. Her first volume, The Golden Threshold (1905), is linked with the sequestered, domestic and contented life she experienced in the house in Hyderabad. The poems in this collection present the stereo-typical picture of the woman oppressed by social conditioning. The second volume of poems The Bird of Time was published in 1912 when she had crossed the threshold of her home in Hyderabad to join a career in politics. It was here that she met the distinguished political leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The poems in this volume are however similar to the poems in The Golden Threshold. The third and final volume of poems, The Broken Wing was published in 1917 when she was already engaged in active politics. This group of poems which culminates in the long poem “The Temple, A Pilgrimage of Love” shows the affirmation of the female self unlike the poems in the
earlier volumes. The early occasion to express her self must be seen as providing a foundation for the manner in which she perceived her self subsequently.

Jean Grimshaw argues that to unravel woman's true self or the inner self, the false layers of the outer self that have been deformed by patriarchy need to be peeled off (Grimshaw 2005:331). Referring to Aristotle's distinction put forward in his *Ethics* between outer and inner self she goes on to explain that actions which originate from inside the self are those which are seen in accordance with conscious desires or intentions, and those which originate from outside the self are those which one would not do if one were not coerced. She states:

> The female self under male conditioning is riddled through and through with false or conditioned desires. But set against this conditioned, non autonomous female self are various images of a female self that would be authentic, that would shatter this conditioning.

(Grimshaw 2005:330).

Basing on Jean Grimshaw's assertions, I would show the progression in Sarojini Naidu's poetry from the non-autonomous self to the autonomous self or the objective/depersonalized voice to the subjective 'I'. This I feel brings a remarkable shift in women's voices – a shift from diffidence to confidence. I locate two important features in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu: (a) the presence of the depersonalized mask in her first two collections of poems *The Golden Threshold* and *The Bird of Time*. A diffident voice beneath this mask struggles to express itself in the form of questioning, ellipses or gaps. (b) The revelation of the authentic female self which shatters the depersonalized mask in *The Broken Wing*. 
The poems in *The Golden Threshold* and *The Bird of Time* are objective representations of the passive woman. They depict a woman’s outer self, which is subjected to social conditioning. Yet, in the form of ellipses, gaps and questions, the female personae struggles for expression. However, the social restrictions make her retain the stereotypes – these women cannot articulate, they are left mute by the social conditionings. The “Palanquin Bearers” in *The Golden Threshold* depicts the complete exclusion of the female self from a dominant discourse. Through the women’s silence, Naidu implicitly comments on male controls on women. The woman in the palanquin is passive and “faceless,” and is controlled by the male bearers who bear her along the way (27). Her mobility is determined by the bearers: the motions in the verbs “sways”, “skims”, “floats” and “glides” in the first stanza and “hangs”, “springs”, “falls” and “glides” in the second stanza are controlled by the first line which is repeated in both the stanzas. The repetition of these lines accentuates this sense of control:

```
Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string
Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride,
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
We bear her along (27).
```
The movements of the palanquin “Lightly, O Lightly” and “Softly, O Softly” are calculated to match her femininity. Her shadowy presence is marked in lines like “She sways like a flower in the wind of our song”, “She hangs like a star in the dew of our song” (emphasis added). The female voice is mute, she is romanticized and distanced from the bearers. Naidu here, as it were, tries to suggest through the poem the complete control of the female self under a new patriarchy.

In the poem “Suttee,” we have another representation of the woman’s “outer self” (46). Here the social conditioning is such that the woman feels that her whole existence ends after the death of her spouse, since he is the source of her life. The woman is dependent on her spouse and after his death she has no other options but self immolation. The three metaphors in the three stanzas show how her survival completely depends on him – she refers to him as (a) the “lamp of my life” without which she is condemned to “dwell in the living dark;” (b) The “tree of my life” the death of which inevitably leads to the death of the “blossom,” and (c) “the life of my life,” without which she has no chance of survival. Yet behind this passive figure, a victim of social conditioning, an ambiguous voice in the form of questions, gaps and ellipses marks the presence of a mute depersonalized entity which struggles to express itself. Although Meena Alexander states that the three questions asked in the female voice are merely rhetorical, yet they echo in the form of a refrain the social parameters where a woman’s life is subjected to male conditioning. The rhetorical questions imply an ironical comment on such conditioning.

