CHAPTER - III

NATIONALISM AND MASCULINITY

Even if we die, patriotism will remain in us.

From our corpses will be permeating the divine scent of motherland. (Bhagath Singh sang this song while he was walking towards the gallows. qtd. in Raghavan: 151).

The culture of nationalism is constructed to emphasize and resonate with masculine cultural themes. The ‘manly’ virtues of heroism, independence, courage, strength, rationality, will, backbone and virility were celebrated during the period of Indian national movement. Terms like honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness. (Nagel 1998: 251-52).

Masculinity represents a critical site for colonialism, anti-colonialism and nationalism. State power, citizenship, nationalism, militarism, revolution, political violence, dictatorship and democracy are understood as masculinist, involving masculinist institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities (Pateman 1989; Connell 1995). The concept of a single-powerful nation state promoted masculine ideology for its own sustenance.

Irrespective of its origin in modernism, unlike colonialism, anti-colonialism and nationalism, masculinity remained a transparent, inadequately theorized construct. (Krishnaswami 6) The concept of masculinity in various contexts, nationalism among them, constituted a major subtext. This chapter engages closely with the select texts, biographies and autobiographies of Nationalist leaders of Kerala to explore the gender framework within which the nationalist masculinities were fashioned and legitimized.
The pertinent question this chapter seeks to raise with regard to Indian nationalism in general and nationalists in Kerala in particular is why do men and women appear to have very different goals and agendas for the nation. The critical role played by the patriarchal leadership of the National movement and party mechanism in defining and patrolling the borders of female social and political existence needs to be probed further.

Nationalism and its links to manhood have been discussed in a variety of cultural contexts. For instance, Mosse (1996) has produced the associated histories of European nationalism and masculinity; Oliven (1996) has discussed Brazilian gauchos and national identity; Guy (1992) examines the historical relationship between sexuality, family and nation in Argentina. Richard Cashman has made an interesting comparison:

Indian nationalism was less radical, in a cultural sense, than Irish where nationalists attacked cricket and other English sports as objectionable elements of colonial culture and patronized Gaelic Sports instead. The Indian national leaders attacked political and economic aspects of British imperialism but retained an affection for some aspects of English culture. (1979:58 ).

Social science scholarship in India has paid scant attention to how the public that gets constituted as masculine has been structured historically in different regional contexts during the colonial nationalist period and after it. It has been argued that the works on colonialism and nationalism have not addressed the masculine nature of the public sphere that was constituted at the time. (Sinha1995; Krishnaswami 1998; Sruthi Kapila 2005).
Colonial Masculinity

The politics of masculinity has acted as an ideology of both colonialism and anti-colonialism. As Mrinalini Sinha observed, colonial masculinity—a politics that informed both the colonizer and the colonized—illustrates the multiple ways in which masculinity cemented relations of power in the colonies (1995). It constituted a hierarchy of masculinities in which an elite ‘White’ masculinity presided above both the loyal but simple, martial or manly races and clever but treacherous, feminized or effeminate native men.

Masculinity acted as the hegemonic ideology of British imperialism in India. As argued by Krishnaswami, the cult of masculinity rationalized imperial rule by equating an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness with racial, national, cultural and moral superiority (15). A discursive terrain was constructed to spread the ideal model of English masculinity through the well organized colonial apparatus. Similar to the categorical statements of Macaulay, who attributed effeminacy to Bengali men, is the following statement of a divisional commissioner in Bengal, J. Munro:

The training of natives from their childhood, the enervating influence of zenana on their upbringing, early marriage, low moral standard resulting from caste distinctions and the influence of centuries of subjugation all tend to hinder the development in Bengalis of those manly and straightforward qualities which under other conditions are found in Englishmen (Krishnaswami: 74)

This encapsulates the mentality of colonialists. In short, ‘colonial masculinity’ was a cultural and epistemological project of colonial domination.
In general, and as historians of Victorian and Edwardian Britain have noted, the colonial power invested much in cults of manliness and masculinity, an investment which articulated in specific ways with British imperialism. A noted study (Nandy 1983) on the psychology of colonialism shows a language of homology between the sexual and the political in colonial culture, and suggests that the British imperial ideology in India was hyper-masculine through maintaining a rigid dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine that was part of the gender ideologies of the post Enlightenment West. The ideals of Victorian manliness, athleticism and militarism featured centrally in studies of British and Anglo-Indian society, especially in accounts of the colonial Indian bureaucracy and the Indian army (Sinha: 1999).

The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919 by the British was the most ruthless act against the national movement. General Dyer’s testimony on what prompted him to resort to such bloody action implies that a crucial aspect of maintaining peace in Amritsar included upholding British military prestige through the exercise of force. Dyer explains that he rejected the option to disperse the crowd without firing on it out of the anxiety that the crowd would make a laughing stock out of him. (Bose 2006: 36) Bose comments, “His display of force … was meant to showcase the power of the colonial military apparatus and to shore up the subject position of its male agents.” (Bose 2006: 37).

Physical Culture and Colonialism

An unprecedented enthusiasm for athletic and gymnastic disciplines swept Britain and Europe during the nineteenth century. These disciplines and the values that underpinned them found their way to British India, where they at once reinforced stereotypes of Indian effeminacy and at the same time offered methods to rebut that
image. In many respects 20th century sports as they are intimately linked to the powerful expression of masculinity, emerged out of the shift colonial discourse generated. Horse riding, gymnastics, hunting wrestling etc... produced gendered bodies.

