

**WOMEN AND HINDU NATIONALISM:  
A STUDY OF SELECTED DIASPORIC  
INDIAN COMMUNITIES**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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### CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that the dissertation entitled **Women And Hindu Nationalism: A Study of Selected Diasporic Indian Communities** submitted in partial fulfillment for the M.Phil degree of this university has not been previously submitted for any other university and is my original work.

**RITU SINHA**

We recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*To Ma and Papa*

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## **CHAPTER I**

## INTRODUCTION

Migration involves the unprecedented movement of peoples all across the globe in the form of immigrants, refugees, temporary workers and political exiles. It has resulted in the phenomenal growth of immigrant communities in various parts of the world. Such mass movement of people produces a continuous process of collective transformation which involves the use of old social networks and categories to produce new ones. It gives rise to individual uprootedness, disorganization and assimilation to an alien culture, adjustments, collective actions or shared experiences. Thus migration gives rise to "diaspora". As this study focusses on diasporic communities, it is important to look into the meaning of the word "diaspora"

### **Understanding Diaspora**

The diaspora came into being in the ancient and pre-modern world. It has renewed importance in the late twentieth century but the notion of diaspora was first used in classical world. Though the term was initially applied to the "dispersal of Jews", in recent times, most of the ethnic groups declare their movement as diaspora.

The word "diaspora" comes from the Greek words "dia" which means "through" and "speirin", which means "to scatter". Literally the term means "dispersion from" which describes that the "word embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, a home from where the dispersion occurs".<sup>1</sup> The term first appears in the Greek translation of the Bible and is meant to signify a "forcible dispersion" but essentially the term has a positive connotation.<sup>2</sup> It suggests the importance of journey and travels. Brah states that the diaspora is not simply the "causal travel"

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<sup>1</sup> The webster dictionary describes the literal meaning of the term and also provides information about dispersion of Jews. Avtar Brar, (1996), 'Diaspora, border and transnational identities', in *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*, Routledge, p.181.

<sup>2</sup> "Forcible dispersal" in Bible meant 'scattering to other lands', punishment to people who abandoned the righteous path and oldways. See. Robin Cohen, (1996), "Diaspora and the nation-state: from victims to challenges. *International Affairs* 72, 3, pp.507-520.

or "temporary sojourn" rather it is essentially all about "settling down "or spreading roots elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> There are various socio-economic and political reasons for the formation of diasporas or even in the similarity or the differences among them. It can be the result of conquest or colonization, or of capture or removal of the system of slavery or systems of indentured labour, or of persecution and expulsion, or of forced migration due to political strife, or of the formation of new states due to conflict and war and can also be the result of the population movement as a result of global flow. Brah points out that "the concept of diaspora centres on the configuration of power which differentiates diaspora internally as well as situate them in relation to one another. "He also points out that the "diasporic community" has a different history with no fixity of identity, as various components of a diaspora are a result of particular economic, political and cultural specificities. This is precisely because diasporas is a confluence of multiplicity of journeys.<sup>4</sup>

Marcienstras on the other hand, explains diasporas in a slightly different manner and expands it further. He writes that historically the term describes the dispersal of Jews but in recent times the term has different implications. It implies the idea of a centre and a periphery, majority and minority, the relationship between the soil and territory, to the state, a central or regional administration, to structuring of institutions or associations, to the degree of national, cultural or linguistic awareness and to economic situation.<sup>5</sup>

To further explain the term, it is important to look into the definitions provided by Vertovec and other writers. Steven Vertovec uses the term "Diaspora" to describe "practically any population that is considered deterritorialized or transnational- that is which has originated in a land other than

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<sup>3</sup> Avtar Brar, *oppcit*, p.182.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Marienstras (1989), "On the notions of diaspora", in Gerald Chaliand (ed.), *Minority Peoples in the age of Nation-States*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, p.120.



in which it currently resides, and whose social economic and political networks across the border of nation-states ...span the globe."<sup>6</sup>

He points out certain common characteristics emerging out of various theoretical works which can be attributed to the general social category of diaspora. These traits are:

