Chapter 2

GENDER AND NATION
Chapter 2

Gender and Nation

Nationalism is a ‘variable cultural artifact’ that changes with context, historical circumstances, gender and a number of other variables. The behaviour, roles and languages through which people act out nationalism are determined by their concept of the nation. Nation is thus a changing discursive construct and historical material reality. However, there are certain aspects which are common to all nationalisms.

Nation and gender, both social constructions, are closely related in many complex and complicated ways. Usually nations are gendered with strong masculine bias and their narratives are full of imagery drawn from traditional roles of gender. An analysis of gendered narrative of nation unfolds the link between hegemonic patriarchal ideologies and nationalist ideologies.

Nation and nationalism, as referred to in voluminous literature on these issues, have been imbued with several meanings, depending on historical contexts in which they are used. Some of the European scholars discussed here situate the issues of nation and nationalism at the point of ‘intersection of politics, technology and social transformation’.

Nationalism, in its general sense, is determined by certain features of the world political economy in the era between the French and Industrial Revolutions and the present day.¹ These features include ‘a new heightened significance accorded to factors of nationality, ethnic inheritance, customs and speech, creation of a national market economy and a viable national bourgeois class’.

Hugh Seton-Watson identifies the late 1700s as the dividing line between the 'old' and the 'new' nations in Europe, during which period the old nations, such as Britain, Scotland, Denmark, France and Switzerland enjoyed relative autonomy, and the new nations, basically, the rest of the world, mobilised in the form of national movements to achieve independence, either from monarchies or from colonialism, articulating a form of nationalism designed to implant in their constituents a nationalist consciousness and a desire for political action.²

Nation originated, according to Ernest Gellner, as the need of the new industrial society with traditional agro-literate societies increasingly replaced by growth-oriented, mobile and industrial societies.³

A state-imposed, external and standardised mass schooling became the need of modern industrialising or industrial society to create a literate and technically sophisticated workforce necessary to man the industrial machine. And the teachers too had to be specialised educational personnel, able to service the new literate 'high culture' which characterises and defines modern nations.

Ernest contrasts the 'high' culture of modern societies with the 'low' culture of agro-literate societies. A 'high' culture is a literate, sophisticated culture, serviced by specialised educational personnel and taught formally in mass, public, standardised and academy-supervised institutions of learning. It is a highly cultivated or 'garden' culture. Nation is essentially, the general imposition of a homogenous 'high' culture on modern society in order to ensure its smooth functioning.

Benedict Anderson, though admits Gellner's views on the relation between modernisation and growth of nations, places greater emphasis on the constructed nature of culture and on the role of print capitalism in the development of nations.

Nation, as Benedict Anderson defines, is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'. The people in the collectivity would not have seen each other and if they meet are not able to recognise each other, but still they all feel that they are members of the same community.4 “All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined,” he observes. He further says that the communities should be distinguished based on the style in which they are imagined. These communities are imagined as ‘limited’ because they have finite boundaries which are defined against the ‘Others.’ Further, these communities are imagined as ‘sovereign’, as the concept originated in an age in which Enlightenment and French Revolution were destroying legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Finally it is imagined as a ‘community’, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Besides, the people feel that their membership of the community is ‘natural’ and not chosen.

---

The nation, as a social and historical construct, is imagined based on core organising principles such as ethnicity, language, religion, territory and central political power. However, the last two are not necessary constituents of nation and either of these constituents can be predominant depending on the historical context. Anderson considers nation as a cultural artifact. He argues that pre-national culture was religious culture. Nations replaced this religious culture with their own uniquely constructed national cultures.

Anderson places print capitalism at the very heart of his theory, claiming that it was print capitalism which allowed for the development of these new national cultures and created the specific formations which the new nations would eventually take. The print media presented technical means for "re-presenting" kind of imagined community or nation. He explains that with technological innovations establishing print capitalism, reading spread from the elites to other classes and people started to read mass publications in their own languages rather than in classical religious languages. Besides, literature plays a unique role in shaping nationalist consciousness. It provides narratives in which imaginary national characteristics develop through characters and their actions. They become part of consciousness of citizens as national subjects.

---

5 There are several arguments on concept of nations and nationalisms. While nationalists consider nation as a timeless entity, the Marxists and other scholars study it as a modern phenomenon and trace its beginning to the eighteenth century. Even among the scholars there is no consensus over constituent elements of nation. There are arguments that the Western notion of nationalism stresses central political power as important for 'nation-state' while there are nations which don't come under single political entity. However, there are varieties of nation-states in the world today. For example, One-nation one-state (Japan), Parts of different nations come to constitute a state for geopolitical reasons (Switzerland), One nation is divided into two (Germany till 1990, Korea) or more states (Arab), Part of nation constituted into sovereign state (Bangladesh) and the remaining part is incorporated into another state (West Bengal in India)
Marxist scholar E. J. Hobsbawm, taking cue from Gellner and another scholar Miroslav Hroch, stresses the class factor in theory of nations and nationalism. He agrees with Gellner that 'nationalism is primarily a principle which holds that the political unit and national unit should be congruent; nationalism sometimes makes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures'. Hence, nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round. Nations exist not only as functions of a particular kind of territorial state or the aspiration to establish one but also in the context of a particular stage of technological and economic development.

While delineating the development of nations over the past few centuries, Hobsbawm dismisses ethnicity, common language, religion, territory and common historical memories as criteria, but holds that nationalism has core principle of 'common interests against particular interests, the common good against particular privilege'.

Extending Gellner's proposition that national consciousness develops unevenly among the social groupings and regions of a country Hobsbawm argues that the popular masses - workers, servants and peasants - are the last to be affected by it.

Nationalism develops from its early stage of being limited to aspirations of the select people of 'high culture' to populist romanticist phase of cultural renaissance including peasantry and its vernacular, folkloric languages and literature in its latter stages. In this phase begins political nationalist campaigning from the minority group of militants and pioneers of the 'national idea.' Some of the contributing factors to the growth of nationalism in this phase are the resistance of traditionalists to the

---

onslaught of modernity, emergence of non-traditional classes and strata due to urbanisation and the unprecedented migrations spreading the multiple diasporas across the globe and consequent hatred for ‘foreigners’, ethnic and racist conflicts, democratisation of politics with creation of modern administrative, citizen-mobilising and citizen-influencing states. And in the next phase, nationalist programme acquires mass support.

Hobsbawn elaborates the role of mass media, mass schooling in taking the ‘nationalist idea’ to the mass. Like Benedict Anderson, he explains at great length printing, mass literacy and mass schooling and subsequent promotion of standardised national languages. He elaborates on the significance of mass media such as press, cinema, radio and even sports in providing means for expressing national identity in modern societies. They are effective in making ‘national symbols’ part of life of every individual. National narratives are conveyed effectively through such symbols.

Nationalism, as a movement, aims to build ‘nation or ‘state’ and as an ideology, a belief in common collectivity. As Gellner says, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist.” Nationalist projects and ideologies have three prominent dimensions. These major dimensions of the nationalist project are combined in different ways in different nationalist projects in different historical contexts:

1. Civic dimension of nationalist project involves striving for ‘statehood’ and citizenship. This is related to the notions of state sovereignty and specific geographical boundaries or territoriality.

---

8 Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, Chicago: University of Chicago. 1965 Page 169
2. The ethnocentric nationalist project with the most homogenous and exclusionary vision of 'nation', is based on myths of common blood/gene.

3. The cultural dimension involves symbolic heritage provided by language and/or religion and/or other customs and traditions as the 'essence' of the 'nation'.

Apart from some 'objective' attributes like a name, a demarcated territory and a common economy, 'nation' has some subjective properties such as fund of distinctive myths and memories, as well as elements of a 'common culture'. Cultivation of shared memories, reinterpreting history and tradition are crucial to the creation and reproduction of nation. The members conceive of their nation as 'stemming from' older communities of historic culture with whom they share myths of descent and common memories, including links with a homeland. They select from the past those aspects to construct 'history' and 'tradition' that suit their requirement of the nationalist project.

---

9 Anthony D. Smith, dealing with ethnocentric nationalism, terms this approach to nationalism as 'ethnosymbolism'. Nationalism builds on pre-existing kinship, religious beliefs and systems. Ethnocentric nationalism drew worldwide criticism after the World Wars, fascist and racist conflicts. However, his works are relevant to understand ethnic aspects of the groups involved in the nationalist movement, especially intellectuals and their nationalist narratives. Many writers have also distinguished between 'civic nationalism' and 'ethnic nationalism'. For example, Michael Ignatieff's controversial work, Blood and Belonging Journeys into the New Nationalism (first published in 1993 by BBC Books) distinguishes between these two types of nationalism as 'good' and 'bad'. Drawing from his observations of the nationalism in post-cold war years, he argues that nationalism can be a constructive, welding force, but in its extreme, authoritarian form, it serves as a collective escape from reality, whose adherents, inhabiting a delusional realm of noble causes and tragic sacrifice, straitjacket themselves and other groups in the fiction of an irreducible ethnic identity. Hence, civic nationalism, based on perception of common laws, is better compared to ethnic nationalism with blood kinship as its organising principle. For, the civic nationalism characterises tolerance and allows multi-cultures and pluralism. However, the scholars later have criticised such dichotomous notions of nationalism on several grounds. France and the United Kingdom which are examples of 'civic nationalism' have ethnic themes. See also Philip Spencer Howard Wilson, Nationalism A Critical Introduction. London, 2002.
The drive for regeneration of a nation is also based on memories of a golden age or golden ages. This is the idealised former age of great splendour, power and glory, intellectual or artistic creativity, or religiosity and sanctity. It is the age of the community's exemplars - its saints and sages, poets and heroes, artists and explorers - the ideal against which to measure the present, usually a lamentable state of nation, and set a model for emulation for successive generations. The memory of the golden age signifies the possibility and hope of national regeneration. Besides, they share a collective mission or destiny based on their past (probably, 'progress'). However, in the absence of 'golden past' the members may resort to conscious creation or use of overarching myths and traditions, memories and symbols.

Nationalism involves, as explained earlier, 'imagining' a national past and present, inventing 'tradition', and symbolically constructing a community. The tasks of defining community, of setting boundaries, and of articulating national character, history and a vision for the future tend to emphasise both unity and exclusivity. When nationalism involves armed struggle, either in achieving 'statehood', or in subordinating 'others', it becomes militant. When it stresses on myth of common blood/gene to define the national character, it becomes ethnocentric. In whatever forms, it is mainly concerned with boundedness ('belonging' to the community), continuity (with the past) and homogeneity encompassing diversity. Nationalism, hence, is also defining national identity which distinguishes the group and its members from 'others', and also denies individual internecine differences.

---

10 As Raymond Williams puts it, tradition is not past but an interpretation of the past; a selection and valuation of the past. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. Oxford University Press, 1984
However, nationalist projects are usually multiplex, as different groups of people strive for their hegemony always. Besides, nationalist consciousness develops unevenly among the different social groups and regions. Hence, different members of the collectivity tend to promote contesting constructions which tend to be more hegemonic than others at different historical times, and more or less exclusionary. As a result, there will be constant shifts in the nationalist discourses and narratives at different points of time and place.

Nationalised gender

Like national gender is also a social and historical construct. (Masculinity and femininity are not of predetermined characteristics but are governed by social norms which always alter in tandem with culture.) The nationalists draw from historical and social constructions of gender roles and relations, and in turn, they also determine and reconfigure these constructions in the course of nation-building process.

There are various ways of looking at asymmetric gender roles in the nation. 'Nation and gender intimately participate in the formation of one another: Nations are gendered; and the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms (feminised soil, landscapes and boundaries and masculine movement over these spaces). National mythologies draw on traditional gender roles and the nationalist narrative is filled with images of nation as mother, wife and maiden. Practices of nation-building employ social constructions of masculinity and femininity that support division of labour in which women reproduce nation physically and symbolically and men protect, defend and avenge nation."

Nationalism, as a political project, is closely linked to state, military and other institutions which are dominated by men in the history. Hence, culture and ideologies of patriarchy go hand in hand with the nationalist culture and ideologies.

Interestingly, several Western scholars notice modern forms of masculinity and nation developed almost at the same time (in the eighteenth and nineteenth century). According to a study by George L. Mosse, nationalism is a ‘movement which began and evolved parallel to modern masculinity’, in the West a century ago. He describes modern masculinity as a centerpiece of all varieties of nationalist movements:

The masculine stereotype was not bound to any one of the powerful particular ideologies of the previous century. It supported not only conservative movements... but the workers’ movement as well; even Bolshevik man was said to be “firm as an oak”. Modern masculinity from the very first was co-opted by the new nationalist movements of the nineteenth century.

---

12 In the 18th and 19th century Europe, along with the industrialised capitalist economy emerged the new forms of states. In ‘invention’ of nation, the political ideologies and enlightenment tradition with their emphasis on ‘reason,’ ‘progress’ and ‘modernisation’ act as mutual contributory factors. The invention of modern nations and the process of modernisation are two sides of European history. The new regimes of the centralised states operated on the imperative of political and socio-economic integration. Their aim was to create homogenous bodies of societies as the basis for industrial production and a capitalist market. The formation of modern state seemed to presuppose the ‘invention’ of new image of nation. This image of nation is the medium through which a new, post-feudal and post-religious collective identity is created.

13 It is difficult to generalise notions of masculinity and feminity. However, for the sake of convenience and coherence of this study, the Western conceptualised notions of masculinity, its historical connection to the development of nation are discussed here.

14 George L. Mosse in his works, Nationality and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe (New York, 1985) and The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), elaborately investigates into these issues. However, the notion of the British masculinity in the context of colonialism is studied from a different frame of reference by many authors in India. I have discussed it later in this chapter.

15 Mosse, The Image of Man, 1996, page 7
Other political ideologies of that time, especially colonialism and imperialism, also resonated with contemporary standards of masculinity. Many scholars relate the nineteenth century renaissance in manliness in Europe to the institutions and ideology of the empire.\(^\text{16}\)

John Springhall describes the middle class English ideal of Christian manliness with its emphasis on sports—the ‘cult of games’ in the public schools; he explains how through men’s associations, the middle class values were communicated to ‘less privileged, board-school-educated, working-class boys in the nation’s large urban centers’.\(^\text{17}\) Boys from both middle class and working class served throughout the Empire in British imperial armies. Joane Nagel observes:

> Given the close association between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism, colonialism and imperialism, militarism and masculinity, given the fact that it was mainly men who adhered to and enacted them, and given the power of those movements and institutions in the making of the world, it is not surprising that masculinity and nationalism seem stamped from the same mould—the mould which has shaped the important factors of the structure and culture of the nations and states in the modern state system.\(^\text{18}\)

---


\(^{17}\) Springhall, Manliness and Morality, 1987, page 52

\(^{18}\) Joane Nagel investigates into similar link between the US imperialism and manhood: The imperialist discourses reflect racialised, imperial masculinity where adventurous, but civilised white men tame or defeat inferior savage men of colour or protect the ‘Western’ hemisphere from European colonialism. “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations,” in Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 21, Number 2, Routledge, March 1998; page 251
Formation of collective identity is crucial to the nationalist projects in order to defend and define the 'unique character and purity of the nation.' The nationalist discourses express feelings and aspirations of the collective belonging and at the same time, provide means of ideological legitimisation for new form of central power. This will, by necessity, take the problematic form of an enforced and all-including or excluding identity. It involves denying individual differences and demonising the 'Other.'

Though the collective identity is projected as neutral and universal, it intersects with gender, social, cultural, economic and political identities.

Masculine identity is accepted as a norm in the patriarchal nationalist cultures. Though there are various definitions of masculinity, Gilmore's research on cross-cultural conceptions of masculinity, *Manhood in the Making* shows that there is no universal standard of masculinity. Despite that, he argues:

> Although there may be no "Universal Male," we may perhaps speak of a "Ubiquitous Male" based on these criteria of performance to be a man: one must impregnate women, protect dependents from danger, and provision kin and kin. We might call this quasi-global personage something like "Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider." 19

Nevertheless, at any given time and place, normative and hegemonic notions of masculinity set standards for male demeanour and thinking. Mosse traces how bourgeois ideals of masculinity are linked to the programmes of the nationalists projecting hegemonic masculine identity as the universally accepted legitimate national identity. Klaus Theweleit investigates relationship between such formation...