The cultivation of masculine strength by participating in indigenous sports like wrestling and body building soon came to be regarded as insufficient to counter the politics of colonial state. In many respects modern wrestling was intimately connected to the powerful expression of masculinity that emerged out of colonial encounter with native physical culture. It represented colonial politics during the nationalist struggle in terms of the way in which it produced gendered bodies, and principles of gendered health.

Kumbalath Sankupilla was a tall and dynamic leader of freedom movement and the movement for responsible government in Travancore. He was a well known wrestler too. He says that physical power helped him in his social and political activities. (Kumbalam: 37) Sanku Pilla was a passionate practitioner of physical exercise and wrestling, he even exhibited his wrestling skills at Congress conferences.

The ideal of energetic service to the nation is addressed in following passage:

Even after marriage I did not stop exercise. I did it very punctually. With rigorous exercise all my ailments were gone. My body resembled a wrestler’s body I realized that everyone should essentially have this practice of exercise. Celibacy and such practices are not obstacles to exercise... One grows smart and bold with it. This is my experience. (Kumbalam: 37)
Fluanting and exhibiting a healthy body can be interpreted as both defensive and compensatory, as nationalists strive to prove their confidence and make up for collective failures in the historical past. And also as Tosh observed, “Public affirmation was and still is, absolutely central to masculine status.” (2005:35)

The Indian ‘Cult’ of Manliness

Sir C. Sankaran Nair, former president of Indian National Congress (1897) and Viceroy’s executive council member, made the following statement in his autobiography, “The spirit of manliness and independence was attempted to be fostered by the Sivaji Cult.” (1998:12)

This is a popular historical account of manliness. The then Subedar of Kalyan met with defeat in a combat with Sivaji. As Sivaji reached his tent for a short repose the general of his force came and said that they have procured something very precious from the enemy and requested him to accept the offering. Outside the tent there was a veiled palanquin. The extremely charming lady inside was the Subedar’s daughter-in-law. The general remarked that the most beautiful woman of India should belong to him.

When Sivaji approached the palanquin and lifted the veil, the lady was anxiously hiding her face with her trembling hands. On hearing the word “Amma” she looked in wonder to find the valiant emperor standing with folded hands. There was grandeur in his voice when Sivaji assured her that in India all women are respected as mothers. No one will even look at her with disrespect. He ordered that the lady should be returned with all queenly respect to her relatives. He sternly admonished the general that it was demeaning and unbecoming of a man of India to thus offend a woman.
There is an incident associated with Swami Vivekananda, the handsome, sturdy, world renowned saint of India, that stands out among such narratives of ‘manliness’. In America when he was being greatly celebrated by the dailies, a young lady once expressed her desire to have a son in Swami’s form. The very moment he knelt before her and with folded hands solemnly offered himself as her son, “Here I am, your son. There is one Vivekananda. There cannot be another. Your son is here at your service.” Thus narratives proliferate.

The influence of Vivekananda on social reformers and nationalists alike in India in general and in Kerala in particular has been subjected to rigorous scholarship. Unlike his Guru Sree Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda promoted virile Hinduism. He was in tune with the spirit of the age which witnessed the emergence of Nationalism. As noted by Krishnaswami, Vivekananda’s hard gendering was locked in a Manichean battle with colonialism and, consequently, carried with it all the normative trappings of colonial masculinity (44).

Attributing contemporary Hindu weakness or emasculation to the loss of textual Brahmanism and social Kshatriyahood—a loss that had robbed Hindus of those original Aryan qualities they shared with Westerners—he tried to turn Hinduism into an organized monotheism, complete with The Book (the Vedas and the Gita), priests (order of monks), and even missionaries. Echoing the novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, this activist monk, who declared manliness to be his "new gospel," preached that the androgynous motifs of Hindu mythology were dissolute, enervating and effeminate. “Who cares what your scriptures say?” he asked defiantly. “I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can arouse my countrymen, immersed in darkness, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of Karma yoga.” (Krishnaswami: 44-45) Attempting to arouse his followers to action,
Vivekananda admonished them: “No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion I want. I want the strength, manhood, kshatrabirya or the virility of a warrior.” Musing that “the older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness” he prayed, “O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me – Make me a man!” (Krishnaswami: 45)

**Invention of Nation, Tradition and Identities**

According to Eric Hobsbawm, the nation is an important example of “invented tradition” (1983:1-14). Benedict Anderson’s conceptualization of how the nation is “imagined” places the individual’s national attitudes in the realm of knowledge and cognition. But this idea fails to explain the stronger passionate attachments that elicit self sacrifices for the nation (Smith 140), of the kind described by Nirad C. Chaudhuri in his autobiography:

An eagerness to serve and sacrifice ourselves was the third element in our patriotic emotion. Hence forward, we thought, we had no right to live any other life but a dedicated life. Our country was waiting for us to rescue and redeem her. She could be only what our faith and effort would make her. The sense of the demand made on us by our country was so real that it seemed as if actual calls of distress from some living person were reaching us, and we felt guilty if we could not show some activity at every hour of the day which could be interpreted as the service, direct or indirect, of our country. (1997: 210-211)

The creation or discovery of a national identity was a crucial element in the nationalist struggles. It was often inspired by a romantic rediscovery of ancient custom and literature, campaigns for the reinstatement of a suppressed language and a stress on ethnicity and religion. (Perking 2008:68). Nationalism and national identities
developed in the modern period from the 18th century onwards, the period in which colonialism started taking roots in India. Nationalist fervour in India began to ferment broadly after the revolt of native states, landlords, and disgruntled British Indian soldiers against the rule of the East India Company from 1857 to 1868.

