CHAPTER IV

HINDU NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY AND THE DALIT WOMAN

Postcolonial (PC from henceforth) theory premises itself on the notion that everything underwent a radical transformation with the advent of British colonialism. Their theory also goes to the extent of suggesting that everything was quite alright in the pre-British colonial period in India. The third notion that they stick to is that the pre-British peculiarities of the land have not much to do with the British colonial and postcolonial realities. The present chapter tries to prove the falsities of such notions by exploring the areas of congruence between the ideologies of ancient Hindu scriptures and mainstream nationalism regarding the Dalit woman.

This chapter is an explanation and extension to the criticism made in the previous chapter of the PC and dominant feminist theories. It tries to dismantle all the three suppositions that have been cited above. This is done by deconstructing the extremist Hindu fundamentalist ideologies of Dayananda, Savarkar, Altekar and Gandhi. Thus, this chapter tries to explore how the images of Dalit women have been constructed by ancient Hindu scriptures, mainstream nationalists and how these are being renewed by contemporary mainstream Indian scholarship of the postcolonial school. PC academic project tend to renew this epistemic violence either by maintaining complete silence about her or by dealing with her in a partial fashion.

The main concern of this chapter is to prove that caste was a powerful ideology and system that existed during the pre-British colonial period and which bore significantly upon the nationalist processes. There is hardly any serious work done on this aspect despite the fact that their effects have been rampant and long. The main hypothesis that this chapter tries to prove is that caste patriarchy is essential to the very configurations and reconstructions of the socio-economic-political and cultural systems during the British colonial period as well as in the existing postcolonial times. The academic developments in the last few decades have not succeeded in bringing this dimension under scrutiny. More damagingly, most of their theoretical narrations on nation, caste, gender (caste patriarchy is something too far for them to even consider) are premised on the very gaps and exclusions of Dalit women. The present effort is therefore
to understand the enormity of the role that caste patriarchy has played in regulating and directing political processes during colonialism. More importantly, the fact that caste patriarchy has continued to survive this long indicates its power, durability and brutality.

Though there are numerous books on the congruence of Hinduism and mainstream nationalism there is still a great need to take up this for study. This is fundamentally important because most of the works done in this field either do not explain its implications to the Dalit woman or completely ignore her. They have left a strong impression on the students of social academics, so much so that Indian archives and scriptures appear almost devoid of any information on Dalit woman. However a vast and immense presence of information about Dalit women surprises anybody who sincerely tries to excavate historical sources. Leave the question of an exclusive study on Dalit women, why there is no mentioning of Dalit women even on those occasions when she really deserves it! It is extremely disheartening to realize that unless the Dalit women talks and writes about her own politics and history nobody would do it. It is precisely for this reason that it becomes correct to assert that only Dalit women should write their histories.

The present attempt is also to shift the burden of guilt to Hindu society. This is specifically felt to be crucial since most of the postcolonial texts, which deal with colonialism, and the construction of the nation go on erasing the socio-political features of pre-British colonial state of India and put all the burden on the British colonial process. Consequently, many differential experiences that Dalit woman had faced before the advent of British colonialism and during and after it are not considered worthy to be put for academic examination anymore. The dominant versions of the nation, colonial experience and 'postcolonial' realities would thus appear as the only legitimate ones. Such postcolonial missions have actively deterred the Dalit woman's emergence as a national subject in the field of theory. All this would effect the Dalit woman's negotiations with the nation and vice versa.
Congruence between Prejudiced Hindu Legal Sanctions and the Ideology of Mainstream Nationalism:

Dalit Woman as Pollution:

Menstruation:

Caste brands people as pure and impure, as pure and impure by increasing degrees. Thus some people are touchable, some reluctantly touchable and others less touchable and untouchable. It is a fixed expression of status differentiation. Demarcation of the female population into chaste and unchaste categories occupies great attention in patriarchal society since women are the ones through whom caste is reproduced. This has led to a more rigorous control of bodies and selves of women of all categories. Any code relating to the female body has thus become a closely guarded matter and stringent punishments have been meted out to those who transgress prescribed codes of behavior. Two areas were to be protected: 1. False blood should not be allowed to contaminate pure blood. For this purpose the pure castes ordained against marriages between the lower and the upper castes. 2. Upper caste women were to be saved from lower caste men and simultaneously. Dalit women should be sexually available to Hindu men. Thus an extremely clashing set of standards were needed. The Hindu society applied a great range of tricks to define the women of different castes on these terms of disparity. The higher the status in the caste system the less bad she became.

Since sexuality was an area of anxiety for Hindu men they did not want to leave even the most private matters of a woman unlegalislated. Everything from menstruation to childbirth was to be scrupulously administered. This politics of surveillance came through religion and thus carried legitimacy. It was by administering bodies that, selves became most effectively impinged on. Since a Dalit woman was both a woman and a dalit her oppression became not just additive and double but multiple and continuous. It is during the phase of menstruation that Hindu society usually makes its entry more strongly in a woman's life (In one sense the Hindu society involves itself from the very birth of the female child. When the female child enters a biologically mature phase, it becomes more keen and alert). According to religious scriptures the Hindu woman is seen
as one who becomes impure in the time of menstruation or childbirth. During this period tamasic process and matter is seen to adhere to the Hindu woman. This impurity is seen as temporary and moreover it would be transformed into generative power. The husband is the agent who transforms this destructive power into generative power. Once the upper caste woman becomes impure there is always a possibility for her to become pure again. This facility is not available to the Dalit women. They are placed not only as "opposite others" but also as “stratified others” For instance they are not Hindu woman/Dalit Woman but Hindu woman/

This re-dichotomisation is very clearly laid out in the following Hindu revelations of truth:

“On the first day [of the menses], she is a Chandala woman, on the second, she is the murderess of a brahmana; on the third, she is called a washer woman; and on the fourth day, she becomes purified.”¹

“A barren woman should be known as a vrishali; a woman who gives birth to a dead child is a vrishali, a sudhra woman is to be known as a vrishali, and similarly a maiden in her mensus.”²

“She, who, renouncing her husband, desires for the company of another man, is to be known as a vrishali.”³

Thus the connotation is: a lower caste woman is equal to an upper caste woman in her first day of menses (when she is supposed to touch ultimate levels of impurity), to a woman who is not faithful to her husband, to a barren woman, one who has given birth to a dead child and to a servant woman who is in menstruation. She is equal to all of these at once not to any one of these categories. She is thus defined as a combination of the fractures of different inauspicious selves of desirable women. The identity of the lower
caste woman is thus fabricated on the occasional impurities of the upper caste. However, unlike the upper caste woman, the Dalit woman would not have a state of purity anywhere in her life cycle. There is no such relaxation; she is always an impure category, she can never escape it since she is born so. Throughout the texts the Dalit woman is portrayed in connection with pollution, vrishali (a bad woman), an unfaithful one and so on. Her caste makes her not just a site of pathology but pathology incarnate. She is not just an untouchable but she herself is untouchability. One has to pay attention here to how the Dalit woman is superimposed with one negative image after the other in a simultaneous manner.

It is difficult to find a direct reflection of these notions in mainstream nationalist thought. But the idea that the lower castes are originally impure is very much in circulation through the ideology of the. One thing, which the scholars who search for such ideology do, is to look at the implications of nationalist ideology as a whole rather than to examine direct references. It does not in any way mean that the nationalists were democratic enough to not make direct use of such ideology. The idea that lower castes are impure is central to the definition of the nation as a home for pure insiders. We come across various superficially progressive ideas, which would seem to hinder an easy conclusion that mainstream nationalists considered the lower castes as impure and thus as lesser citizens. There are numerous examples of mainstream nationalist generosity, which allowed the lower castes to become entitled to education, employment and so on. Despite Nehru’s socialist reputation, he was incapable of including the name of Ambedkar in his foundational fiction of the nation, Discovery of India. It is rather surprising that this radical nationalist was able to see even extreme Hindu nationalists as participants in the “discovery of the nation” but not the lower caste Ambedkar. Thus it is apt to conclude that the Dalits as an impure population is central to the ideology (both liberal and hindutva), which inscribed the Indian nation. Most of the hindutva and liberal ideologues of nationalist times had fabricated their versions of women’s liberation on the basis of the supposed superiority and purity of upper caste women.
Motherhood and Pure Race:

Hindu religious texts reflect a strong set of exclusive Hindu feminine values about Hindu womanhood premised on the exalted notion of the Hindu woman's procreative role. The ancient pundits had defined the home as heaven and had glorified the principles of docility, domesticity and home-centered motherhood as the zenith of Hindu womanly achievement. In hindutva ideology in general, motherhood necessitated a rigid affiliation of upper caste woman to her caste community. It added the realm of sakthi or power to this role. Lastly, the mother transmitted a promise of fulfillment, by linking Hindu womanhood with nationality thus asserting that caste superiority was crucial in defining citizenship. Caste-centerness became a prominent dimension of the new nationalist maternal discourse. When Hindu men increasingly participated in the outer domain of anti-colonial politics, the duty of protecting their culture actually fell into the hands of 'their' women. A notion that the nation is an enlargement of the family became deeply rooted. The image of the mother as the main character of national womanhood was promulgated alongside this emerging definition of the Hindu religious nation. Since Hindu caste communities were clearly perceived as a would-be nation, non-casteness or dalitness implied a space that was either non or anti-nation. In this context the female womb became the site of a major contest and of considerable disquiet to Hindu men.

