

**‘POLITICAL’ MOTHERHOOD AND THE WOMEN’S  
MOVEMENT**

*Issues of Resistances and the State*

*Desertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of  
Master of Philosophy*

*By*

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled

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Submitted by me for the award of **Master of Philosophy** is my own work. The work has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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*Dedicated to my parents...*

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Out of the many issues of womanhood, motherhood got its due attention lately in the 1970s and the early 1980s. Since then, it had emerged as a continuing topic of debate and discussion. It remains ambivalent and contested, inadequately explained and theorised, inspite of ample research and interventions in the field.

The question of who is a mother is difficult to answer. If a mother is one who gives birth to the child than it gets too narrowed down to being a biological relationship. But motherhood goes much beyond the biological determinant, and includes those women, who inspite of not having given birth become mothers, when they do the rearing part. In other words, one who brings up the child helping him shape up is also a mother. Motherhood and women are so closely associated that they are almost perceived as synonymous. All women are seen as mothers but it would be wrong to do so. Though all women are seen as potential mothers in the near and far future, not every woman becomes a mother. One reason for the synonymous association is the fact that all mothering work are done by women only. It is again wrong to consider mothering as an entirely women' s domain, as we have seen so many feminist who have stood for sharing the role of mothering between men and women (Simone de Beauvoir,1989, Ruddick, 1994)

The ambivalence in the notion of motherhood is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, motherhood is never comprehensible to the fullest extent, even by the woman who is a mother herself. She is never very sure of her ongoing deep emotional feelings and

experiences. Secondly the experiences of motherhood cannot be generalised as their practices are conducted in different social systems and periods. It cannot be treated as a stable concept and experience which each women share. Each woman has her own desires, and ambitions and they also have their understanding of the role of motherhood. Their understandings, desires and ambitions are shaped by the social circumstances which surrounds them. These social systems include one's culture and tradition and also a complex power relation which is embedded in every relationship that operates within the social order. Motherhood operates within a power structure, a structure of patriarchy both at the familial and state level. All these reasons combined together, made the study of motherhood a really difficult task.

Motherhood is associated with care and nurturing for people. It evolves a relationship between the care giver, nurturer and the receiver. Motherhood entails the existence of a child. The mother and the child relationship is conceived as purely an emotional one which entrusts upon the mother, the responsibility to bring up the child and help him/her develop an identity, and prepare him go out to the social space. The caring and nurturing responsibility extends to the entire family and envelops each member of the family at its largest extent. This care is the standard form of all forms of caring in every relationship. The intimate relation of care also involves, and has evolved 'maternal' skills. The maternal work which comprised of nurturing, protection, training etc. receives a certain kind of response from the children driven mainly by their needs. In their active dynamic interaction, the mother develops affectionate connections with the child while the child starts to lay certain claims on the mother emotionally and morally.

Motherhood can be analysed as both a source of power and also of powerlessness. The present study will explore how motherhood can bring powerlessness for some and a source of power for others. For this purpose, the study will deal with the idea of 'political motherhood' and its varying attributes. Political motherhood is a sort of motherhood which transcends the boundaries of the 'ideal'. The use of the concept of political motherhood, we will see, challenges the rhetoric of motherhood in an unusual way. The objective of the study is to explore political motherhood and its manifestations. Also, we will see how 'motherhood' in 'political motherhood' challenges the 'political' transforming the constitution of the political itself.

Branching out from this primary questions are other problem areas like the evolving relationship between the nation-state and women, wherein motherhood plays a key role. The major concern here, is the nature of their relationship and the changes that have occurred, taking into view the varying priorities of the state. The question is how political motherhood emerged in these scenarios of state and nation-building. The study includes various case studies, the special reference for this section is Bangladesh. There are certain reasons for choosing Bangladesh as a reference point. Firstly, the state formation of Bangladesh is one of the more recent phenomena of the formation of a nation-state, in which the state's manipulation and regulation of women's sexualities, specifically their mothering role was made manifest. We may also say that the violence that had occurred to women at the time of India-Pakistan partition had certain reverberations that could be seen in 1971 Bangladesh War of Liberation. Secondly we could also see the shifting priority in the politics of the state at the time of crises and war, for which the major victims have been, and are, always women. The particular scheme of motherhood that the state produced, are devised in such a way that shifts motherhood from its 'original' habitat forcefully. And this is where political motherhood came into being, but not in a very enthusiastic way.

The shifting of the domain of motherhood is also seen in a particular type of women's movement. The women's movements all over the world have been driven by various issues, viz., social, political and economic, around which women have rallied. The interesting fact about this particular struggle by women, which has rallied around their 'biological' roles as mothers, is their specific grounding of motherhood. We will see that the political motherhood, which manifested itself at this juncture, is very different from the previous case because they derive a certain kind of leverage and power from their act itself. Their act is an extension of what they do in the private. Their concern for their loved ones, the love, care and protection, their ability to produce and preserve life, all gets entwined in their struggle. Such phenomena was absent in the motherhood which is regulated by others, i.e., the state, as they were mainly concerned with curving the virtues of motherhood. Political motherhood, here, let the virtues flow freely, and it is when they were not allowed to do so, they came out in protest. Driven by the force of the identity of motherhood, these women create a counter culture of the 'political'. The question is how



womanhood is articulated in these particular movements, in which women choose to present themselves in the public space, as mothers? Is there an inherent contradiction in such self-representation and self-expression by women in movements? Does this articulation redefine gender roles or conversely reinforce the oppressive dichotomy of the private and public spaces? These are certain interesting areas which throw light into the ways in which motherhood came to play active roles in public spaces. The 'publicness' is what give rise to political motherhood. Then the question is, whether the 'publicness' has anything to offer these women in terms of their agency and status.

With reference to the women's movement of the Mother's Front in Sri Lanka, Association of Parents of the Disappeared Persons, Kashmir and the Meira Paibis of Manipur, the study explore the nature of these movements focusing on their motives, mobilisation and goals. The purpose is to find out how motherhood figures in these movements, and what is it about it, that can be termed political. These movements have been driven in opposition and in response to repression by the state and its violence causing different magnitudes of human rights' s violations. Tracing the origin of these movements based on motherhood, leads us to the similar types of women's movements against human rights violation in the Latin American countries, mainly Argentina, Guatemala and Chile. These movements were results of the circumstances created by repressive states. These movements have been called 'motherist' movements by Jennifer Schirmer, for these women came out as mothers rather than as women. These mothers fought against repression by mobilising themselves in a particular kind of protest that transformed women's language of motherhood into a kind of political expression.

Latin America was engulfed by anti-democratic authoritarian government in the 1970s and 1980s. In Argentina from 1976-83, Guatemala in the 1960s, and in Chile in 1973 under Augusto Pinochet, extreme political repression with massive 'enforced disappearances' was used against the people.<sup>1</sup> In all these countries, state terrorism was practiced at it maximum heights, treating everyone as a suspect and keeping the whole society in a state of terror. They broke into homes, conducted search

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<sup>1</sup> Mabel Ballucci (1999), p.83

operations, and picked up whomever they found. The states were engaged in removing any opposing voices, and their unjustifiable acts were justified by any means. It was the use of institutionalised violence as a means of governing that caused much anger and distress among the women. Similar cases are also seen in Sri Lanka during the 1980s and the 1990s when the government set up counter offensives against rising Tamil and Sinhala nationalist violence. The same scenario of institutionalised violence is, at present, being experienced in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur, where state machinery operates through extra-ordinary laws like AFSPA, POTA, TADA, etc. Stories of ‘enforced disappearances’ are heard in a never ending way. This is the context in which the study of the mother’s movement is made.

It is at this time of extreme repression and violation of human rights that the mothers’ movement arose. When all other means of resistances, social protest and collective action had been closed down, it was only these mothers who can break the prevalent state of fear and take to the forefront. They were the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*) in Argentina, Mutual Support Group for the Reappearance of Our Sons, Father, Husbands and Sons (GAM) in Guatemala, and The groups of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (Agrupacion) Chile. Their trends of struggle were inherited by the mother’s movements in other parts of the world, including Sri Lanka and India which the study had taken into consideration. What is common in all these movements is the state’s violation of the sanctity of the family and the right to life. These women with their traditional role of reproduction of life, made familial and private pleas, thus, opening up a new way to challenge the state and its politics.

The two modes of motherhood are taken into account for its contradictory nature, yet we will be able to see a common thread that runs throughout. The theme of motherhood, whether active or passive, is crucial in sustaining various social structures, whereby it gets enmeshed by one or the other player. The cycle in which the icon of celebration and glorification becomes a severe tool of suppression, and then later again emerged as the driving force of women’s activism, is an interesting phenomena. Throughout this cycle, the role of the state remains consistent. And therefore it is imperative that we also look into the state and its association with the

notion of motherhood in particular and womanhood in general. We will explore what happens when care and nurture, which is associated with motherhood, gets enmeshed in the activities of the state. Or in other words, what is care and nurture for the state and what happens when state assume the parental/paternal roles?

The study will start from the different feminist stands on the issue of motherhood and the debates which surround it. While motherhood has often been invested with status and prestige, feminism objects the reduction of a women's identity exclusively to this role. Most feminist tend to see reproduction as a burden, which limits women's ability to participate in wider society. There are also others who defend it saying that this particular role is what makes women powerful and unique. One thing which runs central to the feminist thought about motherhood is the question of choice. Motherhood like every other aspect of women's life should be freed from any interventions and control. It should be fully in the hands of the women and the decision to mother should be in accordance to her own needs and desires. The question of choice had emerged since the time of Mary Wollstonecraft who emphasised on the need to develop women's potential through education, so that she could decide for her own life and activities. The 'feminine mystic' which had engulfed the then America in the 1960s was broken by Betty Freidan by her challenge to the very notion of femininity. She took forward the emphasis on education, and believed that it could lead to more and better opportunities for women, in both career and personal lives. She also challenged the dichotomy between a women's private household work and her career outside the house, and said that women should balance both these roles and make an ideal combination of both. On the other hand, is Simon de Beauvoir calling on to denounce the idea of femaleness to achieve the emancipation of women. The role of motherhood should not be seen as central to women's existence for it is a result of the societal necessity. It gets a mixed response of both contempt and respect. The responsibility should therefore be shared between the husband and the wife. Glorifying the joys of motherhood, Alexandra Kollontai, considered mothering as a social concern calling for the role of motherhood to be more broadened. Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone gave the most fierce critique of motherhood, as one which is a tool of oppression, which should be gotten rid of. Kate Millet rejected heterosexual unions as the only acceptable norm, and Firestone

advocated the use of new scientific techniques to get rid of the biological differences. The late 1970s saw the rise of a genre of feminist thought called the pro-family feminist, who focused on the emancipatory potential of motherhood. Sara Ruddick, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Joan Tronto are the most influential ones who focused on the notion of nurture, care and love associated with motherhood. The chapter will also explore the notion of 'political motherhood', which challenged the 'universal' and 'rational' aspects associated with the 'political'. We will see that, political motherhood is fierce and powerful, but also soft and loving like the traditional mother.

Chapter 3 will trace the changes in the relationship between the nation and women, before and after, the nation gets teamed up with the state and its institutions. Motherhood which was glorified and valorised in the narratives of nationalism gradually becomes an instrument in nation building. The control and regulation of motherhood and the role of 'women as mothers' have been central to various nation building exercises providing legitimacy to the political interests of the states. Mother is the much revered image. We see nation being feminised as women and mother. We also see various projections of mother goddesses as a source of strength and power. In films and literatures, mothers are celebrated. She is the image of regenerative and nurturing power, the symbol of love and care. She is a prominent figure in mythology, legends, and popular culture. But, on the other hand, she had been associated with honour and shame. She becomes the marker of group identity, and a site for contestation and manifestation of power. She becomes the indicator of modernity and also the reservoir of tradition. She is the reproducer of the nation in the cultural and symbolic way besides the biological way. She is expected to maintain the unique identity, origin, culture and aspirations of the collective. The multi-task of being the guardian, preserver and reproducer of identity is worked out through an iconisation of the body of the women. The chapter will deal with the ways in which the women's body and identity are shaped and reshaped in accordance with the larger issue of nation-state. This chapter, in short, will deal with the powerlessness aspect of motherhood, taking the case of Bangladesh and its war ravaged/raped women. We will see how the 'motherhood' which is often revered and glorified becomes a means in the hands of the state to regulate the sexualities of women, so as to achieve its aspiration of nation building. A new relation emerged in which the state is seen

constructing the context within which the local reproduction relations are played out. The notion of honour and shame, leads to birth control experiments, and other regulations, and also becomes the driving forces which motivate the state in using its institutions against the women.

Chapter 4 will talk about the powerful facet of motherhood, where we will explore some particular modes of resistance in which the women come out in the streets as mothers and as wives against their governments, seeking the restoration of their disappeared sons and husbands and reclaiming their lost familial role of ‘mother’ . The cases of women claiming back their lost role of motherhood, though rooted in a patriarchal construct, challenges the notion of motherhood as something which is only associated with the private domain. Here the chapter will look into cases of forced disappearances and the consequent protests/resistances of women’s fronts in Sri Lanka and India. These women are the victims of the state violence in multiple ways, but the loss of their male kin is the most severe of all as it left them half dead. Rallying around the role of motherhood, these mothers question the notion of the ‘political’ by creating a space for themselves entirely based on feminine virtues. They developed a different political consciousness, which was mainly instigated by the loss they suffered. Their collective action gave a new face to the notion of motherhood and transformed the classic values associated with motherhood. Motherhood is entirely politicised by their acts, providing their entry into the public and opening a new form of civic participation. They used their power to nurture and conserve life as a means to claim back their rights which is associated with motherhood.

The study is based mainly on secondary sources. It is a comparative study of the trend of motherhood that had been emerging in the recent decades. The study takes into account the significant events and trajectories in these places and, is mainly a qualitative study.

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## CHAPTER 2

### **THEORISING MOTHERHOOD**

#### *Exploring dominant Frameworks*

#### **2.1. The notion of motherhood**

Motherhood has emerged as a debated concept. The concept and ideology of motherhood has been closely associated with women and is seen as a major factor which distinguishes women from men. In some theoretical strands, it is perceived as the central fact of female existence. This chapter will explore the concept of motherhood, and the various underlining feminist debates around it. We shall also see the conflicting views of different strands of feminisms with regard to this concept, keeping in view their different ideological leanings. The last part of the chapter will examine the concept of political motherhood, and also see how it relates to, or diverts from the mainstream feminist theories in its consideration and stress on the politics and ethics of care and love, associated with ‘motherhood’.

The capability of reproduction is what makes women ‘mothers’. Through the act of carrying a child in her womb and giving birth, a woman attains ‘motherhood’.<sup>1</sup> The definition of mothering shares a theme: ‘the social practice of nurturing and caring of dependent children’.<sup>2</sup> So motherhood is ideologically and practically associated with care and love for the child, the act and power of generation and nurturing is what

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<sup>1</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 2010, *Motherhood in India, Glorification without Empowerment*, p.2

<sup>2</sup> Terry Arendell (Nov., 2000), “Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade’s Scholarship”, p. 1192

makes motherhood the icon of celebration and worship. The ideology of motherhood conceptualises women as being specially equipped for reproduction and invested with an essential maternal instinct.

To theorise motherhood is quite different from a woman's empirical experiences of motherhood. A mother's experience include the painful phase of pregnancy and giving birth; once the child is born the women's unconditional love for her child, her instincts and action of providing care, protection, and guidance, her toil in bringing up the child, and her pleasure to see him grow, and many more emotional ties which cannot be fully expressed. It is not just the presence of the child that makes a woman 'mother'. It is rather comprised of a complex interplay of various forces and is multi-dimensional, relational and supposed to be authentic. Conceptualisation of motherhood should take into focus the mother's activities, understanding and also experiences. Mothering should not be seen as a uniform, universal and a static practice. Apart from just defining motherhood in terms of bearing and rearing of children, we also need to empirically take into account the various socio-cultural variables shaping it. Mothering, thus, evolves dynamic activity and always evolving relationships.<sup>3</sup> Here the relationship is not only the one of a child and a mother but a complex of socio-economic and cultural context that had influenced both its understanding and its practice.

Motherhood and womanhood are perceived as synonymous. Motherhood is entwined with notions of femininity and women/gender identity is enforced by motherhood.<sup>4</sup> It holds out the promise of the most desirable way of being a woman. This is a construct around which a range of social practices revolve. It creates and recreates the notions associated with motherhood, in turn making itself, a tool for the subjugation of womenfolk. Since reproduction continues to be one of the major roles of women, it has continued to be basic to women's life. It is also intertwined with the idealised notion of family and that of heterosexual couple. Motherhood has thus, been fundamental to the genesis of the ideology about women. The ideals of motherhood also portray the women as the embodiment of sacrifice and nobility, who find

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Arendell, 2000, p. 1192.

<sup>4</sup> Nanci Chodorow, 1989,1990, Glenn, 1994, McMahon, 1995, cited by Terry Arendell (Nov., 2000), p. 1192

fulfilment in the service of their progeny, and they are also expected to shape and guide their children.

Now let us turn to some of the issues which make the notion of motherhood a contested one. Firstly, it is worth noting that motherhood, which often defines women's identity and existence, is not entirely controlled by women. History shows various accounts of how women were not allowed to decide when to conceive and become a mother. There are also instances where their sexualities were subjugated to the male counterpart and also those of forced motherhood where women were just treated as sexual objects. This inability to exercise any real control over their reproductive power and sexuality, alienate women from their own body. Regarding this, Clarie Duchen had given a very interesting equation. She says- 'Enslaved motherhood+ voluntary motherhood= voluntary slavery' .<sup>5</sup> Here the equation clearly brings out the question as to how far a woman has the liberty to conceive when she wants to, and when the baby is born, how far is the surrounding free from interventions. It shows the dilemmas of motherhood, whether the decision to mother, is a result of delusion or external influence, rather than women's inner existential quest. Once persuaded by external inclinations, they get enmeshed into the whole structure and their ability to make a genuine decision based on their own interest and bodily needs is compromised for a larger societal culture. Then everything takes place as natural and voluntary due to the external conditioning and that is how women are paralysed in disentangling their real desire from culturally conditioned desires.

The maternal ability is also used to exclude women from power and public life. This is done mainly by the imposition of a hierarchy of expected roles to the women, making and remaking the notion of an ideal role for women. Women's homemaking roles are feminised and the 'private' is rendered an exclusive domain for women. Also if in case a women works outside, they have to also fulfil their roles as wife and mothers. Here we see a double burden on women which is neither recognised nor appreciated. Apart from seeing a woman working outside as breakers of traditional norms, they are also labelled unwanted.

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<sup>5</sup> Claire Duchen, cited in Sheila Rowbotham, 1989, "To Be or Not to Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering", p.85



Bourgeois and capitalist narration of the history have shown women as not very active member of the political and economic sphere. In spite of this depiction, we have increasing number of women coming out and asserting their roles also in the public realm. They are gaining grounds in different fields which were before exclusively male dominated. But in spite of this breakthrough they seem not much liberated from their ascribed family roles. As they have been understood to excel in these fields of caring and nurturing of the child and taking care of the family, men are not to be expected to even try out these roles. The worst thing is that these roles are more tiring and time consuming than any form of work. It has to be whole time engagement, where you do not have anything like completion. Moreover these roles are neither paid nor accounted as a main form of labour which contributes to household or the national income. This keeps the women economically depended on men, creating an impossibility to escape from male domination.

## **2.2. Notion of motherhood and feminism**

Feminists are divided over their views regarding women and their role of motherhood. Some share the view that women have a special nature while the others proclaim that men and women are the same and that it is the social conditions that create that inequality. This section will explore the different notions of motherhood put forward by some prominent feminists taking into account their various ideological orientations. One thing which is worth mentioning right at the onset is that, even feminists who share common grounds of theorisation and ideology seem to offer different and often contradictory ideas about the notion of motherhood. Though they are grouped, here also, according to their affiliation to the different mainstream ideologies, understanding of the major convergences and divergences in their ideas is critical and should be well taken into account.

### ***'Motherhood' for liberal feminists***

The main claim of liberal feminist is that, women are also rational beings like men and they are entitled to the same legal and political rights. So the liberal feminist have always demanded right to education, political participation, employment and full legal equality.<sup>6</sup> In this scheme of thought we shall see what the liberal feminists have to say

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<sup>6</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, *Feminist Political theory: An Introduction*, p-2

about women's role of being a mother. Among the liberal feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft is seen as the forerunner who had successfully carried forward the debates regarding women's nature and their capacity to reason. She was very much against the association of women with frailty and weakness, for according to her, women are equally possessed of reason and that they should be equally educated to make full use of their capacity of reason. Further she said that women's common humanity with man is based on their possession of reason. From here it follows that virtue should also be based on reason and free choice<sup>7</sup>. Applying these notions, we may deduce that virtues of being a good mother or a good wife should be based on reason. She does not offer much on the debates regarding motherhood but from her emphasis on 'virtues based on reason' we can derive that she was against the imposition of male dictates on women's lives and that women's roles like motherhood should not be judged and manipulated by values and conventions carved out by men, but should be based on the free rational choice of women. In that sense we do not see, in Wollstonecraft, a well worked out account regarding the question of motherhood. Her position towards it is ambiguous, but focused more on the development of women's agency so that she could decide and have control over her own life and body. She did not focus on the issue of liberatory and non-liberatory aspects of motherhood. She rather emphasised on equal worth and equal rights which would imply that any human aspects or roles of both men and women are of equal worth and that no aspect should be marked out as disadvantageous and non-liberatory, and that would also include women's role of motherhood. One significant idea of Wollstonecraft, that is, good citizens require good mothering, sums up and reveals her commitment to the notion of motherhood and the responsibilities associated with it.

A relatively concrete stand on the issue of motherhood is seen in the position of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal feminist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. According to her, motherhood is a source of both immense satisfaction and also intense frustration. She was of the view that women's capacity to bear children, make them superior to men and that good mothering should be based on reason and good education. While at other times, she claimed that motherhood only calls out the virtues of the apathetic classes such as patience, endurance and self sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> Stanton is known to have campaigned publicly

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, cited in Valarie Bryson, 1992, p-23.

<sup>8</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.41

for change in the structure of family and marriage. She feels that the main cause of women's oppression is the loss of sexual autonomy of women in marriage. Unlike other liberal feminist, Stanton does not see women's problem as only those of political and legal inequality.<sup>9</sup> Here Stanton's position regarding issues of motherhood is more profound than that of Wollstonecraft but her position is not altogether immune from ambiguity. She, also like other liberal feminists, seems to give more emphasis on the public sphere involving the devaluation of certain women's roles.<sup>10</sup>

The 1960s saw the coming of the second generation liberal feminists and among them, Betty Friedan was one prominent voice. Her famous phrase the 'feminine mystique' refers to the situation of women in the then America. Here she pointed out that, these women are persuaded into believing that the only duty and commitment of women is the fulfilment of their 'femininity'. This feminine mystique, according to her, had acted as a watershed to the liberal feminist demands of equal rights and independence therefore, women should be freed from this. Her goal is to allow women to live for themselves and for others, and this, according to her, can be fulfilled by educating women to help develop their potential so that they could pursue a career of their choice. Only then there will be new opportunities coming up for women in their relation with men, which will then be based more on shared values and work.<sup>11</sup> Most of the liberal feminists tend to see motherhood and its practice of childrearing and child bearing as a big hindrance in coming at par with men. Therefore they demand women's right to choose, and complete control over their fertility. Friedan is more vocal regarding her demand for a flexible work arrangement which would create conditions for more and more women to participate, and also demanded greater involvement by men in childrearing.<sup>12</sup> Friedan too, focused a great deal in fulfilment of duties outside home though she does not offer a critique of the family and its chores. This would refer that she does not believe in entirely rejecting the women's role inside home including her child rearing and child bearing exercise but she rather looks towards an ideal combination of career plans and family responsibilities. The image of glorified femininity which had affected the minds of the then women was what she attacked, for according to her, it had misguided women

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<sup>9</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.49

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.42

<sup>11</sup> Betty Friedan, 1986, *The Feminine Mystique*, p.270, 323, 297.