The nationalist movement for independence was much more than just a political struggle waged against foreign rulers. Not only did the national identity of modern India consolidate itself during these mobilizations, many of the regional and community identities were also shaped and sharpened during this period. Historically gendered symbols, identities and divisions of power, labour, and resources have been central features of nationalism (Peterson and Ryan 1993: 190). Along with the rise of these identities the newly emerged middle classes also spent a great deal of energy in generating new knowledges about their cultures and regions.

While most of the nationalist leaders were trying to find ways and means of negotiating between the traditions they inherited from their pasts and the ensuing modernity they received from the colonial education system, they confronted a larger issue. The challenge for them was to work out a case where India could be represented as a single cultural and political entity, on the basis of which they could imagine nationhood for India. To the advantage of these ideologies of the nationalist and regional movements, a world view was already being created by colonial scholarship, administrative and legal apparatus. The post-industrial Victorian world view from the colonizers percolated down to the Indian masses. This male centric, patriarchal family system was privileged over other pluralities.

Most of this colonial knowledge system would have obviously been found to be very useful by the middle class leaders of the Indian nationalist movement while trying to visualize India as a national entity. Many of these ideas about India would
have initially come to them as plain truths or facts about their society. However their involvement with the mobilization of Indian masses and in this process their first hand exposure to the realities of India, would have also been equally important factors in shaping their understanding of the Indian society. It could be argued that it was the combination of received knowledge about India from available literature produced mostly by Western writers, and the nature of their involvement with the people that eventually formed their own views of the Indian society.

Moreover, the figure of the woman was important in the construction of oppositional identities by both the nationalists and colonisers. The representation of women as the objects of male gaze or male protection within colonial texts was central to the process of constructing a male national identity in the colonial period.

The nation – a community and not a society – provides a framework for a male-male world, for eroticism without women, sanctioned by heterosexuality. According to Mosse, 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, the sublimation of sensuality into the leadership of society as the nation (Mosse1985:13). Nationalism devalues both women and the body as a source of desire. It has been argued that the ideals of warfare and masculinity that men pursued, and a kind of cult of virility, follows from their unsuccessful differentiation as selves in their development as men. This virile or strong self has become a cultural norm in the patriarchal society, and is particularly present in moments of ethnic or national conflict, as is its counter image the submissive woman. It is argued that to become a man, a boy must separate himself from his primary relationships to his mother and repress his feminine side. Separating from the first symbiotic, naturally organic union with the feminine leads the future
man to create a secondary organic and natural replacement claim of belonging to the community.

Thus Indian nationalism and its proponents aspired for masculinisation of Indian political life as a panacea for effeminism. This masculinisation is to be achieved through a training of individuals so that they are willing to perceive their identities as a part of the singularized identity of the nation. Such heroic actions kept the movement vibrant and the followers inspired.

The project of Nationalism soon became a process of remasculinisation which emphasized on two continuous developments. One was to build up physical strength, and the other to assert greater control over their women. While at the individual level the measure of masculinity becomes physical strength, courage, valour, assertiveness, self control, patriotism, nationality etc., at the community level it is the control over their women and the relative status of their women. Individual measures of masculinity are not to be dissociated from community.

Masculinisation of nationalist struggle is well reflected in the heroic actions of its young stalwarts of Kerala. As the biographer of P. Krishna Pillai (Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party of Kerala in 1934) notes,

The police swooped down on the volunteers. Heads were broken. Bones cracked … the leaders fell unconscious. Only one man refused to yield. The dark lean figure in blood- spattered white khaddar cloth, holding high the national tricolor…. who was this hero...this youngster who raised the tempest?... Someone answered in words full of pride and emotion, “A man from Travancore, by name Krishna Pilla.” (Krishnan 1971:16).
Elsewhere we find KrishnaPilla blocking the jail Superintendent saying; “We’re political prisoners. We’re here for national liberation. You should not ill-treat us. You should be well behaved and humane, or else we know how to teach it” (Sekhar, N. C. 223).

Another dimension of nationalist masculinity is revealed in the incident where Sree Narayana Guru was responding to the statement of an inmate at the Sivagiri Ashram that “if Indians spit with unity at the British they would drown in it.” In his characteristic vein Guru said “But the moment one sees the White man his saliva dries up. Why so?” (Balakrishnan: 162)

The autobiographical works of nationalist leaders and the nationalist imagination of the male fraternity took shape within historically specific contexts and conditions. These imaginings arouse the faith and motivation of the people to involve in the larger cause. The selected texts mostly highlight comradeship for the larger cause of national liberation. These texts also demonstrate how the personal and the social bonds of friendship are linked to the political sphere.