Home, where the legitimate procreation of the upper caste species takes place is now eulogized as one of the main spaces of Hindu women's privilege. A spate of both vernacular and English literature depicting the holiness of the Hindu home mushroomed in all regions of pre-India. It meant that a woman who did not hold a home according to caste rules is not a national woman and therefore that she could not make legitimate claims to nationhood. The core women were pulled into the presumed national territory and the peripheral women were pushed further from any protective territorial boundaries, be it home, caste, religion or nation. Dalit women were thus denied all possible, practically respectable identities, which would allow her to be enumerated within the nation. The inner woman symbolized fertility and was admonished from time to time to keep herself at the disposal of her men, because serving at home was equated to serving
the nation. Gandhi's ideas of home as the right place for Hindu women correlates to these sanctions.

The first behavioral necessity for the Hindu mother was that she should hold herself aloof from other woman. The second requirement was that she should not transgress caste rules. Endurance, abstinence from 'evil' and, masochism were spoken of as essential features of perfect or true mothering. The character of the compassionate mother is always presented with a blend of sakthi. Aurobindo's ideas of motherhood are centrally built on this. Hindu motherhood is defined in terms of being both preserver and destroyer. It is visible in the two feminine principles that Hindu's call upon; destructive mythical goddess like Kali and of matrubhumi, who is also the maternal principle in terms of amma. Liberation of this mother is often conceived in terms of her children (mostly sons) coming to her rescue by fighting against the colonizers.

Hindu women who were boosted up by the false prestige offered by this hindutva rhetoric actively participated in the hindutva patriarchal hegemonic warfare launched against all women in general, and Dalit women in particular. They were thus able to translate their subjugated domesticity into caste based superior femininity available only to Hindu women. Legitimate motherhood was possibly the strongest rhetoric of femaleness at a time when injections of liberal notions of individualism, anti casteism, equal rights and accesses threatened to blockade the existing casteism in society. The image of the national mother was then a renewed image of the familiar Hindu mother who married and procreated children according to caste rules.

The Hindu nationalists resurrected these notions, which revolved not around Hindu woman's productive function but rather her reproductive production. By the time of Hindu nationalism, a new facet was added to the Hindu woman's maternal role: procreator and nurturer of a superior, pure, essentially national progeny. The Hindu mother was then expected to train herself and her children in proper citizenship. This hindutava motherhood was premised on the same old presumptions of quantitative gaps between the races symbolized by their different civil functions. Hindu and untouchable women were addressed as different cultural species, with Hindu femaleness denoting nationhood and Dalit woman nonnationhood. The norms set for national motherhood
necessitated the re-inscription of caste rules on both Dalit and Hindu female bodies. The Hindu nationalist discourse took every precautionary care to keep primordial identities attached to the lower caste female biology alive. It would be useful to look at how such notions have been sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures.

Rights of Progeny:

As the above discussion explains, the children of Dalits are generally subjected to all the inequalities that impinge upon the Dalits. For instance Sankha Samhita says "The name of a brahmana child should be a term of blissful signification ...while that of a shudra child should be of a lowly import."5 There are also ordinances and stringent restrictions on the children of lower caste women who are born by upper caste men to discourage any legitimate relation between the two categories. This also shows how caste system is a tightly built class establishment. There are a set of rules to deprive children of lower caste women, who are married to Hindu men of any progenitor rights: "A maiden who is bought, should never be taken as a wife; the sons, begotten on her, are not qualified to offer funeral cakes to their departed Manes."6 "Even, he, who is foremost of all virtuous men...is degraded to the status of a sudhra by having the thirteen sraddas done unto him by (such) a sudra son."7 Gautama Samhita writes, "A son of an idiotic father shall take a share like a son begotten on a sudra mother."8 While any child is addressed and identified after the father, in the case a child born to a chandala woman and an upper caste man, this rule does not pertain.

Deconstruction of the views of the below ideologues would prove the compatibility between Hindu religious ideology and the mainstream nationalists. Imanigining the Dalits as the outsiders is central to both the caste ideology and the upper caste nationalist stream. The below analysis try to focus on this dimension.

Dayananda Saraswathi:

We can find the ideological twin of these ordinances in the area of mainstream nationalist thought. It is Dayananda Saraswathi, the forerunner of this stream of hindutva who proved to be even more far sighted than many of the ideologues of hindutva. He did not even entertain the idea of lower caste women as mothers. Dayananda Saraswathi dealt
with the women’s question as part of his project of reforming Hindu society and taking it back to the Vedas in order to purify itself. Most of the ideas of Dayananda on “Indian” woman are identical to the dominant views of his age. He believed that they enjoyed great freedom in the public sphere and that it was the Muslims who relegated them to the status of objects of concealment. He believed that it was the procreation of Aryan sons which could make the land acquire its lost glory. It is in the context of procreating the correct breed of Aryan men for the rejuvenation of the nation that the question of the Hindu woman come in.

He perceives marriage as essentially for the purpose of procreation, particularly for the procreation of Aryan sons. It is in the second chapter of his Satyarthaprakash that he gives detailed prescriptions for Hindu mothers. His suggestions go like this, “The mother should suckle the child only for the first six days, thereafter the wet-nurse; but the parents should see that the wet-nurse gets good food and drink. If the parents be too poor to afford a wet-nurse, cow’s or goat’s milk diluted with an equal quantity of water should be used; ...When neither the wet-nurse nor milk (cow’s or goat’s) can be procured, the parents should do what they think best at the time; but they must remember the child’s body is made up of the elements derived from the body of the mother, which fact accounts for the mother getting weaker after each confinement. It is best, therefore, for the mother not to suckle her child. Plasters should be applied to the breast that will soon dry up the milk. By following this system the woman becomes strong again in about two months. Till then the husband should have thorough control over his passions, and thus preserve the reproductive element. Those that will follow this plan will have children of a superior order, enjoy long life, and will be of high mental caliber, strong, energetic, and devout” (21-22).

All the following inferences can be drawn from the above: a wet-nurse is a non-upper caste woman. Her motherhood was available in the market. What about the milk for her child if she uses it to nurture the upper caste child? Clearly, her child is not relevant here. She does not need to preserve her strength in order produce children of a "superior order". Her children need not "be of high mental caliber, strong, energetic, and devout". Her rights as mother and her child’s rights are not considered. She and her child
need not live a long healthy life because they are naturally not fit to be the national subjects. The lower caste woman is equal to cows and goats, her motherhood can be bought. She is unproblematically bestialized.

The real task of the upper caste woman starts when the child attains the age for learning. She becomes the first instructor. He quotes a statement from Shathapatha Brahmana, "He alone is said to have a mother whose mother is devout and learned." (20). Thus a lower caste woman who is not devout (at the most she could be religious and ritualistic but not devout in the way that the upper caste woman is since, according to Hinduism, even devotion is hierarchized) and not learned is not a mother. In this sense the upper caste woman's role is equal to her male counterpart's. Apart from giving birth, and preparing herself for continuous reproductive functions she is seen as a learned person like an upper caste man.