---

of rigid strong masculine self and the cult of violence. Many feminist scholars explain how nationalism and sexism have the same psychic root in its suppression of 'feminine self', desire for belonging and fear of Other.20

Mosse, in his *Image of Man*, traces the resurgence of the ideal of masculinity in Europe to the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The French Revolution and industrialisation brought about a sea change in all dimensions of society. The modern capitalist economy separated the public sphere of production and private life (world and home). The split between the public sphere and the private life enforced restriction of the perception and articulation of bodily and emotional needs in the private realm. Religion further regulated perceptions of body and mind, sexuality and gender relations. The model of bourgeois family and its arrangement of gender relations became part of the symbolic order of modernity. While male identity was associated with 'rational' and 'modern', women became a kind of natural resource for the satisfaction of 'natural' needs.

The ideal stereotype of masculinity that originated in Europe defined manly virtues as will power, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, sangfroid, persistence, adventurism, independence, sexual virility tempered with restraint and dignity and moral fortitude. This ideal also stereotyped the concept of physical beauty, linking surface appearances to depth of mind and morality. The body becomes signifier of manliness. Based on Greek principles of harmony, proportion and control, the masculine body is defined as that conquered the world outside and reigned supreme within the individual. Physical beauty guaranteed strong will power, moral fortitude and martial nobility. Physiognomy reflected morality.

This ideal masculinity also defines itself as against the ugliness, lack of harmony and effeminacy of the ‘Others’, marginalised groups including gypsies, sexual deviants, Jews and vagrants who are excluded from the stereotypical ideals. According to Mosse, women became the mirror in which men’s ideal self-image is reflected. He focuses more on how masculinity was institutionalised through clubs, schools, gyms, and military, but he doesn’t focus on home.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the modern ideal of masculinity was firmly in place, characterised by ‘Greek physique, a steeling character and nationalism’. There were challenges to these stereotypes – feminism, the literary and cultural avant garde, sexual deviants and social nationalism. They provided a counter-image to this stereotype: languor, softness and sensuality, effeminacy and androgynous personality.

However, Mosse observes that they failed to mount an effective challenge to the hegemonic masculinity. Besides, in the 1920s National Socialism (Nazism) and religion also further stiffened the normative ideal of manhood. Evangelical Christianity brought in the middle-class sensibilities and respectability; self-control and gentle paternalism were projected as ideals of man as a patriarchal head of the family. The Christianity reconciled the Greek principles of manliness with piety in ‘muscular Christianity’ that stressed will power, restraint and discipline.

During the First World War, the ideal of masculinity resurrected; aggression was hailed, patriotism was considered life-blood, and sacrifice and honour became key words. For fascists and racists, ideal body was fused firmly with the will and the mind and those who don’t have this ‘rigid self’ were to be excluded from the community.
Besides, the discourses of nationalism reinforced the hegemonic masculine ideals and stereotypical notions of sexuality. In the military schools, clubs and soldiers' groups, men could develop fantasies of male-male world. Nation provides a framework for a male-male world, for eroticism without women. Nationalism redirects men's passions to a higher purpose and projects a stereotype of human beauty which transcends sensuousness. Manliness comes to mean freedom from sexual passion, sublimation of sensuality into leadership of society as nation. Thus, while individual masculine is desensualised, nation is sensualised through these fantasies. Hence, the hegemonic nationalists think of sexuality as to be acknowledged but regulated, it is deflected from the physical onto an ideal stereotype of male and female beauty.

Despite cultural differences, across the world the nationalist movements focus on recovery of lost masculinity. For example, Irish nationalist rhetoric in the late 19th century addressed the loss of Irish masculinity at the hands of the British. According to McDevitt (Muscular Catholicism Nationalism Masculinity and Gaelic Team Sports 1884-1916, 1997), "the creation of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in 1884 and the subsequent standardisation of hurling and Gaelic football marked a nation-wide campaign to resurrect the physical stature of manhood of Ireland, which was deemed debilitated because of the effects of British rule" (page 262). A similar masculinisation of nationalism occurred in Hitler's Germany. In 'Mein Kampf' Hitler compared the weakness and corruption of pre-Nazi Germany to a "dehorned Siegfried" (Kenneth Burke, 'The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle' in On Symbols and Society, 1989, page 195). For Hitler, Germany and her masses were weak and had become "femme" in dealing with the "villainous Jew". Hitler's rhetoric sought to create a powerful Germany with an army of strong, virile German men who would effectively weed out the evil, namely, Jews, and help restore the honour and dignity of the German people. Just like his German counterpart, Mussolini was concerned with the effeminacy of Italians, and he vigorously sought to create a virile nation that was made up of strong Italian men (Mosse, 1996). The quest for virility and masculinity in the construction of nationalism was found in Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, who sought to recuperate manhood by exhorting Jewish men to abandon their feminine characteristics and construct a strong, virile Jewish nation that was linked to manliness and freedom (Arno Mayer, Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel, 2000). After the war in Vietnam, American manhood seemed to be challenged as their soldiers were killed by women, children and an "often poorly equipped and nutritionally depressed enemy". The process of recuperation of masculinity started with Hollywood's production of action-oriented films that portrayed Vietnam veterans as mythical heroes who "battle entire towns and scores of soldiers and come away unscathed" (Susan Jeffords, Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War, 1989, page 135). Glorification of 'Kshatryayahood' in the 19th century nationalist discourses in India is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Mosse Nationalism and Sexuality 1985 page 11 13
Psycho-political analysis of process of formation of ‘collective masculine identity’ as rigid ‘strong’ national self further reveals how nationalism devalues both body and women as source of desires and sustains itself through cult of virility and violence.

Klaus Theweleit explains this in his study of men from the Freikorps in Germany after the First World War.23 The process of formation of male identity involves for a boy, who is born of other sex, to be oriented towards the same sex. He should differentiate from his primary symbiotic relationship with mother in the process of socialisation and individuation. According to Theweleit this rigid masculine nationalist is socially ‘unborn’ as he could not successfully differentiate himself to become a separate, autonomous self, but seeks alternative imaginative maternal instance of refuge in ‘nation.’ These aggressive nationalists crave for an all-encompassing maternal body as shelter (symbolically Nation). As they fear separation or fragmentation, they cling to their groups – tribes, national community, teams or clubs, army etc. for protection, for sense of security.

Theweleit, through the study of child psychology and ego-constitution in violent adults, reveals that the ‘fascist’ is in need of fusion within a sharply determined matrix, a common body shared with others identical to him, as quite distinct from the masses. Rather than build his identity through a process of differentiation and individuation which relies on exchange and interaction, the nationalist seeks immediate exclusion through violence and war. He reacts violently to protect his maternal body (nation) and would avenge any attack on it.

23 Klaus Theweleit 1989. His insights are used by the feminist scholars to explain their theories of gender and nation. For example From Gender to Nation, Rada Ivecovac and Julie Mostov (eds.), New Delhi: Zuban, 2004
As he fails to reconcile the need for being autonomous with desire for belonging, he tries to maintain 'strong self' by repressing bodily emotions and desires for belonging, and tries to seek protection behind armor of virility. He harbors a high potential for anxiety about 'losing' himself when allowing himself openly to live out elementary bodily and erotic desires. Repression, exclusion and denigration are the root of sexism, racism and nationalism in such mechanism of psyche.

Fantasma of the 'strong self' has been enforced and reproduced by the bourgeois 'metaphysics of gender'. In a lived experience, the 'strong self' from the perspective of masculine self can only be sustained if it is stabilized by an adequate counter-image of 'woman'. However, the two dialectically interwoven moments of mature self are transformed into a metaphysical dichotomy of incompatible gender traits in the context of patriarchal ideology.

Nation, as often compared to family in the nationalist discourse, is this vertical patriarchal construction claiming self-referential genealogy in identity. It is hierarchical, non-democratic and stresses on continuity. Here both women and men play the 'natural' gender roles. The paternal parent gathers its members to the maternal body, i.e. Nation. The nationalist here relates himself to the community and to other members of the community through a higher principle (patriarch head, God, religion or hegemonic idea). He communicates to others through this higher principle.

24 Elisabeth List analyses the issue in her essay "Selfhood, Nation And Gender. The Psychic Roots of Sexism, Racism and Nationalism" in the book From Gender to Nation, 2004. According to List, both nationalism and sexism as psycho-political phenomena appear as the result of a family process of individualisation, a failure to attain the level of a mature self that is able to reconcile the desire for autonomy with that of belonging in a non-contradictory way. But both sexism and nationalism are not simply the expression of a psycho-pathology, but as much the effect of established patterns of gender relationship and forms of social bonding which are defined, regulated and controlled by a socio-cultural context and a symbolic order of a special type that devalues both women and body as the source of desire.
For him, national identity and personal identity coincide. He can be subject of the nation and relate himself with fellow men with the notions of brotherhood. However, woman can never be an autonomous subject or member like man. She is included as subordinated member into the community. Woman, to claim the national identity or male ideal of the national, has to erase her identity as particular gender and individual. She is always put in a double bind situation as claiming national identity is necessary but impossible for her due to this asymmetry inherent in the construction of nation.

Woman’s involvement in nationalism is hence complex and complicated. Though nation may be male-world of ‘brotherhood’, its survival and reproduction depended on female sexuality. Hence, for woman her ‘belonging’ to nation hinges on her sexuality, honour and chastity. Any nationalist project involves redefining ‘woman’, her virtues and reconfiguring her roles.

The constricted vision of nation circumscribes woman’s rights and mobility. She would play the roles proffered to her by the patriarchal head, conforming to the qualities of idealised womanhood ascribed to her. Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias have identified five ways in which women have tended to participate in the ethnic, national and state processes and practices: 25

1. Biological reproducer of the members of the national and ethnic collectivities.
2. Reproducers of boundaries of ethnic and national groups.
3. Key participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of culture.
4. Signifiers of ethnic and national differences (i.e. as symbols used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic or national categories).
5. Active militants in the national, economic, political and military struggles.

However, these categories intersect/overlap with each other in both actual practice and symbolic representations of gender relations in the community.

Using sensual and sexual imageries in the nationalist narratives, nationalist elites sensualise nation while desensualising and repressing sexuality of actual men and women. De-eroticised images of chaste wives, patriotic mothers and pure ‘wholesome’ national heroes support their politics of reproduction and demographic control.

These images of purity and sacrifice, of chastity and innocence provide the national models that are in tune with their practice of transforming the sensual to the symbolic plane of nation, imagined as an object of pure love, and at the same time desexualising the physical body. Especially the ethnic and religious nationalism which have the myth of common origin as the organising principle lay great stress on the ‘purity’ of nation and continuity of its genealogy (line of patriarchal genealogy). Such nationalist projects are more preoccupied with sexual relationships of the members. There are various other reasons for regulating women’s sexuality and faculty of reproduction in various nationalist projects.

Women as mother symbolise Nation (Bharata Mata, for example) in the gendered narrative of nation. Women in such narratives become a collective symbol for virtue, fertility, strength and continuity. Their sufferings as patriotic mothers, widows, rape victims and refugees become symbols of national tragedy. Women’s bodies are designated as space of nation and they become at a time property of nation and its territorial markers. Woman as Mother Nation and actual female body becomes the site to play out the battle for power, for conquering nation or securing its boundaries. The variations of struggle played out over the feminine body parallel the gender roles that reinforce sexual stereotypes and imagery: the feminine as passive and the masculine as active. The Motherland
provides a passive, receptive and vulnerable image in contrast to the active image of masculine institutions such as military which is the force behind the invasion, conquest and defense.

In representations of women as mother, we find two major archetypes: One is the Great Mother – an image of omnipotent Mother, and second, an eternal victim which becomes metaphor for victimised nation.

The nation as mother produces an image of the allegorical mother whose children are the country's guardians, heroes and martyrs. Individual mothers are celebrated as instances of this image. Woman is revered as biological reproducer of nation and its members whom she incites later to sacrifice for the cause of nation. Her pleasures and sufferings are limited to this extent. Hence, her sexuality as an individual is denied and her pleasure is sublimated in the acts of reproducing and nurturing nation's sons, tending to its wounds, awaiting for return of son/heroes from the war field or supporting them in the militant activities and remaining faithful to the protectors.

However, in symbolising and elevating women's role as mother is implicit notion of sexuality of mother. In the desire to recover and retain ‘purity’ of the nation, women’s sexuality as ‘mother’ becomes crucial to the nationalist projects. Women's sexual relations with the national men or the other men become determining factor in involving them in the private corner of the nationalist project.

Woman’s sexuality is regulated in terms of political jurisdiction through policies on demography - the policies on anti-abortion, campaigning for growth in members of the ethnic or religious groups and other such policies and norms which exercise control over the reproductive rights of women. Reproduction and conjugal relationship are controlled in such instances by State as well as moral and cultural institutions such as church/religious centers, marriage and family.
Nations, with their conception of boundaries, divide the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘our women’ and ‘their women’. While “our” women stand for the ‘purity’, chastity and honour of our nation, they are also vulnerable for the sexual attack. “Their” women are enemies as reproducers, multiplying number of outsiders, besides conspiring to seduce “our men” and dilute “our” culture. While protecting “our” women is important, controlling all women is also important. Such sexual fantasies collectivise the identity of women: the enemy male wants to invade the national space and abduct “our” women, to steal our identity, to dilute our culture. The “Other’s” men are collectively seen as sexual aggressors, “our” women are object of their temptation. “Their” women are as such potential sight for warfare, both symbolically and literally. Sexual encounters between the national women and ‘other’ men, both willing and unwilling, create crisis of honour and precipitate vengeful violence.

Hence, sexuality of individual woman is matter of concern as it poses threat to nation – she is vulnerable to sexual attack and also suspected to transgress the borders. Just as she stands for purity, she is also vulnerable to contamination. As a mother her fecundity is valued while her sexuality, unless regulated, is a threat. Hence, in such situation, woman’s position in nation is precarious and any act of hers against the higher principle would lead to exclusion and push her to the state of unprotected object dangling between the borders of the national communities. She will always be under pressure to conform due to the danger of exclusion. Hence, woman’s ‘belonging’ to community is closely

---

26 The rape and violence on individual women become symbolically significant in the nationalist, ethnic and communal discourses and conflicts.

linked to her sexuality, chastity, honour; family, community and state must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy, and their membership within the fold. Hence, the need for protecting woman also involves monitoring her action.

Besides, Mosse explains the duality of the nationalists' notions regarding women's sexuality, especially in the European nationalist history: On the one hand, female embodiments of the nation stood for eternal forces and suggested innocence and chastity, and most of all respectability, but on the other hand, the right women needed to be sexually available to the right men: 'the maiden with the shield, the spirit that awaits a masculine leader' to facilitate 'the enjoyment of peace achieved by male warriors.' These images of acceptable female sexuality stood in contrast to female 'decadents' (prostitutes and lesbians) who were seen as 'unpatriotic, weakening the nation,' and dishonouring the nation's men.

However, women are not always passive victims. In their role as signifiers of ethnic differences, bearers and transmitters of culture, women will be entrusted with power granted by the patriarchal authority.

---

28 Ritu Menon, in “Do Women Have a Country?” in From Gender to Nation, elaborates this point discussing the issue of atrocities. Ethnic and religious 'cleansing', abductions, rapes, deportation during the partition of India in 1947. Urvashi Butalia in her book - The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India, (New Delhi, Viking, 1998) observes that lakhs of women were reported 'missing' during the partition, and in many villages, women were traded for freedom.