Here is another experience of jail-breaking:

By 2 o'clock, a hole big enough for one person to pass through had been made. I peeped out of the hole muttering to myself, “let imperialism be damned, long live the freedom struggle”. We were eager to get out although it was pitch dark and raining outside. I felt that Mother India was shedding tears of joy to welcome her beloved children who, piercing jail walls, were coming to rejoin the struggle to break the bonds of slavery. Those tears moistened our heated brains. As though nature too wanted to help us, she flashed electric torches of lightning so that we wouldn't go astray in the darkness or encounter
other pitfalls. Even nature was against imperialist greed and repression! . . . We challenged imperialism. Where are your troops and police, jail wardens and thick walls and C.I.D. officers? Discard at least now your delusion that you can thwart man's spirit of freedom with guns and swords and stone walls. We have a weapon that vanquishes all these: unalloyed patriotism and love for the working class. We will serve the people, no matter whether we starve or die. I will try not to step inside the cursed jail walls anymore. If possible, I will smash these walls and set the prisoners free. With these thoughts we bade the jail walls farewell. (Gopalan: 148-149)

**Nationalist and Anti-Colonial Masculinities in India**

Each nation is always conceived as “a deep horizontal comradeship,” “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail there.” (Anderson 47). Nationalism does not perceive the gendered or hegemonic nature of this comradeship. In fact what is found from the studies of India’s freedom struggle and from other studies on masculinities is that there is no one notion of masculinity. There are different competing notions of nationalist masculinities.

Early nationalists, mostly English educated, emulated and imbibed the very notion of masculinity which sought to subordinate them. The anti-colonial movements often demonstrated a preoccupation with colonial masculinity. (Gouda 161-174) It appropriated and contested colonial gender norms through masculinities that were militarized and self-disciplined.

The immediate influence of Western masculinity in India was the reordering and revival of traditional conceptions of masculinity.(Nandy1983)Thus three streams
of masculinity emerged in the colonial period: firstly, brahmanic masculinity which emphasized a hard asceticism, renunciation and sublimation, secondly, *kshatriya* masculinity, which emphasized a hard aggression, pleasure and good living and thirdly, androgyny, particularly for men, that evolved out of Indian tradition and was held up as a spiritual ideal. (Krishnaswami 42)

In India of the colonial period it can be argued variously that nationalist masculinity was intertwined with Hindu masculinity. Naturally the ideal of Hindu masculinity weakened and eroded under colonial discourse. As scholars argued, androgyny got rescripted as effeminacy, and Hindu men felt forced to reform themselves and their religion in the image of a muscular, monotheistic, heterosexual, masculine Protestantism (Sinha 1995; Krishnaswami 1998).

**Debates on Gandhian Masculinity**

It was the Gandhian twist in nationalism especially with Champaran Satyagraha, that finally revived, reformed, and explicated androgyny as an alternative to colonial masculinity. (Nandy1983:8-9) Ashish Nandy produces a binary of masculinity and femininity in his understanding of the West and the East and presents Gandhi’s struggle as one that posits the feminine principle against the masculine (Nandy 1983: 52-53). He termed *purushatva, naritva* and *klibatva* as the foundations on which colonial power in India operated. He argued that whereas earlier nationalist movements tried to articulate indigenous masculinities in opposition to colonial machismo, Gandhi tried to elevate femininity as the foundation for his anti-colonial politics. Gandhi successfully countered the colonial ideology which preferred masculinity to femininity and androgyny. Interestingly there were moments when Gandhi explicitly expressed his desire to transcend his biological sex. (Nandy 1983) In the instance of Gandhi, it was altogether a different game, as the politics of anti-
colonialism produced a deliberately softer, gentler and almost androgynous masculinity.

The dominant stream of nationalist movement in India led by Gandhians yoked nationalist fervour with masculinity. The ideal of masculinity was conceived as standing for the virtues of self respect, justice, ethical conduct, responsibility, and enlightened leadership and of femininity as courage, sacrifice, inspiration, and source of strength (Chatterjee 1994:26). Gandhiji believed that it would be possible for India to achieve independence from the clutches of British colonialism only through the nonviolent method. He tried to give philosophical justification to demonstrate that a nonviolent method was better and bitterly criticized those who practiced the violent method for falling prey to modern civilization.

His ideology of nationalism on the contrary has also been argued as one of the most masculine expressions of patriarchal politics. Naturally, the rhetoric of brahmacharya (celibacy) promoted during the nationalist discourse, is aggressively male. As Joseph S.Alter argued, male sexuality, the metaphors of conquest, penetration, and violent domination are absent from the discourse of celibate power (Alter 1994: 62).

Curiously both Gandhiji and Godse invoked Krishna’s teachings to Arjuna in the Bhagavath Gita for entirely different purposes. Godse justified the murder of Gandhi as the performance of his duty. Gandhiji relied on the Karma theory of peaceful constructive programme to initiate changes in the country. Thus inspiration for destruction and construction could be derived from the same source. It shows the multiplicity of masculine derivatives that emerged during the making of modern colonial India.
During the colonial period social prestige was increasingly defined in terms of professional and administrative jobs and positions, but the kind of status was acquired through blatant imitation or mimicry as Bhabha argued (Bhabha: 1984: 127). Hence, to provide a dimension to native masculinity, Gandhi attempted an alternative.

In his response to Gandhian masculinity Sir. C. Sankaran Nair dismisses it as ineffectual:

Satyagraha or soul force, was too metaphysical a doctrine for ordinary mortals to follow. Non-violence he regarded as almost effeminate. Violence he could understand, but he disapproved of it as it was not likely to be effective in the prevailing circumstance in India. He objected to it not on moral grounds, as Gandhiji did, but purely for practical reasons (Menon, KPS 1967:121)

Sankaran Nair was unable to get over his distress at Mahatma Gandhi’s methods till the end of his life. He thought that Gandhiji was needlessly alarming the British Government and this enabled the Government to forestall him. It was a mistake on the part of Gandhiji to have held out the threat of repudiation of public debts by India. The result of this threat was that stringent financial safeguards were included in ‘the white paper’. To be forewarned was to be forearmed, and the British Government armed themselves with extraordinary powers. “Who but an imbecile,” said Sankaran Nair “would disclose his plan of operation to the enemy.” K.P.S.Menon concludes that “Gandhiji believed in an open warfare with the British Government; Sankaran Nair, in tactical warfare.” (1967:118).