The “Purdah Nashins” also present the outer self – the “ease and sequestered world of the purdah nashins” (87). The zenanas were the secured spaces for women defined by the nationalist project. Beneath the apparent ease and security, Sarojini
Naidu presents an implicit tension of this space in her poem “Purdah Nashins”. The enclosed space of the “purdah” is strictly guarded by the world outside which constantly keeps surveillance. It is secure from “the thieving light of eyes impure and the coveting sun or wind’s caress”. The use of metaphoric words like “thieving light,” “coveting sun,” “days guarded,” and “cavern lattices,” “turbaned crests,” and “secrets in a lover’s breast,” emphasize the outside world inaccessible to the private sequestered world of the “purdah nashins”. Yet there is the presence of a diffident voice beneath the visible surface which struggles for expression. The last lines of the poem indicates other voices, which are suppressed beneath the feeling of comfort on the surface:

Unveil the mysteries of her grace,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And sorrow looks into her face –
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman’s eyes from tears? (87).

These lines are marked with ambivalence at the apparent ease and protection provided by the world of the purdah nashins. The woman inside the purdah is inaccessible and she remains a mystery to the world outside. Her “tearful eyes” suggest her suffering inside the purdah. This ambivalence is suggested in the dual voice which expresses the ease of a sequestered existence and at the same time suggests a struggle for expression. Malashri Lal says, “In Sarojini Naidu, the conflict between the ethos of conventionality to which she succumbed and the suppressed desire to break out of it gave the most reliable voice to her poetry” (Lal 1995:65).

The presence of another voice is also implicit in her poem “Village Song”. Here Naidu presents a maiden’s fears at having transgressed the limits of her
“femininity”. She had to adhere to the codes of the feminine; the slightest deviation would lead to serious consequences as she is subjected to the strict surveillance of the society. In the poem, her slightest temptation of being lured by the boatman’s songs lands her in a situation of potential danger. There is no resistance by the maiden here as she accepts her situation and prays for her safety. Yet under the surface, there is an implicit attempt to make visible the social strictures that put her to such discomfiture. “The Song of Princess Zebunissa: In Praise of Her Own Beauty” makes an implicit suggestion at the waste of beauty inside the purdah (70). The prince’s beauty that remains imprisoned inside the purdah could vie with the beauties of nature: “When from my cheek I lift my veil, / The roses turn with envy pale”. Thus we have stereotypical representation of the women of the east. In the “Indian Dancers” there is an objective representation of the rapturous movement of the Indian Dancers. As Naidu suggests these women are tied to their lot. Their performance is mechanical as it is controlled by the rhythms of the dance, they can take no initiative to change the movements of the dance as Naidu says:

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging  
Like blossoms that bend to the breeze or showers,  
Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they falter,  
And lingering, languish, languish in radiant choir (71).

The “The Indian Gypsy,” the gypsy girl’s untamed spirit is possibly drawn as a contrast to the restrained life of the middle class girl or of the constraints in the formalized dance of the earlier poem:

Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,  
Tameless, with the bold falcon’s agile grace  
And the lithe tiger’s sinuous majesty (83).
Naidu accentuates her mobility and freedom as against the wives and daughters of the upper class. Sarojini Naidu's suffocation in her secluded life at the "Golden Threshold" must have made her envy the free life as represented in the figure of the Indian gypsy:

With frugal skill her simple wants she tends,
She folds her tawny heifers and her sheep,
On lonely meadows when the daylight ends
Ere the quick night upon her flock descends
Like a black panther from the caves of sleep (83).

In the "Corn-Grinders," Sarojini Naidu presents the despair and insecurity that surrounds the female at the death of her mate. Three examples of grief are presented in the three stanzas: "a female rat" in the first stanza, "a female deer" in the second stanza and "a bride" in the third stanza – all mourn the death of their spouses (35). All the females here—the deer, the bride and the rat—are tied painfully to their fate after the death of their spouse as their existence wholly depended on his life. It is, as if, Naidu foregrounds these tales of female dependence and passivity through the female deer and the rat, to connect their helpless situation to that of the widowed bride.