Like most of the ideologues of hindutva, Dayananda was also caught up in legitimizing the essential teachings of Hinduism and of projecting it as having a humanitarian face. Such a feat obviously had to cram a great many explicit contradictions. One can grasp these contradictions especially in his re-readings of Hindu texts. To the question whether lower castes were entitled to read and preach Vedas he quotes Yajur Veda, “…Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, women, servants, aye, even the lowest of the low, so should you all do, i.e., teach and preach the Veda.” Soon such a radical suggestion is severely contradicted when he tries to sketch his ideas mainly around the text Manusmrithi. For instance he quotes Manu ii, 168. "A Dwija as well as his children who, instead of studying the Veda, wastes his time in doing other things soon goes down to the level of Shudra” (47). But how do we still categorize people along caste lines when not the caste but merit is the parameter? Rejecting caste as the base for the segregation of people and also at the same time accepting it as a legitimate supporting structure for merit is a cunning feature of all the hindutva theories, which try to both argue for the restoration of the land on caste lies and also balance a democratic profile. As mentioned above such a contradiction is evidently there in Dayananda’s ideology. For instance, after quoting the Hindu scripture’s sanctioning of education for sudras, he moves on to define merit, “Wherever it is declared (in the books of Rishis) that the
Shudras are debarred from the study of the Veda, the prohibition simply amounts to this that he, and name is one among them. These names include those denoting "low origin", "servility" etc. The footnotes carry an explanation for these terms, the first of which is Kali (Black), and the second Chandali (an out caste). After strictly restricting inter-caste marriages between the lower caste woman and the upper caste man, he again tries to propose his redefinitions of castes according to merits, this time in a more confused manner. He seems to be borrowing heavily from Plato's notion of Philosopher King, common property and children. After trying to somehow prove that the vedic hierarchisation of castes was on the basis of merit and not on birth he proposes that even women are to be defined on these terms. Thus if a lower caste woman manages to enter into an upper class then she is no more a lower caste but she automatically becomes an upper caste woman and her uppercasteness again depends on how much she has achieved. In other words, how much she has ceased to be a lower caste woman and how much she has become capable of pulling herself to the level of the upper caste woman. Thus whoever exists as lower castes are virtually the lower types. Practically, it is clear that Dayananda's demarcation of castes according to merits is wrong that does not learn anything even after a good deal of teaching, being ignorant and destitute of understanding, is called a Shudra. It is useless for him to learn, and for others to teach him any longer" (79). But immediately in the next page he stoops down to demarcate the meritorious status of women of different castes on pure caste lines. After citing Gargi as a lustrous icon of learned Hindu womanhood, he allocates respective tasks for women according to their castes. Here again the issue of upper caste women's education creeps in as the need to make her compatible with her learned husband ensures peace at home and the nation (he uses the term state here for nation). He goes on, "The Kshatriyas women in ancient India, used to be well-acquainted even with the military science, or how could they have gone with their male relations and fought side by side with them in battle-fields, as Kekai did with her royal husband Dasaratha. Therefore it behoves Brahman and Kshatriya women to acquire all kinds of knowledge, and Vaishya women to learn trade, and the mechanical arts and the like, and Shudra women, the art of cooking etc." He then explains the need of all these educations for women. All these can prevent people from going astray.
Now the question that repeatedly poses itself before a Dalit feminist is, ‘Which comes first for a hindutva like Dayananda? Merit or caste? If, as he has been arguing caste is something, which is determined by merit, then how could he allocate tasks for the women of different castes on caste lines? How could he ordain that the lower caste woman should resort to lesser jobs without checking whether she is capable of a more meritorious job? And also, how does he presume that the upper caste homes would be able to maintain total equilibrium from the matters of art, medicine, house construction to food and drink? But what about the lower castes? The inference is naturally that their homes need not be ideal sites for the upbringing of their children as national subjects. Lower caste women should serve as wet nurses, cooks and do all kinds of menial jobs for the upper castes. Dayananda, like Gandhi, professed that there are no degrading meanings traditionally attached to such jobs.

Dayananda is very keen that marriage should take place only between the same castes. He quotes Manu iii, 4, "Let a twice-born man (Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya)... return home [after seminary] and espouse a maid, of his own Class, endowed with excellent qualities" (82). He quotes Manu III, 9, to explain that the upper caste man should shun any material relations with the girls from categories below him. He gives various measurements to understand whether the bride is of a respectable background and that such demarcation had taken place quite definitely on the basis of birth. The upper castes on the other hand were projected as the true nationalist subjects and the Dalits were seen as a lower stock, which remained so due to their incapability to be meritorious. The Dalit women, therefore, has no reason to feel bad and betrayed if she remains as mere wet nurses or servants to the upper castes. What exists as lower caste women is in fact a mixture of females from various communities who failed to make grade; which failed to become upper castes women. Dayananda thus managed to target many birds with one shot.

Savarkar is one who lived in that phase of hindutva nationalist times when he had to compromise with his exclusionist notion of the Hindu nation. According to his original imagination, the Indian nation was essentially constituted by, for and according the superior Aryan race. But soon he had to make a major shift in his adamant notion in order
to make the hinduva imagination of the nation palatable to the changing world politics. The threat of the minority became a determining factor. During that time Savarkar had to make heavy compromises and come down to other caste like the sudras in order to visualize India as a Hindu nation. Even so, he was not able to include the mlethchas (the lowest castes) as part of the nation. The notion of cultural unity and intercaste marriages were shown as reasons to include the non-Aryans into the imagination of the nation.

There is, purportedly, common blood flowing in the bodies of all the Hindus. But the mlethchas are listed with the foreigners, the potential enemies of the nation. Intercaste marriages also took place among the four above varnas. Thus the blood of the lower caste is not seeped in the blood of the essential upper caste citizens. He could not extend his thesis about intercaste marriages unifying the blood of the Hindus to the lower castes.

Savarkar also holds on to the view that the Hindu woman should be the biological link joining the castes of generations. Therefore, in a letter he wrote to his family, one woman called Shanta appears. He wrote about her in a letter dated 5 Aug 1917, from Port Blair: “...the first and foremost consideration of a young lady should be her health. It is a trust she holds for others, a debt she owes to generations not yet born. Every atom of health that a young lady dissipates is so much that is taken away from the strength of souls that are yet to rise. She is golden link that joins the Yesterday to the Morrow; a promise that holds in it the possibilities of her race. Therefore, the first care of a wife should be her health that would harmonise the beauties of her body and mind and soul. So neither study nor pleasure should entice her away so as to tax her energy too much, but both should be indulged in only so far as to render that Health perfect and that Beauty transparently pure.” So, this is a woman who is either newly married or an unmarried one. Vahini is another woman, the wife of his deceased brother, who often appears in his letters. He writes: "Scanning thus thy thoughts, discriminating thus, continue, dear Vahini to uphold the traditions of our family and stand faithfully by the Cause." He writes that "Uma practicing severe austerities in the snowclad Himalayas" should be her ideal. Thus Savarkar warns the two women to follow two different paths, one that of a would be mother and the other that of a widow.
Altekar:

Dalit Woman as the Bad woman and the Betrayer:

There are strict rules for ostracizing the upper caste man who involves in any respectable relation with a Dalit woman. Sexual abuse of the Dalit woman would not invite the wrath of caste patriarchy upon him. But anything, which would offer the Dalit woman some respect in society, for instance, marriage, owning and growing up the children born out of such a relation, offering any amount of protection to her, are all strictly prohibited. Unlike the general rule for Hindu kinship which specifies that a child bears the name of the father and naturally comes under his ownership, the relation between the Dalit woman and the upper caste man is embedded in the reversal of this logic. Below are some injunctions regarding this:

If one cohabits with a woman in [her] menses or with low-caste woman, he is known as being obliged to perform a panacea; he should [take his] bath before that”’ “Having gone to a she-animal, prostitute, she buffalo, she-camel…one should practice a prajapatiya panacea.”

Thus sodomy is equal to cohabitation with dalit woman. Dalit woman is a mere animal.

To reiterate, none of these Sastras actually prohibit any Hindu man from exploiting a Dalit woman sexually. But they made extremely stringent rules against a hindu man marrying a Dalit woman. For instance Sankha Samhita writes, “Even in distress a twice born one should not wed a sudra girl, in as much as a son begotten by him on her person will never find his salvation.”’ Gautama Samhita writes ”A house-holder should marry a wife of his own caste…”’ Ostracizing is another way of punishing, ”[one should not feed] a hurtful person, a deceitful person…one who is a servant, one who is a tawny-coloured, a deaf…and one who has married a vrishali.” (The list of vrishali women includes a lower caste woman also, as mentioned in the above reference).