1. Social relationships which maintain special ties to historical and geographical location- in these diasporas are considered to be an outcome of "forced and voluntary migration", from one location to at least two others. In this people believe in the myth of common origin and consciously maintain "collective identity" as a result of common historical experience and link to a particular location. The institutionalization of exchange and communication networks creates "new communal organizations" in new locations of settlement. The development of solidarity amongst "co-ethnic members" becomes important and ties with the homeland are maintained in explicit or implicit ways. It is mostly marked by a sense of "alienation" or "exclusion" or "difference" due to unacceptability in the host society.
2. The tensions arising out of "political orientation" - immigrants can be significant role-players in the political plight of their homelands. Hence the immigrant faces the problem of "divided loyalty to homeland in most countries".
3. The other trait is related to "economic strategies", which can be explained by Kotkin's formulation where he says that a sense of collectivism amongst specific groups provides a key to their success in the new global economy. The economic success of such groups is a direct result of a mutual pooling of resources, capital investment, services within the family, extended peer group or members of the same ethnic group.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Vertovec (1997), "Three meanings of "Diaspora", Exemplified among South Asian Religious, Diaspora, 6.3, p.277.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.278-279.

Vertovec further identifies three general meanings of diaspora emerging out of different studies. He discusses diaspora with an emphasis on South Asian religious diasporas as "social forms", as "types of consciousness" and as "mode of cultural production". He also recognizes Jewish diaspora to be negative, as it was an outcome of forced displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss-an exile from their historical homeland. He refers to the distinctions made by Martin Baumann as it concerns diaspora as a social form in which, "the emphasis remains on an identified group characterized by their relationship despite dispersal."<sup>8</sup> After considering various theoretical works, he characterizes diaspora as a social form as a "triadic relationship" among people who are globally dispersed, yet remain to be ethnic groups, territorial states and geographical contexts where they settle and the "homeland states" from where their ancestors came. He emphasizes the fact that most of the work on South Asian diaspora describes diaspora as a social form.

Vertovic further discusses diaspora as a type of consciousness, which emphasizes a sense of identity, experience and a state of mind, which generates a particular awareness, and consciousness among the transnational communities. This he derives from the notions of diaspora put forward by Clifford and Safran and Cohen. Apart from Cohen, he discusses Appadurai; Breckenbridge and various other writers who elaborate on other functions which explain Vertovec's formulation of diaspora as a type of consciousness. As Vertovec writes, Appadurai and Breckenbridge mention about a trail of collective memory which diaspora always leaves back and thus gives rise to new desires and attachments, but they also point out that these collective memories do not always consolidate identities. He further considers diaspora consciousness "to be the source of resistance through engagement with, and consequent visibility in public space... It is also specific to religious groups an occurs through a particular kind of self-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.278. Baumann indicates three points in respect to the Jewish experience "there are: (a) the process of becoming scattered, (b) the community living in foreign parts and (c) the place or geographic space in which dispersed groups live.

questioning stimulated by conditions of diaspora coupled with religious pluralism."<sup>9</sup>

Finally he comes to the analysis of diaspora as a mode of cultural production where he analyses the writings which attribute the notion of diaspora in reference to globalization. He mentions about various writers including Hall, Appadurai, Breckenbridge etc. Here the emphasis is mostly on the cultural production and reproduction. Vertovec's formulation of three different types of diasporic studies throws light on the various aspects which have been studied to explain the term in order to make the concept clear. It is essential to highlight few of the major definitions of diaspora. One of the most famous writers who have thrown light on the term is Safran. He is followed by Clifford, Cohen etc. Safran as Clifford mentions in his article, considers the Jewish diaspora as an ideal type and defines diaspora as "expatriate minority community". Safran's definitions are as follows:

1. "that are dispersed from an original 'centre' to at least two 'periphera' places;
2. that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland;
3. that believe 'that are not and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host society';
4. that sees the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right;
5. that is committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and
6. whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are 'importantly defined' by this continuing relationship with the homeland."<sup>10</sup>

Clifford endorses these as the main features of diaspora and marks it as a history of dispersal, alienation, myths and memories, desire to return and the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.279.

<sup>10</sup> James Clifford, (1997) "Diasporas" in Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex, ed. *Ethnicity reader: Nationalism, multiculturalism and Migration*, Polity Press.