The second volume of poems the "The Bird of Time" was published in 1912. This was the time when Sarojini Naidu introduced herself to a political career and had earned recognition in the public sphere. In 1906, Sarojini Naidu addressed the Indian Social Conference "The Education of Indian Women" at Calcutta (Sengupta 1966:65). On December 31, 1906, she attended the first conclave of women, under the auspices of the Indian Ladies Conference at Bethune College, Calcutta. (Sengupta 1966:67). In March 1908, she attended the jubilee of "Stree Bodha", a
Bombay Gujrati monthly (Sengupta 1966:69). On December 3, 1908, Sarojini Naidu attended the Session of the Indian National Congress held at Madras, in the Congress pavilion (Sengupta 1966:69). From 1911, till her father’s death in 1915, Sarojini Naidu spent a great deal of her time moving between Calcutta and Hyderabad, for Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya had moved from Hyderabad to Lovelock Street in Calcutta (Sengupta 1966:65, 67, 72). Her steps towards a political career acquired a stronghold under the guidance of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The friendship with Gokhale began in 1906 when he sent her a note of appreciation:

May I take the liberty to offer you my most respectful and enthusiastic congratulations? Your speech was more than an intellectual treat of the highest order...We all felt for the moment to be lifted to a higher plane.

(Sengupta 1966:77).

Even after her involvement in the public sphere her poems in the volume The Bird of time show no change in the themes. As her public life offered her an alternative avenue for a voice, she chose to repeat the same themes in this volume of poems as in the The Golden Threshold. In the first poem of this volume which is named after the title The Bird of Time, Naidu refers to the varied notes sung by the bird of time. The notes of the songs are inextricably connected with the private experiences of life:

The happy laughter of new-made brides and the nests of the new born spring
In the dawn that thrills to a mother’s prayer,
And the night that shelters a heart’s despair
In the sigh of pity, the sob of hate,
And the pride of a soul that has conquered fate (10-11).
The poems in this collection can be divided into three types which are not in any way different from her collection of poems in *The Golden Threshold*. (1) Love lyrics; (2) poems written to celebrate the Spring; and (3) poems which describe the Indian flora.

Hindu widows were not allowed to take part in any festive ceremonies as per social customs. Naidu writes about these widowed women who were deprived from all happiness and the joys of spring in her poem “Vasant Panchami”:

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Ha ! what have I to do with nesting birds,
With lotus honey, corn and ivory curds,
My heart hath grown, plucked by the wind of grief
Akin to fallen flowers and faded leaf,
Alien to every lone and withered thing
That hath foregone the kisses of the spring (40).
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Here Naidu tried to visualise these widows who were victims of social norms. Her focus on their present shows her oblique critic at a social system. As per Edmund Gosse’s instructions to set her scenes in India, Naidu writes of Indian flowers – the Gulmohars, the Champak blossoms, Golden Cassia and Nasturtiums, Henna leaves, Sarisha and Neem.

Slowly, Sarojini Naidu was drawn to an active political career which overburdened her energies. Sarojini Naidu first met Gandhi in London in the year 1914. This was a landmark in her political career. When Naidu later recalls her first meeting, she refers to the incident when Gandhi invited her to share his meal. She replied, “An abominable mess, no thanks” (Sengupta 1966: 89). This shows her growing confidence to articulate her self. Her biographer writes thus:
When her collection of poems *The Broken Wing* was published in 1917, Sarojini Naidu was thirty-eight, experienced in the world of politics and social work, a friend of Mahatma Gandhi, and a woman of poise and dignity who had suffered and knew she would suffer further, because of the life she was about to choose.

(Sengupta 1966:105).

In her forward to this collection of poems, she asserts thus:

The Indian woman of to-day is once more awake and profoundly alive to her splendid destiny as the guardian and interpreter of the True Vision of national life – the Vision of Love, the Vision of Faith, the Vision of Patriotism. Her renascent consciousness is everywhere striving for earnest expression in song or speech, service or self-sacrifice, that shall prove an offering not unworthy of the Great Mother in the eyes of the world that honour her. Poignantly aware of the poverty of my gift, I still venture to make my offering with joined palms up lifted in a Salutation of Song.