<sup>12</sup> Betty Friedan cited in Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.165.

towards a feminine myth.<sup>13</sup> Her blending of career and familial responsibilities would mean that she wants women to be more than just being a wife and a mother, for she believes that motherhood should not be taken as a full time and a career in itself. Women should not be identified by the housewife image and should not glorify marriage. They should instead break away the false dichotomy between career and household and should continue to perform the roles of motherhood and practices of marriage alongside their career.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Marxist feminists and 'motherhood'***

Now let us come to what Marxist feminist say about motherhood. Marx does not say anything about women liberation but Marxist ideas do have some implication on the development of feminist thoughts. For Marx, family and sexual relations are nothing but a product of a particular historical situation, neither given nor planned, and therefore open to change in the future. It follows for him, that these changes will not be an outcome of reason or appeals to justice, but will take place according to the changes in conditions of production.<sup>15</sup> According to this ideology, oppression based on sex came as a result of private property and is a part of class society which could only be ended with the abolition of private property. It was because of private property that women sexualities, including their role of bearing children, started to be controlled by men. They became mere possessions of their husbands whose main responsibility was to provide them heirs. Here, we see that her role of motherhood was used so successfully to subjugate the whole female sex. In Engels own words, 'The overthrow of mother's right was the world historical defeat of the female sex'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed from his words we know the immense inevitability of motherhood for keeping the women under the male dictates, where they are more oppressed and exploited not just as women but also as a class whose labour the men as a class enjoy.

So we see in Marx's ideas that women come into being only where ideas involving reproduction is concerned. For him production and reproduction are the basis of society. 'The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as natural, on the

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<sup>13</sup> Vidyut Bhagwat, 2004, *Feminist Social Thought: An Introduction to Six Key Thinkers*, p. 143

<sup>14</sup> Betty Freidan, cited in Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.160-61

<sup>15</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.69.

<sup>16</sup> Engels cited in Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.70

other as a social relationship’ .<sup>17</sup> When he talks of reproduction, it is not just the reproduction of the progeny, but more important is the reproduction of the labour force. Women’s role of motherhood becomes essential here for not only creating and producing ideal labour force, but also nursing and building them up, catering to the capitalistic principles.

Simone de Beauvoir, a Marxist feminist, argued that the most important obstacle to a women’s freedom is not her biology, or the legal, political and economic constraints, but it is the way in which the idea of femininity is produced and reproduced. For her, one is not born a woman but becomes one.<sup>18</sup> Here she is pointing out the societal conventions and norms set up in the interest of male hegemonic tradition whereby there are certain attributes which are already pre-attached with women. Certain value norms guide and shape the women since birth, and any crossing of the defined boundary is regarded unacceptable. These forced and prescribed norms constrain women, and deny them their own self expression of who they really are, and therefore they become someone who conformed to the already established structure. Beauvoir mainly believed that women’s liberation would depend on the change in the societal methods of production. She also laid stress on the issue of rationality, self-affirmation and autonomy. Her theory is seen to be based on the rejection of traditional female qualities such as nurturing and cooperation. According to her, achieving full humanity alongside men would require women to deny her ‘femaleness’.

She strongly condemned the social norms of looking at women as a complete individual only when she becomes a mother. She goes on to say that there is nothing called ‘maternal instinct’ in human species. The activities of giving birth and becoming a mother bring no pride and satisfaction. Women should not look at the role of reproduction as something creative because the function itself represents a rationalisation of necessity.<sup>19</sup> For Beauvoir, the women’s experience of motherhood is shaped by factors which are both biological and social. The mother’s attitude depends on the total situation and her reaction to it, and therefore it differs from woman to woman, and situation to situation.<sup>20</sup> This would mean that motherhood can be a means

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<sup>17</sup> Marx and Engels cited in Bryson, Valarie, 1992, pp-76

<sup>18</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 1989, *The Second Sex*, p.297

<sup>19</sup> Vidyut Bhagwat, 2004, p.114

<sup>20</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 1989, p.526

of joy and liberation or a burden depending on the prevailing complex of economic, social and sentimental factors. To quote Beauvoir, 'maternity is usually a strange mixture of narcissism, altruism, ideal daydreaming, bad faith, devotion and cynicism'.<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir concluded that the role of motherhood for women is mixed, on the one hand, with common contempt for women, and on the other, respect for mothers. Therefore there is a big contradiction inherent in it. She believed that the duty of childrearing should be shared and that it shouldn't be a sole responsibility for women, for according to her, it is counterproductive. The relation between the husband and the wife, and the task of housekeeping and maternity, form a whole which affects and determines the significance of motherhood for a woman.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Socialist feminists and the notion of motherhood***

On the other side the socialist feminists view women's oppression as determined by the existing mode of production and resulting property relation. The only way to bring about women's emancipation is revolutionary transformation of the society through socialism. Modern socialist feminist are seen to be combining the best of Marxist and radical feminism. They seek to trace the history of patriarchy and to understand its relationship with other forms of domination. They are of the view that men have an interest in maintaining the gender inequalities.<sup>23</sup>

Alexandra Kollontai was one of the most vocal feminist in demanding a change in the role and nature of the family for wider social change. She does have a strong opinion about motherhood, and her stress on the maternal instinct, and her glorification of the potential joys of motherhood was problematic to her critics. According to her, motherhood is a satisfying experience for women only when the drudgery, ill-health and poverty are removed. The contact with the mother and the child is itself a source of joy and happiness, but one thing she stressed more about the maternal instinct is that it should not be limited to the love and care of one's own child. Rather it should have wider social implication, for according to her, women should not only love and care for her own child but also have the same care and affection for all children<sup>24</sup>. Even if she talks of the joy of motherhood, Kollontai does not really consider the

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<sup>21</sup> Simone de Beauvoir cited in Vidyut Bhagwat, 2004, p.116

<sup>22</sup> Vidyut Bhagwat, 2004, p.117

<sup>23</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.4

<sup>24</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.142

issue of giving full absolute control to women over their own reproduction and over their bodies. Her demand for collective child care and her insistence on reproduction as a social concern deny women the right to choose. Looking at motherhood as a social responsibility would make women's sexuality a matter of public property whereby they will be forced to perform a socially prescribed role of mothering.

Another very prominent socialist feminist was Clara Zetkin. She had the firm belief that the emancipation of women will come only by the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. Women's subordinate position is mainly due to her economic dependence on men, and her inability to participate in socially productive labour. According to her, socialism in emancipating the whole humanity also emancipates women. The emancipation of labour would confer a meaningful reality to economic independence by mitigating the conflict between motherhood and occupational labour.<sup>25</sup> She also hinted on the need to convert family into a moral entity, from being one which is formed out of economic necessity.

For her, men and women are not identical but fully equal. This means that women can also efficiently contribute in the public sphere not only in terms of quantitative social and cultural goods but also in the qualitative increase of development through their increased participation. Women are to be seen not just as sexual being or as only human being but as 'female human being' as she termed, and therefore her fullest development and emancipation lies in the fullest development as a female, through motherhood and creative occupational labour. Through the experience of motherhood, women mature and develop the moral strengths and ethical values, and through occupational work, women widened their horizons and knowledge. Both are seen as essential, and they complement each other.<sup>26</sup> According to her, all except selfish and self-centred women are mothers and also should be mothers. This view came out while strongly critiquing the widespread claim that abortion and contraceptives helps in women's emancipation. She holds the view that women can contribute to the general social cause by the fulfilment of traditional female roles. In fact, she called on all women to contribute to the socialist movement by using their influence as wives, daughters, sisters and mothers upon their menfolk. A very significant stand of Zetkin

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<sup>25</sup> Karen Honneycut, 1976, " Clara Zetkin: A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Woman's Oppression", p.134

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*,p.135

which is worth noting at this point, is her assertion that, one should not alienate the proletariat women from their role of wife and mother, because the women in these traditional female roles achieve exactly the same as the women who come out to the public realm for activism.<sup>27</sup>

### ***'Motherhood' and radical feminism***

Radical feminism which came in the 1960s was a major attack to the liberal and Marxist feminist theories. Their main emphasis was 'personal is political', involving a redefinition of politics and power whereby they claim that power relation operates not just in the public realms of polity and economy but also at the most private of familial and sexual relationships. They seek the development of a new theory and strategy for women's liberation which will be entirely based on women's shared experience and not on some abstract speculation. They see women oppression as the most fundamental and universal form of domination which should be understood thoroughly and brought to an end. Some radical feminists went beyond this, and asserted that women embody superior qualities to men. They consider men as a natural enemy and therefore the only solution to liberate women is lesbian separatism.<sup>28</sup> Some of these central ideas of Radical Feminism can be dated back to the thoughts of Mary Astell of the 17<sup>th</sup> century who is also described as the First English Feminist.<sup>29</sup>

Kate Millet was among the first who had voiced the major concerns of radical feminists. She introduced the concept of 'patriarchy' as a political institution whose major role is to foster the domination of women. Her objective is to prove the often neglected notion that sex is a status category with political implications.<sup>30</sup>

The sexual relationship between a man and a woman is an expression of male power, and since it is based on power, it is therefore political. Kate Millet was concerned to

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<sup>27</sup> Karen Honneycut, 1976, " Clara Zetkin: A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Woman's Oppression", p.136

<sup>28</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.3

<sup>29</sup> Mary Astell is seen to have forwarded certain ideas like men being the natural enemy of women. According to her women should not bound herself with the task of pleasing men, the need to please men should be abolished only when women live separately from men. She also challenged the notion that men have (cont.)controlled and defined knowledge, and rejected the value system. See Perry, 1986, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, p.103

<sup>30</sup> Kate Millet, quoted in Bryson Valarie, 1992, p.184-85.



expose this crude sexual domination of women by men. Though men dominate women in all areas of life, the sexual domination is so universal that it almost appears natural. It is, according to her, perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture. It also provides the most fundamental concept of power.<sup>31</sup> Therefore for women to be emancipated, the institution of patriarchy should be ended. She also called for a sexual revolution, which would abolish the ideology of male supremacy and its conventional socialisation culture. It would bring to an end the sexual taboos and restraints, and also the negativity surrounding sexual activity.

Kate Millet argues that if male dominance is linked to the sexual mode of reproduction then the solution was to reject heterosexual unions. Regarding marriage and motherhood, she is of the opinion that, so long as she remains obliged to this role as wife and the nurturer and carer, she will never become a full human being. For the matter of women's emancipation, the care of the child should be a public concern. Family is something she attacked very fiercely, for it is the primary place where patriarchy is reared and fostered.

A more fierce attack on reproduction and motherhood came from Shulamith Firestone. According to her, it is the reproductive role of women which had made possible the institution of patriarchy. Women's role of child rearing and child bearing has been the heart of centuries of their oppression. It has also been the main reason for inequality and the fundamental division in the society between men and women.<sup>32</sup> According to her women as an oppressed and subordinated class should take advantage of the new technological advantages which include contraceptives and other reproductive means to break free from their reproductive roles. They should be able to hold controlling power over their own reproductive role, to be able to challenge the biological basis of women's oppression. She goes far beyond, and sees the possibility to use technology for artificial reproduction outside the womb. This, according to her is essential as it will help in the liberation of women. Her ultimate aim is to eliminate, not just the male supremacy, but the sex distinction itself, for only then the genital differences between human being would no longer matter culturally.<sup>33</sup> Showing her extreme displeasure with the women's role of motherhood, child rearing

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Millet, quoted in Bryson Valarie, 1992, p.185

<sup>32</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p. 204

<sup>33</sup> Valarie Bryson, 1992, p.205

and pregnancy, Firestone stated that pregnancy and child birth is not a creative and fulfilling experience. According to her, pregnancy is simply the distortion of one's body for the sake of the species, while childbirth is something which hurts. The emotional manipulation involved in this process is rather harmful for both the mother and the child.<sup>34</sup>

Ann Snitow had very clearly summarised the major changes that had taken place among the various generations of feminists since the 1960s regarding the notion of 'motherhood'. First is the period from 1963 to about 1974, which acknowledged the coming of the 'demon text', as she called it, mainly comprised by the writings of Betty Freidan and Shulamith Firestone which had emphasised women, and women alone, or the idea of women against men, and not much about the family. According to Snitow, the feminism of the 1970s developed a harsh self questioning of motherhood, which later was mistaken as an attack to housewives. Later, the period from 1975 to 1979 was marked by feminists' increased seriousness on the issue of motherhood, starting to criticise it and to study its actual experience and its implications. The taboo on women's own description about the fascination and joy of mothering and also the pain, isolation and boredom was slowly broken.<sup>35</sup> By 1979, as she pointed out, there was a marked shift. Feminists started to extend its discussion of motherhood to family and their analysis of motherhood had taken a defensive turn. Also the question of choice of the mother was very much taken care of. By the 1980s, there was appreciation and embracement of nurturance as an ethic.<sup>36</sup>

### ***The pro-family feminists: Motherhood as a source of power***

Feminists, despite their different inclinations, and despite their differential degree of supporting women's maternal role, commonly have the view that women's ability to participate in the wider society is curbed by the burden of reproduction. Their basic approach is that motherhood should be by choice. They are also against the reduction of women's identity exclusively to the role of motherhood. Though it is often glorified with status and prestige, what they want to keep in mind is that women are 'mothers' and also 'women'. What lie in hand for the feminists to fulfil is to

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<sup>34</sup> Shulamith Firestone, 1979, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p.189.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Snitow, 1992, "Feminism and Motherhood: An American Reading", p.38

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38



retrieve motherhood as source of emancipation, they should not eliminate it as an obstacle, but rather should redefine appropriate terms and conditions that would make motherhood a rather creative experience.

Let us then come to those scheme of thoughts which stretch the point of enrichment and satisfaction that motherhood brings to women, i.e, mainly the fulfilling elements of being a mother. There are some feminist who asserted the motherly values of nurture and care. Their main argument is that, motherhood is a source of power, and therefore men try to suppress and control it. To deny the importance of the role of motherhood is to deny the passionate and intense aspects of women' s life. They reassert the naturalness of women's childrearing and childbearing role, while the others challenged it as something which is socially constructed.

Adrienne Rich argued that, the biological fact of giving birth or the role of reproduction is not what makes women vulnerable, but rather the fact they perform such roles in a patriarchal societal order. Here, in these societies, it became naturally oppressive as these roles are never under the dictates of the women, the question of choice of women is completely absent and it is the men who control it. She is of the view that the institution of the family and traditional female roles like motherhood are capable of empowering women if it is free from patriarchy. Motherhood for her can be the potential source of power for women. The act of mothering and care for the children help in the rise of the 'womanly values' such as cooperation, nurturing and peace.<sup>37</sup>

According to Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 'it is not the fact of mothering that makes women vulnerable, but their social construction, the implication of women following from the meanings attached to the idea of motherhood, and the terms and conditions under which it is allowed to express itself' .<sup>38</sup> She is of the view that becoming a mother is an emotionally fulfilling experience but it turns to be a burden for women if they do not get adequate support from society.

The family, which has been always critiqued, started having its defenders by the 1980s. These defenders stressed on the necessity for the reconsideration of the values of the family and motherhood for a new feminist consciousness. The 'pro-family'

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<sup>37</sup> Adrienne Rich, quoted in Valarie Bryson, 1992, p. 208

<sup>38</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 2010, p.7

feminist, as Mary G. Dietz has pointed out has two goals, one theoretical and the other practical. 'The practical aim is to seek to wrest the defence of the family from the New Right, and theoretical in so far as they intent to reclaim mothering as a dimension of women's experience and defend it as necessary for both gender identity and feminist gender consciousness.' <sup>39</sup>

Among the most prominent of the pro-family feminist is Sara Ruddick who promoted the notion of 'maternal thinking'. Ruddick is aware of the powerlessness attached with mothering but she comes up with a new view which focused on the fact of a constant conjunction between powerlessness and power. According to her, powerless mothers are also powerful.<sup>40</sup> And when she says this she is referring to the power which comes from her capacity to bear and nurse infants. When we deal with mothering, we should not only take into account the pain and oppression because it is itself oppressive to women, but we should articulate in terms of the efficacy and happiness it brings. Mothers, according to her, take a social-biological pride in their reproductive process and develop a maternal competence which comes from her ability to protect and foster the growth of their child. This role of mothering is socially rewarded even in indecent societies. So when all the things are taken together, i.e., loving, competent and appreciated, women need not experience her work as oppressive.<sup>41</sup> According to her, to despise motherhood is to despise women in general.

To scorn, simplify, or sentimentalize maternal care lays the emotional and political foundation for the exploitation of labor, as well as the exploitation of the material and natural worlds in which mothers work and which they are often taken to represent. On the other hand, mothering, as it is now practiced, confines and intimidates women. Moreover, the ideology of Motherhood which turns upon self-sacrifice and the sexual division of responsibility, power, and pleasure is an explicit instrument for the subordination of women's lives to men's desires. To honor mothers or mothering comes all too close to praising the conditions of oppression.<sup>42</sup>

Her main aim in putting forward a form of maternal thinking was to bring the feminists and the mothers together. She wanted to counter those feminist thoughts which regard mothering as boring, monotonous work which confine women to

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<sup>39</sup> Mary G Dietz, 1985, "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking", p.19-20.

<sup>40</sup> Sara Ruddick, 1980, "Maternal Thinking", p.343.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.343,345,346.

<sup>42</sup> Sara Ruddick, 1983, "Thinking about Mothering-Putting Maternal Thinking to Use", p.4

powerlessness. Feminists, according to her, should start considering maternal work as a source for understanding a certain distinctive female perspective.<sup>43</sup>

Another very important figure in this scheme of thought was Jean Bethke Elshtain. Her 'social feminism' is an attempt to restructure the feminist consciousness by pointing out the implications of maternal thinking. According to Elshtain, the family remains the site of the most resonant human ties, the most enduring hopes, the most intractable conflicts, the most poignant tragedies and the sweetest triumphs human life affords.<sup>44</sup> She wanted to offer, in her own words, 'reconstructive ideal of public and private'.<sup>45</sup> She is of the opinion that those who are against the notion of motherhood have destroyed women's most powerful experience and therefore she seeks to foster the identity of women as mothers. She was concerned about the subjugated status of family and therefore aimed at creating a kind of primary importance of the family and the private, against the public political realm. Thus she elevates the family to a morally superior level. She is of the opinion that women's role of mothering is not a simple one, but rather a complicated one which involves the preservation of the vulnerable human life. Clearly Elshtain's social feminism is seen to be propounding a kind of politics of compassion.

Stressing on the importance of care, Joan Tronto, asserts that care provides the basis for the most important form of contemporary radical political thinking. According to her care can be taken as a framework for moral and political judgement as some of the elements that a care perspective suggests are important in making practical political judgements.<sup>46</sup> Going beyond the association of care with motherhood, she says that care should not merely refer to the role of the mother towards her child or other family member but also to those who are receiving care. For her it is always relational and therefore both roles are important<sup>47</sup>.

### ***Motherhood and the Right-Wing***

Another school of thought which had always asserted their strong stand against changes in the traditional familial and maternal role is the Right Wing ideology.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.4

<sup>44</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, 1983, "On 'the Family Crisis' ", p.138.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain cited in Mary G. Dietz, 1985, p.21.

<sup>46</sup> Joan Tronto, 1995, "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments", p. 142

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.143.

Though different in their thought process and approach from the pro-family feminists, they also have always been defensive of the notion of 'motherhood' as central to women's existence and have been mounting a massive offensive against all efforts to separate women from these roles and also from their children. They are the most dedicated defenders of old social order and are often associated with ethnic nationalism. They are supporters of family values and have always been the one who have fiercely opposed abortion, adultery, homosexuality etc. They are also often seen to use motherhood for the interest of the nation.

To know more of how motherhood figures in this scheme, the focus will be on the Right Wing Women Groups in India such as the Mahila Aghadi backed by the Shiv Sena or the Rastrasevika Samiti, an offshoot of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS), focusing on their different forms of articulation of the notion of motherhood. To start with, here is a little background of what motherhood means in socio-cultural context in India.

Motherhood is highly idealised in India. One way of this idealisation is the worship of mother goddesses. But according to Kamala Ganesh, the mother goddess which is worshipped in India is not necessarily a biological mother. It rather conveys the idea of the creative power of femininity, the power of regeneration, and who is able to mediate life and death. It is the worship of a free, unfettered feminine creative principle.<sup>48</sup> The major difference between mother goddess and the human mothers is that, mother goddess are absolutely free and autonomous agents while the human mother is subjected to the various authorities and they are powerless and inactive agents. Indian motherhood, in practice, is dependent on certain conditions like social location of the mother in the family, the desired sex of the child, etc, in determining the privileges of motherhood. The society's attitude towards a woman and her role of mothering depends upon the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Each girl was looked upon as potential mothers of sons and therefore they are trained for the task since an early age.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kamala Ganesh, 2010, "In search of the great Indian Goddess: Motherhood Unbound", in Maithreyi Krishnaraj (ed.), p.74

<sup>49</sup> Indian mothers are glorified as mother of sons. The main concern for the women was sonlessness as it is a major taboo. Women reproductive labour does not give them any control if they do not fall within the accepted framework. It was obligatory for a girl to be a good wife and a good mother. The right of the men over the women was manifested in the various rituals which are conducted in the life cycle

There is also another manifestation of the divine motherhood in India and that is the notion of 'nation as mother'.<sup>50</sup> This facet of motherhood has been used to politicise the realm of culture, religious and aesthetic domain and to give force to the wave of nationalism mainly at the time of the struggle for independence and in the later post-independence politics. In India, the notion of motherhood is symbolised in mythology, legends and popular culture. The mother-child relationship is treated as the most sacrosanct of all. The Right Wing groups in India and its associated movements have always had a strong ideological leaning towards the notion of 'motherland' and 'nation'. And from there they deduce their notion of 'motherhood' as crystallised into two identifiable yet related constructions: one was created out of the icon of 'motherland' while the other is generated by the image of motherhood in the family. One thing we should keep in mind is that both these construction placed motherhood at the heart of the project of framing the 'good' women, defining 'desirable' forms of behaviour among women.

The Right Wing groups emphasised the notions of 'pure wives' and 'good mothers'. They are of the opinion that women should be ready to sacrifice for the family and uphold the unity and integrity of the family. In this sense, they subscribe to the traditional notions of the upholding the values and essence of family as an institution. These women are not so much in support of the notion of fighting for rights and liberties, like the ones which is abundant in the West. They are of the view that a good, pure Hindu woman can achieve respect and happiness by being a mother. By being 'good mothers', women will cope with dowry demands, domestic violence, desertion and discrimination. These women are taught how to possess honour, dignity and authority in the family. They do so by being good mothers, and this role is quite exclusive to them that nothing can take that away from them. Even if they suffer in every other way, when they still nurse their children lovingly, they have the faith that there will be no one who will not honour them.