On the other hand dreadful threats are given by the same samhitas against any possible intrusion of Dalit men against Hindu women. Gautama Samhita writes, ”A sudhra detected in the act of sexually knowing a brahmana woman, or guilty of that offence should be punished by cutting of his genitals.” Gautama Samhita is particularly cruel in dealing with sexual relations between a Hindu woman and a Dalit man. In its own words ”A woman, of a superior caste, having been found guilty of illicit intercourse...
with a man of an inferior caste, the king of the country shall caste her to be torn alive by
dogs at a public space, or the guilty man should be dealt with the same manner."\(^{17}\)
The marital status of dalit woman is also not respected. As she is addressed as a vrishali, she
cannot hold any legitimate right to have any decent personal life- declares the dharma. In
Sankha Samhita there is a description of rites that ought to be performed by the bride. For
instance it says the Brahman girl at the time of marriage should hold a mendicant’s cup, a
Kshtriya girl an arrow and a Vaishya girl a stick.\(^{18}\) There is no mention of any rite that
should be performed by the Dalit bride.

Katyayana Samhita orders a keen observation of difference among the women of
different castes married to a single Hindu man: "Many wives of the same caste and of
other castes existing, the rite of churning, for producing the fire, should be done by the
chaste wives of the same caste, on account of the superiority of birth.... fin it] one should
not employ a sudra wife, or one who tries to injure her husband or is jealous of him, or
one who does not perform religious observances, or one who lives with other men."\(^{19}\)
Thus again the equation is drawn between the lower caste woman, one who is jealous,
and causes injury to her husband, one who is not religious and one who is not faithful to
her husband. Daksha Samhita writes, “A woman who forsakes her poor or diseased
husband, is repeatedly born either as a bitch, a vulture, or a shark."\(^{20}\) This truth implies
that all the existing lower caste women were born so due to their disloyal attitude to their
husbands in their previous lives. Thus the Dalit woman by definition is a woman who has
bewitched her husband.

Satatapa Samhitha links terrible diseases like leprosy and biological sexual
deformity with cohabitation with a Dalit woman. "By cohabiting with a chandala woman
one is born without testes."\(^{21}\) “For cohabiting with women, who should not be known,
originates the disease of dhavamandala (a kind of leprosy). Having made image of a
cow...one should duly present it unto a vipra, and recite the Mantram "May the mother of
surabhi, daughter of Vishnu, destroy my sin."\(^{22}\) This mother of Surabhi and daughter of
Vishnu is an upper caste woman who is capable of curing the upper caste man who is
infected from his sexual interactions with a lower caste woman.

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Altekar's text is exemplary of the kind of ideology, which laboriously tries to illustrate the Dalit woman as bad and betrayers. He examines at length the historic betrayals of the lower caste woman who transgressed her limits in order to claim privileges for which she is not naturally entitled. Such transgressions had apparently jeopardized the fate of the nation and of innocent upper caste women. Curiously, lower caste women occupy the place of Muslims and other foreigners who are often portrayed as the betrayers of the Hindu nation by traditional historians. Chasing away the foreigner was seen as the means to liberating the nation. Thus for Altekar also configuring the nation included keeping the Dalit woman in their place by chasing them away into their original ranks. Altekar writes "From about the beginning of the Christian era we begin to come across passages, which were deliberately written for the purpose of blackening the character of women" (320). Needless to say, the "women" this historian refers to is the hindu women. Therefore his intention seems to whiten the character of hindu women. It is in intercaste marriages that took place between the upper caste man and the lower caste woman that he tries to locate all the reasons for the degeneration of the Hindu woman's status. Altekar freely goes on:

In the age of Rigveda, we do not come across any cases of Arya Sudhra marriages. The Brahmanas and the epics, however supply ample evidence to show that the Aryan chiefs were freely marrying non-Aryan princess as in the latter period. Arjuna married Udupi, a Naga princess regent. Bhima married Hidimba, a sister of Rakshasa chief. The sage Kavasha, who plays an important part in the Aitereya Brahmana, was the son of a slave girl. ...It is important to note that the early Dharmastra writers have no objection to an Aryan marrying a Sudhra woman, provided he had another Aryan wife; it was only latter writers who proceeded to interdict such a procedure with a great vehemence (344-5).

Altekar goes on legitimising this ruthless hypothesis:

The introduction of the non-Aryan wife into the Aryan household is the key to the general deterioration of the position of women, that gradually and imperceptibly started at about 1,000 B.C., and became quite marked in about 500 years. The non-Aryan wife with her ignorance of Sanskrit language and Hindu religion could obviously not enjoy the same religious privileges as the Aryan consort. Association with her must have tended to affect the purity of speech of the Aryan co-wife as well. Very often the non-Aryan wife may have been the favourite one of her husband, who may have often attempted to associate her with his religious sacrifices in preference to her better educated but less loved Aryan co-wife. This must have naturally led to grave mistakes and anomalies in the performance of the ritual, which must have shocked orthodox priests. The first remedy they must have thought of was to declare the non-Aryan wife to be unfit for association with her husband in religious rituals. The black non-Aryan wife may be her husband's associate in pleasure, but not in religious rituals say several authorities. But a mighty king mad with love for his non-Aryan beloved, was not to be dictated to by a priesthood dependent upon him for its
subsistence. He would insist upon having his own favourite wife by his side at the time of his sacrifices, no matter her race or caste.

How then was the situation to be retrieved? Eventually it was felt that the object could be gained by declaring the whole class of women to be ineligible for Vedic studies and religious duties. There would then be no question of rejecting admission to a non-Aryan wife and granting it to an Aryan one; all would be ineligible and none need be offended. It is Aitisayana who is seen advocating this view by about 200 B.C (345-6).

Altekar seems to be very much moved by the sorry state of his community’s women. Hence, he tries to warn his fellow men about the need of co-opting their women by allowing them to take to the glorious roles that vedic Hinduism has offered them ages ago. Now the innocent Hindu woman has to be saved not only from the aggressive lower cast women but also from the conservative rules of hinduism. He has crossed the boundaries of Hindu patriarchal conservatism in order to save their women from being perpetually lost to the lower caste community. Altekar gives a reason for how the lower castes have swelled in number. He writes:

...it clearly shows that lapses of men were leniently treated, while women had no chance if they had committed a single mistake...Hundreds of women of misdemeanor, are becoming eternally lost of Hindu society, because it refuses to treat them with human sympathy. This again led to a considerable swelling of the non-Hindu and low class population in India. We must once more begin to follow the liberal lead of Vasishta, who has recommended the acceptance of such women, provided they show genuine repentance (314).

Thus for him the entire lower caste community is a bastard population.

In his "history" the author, like any other nationalist hindutva of the British colonial time has attempted to construct the history of the Hindu woman by making the Dalit woman a footstool. Using this footstool the Hindu woman was made to get atop the pedestal. He writes:

In the Vedic literature it is pointed out that a woman ought not to be killed. Rama very reluctantly killed Tatika, only when he was convinced that there was no other alternative open for him, he had to protect the sages, hundreds of whom had been already killed by the ogress. It is interesting to note that even in spite of the universally accepted divinity of Rama, there were critics like Bavalhuti in later times who ventured to fearlessly censure his conduct in killing Tatika (349).

With the example of Tatika, Altekar seems to suggest that strategy of elimination as a remedy to inhibit the lower caste women from entering the upper caste domains.
Savarkar and women:
Upper Caste Widows need not commit suttee:

Savarkar describes a chain of causes for the 1857 mutiny in his text, Indian War of Independence: National Rising of 1857. The first cause is the lack of heirs for the kings and queens. It is the question of the Hindu's accession to the throne. In 1853, when Raghoji Bhonsla (the owner of Nagpur Gadi) died childless Dalhousie tried to annex it. Savarkar writes about the rights of the Hindu widows here: "Even if he died without a child, the right of adopting passed at his death to his legal wife"(20). Savarkar does not advocate the widowed queens to commit suttee. He was trying to negotiate with colonialism to draw a balance of power between the distant rulers and the native rulers.