(1912: IX emphasis added).

All these utterances and reflections speak of a different voice – a voice of confidence that does not hesitate to express its own self. There is not the timidity and the diffidence, which mark the poems in *The Golden Threshold* or *The Bird of Time*. Here Naidu transcends the stereotypical representation of women in the discourse. She is confident to express her consciousness through the songs and speeches that were her œuvre. Thus, a woman’s consciousness, which subvert the symbolical representations of the discourse, is what is revealed in these poems. In the first poem of the collection which she addresses to Gokhale she writes: “Behold I risk to meet the destined spring and scale the stars upon my broken wing” (3). She is inspired by her consciousness to break the limitations. In “The Flute Players of Brindaban,” she has in her the courage to undertake a perilous journey to fulfill her desires as she says:
Beloved I must go!
No peril of the deep or height
Shall daunt my winged foot
No fear of time unconquered space
Or light untravelled route (22).

Her poems that celebrate the spring in this collection are subjective. *The Bird of Time* shows an objective representation of spring. But here as in "The Flute Players of Brindaban," the objective note is relinquished for a more subjective response to spring.

*The Broken Wing* culminates in a long love poem called the "Temple, A Pilgrimage of Love" which consists of twenty four verses. Sarojini Naidu’s love poems in her collection of poems *The Golden Threshold* and *The Bird of Time*, refer to the love in legends and lores. *The Broken Wing* is distinct from the rest of the collection as here she emphatically talks of her own love. Here we discover the authentic female self which shatters the depersonalized mask of the symbolical figure in *The Golden Threshold*. It is here that Naidu relinquishes the socially constructed self. Jean Grimshaw states that discovering or rediscovering one’s own self is akin to a process of salvation or re-birth (Grimshaw 2005:331). It is in this group of poems that Naidu rediscovers her own self and attains a sense of salvation. Sarojini Naidu opens this long erotic poem with Tagore’s epigraph which suggests the strong connection between passion and salvation in these poems:

"My passion shall burn as the flame of Salvation, the flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of Devotion" (71).

The metaphor of the temple in the title is strategically used here as a site where the woman un masks her passionate desire and attains her salvation. It is in
this collection of poems that Naidu expresses her inner self. The "Temple," as the title suggests stands for truth. To a question raised by Gokhale, on the "abiding sadness" that underlies all her brightness, she replied, "No, I have come so near life that its fires have burnt me" (Sengupta 1966:109). Sarojini's answer to Gokhale implicitly re-affirms her salvation from her passionate desires. She purges herself of her passions by unravelling the truth. The poems are a direct revelation of a woman's erotic desires expressed with force. The bold expressions, which characterize the poem, show her breaking out of cultural and traditional repressions with a vengeance. She moves to her liberation by shedding the shrouds of cultural conditioning. The "Temple" is divided into three main sections: "The Gate of Delight", "The Path of Tears" and the "Sanctuary". Each section is broken up into short poems, three or four stanzas in length. The first section "The Gate of Delight" is a celebration of female desire fantasized by Naidu's own imagination. The second section "The Path Of Tears" presents the woman's sorrow and remorse at the rejection by her lover. Yet the voice is bold even at the moment of rejection. The third section "Sanctuary" presents the woman as she surrenders her love at the altar of passion.

The small poems in the "Temple" are an unrestrained expression of a woman's sexuality. There is no revelation of the addressee in these poems. Yet as revealed in her letters, Sarojini Naidu at that point of time was involved in an intimate relationship with Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The metaphorical expressions in the poetical form offers Naidu the privilege to conceal the identity of her addressee. However, in the personal form of the letter, there was more scope for self expression. *The Broken Wing* was published in 1917 and her letters to Jinnah were
addressed in the period from Jan 6, 1916 to February 6, 1918. In a letter addressed to Jinnah on January 6, 1916, Naidu expresses her desire to write her new volume of poems, "I am tired of being set forth as the prophetess of the New Faith. I long for a little rest and a little happiness and a little leisure and solitude to sing my songs of sorrow and of hope" (Letters Naidu 108). Implicitly, this is perhaps Naidu's effort to bring a straying Jinnah back to the nationalist front. In her letter addressed to Jinnah from Bombay on January 6, 1916, she writes:

And I want to remind you of your promise to me to give your young life as a beautiful and precious gift to the country that needs and cries for just such splendid love offerings as the offering of your fine young manhood, your talent, your courage, your service, your sacrifice and life. Dear Mahmud – dear young friend and comrade – you have so much to give in giving yourself to the cause we have so deeply at heart. Redeem then your promise to me: and you cannot offer me a sweeter and nobler token of your affection for me than to consecrate yourself to the country's welfare.