Sir. C. Sankaran Nair represented a British educated elite masculinity that adopted a strategy of cooperation, sustenance and change. He had subscribed to
the more practical view that self government could be achieved only through relentless constitutional pressure, backed by hard and unremitting work. (Menon, KPS 1967)

In another context Menon reminisces,

“A politician”, said Sankaran Nair to me once, “must not expect to enjoy the fruits of his labours. Had it not been for me, the reformed councils would not have come into existence, at any rate in their present form. And yet, the Congress would not even give a constituency for me to get into them. I am a reactionary because I crossed Gandhiji’s path”. (2010:99).

Hindu nationalists during the colonial period formed cow protection leagues, and though Gandhiji unequivocally condemned the violence that accompanied efforts to induce Muslims to give up cow slaughter, he described cow protection as an ‘ennobling creed’. Gandhiji went on to declare that no one who did not believe in the protection of the cow could possibly be a Hindu.

Kesavadev, who as a public speaker propagated nationalist, communist ideas in the public sphere of Kerala, narrates an interesting event which represents a non-Gandhian sense of nationalist masculinity:

Give him a plate of meat and two appams,” Bodheswaran directed the man at the teashop. Kesavadev was shocked and said, “I do not eat meat”. Bodheswaran asked, “Don’t you chant Vedic mantras? . . . Don’t you know Rishis composed Vedic mantras while they were languishing after eating beef and drinking Soma. ” While eating the stuff with hesitation, Dev thought that Bodheswaran shared his own thoughts to a large extent. (Kesavdev:182)
A section of those who regarded Gandhiji as the great leader of India’s political liberation also shared this notion: “Without losing an iota of great regard and respect for Gandhiji Bodheswaran stated, “those deers who eat grass and drink water to confront the British gun will not fetch you freedom.” (Kesavadev: 183). Kesavadev admits that he too had similar convictions. Vinay Lal has observed that a discourse was current during the early phase of nationalist movement which meant to persuade many Indian nationalists that vegetarianism had rendered the Hindu effeminate. (Vinay Lal 2010: 147).

Kumbalath Sankupilla was a hypermasculine leader of the nationalist stream of Travancore State Congress which was fighting for responsible government against the rule of the Diwan and the King. He describes the situation when he, an admirer of Gandhi had to support a violent move against the Diwan. The nationalists, socialists and communists together nurtured enmity towards the Travancore Diwan Ramaswami Iyer for his repressive policies. In the wake of Indian independence he mooted the plan of an American model of government for an independent Travancore. Both the moderates and the extremists opposed the move. A group of socialist youth conspired to kill the Diwan. The man entrusted with the risky task was K.C.S. Mony, a young activist of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Kumbalam has reserved two chapters of his autobiography for K.C.S. Mony to narrate the historic event in his own words:

I felt that whatever I was doing was foolish. I need not have personal vendetta towards Ramaswami Iyer. Till then I have not been taken to the lock up; I have not been beaten up. There are many who have been subject to extremely brutal persecution. Can’t any of them do this? Is it that only I love my country? After a while I doubted if my thoughts weren’t artificial. I looked into the watch of the person sitting next to
me. For some time I observed the movement of the short needle. It was as if the very last moments of my life were running past me into darkness, as I had read in some novels. But, suddenly the sight of hundreds of labourers who were shot dead at Punnapra – Vayalar came to my mind; their families also who were turned helpless. Quickly I gathered myself. What if my resolution gets shaken by such thoughts? (Kumbalam: 538).

In his narrative Mony revealed how his masculinity was offended when he was initially excluded from the mission to finish off the Diwan. He persisted and finally when he was entrusted with the murder, he desperately wanted to prove his mettle even though he had no personal animosity against the Diwan. Thus collective animosity overtook the personal.

Michael S. Kimmel observes in his monograph on masculinity as ‘homophobia’: if masculinity is a “homsocial enactment,” its overriding emotion is fear. (1994: 129). Mony was nervous about the codes of gender enactment, and his exaggerated actions that keep others from seeing through his performances were intended to keep his fears about himself under control. He needed to undergo a high degree of mental training and testing himself before adopting ruthless and violent acts to achieve his ends. He was as well trying to prove himself; masculinity as a ‘homsocial enactment’ requires other men to grant him his ‘manhood’.

When C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the Diwan of Travancore, continued his repressive policies, the Travancore State Congress prepared a memorandum against the Diwan raising various allegations. It was alleged that C.P. Ramaswami Iyer influenced Gandhiji through his accomplice and Gandhiji in turn directed the State Congress and its virulent Youth League to withdraw it unconditionally. He told the
Youth League members categorically that they have to distinguish between the nature of struggle for responsible government and personal vendetta against the Diwan. The Youth League leaders expressed their resentment against Gandhiji’s statement and accused that Gandhiji’s stand had a debilitating effect on the strength of the State Congress. And they refused to follow Gandhiji’s instruction to stop all agitations. They went on with alternative struggles by stating: ‘don’t sermonize to a buffalo that would butt you.’ (Sanku Pilla: 355).