Here gender becomes a site, on which he tried to work some benefit. Thus, instead of suttee, adoption rights for the Hindu widow becomes important. Moreover, such a claim for widow's rights was seen as legitimate, not as anti-tradition. This is despite the fact that in the fifth chapter of the same text he sees the abolition of suttee by the British as an injustice and also as a perfectly legitimate reason for the emergence of the revolt. He has, in the case of the widows of the ruling Hindu order, compromised with his patriarchal beliefs. Here the cause of nationalist succession emerges as more important and this would not take place smoothly unless the reliable mother of the infant future king is alive to protect him. So, he sacrifices his faith in suttee for the nationalist cause. Clearly, it is the upper caste women whom he appoints as the legitimate supervisors of the nation in the absence of upper caste men. Thus the regent of the upper caste male rulers were their female partners.

Why Was Laxmi Bai of Jansī not a Suttee? :

Savarkar gave a bulky chapter to Laxmi Bai. Laxmi is equated to a precious stone kaustubha, which is said to be worn by the mythical Hindu god, Vishnu. And Laxmi is the name of the wife of this Vishnu. Thus this warrior Laxmi becomes identical with the goddess Laxmi. In fact she said to be a devotee of the same goddess. She is attached to her "bride's jewels" and also to her husbands precious jewels. Thus in the first page itself
the author invoked the marital status of the already widowed Laxmi of Jansi. This is to hint to the Hindu reader (mostly the male) that this 'nationalist woman' has no inauspiciousness attached to her even in her widowed state. Her patriotism compensated her widowhood. When Savarkar wrote this text, Laxmi was already dead so she became an 'unproblematic' widow, or since she has already reached heaven, she was no longer a widow. Therefore, the Brahman male author had only one task left: to plead with his readers to receive this role as a legitimate woman's role though she was a widow. The portrayal of this role as a nationalist warrior should not surpass her role as an authentic woman. Thus, first she is presented as a goddess Laxmi, who symbolizes eternal auspiciousness and as a woman who has an indissoluble love for her bridehood-like any other Hindu woman!

Freedom for her is equated with the freedom to hold on to her everlasting bridgedom. Thus "She wore close to her heart the jewel of liberty." Loosing her kingdom was thus to be equated to the loss of bridgedom. Her daily routine has also been described to serve the same purpose. She used to wear a "faultless white" saree during her puja. She would first drop the necessary water as a Prayashchitta for keeping her hair even after the death of her husband and then start "Parthiva Puja." After this she would put on male attire and go to the durbar. In this attire she looked like a Hindu goddess, "Gouri herself. She never wore nath or similar jewels after the death of her husband. She never was seen by the members of the Durbar. She did not lack the kind heart, which is natural to the woman. Her generosity is also described vividly. She gave black and white blankets to the "thousands of beggars" who blocked the passage to the temple. (We will not be answered how it could be an ideal kingdom when there could be thousands of beggars around a single temple itself). Her presence soothed their wounds. Thus her male attire did not change her heart, the essential self of a person...inside she was very much a woman. Thus Savarkar drives the image of Laxmi through all the pre-requisite tests of bridehood, womanhood and, motherhood before she can pass for a warrior. After thus making a balance between the two incongruent identities of the Hindu woman and warrior (in order to satisfy the ego of the upper caste reader and his own) the narrator slowly transfigures this character into a 'nationalist fighter' who can invoke a sense of nationality in these 'subjects' (were they, i.e., these beggars citizens?).
Now after tasting this motherly love from the ranee, these subjects filled with gratitude would be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the Ranee, the epitome of the nation. She is presented as riding both in a palanquin and a horse and even in palanquin she is under curtains, and on horseback she is covered by batti. She and goddess Laxmi move "at the same time." In the reader's mind Laxmi Bai has by now become goddess Laxmi in whom people put their trust and plead for various kinds of liberations. Independence was what "all were asking for." Laxmi Bai, who assumed the status of goddess would assure them, both male and female: "None can have my Jhansi, he who dares may try!" This goddess further transfigures into another goddess, Swaraj. She is now a "central idea", and an "incarnation of liberty." By now Laxmi Bai ceases to be a person, a female body. Therefore a need to convince the reader of the odd juxtaposition of Bai as a 'female who is equivalent to a man' no longer exists. Thus Bai was impersonalized into an idea, she becomes the very imagination of the nation. At this stage the tussle between the author and his upper caste reader is resolved. Bai would not be a participant in the imagination of the Hindu nation but she herself becomes an essence of it; she (the Hindu woman herself) becomes the nation.

Even so this Brahman author had to acknowledge the fact that this goddess was defeated. How can a goddess ever be defeated? The reason for this was attributed to the cowardice of the army, of effeminate men. But Bai was fighting for death. Now cruelty in Bai, one important characteristic of war has to be justified. Savarkar in a timely manner provided himself with another image, that of the well-known goddess of war Kali. Thus Bai also becomes Kali at this point in the narrative. And again motherhood, and essential feature of an essential woman is invoked here as a justification for her vigor. Thus she becomes a "tigress to avenge her cubs." When she lost her kingdom to the British, she becomes a mourner, another natural image of a reasonable woman. She preferred to die in the battle field, but was scared that the enemy would insult her person. The durbar would answer that who touches her sacred person would be killed by them. The author felt the need to refer to her sacredness to assure the reader that her chastity, a potential cite for women’s oppression, was kept intact, even after the war. She is finally a woman who would tremble at the idea of loosing her chastity. In the writing of Savarkar, a brahman male, Laxmi Bai had but to say these dialogues. In the battlefield she runs to
protect the "vanguard". This inspired the soldiers to fight back the British—at least for some time. She killed until she died. And she was cremated according to her dying instructions. These instructions are both nationalist and womanly-thai the enemy should not "defile even her dead body" (407-442). Thus in her death both the nationalist and the womanly desires were merged together! Her death was also according to the expectation of the Hindu. She goes to heaven, to reach her husband, the final destiny of a real woman and the nation reaches the hands of the upper caste male community.

In the last chapter of Savarkar's work, Baskar Rao Babasaheb's wife who was both beautiful and spirited would decide to fight against the British since she was refused the right to adopt. When her husband dies she commits suicide and thus becomes suttee by jumping into the waters of Malaprabha. The reason is that why should she be alive when her husband died and also there was no nationalist task of adopting a male child to ascend the throne.

**Ranees as embodiments of the nation:**

Savarkar goes on to describe the annexation of Nagpur by the British: "While the pure Ranees were weeping themselves hoarse, a loud knock came on the palace gate...Horses were let loose from the stables, elephants—after forcibly pulling down the Ranees riding on them—were taken to the bazzars for sale...The necklace that adorned a queen was lying in the dust of the bazzars...and no Ranee had a single jewel left on her person" (21). Now he describes the entrance of the British into the bedrooms of the Ranees. Here, he puts extra adjectives, exclamations and a tone of suspension as in a detective novel to attune the reader to identify with the sorrows of the Maharanees Anna Poorna Bai, and to translate this into a nationalist anger or dharma krodha. This Ranee is finally shown dying in agony for the insults tossed at her ancient dynasty. Thus the first and foremost cause of 1857 according to Savarkar was the destruction of royal families. This queen on her deathbed is applied as the symbol for the bar at mat a. A old, hapless woman, bereaved and dead. He does not bother with what must have happened to the other women in this process. After all the queens in the palaces would have been the last community to be touched by the alien men. How many other women had been molested during the journey of these British and native soldiers from the outskirts of the
kingdom (which is the dwelling place of the Dalits, historically) to the queens' cloisters? Their sufferings did not provoke the nationalist sentiments of the author since they had always been subjected to such oppressions in the hands of these rajas and ranees. It was the Hindu woman who symbolized the nation and the Dalit woman is nothing, her suffering is not to be counted as one of the causes for the arousal of freedom fights Savarkar meant it!

Assertion of Freedom by Scavenger as the last Nail on the Cow's back:

"Adding fuel to fire" is the title of the Ch V. Interestingly this chapter starts with a direct discussion on religion. He questions: "What religion is there which has not condemned dependence and slavery?" (46). Swaraj is for the sake of religion—he concludes at the end of the paragraph. He had stated a list of reasons, which operated to add fuel to fire—the fire being the one of 1857:

To-day law regarding Suttee only had been passed. Who could say that, when this injustice was allowed by the people, what other laws the company would not pass? ...One injustice begets another... Railways had already been constructed and carriages had been in such a way as to offend the caste-prejudices of the Hindoos (50).