(Letters Naidu 108).

The first poem of the "Temple," "The Offerings" echoes the offerings of love which Naidu believes that Jinnah could instill into the movement. The poems can be read against the backdrop of this relationship, and what is of interest is the frank expression of passion in these poems. The first poem in section I, "The Offering" starts with the revelation of female desire in the first person:

Were beauty mine, Beloved, I would bring it  
Like a rare blossom to love's glowing shrine,  
Were a dear youth mine, beloved I would fling it  
Like a rich pearl into love's lustrous wine (73).

The woman here becomes the author of her self; she can contrive and control her actions unlike the silent woman in the "Palanquin Bearers". She can assertively
express her fantasies in the first person with confidence: "I would bring it" / "I would fling it" and "I would offer". In the second poem, titled "The Feast", the woman can talk directly of love, "Bring no fragrant sandal paste, / Let me gather love instead" (74).

In the third poem, "Ecstasy" the woman becomes more assertive and takes off the depersonalized mask of *The Golden Threshold*. She articulates her desires explicitly: "But I have plucked you, O miraculous Flower of my desire/And crushed between my lips the burning petals of your mouth!" (75). The symbols used are erotic; the female self is active in the sexual act. The voice is fierce, forceful and unrestrained with the energy that comes from having broken all the codes of femininity. There are no restraints in her articulation and it is the woman who expresses delight in the sexual act.

In the poem "If you call me I would come," the woman emerges from all the restrictions to reach out to her love:

If you call me I will come
Swifter, O my Love,
Than a trembling forest deer
Or a panting dove,
Swifter than a snake that flies
To the charmer's thrall...
If you call me I will come
Fearless what befall.
If you call me, I will come
Swifter than desire.
Swifter than the lightning's feet
Shod with plumes of fire.
Life's dark tides may roll between,
Or Death's deep chasms divide —
If you call me I will come  
Fearless what betide (79).

Here the woman breaks the social restrictions which the maiden in Sarojini Naidu's "Village Song" is subjected to. She is now the prime agent of her actions and can respond at any time whenever her lover calls her, ready to face the consequences of her action as she says: "fearless" to "what betide". In the poem "The Sins of Love," the woman is apologetic to her beloved for the intense passion she feels for him. She does not feel any sense of hesitation in unveiling her desires to him. Her eyes, her hands, her mouth and heart have extended to her beloved, as she says, "Forgive me the sin of mine eyes, / O Love, if they dared for a space" (80). In the four stanzas, the woman transcends social sanctions and asserts her sexuality - her eyes "dared for a space," her hands were "bold," her mouth "ravished," his lips and her heart "trespassed" to lure him. It is the woman who becomes the active agent - she can "assail", "oppress" and "ravish" her lover.

In the poem "The Desire of Love," the woman can fashion her lover. She infuses him with strength -she can "brew" "carve" "instill" and "fashion him into a god". She gives him the strength and power to face life. Thus, it is the woman who becomes the subject - it is her power of agency which is valorized against the masculine subject. What could be read as slavish devotion giving the lover the status of a God, is also possible to interpret as an infusion of power into the lover by the beloved to transform him into a God: "So could my true love fashion you /Into a God ?" (82).

The next section "the Path of Trees," starts with the poem "The Sorrow of Life". Here the woman has the confidence to question her lover when he does not
respond to her love. The voice is assertive and direct, “Why did you turn your face away?/Was it for grief or fear” (84).