Thus the masculinist conceptions of Indian Nationalism have engendered a host of conflicting discourses. The concept of Indian nationalism in which India simply squared off against British loses the complexity of the events and erases too many disputes and alliances. Class and gender categories invariably get subsumed into a larger dichotomy. But the examination of caste, class and gender has the potential to disturb and complicate the standard views of this colonial confrontation.

**Nationalists and the Agency of Women**

According to Joane Nagel three puzzles are partially solved by exposing the connection between masculinity and nationalism: Why are many men so desperate to defend masculine, monoracial, and heterosexual institutional preserves, such as military organizations and academies; why do men go to war, and the gender gap, that is why do men and women appear to have very different goals and agendas for the nation. (242) Deconstructionists contend that it is the interests of male social elite that nationalism actually served and that these interests conflict with the interests of women, the peasantry, workers, and the poor.

Nationalism in India began its journey as a political movement after it had proclaimed its sovereignty in the domain of culture and had inserted itself into a new public sphere constituted by the processes and forms of the modern state. Taking cue
from social reformers Indian nationalists argued that emulating Western modernity was desirable only within a public material context while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture (Chatterjee 1989: 238). The spiritual core lay in the social spaces of the inner domestic world of women and tradition. Women were cast as symbols and bearers of this traditional essence.

Nationalist leaders while maintaining a fairly traditional view of women and their roles, worked for other changes. They did whatever at their disposal to uplift women to create a healthier family atmosphere. It is argued that many nationalist leaders thought of women not as individuals, but as wives and mothers. They promoted women’s health and education, but this was to improve their service to the family. The kind of education they wanted to facilitate was to help women relate to educated husbands and improve their talents as mothers. They did not bother to promote women’s individuality and prepare them for new kinds of work that men themselves aspired for. Veteran Travancore State Congress leader and former KPCC president, Kumbalath Sanku Pillai, responded to Jawaharlal Nehru’s call to include more women in the Congress candidate list, claiming that Malayali women enjoyed the right to education and property, and hence did not need political rights. (*Deepika*, 29 October 1951:1)

A tall leader of the freedom movement in Kerala, Kumbalath Sankupilla remarked,

The common practice here is that after a woman gets married, though she is educated, the man would take the responsibility to protect her, and bear all the responsibilities towards her until her death, and beyond, with an ethical sense of duty. The woman sits at home and rules the man. Our women have not yet felt the need to come out and with a sense of liberation work in public spheres. Unlike North India,
here women have not been denied their rights. The Hindu code itself is quite unnecessary in the case of these women, because women have equal property rights and all other rights with man. In such a place where women righteously and unhindered enjoy all kinds of rights, and as wives rule over men, there is no harm that they do not go to the legislatures. (qtd. in Devika 2011:62)

Kumbalam and his ilk during the period of nationalist struggle shared the same world view. Women were not only expected to be virtuous and above reproach they must also submit themselves to the guidance and control of the family under male leadership. The general perception these national liberation leaders shared with the ruling forces they opposed was that of the physiological and mental weakness of women who therefore required male protection and guidance. As the weaker sex, women were not only obliged to submit to the control of their brothers and the protection and support of their father or husband, they were also excluded from important areas of decision making both within and outside the family. One of the consequences has been women’s limited role in public life and politics. Partha Chatterjee argues in the same line that now the distinction between the home and the world (Ghar and bahir) was appropriated in Indian Nationalist discourses to form a new patriarchy in which men must continually compromise with Western ways in the world and women become the guardians of Indian spiritual values at home (1989).

Partha Chatterjee’s article on the question of women during the nationalist movement is relevant in this regard. He writes on the subtle strategies of Indian patriarchy:

As with all hegemonic forms exercising dominance, this patriarchy combined coercive authority with the subtle force of persuasion. This
was expressed most generally in the inverted ideological form of the relation of power between the sexes; the adulation of woman as goddess or as mother. It served to emphasize with all the force of mythological inspiration what had in any case become a dominant characteristic of femininity in the new construct of woman standing as a sign for nation, namely the spiritual qualities of self sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity and so on. This spirituality did not, as we have seen, impede the chances of the woman, moving out of the physical confines of the home; on the contrary it facilitated it, making it possible for her to go into the world under conditions that would not threaten her femininity. In fact, the image of woman as goddess or mother served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home (1999:256-57).

Thus the nationalist movement resolved the women question by reworking and reaffirming the pre-existing patriarchal structure. The nationalists, while approving of imitating and incorporating the material culture of the West argued that adopting the West in aspects which were spiritual or anything other than the material sphere of Western civilization would threaten the self identity of national culture itself. As an extension of this position, they located home as the site to retain the inner spirituality of indigenous life and women as the agents responsible for that. It was advocated that women could meet this responsibility of preserving the spiritual core of the national culture through chastity, self- sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and labour of love. Only within this new patriarchy the nationalist movement attempted all its reforms related to women. As long as women demonstrated these so called feminine / spiritual qualities, they could go to school, travel in public conveyance,
watch public entertainment programmes and in time even take up employment outside home. (Partha Chatterjee 1987).

Gandhian gender ideology did not radically alter Indian conceptions of womanhood or wholly liberate Indian women from conventional roles. In Gandhian nationalism, as in various forms of anti-colonial Hindu militancy and subaltern insurgency, femininity, particularly maternity, serves as an important discursive site for the mobilization of male interest and aspirations. The maternal figure in Hindu iconography incorporates a dialectical tension between the virulent, potently sexual Kali and Durga, her docile, domesticated counterpart. Most varieties of elite Hindu militancy and subaltern insurgency have traditionally embraced the more aggressive symbol of female energy; Gandhi, on the other hand, upheld the domestic ideal, emphasizing moral qualities such as patience, self-sacrifice and suffering. It sought to subsume female liberation under the grand narrative of national liberation. (Krishnaswami 46). Indian feminist scholarship has identified the domestic ideal as an important inhibiting factor in Gandhian gender ideology. Therefore it can be argued that Gandhian ideology was an effort to construct an oppositional model of masculinity for Indian men, rather than as an intervention into the lives of Indian women.