Savarkar proceeds to describe the immediate reason for the explosion of the mutiny:

One day a Brahmin sepoy belonging to the village of Dum-Dum very near Calcutta, was going to military barracks with his lota full of water. At that instant a scavenger came and asked to drink from the lota. The Brahmin replied that his lota would be rendered unclean by his touch. The scavenger replied, "Enough of caste pride now! Do you not know that soon you would bite with your teeth the flesh of the cow and the fat of the pig?... When he heard this, the Brahman ran wild with excitement towards the camp, as if the very devil was in him! And in a few minutes the sepoys became excited, a crowd of mad men! And horrifying whisperings were in the air.

This was the immediate reason which this text highlights! And this chapter ends with a call given for mutiny: "Rise, then 0 Hindustan, rise! "Die for Dharma; while dying kill all your enemies and win back Swaraj; while killing; kill well!" Murmuring such sentiments to himself, every sepoy in India began to sharpen his sword for the fight of Swadharma and swaraj!" (56-7). Thus the hindutva version of swadharma and swaraj do not include the liberation of Dalits and women. The scavengers remain scavengers and the widows must become suttees.
Savarkar had dedicated one chapter to Mangal Pandey whom he introduced as a Brahman. When he was caught by the British, Savarkar writes that the other sepoys shouted "We would not even touch the hair of this sacred Brahmin." (p.88). Mangal Pandey was according to Savarkar able to mesmerize his audience so much that, "Not even a low class man could be found in the whole of Barrackpur to act as executioner. At last four hangmen were to be brought from Calcutta to do that dirty work! " (89). Thus, it would appear that the first war of independence was a spontaneous insurrection that provoked when a sweeper warned them about the immediate dangers to established caste order, and gained momentum when a "sacred Brahmin" spilled his blood. The archetypal defender and fighter of the "nation" was thus a Brahman and the nationalist fight was as much against the lower castes as it was against the British.

Fate of ‘Traitors’:

In the chapter titled "Meerut", he writes that sepoys used to burn the houses of traitors. In his own words: "Every night the houses of tyrants and traitors used to receive the unwelcome visit of fire" (91). These fires spread soon to all over ‘Hindustan.’ Who were these traitors? We would get an answer to this in the chapter titled “Havelock.” His narration goes like this: "Neil hit upon a new plan for the defence of Cawnpore. He formed a corps of Mahars and gave the town in their possession. The trick of inciting the low class men against the higher classes succeeded wonderfully. When the division among Hindus and Muslims vanished this caste difference was thus made use of (281.) (we find no reason for why the division between the Muslims and Hindus vanished suddenly). Savarkar includes "Pariahs" as one of the "raw recruits" in the list of the loyal armies to the British (396-7). Thus Dalits were the "traitors" and their ascendency to power inevitably marked the fall of the Hindus. Though few isolated figures of Brahmans come in his text occasionally as traitors, it was always the others, as a community who occupied the place of the traitor. Gurkhas, Sikhs are also listed along with the Dalits. And they, as cursed by Savarkar, would not find place even in the bottomless pit of hell like the queen of Banka (who colluded with the British)!

Savarkar included sudras in the list of the patriots but not the ‘panchamas. Being an outcaste meant' being a 'traitor' and being a traitor meant being anti-national. He
writes, "Those who persisted in Government service were excommunicated by their caste; no one would eat with them; the Brahmin refused to do Puja for him...The service of the foreigner, of the Feringi, was considered matricide!" (245.). A traitor is treated as an outcaste. Nobody would eat with him as nobody eats with an untouchable. Thus being an outcaste means being an out-nation also! Any cruelty against these 'traitors' was appreciated. Burning houses meant the total destruction of women, children and property. The lower caste women die along with their men for being part of a trait or caste.

'Caste'ing the Nation:

One should remember that Savarkar was writing this text after fifty years of the mutiny. By that time the political understandings had become different and had radically changed. At that time Dalit politics was not on the political dais of the nation. Then why did Savarkar have to construct the Dalits as being anti-'nation.' An irresistible urge to see the lower caste as being the punished is the instinct behind such a portrayal. His treatment of respectless people is an extension of his idea of destroying unwanted communities. For instance see how he fantasies about the juridical administration of Nana Saheb: "Nana Saheb first began the work of giving justice and protection to the inhabitants. The prominent citizens of Cawnpore were called together and men were elected by the majority of them." The orders that Nana gave to these men were to "protect the citizens from...bandit villagers," disgrace the "vagabonds" and "people convicted of small thefts" (198). Punishments were severe like cutting the limbs. This was the romantic idea of Savarkar, where nameless thieves, vagabonds and bandit villagers would be cruelly punished to protect the citizens. Who were these "prominent men" elected to execute justice and the citizens? Who were these vagabonds, village bandits and thieves? It is not far fetched to suggest that the former is the upper caste and the later is the lower caste. At the time of writing this text Savarkar was guided by an impulse to essentialise the Dalits as anti-national, thus justifying the crimes of the upper castes against the Dalits in the process of keeping them out of the nation both imaginatively and virtually.

One can see western impacts on Savarkar's ideas on the nation. The following statement, shows Renan's influence on resurrecting the past: "The nation that has not
consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true it is that a nation must develop its capacity not only of claiming a past but also of knowing how to use it for the furtherance of its future" (i). Throughout his book Savarkar thus uses Hindu religious idioms to invoke a sense of a hindutva past. The whole narration of history is paraphrased as fights by the Hindus against their enemies who range from Alexander and the, British to the lower castes. Savarkar's idea of claiming the past in order to take hold of the future is transparently hindutva! The publisher of this text Mayuresh, refers to the 1857 mutiny as the "Gita of Indian Revolutionary Movement" and Savarkar's own role as that of "Krishna" writes this "Gita" (vii). The wheels of this chariot/nation are in the hands of upper caste Hindu men who often would not mind their women riding it. Thus Altekra’s perception of Dalit woman as traitor of upper castes/home/nation coincides with Savarkar's view of Dalits as betrayers. Both the ideologues believe that elimination of Dalits/Dalit woman from home/nation/nation/upper caste as a solution effective solution.

Gandhi’s Views on rape:

The Notion of the Virtuous Woman

Hinduism essentialises women as bad and good. Through the matter underlying it is now almost clear that all the upper caste women are essentially virtuous and all the lower caste women are depraved. Thus the Dalit woman is defined as the negative of the Hindu woman. It is in the ideas of Gandhi that one can find an exemplary instance of this essentialising mission. He completely endorses the binary by which the different woman are also the bad women.

Gandhi held conservative views on the question of gender and caste. It is difficult to trace his views on Dalit woman directly. The following incidents which indicate his ideas would be able to explain what is in store for Dalit women in the Gandhian worldview. On 29-12-1945 a group of workers of Mahishabad met Gandhi and asked him whether they were supposed to remain silent even when their women were being humiliated. To them Gandhi replies, “After all who protected Sita from Ravana ? The poet tells us that her purity was such that Ravana dared not compass his end without her consent”.24 In another context he says, "While it was true that no one could touch a woman who had the purity...of Sita, it was hard to find a Sita in this age" (201). As it is
well known Gandhi only propogated passive methods of protest for the oppressed people, he says, "The enslaved people should inflict more suffering on themselves to convert their so called enemies the imperialist, capitalist and landlords into their friends. If the oppressed people themselves become pure and just, nobody will be there to oppress them". During the times of partition of India he is reported to have suggested to the victims of sexual violence, "They ought to learn to die before a hair of their head could be injured. He asserted that it was possible for a woman to put an end to herself by choking or biting the tongue" (196). There is nothing that is particularly about the Dalit woman here. But when one observes the implications of Gandhi's conservative views on women and on the other oppressed sections, it is clear that they have dreadful implications for the Dalit woman. When Gandhi suggests that the oppressed should not fight against oppression, but should remain pure and just, and should not be "envious", and when he suggested that a woman should not fight against her rapist, what could be the possible implications for a Dalit woman who is a labourer, Dalit and a woman? Should she retaliate with her natural weapons like nails and teeth (Gandhi allows a woman to use only these two natural weapons against her oppressor) because she is a woman or should she yield without even this feminine mode of retaliation because she is a laborer and a Dalit?