In the poem “The Menace of Love” she can even scorn at his proud refusal to speak to her – she can “assail him,” “haunt him,” and “smite him”:

How long, O Love, shall ruthless pride avail you
Or wisdom shield you with her gracious wing.
When the sharp winds of memory shall assail you
In all the poignant malice of the spring?
All the sealed anguish of my blood shall taunt you
In the rich menace of red-flowering trees;
The yearning sorrow of my voice shall haunt you
In the low wailing of the midnight seas.
The tumult of your own wild heart shall smite you
With strong and sleepless pinions of desire.... (88-89).

The voice becomes even more assertive when she says:

When youth and spring and passion shall betray you
And mock your proud rebellion with defeat,
God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you
As you lie spent and broken at my feet! (89).

“The Secret” shows her resolution in the face of death. She charges her lover for his betrayal, “And how you flung the throbbing heart that loved you / To serve wild dogs for meat?” (96). “Love Transcendent” celebrates her love which she refers to as “passionate sin”. Her voice is hard and strong even at the moment of defeat. She remains steadfast in her desire to the very last moment, “My proud soul shall be unforgiven / For a passionate sin it will never repent” (103). Although she knows the bitter consequences of her actions, she is fearless and extremely confident of her love as she says that even if she is hurled from the battlements of heaven...
of her fall shall be sweet and brightened by "the memoried joy" of his "radiant face" (104).

In "Devotion," the last poem of the "Temple," she boldly sacrifices her love on the altar of passion. *The Broken Wing* is the manifestation of Sarojini Naidu's passionate self which transcends all constructions of "femininity". The masculine national identity sculpted by the discourse of nationalism had repressed the authentic female self by romanticizing her "femininity". The theme of the feeble, dependent and vulnerable woman subjected to male control recurs in *The Golden Threshold* and *The Bird of Time*. The long poem "Temple" in *The Broken Wing* subverts the symbol of woman in the discourse. Here she is bold and assertive in articulating her desires in opposition to the structures of the nationalist discourse. The period in which Sarojini Naidu was writing poetry was also the period when the intelligentsia was engaged in the revival of a glorious past. The feminine identity of women constructed by the nationalist discourse, as Susie Tharu says, placed an enormous burden on women who came within its defining scope (Sangari and Vaid 1989: 262). It was the purity and sacrifice of women which ensured their moral and spiritual power. The image of the suffering mother was also projected to show that past radiance of the mother figure had faded into "total darkness and ruin within the colonial present" (Sarkar 2001:255). Against the rhetoric of the suffering mother which forms a major theme in the art and literature of the times, Sarojini Naidu's *The Broken Wing* is a significant departure.16

However, such explicitness had its limitations as the public form of poetry did not allow Naidu to reveal the identity of the addressee. The suggestiveness, evasiveness, and excessive metaphorcity in this genre could always put limitations
on direct expression. The obliqueness of expression in the poems gave way to a more direct style in the autobiographical form of the letter. The private epistolary mode was particularly accommodating to women. The informal and friendly correspondence she engaged in, compensated for Toru Dutt’s feeling of loneliness and enabled Sarojini Naidu to make a more direct declaration of love. The next chapter studies the letters written by these two women in order to see how this more private and intimate form enabled women to express themselves.

Notes


1. John Hutchinson states that cultural nationalism had been a major ideological movement in regenerating the nation. Emphasizing its impact in the case of Irish nationalism, he goes on to say that it has expanded beyond its definition as “a small scale coterie of historical scholars and artistes concerned to revitalize the community by invoking memories of the nation” (Hutchinson 1987:482-483).

2. Malashri Lai refers to a “Dual voice” in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu as it expresses her inner conflicts. She was enchanted by the comforts of the interior world, yet she had the fascination for the outdoor world (Malashri Lai 1995:63).


4. Kopf states that Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism needs to be contrasted with the term, as it was understood by the intelligentsia in India (Kopf 2000:196). He says that Said’s ideas do not fit the historical situation in India. British Orientalism inculcated a sense of awareness for the past in the minds of the Indian intelligentsia and this helped in the formation of a national identity.
5. By “Orientalist” poetry Rosinka Chaudhuri refers to the poetry written by the Indians under the influence of the Orientalist scholarship.