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(cont.)of men. Women figures nowhere in these rituals for they are only for the wellbeing of the husband and the soil. Women is just the soil where the men sowed their seeds and the harvest belong to them. Sukumari Bhattacharji, 2010, " Motherhood in Ancient India", in Maithreyi Krishnaraj (ed.), p.59

<sup>50</sup> Portrayal of nation as mother is found in several literatures, and mainly the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterji links the natural bounty soil of the land to the affectionate mother. Also the portrayal is seen as a national agenda, projecting mother as a combination of affective warmth and divine power. See Jasodhara Bachi, 1990, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in colonial Bengal".

The very thought of being equal with men, competing with them and fighting against them for equal rights divert women from their inevitable roles according to them. Therefore those who are engaged in these pursuits cannot be termed as good wives and good mothers, and therefore they are not ideal women or mothers of the Hindu nation. They are also completely silent on problems within the family despite their addiction to preserving what is good and ideal of women. They place happiness and security as opposed to rights and equality, and in an 'either or' relationship. Thus, pleasure, desire and rights are aligned together as the other of 'motherhood' and 'tradition'.

Looking back and retrieving the past honour make the motherhood ideal regain its firm ground. Motherhood and the importance of the mother in raising brave and heroic sons, is reiterated at every turn. Hindu women are made in the image of Motherland herself and therefore they are and should be taught of 'decent behaviour'. For Indian women, liberation means liberation from atrocities. It doesn't mean women should be relieved of their duties as wives and mothers. They talk of the 'pride of place' that the Indian woman has always had within the household and therefore no fundamental change in values is necessary according to them.

### **2.3 Political motherhood**

The term 'political motherhood' is composed of two concepts which appear quite contradictory. The term deconstructs the 'private and public' dichotomies and brings forth a new phenomena which, while stressing on the reaffirmation of the established traditional roles of womanhood, creates a kind of activism and assertion of rights that clearly brings them into the public and the political at the same time.

'Political Motherhood' as a term, was also used by Jennifer Schirmer, in the context of Latin American women movement. According to her, it is the use of the language of sacrifice and other traditional values associated with motherhood as both political tool and political protection.<sup>51</sup> Women have been always seen as apolitical creature but here we see the transformation of the culture of care, the preservation of life into a

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<sup>51</sup> Speaking of how state repression could be transformed into possibility of hope and change, Schirmer referred to Argentina, Guatemala and Chile and the rise of the human rights resistance movement, where the mothers challenged the limit of permissible political action, using the image of the powerless and the weak to demystify the powerful. Jennifer G Schirmer, 1989, " 'Those Who Die for Life Cannot Be Called Dead:' Women and Human Rights Protest in Latin America", p.4.



kind of woman's political expression and where the powerless victims of the private domain come out to become political actor in the public realm.

To go deeper into the notion of political motherhood, we need to first delve into what we call the 'political'. The word 'political' is itself a very loaded term which covers a range of activities, and which is a domain in itself, whereby dialogue and reconciliation of interests and opinions take place. Although the realm is not demarcated in very significant ways, and there is always an overlapping of boundaries, the word become more profound and clear when it is juxtaposed to what is 'non-political'. The simple definition of what is non-political refers to those areas of life which the individual can manage herself/himself. Among these areas, domestic sphere is one which serves as a hallmark of what is non-political. The distinction between the political and the non-political gets further condensed into one between public sphere and private sphere or between 'personal' and 'political', and this is where the problem starts. It was often stressed that the attributes of individual rationality, autonomy and equality are the criteria to decide a person's qualification for the public sphere. Unfortunately these qualities have been treated synonymous with masculinity. Women on the other hand have been described as meek, irrational, emotionally shallow who lacks creativity. Throughout the world we have seen various efforts that have been made to confine women within the four domestic walls by constructing them as virtuous mothers and carers. The same patriarchal instincts take root also in higher institutions of the society and the state whereby women are portrayed as helpless creatures who needs protection.

One of the most influential discourse on the public and political space came from Jurgen Habermas. Habermas had successfully historicised the public sphere. The public sphere, which we see now, came about in the early Eighteen century capitalist era, as a zone of rational discourse, associated with the print media, and as a specific sphere between the state and the society. It is in no way associated with the state, but rather for Habermas, it is to oversee the absolutist state. Here, one of the main duties of the bourgeois public sphere is to make transparent the political and administrative decisions.<sup>52</sup> The bourgeois claim that they would make the public sphere accessible to everyone was not fulfilled, for later in the nineteen and twentieth century it no longer

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Hohendahl, and Patricia Russian, 1974, "Jürgen Habermas: "The Public Sphere", p. 46.

remained autonomous. Habermas, therefore, feels that it is no longer relevant and so it will be replaced by a new public sphere which no longer mediates between the state and the private, but there will be the development of a “state which will merge to the society as a whole, an autonomous public body, as private individuals, assure itself with freedom, free time and freedom of movement”.<sup>53</sup> For Habermas, public sphere is as an opinion-shaping zone of discourse and argumentation. He located public and politics beyond the narrow confines of electoral and legislative processes, as the structure through which the content of "political culture" flowed. His concept of the public sphere is implicitly masculine which alienate women and it is not just men who dominated the public sphere, but white men of property, the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. His insistence on the public sphere as one of rational discourse is the most problematic part as ‘rationality’ alone cannot capture the essence of life in public.<sup>54</sup>

The ‘political’ had always been constructed in a ‘universalistic’ and ‘rationalistic’ manner, as we see in Habermas and also most other major theorists. They relegate ‘particularity’ and ‘difference’ to the private sphere, defining the private as a space where a person’s individuality and unique attributes get shaped, and where all other personal attachments and commitments to various groups and sections gets manifested. This attribute of the ‘political’ is problematic especially from a feminist point of view, and feminist theorist throughout different generation have critiqued it and offered various alternatives of ‘political’ which is far more inclusive and acceptable. Iris Marion Young criticised Habermas for being too committed to the ideals of impartiality and universality. Referring to civic public, she is of the view that Habermas reproduces opposition between the universal and the particular, reason and desire.<sup>55</sup>

Judith Butler called into question, the parameters of the ‘political’ itself by making a very important distinction between the constitution of a political field that ‘produces

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<sup>53</sup>Habermas quoted in Peter Hohendahl, and Patricia Russian, 1974, p.47

<sup>54</sup> John L. Brooke, 1998, “Review: Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians”, p.54

<sup>55</sup> Critiquing the notion of ‘impartiality’ advanced by political theorist as principle of civic public, Young expressed the need to express universality and impartiality in a particular form of reasoning which does not oppose reason to affectivity and desire, otherwise impartiality will only lead to seclusion. Habermas theory of communicative action, though realizes that reason does not mean subjugating particular to universal, his reason still stands opposite to desire and feelings. Iris Marion Young, 1987, “Impartiality of the Civic Public” in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique*, p.68-9.

and naturalizes' the constitutive outside and a political field that 'produces and renders contingent' the specific parameters of that political field. Calling the grounds of politics into question, Butler is of the view that 'universality', 'equality', and the 'subject of rights', have been constructed through 'unmarked gender and racial exclusions and by a conflation of politics with public life that renders the private i.e., the reproduction domains of 'femininity', pre-political.<sup>56</sup> The notion of the universal which is so associated with the public and the political is itself a site of contest and re-signification and therefore to assume a concept of the universal would be to impose a culturally hegemonic notion of the social field. Therefore she suggested that the term should be left permanently open otherwise the totalising effect will only lead to exclusion like that in the case of women.<sup>57</sup>

Iris Marion Young, discussed the division between the public and the private whereby the public is seen as a realm of universality and homogeneity, and asserted that this distinction not only excludes women but also other social groups. The most problematic about what is public and political is the presence of a 'general will' which ofcourse had been arrived by transcending all differences. What Young wants and proposed, is the re-politicization of the public life where no one would be required to leave behind their specificity and group affiliation for joining the political realm in discussing general interest. She proposes a 'heterogeneous public' where each different voice will be heard.<sup>58</sup>

Carole Pateman too rejected the idea of 'universal' based on male model, and proposed to replace it by the existence of two sexually differentiated forms of universality. The notion of the political should take into view the specificity of womanhood and the common humanity in the context of men and women. It should give due weight to the sexual difference in the context of civil equality, requires the

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<sup>56</sup> Judith Butler, quoted in Malathi de Alwis, 2009, "Interrogating the 'political': feminist peace activism in Sri-Lanka", p.82

<sup>57</sup> Judith Butler, 1992, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the question of "Post-Modernism"", in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott (ed.), *Feminist theorize the Political*, p-8

<sup>58</sup> Iris Marion Young, 1987, "Impartiality and the Civic Public" in Seyla Benhibib and Drucilla Cornell, p.73-6.

rejection of unitary conception of the individual and the division of the public and the private.<sup>59</sup>

The natural sexual difference is associated with a perceived 'difference of rationality'. The patriarchal account of masculinity and femininity, of what it is to be a man and a woman, endowed masculinity certain attributes and capacities, which are essential for being a part of the public sphere. Although it is said that 'all men are born free and are equal to each other', Pateman asserted that women are not born free. According to her, sexual difference is a political difference, a difference between freedom and subjection. For her the patriarchal civil society has two spheres, out of which one is given more importance. It is the public sphere which is a sphere of civil freedom and it is a realm of the political, while the private sphere is not seen as politically relevant. Pointing out the dichotomy between the private and the civil public sphere, she asserted that the dichotomy reflects the order of sexual difference. The way in which women were incorporated in the civil society is such that they are kept in a sphere which is part of the civil society but separated from the 'civil' sphere.<sup>60</sup>

'Political', for Pateman, is an arena which had been constructed according to the masculine image. Those who belong to it, and the task within it, are all patriarchal constructs. Although women are gradually included in modern liberal democracies, giving them formal citizenship, the 'political' is still a patriarchal power structure, where women are inculcated without giving due value to their qualities and tasks. The promise of equality in the political realm is mainly measuring each one, from a patriarchal scale, and this for women, implies that women must become like men. For Pateman, the public and the 'political' should include women as 'women' with their bodies and all that they symbolise.<sup>61</sup>

Another problem with the notion of the 'political' is the concept of the 'individual', the subject which forms a part of it. The subject, in the modern sense, is better explained by what one calls 'citizenship'. The meaning of 'individual' remains an unsolved question when dealing with the issue of the 'political'. The nature in which inclusion into the 'political' had taken place so far, brings into focus the act of

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<sup>59</sup> Carole Pateman quoted in Chantal Mouffe, 1992, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics", in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott, p.375.

<sup>60</sup> Carole Pateman, 1988, *The Sexual Contract*, p.11

<sup>61</sup> Carole Pateman quoted in Chantal Mouffe, 1992, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics", in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott, p.375

political generation in which members are said to be constituted by 'free relations'. Quoting Pateman, "the individual is constructed from a male body so that his identity is always masculine. The individual is also a unitary figure, a being of the other sex can only be a modification of the individual, not a distinctive being, or his unity and masculine identity is endangered".<sup>62</sup> This idea of the individual does not have any room to fit women into its fold. Clearly the 'individual' could not offer much to women as it had done to men. But the paradox is that, when women was incorporated into the civil society, they too could hear the language of the individual being spoken to them, which guarantees them freedom and a rightful place. In their case, the rightful place being the home, the private sphere. Only men can create political life and take part in it while women are just parties to the 'marriage contract'.<sup>63</sup> Therefore there is a need to abandon the masculine unitary individual and body and sex should also be separated from the individual. The issue at stake is the body of the women for women can attain the formal standing of the civil individuals but as embodied feminine beings and never as individuals in the same sense as men.<sup>64</sup> Critiquing the idea of a given male, unitary individual, and the women's problematic political subject status, Butler argued that subjecthood is not given but rather it is an endless process of becoming. She traced the process of the formation of identity and subjectivity, how we become subjects when we assume the sexed/gendered/raced identities which are constructed for us within existing power structures.<sup>65</sup>

To require the subject means the foreclose the domain of the political, and that foreclosure, installed analytically as an essential feature of the political, enforces the boundaries of the domain of the political in such a way that enforcement is protected from political scrutiny. The act which unilaterally establishes the domain of the political functions, then, as an authoritarian ruse by which political contest over the status of the subject is summarily silenced.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore we see the construction of individual through an act of exclusion and differentiation and not to forget, repression. The act of differentiation created a divide between what is political and what is private. This subject, for Butler, is invariably

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<sup>62</sup> Carole Pateman, 1988, p.223

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p.222

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p.224

<sup>65</sup> Salih Sarah, 2007, *Judith Butler*, p.2

<sup>66</sup> Judith Butler,1992, in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott (ed.), p.4

engaged in the political field for the subject is an accomplishment regulated and produced in advance, and is at such fully political.<sup>67</sup>

Chantal Mouffe put forward the idea of a social agent, an articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, corresponding to the multiplicity of social relations in which it is inscribed. She calls for the construction of a new conception of citizenship where sexual difference should become effectively non-pertinent. According to her the public / private distinction will not be solved by discarding it but by reformulating it in a more adequate way where the emphasis is on rights and a more active sense of political participation and of belonging to a political community. For her, the distinction between the public and the private does not correspond to discrete separate spheres, but every situation is an encounter between the public and the private because every enterprise is private while never immune from public conditions prescribed by the principles of citizenship. In this sense, the membership to the political domain, better impersonated in the idea of citizenship, should be an articulating principle which affects different social agents located at different positions, allowing plurality of allegiance and also should respect of individual liberty.<sup>68</sup>

From all the critiques that we have seen, we can now arrive to a point that, for the notion of the 'political' to be unproblematic and meaningful, it has to be one which can incorporate two bodies of mankind along with feminine and masculine individuality.

Now that we have had significant insights into the concept of 'political' we will now see how 'motherhood' gets its share in this sphere and how the notion of 'political motherhood' posed a challenge to the rhetorical notion of the 'political'. As we have already seen the various thematic on the issue of motherhood in the first section, we will now proceed with the interplay (if any) between the women's role of motherhood and the political.

Motherhood seen as a typical female attribute, therefore, came to be a strictly private and familial matter. This strict confinement of motherhood into the four walls of the family had invited a lot of criticisms and alternate theorising of both concepts. It is

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<sup>67</sup> Judith Butler, 1992, in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott (ed.), p.12-13

<sup>68</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 1992, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics", *Ibid*, p.376-378

this notion of motherhood as confined to the private realm being challenged by the concept of political motherhood which aspires to use the notion of motherhood and the attributes associated with it, to a larger scheme of phenomena outside the familial domain. Stressing the importance of motherhood and the role of women as social reproducers, Hannah Arendt asserted that, the capacity to begin or to create life is the foundation of all thoughts, all actions and all politics. Though women role of reproduction is hidden in the private realm of the household, they are foundational to sustaining the public sphere.<sup>69</sup> Therefore there is a need to confer a political relevance to the notion of motherhood and the capacity to create life, as pointed out by Pateman. According to Pateman, this capacity should be treated with equal political relevance to men's willingness to fight and die for his country, which is offcourse the ultimate test of citizenship. Thus she stood for political value of motherhood and that it should no longer be presented as antithesis to what is public.<sup>70</sup> The exclusionary practice that the 'political' does not take into account is the real birth of their citizens as Luce Irigaray has pointed out, the birth of the citizen from the mother, and regard the relation between the mother and the child as irrelevant and unpolitical. It takes every individual as a given, a birth without a women.

The notion of political motherhood, seeks to draw power from the role as 'mothers' and use it for paving a way for their entry into the political. A move beyond the home or familial domestic sphere, assuming public roles and offices or voluntary organisations against their male counterpart is not the only concern. The concern is the reassertion of their traditional roles not in terms patriarchal culture but in terms of women's natural inclinations, desire and needs. It is bringing new dimensions to the public sphere, which fostered the special identities and attributes of women. Imogen Tyler, gives a slightly different but interesting view on the issue of maternal agency in public. According to her, women are no longer confined to the private sphere but they are only able to enter the public through the processes of maternal abjections.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hannah Arendt, cited in Tyler, Imogen, 2009, "Intoduction: Birth", p.1

<sup>70</sup> Carole Pateman quoted by Mouffe, Chantal, 1992, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics", in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott (ed.), p.375

<sup>71</sup> The need to recognise that the politics of birth is the politics of generation is expressed by Tyler. Natality remains an unsolved area for feminism and therefore they need to find certain ways that can hold together different works on birth and motherhood. The works should place birth and those who give birth at the centre of politics. Imogen Tyler, 2009, p.2

Women would struggle hard and achieve some degree of equality in the public realm but this equality will always be interpellated by the women's relation to the maternal.

Treating mothering and motherhood as an ethics, public and a political practice, Lisa Baraitser talks about two concerns- maternal ethics and the notion of 'making things public'.<sup>72</sup> Women need to communicate their maternal experiences in public in away to make a difference, for the maternal voices are not heard and if so heard they have been always represented incoherent images and comments. She claims that mothering makes things public and it occurs frequently and importantly in public. This view of hers, not only take into view what have been long denied about the role of motherhood but also deforms and reforms the understanding of the public itself. She argues that there are spaces which are created when maternal works are strayed from the local, emerging from the everyday use by the mothers with their children in tow. She, taking a cue from Nancy Fraser, named it 'counter-publics'.<sup>73</sup> Though these spaces are not exactly the spaces of employment or decision making, she calls these spaces 'transitional spaces' and it contest the singularity, normativity and bourgeois nature of the public space.

There is an inherent contradiction and a split in the things that is associated with motherhood when it comes to the public. Mothers, in the initial years would be expected to be the caring and clinging mother and later, with time she is expected to be the loving mother who is ready to let go of the child. This is precisely because of the sense of humiliation associated with adults in the display of this primordial dependency, or the earliest object of love, in the public. Therefore, after a certain period, there is always an effort to suppress it. This is how motherhood undergoes idealisation, and than denigration.

For Baraitser, maternal ethics is not describing ethics in the feminine sense, premised on capacities to nurture, care, preserve or contain, but to think about what is generative about motherhood for mothers and maternal itself. The understanding of 'public', as an expression of general and anonymous, while marking mothering as specific task and private, makes the relation between mothering and the public space problematic. It is considered so because mothers themselves are conceived as 'place-

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<sup>72</sup> Lisa Baraitser, 2009, "Mothers who makes thing public", p.9

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p.10



the unthinkable and unamenable place we come from and return to',<sup>74</sup> and therefore she is always out of place in public sphere. But what Baraitser argued is that, when mothers inhabit 'non-place' (according to Marc Auge, a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity), they reproduce a reverberation that constitutes a particular form of publicness.<sup>75</sup>

While talking about political motherhood, Schirmer had mainly referred to a kind of women activism which she referred to as 'motherist' movement. These women use the image of the weak and powerless female to their advantage as a protective means for mobilisation, resistance and survival.<sup>76</sup> The movement started with mothers whose maternal roles of protectors of their homes and family have been violated, and who sought restitution from the state.<sup>77</sup>

Referring to Schirmer, Pnina Werbner had pointed out some significant characteristics. Political motherhood according to her, 'valorise maternal qualities- caring, compassion, responsibility for the vulnerable- as encompassing and anchored in democratic values. Political motherhood is a process of unfolding consciousness, as women progressively moved into the public sphere'.<sup>78</sup> To quote Werbner further,

Political motherhood is by definition overt, a move into the public domain which challenges the confinement of women to domesticity. As such it transforms the social order without undermining it. 'Motherist' movement advocate defence of the integrity of the family and the autonomy of persons within its ambit of responsibility, and stress the centrality of values associated with motherhood for shaping the wider order of the political community. They work for women's cause while advocating a transcendent world view.<sup>79</sup>

Now it is to be kept in mind that the above notion of political motherhood is not applicable to all types of women's activism. Though apparently Right-Wing in its defence of familial values and roles of women, it can be juxtaposed to the other Right-Wing women's activism and the ideology behind their mobilisation.

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p.12, 13,14

<sup>75</sup> Marc Auge used the phrase 'non-place of supermodernity', which according to him is not a secluded private place, but are the spaces where mothering takes place in Western late modern urban context. Marc Auge, 1995, "*Non places: introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*"

<sup>76</sup> A particular form of women's movement in Latin America, where mothers fight against the state violence of 'enforced disappearances'. Jennifer G Schirmer,1989.

<sup>77</sup> Pnina Werbner,2005, "Political Motherhood and the Feminisation of Citizenship: Women's activism and the transformation of the Public Sphere", in Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner, *Women Citizenship and Difference*, p.221.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.221

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.231

For instance when we take into account the existing Right-Wing women movements in India we find quite different underlying characteristics. Mainly these women's organisations are developed as a satellite of the male dominated nationalistic discourses which have a well defined enemy 'Other'. And it is their hatred and need for protection from this 'Other', that brings them together by their male counterparts. Now what is interesting here is to look at the very circumstances which bring these women into the male dominated fold of violence. These women wings are mostly dominated by urban poor women who have experienced so many complex situations affecting their lives. And therefore one main reason for their adoption of violent communal conflict is because it provides them an alternative way to overcome vulnerabilities within a life of poverty.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike the women of the 'motherist' movement, the women of the Right-Wing believe in the power of violence to achieve certain personal and political goals. They project themselves not as meek and helpless, but as strong female figures, who then comes out to control a range of physical material and social space. Women's adherence to these violent movements are motivated by conviction, opportunism and active choice, as Bacheetta has pointed out and they were more concerned with gaining visibility as women even more than any real commitment to the Hindu fundamentalism which had brought them together<sup>81</sup>. According to Sen, poor women overtly displayed loyalty to a nationalist cause but covertly rested important social spaces and economic leverage.<sup>82</sup>

The 'motherist' movement does not involve any sorts of ideological leanings unlike the Right-Wing. The fact that they are mothers, sisters, wives etc itself acts as the mobilising and uniting factor. They are not seen to be wrestling for any political

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<sup>80</sup> The Mahila Aghadi, the women's wing of the Shiv Sena also stand for the assertion of religious and cultural identity. The 'Other' which is referred here is the Muslim Other, who is their enemy rather than patriarchy as a whole. Adding their support to the Shiv Sena's 'son of the soil' movement, they became perpetrators of the fierce nationalistic discourse overtly while covertly negotiating economic and social spaces. See Atreyee Sen, 2007, *Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum*.

<sup>81</sup> Bacheetta discusses the Rashtrasevika Samiti, a branch of the RSS, which started its massive participation with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The RSS used its women wing in mass mobilisation and in their violence against Muslims. They were trained for their new roles in public once they emerged as a strong women's wing, but their role of a powerful female was never brought back inside the four walls of the family. See Paula Bacchetta, 2004, *Gender in the Hindu State: RSS Women as Ideologues*.

<sup>82</sup> See Atreyee Sen, 2007.

leverage or economic gains. They upheld the feminine ethics of love and care to a very high level and from there they derive their strength to fight those who have violated their rights. It is when they are robbed of their roles of mothers and wives that they started to confront those powers, forming a community along the lines of women attributes.

Looking at political motherhood as just 'motherist' movement would be too narrow as there are also several manifestation of motherhood which is not confined to the domestic realm. One such notion of motherhood which had clearly came out to the 'political' are also those women whose sexualities and roles have been instrumentally regulated by the state. Here we see various instances of violence against women, first violating their sexualities and then rehabilitating back. This area will be discussed in the next chapter.