Analogies Between Lower Caste and Bad Women:

Gandhi on Religious Prostitution:

It is Gandhi who drew major analogies between the bad women and the lower castes. In the Hindu scriptures we come across here and there equations drawn between the status of Hindu women and the sudras. Gandhi went further and drew parallels between the lower caste women and the bad devadasis of the upper castes (it is impossible to think of lower caste women devadasis meeting the “mahatma”). It is in his ideas on devadasi women that one can decipher his hatred for the women of lower castes. Gandhi met (as he writes) devadasis in Cocanada in Andhra Province. He called them in his self-righteous style "fallen sisters." He discouraged them from seeking office in the Congress Committees. When the question of their survival came he told them to become "true sanyasinis of India" and told them that they need not dream about
marriage. He suggested that they spin and weave to their heart's content. When he was
told that two "fallen sisters" took to spinning he reacted thus: "These were not young
girls but women over forty who could no longer sell their shame but who would, but for
spinning, have lived on begging. They were, therefore, strictly speaking, weaned from
begging and not from their original trade." Thus Gandhi was not ready to easily believe
that these women could become good. He does not pause to think who he is to pass such
judgments on those women. He thus projects himself as the moral instructor of the nation
though his sexual moral credentials themselves were in question.

The devadasi women of Barisal had been gathered into a welfare scheme where
they were expected to look after the poor, nurse the sick and to give musical training and
so on. In his coercive fashion Gandhi writes, "To say the least, it is putting the cart before
the horse. These sisters are advised to do humanitarian work before reforming
themselves. The idea of giving higher musical training will be accounted as extremely
funny, if it was not tragic in its consequence. For let it be understood that these women
do know how to dance and sing. And they may join all the organizations which have
Satyagraha and non-violence as their creed all the time they are, by their trade, doing
violence to truth and non-violence!" He called their manifesto obscene. He continued his
overreaction and equates them with "professional murderers." He is repelled by their
enrollment in the Congress,"...I would prevent by all the power at my command an
unrepentant professional murderer from signing the creed." Even when he tries to
maintain a balanced reaction and some equanimity, "My whole heart is with these
sisters", he fails to hide his intolerance and immediately. He goes back all too quickly
to his hateful tone, "These sisters have acquired a status which for the sake of the moral
well-being of society they must not have. We will not incorporate an association of
known thieves for the purpose for which these women have formed their association.
There is keen warrant for this association, for these are more dangerous than thieves. The
latter steal material possessions, the former steal virtue." After putting all the burden of
keeping the morals of the society on these women he tends to make comparisons between
the lower castes and these women.
Equating Dalits with devadasis was the routine practice of Gandhi. He writes that there: "are some women, like the panchamas, born to a life of degradation." He calls this "moral leprosy". A Dalit feminist can only contemplate, "What is moral leprosy?". He does not clarify whether being a panchama or being a devadasi is moral leprosy? Another question is whether being born in a community of devadasi/panchama (where they have no option) amounts to moral leprosy. Or is it moral leprosy when they are not able to get rid of these identities (where they have chance to leave it but stick to it due to various personal incapacities)? As usual he does not care to specify. There is also a tendency in Gandhi to treat the devadasis as actually the lower castes. There is an article in "Women and Social Injustice" where Gandhi consents to an overenthusiastic correspondent's view that devadasis are almost like Harijans. The correspondent (who himself belongs to a devadasi community) writes: "Harijans and devadasis are the only two communities which are almost in the same degree of depravity. Of course they will have to help themselves to moral elevation. Still a teacher like you would educate them and the society more quickly than they can do it for themselves. These are two sister movements. Please don’t forget the sister community in your enthusiasm for the Harijans." Gandhi does not clarify to this young man that lower castes were not by definition morally wretched.

Implications of Orientalism for the Dalit Woman:

Orientalism as an ideology is prevalent in most of the writings of the foreigners whether they glorified or laughed at India. Though most of the Orientalists were in praise of India there are a few foreign writers and thinkers who pointed out its caste and gender systems of oppression. But the aesthetic spirit that Orientalism had injected into the general intellectual air of those times seems to have effected most of the foreign writers even when they took a critical outlook towards the backwardness of India. The point is that Orientalism as an ideology was operating as an unconscious guide in forming the intellectual opinion of those times. This, whether individual writers were defending or rejecting Indian culture. It was Max Muller who thought till his death that 'caste' is what India can teach to the rest of the world. In other words, if there is anything the world has to learn from India it is the organization caste, according to Max Muller.
There are other writers who did not blindly valorize the crooked systems of Indian patriarchy and caste system. Yet, it is evident from their writings that they were certainly influenced and motivated by such Orientalist constructions. The following text elucidates how even those western writers who rejected caste as a meaningful system were preoccupied with the scholarly instincts structured by the theory of Orientalism, which saw only the upper castes as the real Orientals. The lower castes were almost entirely ignored in these formulations.

**Katherine Mayo’s “Mother India”: A “Drain Inspector’s Report” or an Important Archival Source of Orientalism?**

There are very few academic works, which have tried to focus on the realities presented in this book. It was not even been given an archival status. Nationalists and post-colonialists are united in despising it as an ethnocentric work. They see it as a writing that, plotted to ridicule Indian nationalism and to discourage their efforts to gain self-rule. They have not even tried to extract useful information, which has been incorporated about Hindu women. The chapter "Method of Skipping" elaborated on this dimension. But for a Dalit feminist this text offers very crucial historical information both about the conditions of upper caste women in general, and the failure of colonial scholarship to imagine the lower caste women as indispensable Orientals. This is despite the fact that Mayo predicated her text on the denial of any Orientalist presumptions. It shows how powerful the caste ideology was in injecting even those foreign thinkers, who vehemently refused to see any good in the native culture.

Mayo’s *Mother India* is dedicated to describe the pathos of the Indian woman, particularly the Hindu women. But interestingly, she makes scattered references, throughout the text to the lower caste women as well. The Indian legislature was preponderantly Hindu. She tries to discuss various problems that Hindu women face due to this. What is striking in the illustrations of these two categories of women is that they are set as contrasting figures. The upper caste woman is Mayo’s object of study and gets all the due sympathies from the writer where as, the Dalit woman gets severe sneers from her. The former makes collaborations with the people like men, Hindu priests or a cruel mother-in-law in oppressing the Hindu woman. In the whole text only on one occasion, does the
lower caste woman appear as a figure who deserves a mild treatment, which is due to a real woman. The text exhibits that it is the upper caste woman who is the perfect sign of Orientalism and that the other woman is incompetent to fit into it. The ideology and politics behind Orientalism could be out of ethnocentric (this became a powerful ideological tool for the hindutvas and many other mainstream people of today) preoccupations of the author also, but the present analysis tries to understand Orientalism as holding more than ethnocentrism for the lower caste women. The scholar tries to argue that more than ethnocentrism it is the caste ideology which was crucial in framing the ideas of Mayo towards the Indian women.

About the torture related to procreation, she writes that child-bearing and procreation are the women’s subjects "be her caste high or low" (30). Such an over emphasis on procreation and her refusal to give priority to other socio-economic factors reflects her commitment to liberal (to some extent radical biological determinism also) western feminism. In fact her entire text pivots around this phenomenon. Mayo makes blanket statements like: "Rich or poor, high caste or low caste, the mother of a son will idolize the child" (79). In the chapter titled after the title of her text "Mother India", Mayo gives an elaborate description of how Indian women suffer during childbirth. Here the legitimate victim is again the Hindu woman. The Dalit woman enters only as a "bazaar dhai" a name given by Mayo. She writes, "According to the Hindu code, a woman in childbirth and in convalescence there from is ceremonially unclean...contaminating all she touches. Therefore only those become dhais who are themselves of the unclean, 'untouchable' class, the class whose filthy habits will be added by the orthodox Hindu..." (90). Mayo gives elaborate description of the torture that a Hindu woman suffers during her delivery. Mayo often sides with the suffering woman as a perfect and helpless victim and shows great hatred toward this untouchable midwife. She writes: "Sweeper-girl or Brahman, outcaste or queen, there is essentially little to chose between their lots..." (99). Despite also observing how lower caste women are left to do these unclean occupations, she goes on villainising the former. In the next scene the dhai is depicted as colluding with the parasitic male Brahman priest to lead the helpless pregnant Hindu woman to a torturous death. In the very next scene the lower caste woman again appears as a murderer of the helpless woman in labour. A woman
who dies before delivering the baby is said to bring evil to the family. Therefore, the burden of saving the family from that evil falls on this *dhai*. Mayo now sets about describing the devilishness of this *lower caste* midwife:

First she brings and rubs it [some spice] into the dying eyes, that the soul may be blinded and unable to find its way out. Then she takes two long iron nails, and, stretching out her victim's unresisting arms for the poor creature knows and accepts her fate - drives a spike straight each palm fast into the floor (102-3).