Cherukad Govinda Pisharadi, a well acclaimed writer and supporter of the Communist Party of Kerala, in his narrative refers to his brother-in-law, a Nambuthiri Brahmin, and his habit of worshipping the picture of Gandhi every morning before he left to attend his priestly duties at the temple. His idealistic masculine piety and adoration of Gandhi and the nationalist cause did not deter him from abandoning his wife and child without any kind of fore-warning (Cherukad 76).
Nationalism as a Site of Contention

Indian Nationalism in its initial stages, by the very nature of its historical development, was an upper class / caste phenomenon, reflecting the interests and aspirations of its members. Naturally when nationalists spoke in terms of national interest they certainly meant their own interests. The evocation of nation was a necessary ritual to ensure the much needed popular support for an essentially partisan cause.

The nationalist invocation of Vedic civilization which meant to challenge the dominance of the British resulted in reaffirming the hierarchisation of different social groups along “the complex and intersecting axes of caste and gender.” (Rege 25) Sree Narayana Guru, curiously, is reported to have said that one should pray for the victory of the English in the First World War, since they should be considered as his guru. He further elaborated that even under the rule of Shri Rama lower castes could not undertake spiritual practices, and that it was British colonial rule that made it possible for Ezhavas like him to engage in ascetic practice (Balakrishnan 162).

The celebrated social reformer of Maharastra, Jyotiba Phule was critical of the anti-colonial nationalism that was preached by upper caste leaders. He stated:

The Brahmins have hidden away the sword of their religion which has cut the throat of the people’s prosperity and now go about posing as great patriots of their country. They… give this advice to... our Shudra, Muslim and Parsi youth that unless we put away all quarrelling amongst ourselves about the divisions between high and low in our country and come together, our... country will never make any progress. It will be unity to serve their purposes, and then it will be me here and you over there again (Phule).
Significantly, the untouchables were encouraged to join protest movements launched in the interest of other political issues. Only in the matter of their own untouchability did Gandhi expect them to step back and allow caste Hindus to redeem them.

Nehru on the Cause of Untouchables

When news reached Nehru in jail that Gandhi had decided to undertake a fast unto death in protest against the government’s communal award (1932), he was angry: “I felt annoyed with him for choosing a side issue for his final sacrifice. What would be the result of our freedom movement? Would not the larger issues fade into the back ground?” (Nehru 1941: 236). The notion that untouchability was ‘a side issue’ which reflected in the later histories of nationalism, originated with such powerful (hegemonic masculine) and influential politicians like Nehru.

This very hegemonic notion can be seen reflected in the speeches and writings of contemporary nationalist and communist politicians of colonial Kerala. When the Congress-led national movement started gaining ground in Kerala in the early 1920s, its elitist orientation, according to lower caste leaders did not enthuse subordinate castes. It is widely deliberated that Gandhiji’s stand on Vaikom Satyagraha and his abiding faith in the Varnashrama-dharma disillusioned even his admirers. Hence the lower caste leaders demanded that social revolution should precede the political freedom. A leading figure of this ideology, Sahodaran Ayyappan made a scathing critique on Gandhiji and asked why he did not call such Indians devilish who were treating Pulayas, Parayas and other lower castes as subhuman beings, though he railed against the British and called them ‘devilish’ and ‘satanic’ for their oppression of Indians. Ayyappan was trying to give voice to the general anguish of the subordinate people when he severely criticized that neither Gandhi nor other leaders of the
national movement had comprehended the evil of the caste and cultural oppression (Sekhar A.: 171-173). He represented a different line of nationalism which is inclusive, where voices of the subordinate castes are heard and not drowned in the uproar of nationalism.

Ayyappan was present when Gandhiji visited Narayana Guru during the Vaikom Sathyagraha agitation. He was impressed by the humble dressing, frankness and the childlike energy of the great leader. While the Guru and Gandhiji were discoursing on Ahimsa, Ayyappan intervened and argued that all the Hindu texts refer about violence and killing in various ways. He also provoked Gandhi’s Hindu sentiments by asking: “Your God Sree Krishna was a real murderer, wasn’t he?” (Sanu 1980: 468).

J. Reghu observes,

The main challenge before Ayyappan was not the ritual reform of Ezhavas, but rather resisting the nationalist strategy of marginalizing the lower caste movement in the name of the ‘nation’. Ayyappan understood that ‘nationalism’ was the mode of transmission of the culture and values, traditionally held by the upper caste Hindus as the apparatus of social domination (2010: 49).

What Sree Narayana Guru, Mithavadi Krishnan, C.V.Kunhiraman, and Sahodaran Ayyappan had to say about Nationalism is reflected in the words of Jyothiba Phule of Maharashtra. They shared the notion that Hindu Culture was responsible for India’s various social, economic and political ills. They were convinced that Indian people, especially the subordinate castes needed the continued civilizing mission of British colonialism. That was why Sree Narayana Guru made
such a paradoxical reference, “It was the British who gave us ‘Sanyasam’? (Balakrishnan: 177).