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## **CHAPTER -3:**

### **MOTHERHOOD AND THE NATION-STATE**

The nation-state constructs people in certain ways. It is in one such construction that gender is produced. The state also constrains and regulates the lives of people, more in case of marginalised groups, especially women. It includes women within its fold, in certain ways different from that of men. Most of the times, it had treated women as passive, dependent, vulnerable, and one which needs to be protected. The state is seen to have emerged as a monolithic social structure which failed to inculcate different aspirations of different groups, rather than a set of social institutions and relations which accommodate differences, making it more exclusive rather than inclusive. Various different voices gets neglected and sidelined, when it comes to the mainstream political discourse. Issues of women and womanhood, therefore, does not get the required attention it deserves from the agency of the state. Although women constitute a significant part of the nation, they are, time and again, subjected to immense repression and violation of their personhood. This puts the membership issue of political community and other forms for community into question as to whether the individuality and identity of women could ever be one which goes along with other dominant male identities.

The chapter will explore how the nation-state addresses women. It will look into the relationship between a nation and its women, the various ways in which the nationalist ideology constructs women. What are the changes in this relationship once the nation gets associated with the state? Also how did the relation between women

and the post colonial state manifest itself, when the state's institution were getting entrenched, and what happen when the nation gets prioritised? We will find out that, in virtue of nation building, womanhood in general and motherhood in particular gets instrumentalised. Further the relationship gets more intertwined in the project that women's role of motherhood, which used to be often idealised, actually become a cause for their own estrangement. As we move on, we will also see the implications of gender on the nation-state and the political subjectivities that are conferred upon women. We will explore how, and in what ways the dominant constructions of womanhood gets transformed into practices in the relationship between the state and women.

In most nation building exercises, it is observed that the notion of 'motherhood' and 'womanhood' have always been a major subject of thought. One reason being the different sort of relationship which evolved between the nation-state and women. In the new relationship, the control and regulation of motherhood and the role of 'women as mothers' becomes central to the nation building projects, providing legitimacy to the political interests of the states. To illustrate this case, the chapter will look at the state of Bangladesh when it was newly born. The state of Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, struggled for the formation of its new state, which was realised after the war of 1971. In the complex project of state formation and nation building, the newly formed Bangladeshi state made use of the notion of motherhood of the war raped women. The use of their role of motherhood was very much seen in the state programme of reinstatement and rehabilitation of these victims into the state and the society, claiming that those women needed to be protected from the unwanted motherhood. According to Nayanika Mookherjee, the Bangladeshi state was seen to be mainly concerned with containing the role of the raped women as mothers. The state, thus, dekinning the children born due to rape from their mothers, and rekinning those rapped women within legitimate heterosexual motherhoods.<sup>1</sup>

We need to therefore go into the issue of motherhood and womanhood with regards to the state and its certain institutions, exploring how women become a focus of

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<sup>1</sup> The state way of handling the war rape women through legal technology of abortion and adoption showed trends of the state of exception in Bangladesh, where women's sexuality is controlled and children are categorised. The later part of the chapter will go into more details. Mookherjee Nayanika, 2007, "Avialable Motherhood: Legal Technologies, 'state of exception' and the dekinning of 'war-babies' in Bangladesh", p.339.

intersection of various forces that operate within the working of a state and a nation. As we move through this journey, we will see how women's identities got linked up with the creation of the nation-state – the ways in which they become the symbol of honour of the community and the nation, and the importance of their role of motherhood in reproducing the nation – articulating another form of control over them. Violence operates at every level of national processes and therefore we need to analyse how women are integrated into the nationalist projects and what are its various implications.

### **3.1. Women and the Nation**

Nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is 'an imagined community, and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.<sup>2</sup> The genealogical dimension of the nation is constructed around the specific origin of the people or race. The myth of common origin or shared blood/genes tend to construct the most exclusionary / homogenous visions of the nation. Another major dimension of nationalist project is the cultural dimension in which the symbolic heritage provided by language and/or religion and/or other customs and traditions is constructed as the 'essence' of the 'nation'.<sup>3</sup> For Anderson, nationalism was described in terms of kinship and home, those that are naturally tied, and cannot be chosen but something inevitable which leads to selfless attachment and sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> Nira Yuval Davis adds another important element to the definitions of nation, and that is the idea of 'common destiny'.<sup>5</sup> So we see that the major dimensions of a nation are common origin, common heritage/culture and common destiny.

Nationalisms carry the belief of pure and liberatory patriotism, which is pitted against an evil, according to Uma Chakraborty, and that evil ranges from racist colonialism to certain other violent aggression, religious or communal divides, etc. which goes against the main 'national' interest. There is always a tendency of guarding one's

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson cited in Nira Yuval-Davis, 2005, *Gender and Nation*, p-15.

<sup>3</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, 2005, *Gender and Nation*, p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Denise Kandiyoti referring to Anderson in "Identity and its discontents", (1991), p. 234

<sup>5</sup> Common destiny was emphasised by Otto Bauer. This component is future oriented and is able to explain more important and contemporary issues like the subjective sense of commitment of people to groups, the dynamic nature of national collectivities, etc. Nira Yuval Davis, 2005, *Gender and Nation*, p.19

nationalism as 'higher'<sup>6</sup> nationalism, than that of others, also in the process claiming ones culture as 'authentic' marginalising other cultures.

Nationalism is a deeply gendered, racialized, sexualised social structure. It is, according to Anupama Roy, 'a masculinist project in which male agency was prioritised and female agency circumscribed'.<sup>7</sup> In the nationalist discourse women features as discursive constructions, as sites of struggle for power, as objects of purity and as symbols of domesticity and home. She also asserted that, 'the subsumption of women into the national body politic takes place as symbols of national honour, essence of the nation, as signifiers of differences or metaphorical boundaries between nations, and by implication, the powers of men'.<sup>8</sup> The discourse of nationalism, thus marginalises women, and according to her, institutionalised gender difference.

In order to explore the complex relationship between the nation and women, it would be interesting to start with the ways in which the nation, and its processes address the question of women at the time of its formation. Efforts to resolve the problem of women are driven by the notion of preservation of culture – whereby social life, is divided into two spheres, the 'material and the spiritual'.<sup>9</sup> Partha Chatterjee explained that the material domain is the one which is subjected to outside influence and dominance while the inner spiritual sphere, as they claim, are not to be exposed to such influences and that this sphere should be kept intact of its distinctive spiritual essence. This division between the material and the spiritual also takes the form more ideological inner and outer dichotomy or a more concrete division of the home and the world. In all this divisions, the material, the outer and the world signify the terrain of material interest and practical consideration which is outside of us and typically a domain of the male. On the other hand the spiritual, inner and the home are the space of inner spiritual self and our true identity which should be kept unaffected by the material world and this is a space represented by the women. This dichotomy was very much in the consciousness of the nation building exercise and therefore efforts

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<sup>6</sup> Taking the example of India at the time of independence and later, the notion of 'higher' nationalism based on principles of secularism and democracy was pitted against the evil, selfish, communal Pakistan. Uma Chakraborty, 2008, "Archiving the Nation-State in Feminist Praxis: A South Asian Perspective", pp.1

<sup>7</sup> Anupama Roy, 2005, *Gendered Citizenship, Historical and Conceptual Explorations*, p.57

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.41

<sup>9</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1990, "The Nationalist resolution of the Women's Question", in Kumkum Sangari (ed.), *Recasting Women*, p.238

are made towards protecting, preserving and strengthening the inner core of the national culture. According to him, the home is seen as the site of the pure spiritual quality of the national culture, and therefore women were to protect it from the changing outside world and they must also not lose their spiritual feminine values.<sup>10</sup>

As was the case of India, in many colonial states, the women's question was an issue of contest between the colonial state and the nationalist elite. Anti-colonial nationalism emerged with the need to carve out a sense of nationhood, liberation and self-determination. They struggled to assert equality with the coloniser. They brought out the issues of oppression, resistance and freedom, along with the women's question. The women's question was largely shaped by class concerns and concerns of a national identity. The social reformers attempted to 'emancipate women from a savage past', but they did not involve or attempted any critique of the existing structures of society and women subordinate roles. What they did was to stabilise the social structure, making the women's subordinate role more secure.<sup>11</sup>

According to Anupama Roy, 'The construction of a distinct national identity that was signified by difference based on gender was the basis for much of national recovery in anticolonial struggles the worlds over'.<sup>12</sup> This national recovery was to construct a reformed national tradition and defend it on grounds of modernity. It was grounded on an ancient and unsullied past, and also with the creation of a 'new woman', which according to the nationalists, is a more 'refined' woman distinct from the Western woman and also the street/ordinary woman. The construction of 'ordinary' women, according to Partha Chatterjee was as follows-

...coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males. It was precisely this degenerate condition of women which nationalism claimed it would reform, and it was through these contrasts that the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the Westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as the common women of the lower classes. Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the

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<sup>10</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1990, "The Nationalist resolution of the Women's Question", in Kumkum Sangari (ed.), *Recasting Women*, p.238, 239,243.

<sup>11</sup> Enmeshed within the ongoing contest and conflict between the coloniser and the nationalist, the women's question was more of addressing the issues of child marriage, sati, the life and condition of widows, etc., the debate around the status of women in the society was subjugated by political issues. The social reformers themselves were not able to incorporate liberal and egalitarian ideas efficiently and continued to stick to several fundamental conservative elements. Anupama Roy, 2005, p.59

<sup>12</sup> Anupama Roy, 2005, p.62



mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question.<sup>13</sup>

The resolution of the women's question by the creation of a 'new woman', clearly indicates the 'differential construction of the public sphere'.<sup>14</sup> The reform movement while stabilising the social structure, advocated a new form of patriarchy under nationalism. It conferred upon women the social responsibility to act as the guard of the spiritual and cultural domain, thus binding them with a new technique of subordination. This new patriarchy, according to Partha Chatterjee, is a combination of subtle force of persuasion and coercive force.<sup>15</sup> The new women struggled to readapt the past, so as to meet the needs of the present. At this point it is worth remembering an interesting feature of the nationalist discourse. Nationalism, on the one hand, presents itself as a modern project which have the ability to transform traditional attachments in favour of new identities, but on the other, seek reaffirmation of a communal past, and restoration of authentic cultural values which they take pride of.<sup>16</sup>

In most of the reform movement we could see that, as Sami Zubaida points out, the reformers' main concern was to uproot 'backwardness' than 'foreignness'. The Indian case provides an elaboration to this point. It was pointed out that the nationalists clearly felt the need to upgrade the country with material advancement and cultivate material techniques to be completely independent. Certain imitations and adaptations of Western norms were necessary even though they claim the necessity of keeping the spiritual domain untouched. According to her, the nationalists were politically opposed to European domination, but they were not culturally antagonistic to its civilisation.<sup>17</sup>

The emancipation of women was presented as part and parcel of a national regeneration project articulated in the language of moral redemption. They also have a cultural pride and a belief in their ancient civilisation which once accorded equality with men. While the nationalist often emphasised on the need to regain the lost freedom which the women once had, the facts present a rather different picture. Their main agenda of reform was not so much out of concern for the status of women, but

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<sup>13</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1989, 'Colonialism, Nationalism and the Colonized Women', p. 627

<sup>14</sup> Anupama Roy, 2005, p.64

<sup>15</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1989, p.630

<sup>16</sup> See, A. D. Smith, 1971, *Theories of Nationalism*; E. Gellner, 1983, *Nations and Nationalism*; B. Anderson 1983, *Imagined Communities*; and H. K. Bhabha (ed.), 1990, *Nation and Narration*.

<sup>17</sup> Sami Zubaida, 1998, 'Islam, Cultural nationalism and the Left', p.7

rather about a political encounter between the tradition of the conquered people and a colonial state.<sup>18</sup>

According to Denise Kandiyoti, the women's stake in nationalism is a very complex issue.

On the one hand, nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interrelating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore we see the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the nationalist project whereby it tries to fit modernity into the tradition and make the both compatible with each other. Their reform measures are full of ironies. The aspiration of modernity forced them to critique the existing structures as backward, feudal or patriarchal; but rather than posing a threat to these structures, they are redefined as ethnic markers or as symbols of 'national' identity. These contradictions are best felt in the lives of women because modernity was invested with different meanings for men and women, whereby men were relatively free to adopt new styles of conduct, while women had to be 'modern-yet-modest'.<sup>20</sup> They might have hopped to take refuge in the reforms but they were subjected to new legitimised forms of subordination.

The inherent gender biasness in the nationalist projects is also visible in the hegemonic theorisations about the nations and nationalisms. Theoretical formulations on nationalism have 'typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope'.<sup>21</sup> They have, by far till date, ignored the gender experiences as irrelevant. Most theories of nations and nationalism saw nations as natural and universal phenomena which is an 'automatic' extension of kinship relations.<sup>22</sup> And therefore they thought it unnecessary to take into its preview, the various aspects of women's life. Also the construction and making of history do not

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<sup>18</sup>The belief of the nationalist that the women's question belong to the spiritual domain, a domain which is considered superior and sovereign from the colonial state, could not allow any form of encroachment from outside. Thus the nationalist thought that this was a domain where it could act on its own without any intervention of the colonial power. Anupama Roy, 2005, p. 60-61. Also see Partha Chatterjee, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Denise Kandiyoti, 1991, 'Identity and its Discontents', p.433

<sup>20</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, 1991, 'Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran', in D. Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, p.49

<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Enloe (1989) cited by Anupama Roy, 2005, p.42

<sup>22</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, 2005, p.1

include women's experience and therefore what we call 'history' is male history, which is bias and incomplete. Thus, women were silenced in these processes. Now what it implies is that, in order to find out the roles and experiences which women had, we should look in terms of the feminine roles in familial spaces rather than political or public space. They were only accounted for their supportive roles. As Anupama Roy says:

Not only are the needs of the nation identified with the frustrations and aspirations of men, the representation of national power is contingent on the construction of gender difference. The very definition of nationhood rests on the male recognition of identity and camaraderie. The struggle for decolonisation is waged over the feminised domestic body/space displaying a proprietary relationship of ownership, exchange and conflict.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, the fraught relationship between the nation and gender and the gendered symbolisation of the nation gets manifested in the rhetoric of motherland – the use of women (mother) in the nation building, where landscapes are represented as the 'mother', thereby feminising the landscape and filling them with emotive and political meanings.<sup>24</sup> This representation is a site of eventual poignant blame and a source of strength and meaning. It also invokes the notion of sustenance and violation which leads to the assumption of the role of the 'protector' by the men, a sense of piety and devotion, affection and pain for the mother nation, who is in need of protection. Moreover, as the women are always seen to be associated with the private, the nation or the community merged with the mother or the devout wife who are in dire need of protection. This association drive the men to come out and sacrifice their lives for her defence. When women came out in defence of the nation, like participating in nationalist movements, their act of coming out of their narrowly prescribed roles of the private and the spiritual, is needed to be justified in the name of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the nation. 'Their activities, be they civic, charitable or political, could most easily be legitimised as natural extensions of their womanly nature and as a duty rather than a right'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Anupama Roy, 2005, p.42

<sup>24</sup> Nation as mother (land) was also seen as a scheme of thought in nationalist movement and later the nationalist Hindu Right ideology as pointed out in the previous chapter how the nation is looked as the natural bountiful, rich soil which gives the warmth and affection like a mother. Nayanika Nayanika, 2007, 'Gendered Embodiments: mapping the body-politic of the rape women and the nation in Bangladesh', p.39. Also see, Jasodhara Bachi, 1990, 'Representatting Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in colonial Bengal'.

<sup>25</sup> Denise Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 433,

The personification of nation as women, according to Karen Gabriel, signal, establish and maintain certain important markers. These markers are those of-

...exclusivity and legitimacy and thereby contain within their significations, the characteristics of a desirable, acceptable and ideal national corpus. Figuring the national space, actually embodying and detailing it, are thus the highly political acts of socialising, culturing and claiming that space politically and ideologically. The material attributes that are bestowed on this body (at once social and divine) are designed to render it simultaneously contemporary and immediately relevant, prophetic and forward looking, historically retrospective and epical, reaching back into real and symbolic time, thereby signalling a notion of the nation that attempts to assert the fundamental social, cultural and consanguinal continuity and commonality between its contemporary inhabitants and their ancestors, both historical and epical.<sup>26</sup>

According to Gabriel, conceptualisations of the nation have various components which are ideational, ideological and emotional. The sexualisation of the nation – nation as mother – is supported by the cultural and historically contingent organisations of gender relations. Out of the many facets of gender relations – the mother and the son relation – signify the relation between the nation and the male citizen. She further points out that this signification is done basically by defining nation and citizens as ‘both intimately and abstractly, domestically and publicly, individually and communally’.<sup>27</sup> The mother figure acts as emotive binding mediator of this relation and provides an emotional conduit between the mother nation and the son citizen.

The glorification of nation as the mother, in literatures and ideologies represents passive, decorative and emblematic status. When the idea of nation is mixed with women or when nation becomes a woman, it portrays simpler and abridged reality of women life experiences. As Boland said ‘Once the idea of nation influences the perception of a woman, then the idea of woman is suddenly and inevitably simplified. She can no longer have complex feelings and aspirations. She becomes the passive projection of a national idea, a dehumanised ornament.’<sup>28</sup> Nationalism, thus, colonised certain categories of imagination, politicised certain realities by devaluing certain others.

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Gabriel, 2009, ‘Whose Mother(Land)?: Visualising and Theorising National Identity’, p.2-3

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.11

<sup>28</sup> Boland Eavan, 1996, *Object Lessons*, cited by Shiv Visvanathan, 2003, ‘Interrogating the Nation’, p. 2301

The figure of a woman is also important in the construction of oppositional identities by nationalists. One is the figure of the colonialist white women and the second is the colonised woman. With respect to the colonised women, both the nationalist and the colonialist expressed the need to save them; while the colonialist focused on the evil traditional practices that were prevalent, the nationalist portrayed the colonised women as victims of the foreign power. According to Anupama Roy, the representations of women as image of male gage or male protection helped in the construction a masculine national identity.<sup>29</sup> This construction of a male national identity had implications on women's agency as well. It is pointed out that women only enjoy a designated agency, an agency by invitation only. It is not in direct political relation but as always mediated by their domestic relation to men.

By now we have seen the relation between women and the nation which was established mainly by the nationalists through its reform and regeneration programmes. Besides these, there are also other implications of nation on women. Focusing on the women's specific role of reproducers, we shall now see the various conjunctions between the nation and women.

### ***Women as reproducers of nation.***

We should always keep in mind that women are a very crucial part in the national project. There are various intersections between women's reproductive roles and the constructions of nations. It is infact, the women who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically.

Women reproductive role i.e., their ability to bear children, have various implications on the constructions of nations because, the carving out of a nation needs an exclusive national identity, an identity of 'unique people'. As biological reproducers, women are 'bearers of the collective' within the boundaries of the nation.<sup>30</sup> The nation state professes the idea of a collective homogeneous identity, i.e. the nation. According to Amena Mohsin, the nation or collective, in the discourse of nationalism, has been linked to a clan or kinship for which the authentication of the clan members is imperative. Women, therefore, became the biological and cultural bearers of that

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<sup>29</sup> Anupama Roy, 2005, p.51

<sup>30</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, 2005, p.26

nation, in order to maintain the purity and authentication of the nation. They also become the property and symbols of honour of the nation.<sup>31</sup>

Women's reproductive role is of immense importance when we consider the notion of 'common origin' in most ethnic and national collectives. Nira Yuval Davis has pointed out that though common origin is the most accepted norm, there are also other nations which stress on the notion of 'common destiny' as their organising principle. The mythical unity of the imagined communities which divides the world into 'us' and 'them' is maintained and ideologically produced by a whole system of what Armstrong calls symbolic 'border guards'.<sup>32</sup> The border guards can identify people as members or non-members of a specific community. Here too, gender plays a very specific role. Women's role can be seen as symbolic body guards and as embodiment of the collectivity, while at the same time being its cultural producers.<sup>33</sup>

Yuval Davis had pointed out three discourses regarding the women's role of reproduction. The first one sees 'People as Power', relating people as a source of power of the nation. The future of the nation is seen to depend on its continuous growth. Sometimes this growth is depended on immigration and at other times it is depended most exclusively on the reproductive powers of women who are called upon to have more children. The second one is called the 'Eugenics' discourse. It is concerned not with the size of the nation but with its quality. Beyond its concern for the physical health of the next generation, they also stress on importance of national stock and biologization of cultural traits. The third and the final one is 'The Malthusian Discourse'. It focuses mainly on population control policies which are primarily aimed at reducing the rate of growth overall. Women are often the captive target population for such policies. Malthusian discourse has not only been an ideological discourse but has become a cornerstone of the population policies in many Third World countries themselves, as a major strategy to try and solve those country's economic and social problems. The effect of the Malthusian approach is often highly gendered. Where there is strong pressure to limit the number of children, and where

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<sup>31</sup> Amana Mohsin, 2007, "For her the war continues: Women, Insurgency and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh", in Shrestha and Thapa (ed.), *The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Women in South Asia*, p.27

<sup>32</sup> Armstrong quoted by Nira Yuval Davis, 2005, p.23

<sup>33</sup> Yuval-Davis, 2005, p.23

male children are most highly valued for social and economic reasons, practices of abortion and infanticide are mainly directed towards the baby girl.<sup>34</sup>

### *Nation 's identity and women ' s body*

The identity of the community and nation is constructed on the bodies of women. Women are not seen as members, rather they are seen as 'belonging' to the community and as a result, the community's proprietorial rights over women are defined by placing them within the family and community. They are expected to act according to the set norms if they want the protection and name of the community or group. These proprietorial rights can also be challenged by the 'other' group, by removing the women from the realm of the family and the community.

In the name of protecting the honour of the community and the nation, time and again women's freedom has been curtailed. As the bearer of culture, she has to carry the burden of being a 'proper women'.<sup>35</sup> She has to cater to the prescribed norms and degree of acceptable sexualities. Aggression on women can be legitimised by proving that they are outside the 'proper' norm and also by their lack of family or community status. Thus, identity formation, is defined by, and through the aggression of women. This aggression is mediated by caste and community specially, in situations where there is precipitation of caste and community interest. In an atmosphere charged with polarised interest, women of particular communities are targeted for attack.<sup>36</sup>

Women are also trapped in battles of identity which places them firmly within the family and the community. This aggressive identity politics get legitimised by the state and limits women's access to secular criminal and civil justice in serious ways. By legitimising male control within the family and community, it pushes all those women who cannot be placed within the family and community, outside the preview of law, thus sanctioning all manners of aggression against them without providing any access to democratic justice. This is of serious consequences for all women because,

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<sup>34</sup> Yuval-Davis, 2005, p.32-33

<sup>35</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2007, "For her the war continues: Women, Insurgency and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh", in Shrestha and Thapa (ed.), p.28.

<sup>36</sup> Kalpana Kannabiran, 1996, "Rape and the construction of Communal Identity" in Kumari Jayawardene and Malathi de Alwis (ed), *Embodied Violence: Communalising women's Sexuality in South Asia*, p.32-33.

all that is needed to be done in instances of aggression or rape, were to prove that they are not the property of any men.<sup>37</sup>

The struggle for hegemony and power among communities and nations is also carried out on women's body, establishing control over women through various ways, the worst among them being rape. Kalpana Kannabiran pointed out two ways in which identity formation takes place: One is the rape of the women belonging to a lower/minority group, which signifies the rape of the community, and it is justified by demonstrating its inherent immorality of the lower group. Second is through allegation by dominant group of rape and aggression against their women by men of minority communities, demonstrating the lack of character of minority men.<sup>38</sup> Similar argument has been put forward by Amena Mohsin, whereby she says that the construction of the women's image as the honour of the nation, has largely contributed to the adoption of rape as a systematic war strategy. Raping a woman is equated with dishonouring the enemy's property and honour. Wars are often fought in the name of protecting women and children, who are considered weak and vulnerable.<sup>39</sup> Thus we see the use of rape as a legitimate tool in the struggle of power and honour. It will be not much to say that honour, pride, dignity, purity, sovereignty and tradition were all invested in women, who act as keepers of their family's, community's and nation's honour.<sup>40</sup>

### **3.2. Women and the nation-state**

We have already seen the nation's articulation of women and their various aspects of life. This relationship undergoes a major change once the nation is associated with the state, as we see in most of the modernising states. In this section we will look into the dynamics of this relationship.