continuous support of the homeland which defines the collective identity in an alien world. Clifford, though he endorses Safran's six points, yet emphasizes the fact that all diasporas cannot exist in the pure form with all six features. A diaspora can have two or three or a maximum of four of these features at a time. It doesn't remain the same throughout and is bound to change with the course of time.<sup>11</sup> It is constituted both by positive and negative senses with "experience of discrimination and exclusions" and by identification with political or cultural features of the contemporary world. Cohen also endorses Safran's six points but emphasizes like Clifford that all in one cannot be a reality, that "no one diaspora will manifest all features".<sup>12</sup> He calls it a 'slack methodological device' despite the fact that it includes certain points which he says can be part of a diasporic phenomena. He explains this by citing examples from these features. He considers the case of (feature 2) which he says seems to be relevant although it is a radical departure from the Jewish tradition as it describes trading and commercial networks. He suggests that trading groups do not 'creolize' and thus retain strong links with the homeland. He cites the other example of (feature 4) where he says that diasporas may not merely be linked to their homelands but play a role in its creation. So it covers the idea of 'imagined homelands'. Finally he adds two more important features which refer it directly to sentiments of ethnicity. For him the most "adventurous concept of diaspora" is that diaspora can be constituted by acts of imagination. The idea that transnational bonds do not need to be strengthened through migration as diaspora can to some degree, "be held together or recreated through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through a shared imagination"<sup>13</sup> excites him. Thus it serves to bridge the gap between the local and the global even if the outcome is a cultural artifact rather than a political project. He further qualifies two more points, first that a number of diasporas commonly under go change in the different phases of their migratory history. He cites the example of the Indian diaspora, of its indentured period and 20<sup>th</sup> century migration to developed countries. Secondly, as borrowed from

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.284.

<sup>12</sup> Robin Cohen, *opcit*, p.515.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.516

Marienstras, the idea that time should pass before confirming a community as a diaspora.

Thus these definitions point out the more recent meanings of the term diaspora. In a much more different manner and do not restrict just to ideas of scattering, persecution and hardship. It has become part of a much wider understanding of society, culture promotion and preservation of identities. In recent times, "diaspora becomes a signifier of multiplicity, fluidity, wildness, hybridity, the dislocations of modernity or the decentred textures of post-modernity and post-colonialism."<sup>14</sup> Apart from this, it involves notions of race, culture, religion, political and cultural nationalism, an interplay of identity politics and "calls for wider recognition and inclusion of diversity".<sup>15</sup> It focuses on the links and flows, cultural bonds, ties to a homeland, transnational organizations or networks linking people together across geographic boundaries and dispersion. What also emerges out of these definitions is the idea of an imaginary homeland, imaginary linkages, transformation of peoples through new connections and also the fact that ideas of migration are linked to nation based perspectives.

In recent times, diaspora is also linked to the transnational networks and linkages. Adam Mckeown focuses on the problems of linking diaspora with transnational links and emotional ties. He says it leads to temptations, to de-link diaspora from any historical context. The context of diaspora is taken for granted and therefore loses sight to explain the shifts and attachments over a period of time. It fails to investigate how the very conceptualization and consciousness are rooted in historical contexts. He points out that "multiplicity" and "hybridity" is highly emphasized and such conceptualization stand closer to the theories of cultural globalization "with its vocabularies of nodes, flows and shifting relationships."<sup>16</sup> The electronic media (as pointed out by Appadurai) embodies

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<sup>14</sup> Adam Mckeown (1999), "Conceptualizing Chinese Diaspora, 1842 to 1949", in the Journal of Asian Studies 58, no.2, p.308.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.311.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.310.

this change and movement, transnational organizations and access to increased physical movement has led to the transformation of social identities. Identities have taken different forms in the age of transnationalism, global media and global networks.<sup>17</sup>

It shows that the term diaspora is taken with contradictory meanings. Here in this study, an attempt has been made to study Indian diaspora in nation-based frames of reference and by using terms like deterritorialization, flows and global networks. Before reflecting on the purpose of the study, which is essential to throw some light on Indian diaspora as a whole.

### **An overview of Indian diaspora**

V.S.Naipaul considers Indian immigration as "a great migration". He writes, "the Indian diaspora is a staggering thing and it is giving Indians a new idea of their own possibilities in almost every field. This idea of achievement is revolutionary and it will fundamentally alter India."<sup>18</sup> As Ravindra K.Jain and various other scholars point out, the Indian diaspora can be classified into three broad phases in "global and historical terms".<sup>19</sup> Firstly, the 'classical wave', starting from fifth century B.C. which includes early trade adventures of Indian traders. R.K/Jain points out that during ancient and medieval period, monarchs and traders from east and west coast established cultural contacts and reached out to the lands of middle east, eastern and northern Africa and South east Asia. This movement gave rise to the "historical imagination called the 'Greater India'".<sup>20</sup> This phase of the diaspora mainly resulted due to trade and is well documented historically but can also be understood in works like Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *In an Antique Land* by Amitabh Ghosh.

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<sup>17</sup> See also. Arjun Appadurai 1997 (1996), *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*, Delhi Oxford University Press, p.53.

<sup>18</sup> V.S. Naipaul, (2000), *Diaspora*. in *come to history, INDIA TODAY, The Millennium series vol 2*.