29 Mosse, Nationality and Sexuality, 1985
Through such gender roles and symbols, the dichotomy between the ‘world and home’, public/civic sphere and family, which in turn correspond to man and woman, is ideologically reproduced and maintained by a system of symbolic ‘border guards’.\(^{30}\) Besides, these ‘border guards’ can identify the people as members and non-members of the collectivity. They are closely linked to specific cultural codes of styles of dress, behaviour as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, religion, literary and artistic modes of production and language. Women, through their proper clothing and behaviour, reproduce boundaries of the ethnic or national groups. They also transmit the cultural values to the posterity. Hence, nationalists intensely debate the ‘proper’ dress and demeanour of their women.\(^{31}\)

On the contrary, very often it is women, especially older women and ‘national new women’, who are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of nation and are empowered to rule on what is ‘appropriate’ behaviour and appearance and what is not and to exert control over other women who might be construed as ‘deviants’. As very often this is the main source of social power allowed to women, they might become fully engaged in it. Woman’s power depends on her class and age, position of her husband in society, her possession of sons, her fertility, her looks, health and capacity for domestic labour. The middle-aged mother of grown up sons could be a powerful matriarch and elderly mothers-in-law could command and oppress young wives.

---

\(^{30}\) Nira Yuval – Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1997. However, the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres or the ‘world’ and ‘home’ are not watertight compartments but they have porous boundaries. They have a complex reciprocal relationship.

\(^{31}\) A striking example for this politics of dress and demeanour is Islamic nationalists’ concern over ‘purdah’ (veil) which is considered a key element in the protection of family’s pride and honour.
Tanika Sarkar explains the complex trajectories of hegemonic patriarchal power which involves woman not as a passive victim but as an active subject of its power. She writes:

Woman would get more securely stitched into the fabric of lineage, caste and class at a later stage in her life cycle. We tend to absolutise male and female domains and see them as seamless blocs, forming opposites of total power and total powerlessness. Patriarchy, however, operates through far more complicated trajectories, with crisscrossing power lines, that fracture both domains and that, at times, unite segments across the blocs. The same woman, depending on the presence of sons, her husband's status and fortune, and her age, gets to know both subjection and rule. This is why, and how, perhaps, women are much of the time, complicit subjects of patriarchy.\(^\text{32}\)

The male nationalist also delegates her certain complementary 'feminine' qualities such as strength, love, gallantry and morality. This new 'enlightened' woman holds the centre of nation's roots in its antiquity – as uncorrupt, innate, emotional and harmonising bond of the national family. Through her qualities – nurturing and co-operative, 'feminine qualities' are included in the national models. However, this will always be a subordinated inclusion.

As discussed above, sexuality and nationalism are linked in various ways in its reconfigured gender roles and relations. An individual’s choice of sexual partner may depend on his relation to nationalist project and also nationalism may determine his choice. Hence sexual desire is also nationalised. Apart from their social and religious dimensions, family and marriage are crucial in

maintaining such reconfigured gender relations and also as institutions to guard the ‘morality’ of the nation-in-the-making. Nationalist discourses provide idealised notion of healthy, safe and stable family which provides ‘a solid base’ for nation, serves as spine of nation; and in such family, the future nationalists are produced. As a result, the quality of nation is also dependent on such family. The national/ethnic culture is organised around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and family. The nationalist couple will be abiding by these rules.33

Qualities such as fidelity or chastity and loyalty are crucial in both conjugal relationship and national morality. Besides, male and female sexuality regulated within family and marriage helps in determining the porous boundary between the private and the public, the nation and the foreign.

Though there will be discrepancies between the ideals of the nationalists and actual lived experiences, there will always be efforts to impose the hegemonic notions of sexual relationships through family and marriage. Usually, monogamy and endogamy become widely accepted forms of marriages to suit the needs of nationalists and through religious institutions and state laws these marriages also become legitimate.

However, norms on choices of sexual partners are also not same for national man and national woman. Though monogamy and endogamy may be desirable, man can be excluded considering his capacity to ‘convert’ ‘their’ woman and ‘dilute’ enemy culture and weaken/conquer enemy nation. However, ‘Our’ woman can’t be given the choice for reasons already discussed above. Hence, her

33 Family is considered a problematic site by nationalists, anti-nationalists and feminists. There is plethora of literature on the discussion of patriarchal control over women through the oppressive systems - family and marriage. Family and marriage also are closely linked to idealised notions of womanhood/wifeliness which naturalise gender stereotypes.
sexual fidelity is often highly praised in the nationalist discourses as a national virtue. In comparison, the foreign and the orthodox sexual relationships, and exogamy are denigrated as root causes of various social ills and national degeneration.

Nationalist wife can serve nation by helping her husband to be a better nationalist, by encouraging him in the acts of nationalism, supporting him in the nationalist struggles, provoking his bravery/virility and chastising his cowardice or lack of ‘patriotism’ in times of nationalist conflicts.

Hence, the national woman gets freedom of choice to fall in love, only if her choice is national male! Only such marriage within the prescribed norms would be considered ‘pleasurable’ for women. Sometimes, the national woman’s sexual desire is acceptable and tolerated only when it is within the fixed boundaries and if she could retain her national credentials. For men, nationality is inalienable, but for women her nationality is dependent on her sexual choices.

There are several perspectives on women’s active participation as a militant nationalist in the nationalist struggles. Women’s active and direct participation in the struggle is hemmed with restrictions and reservations. The women nationalists work under the pressure to remain in supportive, symbolic, often suppressed and traditional roles. Faced with these constraints, sometimes women attempt to enact nationalism through traditional roles assigned to them by nationalists – supporting their husbands, raising their children and serving as symbols of national honour. In these cases women can exploit both nationalist and enemy or oppressor patriarchal views of women’s roles in order to aid in the nationalist struggles. For example, women could distribute pamphlets secretly in different places as they are less suspected than male nationalists and less likely to be seen as dangerous or ‘up to something’.
Despite their bravery, sometimes taking on traditional male military roles in cadres and military units, the women find themselves once again under the rule of institutionalised patriarchy once national independence is won. Hence the nationalist movements which encouraged women’s participation in the name of national liberation could not concede to their demand for gender equality. In such struggles women find autonomy, but risk new exclusions in a newly configured community at the hands of the nationalists.

**Feminised narrative and signifier of resistance**

Does the feminine narrative of nation make any difference in perception of the whole enterprise of nation-building? What would happen to the masculine narrative when women become feminine signifier of resistance and subversion? There are divergent opinions among the scholars over the issue.

For example, Cynthia Enloe in her book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* observes ‘nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope.’ She argues that women are relegated to minor, often symbolic, roles in nationalist and ethnic conflicts, either as icons of nationhood, to be elevated and defended, or as booty or spoil of war, to be

---

34 Kuman Jayawardena, Joane Nagel and Geraldine Forbes among many other feminist scholars have explained this, citing examples of various nationalist movements.

35 For example, during the formation of the modern nation-state, when the concept of a fraternity of national subjects took hold of 18th century Europe after the French Revolution, women were conspicuously left out of this fellowship. They were excluded from its civil law through a dispossession of their inheritance in favour of their brothers, and through the legal regulation of their sexual, biological and reproductive rules. More such examples are cited by Carole Pateman (*The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989), Neloufer De Mel (*Women and the Nation’s Narrative*, New Delhi Kali for Women, 2001), Kuman Jayawardena, (*Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, New Delhi. Kali for Women, 1986)
denigrated and discarded. In either case real actors are men who are defending their freedom, their honour, their homeland and their women. She notes the limited change that has resulted from the many nationalist independence movements around the world, and observes that in many post World War II states it is ‘business as usual’ with indigenous masculinity replacing colonialist masculinity at the helm of states.

However, some other feminist scholars argue that while accepting the hegemonic masculine narrative of the nation-making process and considering male’s role as paramount in the nation-building, women’s intervention in the anti-war struggles, their subversive roles and the feminist narrative of the nationalist struggles go unnoticed. These analyses are criticised for erasure of women’s agency from the discourses on state and nation.

For example, Urvashi Butalia explains that through women’s local networks and groups during the freedom movements and through feminist intervention in the dominant male discourse the constructs of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ are contested. During these struggles women can and do create social spaces for contestations and resistance. She writes:

When women narrate the nation they do so rather differently than men. In men’s narratives of the nation, women are often seen as symbols of national and family honour. In women’s narratives, the concerns are often different: the need to keep the family together, to contain grief, to put closures on unexplained deaths, to try and somehow contain the violence that such a situation inevitably unleashes.

---

35 Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000
She further passionately writes on women’s role in the nation-making:

In all wars of conquest, when men go in to conquer one nation, to bring the rule of another nation to the one they wish to conquer, as armies enter villages and towns, the men run away. The women stay – they hide knowing fully well that they might be raped and violated – but they stay, trying to protect their children, trying to save the old and infirm, trying to keep the home and hearth intact.\(^\text{37}\)

Kumari Jayawardena in ‘Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World’ reveals that during the nationalist struggles of these countries (Egypt, Iran, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, the Phillippines, Vietnam and Indonesia), women from the emerging bourgeoisie stressed women’s emancipation issues – equal rights and legal reforms within the existing social structures.

Women, both from the nationalist high class and from other classes in countries like China raised more basic feminist issues concerning women’s subordination in the family and the structures of society generally. These women fought for the right to control their own lives in the home and outside, and to change those social institutions that contributed to their subordination. Jayawardena traces growth of feminism in these countries during the nationalist struggles.

Does feminised narrative of nation promise emancipation of woman? Can nation-building as a masculine enterprise contain counter-hegemonic moves of women completely? Can there be deviant narratives which can subverse masculine/feminised narratives and liberate women from both oppressive nationalist and conventional patriarchy?

Colonialism, modernity and nationalism

The Western stereotypes of gender categories and their models of nationalism and nation-state came into the cultures and worldviews through colonialism in India. Colonialism is a point of convergence of the Western stereotypes of gender categories, political and economic domination.

The colonial rule over others was legitimised claiming the racial superiority and modernity of the Western civilisation. The West justified colonialism as a civilising mission by propagating its concept of modernity and progress. Colonial discourses, based on the works of the Western philosophers of Enlightenment, argued 'modernity' would bring in era of universal reason and emancipation. Colonialism was defended on the ground of its providential mission of facilitating modernity and progress of its subject nation, drawing from various discourses and body of knowledge supporting the Western superiority vis-à-vis inferiority of the colonised country.

Colonialism affected change in perceptions and sensibilities of the colonised towards social, cultural, religious, political and economic aspects of life. It postulated disjuncture between India's past and present – the civilised India was its bygone past – 'golden age' when 'spiritualism' was the core of Indian tradition. And its later degradation was due to aspects of the traditional Indian culture, which in spite of its valued aspects carried the seeds of its downfall. The Orientalist scholars and

---

38 Insights into colonial masculinity and gender ideologies are drawn from the works of Ashis Nandy (Intimate Enemy), Partha Chatterjee (The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus London: Oxford University Press,1999), Mrinalini Sinha (Colonial Masculinity) and Ronald Hyam (Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918 – 1968) among others.

39 The influence of liberalism of 19th century thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in Britain, the socialist challenge of the French Utopians and later of the Marxists, Darwinism, anti-Christian and anti-clerical movements and secularisation on the Indian intellectuals of the period could not be discussed here.
Christian missionaries constantly attacked the 'backwardness of Indian society', keeping the Western ideals as yardstick. They came down heavily on the 'barbaric practices' and social mores of the colonised people. They put forth the concept of 'golden age' or a glorious past which later declined following 'dark age' of the medieval Muslim rule leading to the present lapse of glory to justify the colonial administration to revive the glory by making it the European present. The canonical Hindu scriptures, widely translated and circulated by Orientalist scholars, became textual standards for even the nationalist discourses.

The Orientalist evaluation of culture and social life of the colonised, the Western ideals of masculinity, femininity, man and woman relationship and family were introduced to the colonised society and they were interconnected with their project of national regeneration. Besides, its mission of ordering of modern society also unleashed several contradictory forces.

The British, through 'secular' mass English education, exposed a section of youth in India to the Enlightenment ideals of rationalism, freedom and nationalism, liberalist and humanist schools of thoughts and to Orientalist assessment of India. Paradoxically, for the English educated youth of the middle class and upper caste the realisation of 'modernity' was both 'emancipating' and 'victimising' as evident in their approaches to the modernising project involved in the social, religious and political movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Notwithstanding differences in their stances towards the British administration, the English educated youth were into deep introspection and evaluated both the West and the East in varied

---

ways. Tension caused by the colonial experiences and awareness of their victimhood coloured their own evaluation of both India and the West. There were different sets of responses—sometimes strange mixture of them—like the one to find modernising Indian culture and tradition; criticising such ‘aping the West’ and upholding revival of pristine Hindu past which has accumulated a lot of dross; being critical of the West and also of the Hindu past and present. And hence, we come across inconsistency, contradiction, ambivalence and sometimes incongruity co-existing in their approaches to various issues debated during the period.

In the light of their newly acquired knowledge and encounter with the West, the educated English youth in the nineteenth century took up social, political and religious reforms which were initiated by the Christian missionaries and scholars for their own reasons. They shared unnatural bond with the colonisers over the colonial ideologies pertaining to gender categories and modernity, progress and reinterpretation of history and mythologies of the nation-in-the making.

The modernisation process which was initiated by both the colonisers and the colonised, had involved construction of ‘tradition’. While the colonisers cited the ‘glorious past’ to highlight ‘semi-barbaric,’ ‘degeneration’ at the present, for the nationalist it involved asserting the past spiritual superiority of India over the materialism of the West.
As Partha Chatterjee observes, the English educated youth with budding nationalist consciousness attempted to fashion a different kind of modernity which would be consistent with their mission of achieving ‘nationhood’ and construction of national ‘identity’. While discussing various attempts by the nationalists to evolve a ‘national’ modernity, Partha Chatterjee points to the difference between the Western model of modernity and that of the national:

Immanuel Kant, speaking at the founding moment of Western modernity, looks at the present as the site of one’s escape from the past, for us it is precisely the present from which we feel we must escape. This makes the very modality of our coping with modernity radically different from the historically evolved modes of Western modernity.41

Though Partha Chatterjee emphasises the nexus between modernity and power, here he leans towards the Hindu nationalists while insisting on conceiving ‘national modernity’ as a necessity and ignores the dangers of accepting narratives of progressive modernisation and analysis of the nationalists’ fallacies on modernity.

He points out that the English educated middle class and upper caste nationalists, who were experiencing humiliations in their daily life during their encounter with the colonisers and searching for their own ‘national identity’, made attempts to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project aimed to cultivate the material techniques of modern, Western civilisation while retaining and strengthening the distinctive ‘spiritual essence of national culture’.

The sieving and weaving of the various aspects of 'modern' and 'tradition' had triggered a complex set of processes in all aspects of life and it requires for one to problematise the use of these terms in each context while analysing these processes. Besides, the nationalists, while evolving their own strategies to counter the West, draw upon the dichotomy between spiritualism of India and materialism of the West as previously postulated by the Orientalists and colonial historians or culture critiques.

Here, though the nationalism is not derivative of the European ideologies, it certainly appropriated those very ideologies and readings of 'India' to formulate its own essences. The nationalists accepted, in their pride for cultural achievements and critique of the West, the cultural essences which were formulated by the Orientalism though to cause the humility in the colonised. The nationalists, however, differed in their emphasis, to establish an indigenous vocabulary and thus we find both the nationalist and Orientalist ideologies overlapping leading to certain paradoxes of nationalism in India.

The 'modernisation' as per the colonial standards, necessitated dismantling of the pre-capitalist structures, especially, ruling dynasties and religious orthodoxies which stood in the way of the nationalists' modernising project and the anti-imperialist struggle. But, modernity as a cultural goal implied an exposure to deeply ambivalent situations: the normative structure of modernisation being mostly foreign to the indigenous cultural tradition of the colonised societies, it posed a threat to their identity. In contradiction to this, since modernisation also constituted a kind of universal strategy for economic development and social growth, its requirement was urgently felt and was coveted for. Hence some nationalists while challenging the colonial claim to political domination accepted the very
intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based. This introduced some ambivalence in the cultural response of the colonised to modernisation. Besides, these reforms were also attempts to reconcile a certain set of contradictions produced by the colonial discourses such as the past/the present, tradition/modernity and the East/West. As a result, we come across many ad hoc, contradictory, paradoxical and ambivalent positions towards these issues.