Tracing the development of the modern state, David Held pointed out its characteristics, which includes a fixed territoriality within which it holds the sovereign power and legitimacy over a defined population and exercises control over

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<sup>37</sup> Kalpana Kannabiran, 1996, in Kumari Jayawardene and Malathi de Alwis (ed), p.40

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.33

<sup>39</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2007, in Shrestha and Thapa (eds), p.28

<sup>40</sup> Aysha Ghani, 2009, "Abducted identities, Pakistan, its partition and its Abducted women" in Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai, Parama Roy(ed.), *States of Trauma, Gender and Violence in South Asia*, p.173



means of violence. The state is thus sovereign, independent and autonomous control over means of violence requires the 'pacification of the people' and breakdown of rival camps, and the issue of legitimacy calls for the loyalty of the citizen to the state.<sup>41</sup>

The state has been always gendered. They have a distinct gender bias and operate within a masculine paradigm that marginalises women. The prejudice against women in the discourse of the state could be well understood by looking at its key concepts and concerned critical anchors. The main players in this game, as Mohsin points out, are the issue of nationalism and security. Nationalism, as we have discussed in the previous section, are seen to be extremely sexualised, for it has always underpinned the agencies of women. It also involves notions of security and power, which functioning largely depends upon the use of domination and control. Thus 'nationalism' becomes a masculinised notion, and they are based on the conventional masculine attributes and therefore regarded exclusively as a male domain. Thus, according to Mohsin, state, nationalism and nation becomes a matter of high politics outside the realm of women.<sup>42</sup>

Another critical aspect of the state is security, which depends on the strength and calibre of men. History has shown us well, how men used to go to war to protect frontiers and authority of a regime, while women maintain the internal chores of the family and extended groups. Beyond the definition of security as mere protection of one's sovereignty and frontiers, today's notion of security is composed of a complex interplay of various factors, viz. socio-cultural, political, economic and strategic. Security which is of immense importance to the state, when seen from a gendered lens, gives us a whole new different reality. According to Iris Marion Young, the modern 'security' state is a 'masculinist' state. She says so because nationalism assumes the masculine role of a protector in relation to women and children, and expects loyalty in return. While they prevent any sort of disturbance within boundaries, on the other hand it wages war abroad. The 'masculinist' state keeps those 'protected' in a subordinate position. This paternalist state gets its legit-

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<sup>41</sup> David Held, 1994, "The development of the modern nation state", in Stuart Hall and Bram Geib (ed.), *Formations of Modernity*, p.88

<sup>42</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2005, "Silence and marginality, gendered security and the nation state", in Faiza Rajagopalan (ed.), *Women, Security, South Asia, A Clearing in the Thicket*, p.135.

from the threat it produces and also from the citizen's gratitude for the protection it provides. While it legitimised its authoritarian power over its citizens internally, the logic of masculinist protection justifies aggressive war outside. She compares this security state with the paternal male head of the family and says that just as the head of the family is responsible for the protection of the family, the state assumes this role with regards to its citizens. Mobilisation of fear, is another way in which the state uses to gain loyalty. Due to the state's obsession for obedience and loyalty from the citizens, and the citizens' dire need for security from the state, a 'trade off' take place. The state in promise for security, takes away the rights and liberties of its citizens, subjugating its citizens and giving no room for accountability no dissent.<sup>43</sup>

Another area where we could clearly see the gendered pattern is in the idea and the status of citizenship which the state conferred upon its legal members. It is, as pointed out in the previous chapter, centred on the idea of individualism, which in turn connotes that such a person would be rational, independent and autonomous, that is a citizen with agency. Historically, however, the above notions are associated with maleness, while subjectivity, personal care, dependence and emotionality were associated with femininity. Hence initially the notion of citizen was premised on masculinity and extended only to men. Women were, for a very long time, excluded from citizenship and were considered to be part of the private sector. A patriot who is considered as the most revered citizen, is also constructed on a masculine notion.<sup>44</sup> Following the idea of a patriot, lies the woes and plight of the 'captive mother', asking the sons to rescue her. Apparently it is the men who are qualified for the highest duty of sacrifice for the motherland. The constructions of nationhood involve the eulogised 'mother', but their women are never seen to be capable of this duty of sacrifice. Rather they were always relegated to a position of weak, passive and those who needs protection. This in turn strengthens the patriarchal values and systems of state and also further the subjugation of women.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Young, Iris Marion, 2007, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Relections on the Current Security State", in *Global Challenges, War, Self Determination and Responsibility for Justice*, p.118

<sup>44</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2007, in Shrestha and Thapa (ed), p. 29

<sup>45</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2005, " Silence and marginality, gendered security and the nation state", in Faizal and Rajagopalan (ed), p.136

The formation of the state depended on the sexual division of labour which established and reinforced the economic and political structures. Two sets of social relations were established. Female roles revolved around the work of the home and the family while male social roles extended to the duties of citizens and war and to relations with other city states. The process of distinction began at the level of the family. It is argued that the private or the domestic, though supposedly the realm of women is not in actuality a realm where the women reigns.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Process of integration and women's sexuality***

The integration of women into modern 'nationhood' in a sovereign nation-state, epitomised by citizenship, follows a different trajectory from that of men.<sup>47</sup> Though women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, they are nevertheless denied any direct relation to national agency or citizenship. Rather they continue to serve as boundary markers of national, religious and ethnic groups, making their status of citizenship and their rights incomplete.

One important reason for the different trajectory for women's integration is the nation's search for authentication. The process of authentication meant that the women were to be regarded as the sacrosanct 'property' and 'honour' of the state.<sup>48</sup> The nation is also obsessed of upholding the notion of 'pure blood', for which the maximum responsibility goes to the women. In order to achieve this aspirations of the nation state, women are subjected to physical, psychological and emotional torture, most of the times unaccounted and unrecognised. These violence change the lives of the women drastically. With no agency to control their own bodies, they always remain mere reproductive machines. These notions of puritanism and propriety, according to Mohsin, also expect women to conform to certain standard, 'proper' behavioural patterns. The values of the society or the 'proper' behaviour means the values of men, where in one to grow up like a proper human being, one need the

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<sup>46</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2007, in Shrestha and Thapa (ed), p.28

<sup>47</sup> Denize Kandiyoti, 1991, "Identity and its Discontents", p.429

<sup>48</sup> Amena Moshin, 2005, "Silence and marginality, gendered security and the nation state", in Faizal and Rajagopalan (ed ), p.136

identity of one's father or the shadow of a man. In other words, the much eulogised mother figure needs to be sanctified and legitimised by a man.<sup>49</sup>

It is often accounted that the logic of the nation-state is coercive in its normalcy. The reason behind this label is the prevalence of violence of the state, whether in moments of defeats or victory. There is also an expanding ambivalence of the nation in a nation-state, which tend to become a genre of violence in itself. According to Shiv Viswanathan, the nation has increasingly become exclusionary and the violence it commits are rooted in – ‘The idea of citizenship as a static entity, the problematic nature of identity, the positivism between territory and a people and the fixity of boundaries, and the genocidal nature of the exclusionary process’ .<sup>50</sup> We will see all these factors being played out on the bodies of women, producing a complex set of coercion.

At different stages of the nation building exercise, the gendered modern nation-state had been in a tug-of-war between private patriarchy and public patriarchy.<sup>51</sup> According to Kandiyoti, to integrate women into the nationalist fold, battles are fought over women's souls – exemplified in debates and efforts of the nationalists during independence and state formation, for the creation of a ‘new’ women by educating them, and through various reform measures; and their bodies – which we will see in this section, the ways in which women's sexuality came under the control of the state. Thus, women become a site of multiple contestation-political, legal and religious- in efforts to integrate them, and also in order for the state to invent and reinvent itself. It should be kept in mind that women did not enter the national arena, rather they were always there central to its constructions and reproduction, but the problem arises when this very role of reproduction is no longer controlled by them.<sup>52</sup> We shall see the case with reference to Bangladeshi state when it was newly formed at the aftermath of the war of 1971.

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 successfully overthrew the military dictatorship of the, then, West Pakistan. It is considered to be the first successful

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<sup>49</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2005, p.138

<sup>50</sup> Shiv Viswanathan, 2003, “Interrogating the Nation”, p.2296

<sup>51</sup> Denise Kandiyoti, 1991, p.230

<sup>52</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, 2005, p.2

liberation movement against ‘internal colonialism’.<sup>53</sup> It was referred to as internal colonialism due to the West Pakistanis massive cultural assimilation drive targeted against the East Pakistanis who they considered as highly Hinduised nominal Muslims. These cultural and linguistic impositions, coupled with other administrative, military, civil and economic controls, acted hard on the vocal chords of the East Pakistanis, leading them to fight and break free from West Pakistan, and create a new nation for themselves. But alongside this heraldic feat, was a terrible dark human story of loss and destruction. The war was a manifestation of the violent ethos of the state, which sanctions killing to establish its power of sovereignty.<sup>54</sup>

The violence suffered by the womenfolk during the 1971 war has been clearly enunciated by Yasmin Saikia-

The army which stood in for the state was most visible in terrorising women in East Pakistan. Pakistan army established sex camps where they held women captive to serve the soldier and officers. These women were kidnapped and abducted from their homes or arrested during ambush, and some were handed over by their neighbours to ‘teach women a lesson’ about men power. Sexual violence against women were not confined to the Pakistani army. The soldiers and supporters of the Mukti Bahini also raped, tortured and brutalised Bengali and Bihari women. Being a clandestine group, the Mukti Bahini could not set up camps and keep women in captivity. The third group of perpetrators are the Bihari men who indulged in sexual violence in a devious underhanded manner. They kidnapped and raped individual Bengali and tribal women, mostly neighbours and often killed them to hide their violence. Sometimes they handed victims to the Pakistani soldiers who took them to their camps and kept them confined for sex works.<sup>55</sup>

What we need to see now is how and in what ways the state came to control these women’s bodies and their role of motherhood, in its nation building project. The concepts of purity and honour, which are seen to be at play in the sphere of the family and kinship, also extends to the level of the nation in the process of its constitution. When these factors guide the nation building exercises, the state more than anything, use its institutions to achieve its goals.

The creation of the nation of Bangladesh took place amidst massive violence. The three million dead and two hundred thousand women raped, was inflicted by both Pakistani soldiers and local Bengali collaborators. One justification for the rape of women, given by the West Pakistan, was to improve the genes of these Bengali

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<sup>53</sup> Ronaq Jahan, 1973, “Bangladesh in 1972: Nation building in the new state”, p.199

<sup>54</sup> Georgio Agemben quoted by Yasmin Saikia, 2007, “Overcoming the silent archive in Bangladesh”, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.), *Women and the Contested State*, p.68

<sup>55</sup> Yasmin Saikia, 2007, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.), p.70

Muslims so that they breed pure non Hinduised Muslims.<sup>56</sup> In massive violence like that of 1971, numerous crimes are committed by both sides. In such accidents of collective violence, women came to be the centre of tension. In this context, Veena Das argued that the women's body became a sign through which men communicated with each other.<sup>57</sup> The violence of partition are committed through and against women, they are not only targets but also the means through which violence is inflicted upon the target. The violence is mainly committed upon women for a number of reasons. One is the believe that, targeting women will fulfil numerous agendas.

Another principle that had guided such scheme of thought is the fact that women bodies have meanings ascribed on it by the society. According to Aysha Ghani, women are the repositories of culture and the symbolic figuration of the nation. They not only transfer the cultural and ideological tradition of the ethnic and national group but they are the actual symbolic figuration. Thus, women were abducted in order to dishonour the enemy. The body of the women who have been abducted / violated also acts as an embodiment of memory, reminders of the valences of loss. It is not just violation of citizen's right of these women, but their bodies, their person is violated which leads to the disruption of their lives, their futures and their family lives.<sup>58</sup>

Guided by the above thought, rape is often a technique employed in these times of violence. The violence of rape is mainly used to depersonalise the women, or to keep all women in the state of fear, or a method to bring women in line, and also as terror warfare. Rape is never just about sex, it has to do with many other things like domination, rage, sexual expulsion and male bonding. Besides the usual connotations that the act of rape carries in normal times, rape in times of war encompasses numerous meanings. Nayanika Mookherjee has very well jotted them down as-

...the gender performativity of rape during collective violence ensures that the gendering of women's bodies as female constitute them as political signs, territories on which the political programmes that also effect the nation, community, and family gets inscribed. Rape thereby becomes an explicitly political act, a ritual of victory, the defilement of honour and territory of the enemy community. It disrupts women's essentialized roles as a medium of producing progeny for the community and the

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<sup>56</sup> Nayanika Mookherjee, 2008, "Gendered Embodiments: mapping the body-politic of the rape women and the nation in Bangladesh", p.39

<sup>57</sup> Veena Das, 1995, "National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children", *Critical events, An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, p.56

<sup>58</sup> Aysha Ghani, 2009, "Abducted identities, Pakistan, its partition and its Abducted women" in Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai, Parama Roy, (ed.), p.179,187.

symbol of honour of the family and community. Rape becomes a means of retribution and pre-emption as well as a metaphor of sacredness and humiliation.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly women's body had been forcefully inscribed with a lot of meanings due to which time and again, women's sexuality get used up in the name of family, community and the nation. These meanings associated with women's bodies, make them the tool for any sort of struggle for power. Suzanne Zeedyk expressed similar view about rape being a political term and a political act. For her, without a political context, there is no way to take account of the gendered social relations that are an inherent aspect of human rape. It is indeed a ritual of victory, a defilement of the enemy honour and territory, and it functions as retribution and humiliation.<sup>60</sup>

In the War of 1971, as pointed earlier, 200,000 women were raped. Maximum got pregnant and some even gave birth. The big question before the new state was how to take these women back to the 'normal' life. The state manifested its rougher side of power against its women through a number of projects. They were subjected to numerous assimilations, due to their illegitimate pregnancy and also because of the child born of 'wrong' fathers. It is often said that abduction and construction of women's identity took place twice- one during the process of abduction and later in the process and project of repatriation.

For a rape victim, the distinction between motivation and tactics of rape disappears, infact for the victim the distinction is non existent, but we need to see the various anchors which are intertwined with the violence of rape in the aftermath. During periods of war or collective violence, Das is of the view that, women come to the consciousness as an abstract category, and the regulation of their sexuality and reproductive functions can become visibly a matter of state.<sup>61</sup> Certain kinship norms come into play in this context of the abducted women/ violated women. They are purity and pollution on the one hand, and honour and shame on the other. The violence against women, during these times, should not only be seen in terms of the family but also as a discourse of politics, and therefore it is important to see how the

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<sup>59</sup> Nayanika Mookherjee, 2008, p.40

<sup>60</sup> Suzanne Zeedyk, 2007, " The science of rape: (mis)constructions of women trauma in evolutionary theory", p.77

<sup>61</sup> Veena Das, 1995, "National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children", *Critical events, An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, p.83

state produces its own codes of honour and purity regarding these raped women and their unwanted children.

According to Veena Das, there are different ways in which the state and the family come in alliance in the task of preserving the honour of the family and the nation. One is when they form a tactical alliance, as forwarded by Donzelot(1980), whereby the 'surfaces' of the state absorbs the unwanted members of the family, allowing the family to preserve its honour and prestige, while the family inculcate the state's programme into the children through its socialising procedures. Another type of relation is in which the state assign themselves the role of preserving certain codes of conduct. And therefore in such societies the state becomes more rigid in its aim of articulating these codes of conduct through its practices (Herzfeld, 1987).<sup>62</sup> Both these ways were practiced by the newly formed Bangladeshi state. They set up the Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation Board (BWRB) on 18 February 1972, for medical treatment for the pregnant women, which means a programme of abortion of the unwanted child. The government's initiative of inter-country adoption of war babies, which would basically cater to the project of the cleansing the country of unwanted enemy blood, are some examples.

The evolutionary theory of rape has argued that women's psychological pain is consorted by the strategies of either diminishing women's pain or ignoring their experience altogether.<sup>63</sup> Here again, we see both these strategies being used in the case of the 1971 rape victims. The strategy of diminishing pain that Thornhill and Palmer used in their analysis is different from this context, for here we will see giving

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<sup>62</sup> These stands of theorization were cited in Veena Das (1995), p.56-8. Donzelot studied the policing of families, and according to him the harmony between the order of the state and family is due their alliance, whereby the troubling factor of the family, viz., adulterine children, rebellious adolescents, ill reputed women, etc. who are a risk to their honour and reputation, were concentrated by the state, and absorbed them in general hospital and convents. It served twin purpose for both the state and the family, while the family honour is preserved, the state could also utilize the useless individuals. Herzfeld on the other hand talked about the Western construct of certain distinctive features about different societies and civilizations which was not acceptable to the societies concerned. As a result these societies struggled to project a self-image which was based on the conservation of certain codes of conduct and special marks of uniqueness against the Western construct. See Jacques Donzelot, 1980, *The Policing of Families* and Michael Herzfeld, 1987, *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass*.

<sup>63</sup> The evolutionary account of rape is based on the biological explanation which says that rape is a reproductive strategy that serves an evolutionary purpose. They argued that women's trauma and men's desire for sex have played equally important roles in sustaining rape. See, Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological bases of Sexual Coercion*.



heroic entitlement as a method to curb the pain of these women. As far as their experiences are concerned, they are not recounted at any point of time. The state acted its part of covering the evidences and facts of what happened. It had also shown certain reluctance in relying upon the experiences of these women in charting out any rehabilitation and other nation building projects. For the state, erasing the facts will lead to the erasure of the trauma from the mind of the people. On the other side, neither the family member nor the victim women show any willingness to share their experience and even if they do, it is just another way of remembering the traumatic moments over and over again.

To restore the raped women to their essentialized, normative spheres, the state eulogised the women raped as ‘biranganas’ meaning ‘female hero’ in 1971. The title conferred upon these women was to make them acceptable to the society, to normalise and to rehabilitate them. It became a category to classify these women victims. It is also an attempt to reclaim the nation’s lost honour by restoring the lost women back to the places within the national fold. The unfortunate fact is that these violated women and their unwanted children are rarely taken back by their families. They were never looked and treated in the same manner in which they used to be treated before because they were considered impure. They became a taboo, and in order to remove this taboo of impurity, the state gave the title of heroine. To quote Urvashi Butalia, ‘as the boundary of the home opened up beyond the domestic space to encompass the national space, the boundary of the family closed in to become a “pure” space, which then did not allow any for any “external” influence to enter it’.<sup>64</sup>

The state never really made honest effort to rehabilitate these women back. The irony associated with the bestowing of the title of ‘birangana’, is that the women became a marked person. Rather than making them acceptable to the society, they were more and more significantly separated from the other ‘normal’ women. The state assumed the role of a patriarch, and marginalised the affected women in particular and all women in general, by treating men as their saviours.<sup>65</sup> As they were not provided any space for the psychological rehabilitation, the promise of the title to give them their lost prestige did not materialise. Yasmin Saikai pointed out a very unfortunate fact in

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<sup>64</sup> Urvashi Butalia, 2006, “Migration/Dislocation: A Gendered Perspective”, in Navnita Chada Behera (ed.), *Gender Conflict and Migration*, p.139

<sup>65</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2005, in Faizal and Rajagopalan (ed.), p.139

relation to the title of birangana. According to her, the description made the society to immediately rethink and reframe the violence in ways that suited the newly found pride in Bengali masculinity. The term birangana was folded into another level of men's speech, whereby it is transformed to mean promiscuous women. The women's corporeal experiences, according to her, were then viewed as a site of national shame that interpreted rape during the war as sex, not violence. Reduced to the level of prostitute, women were made guilty of the crime of rape.<sup>66</sup>

Nayanika Mookherjee best pointed out the attributes and the rationale of the title. According to her, 'nation building is enabled through the aestheticized, valorised, respectable and mothered birangana who is permitted to be an image, while the troubled relationship towards her as a raped woman is exempted from this national imaginary'.<sup>67</sup> She further says-

Collapsing the image of the female rape with that of the ravages of nature and that of mother-nation, enables an aestheticization of rape and makes it easier to accept. The mothering of the rape women locates the birangana within the realm of respectability. The domesticity intrinsic to motherhood makes her image acceptable and hence available to the political instrumentality of the nation. The imaginary of the mother as the innocent victim, caring, nurturing, compassionate, desexualised, of whose pure womb sons are born to further the cause of the nation, provides a powerful underpinning for the state to see itself as a caring parent, concerned for the fate and future of its citizens. It is this concern that makes it necessary for the state to rehabilitate and normalise the raped women-to recover the mothers for its future citizens.<sup>68</sup>

Rather interesting effort of the state, which complemented to their sufferings, is the infamous project of getting the biranganas married off. This would, according to the state, further reduce their social ostracism. They also set up rehabilitation centres at various parts and also aimed at making these women self sufficient by introducing them to the labour market. The media and the state sought to domesticate these violated, fallen women by setting up women's programme in sewing and weaving, midwifery, care-giving and so on.

Another new problem added by the new state of Bangladesh was the mandate to implement abortion of all pregnant women. This mandate took away the rights of the women, and considered them as an object where the government can inscribe the language of violence all over again. There are several accounts of forced abortion, and

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<sup>66</sup> Yasmin Saikia, 2007, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.) 2007, p.73

<sup>67</sup> Nayanika Mookherjee, 2008, p. 49

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p.48-9

for these children born, they were given away for adoption despite the pleadings of the mothers. The agency of these mothers on their child were assaulted to the maximum extent that their right to have choices were taken away. Leaving them with no option, but to abort or to give away their children, most of the mothers suffered heavy emotional harassment in the hands of their own state. Motherhood is only the available public space for women, but this is again narrowed down to just 'respectable' and 'self-sacrificing' mother rather than being a biological mother of an unwanted enemy child. It is only as an idealised woman that women can be admitted into the nationalist view. The idea behind the forced abortion and adoption programme was to rid the nation of the 'bastard Pakistani'.<sup>69</sup> Here we see the nation's search for authenticity in giving away the war children, and also an attempt to create a puritan state based on patriarchal state.

It would be more interesting to look into the various reasons which motivated the state to undertake the project of recovery and rehabilitation of the violated women. To start with, the rehabilitation of the violated women was done by the construction of the 'Other'. It would mean that only Pakistanis were the ones who had committed violence against their women. Though this is certainly not the case, identifying the rapist no longer carried any sense for the women victims. Enemies were all around, and they were the vulnerable and soft target from all sides. The construction of the "Other" also is driven by the nation's need to establish a sort of legitimacy and authority, for without hiding its own crime, it was not possible to resume control. It was also associated with the notion of pure blood, pointing to the enemy for the heinous crime of polluting the nation.