<sup>19</sup> R.K. Jain , "Indian Diaspora and Paradigm for a post-colonial context", p.1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

The second phase, which can be termed as the colonial wave, the period of indentured immigration to British colonies. Arthur Helweg describes nineteenth century as a period of radical change to the development of the Indian diaspora.<sup>21</sup> Parekh writes that practice of migrating abroad started during this period. After the abolition of slavery in 1833, it was realized that India had surplus of labour, so the Britishers devised a system of indenture labour. This emerged simultaneously with the market-economy introduced by the Britishers who led to the disappearance of commonly held village, loss of lands by peasants to big landlords and moneylenders. This led to acute poverty, social and economic dislocation and mass migration. Mass migration within the country also opened the way to external migration. Indians, though cheated by the recruiters, opted to migrate to sugar plantations of the British colonies as indentured labourers and contract labour. Contract labour was an ordinary form of wage labour and limited to Burma, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. It continued from 1832 to 1937. Indentured labour on the other hand, migrated to Fiji, Mauritius, Caribbean, that is to British, Dutch and French colonies on contract basis. In this system of extreme harshness and exploitation, Indians stayed in extremely poor labour conditions. Not only the labourers but also the traders and white-collar workers migrated to these colonies. The Indian diaspora which emerged as a result of indentured and contract labour, was mostly uneducated, poor or lower middle class. After the termination of the contract some of them preferred to return while most of them stayed back for the second term of contract due to lack of sufficient money to return.

The third and final phase can be marked by the Indian emigration to industrially developed countries. This kind of migration can be called as twentieth century migration as R.K.Jain points out that it draws organic linkages with the colonial diaspora.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the second wave migration, this phase is dominated by educated skilled and professional migrants originating from urban

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur W. Helweg and Usha M. Helweg (1990), *An Immigrant Success Story*, Hurst and Company, London, p.19.

<sup>22</sup> R.K. Jain, *Oppcit.*, p.1.

or semi-urban areas with middle or upper middle class backgrounds. These migrants are the most successful and affluent Indians. This kind of migration is mainly to developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

The above classification of Indian emigration is a broad categorization of migration patterns. To make it more specific, some scholars attempted to work on different sets of migration patterns. R.K.Jain also mentions another set of migratory patterns apart from the above broad categorizations. He mentions "three broad patterns of migration in terms of history and political economy: (a) emigration that started in the nineteenth century (b) twentieth century migration to industrially developed countries, and (c) recent migration to West Asia".<sup>23</sup> Dr. Prakash C.Jain elucidates further on the migration pattern. He points out five patterns of Indian emigration, (1) indentured labour emigration, (2) Kangani/Maistry labour emigration, (3) "free " or "passage" emigration,(4) "brain drain", or voluntary emigration to the metropolitan countries to Europe, North America and Oceania, and (5) labour migration to West Asia.<sup>24</sup>

These classifications of Indian emigration provide a broad idea about Indian diaspora. With this it is also important to point out that there are two broad distinctions within the Indian diaspora. Indian immigrants can be divided into two broad categories called People of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non Resident Indians(NRIs). Motwani explains the distinction between the two categories. People of Indian Origin (PIOs) are those immigrants whose forefathers migrated from India in the nineteenth century and Non Resident Indians (NRIs) are those immigrants who migrated out of India in the twentieth century and still hold passports. All the NRIs are PIOs but all the PIOs are not NRIs. All Indians living in India are also PIOs. NRIs who have become citizens of other countries have technically ceased to be NRI sand are just PIOs. Several PIOs from different countries have migrated to the United States. These are PIOs from the Caribbean

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<sup>23</sup> R.K. Jain, (1993), *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature*, New Delhi, Manohar.

<sup>24</sup> Prakash C. Jain, (1992), "Five Patterns of Migration", in p.2,3



regions; Fiji and other former European colonies and Indians abroad develop an interaction amongst them. However it is important to know that there are differences between PIOs and NRIs which in a way restrict their interaction. PIOs are usually dark-skinned and know languages like Hindi. They have the feeling that NRIs are 'more Indians' as they have migrated recently. India is unknown to most of them as it was their forefathers that migrated and hence the difference in their attitudes and behaviour from the NRIs. NRIs on the other hand are economically well off people.<sup>25</sup>