Thus the Dalit woman is seen to collude with Hindu families to kill those Hindu women who are incapable of becoming mothers of a hundred sons. Mayo’s ethnocentrism and the caste background of the "medical witnesses" (those who gave such versions to the writer) portray the Dalit woman as a direct agent through whom the Hindu patriarchs execute their violence.

However, it is more important to look at the real position of the Dalit women that peeps through to the reader from this text. It is not necessary to give more space to unravel the whiteness of Mayo since after all, it was Hinduism which had oppressed Dalit women historically not white ethnocentrism. Mayo shows some sympathy for the helplessness of the Dalit woman, "It would be unjust to assume, however, that the *dhai*, for all her monstrous deeds, is a blameworthy creature. Every move that she makes is a part of the ancient and accepted ritual of her calling. Did she omit or change any part of it, nothing would be gained; simply the elder women of the households she serves would revile her for incapacity and call in another more faithful to the creed" (102). Mayo kindly focuses a tiny fraction of her scholarly light on the miseries of Dalit midwife also:

**Her services include** attendance at the time of confinement...during which no member of the family will approach the patient because of her uncleanliness. During this time the *dhai* does all that for the **sick woman and the infant**. At its end she is expected to clean the defiled room and coat with cow-dung its floor and walls (102).

Mayo explains what all the Dalit woman gets for doing such degrading jobs:
She receives her pay in accordance with the sex of the child that was born... The poor pay the *dhai* for her fortnight's work the equivalent of four cents for a son and two to three cents for a daughter. Herself the poorest of the poor, she has no means of her own. None are anywhere provided for her. And so, the slaughter goes on (103).

Now she proceeds to write about the selfishness and ignorance of this *dhai*. These women will refuse to leave this tradition since it is the source of income for them. She will also not cut the cord unless a coin already falls into her hand. She therefore becomes a very chap person, in Mayo's description, one who trades in the life of a fellow woman for a mere coin. She is also depicted as a woman who quarrels with men "about the size of the coin that he should lay in her palm, on which to cut the cord without which coin already in her possession no canny *dhai* will operate" (104). Apart from this vulgarization of the role of Dalit women, what such ethnocentric texts do is to totally deny the experience, and medicinal knowledge that these women possessed due to their forcible historic commitment to this field of work for generations.

Mayo cites Abbe Dubois in this text. For both it is the upper caste woman who is the object of study. A Brahman woman's state is compared to the Brahman man's not with the lower caste woman's. The point of reference and concern of the study is thus the Brahman woman not the lower caste one. The lower caste woman comes into the picture when they have to measure how much the Brahman woman is degraded in relation to her male counterpart. The oppression of the lower caste woman is never measured against the oppression of the upper caste woman. The logic is that matters of different qualities cannot be compared.

Mainstream feminists must definitely recognize the differences in the ethnocentric or oriental outlook of western intellectuals. Hindu women succeeded in getting the position of a legitimate and complete subject or object in these ethnocentric studies. Why did Dalit women fail to attract the ethnocentric gaze of these intellectuals? The reason is that, the Dalit woman unlike the Hindu woman is not a complete woman, a symbol of the victim of misogyny. A victim of Hindu patriarchy should be the opposite of a dalit woman, namely she should be a tender looking, meek, slender woman not a lower caste woman who labours outside the home. Her victimhood is multiple and mixed unlike the
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Hindu woman’s who is oppressed exclusively because of her gender. Moreover, to the oriental, ethnocentric, objectifying academic desire of western intellectuals like Mayo, the Dalit woman, with all her intersecting identities as a lower caste, laborer etc, cannot become a complete female victim.

Likewise for Mayo only upper caste devadasis were visible. She sees these hindu women as victims of the Hindu religion. But in case of the ‘untouchable caste’ she writes that they had prostitution as a second industry. Though Mayo attributes this to the general social degradation of the people in this land, the figure of the Dalit woman does not seem to invoke the same kind of sympathy that the figure of the Hindu woman so easily raised. Moreover, this issue is discussed in the chapter which primarily discusses the caste question not in the rest of the chapters where she has elaborately discusses various kinds of women’s problems. The lower caste woman is thus according to Mayo’s understanding a lesser woman.

CONCLUSION:
Liberation of the “Indian ” Woman was an Upper Caste Affair;

Early Hindu male reformers placed faith in the westerners as the liberators of their women and the British too were able to perform such roles. As Spivak puts it (in an ironic way) the action of “White men saving the brown woman from the brown men” was a completely the upper caste affair (Spivak does not see this as an upper caste affair any way). But this existed only in the early 19th century when the upper caste men still believed in the goodness of their colonial masters or when they were still under the impression that it was feasible to convince them of their common ancestry. But still when it became evident that the British colonizers were ready only to operate as civilizing agents not as liberating forces the Hindu male community became alert. At this juncture only the Hindu woman was pulled back to the inner domain. Her status altered from being an exchangeable terrain to being a possessed and encompassed terrain again. The British man could no longer claim access to the upper caste. In other words the Hindu woman could no longer offer herself as exchange to the British man because the British
men clarified by this time that there existed no qualitative equality (Spivak's term\(^3\)) between them. In such an altered situation it was no more possible for the Hindu man to make exchanges with the British male community by allowing them to interfere in their internal subject namely the Hindu woman. When the upper caste women stopped fetching profits, the subject of female liberation was put off till the achievement of independence from the British. In other words, this eternal procrastination of the liberation of the Indian woman became inevitable because the Hindu woman was no more allowed by the British colonizers as fit for the barter. Since the Dalit woman is not an item for barter between the relatively less powerful upper caste and the more sophisticated British colonialists her liberation was not accounted for as national liberation by the nationalists or as an objective of the civilizing mission by the British.

**What Does all this Mean to the Dalit Woman?**

It is by now an uncontested reality that there exists a great amount of congruence between hindutva ideology and the ideology of the mainstream nationalists. Broadly, such a congruence manifests itself in oppressing the Dalit woman in multiple ways. The above are some of the implications, which were renewed to suit the mainstream nationalist purposes of imagining the nation with the core women and the women of periphery. For the reasons already mentioned, postcolonial theory, which could not make any constructive criticism on native nationalism, turns a blind eye to all these facts and thus remains prejudiced about the Dalit woman as national subject.

**Notes:**


2. *Yama Samhitah*, p.279.


6 Atri Samhitha, p. 331.

7 Sanka Samhitha, Chap. 4, p. 10.

8 Gautama Samhitha, Chap. XXIX, p. 720.


10 See Appendix in V.D.S, p. 598-9 & 630.


13 Sanka Samhita, Chap. 4 (9), p. 617.

14 Gautama Samhitha, Chap. 4, p. 663.

15 Atri Samhita, pp. 326; also see Parasara Samhita, Chap. 7(9), p. 569. This samhita says that a brahmana marrying a girl who achieved puberty, should be ill treated as the husband of a sudhra wife (vrisalipati). He should not be addressed, nor accepted to sit at the same row with other brahmanas at a dinner.

16 Gautama Samhitha, Chap. 12, p. 683.

17 ibid., Chap. 24, p. 710.


19 Katyayana Samhita, Chap. 8(6&8), p. 372.

20 Daksha Samhita, Chap IV (18), p. 447.


22 ibid., Chap. 5(24-25), p. 477.


27 Young India, 15-9-1921.
28 Young India, 28-5-1925, p.132.
29 Young India, 25-6-1925, p. 133-4.