Experiences of modernity and colonialism are closely linked in the Indian context. However, some scholars like Dipankar Gupta argue that the phenomenon, which we call 'modernity' in India is 'westoxication'—an imitation of the West. In his *Mistaken Modernity* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2001), Gupta argues that modernity in contemporary India is misrecognised and is equated with advanced technology and industrialisation. However, he sees modernity in India as historically incomplete project, for, many non-modern elements such as caste system, tenacious traditions of Sati and dowry system, lack of institutionalisation, unhygienic conditions, uncivic public, and lack of respect for women, etc. are still prevailing in contemporary India.

Dipankar Gupta says modernity has to do with attitudes, especially those that come into play in social relations. A modern society is one in which at least the following characteristics must be present: Dignity of the individual; adherence to universalistic norms; elevation of individual achievement over privileges or disprivileges of birth; accountability in public life. Generally speaking, he says, technology and consumerism are consequences of the four characteristics of modernisation listed above, and do not by themselves, constitute modernity. Gupta keeps the Western modernity as yardstick and for him westernisation means the establishment of universalistic norms and the privileging of achievement over birth, while westoxication (that he found in India and other countries) is about superficial consumerist display of commodities and facts produced in the West. However, he finds modernity in the West more mature and rules out the concept of multiple modernities as hypocrisy of the middle class to cover its non-modern elements. Imitation of the West in India and Iran, for him seemed 'westoxication' and not the true model of westernisation. But even when one goes by the characteristics of modernisation that he has listed, the West is also not completely modern. Colonisation of countries itself stands on the grounds of inequality and lack of respect for individuals. While Gupta leans towards fallacy of 'true' Western modernity, Partha Chatterjee contends the Western fallacy of modernity stressing the need for multiple modernities. He recognises burden of reason, dreams of freedom, desire for power and resistance to power as the elements of modernity. Hence, for him, modernity can be of different forms depending on geography, time, environment and social conditions. However, he doesn’t problematise the concept of modernity and leans towards Hindu nationalist ideologies of modernity.
The ambivalent approaches to the modernising project with all their complexities and varied nuances could be explained effectively by analysing the colonial and nationalist views on the link between their perceptions of gender categories and modernity and consequent changes in their orientation towards conjugal relationship, marriage and family.

**Loss and recovery of masculinity**

Ashis Nandy, in his psycho-political analysis, links the colonial ideologies of modernity and progress to fashioning of the rigid masculine self. He argues that the colonial discourses changed the perceptions towards age, gender and history in the colonised country. He says:

Traditional Indian society, despite its patrachal dimensions, doesn't allow gender, age and other biological differences to be easily transformed into principles of social stratification. On the contrary, it sees the masculine and the feminine, the infant, adult and the aged as a continuum. The differences are acknowledged but the boundaries are open and diffused.

Though Ashis Nandy's belief in an authentic Indian tradition can't be accepted, it is indisputable that colonial ideology drew from homology between sexual and political dominance, and childhood and state of being colonised. He further argues, it produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolised the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity.

---

43 Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemies* 1989

44 Ibid, page 7
It legitimised the Western views of denial of psychological bisexuality in men and dominance, exploitation and violence as natural and valid. It de-emphasised speculation, intellection and 'charitas' as feminine and justified a limited cultural role for women – femininity – by holding that the softer side of human nature was irrelevant to the public sphere. Femininity-in-masculinity (androgyne) was perceived as the final negation of a man’s political identity, pathology more dangerous than femininity itself. Undifferentiated masculinity was counterpoised against all kinds of androgyny which were in the myths of both India and the West. It upheld certain traditional Indian beliefs of upper classes’ affirmation of masculinity through sexual distance, abstinence and self-control.

The nexus between the political domination and the gender stereotypes is further legitimised by the Orientalist discourses. In the late nineteenth century and in early twentieth century, the distinction between masculine and feminine races as a pervasive theme in the unsystematic imperialist theory appeared in connection with Bengalis, whom most Englishmen knew best and who had most swiftly responded to English culture. Lloyd I. Rudolph, citing examples from John Strachey’s works on India, remarks that Englishmen felt ill at ease among Indians who demonstrated a notable lack of interest in proving their manhood by overt signs of martial, leather-faced masculinity. They much preferred the ‘martial races’ such as the Sikhs and Mohammedans and Rajputs and Pathans which exhibited a more familiar aggressive spirit.45

The distinction between the martial and non-martial was no invention of the English. It had accumulated ethical and historical meaning in Hindu caste structure and culture, which inculcated a

---

non-violent perspective in some castes and an aggressive one in others. But in English minds at the end of the nineteenth century, the distinction was stressed as much for its instrumental utility in the imperialist theory as for its academic interest as a description of caste or regional character.

Mrinalini Sinha describes ‘the imperial constitution of politics of colonial masculinity’, while interrogating the impact of the colonial masculinity in four specific controversies: the ‘white mutiny’ against the Ilbert Bill, the official government response to the Native Volunteer Movement in 1885, the recommendations of the Public Service Commission of 1886, and the Indian opposition to the Age of Consent Bill in 1891. While Nandy explored the reordering of the notions of gender categories analysing the psychology of colonialism, Mrinalini Sinha dwells on material and historical specificity of colonial masculinity. Nandy focuses more on Western notions of masculinity in reordering of more traditional conceptions of masculinity in India and Mrinalini investigates mutual implication of both the notions of modern Western masculinity and traditional Indian conceptions of masculinity.

Her work reveals that British superiority over their Indian subjects was expressed in terms of the distinction between the self-controlled and ‘manly’ Englishmen and the over-emotional and ‘effeminate’ Bengali. Her work also explains how Bengali men contested the stereotypes. They accepted charges of effeminacy but argued that these traits were not innate, but were the product of the subordination they were forced to endure under the British rule, and sought a return to ‘authentic’ Indian manliness through competitive sports and a physical cultural movement.

---

Many English educated Indians while evoking the 'glorious past' of India and reinterpreting its history and mythologies, during the period of socio-religious reforms in the nineteenth century saw that the salvation of India lie in recovering the loss of 'masculine' self.

They resurrected the ideology of martial races latent in the traditional Indian concept of statecraft and gave the idea a new centrality. These social, religious and political reforms and literary and art movements as well tried to make Kshatnyahood the true interface between the rulers and the ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness. These reformists were actively engaged in revaluing the traditional Hindu orientation to male and female. They reinterpreted history and mythology accordingly.

The early reformists like Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) had already introduced the Christian views of the organised religion, a sacred text, monotheism and a patriarchal godhead. This was further propagated systematically by revivalists like Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902).

The main elements of their Hinduism were: An attempt to turn Hinduism into an organised religion with an organised priesthood; acceptance of the idea of proselytization and religious 'conscientisation', an attempt to introduce the concept of 'The Book' following the Semitic creeds (Gita, Vedas)\(^47\); the acceptance of the idea of linear objective and casual history; acceptance of ideas akin to monotheism; a certain puritanism and this worldly asceticism.

\(^47\) An in-depth study of different readings of Bhagavad Gita by different nationalists of the period would be interesting. Many interpreted Gita to legitimise violence in the name of ‘Dharma Yuddha’ and provided it an operative word such as ‘sacrifice’ during the ‘war against the colonisers’. It helped them separate morality and politics and to sanctify violence in the name of ‘Dharma Yuddha’. Tilak also interpreted Gita, to vouch for ‘sacrifice’ and ‘activism’. Gandhi also quoted from Gita, but with completely different meanings.
They also subscribed to the colonial views of the ‘golden past’ and took the position that the Hindus had been great—virile and adult (symbolic of mature phase of civilisation, as explained by Ashis Nandy) — in ancient times and had fallen on bad days because of their loss of contact with textual Brahminism and true Kshatriyahood and linked cultural regression of the Hindus to the loss of original Aryan qualities, especially, loss of masculinity.

Swami Vivekananda exhorted educated men for moral action, vanguardist social and political activism. He was popularly quoted as saying, ‘religion will come afterwards... You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Bhagavad Gita.’ They called to exorcise the painful sense of ‘national impotence’ — a sense of impotence combined with the fear of moral unworthiness. Apart from Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj which spearheaded the social and religious reform movement, several gymnastic societies in Maharashtra and elsewhere launched muscle-building and aggressive Hindu spirit-building endeavors.

They upheld celibacy and harboured attitude towards sex as sinful in response to the criticism of national impotence. Their discourse on national regeneration based on the reconstructed individual, standing strong and pure, ready to serve the nation, emphasised celibacy as a value in itself and as a means towards achievement of spiritual, moral and physical strength.

They upheld abstinence from sex for strong spirit-building by disciplining the mind to counter the European physical strength. The old ideal of ‘Brahmacharya’ - celibacy - acquired a new meaning in the context of their modern sensibilities. The traditional belief that it was a road to spiritual power was now harnessed to more secular ends — physical and moral excellence to combat the Western accusation that Indians are weak, degenerate and lecherous. An ideal which was traditionally relevant
for young students preparing for the life of a householder or for the ascetic, was now appropriated into the marital context as well. The idea of political 'sanyasi' to create nationalist heroes received a new vigour with asceticism being a new technology to recover the lost manhood.

Their new puritanism drew upon the old ascetic ideals which also includes sublimation of sexuality into spirituality. They upheld the belief which is very much part of the tradition that physical strength and mental power have their own source in 'virya', a word that stands for both sexual energy and semen and it is identical with the essence of maleness. Their masculinity is affirmed through sexual distance, abstinence and self-control. Underneath the denial of sex and legitimising the celibacy is denial of woman as source of sex and seduction. Hence they uphold image of woman as Mother as supreme over woman as a sexual being. Thus, nationalist sentiments in a section of the nationalists found expression in religious semantics.

Besides, a new kind of spiritualism was associated with nationalism which further consolidated the internalisation of the Western notions of nationalism consistent with their nationalist discourse. We find one more such example in Sri Aurobindo who combined spiritualism and nationalism in a unique way which had an imprint on the contemporary nationalists. According to him, "Nationalism is an 'avatar' (incarnation of divinity) and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed shakti of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came." In Maharashtra, Bal Gangadhar Tilak tried to mobilise masses on the grounds of religion, by organising Ganesha and Shivaji festivals as public functions.

---

This militant Hindu nationalism with its refashioned patriarchal ideologies can be best explained through the study of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894). In its early phase, he was one of the first nationalists to expound systematically the principles of nationalism.

As Partha Chatterjee analyses, Bankim believed India had become a subject nation—because Indians had lacked physical strength and courage. Realising the link between culture and power, he argued certain aspects of Indian culture such as lack of desire for liberty, national solidarity and physical strength had led to its 'fall', while the superiority of the West was in the materiality of its culture. He advocated regeneration of the Hindu culture embodying an unrivalled combination of material and spiritual values, by sweeping clean of the dross that accumulated over the centuries, to interpret its tenets in the light of contemporary social conditions. Like many other nationalists of the period, his reinterpretation of the past and sacred texts of India actually foregrounded core colonial ideals and values which apparently were conceived to have given strength to the coloniser. He rejected the earlier model of critical Hinduism and suggested a new framework of political culture—a national Hindu culture—the concept which peregrinated across India through his novels and essays.

Bankim asserted hypermasculinity while subscribing to the imperialist ideology and made figure of the weak, irresolute, effeminate 'babu' a special target of contempt and ridicule. His critique of effeminate Bengali was legitimately voiced by the babu’s indigenous others—women in their families and by both men and women of the lower classes.

---

Bankim’s essay on Krishna provided a reinterpreted godhead to new Hinduism: a historical and historically conscious, self-consistent, moral according to norms, respectable, righteous, didactic, 'hard' god, protecting the glories of Hinduism as a proper religion and preserving it as an internally consistent moral and cultural system. Krishna is ‘purged’ of all other qualities such as childlike, soft, self-contradictory, sometimes immoral, sexually playful, androgenous, philosophically sensitive and practically idealist. Krishna became the model for newly configured national identity.

He used the inherently polysemic possibilities of the construction of social entities as gendered categories by classicising, in an entirely ‘modern’ way, the ideal of masculinity as standing for the virtues of self-respect, justice, ethical conduct, responsibility, protecting the righteous and punishing the mischievous, and enlightened leadership and femininity as courage, sacrifice, inspiration and source of strength.

Bankim’s historical romances – *Anandamath* (1882), *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884) and *Sitaram* (1887) had deep influence on the people across the country due to their use of powerful religious semiotics. The ascetic soldiery, propagated in his novel *Anandamath* – training in a forest Ashram, brave, celibate, sturdy and disciplined – provided a model for future Hindu fundamentalist parties and ‘terrorists’. Heroic Krishna and Kali are divine supporters and inspirers for the Hindu armies – Santans - respectively in the novel. Santans’ marching song ‘Bande Mataram’ in *Anandamath* invokes the female goddess as the Mother and became popular among the nationalists fighting the British administration.

---

He created in his novels a utopian political community in which the nation is Mother once resplendent in wealth and beauty, now in tatters. Relentlessly she exhorts a small band of her sons, those of whom are brave and enlightened, to vanquish the enemy and win back her honour. Bankim represented the past, present and future states of the Mother through three main iconographic sets which with variations, decisively influenced all later nationalist imaginings. 51

The Mother in the past was an uncomplicated glorious figure of abundance, peace and benevolence. Past radiance then finds its perfect antithesis in the image of total darkness and ruin within the colonial present.

Two contradictory icons are used simultaneously to depict this state: in one, the Mother is the archetypal, helpless female victim, the ‘Bharata mata’. A more common and powerful image, however is that of Kali. Although used earlier by Bankim, this figure becomes universalised from Swadeshi times, perhaps due to a more clear and open articulation in two very different ways. Bankim saw in her a measure of our shame, deprivation and exploitation.

Kali is a have-not figure, a woman who has abandoned her femininity and even a basic sense of shame. The wrath of Kali also evoked a powerful image of a transformation of the rich country into desolate, awesome cremation ground. Through her thirst for revenge and insistence on the martyrdom of her sons, Kali will make a nation of heroes out of slumbering Indians. The two modes of representing

51 Tanika Sarkar: Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism, 2000, page 254-255; Jasodhara Bagchi in her essay, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal," analyses how concept of ‘mother’ is reconstructed using traditional mother cult in Bengal and how it was politicised by Bankim and other nationalists, reinforcing the patriarchal control over woman. Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) Vol 25, No 42/43, 1990
Kali indicate, perhaps, an inner tension with nationalism about the principle of female strength and about violence and destructiveness latent in it.

Once the Mother, whether through her wrath or through her calm strength, arouses her sons, the struggle for leadership passes out of her hands into those of her sons; so, ultimately, the woman has a specific and limited role and there is no final and absolute transgression. Kali reverts to Durga, - a smiling, matronly beauty, a married woman visiting her natal home with her children at her side - archetypal mother and daughter - domesticated and gentle femininity.

Anandamath also shows the contemporary views on how marriage and individual's love life were closely linked to the political life. One of the protagonists, a married man, was joined by his wife in male attire but the vow of celibacy was not to be broken until the motherland had been liberated. They achieved martyrdom on the field of glory. This had inspired a large section of freedom fighters of the period when political movement had influenced the love life. They perceived a conflict between the demands of love and service to one's country. Patriotic dedication and happy family life seemed irreconcilable as the demands of the family would be a serious distraction.

This cult of virility and violence were core principles of many militant nationalists of the period. Their perception of masculine Hindu national identity had systematically appropriated and legitimised violence, rejecting other models of Hinduism which included countering the British by accepting 'the Indians as they were.'