The interest of the state to restore women was not driven by the sense of women being its citizen but premised on the ground that women are the sexual and reproductive beings and that violation of this section is a violation of the honour of the nation as a whole. And hence the national honour would be regained by regaining control over the sexualities of the women, and also their reproductive functions. Their sexuality is of relevance only if they could be absorbed within the structure of the family as

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<sup>69</sup> Yasmin Sakia, 2007, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.), p.72

defined by the state, and their motherhood was of relevance only to the extent that it does not hinder such absorption.<sup>70</sup>

From the view point of identity of the women getting impinged and violated, the importance placed on the project of repatriation can also be seen as a larger project concerning the construction of women's identities first and foremost citizens of the state. It also become a means through which the 'otherness' of the abduction could be deemphasised by reincorporating abducted women into a homogenous group of citizens, suppressing and negating the identities deemed problematic.<sup>71</sup> This, ofcourse divest women of their right of self determination. But more important for the state is the view that abduction/violation of its women is not just loss of women's agency but also loss of state agency.

Another reason which instilled the state to undertake the project of reclaiming back of women was that the fruits of sexual violence should not be visible. Here the fruits means the unwanted child of enemy blood. They are known by various names- 'unwanted children', the 'enemy children', the 'illegitimate children', and more contemptuously, the 'bastards'. The undesirable child born out of sexual violence is of concern for the state, to show that the women are the daughters of the nation and therefore the unwanted child will further taint the image of the women. Their presence in the new state will only hinder the women to get back their lost normal lives, which means that these women will never be able to return to the nation for legitimate heterosexual unions to produce pure stock. Also the state feels that it is mandatory to give these children away as their presence will only further pollute the society.

There was also a need for the state to prove itself a responsible one. It was to gain the trust and will of the new nation, and in order to do so it has to show that the new government is progressive and modern. Articulation of such a discourse was to show that the rehabilitation programme has the emancipatory potential for the women with which the women could restart their normal life with dignity.

Another very interesting fact is that the rape of these women occurred before their relatives. The men, who are regarded as protectors of the family and the nation

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<sup>70</sup> Veena Das, 1995, p.82

<sup>71</sup> Aysha Ghani, 2009, in Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai, Parama Roy, (ed.), p.188

becomes the onlookers who does not have the power to stop the violence against their women. As Aysha Ghani has pointed out, this is the de-masculanization of men, a humiliation and loss of honour and pride, as they loss their agency to be the protectors of these women. The irony is that this loss will be compensated only by making them saviours in the nationalist project.<sup>72</sup>

The violence of abduction faced by the women, are complemented by another sort of violence which are produced by the state and the community. It is often referred as 'invisible violence', according to Gyan Pandey. This sort of violence reduces and homogenises the victims through the process of repatriation and community restoration.<sup>73</sup> According to Aysha Ghani, women's bodies were constituted and reconstituted according to the demands of the state and community. In reducing, homogenising and infantilising women, women's identities along with their bodies endured abduction at the hands of the dominating entities. When abduction and repatriation takes place, women's body are regarded as site of cultural repository and national symbol. This, as she said, revealed that women identities are themselves conceived as 'abductible', and it is the 'othering' of the women's bodies that must be understood as enabling abduction of bodies and of identities.<sup>74</sup>

Dubravka Ugresic has pointed out that one of the biggest casualties of nationalism and the nation-state is the idea of memory. The nation-state creates two forms of terror - the terror by remembering and the terror by forgetting.<sup>75</sup> The terror of both remembering and forgetting wounded women in unaccountable ways. Similar views are expressed by Ghani when she said that the identity of the abducted and the violated create a space that can be both silencing as well as enabling.<sup>76</sup> Silencing does not sufficiently take the experiences of the victim women into account. The lives of these women are fractured, and it is divided by 'life before the war' and 'life after war'. The women described their lives as 'like being dead' since the war. The state also creates the deadness of the female victims making the past incomprehensible, and by suppressing their voices. The state together with the Islamic rules silenced the

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<sup>72</sup> Nayanika Mookherjee, 2008, p.44

<sup>73</sup> Aysha Ghani, 2009, in Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai, Parama Roy, (ed.) 2009, p.174

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p.201-202.

<sup>75</sup> Dubravka Ugresic, 1998, *The Culture of Lies*, cited by Shiv Visvanathan, 2003, p.2300.

<sup>76</sup> Aysha Ghani, 2009, in Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai, Parama Roy, (ed.), p.196

women thereby relegating women's experiences as private matters which are to be dealt with by the family.

The silencing of women's bodily experiences in war, by making them irrelevant in the public spaces, immediately made atrocities committed against women an unthinkable subject in the public arena of post independence Bangladesh.<sup>77</sup> Silence also enters the source of making history in post liberation Bangladesh in another way. All kinds of documents of survivors were destroyed, erased, lost and removed. According to the state, the documents and the case histories of the women victims of 1971 were destroyed to maintain their confidentiality. It only shows the male rhetoric of protecting women's honour by making them invisible in the mainstream, thus regaining their manly honour and dismembering the women victims of their account of their survival. The violated body invoke a particular memory of emasculation, of helplessness and personal and collective failure to protect women. There is also another fact, and that is the societal reluctance to speak about the female violations while they willingly talk of the male members being killed or abducted. This is not only a suppression of violence committed against women during wartime but also an act which exonerates the perpetrator of the crime. More importantly it raises fundamental questions about the mores and values of the society that valorises death as sacrifice but suppresses other sacrifices wherein women have supposedly lost their most precious possessions.<sup>78</sup> Most survivors are also seen to be engaged in active disassociation.<sup>79</sup> They themselves try to make the degraded body invisible by not talking about what they suffered. It is also enabling as it thereafter create new spaces to understand the sexualities of women even better.

The identity of the abducted and violated is enabling only from the view point that, thereafter it create new spaces to understand the sexualities of women even better. This is not to be sought, as we will find better ways to understand women without having to fall prey in the hands of multiple enemies.

Seeing all these multiple violence done to the women's body, it is indeed clear how the complex interplay of the state and the society came to use women's body to achieve their desired ends. While the language of nationalism singled women out as

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<sup>77</sup> Yasmin Saikia, 2007, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.) 2007,p. 71

<sup>78</sup> Amena Mohsin, 2005, in Faizal and Rajagopalan (ed.) 2005, p.152

<sup>79</sup> Yasmin Saikia, 2007, in Skidmore and Lawrence (ed.) 2007,p. 71

the symbolic repository of group identity, the nation-state and its nation building exercises led to the victimisation of women. The women faced betrayal from her own family, community and nation, as they regulated her sexuality in their desired way. The violence that women experience had created fear and uneasiness with the physical body and destabilised them. The memory that is inscribed in their minds as well as on their bodies continues to remind them of the horrific past and disrupts any sense of a possible wholeness. Women paid a huge price for preserving the national fabric and unity of the nation-state.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MOTHERHOOD AS A SITE OF PROTEST**

In the first chapter, the debates on motherhood have been looked into. We saw that feminists have addressed motherhood in different ways – the extreme poles being occupied on one side, by those who see it as inhabiting or limiting women’s freedom, calling all women to renounce it, and on the other, by those who see it as a source of power and agency, therefore standing firmly for the need to make full use of this aspect of women’s life to further their influence and agency. In this chapter we will explore how motherhood as a trope and practice, has become a rallying principle for certain political movement; how maternal care is related with the politics of resistance, and how the mothers used the instrument of care in their democratic resistances. It is often claimed that motherhood provides women a very important space where they could assert their voices and organise themselves for their entry into the political. As we proceed with the chapter, we will explore various cases where ‘motherhood’ had gained certain degree of success in mobilising specific struggles by women’s organisations. Though they belong to various regions, divided by the territorial barriers, the women in these struggles are united by the common thread of being a ‘mother’.

Women’s activism and their democratic struggles are more and more seen to be interspersed with the “maternal frame”<sup>1</sup>. Their struggles increasingly appeal the notion of motherhood in the political. The notion of ‘political motherhood’ came

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<sup>1</sup> Samir Kumar Das, 2008, “ Ethnicity and Democracy meet when Mothers Protest”, in Paula Banerjee (ed.), *Women in Peace Politics*, p-54-57



to be accepted in the public sphere because of its non-threatening/benign connotations of domesticity/care they bring to the public sphere. As we proceed with the chapter we will see how they do so. The chapter looks into the mothers' resistances in Sri Lanka, Kashmir and Manipur, against state violence, in particular, the practice of 'enforced disappearances'. These cases fit very well into the frame of 'motherist' movement,<sup>2</sup> for unlike any other form of resistance, they speak the language of the powerless and the weak, and resort to care and love as their major weapon.

This chapter will also explore the issues as to how we can situate the Meira Paibis of Manipur, Kashmiri Mothers, or the Mothers Front of Sri Lanka. What are the rallying points around which these movements are organised? In their protest against the state, does the issue of political motherhood emerge in these movements? These movements are seen as against the patriarchal state, but is there anything feminist about these movements? How do women use the principle of 'women' as 'symbol' of home, honour, and culture, and their patriarchal ascribed role of mothering, to invert their relationship with the state and also oppose it simultaneously? We would also find out the idioms of these protests, and see whether the issues discussed in the previous chapters have any linkages with these movements, or do they, in some ways or the other, address those issues.

#### **4.1. Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), Kashmir**

The armed conflict in Kashmir started with Kashmir's awakening to the idea of 'azadi'. Various militarisation phases, along with state's counter offensive, left the state torn and distressed. The military conflict that resulted from this immense militarisation and counter militarisation, subjected both men and women to multiple direct and indirect violence. The most alarming phenomena had been the state's action of targeting the social base of every resistance movements, i.e., the civilians. They inflicted immense assault on human rights, not only upon the militants but also

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<sup>2</sup> See, Jo Fisher, 1989, *Mothers of the Disappeared.*; Marysa Navaro, 1989, "The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo", in Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*; Jennifer Schirmer, 1989, "Those who die cannot be called Dead: Women and Human Rights Protest in Latin America", and "The Seeking of Truth and the Gendering of Consciousness: The CO-MADRES of El Salvador and the CONAVIGUA Widows of Guatemala", in Sarah A. Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (ed.) 1993 *"Viva": Women and Popular Protest in Latin America*.

on the civilians, treating each one as ‘enemy’.<sup>3</sup> The people became victims of disproportionate state violence of varying degrees that include extra-judicial killings, illegal detention, torture, rape, enforced disappearances, etc. The state’s terror tactic of ‘enforced disappearance’ became a common phenomenon where young boys and men were constantly picked up, often on false, or no charges. Enforced disappearances started in 1989 in Kashmir. With the aim of countering the increasing militarism and people’s movement for self-determination against subordination and injustice, the state has made it the most militarised zone in the world with more than 600,000 armed forces.

The increasing crime of ‘enforced disappearance’ in the state exerted profound impact on the lives of many men and women leading to many household live in despair. This is more disturbing because the state demonstrated its military intrusion into ‘private’ social spaces, which they are supposed to protect.<sup>4</sup> The consequences of such intrusion, was the increased vulnerability of life itself. The family members of the disappeared started running from pillar to post in search of their loved ones. It is in their daily quest of information about the whereabouts of their sons and husbands, that these distressed families started meeting other similarly distressed families. The relatives of the disappeared persons then came together, to fight for their common cause. It was in 1994 that the Association of Parents of the Disappeared Persons (APDP) was founded. Parveena Ahangar, a mother of a disappeared, and Parvez Imroz, a Human Rights Lawyer, founded the APDP and it is now supported by human right’s activists and lawyers from inside Kashmir and outside.

The APDP campaigns against ‘enforced disappearances’, which, according to it, is a systematic and predetermined crime. It aims to fight for justice and truth. Awareness, solidarity, assistance, and the generation of information are the basis on which the APDP works. The aims and objectives that the APDP enumerates are-

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<sup>3</sup> Urbashi Butalia, 2002, “Kashmir Imprisoned” in Urbashi Butalia (ed.), *Speaking Peace: Women’s voices from Kashmir*, referred by Seema Kazi , 2009, *Between Democracy and Nation, Gender and Militarisation in Kashmir*, p-148

<sup>4</sup> The ‘private’ has always been a marked out space, in the narratives of state, as one which is constantly under protection from any sort of external violation. The violation of the ideal of the family/private or the ‘inner spiritual space’, marks the loss of culture itself and therefore the state had assumed the task of protecting it since the very start. See Partha Chaterjee, 1989, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India”, p. 622-633. Also see “The Nationalist resolution of the Women’s Question”, in Kumkum Sangari(ed.) 1990, *Recasting Women*.

To exert collective pressure on the authorities to:

- To provide information about the whereabouts of the missing
- Put an end to the practice of ‘enforced disappearances’.
- Put in place mechanisms for justice and reparation including compensation and rehabilitation of those directly affected by ‘enforced disappearances’.
- Repeal repressive measures like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act., Disturbed Area Act, Public Safety Act which grant impunity to the armed forces and perpetrators of forced disappearances
- Set up an impartial commission of inquiry to investigate cases of ‘enforced disappearance’ and the judgment and sanction of those responsible for the crime.
- Promote legal norms classifying Enforced Disappearance as a crime against humanity. Also constitute methods of obtaining justice and of preventing Enforced Disappearance.<sup>5</sup>

The APDP organises monthly gathering on the 10<sup>th</sup> of every month to create solidarity among its members, and to remember their love ones. It acts as a platform for them to gather, and share information about those who have disappeared. It also assists the victims’ families legally, and in humanitarian ways. They form a network among themselves, and build up pressure on state agencies. They call on all to join their struggle against this crime, as it is not only a crime against those victims but against all humanity. APDP demands that justice must be brought and that the perpetrators must be punished insuring that such crime would not be repeated. There is a dire need for proper investigation to the crime, and therefore, the APDP had been collecting and documenting information and cases. They seek to end the crime of enforced disappearances.<sup>6</sup>

The chairperson and one of the founder members of the APDP, Parveena Ahangar has been the face of resilience and the voice of bereaved of the traumatised families whose loved ones never came back. She is the one who never gives up hope and leads the whole front. Quoting her, "I had no choice but to start this organization, since no

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<sup>5</sup> Aims and objectives of the APDP as it has enumerated in its official website, URL- [www.disappearancesinkashmir.com](http://www.disappearancesinkashmir.com)

<sup>6</sup> As stated in the activities of APDP in its official website, URL- [www.disappearnacesinkashmir.com](http://www.disappearnacesinkashmir.com)

justice was done to me. While hunting for my son, I came across many other families who too had been searching for their loved ones. So, I decided to mobilize the women, especially from villages. That's how APDP came to be established."<sup>7</sup>

Behind the formation of APDP lies Parveena's sad story. It all started in 1990 when her 14 year old son Mohammad was picked up by the security forces on one fateful night in June. Mohammad remained in custody for a year and released at last when proved innocent. Meanwhile her other son, Javed Ahmed (17), was picked up in August in another raid by the security forces. He was picked up for interrogation, a case of mistaken identity, which is a frequent and unaccountable manifestation of the military excessive impunity. Parveena searched from pillar to post to get any news about her son but to no avail. It was in 1994, that she could gather some 300 families of the disappeared, who are in the same aggrieved position as she, and started the APDP.

'Everyday I die a hundred times. My tears are my Jesus and resurrect me after every death', said the distressed Ahanger. Her statements reminds one of the image of women in conflict, where she could either be a victim of the direct or indirect violence suffering the disappearance/death/torture of the son or the husband, or, on the other hand, she could become the idealised Martyr's Mother and Grieving Mother.<sup>8</sup> The 'mother' in Parveena is a manifestation of both the sides. She is engulfed in pain at the loss of her son, she mourns, and her days and nights are spent in grief. But she is strong enough to gather her strength to fight the injustice done to her and her son. She is not afraid because, according to her, she and the other mothers are fighting a struggle for truth. Even after two decades, her strength, spirit and hope still remains undying and unfettered. Till today she awaits her son's return and according to her, the pain a mother endures, waiting for her son's return is like drinking a slow poison. Though the strong Martyr's Mother helps each mother to hold on, the fact that her son is neither dead nor living kills one's body and soul slowly, but surely. The struggle for survival is both for the victims who face violence directly, and for those who face indirectly, suffering emotional, physical and mental breakdown for those loved ones who face violence directly.

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<sup>7</sup> Subir Ghosh, "Mothers of the Disappeared", Worldpress.org, 26 May 2011. URL-www.worldprress.org.

<sup>8</sup> Rita Manchanda, 2001, "Guns and Burqa: Women in the Kashmir Conflict", in Rita Manchanda(ed.), *Women, War and Peace in South Asia, Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, p-43

Similar painful stories run in the veins of each mother of the disappeared. ‘My pride and my dignity keeps me going’, said Mughal Masse who, like every other mother, had lived with the hope that her son would return. In September 1990, her son Nazir Ahmed Teli was picked up by the Security Forces. “It was 1<sup>st</sup> September”, she said, “he left for his office...he had to get his salary that day...some hawk scooped and carried him away”. She went crazy as night came, because there were no traces of her son coming back. She searched for him ceaselessly everywhere.<sup>9</sup> Her vividness of the time shows that the wound is still fresh even after a decade when that incident happened. Masse was left by her husband shortly after their marriage and she brought up her son all alone. For someone whose only source of hope is taken away, the remaining life becomes a living hell, and this is exactly what Masse’s life was like after she lost her son. She died without getting the justice which she had so desperately waited for.

The experience of having a son disappeared is expressed as worse than having them killed. No one understands the pain inside better than a mother. Similar story of life turning ugly could also be heard from Sara Begum, mother of Muhammad Yaseen Bhat. Her son was arrested without any reason in 2000 and till now she spends most of her time staring at the door waiting for her son to come. The son went out with his father to offer prayers, where on his way he was picked up. She awaits for justice to be delivered.<sup>10</sup> Hajra, mother of eight children, from Wanigam, Bandipora lost three, out of six sons in encounters. But her misery did not end there. Another son, Bashir Ahmad Sofi, had gone missing after his arrest by the troops. For more than a decade, she had been defying her old age, visiting almost all jails, police stations and interrogation centre with other family members, but could not get any information about Bashi. “Let the government confirm he was killed we will console ourselves,” she said adding, “but I want to see the grave of my son before my death.”<sup>11</sup> The uncertainty caused by ‘enforced disappearance’ completely jeopardise the social fabric and the thread which binds the family. While the natural normal life would be the son grieving at the graveyard of his mother, here we see a rather unfortunate picture of a mother who is deprived of the knowledge of her son’s life or death. She

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<sup>9</sup> Taken out from the documentary *Mughal Masse* by Iffat Fatima

<sup>10</sup> Hizb Media Centre, Srinagar, 2 March, “Decade on, family still awaits son’s whereabouts in Kashmir”

<sup>11</sup> Zulfikar Majid, “APDP warns New Delhi against blocking UN body’s visit”, Greater Kashmir, 10 April 2009.

mourns the loss of her son but could not cry on the grave of her son, as it was still unclear whether the son is alive or dead.

The stories of disappeared sons are never ending, so also the pain associated with it. They all share the common environment of distress and uncertainty.

A common thread in most disappearance cases is that the victims' families rushed to security camps immediately after their loved ones were bundled into unmarked white jeeps or olive green personnel carriers, only to be told that they would be released after questioning. The next the families hear of their sons and brothers is stout denials by the same very camp about ever having arrested their loved ones.<sup>12</sup>

Through the APDP the sufferings of all these people are made visible. The APDP aims to track down their missing loved ones, and to recover them so that they could put an end to their miserable life. They want to know the reason why their loved ones have been separated from them with an inbuilt motive to not send them back to their families. They aim to put pressure on the government to give an account for the missing persons, and altogether put an end to the crime of enforced disappearances. Being largely dominated by women members, the APDP is grounded on women's traditional mothering role. The act of grieving and suffering which are considered to be private affairs, are brought out in the public domain, thus, politicising and making full use of it while negotiating with the structures of power. This is a unique and innovative strategy available to 'unarmed' women and it represents women taking responsibility for political action.<sup>13</sup>

The APDP meets regularly to extend support through their sharing of experiences, information and also hope. According to the APDP estimates, around 8000-10000 persons have disappeared since 1989. They are determined that 'truth' cannot be covered, and 'scars of injustice' cannot be healed. They organise protest and demonstrations, seek the truth, and urged the authorities to leave the attitude of arrogance, denial and suppression. They challenged the government effort to wipe out the incidents from its records and memories. The government, according to them, does not care for their suffering and therefore the families are relentlessly fighting against the forgetfulness of the government. They treasure the lives of their children whose absence they mourn everyday. For them the injustice continues until justice is

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<sup>12</sup> Kashmir Observer, Srinagar May 17, 2011, "Abandoned by 'Saviours', Kin of Kashmir's Missing Fight On".

<sup>13</sup> Rita Manchanda, 2001, "Guns and Burqa: Women in the Kashmir Conflict", in Rita Manchanda(ed.), *Women, war and peace in South Asia*, p-95

done, and therefore they demand for an independent enquiry.<sup>14</sup> APDP press release says, “Justice is never compromised. Truth is never buried. Lies are never sustained. The struggle of the APDP cannot be exhausted or defeated as it is driven by the principles of justice and love of our disappeared family members, whose memories can never be taken away from us. Truth shall overcome...”<sup>15</sup>

Making a break through in their struggle, the APDP submitted their report at the 86th Session of the United Nation’s Working Group on Involuntary Enforced Disappearances (WGIED), in Geneva 2008. The submission comprised six individual cases of disappearances in Kashmir. “The general submissions presented a brief account of the widespread prevalence of Enforced Disappearances in Kashmir and gave an overview of the Indian laws related to sanctions for prosecutions, and special laws like AFSPA which give armed forces extraordinary powers,” said the Chairman of the APDP, Parveena Ahangar. The APDP also urged the WGIED to ask India to ratify and implement the provisions of the International Convention for Protection of Persons from Enforced Disappearances (2007) and UN convention against torture; abolish all secret detention and interrogation centres; take immediate steps to protect family members of persons disappeared from intimidation and harassment by security forces; and also empower the NHRC and SHRC to investigate crimes committed by the armed forces in compliance with international standards and norms.<sup>16</sup> APDP also conducted head count of persons disappeared, supported by the United Nations Human Rights Project under its voluntary fund for victims of torture.