6. In opposition to Said’s concept of Orientalism, the Indian intelligentsia was engaged in a grand synthesis of the east and the west (Kopf 2000:196). In these lines, Tagore refers to the synthesis of the east and the west reflected in the poems of Dunn’s “Bengali Book of English verse”.

7. Kopf traces the decline of Orientalism to the Bentinck administration. William Bentinck came as the Governor General of India in 1828, the effects of his philosophy reduced the dynamism generated by two generations of Orientalist institutional growth and development. Kopf refers to some of the changes brought about by the Bentinck administration: “The college of Fort William was dismantled, the Asiatic Society experienced grave financial crisis, the Calcutta Madrassa and Sanskrit College came close to extinction, the Calcutta School and School Book Societies were rendered impotent, Serrampore College anglicized its curriculum and lost its attractiveness to Indians, and such Bengali socio-religious reform began their long drift to cultural nationalism” (Kopf 1969: 241). However, Kopf comments that although the British Orientalist movement died during the Bentinck administration, “its primary legacy of a reconstituted Hindu cultural tradition lived on in the self image of the Bengali intelligentsia” (Kopf 1969:272). It was this rediscovered cultural traditions of the past which kindled a collective feeling amongst the Indians which later led to the emergence of nationalism.

8. In 1865, the Brahmo Samaj under Debendranath Tagore’s leadership went through a severe crisis in which the movement became divided between the liberals and the conservatives (Kopf 1996:132). At the general meeting of Brahmos on November 15, 1866, the formal break finally occurred. The liberals consisted of the younger generation who saw Keshab Chandra Sen as their leader. The conservatives were of an older generation under the leadership of Debendranath Tagore.

9. In 1870, Debendranath Tagore was replaced by Rajnarain Bose, as the president of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. He wanted to rehabilitate the younger generation of Bengali Hindu intelligentsia so as to challenge Keshab Chandra Sen’s influence on the younger generation. Thus a new masculine identity was what was conceived for the younger generation in defiance with Keshab Chandra Sen’s universalism (Kopf 1996:179).
10. In 1871, immense stress seemed to have been placed on physical training. Nabagopal Mitra had started a National Society to sustain the nationalist enthusiasm during the months between the Hindu Melas (Kopf 1996: 185).

11. Popular culture was subjected to severe criticism by Rangalal Banerjee in his manifesto for a modern poetry for Bengal that spoke particularly against the Kabiyal’s profanities (Dasgupta: 1969: 24).

12. They did resurrect what Ashis Nandy calls the ideology of the martial races latent in the traditional Indian concept of statecraft and gave the idea a new centrality (Nandy 1983:7). Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Tilottama-Sambhava* (1860) stands as an important document in the revival of Hindu Mythology (Dasgupta:1969:60).

13. Ashis Nandy shows that the psychological responses to colonialism in the Indian mind leads to the re-visioning of values by the colonized (Nandy: 1983:22). In his epic, *Meghnadbadh* Michael Madhusudan Dutt retells the Ramayana, turning the sacred figures of Rama and Lakshmana into passive feminine villains and the demons Ravana and his son Meghnad into majestic, masculine modern heroes. This reversal of roles by bestowing all that is masculine and heroic to the traditional villain ‘Ravana’ and ‘Meghnad’ demonstrates how Michael Madusudan Dutt underwrote the concepts of masculinity.

14. Uma Chakravarti says that the women of the past were valorized in two separate ways: for their spiritual potentiality and their role as “Sahadharmini” (partners in religious duties) in ancient times, and as heroic resisters to alien rulers who cheerfully chose death to dishonour (Chakravarti: 52). The sacrificing image of the ‘Sahadharmini’ was used as a force at the time of crisis as in Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Rangalal Banerjee in his *Padmini Upakhyan* valorizes the heroism of a woman who cheerfully chooses death to dishonour.

15. Literally translated to mean the “inner house”, the *antahpur* consisted of a set of rooms, courtyards, terrace, roof and kitchen in which women lived and worked (Karlekar 1991: 7).

16. Except for a few poems like, “Ode to India” (1904) which was recited at the Eighteenth session of the Indian National Congress and “Awake” which was addressed to Jinnah, the theme of the mother is conspicuous by its absence in her poems.
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