There were, however, alternative models that took critical look at Hinduism without subscribing to the colonial ideologies. As Ashis Nandy points out Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's (1820-1891) diagnosis of Hinduism didn't stem from feelings of cultural inferiority, but it grew out of perceived
contradictions within Hinduism itself. Even when he fought for women's causes such as widow remarriage and education, he didn't operate on the basis of Westernised ideals of masculinity and femininity.

But the exclusivist 'Bankim model' of masculine nationalist movement with its homogenised and hegemonic view of Hinduism which fulfilled their need for 'a national culture,' and sanctified new forms of institutionalized violence, had become popular to some extent by the end of the nineteenth century.

It marked the sharp break from the universalism of the earlier phase associated with Rammohun Roy and other reformists. In the process of constructing the 'rigid masculine Hindu identity,' they excluded 'Others' including Muslims and the lower caste men.

**Critique of nationalism, hypermasculinity**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the reformist movements' earlier attempts to 'modernise' religion and social practice led to major backlash in the form of movements to 'revive tradition' and unleashing of mindless violence by the militant nationalists. Besides, the earlier 'rationalism' had gradually given in to the new 'conservatism'.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who pioneered such revivalist tradition in the South, wrote in 1902: "We have lost our glory, our independence, every thing. Religion is the only treasure that we have; if we forsake it, we shall be like the foolish cock in Aesop's fables that threw away a jewel."52 Though he meant to make instrumental use of religion and culture to mobilise people and fulfill the quest for

---

self-confidence and identity of the colonised, it gave way to sectarian politics and communalism. As the struggle to get the political freedom intensified, the reformist agenda took a backseat and the tendency to forge a false sense of homogenous ‘Hindu national culture’ became stronger.

The project of creating new ‘modern Hindu nation’ was seen as a threat by many other sections, largely Muslims and lower caste people. Hence, except in Bengal and Maharashtra, the religious symbols used by the nationalist leaders did not become so effective to provoke the nationalist fervour among these sections. While many favoured British administration for ‘progress’ of their community, Muslims thought of demanding separate nation for themselves. Though many historians speak about the dominance of middle class, upper caste English educated nationalists, Sumit Sarkar, Aijaz Ahmed and others from their Marxist perspective consider Indian nationalist movement not as merely an elitist aspiration for power, but a far more broad-based resentment of the economically exploitative practices of the British Raj.53

Consequently, ambivalent approaches towards nationalism began to develop in the beginning of the twentieth century. However, apart from dissent towards sectarian, communalistic and exclusivist Hindu nationalism by different castes and classes, nationalism – both in its Western origin and attempts at its adaptation in India – itself came under scanner in the works of some of the intellectuals and political leaders of the period. These ‘dissenters among the dissenters’, though small in number, criticised the unreasoned violence triggered by the nationalists and limitations of nationalism as well.

53 Though it would have been ideal to locate the shifts in development of the nationalism, the research is limited to provide sketchy details whenever required. Marxists and socialists’ analysis of the nationalist movement reveal how, by avoiding considering religion as the organising principle Jawaharlal Nehru and other socialists put forth their arguments on different planes by 1930s and 40s onwards. There are also alternative historiographies including caste and peasant movements which challenged the hegemonic constructions of the Hindu past by the nationalists and the Orientalists.
When many nationalist integrationists found that the absence of centralised authority of nation-state and proper national sentiments were 'fatal flaw' of Indian civilisation, these intellectuals, realising the link between the cult of violence and nationalism, colonialism and imperialism, assessed the adverse impact—moral and cultural—on both their champions and their opponents. They didn’t think, like Bankim and other nationalists, the 'fall' was due to lack of certain cultural qualities. For them all cultures are neither sufficient nor insufficient themselves, but are always in the process of negotiation and evolution. The dissenters of the nationalism contemplated an alternative to the exclusionist nationalism and advocated 'a distinctive civilisational concept of universalism embedded in the tolerance which, they believed, was encoded in various 'traditional ways of life in a highly diverse, plural society'.

Two of the dissenters discussed here are Rabindranth Tagore (1861-1941) and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), both of who had a pervasive influence across the country. They built their resistance to nationalism on India’s cultural heritage and plural ways of life. Even in their attack on nationalism and colonialism, Tagore and Gandhi differed in their emphasis on varied aspects of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’. Modernity had a place in Tagore’s worldviews (even while being a critique of modernity) while Mahatma Gandhi perceived alternative views on civilisation outside the modernity (even while being postmodernist in his consciousness). However, 'both recognised the need for a ‘national’ ideology of India as a means of cultural survival and both recognised that, for the same reason, India would either have to make a break with the post-medieval Western concept of nationalism or give the concept a new content.'

54 Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee, in their works, discuss in detail about the content of development of ideologies of nationalism in India. A. R. Desai also observes the growth of different nationalist ideologies in his Social Background of Indian Nationalism (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1946)
symbol of universal struggle for justice and survival of human kind. Instead of assessing the whole way of life in the need for establishing a ‘nation-state,’ they wanted to retain plurality of Indian civilisation and thus could distinguish between nationalism and anti-colonialism, and be patriotic without stooping to become national chauvinist.

However, their views on nationalism also differed, with Tagore viewing nationalism as illegitimate while Gandhi considered going through it to reach ‘internationalism’. 55

Rabindranath Tagore initially had subscribed to Hindu nationalist view of the ‘past.’ In 1905 he outlined his original vision of a self-governing and self-reliant nation in his essay – ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, meaning national society. He hoped for revival of traditional society for the good of all concerned, irrespective of caste or creed. However, his hope was shattered with the rise of political extremism, group maneuvering and the outbreak of communal rioting. He withdrew from the Swadeshi movement, a protest against the British government’s decision to partition Bengal.

He later adopted dual approach to his anti-colonial stand: emphasis on self-respect but rejection of unreasoned patriotism. His education institution, ‘Vishwa Bharati’ was ‘an indigenous attempt at adopting modern methods of education in a truly Indian cultural environment and also aimed to free the world from the coils of national chauvinism’.

Tagore attacks the very ideological bases of both colonialism and nationalism. In his lectures on nationalism Tagore attacks the mechanistic and aggressive urge to power that he saw as the

55 Both of them differed even in their strategies of confronting the West and views on science and modernity. Here is only a limited discussion of the differences and similarities in their political ideologies on certain aspects relevant for this research work. While Tagore criticised Gandhi’s advocacy of using ‘charaka’ in the nationalist agitation on the basis of market economy, Gandhi invested it with his own metaphysical meanings and it became centre of his rural uplift in his economics.
characteristic of European nationalism. He says, 'the Nation with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil.' 56 He envisaged a nation that would steer clear of exclusivist prejudices of states defined by a single identity, whether of language, religion or ethnicity.

Distinguishing between the pre-British rulings by kings and advent of 'Nation', Tagore says:

Nation is like the difference between the hand-loom and the powerloom. In the products of the hand-loom the magic of man's living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonises with the music of life. But the powerloom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production. 57

The pre-British governments, though lacked many advantages of the modern government, had 'texture loosely woven, leaving gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs.' On the other hand, he observes, the 'Nation of the West forges its iron chains of organisation which are the most relentless and unbreakable that have ever been manufactured in the whole history of man'. He calls nationalism, a "geographical demon". He believed that India's history was the 'history of continual social adjustment and not that of organised power for defence and aggression'.

In his novels, *Gora* (1909), *Ghare Baire* (1915) and *Char Adhyay* (1934), he rejects Hindu fanaticism and comprador elitism. He points out problems of violence interconnected with nationalism that wants to 'unify' all sections in its fight against colonialism. But, Tagore observes that

57 Tagore, *Nationalism*, 1985, page: 10
such strand of nationalism makes the poor and weaker sections the victims, even if it succeeds in
decolonising the country. Besides, the vindication of violence also would mean losing one’s ‘self’ by
denying certain aspects of the self which are identified with effeminacy. He captures the painful process
of transformation of man into ‘rigid masculine self’, denying its feminine aspects in his novels. The
novels, rejecting the values embedded in the masculinised world of nationalism, reaffirm feminine
values to ‘repudiate the aggressively phallo-centric, fierce idolatry of nation-worship.’

Through the protagonists of these novels, Tagore clearly demonstrates, India can only be
created by including and recognising its women. This will have to be a collaborative and co-operative
project, harnessing the agencies and energies of both the sexes, not a hypermasculinist imposition of
the will of a strong man on the passive and compliant masses. He believed woman, through her
special qualities, contributed to the harmonious continuance of human society. ‘If the human world
becomes excessively male in its mentality, then before long it will be reduced to utter inanity. For, life
finds its truth and beauty, not in any exaggeration of sameness, but in harmony.’

Resistance to hypermasculine worldview and violent nationalism comes from some of the
strong women characters in his novels. He could celebrate mother-nation even when being an opponent
of nationalism.

For example, in Gora its eponymous character realises this truth as the novel progresses.
Though initially he places woman on mother’s mantle, in practice he lacks respect for woman as an
individual. He abstains from speaking to women including Suchorita, and considers another character
Binoy’s admiration for Suchorita as vent for his lust. After he was jailed, he realises his flaw, his
disregard for women, Suchorita and his mother Anandmoiyi who is Mother India and also representation
of certain kind of liberal and humanistic Hinduism. Binoy, who is a revivalist but a susceptible ordinary
man, could respect both Suchontal, whom he admires and Anandmoyi, in whom he sees face of his motherland and finds broad humanistic concerns.

Tagore's novels indicate that without women the cultural nationalism of the men would turn destructive to both their home and the nation-in-the-making. However, Tagore doesn't reduce these women to stereotypes. Each woman in his novels is an individual with her own traits. Even women who conform or corroborate with the narrow ideals of the nationalists, are criticised in these novels.

Like Tagore, Gandhi also was aware of the limitation of nationalism. He tried to bring the communities hitherto marginalised to the centre stage of the anti-colonial movement. Gandhi is one of the biggest influences across the country between 1920 and 1950. He channelised the national movement on the novel path of his much acclaimed ‘Ahimsa’ and ‘Satyagraha’.

After Bal Gangadhar Tilak, it was Gandhi who could mobilise masses on large scale though his ideologies didn’t go well with several of the nationalists for varied reasons. While a section of the nationalists in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra continued to subscribe to violent methods, some classes, like middle class Muslims or non-Brahmins in Madras and elsewhere found his style or his followers too Hindu or Sanskritic, some intellectuals found his religious style and symbolism repugnant to their secular and rationalist values. Still others rejected his concept of civil disobedience in the name of establishmentarian and reformist loyalty.

Responses to Gandhi as a person and to his sociological imagination vary in many ways in the cultural context of Kannada. Hence, we can't generalise this complex process stating 'Gandhi's influence', and it needs to be contextualised. His own views on gender issues were not so radical, while his influence certainly had a radical impact. This is discussed while analysing the essays and novels in Kannada of this period in the next chapters. The latest novel in Kannada on this issue is Gandhi Banda (Bellary Lohya Prakashana, 1999) by H. Nagaveni, which discusses how Gandhi, as a legendary figure or a mythical hero and also living person set off varied reactions and mobilisation of remote villages and illiterate mass of different castes and classes.
Gandhi also appropriated the European discourses on nationalism and invested it with traditional and religious vocabulary to dismantle the hierarchy of the West/the East, modern/tradition and masculine/feminine within those discourses.

He criticises the colonial authorities’ very moral claim based on its doctrines of ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’. He challenges the supremacy of the ‘materialism’ of the West; he attacks the capital system of production which, he argues, makes man prisoner of his craving for luxury and self-indulgence. He claimed that it looks at man as a limitless consumer and thus sets out to open the floodgates of industrial productions; it becomes the source of inequality, oppression and violence. He points out that the source of modern imperialism lies specifically in the system of social production which the countries of the Western world have adopted. It is the limitless desire for ever-increased production and ever-greater consumption and the spirit of ruthless competitiveness which keeps the entire system going; that impel these countries to seek colonial possessions which can be exploited for economic progress. He shifts the focus to ‘village India’ and its little traditions while bringing masses into the mainstream nationalism. The nation and freedom in European discourses were reinterpreted to mean ‘praja’ and ‘swaraj’ in his ‘Hind Swaraj’ in which he launches a critique of rationalism and historicism.59

Gandhi combined spiritualism, morality and politics. He rewrote the negative colonial script of Indian effeminacy with a new one of positive androgyny. According to Ashis Nandy, Gandhi stands for authentic Indianess and a transcultural protest against the hypermasculine world view of colonialism.

---

59 Mahatma Gandhi: *Hind Swaraj*, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1938 (translated into English by Jitendar T. Desai)
While feminising politics, he drew upon the ancient Hindu concepts of Shakti, positive androgyny or dynamic womanhood, which is an alternative to model of masculinity. He strategically harnessed this spiritual feminine power into his ‘Satyagraha’ and redefined manliness. He made femininity valued aspect of man congruent with his overall masculinity. His principle of non-violence gives men access to protective maternity and by implication ‘Ardhanarisvara’, a god half-man, half-woman, which is positive androgyny. He redefines ‘courage’ which allows one to rise above cowardice and become a man who admits his drive to become both sexes. This courage is not definitionally wedded to Kshatriyahood, but to activism and courage liberated from aggressiveness and recognised as perfectly compatible with womanhood, particularly, maternity.  

Gandhi turned the moral tables on the English definitions of courage by suggesting that aggression was the path to mastery of those without self-control, non-violent resistance the path of those with control. He rejected the British as well as the Brahminic-Kshatriya equation between manhood and dominance, between masculinity and legitimate violence and between femininity and passive submission. His concept of ‘naritva’ represented the traditional belief in closer conjunction between power, activism and femininity.

In stark contrast with the British stereotype of masculine power, Gandhi based his resistance on the power of feminine virtues – purity, tolerance, self-control and spiritual strength. In his discourse, women were considered paragons of ‘prestine’ Indian tradition. He advised the Indian women – “the enlightened daughters of ‘Bharat Mata’ – to be strong, pure and ‘conserve’ what is best in our culture… This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayants”.  

---

60 Ashis Nandy: *Intimate Enemy*, 1989  
61 *Hindu Dharma*: 383
However, Nandy legitimately points to Gandhi as a critic of Western influences, but his equation of Gandhian tolerance with the religion of the pre-modern masses is simply false. Gandhian tolerance proceeded from the Max Mueller tradition of Orientalism which was, in its own right, a distinct discourse of modernity - an abstraction and universalisation of religion with significant implications for the tone of Indian Nationalism.

Besides, Gandhi’s concept of ‘courage’ is closely linked to self-control, ascetism and ideals of celibacy. Like Vivekananda and other contemporary ascetics, Gandhi’s formulations of celibacy or explicit sexual renunciation – were a ‘moral’ act to counter the colonial sexual binaries. For Vivekananda, celibacy was for building ‘spiritual masculinity’ while for Gandhi it meant to humanise politics and creating in the process an ‘authentic’ masculinity that incorporated the civilising imperative of femininity. Having repudiated virile masculinity as the means by which to protest colonial orderings of the ‘self’, for Gandhi, sexuality – or its active renunciation – emerged as the transcendent solution to the ‘problem’ of remasculinising the nation.

It is necessary to problematise even Gandhi’s views of celibacy and femininity which are closely intertwined with his both political strategies and views on conjugal relations and marriage as well. He feminised politics by effectively appropriating in his nationalist narrative the European paradigm of a gendered nation and ritualised the image of ‘woman-as-nation’. His views on women and womanhood also drew from the Victorian concept of morality and went very well with his feminised

politics. He gave primacy of maternity over conjugality in feminine identity. But this belief also specified that woman as a sexual being was inferior to woman as a source of motherliness. His doctrine of married celibacy – to conquer sexual desire to sublimate sexuality into spirituality – desexualised man-woman relationship. Besides desexing the woman, another step to denial of her desire is her idealisation to a purer divine state and thus an object of worship and adoration.