On 10 May 2011, on the sideline of the monthly sit-in protest against enforced disappearances, APDP urged the government to keep its word on setting up of a commission to probe the alleged custodial disappearances in Kashmir. They demanded the government to announce a time frame within which the disappearance cases would be investigated. According to Parveena Ahangar, the charge against the disappeared of having crossed the LOC is not rational and acceptable. Rather than making false accusations on civilians, the state should provide a supportive, enabling environment which facilitates access to justice. They also urged the government to put

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<sup>14</sup> APDP Press Release 28 November, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> APDP Press Release 28 November, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Faheem Aslam, “APDP to UN: Ask India to repeal draconian Laws. Tells government to declare disappeared men dead if killed, or their whereabouts if alive”, Greater Kashmir, 10 May 2009.

in place, their laws and policies and ensure protection of witnesses and those complaining against arbitrary state action. Further, they asked New Delhi to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, which it has, so far, failed to do.<sup>17</sup>

On 28 May 2011, the APDP submitted a preliminary list of 1417 cases of enforced disappearances to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. Stating that the crime of enforced disappearances remained unabated and unaddressed, the APDP reiterated its demand to form an independent and impartial investigation body for the cases of enforced disappearances, as the judicial and administrative agencies have totally failed to deliver justice. It also urged the Jammu and Kashmir Government to provide information about the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared to their families. They also urged that the government should end the prevailing ‘period of uncertainty’ for the family members of the disappeared and to make public the actual list of the missing persons.<sup>18</sup>

“Thousands of persons were subjected to Enforced Disappearance during the last two decades by the troops. We want to know what happened to our dear ones. If they were killed, we still want to know the place where they were buried,” the APDP members demanded. They said there are hundreds of women who are neither widows nor married, as their husbands are missing for years.<sup>19</sup> They are known as half widows, and also another very serious disturbing issue at hand. Their life is in a complete misery. They face the economic hardships and are not entitled to ex-gratia as their husbands are not declared dead officially. Their chances of remarrying are very slim, and especially if they are ex-wife of militants than they face more ostracism. They also face the fear of desertion by the in-laws and the custody of their children remained an unsolved puzzle. At extreme cases women are drawn to prostitution, not to forget the emotional stress, loneliness, sexual harassment, social undesirability, physical insecurity they underwent.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kashmir Watch, “Keep word on tracing disappeared persons: APDP tells Omar”, 10 May 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Press release of APDP, 28 May 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Zulfikar Majid, “APDP warns New Delhi against blocking UN’s body visit”, Greater Kashmir, 19 April, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Seema Kazi, 2009, *Between Democracy and Nation, Gender and Militarisation in Kashmir*, p149,150,153



Years of assembling and protesting against absence of justice and the government's inaction, have not done enough for these distress mothers. The government neither give explanation nor are ready to address the problem of disappearances. Parveena Ahangar said, "Government is giving contradictory statements on the issue. They want to dilute the issue by creating confusion and projecting different theories. Our children were picked up by the security agencies and government is responsible for it."<sup>21</sup> Not a single army personnel has been convicted or punished, most of the times innocent civilians arrested are tagged foreign militants, for promotion, money and rank. No documents and records has ever made for those disappeared and therefore one of the main concerns is the lack of any authentic figure of the disappeared. Another troubling fact is the use of 'enforced disappearance' as one of the many repressive measures. The authorities use this tactic in a purposefully systematic manner, and thus becomes a larger human right's issue and also a reason of people's dissatisfaction. The real tragedy of enforced disappearance is the disruption of the lives of its family members. Death is, in a way, simpler and clearer than disappearance. Those who wait for their loved ones lived in despair, and such a traumatic situation leads all the families to come together. They have no means than to become resilient in all possible ways. A mother has nothing to do other than to protest and grieve for her son, and is exactly what they do. The terror has already traumatised the society to a certain level that they are insecure of the future.

Hope that their love ones will come back and justice will be done keeps every mother going, and sits in protest every month with incurable signs of misery, wretchedness and dejection. They are related by the bond of sorrow and are united by grief.

#### **4.2. Meira Paibis of Manipur**

The women's involvement in the public and political cause has a very long history in Manipur. The women in Manipur have always been a prominent figure, and therefore it is often said that the history of Manipur is a history of its women. The women of all generations derived their strength from various legends and myths of prominent and powerful female deities and queens. They are further motivated by the history of women's activism at different periods, for the cause of the society and against

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<sup>21</sup> Zulfikar Majid, "APDP warns New Delhi against blocking UN's body visit", Greater Kashmir, 19 April, 2009.

domination and imperialism. It can be traced back to the Seven Years Devastation<sup>22</sup> under Burmese rule from 1819 to 1826 followed by the First and Second Nupi Lal<sup>23</sup> in 1904 and 1939 respectively. The women of today and their movement can be seen to have their roots from these historical accounts.

The most contemporary women's activism began against the social inequilibrium, created by male drunkenness, and drug addiction. The instable and backward economic condition led to the rise of many liquor producing business in households. Also government's grant of licence to sales of liquor as part of its economic programme was socially disrupting. This is complimented by the presence of an international illicit trade of drugs where Manipur was a transit route. Consequently most men were drawn into drug addiction slowly destroying the social fabric of the land. Then came the women's intervention in the form of 'Nisha Bandi'<sup>24</sup> which means the banning of all intoxicants. The women kept vigil at night roaming around the streets. With the aim of enforcing a ban on intoxicants all over the state, the Nisha Bandis of all localities came together and formed the All Manipur Women's Social Reformation and Development Samaj in April, 1975. It stood for prohibition of liquor, targeting the liquor producing households and the individual consumers who trespass social norms.<sup>25</sup>

The deeper involvement of women in the public life came along with the violence infiltrated by the armed confrontation between the state, and the non state forces. The major shift in their activism can be identified during the 1980s. This period is

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<sup>22</sup> In 1819, during the reign of Maharaja Marjit Singh, the most notable Burmese invasion occurred. From 1819 to 1826, the Burmese occupied Manipur and it is called "Chahi Taret Khuntakpa" or the "Seven Years Devastation" in the history of Manipur. The whole valley was in deep turmoil and in these dark years, the women play significant roles of protecting the home-front when their men were killed or captured. See 'Cheitharol Khumbaba', the Royal Chronicle of Manipur.

<sup>23</sup> Nupi-Lan literally translated as women's agitation or women's war is significant in the history of Manipur. The first Nupi Lal was a result of the British introduction of new colonial administrative system including the abolition of 'Lallup system' (a kind of feudal system). Unlike other women movements around the world, they demanded for the upliftment of economic condition of the state, mainly challenging the economic policies of the British causing economic exploitation by outside traders. Second Nupi Lal is a direct protest against rice hoarding by the Marwari traders despite scarcity of rice in the valley which is coupled with the maladministration of the British. See, N Joykumar Singh, 2005, *Social Movements in Manipur*. Also see N. Khelchandra Singh, Nupi Lal in "Nupi Lal 1939", A Souvenir published in the Nupi Lal Complex on 18 April, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Nisha Bandis movement started at around the mid 1970s to detoxify the society. Nisha bandis organisations are formed all over Manipur, and is a spontaneous and voluntary association formed by women.

<sup>25</sup> *Women in Sarong* a documentary by Lokendra Arambam.

significant because on 8 September 1980, Manipur was identified as a 'disturbed' state, and along with it came various armed confrontation. The draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, was imposed which empowers the Armed Forces beyond accountability, and ethics. Since then the notion of a peaceful and happy life became just stories. Gross human rights violation took place in the hands of the Armed Forces. This led to the change of 'Nisha Bandis' to 'Meira Paibis'.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly it could be said that the changing socio-political conditions paved the ways for the rise of Meira Paibis. Violence in the state escalated since the 1980s. The 1980s is also a time when the major insurgent groups had a very strong foothold, and were very much determined to their cause. They executed various violent offensives against the armed forces. As also in the case of Kashmir, the Armed Forces' retaliation did not distinguish between an insurgent, and a civilian. The nature of state's policy in these states is militarist in approach with primary consideration for national security, and according to it, any movement for self-determination is 'foreign instigated' and should be crushed. Consequently they gave main emphasis on dealing with "law and order" maintenance, relegating the problem as something arising out of law and order failure. The perceived national threats legitimised the state's militarist responses. Instead of addressing the social, developments and political issues, militarisation got entrenched in the state policy since the 1980s.<sup>27</sup>

There are unlimited accounts of state terrorism to narrate. One significant incident, which, among other factors, incited the women's movement was that of Langjing Village, on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1980, when suspected guerrilla outfit killed two CRPF men and escaped with their arms. The CRPF launch a massive operation in the Village, in search for those insurgents. In that operation, a women called Irom Bino Devi, who was hiding with a boy of 10 was shot to death. The boy too, was dragged out by the CRPF jawans, who tied his hands and shot him to death. Other victims who were shot dead were Angou Singh, a driver, who was coming back home from office, and Naorem Indrajit Singh.<sup>28</sup> During this operation several cases of rapes, physical abuse, and torture of men, women and children was also reported to have been committed. It

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<sup>26</sup> 'Meira Paibi' means women torch bearers. 'Meira' which signify light, is an improvised bamboo torch. More than a source of light, it is an identification of confidence, security, dignity and moral strength.

<sup>27</sup> Anuradha M Chenoy, 2002, *Militarism and Women in South Asia*, p-127-28

<sup>28</sup> Bhabananda Takhellambam, 2008, " Legacy of Women's movement in Manipur", in Anuradha Dutta and Ratna Bhuyan(ed.), *Women and Peace: Chapters from the North East*", p-47

was at this time of massive and senseless violence that women stood up realising that they could not stand and watch passively any longer. They organised protests, and to clamp the situation the government imposed curfew for several days. As soon as the curfew opened women took to the streets, and demanded that the CRPF should be removed. On 28 May 1980, a massive rally was organised. This rally was a very important one in the history of the women's movement, as women from all regions joined in massive number, defying the government ban order on mass gathering. The government cracked down heavily on these women and many were arrested. Among the arrested, was one pregnant woman Sinam Ongbi Pyari Devi who fell and died from the fully packed moving Army lorry that was carrying these arrested women. The outrage over this incident added more strength to the women's movement.<sup>29</sup>

The situation of the state worsened with each passing day – the activities of the insurgents increased and along with it the counter insurgency move of the state grew even much stronger and harder. Each time the army crack down, there were several arrests and detention in the name of suspects, and the abuse on human rights grew deep and wide. Another very important incident in the history of the Meira Paibis was that of 29 December 1980. Some insurgent group planted three bombs near Tomal Makhong, Liwa Road Singjamei. The Army launch an operation as usual to arrest the culprits. In their search, a resident of that place called Ibomcha was picked up on grounds of suspicion. The Local women were disturbed that he will also be added to the list of the 'disappeared'. They gathered, and discussed their plan of action and informed the All Manipur Women's Social Reformation and Development Samaj. The leaders and the local women went to the Army camp, and demanded that Ibomcha be released immediately and unharmed as he is innocent. Due to the pressure inflicted by his women, they came and drop Ibomcha later on that evening. This is a very significant success of the women's movement, and therefore they decided that 29<sup>th</sup> December will observe "Pari Kanba Numit", meaning – Day of Saving the Sons. It is also significant for, it is from this day onwards that the women started lighting up 'Meira'(torch) and started their night vigil, spending nights outside the comforts of their home, patrolling the streets and guarding their locality against any surprise army search and arrest. The Meira Paibis, in the contemporary situation, represents the

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<sup>29</sup> Bhabananda Takhellambam, 2008, in Anuradha Dutta and Ratna Bhuyan(ed.), p-49,50

most powerful force of human rights defenders against the repression of the military. They strived to maintain some sort of social harmony and normalcy.

Besides the above incidents there are also other significant incidents like the 1980 Patsoi incidence; 26 April, 1980, Langjing incident; 1987, Oinam village incident, though the list is never ending. The Meira Paibis have been vigilant throughout, striking back at the state for every abuse it commits. They came to assume the strength of collectivity and proactive presence in the public sphere.

The Meira Paibis again rose to prominence in the 1990s, with the motherly dimension becoming more significant in this phase. In fact we could derive a relationship between women's activism and violence. The more the violence the more the women became mobilised and active in wrestling with the structures of power. If not elsewhere, this relation holds true in the conflict ridden state of Manipur, where with each instance of violence the women folk becomes more and more engrossed with resistance movements. There was no pause to the increase of violence in the state – illegal detentions, torture, fake encounters, custodial deaths, rape of women and firing on civilians, have by then, become a daily affair. Forced disappearance and 'liquidating innocents'<sup>30</sup> in the custody became a very ugly crime in the state since the early 1980s specifically when AFSPA was enforced.

Among the many cases relating to 'enforced disappearances', the arrest of the 14-years old High School Board examinee was one which captures the public memory till date. Yumlembam Sanamacha Singh from Angtha Mayai Leikai, Imphal East, was preparing for his forthcoming Board exams when he picked up on that fateful night of 12 February 1998. It was around 11 p.m., he and two other boys were taken away by the 17-Rajputana Rifles. While the other two boys were released the following day, the whereabouts of Sanamacha is still not known. He was arrested without an arrest-memo, defying the Court's directives. Moreover, the 17 RR denied the charges that they picked up the student. It was only after a long procedure of enquiry and legal procedure that finally established the accusations are true. The missing of Sanamacha caused massive public hue and cry. The whole state was paralysed and was in turmoil for several months. The mothers took to streets protesting the act of the security

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<sup>30</sup> As used by the leader of the regional Manipur People's Party, Okram Joy, quoted in I. Bedamani Devi, 2008, *Women and Human Right Violation in Manipur*, p-74.

forces, they continued their public protests as usual. The case of Sanamacha is still pending and also many other similar cases of 'enforced disappearances'. The mothers have always been in the forefront of public protest. They have the immense power of female ferocity in their fight against injustice and oppression, their fights are exemplary, and the perseverance and genuineness of their movement are manifested every time a son or a daughter fall victim of the Armed Forces.

The most extraordinary incident that rocked the tiny state of Manipur and when the 'mothers' resort to the extreme sort of protest, was when the mutilated bullet ridden body of a 32 year old Thangjam Manorama was found. She was picked up by the 17 Assam rifles from her home, on 10 July 2004 around midnight, on the ground of her alleged link with the People's Liberation Army. Her body was found the next day few kilometres from her home. Her mutilated body clearly showed that she was sexually violated and later killed, with bullet signs on her private parts indicating the motive on the part of the jawans to remove the evidence of rape. This incident was not one which can be forgotten easily with the passage of time. One of the reasons is the people's desperate, long suppressed, violated cry against the violation of life and liberties. And the other was the way in which the mothers manifested their strength to fight for their sons and daughters who were mercilessly taken, disappeared or butchered.

The incident unleashed Massive protests from all works of the civil society mainly led by the women's groups, especially the Meira Paibis. The protest became a one and only one in the history of the world when some mothers stood naked in front of the headquarter of the 17 Assam Rifles, protesting the inhuman rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama. Their slogan "Indian army rape us and kill us" spread like a wild fire against the perpetrators, and became the most visible symbol of Manipuris' protest worldwide. They shouted that they are all Manorama's mothers. What is the underlying implication is the belief that they are universal mothers and therefore the narrow division of biological birth did not separate them from fighting for their disappeared and killed sons and daughters. The act of motherhood going to the extreme of even striping off reflects the very uselessness or the superficiality of clothing when the human dignity is already lost. In Samir Kumar Das's words, "it

shows the “superfluity” of their clothes”.<sup>31</sup> Besides challenging the notion of shame about one's body and sexuality, it also shows how much they care for their sons and daughters even if they are not their biological sons and daughters.

The most recent and shocking case which clearly manifested the impunity under AFSPA enjoyed by the Armed Forces, later spilled over the state police commandos, was that of Maibam Naobi. She was a school teacher and the girlfriend of a People's Liberation Army cadre called Kh. Bikash who was killed in a gunfight which attacked and killed the Inspector of the Manipur Police commando. The villagers had just come back from the funeral of Bikash when the police commandos arrived at Bikash house. They warned the people gathered there from carrying out the last rites, and picked up Naobi. Initially when the Manipur Human Rights Commission met the concerned Officer-in-charge, they denied any knowledge of Naobi's arrest. Later when she was produced before the Chief Magistrate, she was charged as a co-associate of the party who ambushed the Officer in Charge, a girlfriend of Bikash and a member of a terrorist organisation.<sup>32</sup> Naobi's own words showed that she was terribly beaten and sexually molested again and again. Her plea that she was an innocent teacher was not taken into consideration and she was kept in custody until the massive public protest grows unabated. The angry masses and their pressure led to her discharge. A usual it was the Meira Paibis who filled the public interest litigation in the Guwahati High Court on March, 2006. While the Court has ordered an enquiry, it is yet to start.

Besides the stories of mothers' activism, there is also the historic protest of Irom Chanu Sharmila, who resolved to fast to death. Her protest started in November 2000, and now it has been more than a decade that she is fighting against state violence using her non-violent means. Her main demand is to repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, as it has been serving as a protective umbrella for the security forces and their heinous crimes. The impunity of the army and the misuse of the AFSPA had caused the lives of thousands of civilians, killing or forcibly disappearing anyone, on mere suspicion. Now her hunger strike has attained world wide support, and many human and civil rights organisations and activists are rallying for the cause she initiated. Mothers of Manipur have again united and had started another campaign to

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<sup>31</sup> Samir Kumar Das, 2008, in Paula Banerjee (ed.), p.68

<sup>32</sup> Babloo Loitongbam, 2008, “Women in Armed Conflict: The Manipur Experience”, in Anuradha Dutta and Ratna Bhuyan(ed.), *Women and Peace: Chapters from the North East*, p.19,20,21.

save Sharmila. Their demand is to repeal AFSPA as soon as possible, so that their precious and brave daughter could be saved from dying.

Women have always been in the forefront in struggles for peace, they act as shield, and also negotiate with the security forces and the militants too, for the safety of their loved ones. Thus, the Meira Paibis patrolled the streets every night and guard their sons and daughters from being picked up in random by the armed forces, and from any other possible harm to their family and community.

### **4.3. Mother's Front, Sri Lanka**

According to Malathi de Alwis, in the 1980s and the 1990s, there has been a collective mobilisation of maternalism in Sri Lanka. This is a very significant move to counter violence, mainly instigated by the prevailing political scenario. Although there were several Mother's Fronts in Sri Lanka, the underlying motivating force remains the same, i.e., motherhood, as the name itself suggest. The conflict in Sri Lanka is mainly seen as an ethnic one, but it is more rooted in a struggle for democracy, justice and human rights and dignity. The post independence period saw the rise of insurgent groups, first being the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna, (JVP, People's Liberation front), caused by economic deprivation, social marginalisation, and caste-class based discrimination coupled with the problem of unemployment. This insurgency was brutally and successfully crushed by the government. On the other side, i.e., the north and the east of the island, Tamil youth became increasingly tired of the discrimination and underdevelopment they face and therefore began to ask for a separate state, Tamil Elam. Moreover, the Tamils also raised issues concerning Sinhala majority hegemonic rule, thus leading to major conflicts. The state, in order to curb the crisis unfolded severe and brutal repression, adding another field of violence and conflict. It set in motion various mechanisms of silencing and repression, including the creation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 1979. Since then, the gross abuse of human rights started, simultaneously leading to the rise of extreme nationalist thoughts on all sides.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sunila, Abeysekera, 2007, " Implications of Insurgency on Women: The Sri Lankan experience" in Ava Darsan Shrestha and Rita Thapa(ed.), *The impact of armed conflicts on Women in South Asia*, p.67,68,69



The first Mother's Front formed in 1984, in Jaffna, was mobilised against the atrocities of the state security forces and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces. The IPKF and the state security forces began a process of disarming and demobilising the militant Tamils resulting to massive arrest of Tamil youths. They had mobilised their maternal identity against state repression, with their enormous spirit mobilising thousands of people, organising mass rallies and picketing public officials to achieve their cause.<sup>34</sup> This Mother's Front had to be disbanded because the LTTE did not approve of its work of criticising the non-state violence and the anti-democratic practices of militant groups.<sup>35</sup>

Eastern Mother's Front, influenced and inspired by the Mother's Front of Jaffna, began their own branch in 1986, taking to the streets to prevent massacres of members of the LTTE. The LTTE then started its militancy and hegemony, ready to strike and disapprove any independent civil groups and their voices. The eastern Mother's Front then confined themselves to works of charity.<sup>36</sup>

During the years 1987 to 1991, the country was gripped in the endless fold of terror. There was the uprising of the Sinhala nationalist youth called the Janata Vimukhti Party (JVP) which unleashed its massive terror upon anyone who did not seem to approve of them, or criticised them, or who were supportive of the state. Simultaneously, there was the rise of Deshpremi Janata Vyaparaya (DJV or Patriotic People's Movement), a group of southern political actors which stood strongly against the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord. Their protest turned out to be an unmitigated campaign of terror and violence against those who supported the Accord and anyone associated with the state. The state responded by spreading out its arms far and wide, embracing terror on a much larger scale, murdering or enforcing the disappearance of anyone suspected of being 'subversive'.<sup>37</sup> It was at this time when state terror was at its peaks that the Sinhala Mother's Front came into being as one of the most efficient grassroots organisation. It was formed in July 1990, in a southern district called Matara where disappearance was the highest. The Sinhala Mother's Front came out

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<sup>34</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 2009, "Interrogating the 'Political': Feminist peace Activism in Sri Lanka", p-83

<sup>35</sup> Saro, Thirupathy and Nirekha De Silva, 2008, "Women in Sri Lankan Peace Politics" in Paula Banerjee (ed.), *Women in peace Politics*, p.140.

<sup>36</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 2009, referring to Hensman (1992, 503) and Hole (1990, 324), in "Interrogating the 'Political': Feminist peace Activism in Sri Lanka", p-83, 84

<sup>37</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 1998, "Motherhood as Space of Protest, in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), *Appropriating Gender, Women's Activism and Politicized in South Asia*, p-185

severely in protest against the disappearances of their near and dear male members. It was with their formation that mother's politics came to be a very great force against the state. It became the most visible and potent women's protest movement in the history of Sri Lanka and also a unifying ground for women. It radically challenged the government like never before, planned its strategies according to the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent and used both orthodox and non orthodox measures.<sup>38</sup> While the orthodox measures include beseeching of Gods, taking vows, etc., the non-orthodox are confined to staging protests, organising rallies and rallies which mobilised the women. The appeal to the notion of motherhood proved most effective and it gave moral and emotive power to these victimised mothers whose rights of motherhood have been severely wounded and denied.

With more than 25000 women members, the Mother's Front was very much vocal in its mission against 'enforced disappearances' which comprised of more than 60,000 young and middle aged men. According to de Alwis, these women's only demand was for a climate where they can raise their sons to manhood, have their husbands with them leading a normal woman's life. They claimed to have an authentic and unquestionable grief which espoused traditional family values. These women have always insisted that they were merely mothers and that all they wanted was the return of their children to their family. Yet their demand inherently challenged the political rhetoric because even if they say that their demands are not political, it did create problem for the Sri Lankan state, forcing it to refashion its practices and institutions.<sup>39</sup>

The Mother's Front, in its very first meetings of the mothers and families of the disappeared, declared their immediate goal as to try to find the disappeared and to obtain the release of those who were detained without charges. They also demanded death certificates and compensation for those who had been missing for over a year. They also promised to alleviate the misery of those women who had suffered personal trauma.<sup>40</sup> Initially, the Mother's Front could not make much headway due to its regional focus and limited members, they could not do much more than compiling and documenting about disappearances. But after few months, various branches set up in

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<sup>38</sup> Nelofer de Mel, 2001, *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth century Sri Lanka*, p-239

<sup>39</sup> De Alwis, Malathi, 2009, p-84

<sup>40</sup> The Island, 9 February, 1991, referred by Nelofer de Mel, 2001, *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in twentieth century Sri Lanka*, p-224

different districts. The Mother's Front held its first convention at the Town Hall in Colombo, on February 19, 1991. They passed ten resolutions unanimously which included the following demands - to release information about the disappeared and also those who are held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and to guarantee them their basic human rights; to appoint a powerful independent commission to verify the facts about arbitrary arrests and detention and to release immediately those who have not been charged; to harness state funded social service institutions to guide the orphaned children; to pay compensation to the dependents of the disappeared and priority in jobs houses etc; to issue death certificates; to ensure security of those who have been rehabilitated and released; and to nullify all controlling acts and disarm all armed groups.<sup>41</sup>

It was in 1991, that the Sinhala Mother's Front finally came to the limelight asserting their strength and went for a rally in the capital Colombo dressed in white, holding mementos of their disappeared dear ones. They demanded that their lost sons and also their lost role of motherhood be restored to them. Moreover they also pointed out that the state should be held responsible for the violence that rocked the country that not just affected the Sinhala, but Tamil and Muslim youths.