The Abstention Movement

The colonial structures percolated to princely states in various ways. The standardization, centralization and proliferation of the activities of the British State brought traditionally isolated, self-contained communities into far closer and often disagreeable contact with one another. Along with military, legal, and political system modern education had the most profound impact. On the top of it all, the rapid expansion of literacy and the growth of the print media, especially the newspaper brought new, mediated, political communities into being.

The movement for acquiring civil and democratic rights in matters relating to school education, employment in government service, and adequate representation in state legislature took off in Travancore in 1932, the same year Gandhiji resorted to fast unto death to solve the communal award policy of the British. In the Nivarthana (Abstention) Agitation the Ezhava community made alliance with equally deprived communities of Muslims and Christians to secure increased representation in the state legislature as well as in the state service. They held their first meeting at LMS Hall Thiruvananthapuram in 1932 under the chairmanship of C.V. Kunhiraman and decided to form an organization.

C.Kesavan, who emerged as the tall leader of the movement, was sentenced for sedition. His offence was the provocative speech he made at Kozhancherry in Pathanamthitta district. Even before this happened he made a major speech at Thuravur, Alleppey district which was also cited as part of court proceedings. In this
speech C.Kesavan spiritedly reminds that “we have been fighting for our rights with _manly spirit_ for the last two and half years”. (Rajan, Hashim 2004: 76).

The main target of the abstention agitators was the domination of Brahmins and Nairs in bureaucracy and the legislative body. The leaders of Nair community reproached the attitude of Ezhava leaders as they relegate the main issue of Temple Entry to the background. It was an indirect way of attacking the Abstention movement by citing lapses. The unity of the various disgruntled communities irrespective of caste and religious lines made the hegemonic upper castes insecure. What Mannath Padmanabhan forgets while making the following statement is that Temple Entry, proportional representation, right to use the public space etc. were part of the larger scheme of democratization of Kerala society:

The death of Sri.T.K Madhavan gave a setback to the Temple Entry agitation. It was soon reduced to an occasional struggle waged by those interested, according to their convenience. Ezhava leaders seemed more interested in securing political rights than in introducing social reforms. They decided to join hands with the Muslims and the Christians for the purpose. They severed their relations with the Nairs, held them their enemies and formed a union of only three communities namely the Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians, and started an agitation. With this, the foundations of Hindu unity were destroyed and the hopes of realizing temple entry for all, receded. (2003:96)

The Communist movement also contended with the nationalist cause with what they termed a “proletarian internationalism”. During the ‘Quit India’ agitation in 1942, Indian Communist Party opposed it by arguing that Soviet-British alliance
against the fascist regimes in Europe was preferable to Indian national liberation for the time being. Thus the Communists sidelined the national cause and supported the British war efforts.

EMS, one of the founders of the communist movement in Kerala, justifies his party stand during the Second World War:

It was taken for granted that the Party being committed to proletarian internationalism, it was its duty to subordinate India's own national struggle to the international struggle; those who had doubts on the question were inflamed by bourgeois nationalist passions rather than guided by proletarian internationalism. There was naturally no dissenting voice in any of the state conferences or at the Bombay Congress. [1987: 98]

Commenting on its aftermath he says,

The nine months’ experience of ‘swimming against the current’ of nationalism had, in fact, hardened the attitude of the Party leadership. The main report delivered by the General Secretary, Joshi, and the speeches that followed, gave the line of ‘struggle against the Japanese agents,’ increase in the production of industrial and agricultural commodities, etc. Whatever the sophistication with which the line was explained, it amounted to a softening of the Party’s anti-imperialism in politics and militancy in economic struggles [1987: 98].

Moreover we find an acrimonious reproach of Gandhian masculinity in the writings of communist leaders and sympathizers, which has been discussed in the chapter on communist masculinity.
Conclusion

One of the most important socio-economic consequences of the colonial encounter in Kerala as elsewhere in India was the creation of a modern educated, professional middle class which during the pre-independence period revealed many contradictory social tendencies. While a section of the educated middle class opted to be a collaborator of the state the other section actively participated in the anti-colonial movement for national liberation.

The ‘women’s question’ or the question of women’s rights and participation in public life was then variously formulated in response to such dominant expressions of hegemonic masculinity. Women’s participation in national struggle and in nation building was welcomed and celebrated by the nationalists in so far as it approximated the masculine tropes in play but such participation could only be regulated, restrained and domesticated. Masculinist politics thus initiated a parallel set of feminine tropes that simultaneously extend and delimit the roles of women in politics and social life.

Like all the varieties of nationalism across the world Indian nationalism was also male dominated. Like Indian nationalism, national movement or struggle for responsible government in Kerala, stressed the validity of many aspects of tradition, including religion, which was a further potential limitation in connection with changes in male-female roles and relationships. But the changing time and tides made the nationalists see that some alterations in traditional religious practices (largely among the Hindu population) were needed to create a modern nation.

There cannot be only one version of nationalism, but multiplicities. The nationalism of the leaders of backward and untouchable castes was qualitatively different. They were more in favour of the emancipatory space provided by the
colonizer and the civilizing mission they brought in. Their parameters of nationalism emphasized on concerns far removed from the upper-caste sponsored nationalism which foregrounded the contradiction between Indian people and the colonizer.

Nationalism as it had unfolded in the history of Kerala was a multivocal process. Since hegemonic and subordinate classes followed different nationalistic aspirations, the masculinisation of nationalism had to have a plural and conflicting historiographical terrain.