Gandhi condemns sexual life as inconsistent with the moral progress of man. But he doesn’t abhor woman as seducer; tenderness for women is one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character. Though he gave a positive image of femininity, his views on woman as individual, marriage and conjugal relationship comply with the earlier reformist colonial and nationalist ideologies of ‘new woman.’ Despite his respect for woman and support for feminist movements, he basically didn’t disturb the patriarchal social order.

However, mass participation of women in the public during his period might have caused tension and led to re-ordering of the gender relations, but he himself didn’t hold views that would liberate woman from the clutches of the patriarchal ideologies which prevailed masquerading in different forms during the nationalist movement. Instead, on several occasions, he further consolidated the newly configured patriarchal values and gender ideologies.

Though popular belief credits Gandhi with bringing women into public life, it is challenged by several scholars like Geraldine Forbes and Mrinalini Sinha\footnote{Geraldine Forbes, \textit{Women in Modern India}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Forbes discusses women’s involvement in the nationalist struggle. Observing the activities of women from the late 1920s until the early 1950s she says women were, by 1940s part of all movements, conservative and radical, and began to view themselves differently. She also observes, by 1947, women’s activism and the hegemony of their organisations had been scuttled. Mrinalini Sinha in \textit{Specters of Mother India, The Global Restructuring of an Empire}, (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006) explains that by 1920s, at the time of beginning of Gandhian nationalism several women organisations were active in debates on ‘women’s question’} who argue that women were there...
already on the public scene and Gandhi gave them a blueprint of action. Forbes argues:

Gandhi assured their husbands and fathers that these politically active women wouldn’t rebel against family. Feminist demands for equality with men were never fully integrated into the nationalist program even though nationalism was feminised.64

Mrinalini Sinha argues that one of the important dimensions of the early twentieth century conjuncture is the cumulative effect of women’s involvement in the public sphere, whether through print or through activism, on the reinvention and renegotiation of dominant nationalist constructs of modern Indian womanhood. A number of factors made the early twentieth century a critical period for constructing a new public discourse by and for women in India. The advent of Gandhian nationalism provided an unprecedented resource and catalyst for change.

Study of Gandhi and his ‘influence’ is made much more complicated as his influence; his emphasis on nonsexual relations between men and women; and the novelty of his political strategies that revolved around the ‘seemingly trivial, but essential details of daily living’ that inevitably redefined the place of women in the nationalist struggle had more radical impact than his own views on ‘women’s question’.

64 Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India, 1996, page 7
New Woman 65

Woman, apart from her symbolic significance as 'Mother Nation,' was an important concern for both the Western scholars and the nationalists who were convinced that national regeneration could not be achieved unless woman's status was reformed.

Throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century important aspect of social reform and modernisation projects was 'women's question'—eradicating evil practices and system which kept her in the lower status. However, 'women's question' was not about 'what woman want as individual' but because her life and womanhood were entangled with several other issues such as reforming family and marriage which were useful social institutions for national revitalisation. If the status of women was not improved they would prove major obstacle in the mission of modernisation.

Such concern was expressed for varied reasons by both the British and the nationalists irrespective of their caste, class and political affiliations. Their discourses legitimised, as pointed out earlier certain reconstitution of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' which went well with certain socio-economic changes in the Indian society facilitated by the colonial rule. However, their contents were not fixed, but kept shifting depending on various aspects.

65 In Europe, concept and terminology of 'new woman' was fashionable in the nineteenth century and it was eagerly adopted by men and women of educated class in several other countries. As Kumari Jayawardena (1986) observes, Kasim Amin's book on women's emancipation published in 1901 in Egypt was called 'The New Woman'; in 1919 Egyptian women formed the 'Societe de la Femme Nouvelle'; in the same year an 'Association of New Women' was established in Japan, while in China and Korea, in 1919 and 1920 respectively feminist magazine called 'The New Woman' was published. The term was popular even in India in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In India, Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati wrote a poem titled 'Padumai Pen' (New Woman) in the same period. Though the terminology was similar, in each country, it was invested with different meanings in different contexts. In Europe, it came to mean woman who broke free from conventional constraints and voiced women's rights, progressive marriage system and sexuality. They played a role in raising a new concept of sexuality. But the paths of movements in each case differed. What was criticised, scandalised and considered 'new' in their actions and statements differed depending on the existing norms and historical conditions. In the next chapter, this is discussed with reference to Kannada write ups by women on 'Arya Mahila'.
Enamoured with their ‘civilising mission,’ influential Orientalists and Christian missionaries condemned ‘barbaric practices’, religious, cultural and social mores regarding women. Woman, as a barometer of civilisation, came to stand for the degenerated Hindu society. They contended that women are generally degraded among the ‘rude’ people while among the civilised they are exalted. They also linked military strength with status of women, stating men derived their courage and virtue from high position of women. It provided them further proof for the colonial administration’s moral superiority.

As Geraldine Forbes points out, “In arguments over how to best rule their colonial subjects in India, they were led to discussions of the ideal relationship between man and woman.” One of the British officials pointed out to lack of initiation among the native intelligentsia in reforming women, stating: “A society which accepts intellectual inanition and moral stagnation as the natural condition of its womankind cannot hope to develop the high qualities of courage, devotion and self sacrifice which go to the making of nations.”

Such belief was further accentuated by their discovery of the ‘Hindu past’ and ‘Golden age’. Uma Chakravarti in her essay, “Whatever Happened to Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past”, investigates into the link between the reconstruction of the past and womanhood. The construction of ‘Aryan woman’ of the ancient past by the Orientalists and the

---

67 Forbes, Women in Modern India, 1996, page 13
68 Sir Herbert Hope Risley, The People of India, cited by Forbes (Women in Modern India, 1996, page 14)
Utilitarians helped to counter the real existence of women in the humiliating present. The Christian missionaries also criticised the contemporary low status of women and marriage systems such as early marriage and polygamy, condemned religion, social and cultural mores which kept women in a backward state.

They heavily depended on the ancient texts for reinterpretation of ‘Hindu tradition’ and thus legitimised the scriptural authority over the actual practices. However, the nationalists and the emerging middle class \(^{70}\) educated youth who comprised conservationists, revivalists, radicals and reformists, all furthered the arguments on ‘glorious past’ for several contradictory purposes. They also accepted legitimising the ‘Shastras’ codified in the texts while arguing their case for the ‘tradition’ or ‘modernity.’ Their differences mainly were due to the ways they interpreted the texts and different readings of the Hindu domestic practices and customs.

Raja Rammohun Roy epitomises the dominant trends of the early reformists who believed that degenerated Hindu society can be revitalised through legislative reforms and modernisation. Their arguments over women’s issues, including Sati system (immolation of widows) and child marriage were tied up with several other issues – self-definition of the new emerging classes, re-ordering of modern society and encounter with the colonial culture.

Lata Mani in her essay – “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” observes how the abolition of Sati by the British in 1829 triggered debates among the colonial officials, indigenous elites and the conservative Indians who defended the ‘tradition’. \(^{71}\) She says that the question

---

\(^{70}\) By middle class, here I mean those comprising urban professional and trading classes, the small landholders and village literati who sought jobs in the colonial administration and related professions. The rise of cultural nationalism is explained as the result of their quest for identity to counter the humiliation they suffered in their daily lives at the hands of the British.

\(^{71}\) “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,” in Recasting Women, 2009, page 88-126
of Sati was debated within a matrix of constraints produced by the equation of scripture, law and
tradition, and the representation of women. This equation itself was an effect of colonial discourse.

Lata Mani further analyses the official discourses, the discourses of indigenous elite on
contending the tradition and the discourses of the conservatives on defending the tradition. All these
discourses draw from the colonial discourse and privilege the Brahminic scripture and equate it with
tradition. She considers these discourses on Sati as an instance of a ‘modernising discourse’. It
exemplifies late nineteenth century colonial discourses that elaborate notions of modernity against
their own conceptions of tradition.

Here the notion of tradition, reconstituted under the colonial rule, is interchangeable with
‘religion’ and ‘culture.’ This enables them to analyse ‘sati’ in purely ‘cultural’ terms, emptying it of
both history and politics. Further this notion erases agency of those involved in such practices and
significantly, marginalises women. Women are neither subject nor object of these discourses but a
ground or a site on which tradition was debated and reformulated, Lata Mani argues. Another significant
observation made in this essay is that officials, elites and the conservative discourses imbue
‘womanhood’ with certain normative values such as chastity, devotion to husband and essentialise
what they consider as femininity – woman as weak, submissive and fragile figure.

However, the alternative identity formation for woman was never coherent like ‘constructing
a masculine identity’, due to varied situations and reforms required for improving her current status
and for the future needs. But the ideal womanhood of the past could be constructed as a counter part
of male heroes. The women of the past were glorified as ‘chaste wife’, spiritually potent and heroic in
their protection of chastity in the case of threats from aliens. One of such coherent models of woman’s
national identity was put forth in his novels by Bankim. As discussed earlier, apart from images of
woman as mother, he criticised contemporary women for being lazy whose health was no good and children they beget would also not be heroes.

In Anandamath we get a prototype of 'new nationalised womanhood' in Shanti, who in times of national crisis, comes out of the private domestic space, accompanies her husband in garb of male mendicant and fights like warrior.

The Vedic woman who performed sacrifices to the gods by the side of her husband as an equal partner in the offering of obligations, which was envisaged by the cultural nationalists as the highest role women played, is here dynamised into a figure who fights shoulder to shoulder with her husband in liberating the Motherland. Shanti and her husband become martyrs. The novel also through them reveals a conflict between the demands of love and service to one's country in the perception of the nationalists. Patriotic dedication and happy family life seemed irreconcilable as the demands of the family would be a serious distraction. One of the ways to resolve this conflict is shown through valourised chaste and brave Kshatriya or Rajput women as a fit companion for their warrior husbands. As Uma Chakravarthy points out:

Shanti has thus transcended both her sexuality and her domesticity and made it possible for her husband to do the same. She would provide a model of womanhood, which came closest to a 'national' feminine identity during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries till India became independent.\footnote{Uma Chakravarthy, Recasting Women, 2009, page 54}

Regulation of woman's sexuality was central to construction of both 'national wife and national mother.' Most of the nationalists, including Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda, believed in regulating
sexuality of couple, especially woman, to breed future national heroes. Their concerns for prohibition of early marriage, widow marriage and companionate marriage are grounded on need of physically strong women to produce national heroes; for biological reproduction capacity for national regeneration.

The issue of managing woman's sexuality becomes more critical in the debates on marriage of widows, who were in large number due to the child marriage. Here the widow issue was also entangled with family structures and property rights as well. The anxiety about women's sexuality is evident in their arguments advocating marriage of widows which otherwise would lead to adultery and prostitution. While, a few others glorified ascetic widowhood as the ultimate ideal for these women and asked them to indulge in socially useful and altruistic services, and thus transform their loyalty to husband and family into service of 'nation.'

The debates on banning child marriage also revolve around regulating woman's sexuality. While in the West the State and the Church have played a central role in regulating marriage and sexual conduct, in the Indian experience, codes of social conduct were embodied in the scriptures and traditional practices, enforced by the caste councils or the elders. Sanctions operated in less structured way. The elders within the family were the guardians of sexual morality and proper conjugal conduct. And watching over all one's actions was the kinship group.

According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, fear of feminine sexuality and anxiety to control it were conscious motives behind the institution of child marriage. The cruder arguments in the debates on

---

73 Tapan Raychaudhuri: *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. The essay discusses change in sensibilities associated with family life and conjugal relationship due to encounter with the West. Besides, most of the reformers and the nationalists, ranging from Rammohun Ray to Tagore and Gandhi, had married at an early age and to child bride. However, such contradictions were resolved by their attempts to be mentor to their wives or in break up of marriages. In the case of Aurobindo, though he chose young wife, he didn't lead marital life with her till his death.
widows and child marriages evoked the age-old belief in the greater lust of women. The belief system informed by patriarchal values emphasised the occult implications of uncontrolled female sexuality. Child marriage was evidently meant to ensure that this highly disruptive force was contained within the bounds of legitimate conjugal relationship as soon as a young girl became aware of her sexual urge. Besides, marriage was essential ritual for a woman’s salvation, even a nominal marriage to a dying man was preferable to spinsterhood.

Those who were against child marriage argued that apart from it leading to problems of widowhood, the early motherhood would be cruel and socially dysfunctional, as immature semen of adolescent fathers and physically weak, immature mothers produce unhealthy and impotent children. Besides, the early marriage ties up man with the family responsibilities at young age. All these factors, they argued, contributed to national degeneration.

Hence, reforming marriage system and strengthening family also become a major concern on the reformist agenda. Another reason behind such desire for change is the change in economic and social conditions under the colonial rule and certain Western values that shaped the sensibilities of the English educated youth. The earlier joint family system paved way to the nuclear family which was fashioned on the model of the Victorian family, with its alleged discipline and moderation, as projected by the British publicists and those Indians who visited England.

Many educated youth who were widely read in the romantic literature of the West, had also different expectations from their life, especially regarding conjugal relationship, as their aesthetic sensibilities also were impacted. The yearning for romantic love, allegedly the product of such literary studies, apparently couldn’t be satisfied within the institutional framework of child marriage and the
Extended family. The consensual and companionate marriage and monogamy became an ideal and illiteracy and ‘backwardness’ of woman was seen as leading to marital disharmony due to cultural gap.

Individualism might not have been widely acceptable in terms of values and familiar emotional responses, but the conditions of urban employment under colonial rule resulted in reorganisation of the family which increasingly privileged the individual. Hence, while reforming marriage and family became a national matter, individual’s choice also mattered as key to these reforms.

Besides, the new patterns of career aspiration led to similar consequences with new professional men and state functionaries in the urban areas desiring nuclear home. The colonial administration, land reforms and other economic development also affected women of different classes and castes whose alienation from the sectors of production increased and it marginalised the women from the ‘public sphere’.

Women of the lower castes and classes and peasant women were increasingly dependent on their men and were relegated to cheap source of labour in the changed economic situation in the gradually developing capitalist system which displaced certain rural and traditional economic set up and systems of production.

While these women were being proletarianised, the women of upper castes and classes were to be trained to become good wives and mothers to the professional, educated men, by both colonial missionaries, authorities and middle class and upper caste male reformers. The ‘women’s question’ such as widow immolation addressed by the reformers was also concerned with only the upper caste

---

74 Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities*, 1999
families. Hence, reconfiguration of 'womanhood' was more in consonance with the needs of the privileged classes and castes. There was demand for 'civilised housewives,' who would be adequately Westernised and educated to be presentable in colonial society, yet whose role was primarily at home. Even if women involved in activities outside the home, they still had to act as the guardians of national culture, indigenous religion and family tradition – in other words, to be both 'modern' and 'traditional.'

Hence, women's education occupies centre of debates on the reformist agenda and modernising project of both the colonisers and the nationalists, though they diverged drastically on how to achieve this. They believed education could change women's ignorant, powerless and non-productive position as illiteracy reduced women to be burdens of their men and the nation, affected preschool instruction for children, and weakened the nation's capacity in global competition. Hence, depriving women of education weakened the nation and race.

However, there was an egalitarian approach also with genuine concern for true freedom of woman. Such examples can be found in Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Veereshalinga Panthalu.

Ishwarchandra was neither the product of Western education nor was he inspired by the need to 'whitewash' Indian practices, but his campaign for widow remarriage, women's education and against polygamy was taken up under his mother's influence. His attitude to women was not instrumental but humane. He didn't nurse any illusions about the women's status having been high in ancient India as projected by revivalists or nationalist historians. He deliberately selected for his anthologies for school students extracts from classical Indian literature such as Sita's second exile in the Ramayana and Shakuntala's rejection by her husband in a play by Kalidasa that brought out
women's subordination sharply. He advocated equal education for women and men; even the British and the missionaries or the colonial administration initiated such endeavours.\textsuperscript{75}

The missionaries had been primarily concerned with producing Christian wives and mothers for the new male converts in order to prevent the latter from lapsing into their former beliefs, which was thought to be more likely if the women remained 'heathen'. The missionary schools not only trained girls to be good wives, but also introduced them to the nineteenth century European code of female virtue and correct behaviour, a limited view that was contested by many women who were themselves products of new education.