The Sri Lankan state employed a counter rhetoric against the Mother's Front and the rally that they held. According to the state, being a mother and also a protester in the public space are mutually contradictory. The Sri Lankan state argued that women have not been good mothers and have let their children go astray, and it is precisely because of this reason that the state has to step in to mend the deficiencies of mothering and rehabilitate their offspring. They also denounced the Front as 'anti-government' and 'subversive' and 'against the security forces who saved democracy'.<sup>42</sup> The state denied and discredited any attempt to sought justice, and in this case, especially the different route adopted by the mothers. As the activism of the mothers was born out of the crises of the state, their strategies and focus were clearly anti-state. For the state, any deviation of any from is not acceptable. Neloufer de Mel has pointed out that whenever there is a crisis between the nation and the state, the state has always tries to subsume the nation, levelling all anti-state activity as anti-

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<sup>41</sup> Divaina Newspaper, 21 February, 1991.

<sup>42</sup> Daily News, 14 March 1991, 23 Feb, 1991, quoted by Malathi de Alwis, 1998, "Motherhood as Space of Protest", in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), *Appropriating Gender, Women's Activism and Politicized in South Asia*, p-188.

anti-national. The Mother's Front were accused of similar charges, as they have been rallying around the demand for a government which is accountable on the issue of human rights, in a way trying to reinstate the distinction between the state and the nation.<sup>43</sup>

The government also set up counter rallies, which mourned the deaths of male relatives killed by the JVP and the Tamil militants. Later the state also inaugurated another UNP Mothers Front, which attacked the previous Mother's Front and their sons for having killed their innocent children.<sup>44</sup> Here we see the response of the state using the same notion of the 'maternal' in countering the mothers' movement. Fracturing of the unity which women ground in an oppositional 'political' motherhood is evident in the strategy of the state. Mainly the state wanted to show that they have been inadequate mothers and that they are acting as mere tools in the hands of political parties' interest.

The nature of the Sinhala Mother's Front was apolitical, conservative and employed orthodox measures which kept the state on constant defensive mode. The Mother's Front used religious rituals as tools of resistance which according to de Alwis included 'beseeching of Gods and Goddesses, saints and holy spirits with special novenas, penances, offerings, donations and the chanting of religious verses over a period of months, taking vows, taking pilgrimages, and performing bodhi pujas, resorting to sorcery and the placement of charms and curses on those deemed responsible'.<sup>45</sup> These cries, curses and weeping shook the whole nation and became an embarrassment for the government. Their idiom of protest was traditional and non-violent, which was mainly intended to arouse moral sensibilities of the nation. Moreover, according to de Alwis, the use of both tears and curses, suggest an alternative kind of protest which is not merely emotive but powerful, both in the way it is staged and the way it seeks revenge. 'The presumption inherent in a curse – that it could bring about change through the intercession of a deity – complicates efforts for a believer like the President to stall such change, for the curse now transcends the human'.<sup>46</sup> The government retaliated with its counter rituals, to ward of the mother' s

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<sup>43</sup> Neloufer de Mel (2001), p.268

<sup>44</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 1998, in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), p.189

<sup>45</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 1998, in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), p-190

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p-192

curses. Though their activism remained limited to tears and curses, for the first time they could get the attention of the whole nation.

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The state, in all the cases above, had violated the very basic human rights, and had caused major resentment and anger amongst the people. The state's own actions sowed the seeds for various forms of resistance. Among them, the resistance by mothers is relatively new and also ambivalent in the sense that it involved the idioms of the family and motherhood.

In all these movements, there is one common language that the women spoke, and that is the language of 'motherhood', and the attributes associated with it. Those mothers who came out to protest, brought maternal care into the domain of the political. Their act of care is simultaneously used as an act of protest. Maternal care, thus, provides them entry point into the political. As Samir Kumar Das has pointed out, 'the language these women spoke was the stereotypical women's language – the language of love, loyalty, care, and affection, but this they speak with a public anger in a public place in ways they never meant to do.'<sup>47</sup> The language of intimacy which belonged to the non-public domain, assumed a different form when it was expressed in public. It assumes a different audience, and was a performance of the language that was alien in the public sphere. Lisa Baraister, too, seem to express the same opinion when she said, 'Mothers in the public space make a precise contribution of performances and audiences that is central to the link between the virtuosic and the ethico-political. What the mothers perform when they nurture, contain, reprimand, feed, change, amuse, entertain, and teach in public, what they make visible is that which spills out of these experiences'.<sup>48</sup> The protests were conducted using the language which was most handy and abundant to the women, and that was the language of care and nurture which are associated with motherhood. Thus, motherhood became a space which is much larger, nonracist and radical against an extremely corrupt and repressive government.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that in a cultural context, mothers are viewed as caretakers of even adult sons, endows them with the moral authority and sense of obligation to protect their sons and increasingly

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<sup>47</sup> Samir Kumar Das, 2008, in Paula Banerjee (ed.), p.70,71

<sup>48</sup> Baraister, Lisa, 2009, "Mothers who make Things Public", p-23

<sup>49</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 1998, in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu(ed.), p-186

daughters from war and violence.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to the notion of ‘mothers for sons’, these mothers did not discriminate among the victims. As it has been pointed out that the state violence failed to distinguish between innocent and insurgents, they also did not make any gender difference. Though it is worth pointing out that women get extra score of violence by getting raped before they are killed.

It is the belief in the idea of ‘universal motherhood’ that drove these women to transcend narrow boundaries like class, ethnicity and blood, frees itself from the specific biological context of mother-child relationship and its associated obligations. They, on the contrary, become an agent of social resistance.<sup>51</sup> Driven by the common concern of all people, the mothers care for all victims regardless of whose children they are. This was proved by the mothers in Manipur who stripped naked in protest of Manorama’s death. The women shouted that they were all Manorama’s mother, thus deconstructing the association of motherhood with biological birth. The association of mother and a child is thus broadened up to an extent that every women became a mother, or to say in other ways, every women is a mother in the potential or real sense and therefore the inherent qualities of being a mother enable them to treat every child as her own child, in the case of the disappeared and victimised. It totally decontextualised the relationship and gave a totally new dimension to it. Motherhood is defined not only by the existence of an either biological or adopted child, but the identity of motherhood can be maintained in the absence of the other – child. According to Mabel Bellucci, the other way of becoming a mother without a child is manifested by being a mother of someone who is ‘disappeared’. She is of the opinion that the mothers of the disappeared experiences ‘childless motherhood’. At first they came out in search for their own children, but later they realised that in order to defend their family, they have to cut across the narrow boundaries of blood relation and the cause became a generalised one – to the extent that they treat every child as their own child.<sup>52</sup>

Speaking the language of motherhood implies its politicisation. The crime of enforced disappearance have politicised the family and its patriarchal values. According to Sara

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<sup>50</sup> Enloe, Cynthia (2000) cited in Lorraine Bayard de Volo, 2004, “Mobilizing Mothers for War: Cross-National Framing Strategies in Nicaragua’s Contra War”, p.716.

<sup>51</sup> Samir Kumar Das, 2008, in Paula Banerjee (ed.), p.64-65

<sup>52</sup> Mabel Bellucci, 1999, “Childless motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortinas, a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo Argentina”, p.83-4

Ruddick, 'woman who acts as 'woman' in the public spaces transform the passions of attachment and loss into political action, transform the women of sorrow from icon to agent'.<sup>53</sup> The state had always valorised motherhood and the family, and this particular state's nature of valorising and destroying the family simultaneously, have induced the women to be 'mothers' who demand the right to know whether their children are alive or death. The women, according to Schirmer, started using 'the language of sacrifice and the traditional values associated with motherhood as both political protection and political tools, these women are willing to take public action.'<sup>54</sup> This image of motherhood also protected them from extreme violent repression of the state. 'Through dramatic acts of civil obedience, these women of these movements counter the cults of everyday death with celebrations of daily life'.<sup>55</sup> The notion of mothering for the 'disappeared', gave 'motherhood' a public value. According to Mabel Belluchi, 'in order to assert themselves as mothers, they had to deny themselves that same role. In other words their action challenged the paradigm of motherhood as private enclave. They politicised the traditional role and gave new value to it, as a protest against what had been done to their children and therefore to them as mothers'.<sup>56</sup> They confront the state unlike any other by transforming themselves from biological mothers to political mothers, thus transforming their loss into public action. The fact that they are 'mothers' led them to demand the rights inherent in their obligation of motherhood, thereby politicising their relationship with the state.<sup>57</sup>

None of the mothers in these resistances, however, seemed to have questioned patriarchy and its power. They are organisations of women e.g. the Meira Paibis, and not exclusively for women. The Mother's front of Sri Lanka was clearly encouraged and financed by male party political leaders. Even though they address issues of women affected by the violence, they could not reach out to other core women's concern and so is the same with APDP. The mothers demanded information from the government about the 'disappearances' of the loved ones on the basis of their

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<sup>53</sup> Sara Ruddick, 1998, "Women of Peace" in Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer E. Turpin (ed.), *The Women and War Reader*".

<sup>54</sup> Jennifer G Schirmer, 1989, " 'Those Who Die for Life Cannot Be Called Dead:' Women and Human Rights Protest in Latin America", p-4

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p-4

<sup>56</sup> Mabel, Belluchi, 1999, p-84

<sup>57</sup> Mabel, Belluchi (1999), p-84-85

identities as mothers and wives. According to de Alwis, the Mother's Front confronted the state and its contradictions between its own rhetoric and practices:

By appealing for a return to the 'natural' order of family and motherhood, the women are openly embracing patriarchy and its values which primarily define them as wife and mothers. However, by accepting the responsibility to nurture and preserve life, which is also valorised by the state, they revealed the ultimate transgression of the state: it was denying women the opportunity to mother by its resort to clandestine tactics.<sup>58</sup>

According to Patricia Jeffery, motherhood may have embodied, and legitimate power which can frame women's activism but shows her doubt in the very notion of 'motherhood' as having any potential to challenge the patriarchal status quo. She said that:

...devotion to duty, self sacrifice and ennobling activities in others cannot easily mesh with feminist activism and demanding women's rights. Similarly, motherhood embeds women in the family and derives their identities from relationships and duty to others. This gives little space for images of women freely making decisions about their own lives and it tend to put women's agency into doubt.<sup>59</sup>

She further contested the particular politics of maternal framing, and said that politicised motherhood cannot be purely feminist for it is colonised by politicised religious movements. The iconised mother is often imbued with religious overtones. There is the notion of bearing legitimate children for their husband to preserve racial purity. And there is also the notion of women as reproducers and transmitters of authentic culture which stress far and wide including the icon of national honour and mother nation. The use the idiom of motherhood for the feminist could be a source of separation, and if it used motherhood to mobilise women, than it would be hard to keep a distance from politicised religion.<sup>60</sup>

Even though there are several limitations inherent in the identification with the familial and the nurturant, and the mobilisation of feminised repertoires of protests, de Alwis pointed out that these women did manage to create a space of protest in a context of terror and violence. She said, 'Infact the contingent power of their protest stemmed from their invocation of "traditional" sensibilities and the engendering of emotional responses by presenting themselves before a government and a nation as grief-stricken, chronic mourners for their "disappeared" whose only resort now was

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<sup>58</sup> Malathi de Alwis, 1998, in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), p-188

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p-225

<sup>60</sup> Patricia Jeffery, 1998, "Agency, Activism and Agandas", in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), p-225. Also see Nira Yuval Davis, 2005, *Gender and Nation*.



protest, mourn or to beseech the deities for justice'. It was this mother's sorrowful and seemingly apolitical and rhetoric practices that alerted a nation to the hypocrisy of the state.<sup>61</sup>

The notion that women, by playing the role of mother, are bound by their families and tradition, is however, a mistaken one sided view. The fact is that these women, while performing the role, fill it up with new and hitherto unfamiliar understandings and introduce certain new differences to the traditional role. This process thus involves inevitable politicisation of motherhood. Rita Manchanda, while studying the role of women in peace activisms, have also pointed out this process of politicisation saying that women, in their everyday activities of managing survival, politicised their reproductive and nurturing roles. Their political activity is driven by the everyday reality they face, and they do it to assert the safety of their family. Their struggle indeed created a public space for them, which for ordinary women is quite a liberating experience.<sup>62</sup> According to Samir Kumar Das, invocation of motherhood as a metaphor of protest should not be seen as a reproduction of the traditional role, rather a political strategy. Motherhood is one of the few entry points to organise and assert themselves.<sup>63</sup> The politics behind using the metaphor of motherhood is based on the notion that mobilized mothers can be effectively framed as "apolitical" and expressive of some transcendent, moral-laden truth, making the political messages attributed to them difficult for others to dispute. Maternal framing, with attendant cultural notions of political innocence, pacifism, and self- abnegation, is emotionally evocative and thus effective at eliciting sympathy nationally and internationally.<sup>64</sup> Women's use of the idiom of motherhood is also more acceptable and legitimate because it is seen as an extension of women's traditional role, i.e., their familiar role of caring for their men and children. They came out on the streets when their men, who are the traditional protectors, failed to accomplish their role due to the prevailing atmosphere of fear and insecurity. According to Manchanda, when women enter the public spheres of negotiation as women, they can access powerful men, armed men, or

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<sup>61</sup> Malathi De Alwis, 1998, "Motherhood as Space of Protest", in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (ed.), p-198

<sup>62</sup> Rita Manchanda, 2001, "Guns and Burqa: Women in the Kashmir Conflict", in Rita Manchanda (ed.) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia, Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, p-52

<sup>63</sup> Samir Kumar Das, 2008, in Paula Banerjee (ed.), p.62.

<sup>64</sup> Cynthia Enloe, 2000, cited in Lorraine Bayard de Volo, 2004, "Mobilizing Mothers for War: Cross-National Framing Strategies in Nicaragua's Contra War", p-718

security forces and move them to compassion.<sup>65</sup> It is precisely at this time that their struggle for everyday survival, and their concern for the safety of their family, became a political act.

According to Schirmir, ‘the absence of bodies creates a presence of protest’. The mothers were motivated by circumstance and not by ideology. They were motivated by the belief and confidence that their dear ones are not dead and therefore they will return one day. They believe that it will be silly to give up hope and accept failure, for if they stop, the cases will fade away from the memories of the authorities. It was not clear that those who were abducted are dead, there is always hope for them. They are political despite they claim that is not political. Mobilised by the repression they faced:

...these mothers test the limit of permissible political action by demanding the right to know what happened to their missing relatives and the right to reclaim justice from the state. Mobilised by the sheer weight of the social and political circumstances that accompany the lost of a relative and the destruction of the family, these women as disobedient female subjects of the state, dramatise powerlessness and helps to demystify the powerful.<sup>66</sup>

By using the image of the weak and the powerless female to their advantage, they represent the transformation of the powerless victim into political actor, the languages of obedience and submission is also converted into women political expression.<sup>67</sup>

The implication of women as mothers, have been a very effective tool for mobilisation . These mothers have learnt how to use their soft sides, rather than giving in to the suffering, they are able to manage to fight with their wound unhealed. The appearance of motherhood in collectives helped them form a group political identity on the basis of their shared experience of sadness and grief, the identity of mothers who have lost their child. The fact that they are mothers made their protest strong and enduring, providing them legitimacy along with emotional and political weight. Their ability and strength to come out and occupy public space challenged the notion of the ‘political’ and deforms the public space politically.

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<sup>65</sup> Rita Manchanda, 2001, in Rita Manchanda(ed.), p.76.

<sup>66</sup> Jennifer G Schirmer,1989, p-4

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p-4

## **CHAPTER-5**

### **CONCLUSION**

Motherhood had been judged from various vintage points. The different opinions about motherhood have stemmed from the different understandings of what constitutes motherhood, and the political and social contexts within which these understandings are produced. Defining motherhood solely as bearing and rearing of children had been challenged, leading to some major changes in the concept of motherhood. It is now broadened to include important factors like emotions, commitments, obligations, aspirations, desires, etc., both at the personal and societal level. It is more than the monotonous child-mother relationship and takes into its fold, various social interplays. The question as to whether motherhood should be done away with or preserved, has gone out of the context now. The new question is whether and how motherhood can be a major source of power for women.

What the present study intended to show, is the persistence of the two faces of motherhood. How motherhood can be both a source of empowerment and disempowerment/disfranchisement at the same time. Sara Ruddick once said that motherhood can be both a source of power and powerlessness. The study takes her argument further to see the ways in which power and powerlessness are manifested. The earlier debates on motherhood revolved around issues of rationality, agency, freedom, autonomy and opportunities of women. Their main concern was whether the role of motherhood can be a source of joy and satisfaction, and also emancipation for

the women who practiced it. For some it was a hindrance while for others it was a source of happiness.

The study showed that the notion of motherhood is political in the real sense of the term. It is not an aspect of women's life which is in clear disjuncture with the 'political', but one which is seen to shape, and in turn shaped by the 'political'. Motherhood should be given its due political significance as it clearly possesses the potential to sustain the public sphere in multiple ways. The political nature of motherhood arose from the suppressed and dominated private virtues of creating and sustaining life. Though motherhood is regarded as a strictly familiar/private affair, the performance of motherhood overflows the private realm at various instances, claiming its rightful share of the public.

'Political motherhood' is an idea which brought to light the public nature of motherhood. Bringing together two very contradictory ideas, it developed a new notion which challenged the status quo of both these ideas. When the notion of motherhood, which was associated with love, care, nurturing, the ability to create and sustain life, etc., gets tied up with what we call 'political', new meanings are generated. The rhetorical values and symbols associated with motherhood become politicised. Political motherhood then, challenges the idea of motherhood as only a private affair. It means that motherhood and its values are equal players in the public space. Challenging the idea of individuality, rationality, and universality of the public based on masculinity, political motherhood undermines the superficial dichotomy between the private and the political. Political motherhood brings new dimensions into the public. These dimensions are derived from women's attributes, aspirations and needs. It reasserts the traditional roles of women that help foster their special identities. It deforms the way 'public' was understood, and reforms it with new understandings. It rejected the exclusive association of women and the private and their confinement in the private. The questions as to what constitutes the 'political' and 'political action' is restructured in a way which take into account, the long unaccounted women's roles. In short, political motherhood provides a women's entry into the political.

Saying that the notion of political motherhood challenged motherhood as solely a private affair, and provides women entry into the public sphere, is not to say that 'political motherhood' is only empowering. The mere fact that they gain visibility and public space does not mean that they also gain agency and power. In some cases it is powerful while in others it is almost like a burden. The burdensome situation is generated when motherhood gets instrumentalised and remained no longer in the hands of women. This is the case when the state starts to regulate motherhood for the sake of the nation. In the name of identity, culture, honour and other political interests of the nation-state, women's role as mother is shaped in certain ways that often goes against the interest of women. The construction of legitimate and illegitimate sexuality goes on to decide the acceptable and non-acceptable forms of motherhood. The non-acceptable forms and nature of pregnancy and motherhood are the ones which require regulation. Regulation can be of any form, but the motive remains the same, i.e. to control women's sexuality, get rid of the unwanted children and protect women from illegitimate motherhood. The control of sexuality and reproductive functions of women by the state is itself a discourse of politics. It is because the state constructs several ideas of honour, shame, purity, pollution, etc. which in turn shapes the notion of respectable motherhood. Why is the familial affair of mothering and motherhood so keenly regulated by the state? The reason is the state's necessity to gain legitimacy, by observing the role of a responsible guardian. According to the ideals of the state, women's sexualities should only be available to legitimate heterosexual unions which will than produce legitimate offspring. In cases of those women who are raped, as in the case of Bangladesh, their body and sexuality are polluted and therefore needed cleansing. Cleansing is done inflicting emotional and physical violence, once again to these women, taking away their right to their own body and sexuality. It is the victimisation of the victimised. Their motherhood became a political affair which no longer is confined in the four walls. The political nature in this sort of motherhood lies in the fact that, their sexuality remains open to the dictates of state's policies and programmes. In ways unfriendly and vexing to women's agency, their bodies became a field for the execution of political goals. This notion of political motherhood is degrading as they become mere reproductive machines who

despite their will, gets embedded in the desired structure framed by the state and the society.

Motherhood and its powerlessness can be powerful when mothers use the image of the weak and the powerless to their advantage. When motherhood is used as a strategy of mobilisation, resistance and survival, a new consciousness unfolds which transforms the social order. We saw these phenomena when the mothers protest. When the notion of motherhood becomes a rallying point, and when care is used an instrument to resist, women succeed in appropriating a space for their own. These movements certainly are a challenge to the idea of what 'political' should be. And they do it by using the most unthreatening means, their weapon being love and care, and their image being that of a weak and powerless. These forms of resistances belong to the category of political motherhood, for their use of maternal aspects in their struggle. The mothers, first of all, brought maternal care into the political domain. This sort of motherhood helped the women in forming a group identity based on their role of mothers and widened their activism. Their activism consists of purely traditional means, but targeting the strongest forces of the state. Secondly, they accused the state that it had taken away their role of motherhood and therefore it should be given back. A demand which is hard to deny yet more difficult to fulfil, for it is the state and the state only, which valorised and then inflicted harm to their role of motherhood. These women came out as mothers and protested the excesses of the state. As mothers, they felt that it is their duty to safeguard the structure of their family, and therefore any infringement or violation is a matter of their rights of motherhood being denied. The image of the mother and their suffering is what gave them emotional and moral legitimacy. These women's activism, while transforming gender roles, did not question patriarchy, for their very protest against violation of familiar roles, is in a way, though covert, a reinforcement of male structures, something that is carved out by patriarchy itself. The transformation or the overflowing of mothering role outside the preview of the familial, occurred mainly due to the environment of insecurity created by the state, where men are more victimised comparatively than women. Women as mothers emerged as the protectors of their sons and husbands fulfilling the commitments of preserving and nurturing life associated with motherhood. Though they reiterated women virtues as the base of

their struggle, their use of the benign image of the mother helped them to bargain with the powerful state. They were the ones who could reach out and make their voices heard, for their struggle based on motherhood was the most authentic and genuine of all. They held a moral ground which made them powerful enough to challenge the state and hold it accountable for its misdoings.

The state has ample duties once the notion of political motherhood comes to play. As the concept questions the constitution of the 'political' itself, the state is quick to take a defensive mode. It is a time when the state itself undertakes the role of a mother, generating new concepts of care and nurture. The state cannot accept both the powerful and powerless mothers and therefore it formulates certain remedies for both defects. In the first case, the state's active mothering was seen when it operated multiple rehabilitating and reinstatement programmes. Their care was manifested in their acts of forceful abortion and adoption as a step to save women from 'unwanted' emotions of motherhood. Their notion of care is guided by larger political issues, which includes the strengthening of male agency, interests, and structures. Their rehabilitation programme can be seen as another level of violence for these women because they were concerned to reinstate the 'violated' women and their sexuality within the defined familiar domain, and make it legitimate once more, by absorbing them back to 'normal' life. What they call 'normal' is deeply gendered which completely silenced women's voices and curbed their agency. In the later case, the state blamed women for being irresponsible mothers as they let their children go astray. The state felt the need to compensate the loopholes of these mothers, and therefore, they again set out with their mothering role. Their nurturing and protecting ability was visible in their constant doubling of security and armed men in the name of guarding the law and order. It is also a manifestation of the protection that the state provides the people, giving them a sense of security. The mothers were accused of being 'bad' mothers and therefore the state initiated programmes to rehabilitate those misguided youth. How they rehabilitate is something which remained mysterious, but their increasing tendency towards becoming a security state was clearly visible in these cases.

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