Besides, the kind of education imparted by the missionaries was unable to satisfy the nationalists for long. There were widespread debates on the kind of education to be imparted to men and women. Reformists stressed the democratic right to education for all, irrespective of sex, so as to achieve a strong, monogamous (and preferably nuclear) family system which would be the foundation of a stable society. But for women, the type of education recommended was that which consisted of basic subjects and 'accomplishments' considered necessary for a girl to make a good wife.

'Modernity' meant educated women, but educated to uphold the system of the nuclear patriarchal family. Besides, the English education was considered both as gateway to modernity, progress and also as 'corrupting influence'. Hence, while for men, English education was accepted as inevitable, for women the nationalists wanted different kind of education to further consolidate her image of ideal Indian womanhood.

\textsuperscript{75} Geraldine Forbes: \textit{Women in Modern India}, 1996, page 27-28
Reformist organisations such as Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj also introduced new dimensions to marriages in which the educated women will support the reformist works of their husbands. Though their hegemony was contested, their ideas spread across the country creating strange interface among the Christian missionaries, upper caste reformers and their counterparts in the lower castes. One such instance can be found in the case of Brahmo Samaj branch in Mangalore, though a separate inquiry into the issue in relation to whole of Karnataka is required to present any strong argument. In Mangalore, the dissidents in the Saraswath Brahmin community which first came into direct contact with the colonial administrators through the new education system had joined with lower caste Billawa community leaders in setting up the Samaj.

While it didn't disturb the deep-seated hierarchical structure of society, it created turmoil. A Billawa community leader, Arasappa with elementary education, was unhappy with the lower caste status and discriminatory practices of the upper castes. He turned to Basel mission for 'emancipation'. However, after realising that the Missionaries colluded with the upper castes and could not change the hierarchical structure, he turned to Brahmo Samaj for uplift. He was encouraged by Ullal Raghunatharaya and his associates who were also fascinated by the Brahmo ideologies. They arranged first widow marriage and inter caste marriages in the region. They were joined by the Basel mission missionaries who had initially refused to educate Billawa community fearing the wrath of upper castes. The Billawa leaders including their pioneer Arasappa, held Brahmo marriages in Mangalore. Later, coming under Narayanaguru's self-respect movement by 1912, the Billawa community had even temple priests. Kudmul Ranga Rao, who had become the first Honorary Special Marriage Registrar.
at Mangalore and perhaps for the whole of Madras Presidency, legalised the marriages of large numbers of people who followed the ‘Aliyasantana’ system.\textsuperscript{76}

Nevertheless, these modernisation efforts legitimised more or less hegemonic views of the middle class and upper caste section over the diverse practices of marriage, family system and gender relations in different sections of Indian society.

Such a process of homogenisation becomes amply clear in the analysis of colonial laws on widow marriage, child marriage and age of consent and controversies surrounding them. These colonial laws reinforced a split between forms of female sexuality that lay within and beyond the conjugal family, realigning women’s access to property or income. A multiplicity of familial formations were transformed and made consonant with the more familiar pattern of the upper caste patriarchal and increasingly nucleated family.

The diverse systems of traditional laws were replaced by those which the colonial administration perceived to be consistent with textual Hindu customs by drawing from Dayabhaga or Mitakshara school of Hindu Law.\textsuperscript{77} Until the upsurge of anti-British feelings at the turn of the nineteenth century, several legislations including ban on Sati, promoting widow remarriage and Age of Consent were passed. However, certain legislations which affected women were framed, even later, outside the debates of ‘women’s question’, in cases such as new laws on individual property rights.


Along with 'masculinisation' of colonial economy, decline of matrilineal descent patterns that had characterised some communities, women were gradually removed from access to and control over property and resources. Broader economic and ideological changes combined with the law to limit women's customary rights over property and to enforce new male forms of ownership and control.

Women's rights were increasingly decided by their marital status than considering them as their birth rights on par with men. Their certain economic and social powers enjoyed under matriliney were transformed and brought in line with more patriarchal formations. As Mytheli observes:

Situated within the frameworks of colonial and indigenous patriarchies, the question of property was thus not posed in terms of women's equality, but more properly in reconciling the competing claims of a 'tradition' supported by colonial law and agrarian elites with the demands of a 'modernity' that first developed from professional and mercantile interests.

The colonial administration's approaches to reform through legislations were not the same at all times and they hesitantly intervened in 'private' matters such as marriage, family and property issues, as the colonial intervention into these issues triggered strong reactions both in its favour and against, during the nationalist revival period of late nineteenth century. For, nationalist revivalism regarded the household, specifically conjugality, as the 'last independent space left to the colonised Hindu.'

78 The term 'masculinisation' of economy was used by Veena Oldenburg whose analysis reveals how colonial and indigenous patriarchies colluded to deny women's customary rights and to exclude women from new forms of property ownership and control. Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime New York: Oxford University Press, 2000
The nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak gave priority to the political freedom over social reform, for several such reasons.

There were no more illusions about the ‘benevolent rule’ of the colonial administration and also because, such reform attempts split the rising political movement by alienating the socially orthodox section of society. In his magazine ‘Kesari’ published on September 15, 1885, Tilak wrote that efforts to bring about immediate social reforms were likely to create a rift in society and would consequently weaken the political struggle, and that ‘there has been such a degeneration owing to our slavery that the social condition of the people couldn’t improve until their political condition was bettered and, therefore, an exhortation to concentrate on social reform to the exclusion of political reform was suicidal’.

He also refused the British intervention through legislative reforms in the ‘spiritual domain’ of the Indian society. However, more than the priorities over political freedom, there were other reasons behind such opposition to reform status of women through legislation. For, woman was closely linked to ‘home’ where the nationalists had claimed their superiority and sovereignty, and hence he defended certain customs of society which were directly linked to ‘home’. His opposition to the Age of Consent Bill was also based on the grounds that upheld the ‘tradition’. He employed all his accurate knowledge of the Hindu scriptures to justify the existing practices as religiously correct and necessary.

Tilak’s approach to the issue can further be located in the discussion on the correspondence between the colonial binaries of woman/man, private/public and home/world. They intertwined with economic and political domination in the nationalist and colonial ideologies as explained elaborately.
by Partha Chatterjee who also leans in his critique heavily on the nationalists in according priority to the political claims of nationalism.

He argues that the 'women's question' underwent a shift by the second half of the nineteenth century as it was no longer looked as an important aspect of the nationalist agenda. He does not subscribe to views of Sumit Sarkar and other scholars who consider that the fundamental elements of social conservatism such as maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in family, acceptance of the sanctity of the Shastras, preference for symbolic rather than substantive change in social practices – all of them are present in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Sumit Sarkar terms concern for 'women’s question’ an expression of certain ‘acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family’ on the part of the early generation of Western educated males.

Partha Chatterjee, while agreeing with Sumit Sarkar that the early reformists were also selective in their acceptance of the liberal ideas of the West as well as in their construction of ‘tradition’, argues that with regard to women’s issues they chose to limit the modernisation process and 'resolved' the women’s question so as to be in complete accordance with their nationalist agenda.

The nationalist elites rested their foundations of nationalism on elaboration of split between an ‘outer’ or ‘material’ realm where it acknowledged the superiority of the West and an ‘inner’ or ‘spiritual’ realm, where the autonomy and the true identity of the nation resided. While material

---

81 Partha Chatterjee, ‘Nationalist Resolution of Women’s Question,’ in Recasting Women, 2009, page 233-253, also The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus 1999

superiority of the West had to be matched by learning modern science and arts – to overthrow colonial rule, the ‘inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence’ had to be preserved, protected and strengthened, allowing no encroachments into this ‘inner sanctum’.

Women were symbolically identified with the ‘inner’ realm as the essence of the nation and where nationalists claimed autonomy from colonial intervention. Such identification of women with nation underwrote the modernising women as part of a broader regeneration of nation; but it also set limits to that modernisation in keeping with the supposedly authentic tradition of the nation. Henceforth the reform of women’s position was no longer left as a subject of debate with colonial ruler. Instead, the discourse of cultural nationalism now claimed ‘autonomy’ over the women’s issues and consigned the agency for reforms to the internal self-regulation of the community.

Accordingly, the nationalists attempted reorganising family life; reconfigured gender roles and rewrote the norms for women within the framework of analogous colonial binaries – spiritual/material, private/public and masculine/feminine virtues. While men in the ‘public’ world were prone to ‘contamination’ in their pursuit of material wealth, women, who are protected by the material pursuits of securing a livelihood in the external world, express in their appearance and behaviour the spiritual qualities which are characteristic of civilised and refined human society.

They configured the concept of ‘new woman’, drawing from reconstructed ‘classical’ tradition, modernised folk forms, the utilitarian logic of bureaucratic and industrial practices, and the legal idea of equality in a liberal democratic state. But, Partha Chatterjee maintains that the content of the nationalist ‘resolution was neither predetermined nor unchanging, but its forms had to be consistent with the system of dichotomies which shaped and contained the nationalist project”.

81 Partha Chatterjee: Recasting Women, 2009, page 244
The new patriarchal ideology of the nationalist elites placed ‘new woman’ in contrast with that of modern Western society and also distinguished itself from the patriarchy of indigenous ‘tradition’ obviously reconstructed to mark their new national identity. However, this new ideology was also distinct from the immediate social and cultural condition of the life of majority people. Hence, ‘new woman’ was also placed in contrast with ‘common’ woman who was coarse, vulgar, loud, pugnacious and promiscuous. Thus newly configured ‘new woman’, belongs to upper caste, middle class and is superior to: woman in foreign countries, who violates ‘moral values’; woman of the previous and older generation who is uneducated; woman of lower caste and class.

The ‘new woman’ was entrusted with new social responsibility not to imitate men, but to ‘maintain the cohesiveness of family life and solidarity with the kin group to which men could not now devote much attention’.

Partha Chatterjee considers ‘women’s question’ as just a part of nationalist politics; but it was much more complicated and more contradictory from the beginning. Secondly, the boundary between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ is porous and the dichotomy can’t be exaggerated. While indigenous ‘home’ was nationalised, the British also were protecting domain of ‘their women’ from the indigenous population though it was contrary to the then existing conditions in Britain.

His argument also ignores certain contesting gender and nationalist ideologies that were postulated by women themselves and also by the lower caste movements in the South. Besides, even after 1920s the Princely Mysore State was able to push through some of the reform Bills concerning women. (All these three aspects are discussed elaborately in the next chapter.)
Further, as Tanika Sarkar puts it, the attempts to address 'women's question' had, to some extent, created a space for challenge, however limited, to the subsuming of women entirely within the prerogatives of kinship and communal ties. In the emerging print culture where such challenges are more evident, especially in the debates on concerns and contributions of the lower castes, peasants, women and other marginalised people emerged as subjects of debate and brought the existing social privileges under scrutiny. The peasant movements, workers' strikes and many other such developments with regard to the marginalised groups also subverted and challenged to some extent the ideologies of the nationalist elites.

Besides, though limited and unequal, the social reform movement by the turn of the century had caused the patriarchal anxiety about the 'disorderly women' and hence led to assertion of the collective prerogatives of the nation as the final ground for social changes for women. Even those who claimed 'cultural autonomy' had sought intervention of the colonial administration which had restrained after its certain moves regarding widow remarriage and age of consent led to backlash; and also mutiny of 1857 caused anxiety to reconfirm the loyalty of the socially conservative groups. The colonial administration was sometimes colluded in protecting the patriarchal orders though occasionally challenged it.

The refusal to incorporate 'women's question' by the nationalists like Tilak also coincided with the colonial administration's reluctance to intervene in its dealings with marginalised social groups and populations and familial matters which came under 'personal laws', following its official policy of non-interference in religious and domestic issues. Women of the period had to bear the brunt of such

---

contradictory pulls as evident in the case of Rukmabai who was sentenced by the Bombay court for refusing to live with her husband Dadaji Bhikaji, apparently restoring conjugal rights of her husband. Tilak, who was against the reform of women through the British legislation, used this case to argue that education corrupted women as one of the reasons Rukmabai refused to go to live with the ‘husband’ was that he was illiterate, unhealthy and didn’t have decent earning. Tilak defended her husband contending the case should be tried according to Hindu Dhamashastras. Until 1923, restitution of conjugal rights through punishment was upheld though some were vociferous about other options such as divorce.85

However, the newly educated women were conscious of the collusion between the reconstituted patriarchy and the British government, when they expressed their support for Rukmabai. Pandita Ramabai, who was herself caught in the crossfire between the reformists, the conservatives and the British, criticised the Bombay court, saying: “We can’t blame the English government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India…”86

The Rukmabai case and debates around it also marked a shift in the nationalism which gradually transformed from cultural nationalism to aggressive political nationalism which took pride in what was earlier considered backward practices as ‘tradition’ or to be handled after gaining political independence. Besides, at this stage the anti-British as well as anti-Muslim sentiments grew stronger with wider implications for ‘women’s question’.

85 The Indian Divorce Act was already passed in 1869. However, even the Act discriminated against women. While Christians were permitted to seek dissolution of marriage on grounds similar to those prevalent in Britain, and Indian men could seek divorce on the grounds of wife’s adultery, Indian wife could claim divorce on the grounds of adultery only along with other specified grounds. Only in 1983 the Divorce Act was amended. The divorce issue was closely linked to men’s prerogatives of property inheritance. (Detailed analysis is in Janaki Nair, Women and Law in Colonial India, 1996)
86 Ramabai, High Caste Hindu Woman, page 67, cited by Uma Chakravarthy in Recasting Women, 1989, page 74
At this phase of nationalism in the turn of the century, rules regarding regulating woman's sexuality were also framed in the new light with regard to the age of consent for consensual sex between men and women. Fixing the minimum age for marriage was concern among reformists like Vidyasagar and Keshab Chandra Sen. Their arguments against child marriage and criticism of marriage customs also led to enactment of the Native Marriage Act III of 1872, which instituted prohibitions against polygamy, a legal allowance for divorce and no reference to the caste of marriage partner and instituted a minimum age for marriage of girls and men as per the revised customs of marriages by the Brahmos. The Age of Consent Act had little impact on prohibiting early marriage, but its significance lies in raising the nationwide debates on woman’s status. Even women were part of the debates on ‘women’s question’ and their presence was beginning to make difference on the discourse on womanhood. Their intervention in the first half of the twentieth century bore the fruit with amending the earlier marriage Act to strictly prohibit the child marriage by passing the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929. The All India Women’s Conference, which was set up in 1927, pursued the Bill outside and within the Legislative Assembly. The Har Bilas Sarda Bill made restriction of age of consent and child marriage applicable to all communities.

The traditional beliefs and fear of ‘unbridled sexuality of woman’ were also put forth in the arguments against these reforms, stating raising the age of marriage may lead to the immorality of

---

87 There were several factors which contributed to the revival of interests in marriage reforms through legislation and some of them were external: League of Nations taking up the issue of traffic in women and girls; and American journalist Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’. A detailed analysis on this is made by Mrinalini Sinha in Spectres of Mother India, 2006. Mayo criticised Indians for their treatment of women of all ages, focusing particularly on sexual behaviour and accounts of child brides ‘raped’ by their older husbands. She concluded that social customs accounted for the weakness of the Indian race and they were not ready to ‘govern’. There were debates on the issues in America, Britain and of course, India, evoking varied response by both men and women.
young girls. A book, ‘Early Marriage’ published in 1938 in Karnataka argues, ‘late marriage is the Devil’s own device for letting loose shameless and appalling carnality’. The author further vents his anger against the Sarda Bill, stating:

The sinister reforms, the errant government, the hounding Europeans all owe it to themselves to explain their part in the Criminal Sarada (sic) Act which is an outrage on humanity, an outrage on common sense and an outrage on the creator.88

Fear of feminine sexuality and anxiety to control it were clearly behind the institution of child marriage and cruder argument on the greater lust of women appears even in argument over widow marriage.

Those who opposed the child marriage also pointed out that early marriage was not good for woman’s health and also leads to producing weak citizens. More than biological concern, concern over the moral and national regeneration was intertwined with these debates. However, some of the educated women had begun to criticise such views much earlier. Pandita Ramabai, who had in early days of her life garnered the support of the liberal reformists as ‘enlightened woman’ was much criticised by both the liberals and the conservatives as her views questioned the patriarchal domination, and also her conversion into Christianity earned her their wrath. But Ramabai, who herself had suffered as widow and economically distressed, analyses womanhood in her book The High Caste Hindu Women, written in 1886, when she was in America. Being a Sanskrit scholar herself, she didn’t

88 U. Maheshwari, Idu Manushiya Odu, Puttur: Shivarama Karanta Adhyayana Kendra, 2001. However, in the Princely Mysore State the Bill was introduced and passed without much opposition during the same period. This is discussed in the next chapter.
believe in the 'golden past' for the Hindu women and contends earlier Hindu men controlled women and now the Christian British did it. She noticed that though woman was honoured as mother, countless restrictions were imposed on her. While criticising the marital rights of men over women as property, she subverts Dayananda Saraswati's argument over effeminate male due to child marriage. She argues women have developed a mentality of slaves/subjugated as a consequence of years of mental slavery/subjugation.

The cultural nationalist project also ushered in the entry of elite and middle-class women to the public sphere in the field of social reform or anti-colonial struggles, though within the framework of reconstructed nationalist patriarchy. Women's organisations by 1920s also intervened in constructing woman's modern subjectivity and in reforming society on behalf of woman while male reformists were concerned with woman as object of their reform. However, by 1920s they had also realised the futility of legislations without any implementing authority and thereby effect social change. In their periodicals and through their organisations they reformulated 'women's question', and though in feeble voice, they articulated a critique of the patriarchy.

The cultural nationalist project had provided the tools for women, though restrictive, to self-fashion modern subjectivities. While the nationalist ideologies prescribed them norms to fit within the narrow confines of 'modernity' and 'tradition', the women's own intervention stretched these limits and sometimes challenged it, even when they used the same idioms of religion and tradition. They also realised that women's rights could be voiced only if they were linked to larger question of national independence and in terms of women's duties for nation and through social feminism. Besides, the metaphor of extended family was also used to justify women's concerns beyond the kin group and it helped women assume their public roles through the associations. The traditional customs like purdah
which secluded women, were also used to assert that women's needs and nature were special or
different and they mobilised public sphere of their own to voice their concern and it gave them unique
strength.  

However, both reforms of the earlier period and the male nationalists’ concern over women
in the early twentieth century were to provide some liberal space for woman within middle class
families without leveling gender relations in any fundamental way. Their formulations of gender relations
were further worked out by the nationalists like Gandhi even during the intense nationalist movement
that prompted women to enter public sphere which was expanded gradually to encompass both
‘home’ and ‘world’.

Especially, as mentioned earlier, advent of Gandhian nationalism by 1920s acted as catalyst
for further mobilisation of women in ‘public’ sphere. The early nineteenth century emphasis of ‘women’s
question’ on finding a national identity and facing the West enlarged in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth century to including woman in nation-building.

Such a necessity of incorporating women was stressed by Gandhi. Gandhi, taking cue from
Gokhale, his political guru, realised that nation-building called for a resolution of the problems of a
multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious population within a hierarchical social order.

Gandhian feminised metaphysical politics reconciled the ‘home’ and the ‘world’ by ritualising
the political struggles and by politicising the ‘feminine virtues and her domestic duties’. His views of

women's equality were located within the religious sense of the world and within the patriarchal system. Even while upholding the supremacy of feminine strength, activism and power, he could restore woman on the pedestal of 'glorious status of wifehood'. Advocating woman's education he laid stress on woman's position at 'home.' His ideal woman, the mythical Sita, a self-sacrificing and monogamous wife of the Ramayana guarded her chastity and remained loyal to Rama in spite of many provocations. His ideal of womanhood and notions of sexual purity had contained many traits of the Puritan Victorian ideal of woman. His views on self-restraint in sexual matters as great virtue reflected in his advice for widows to practice ascetic life.

Though he held contradictory views on women's direct participation in the anti-colonial movement and many women defied him in facing the colonial oppression there were shifts in his realisation of changes in woman's conditions in the colonial period. He was aware of some of the negative consequences of colonial rule on women's economic status. Hence, he took up the khadi movement to involve women as well as convince men in the need of including the women in the nationalist movement.

He exhorted well-to-do women to support the movement in their dual capacity as consumers and producers, by criticising their lifestyles. He argued it was their duty to help their poorer sisters who had lost their livelihood on account of the import of foreign cloth. He could direct these women to incorporate issues of women in the marginalised section. His views on women and the nation-building process were dynamic and ever-changing. Hence, he could appeal to different sections of women like Devadasis, Dalits, upper castes and classes.

---

But like Jawaharal Nehru, he didn’t find economic empowerment of ‘modern’ woman necessary to change her position both within and outside family. Under the influence of socialism and being sympathetic towards woman suffragists of Britain, Nehru found the close link between the economic and familial status of women. He could understand that the Independence struggle involved two goals for women: one, freedom from imperial oppression and another, liberation from internal patriarchal oppression.

Like Tagore, Nehru had deviated from Gandhi on several issues including nationalism and women. He was not completely against the Western modernity and he situated nationalism within the domain of ‘state ideology’ in which central organising principle is the autonomy of the State and legitimising principle is a conception of social justice. Social justice can’t be provided within the old framework because it is antiquated, decadent and incapable of dynamism. What is necessary, according to Nehru, was creating a new framework of institutions which can embody the spirit of progress or modernity. This can be achieved only by a thorough reorganisation of the systems of economic production and distribution of wealth. However, without State assuming a central coordinating role, effective re-organisation of the economic structure will not be possible. By 1930s it was amply clear that the colonial state, with its imperial interests, will never take this role; in fact it has constantly acted as chief impediment to all attempts at such a restructuring. Hence, the principal task before nation is to establish a sovereign nation-state, Nehru believed.

Partha Chatterjee (The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus, 1999), analysing history of the Indian nationalism as a linear development, considers Nehru as representing ‘mature phase of Indian nationalism’. As already noticed above there were constant shifts both in dealing with gender issues and nationalism and it can’t be viewed as a linear development; Nehru represented alternative views on both nationalism and womanhood.
For Nehru, state embraced the whole of people, irrespective of sex, language, religion, caste, wealth and education status; it must be based on consciousness of national solidarity which includes in an active political process, the vast mass of the peasant. Though he subscribed to the notion of 'golden age', his interpretations were different. Accordingly, he also used in his speech, the idea of 'Bharat Mata', but not imbued it with the meaning ascribed to by nationalists like Bankim in the late nineteenth century. To quote Partha Chatterjee:

We don’t have here a Bankim of Anandamath or a Rabindranath Tagore in his Swadeshi phase. We have instead a state-builder, pragmatic and self-conscious. The nation as Mother comes to him as a part of a political slogan which had gained currency and established itself in the meeting-grounds of the Congress. It doesn’t figure in his own ‘scientific’ vocabulary of politics. But he can use it, because it has become part of the language which the masses speak when they come to political meetings.92

Nehru interprets ‘Bharat Mata’, Mother Nation as the whole of people, ‘people like them and me’ (peasant and the nationalist state leadership which has responsibility towards the former, ‘to act on their behalf,’ and ‘in their true interests’).93

His liberalist and socialist views reflect in his argument over economic empowerment of women. He had realised that economic bondage was ‘the root cause of the troubles of the Indian women’, and superficial reforms would not serve the cause of their emancipation. In ‘The Bombay

92 Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 1999, page 176-177
93 However, Nehru’s views on the State representing people have also proved myth in the post-Independence period. Urvashi Butalia’s work (2004) shows in case of ‘missing woman’ during the partition of India how state acted as patriarchal figure closely linking ‘our’ women’s honour with nation.
'Chronicle', April 25, 1929, he wrote, "The joint family system of the Hindus, a relic of a feudal age utterly out of keeping with modern conditions, must go and so also many other customs and traditions. But the ultimate solution lies only in complete refashioning of our society".

He emphasised the necessity for women to work outside the home, to be economically independent, and not to regard marriage as a profession. ‘Freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political, and if a woman is not economically free and self-earning, she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependants are never free."94

In his speech at the foundation-laying ceremony for a women’s college at Allahabad on March 31, 1928, he expresses the constant evocation of the past:

I must confess to you that I am intensely dissatisfied with the lot of the Indian woman today. We hear a good deal about Sita and Savitri... But I have a feeling that these echoes from the past are raised chiefly to hide out present deficiencies and to prevent us from attacking the root cause of women’s degradation in India today.

While Gandhi prioritised woman’s role as housewife, Nehru did not agree that woman had a separate fixed sphere and education for woman, hence, should have a different emphasis. In his speech at Allahabad, he criticised education aimed at training women to become ideal wives and mothers:

---

94 Bimala Luthra, “Nehru and the Place of Women in Indian Society”, an essay in Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity, B. R. Nanda (ed), New Delhi, 1976, page 5
... Woman has one profession and one only, that is the profession of marriage and it is our chief business to train her for this profession. Even in this profession, her lot is to be of the follower and the obedient slave of her husband and others. I wonder if any of you have read Ibsen's 'Doll's House;' if so, you will perhaps appreciate the word 'doll' when I use it in this connection. The future of India cannot consist of dolls and playthings.95

At the time Nehru was making this statement, women had entered several public fields such as medicine and legislature which were exclusively men's domain till then. While educated women were negotiating their place in these new fields of professions which also served the colonial needs—as teachers, nurses, working class women and peasant women were largely deprived of their economic freedom due to the change in economic system.

95 However, both Nehru and Gandhi gave a lukewarm response to active participation of women in electoral politics after 1930s. Nehru represented more an elitist reformist and had limited understanding of critical relation between controls over women and the maintenance of the religious, linguistic, caste, tribal and hierarchal beliefs and social structure. Though he emphasised women's rights and equality, he could do little to ease the controls of the collectives that determined the boundaries of women's lives and behaviour such as family, community, caste, class and religion. Even the Indian National Congress remained throughout largely male dominated, Hindu hegemonic political party and didn't cater to issues of the marginalised, including women. There are a plenty of works by Marxists and non-Marxists on this issue. To name a few: Sumit Sarkar: Modern India, 1885-1947, New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1983. Sarkar discusses that with the India Act of 1935, the Indian National Congress began its transition from an anti-imperialist movement to a political party with a clear preference for propertied men, between 1937 and 1939. G Aloysius in Nationalism Without a Nation in India (1998) argued there was not one historical bloc in India during the colonial period, but two historical blocs, which were antagonistic to each other. While the elite bloc constitutes nationalism the subaltern mass constitutes nation. The nation failed to emerge as these two blocks were in conflict with each other. Though Aloysius has an ideal notion of nation which would encompass all the people/social classes of the nation, his argument on different blocs contesting nationalist ideologies operating at different levels is indisputable. Geraldine Forbes (1996) and Jayawardena (1986) also arrive at similar arguments about the Indian National Congress, including Gandhi and Nehru; According to Forbes, the women's organisations also from 1935 onward were not considered much seriously by the Congress. While seeking their support for the nation, the Congress thought women themselves need to fight for their rights. The women's organisations noticed the betrayal by the Congress; however, these organisations had not mobilised the women of all castes and class to carry further the feminist movement in this direction. Forbes, rightly points out that while nationalist politics was feminised election politics remained male-dominated.
Besides, several women organisations such as the All-India Women's Conference, the Bharat Sri Mahilamandal, the All-India Ladies' Association and the Women's India Association had also attained hegemony, though for a short period, provided platforms to women from various parts to formulate their views on the 'women's question'. These organisations with their branches both in the British India and the princely States tried to bring solidarity among women from all castes and communities. They worked on women's uplift, philanthropy, social work among poor and destitute women and social reform which later developed into public activities in support of women's democratic rights and contacts with women's groups and movements outside India. (Many Western women had also contributed to formation of gender identity in India and their intervention in addressing the 'women's question' is not discussed here in detail. Theosophists Annie Besant and Dorothy Jinarajadasa; an Irish feminist, Margaret Cousins; and disciple of Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita figure among the foreign women who were also critics of imperialism in their own country. Apart from the Western feminist movement, the women's movements in China and Japan in the early twentieth century have also influenced the feminists in India.)

Some of these women in the organisations were comfortable with the ideal image of Indian womanhood formulated by nationalists like Gandhi and enacted it even when they participated in the public. Some elite women like Sarojini Naidu, who stood as strong supporters of Gandhi and took part in both the nationalist and the women's movements, emphasised harmony and comradely cooperation, not confrontation, between man and woman in the common struggle for freedom and progress. When she was elected in 1926 as the first woman president of Indian National Congress, she evoked the idealised vision of the past, stating, 'you have reverted to an old tradition, and escorted
Indian women to the classic epoch of our country's history. Even when she became active member of All India Women's Conference, she represented moderate current of reformers who were more preoccupied with the nationalist political struggle, bypassing the issue of women's subordination within family. She, instead, termed woman's participation in public affairs in the world outside the house as service extended to the world.

Another example of nationalist elite women is Sarala Devi. Though differed from Gandhi on many fronts, she popularised the heroic ideal of Rajput women and also the women characters like Shanti and Devi Chaudhurani of Bankim’s novels. Unlike her relative Rabindranath Tagore, Sarala Devi became model of militant nationalist woman who contributed to encouragement of martial and heroic culture. She lived in the space created for women in the nationalist politics as Mother Nation, inspiring men and women for acts of bravery and martyrdom. However, it never threatened woman’s position as family-bound housewife and ‘women’s question’ never featured in her nationalist activities. These heroic militant women were praised along with the Kshatriya queens of the past in books on ‘Arya Mahila’, celebrating Indian womanhood.

The urban-centered middle class women propagated social feminism, demanding education and abolition of social evils, to enable them to serve family and nation better. They claimed respect for women within the family order, though they didn’t claim complete autonomy. The development of a

---

97 Sarala Devi was in Mysore Princely State working for a girls school for six months and had inspired women activists like Kalyanamma who published a periodical ‘Saraswati’ apparently influenced by ‘Bharati’ that was edited by Sarala Devi’s mother Swarnakumari Devi, initially. Kalyanamma was also honoured in Bengal for her contributions in educating women and social service.

98 There are ample examples of women participating in revolutionary, armed struggles under different leaders like Subhash Chandra Bose. However, they are not discussed here in detail. But they had also expanded public sphere of women and defined certain notions of womanhood.
social feminist ideology made possible the peaceful co-existence of feminism and nationalism in a new construct called ‘feminist nationalism’. 99

Till 1930s the hegemonic discourses on ‘women’s question’ constituted ‘Indian womanhood’ that was applicable to the middle class, urban and upper caste society and didn’t include women from the marginalised groups. 100 However, after 1930s women were in all the movements – revolutionary, peasant, anti-British, socialist, working class etc. Though their political participation was not so encouraging after 1937, women were politically active when compared to women of the early decades. A new generation of young women - educated, unmarried, willing to undertake dangerous and difficult tasks – were in all these movements, sometimes invoking hostility of their families and neighbours, and sometimes with their support.

They also tried to bridge the gap between the urban and the rural masses; after 1930s they could incorporate problems of working class and peasant women into the ‘women’s question’. They challenged the norms of respectability that obsessed the earlier generation of women leaders. But they also worked with wide range of groups with different ideologies. The feminist consciousness was emerging, from earlier perspective of reform to demand equality. But their social feminism didn’t challenge the patriarchy and only after 1960s they could take up issues such as ‘domestic violence,’ and challenge the family system. They could break the image of ideal Indian woman as accommodating, self-sacrificing and devoted to serving her family.


100 Presence of prostitutes, Devadasis and lower caste women was dealt with reservation due to notions of ‘respectability’ of the elite women.