Rajagopal points out that according to the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act 1973, "If a citizen of India lives abroad for the purpose of carrying on a business or career, but declares his intention to start in India for an indefinite period, then that person would be considered a Non Resident Indian. According to the Act of 1973, persons are held to be of Indian origin if they had at any time held an Indian passport, or if either of their parents or grandparents was Indian or was a permanent resident undivided India at any time. The wife of a person Indian origin would be considered to be of Indian origin too..... A person of Indian origin holding a passport of another country would thus be entitled to all the rights available to Non Resident Indians."<sup>26</sup>

NRIs enjoy special foreign exchange offers as they are invited to deposit their money in special accounts in Indian banks. They are a potential source of foreign exchange for the country. One reason for this being is the need to remit funds to sustain their families in India. It is quite common for first generation migrants to send money home to support their parents and close relatives besides building houses and discharging social and family obligations. Thus an NRI is a highly sought after person both at an individual as well as a collective level. They

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<sup>25</sup> Motwani, Jagat K. et. al. (ed.), *A Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, New York: Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, p.29.

<sup>26</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, (1997), "Transnational networks and Hindu Nationalism" in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholar*, Vol.29, No.3, p.49.

are considered to be a superior variety of Indians as they have more wealth and are the most successful people of India.

The migration patterns and the basic difference between PIOs and NRIs along with the meanings of diaspora leads us to explore the basic aim of the study:

### **Purpose of the study**

This work is an endeavour to look into the relationship between nationalism and women in light of the contemporary feminists debates on nationalism and sexuality. Then finally the attempt is to draw linkages between nationalism, sexuality and the diaspora. The purpose is to highlight how nationalism makes use of female bodies for its own political agenda. Hence the attempt is to show that nationalism is a gendered concept which is reflected even in the context of the diaspora.

In this work an attempt has been made to probe into the relationship between Hindu nationalism and women in the context of the Indian diaspora. It shows how women's sexuality and her body become sites of the cultural reproduction of the nation in diaspora. It also tries to critically analyze the role of Hindu nationalism which utilizes women as the repository of national culture and honour in the process of the construction of India overseas.

The term 'Hindu nationalism' has been used throughout the study and it needs some elaboration. The Indian nation emerged with the purpose to rally all the Indians behind and to combat British colonialism. This nation which the nationalists constructed to present the British as well as the rest of the world was a monolithic community which was unified despite diversities.

Hinduism played a vital role in the development of Indian nationalism. Nationalism requires a central administration and a sense of shared identity as a body that supersedes personal and local identity. This monolithic and homogenous identity portrays the nation as a Hindu following Hinduism.

Leaders of the movement for India's independence from British rule used Hindu practices and ideals to get support from the people at large. They stressed the attacks on the Hindu tradition and culture by the British. The Hindu culture became the main component of Indian nationalism thus giving rise to cultural nationalism in India. Leaders like B.G.Tilak used Hindutva as a source of popular appeal in his efforts to unite India into a nationalist movement, particularly in his home state, Maharashtra.

In a similar vein, the Bengali literary movement during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century period projected India as a sacred land, personified as goddess. Mother India emerged as a unifying figure who had to be defended and freed from the shackles of colonialism.

Whereas in the post-Independence period, the rise of the Hindutva forces after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, clearly marks the growth of Hindu nationalism. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) forms the Hindutva brigade with many other minor cultural fronts, forms the Hindutva brigade which claims India to be a Hindu nation and Hinduism to be the religion of the nation. This rhetoric of Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan gives rise to the militant Hindu nationalism. This kind of Hindu nationalism feeds upon the construction of pre-Independence anti-colonial Hindu nationalism and extends it further on the lines of fascism.

#### **A Brief Outline of the work**

The next chapter outlines the debate which highlights the relationship between nationalism, sexuality and diaspora. The chapter focusses on the theoretical issues giving rise to diasporic nationalism. It focusses on the varied feminist interpretations of the notions of sexuality and shows the reciprocity between female sexuality and constructions of nationalism. It contextualises the relationship between nation and woman within the field of diaspora. Where the imaginary homeland emerges as a feminine construct-the motherland, which limits female sexuality to a patriarchal framework to represent a nation.

Chapter 3 focusses on the second wave of Indian migration which started under the system of the transportation of labour and issues pertaining to female sexuality and the anti-Indenture movement. The chapter highlights the case of Fiji and the Carribbean and delves into the debates of anti-Indenture struggle back in India. It focusses on how the entire debate against Indenture embodied the issue of exploitation, of Indian women's sexuality in the plantation of British colonies and its endeavour to protect the chastity and virtue of Indian female immigrants in the name of preserving the honour of the nation.

The next chapter deals with the problems related to 20<sup>th</sup> century migration. It uncovers the dilemma of non-resident Indians in the USA, which leads them closer to the fascist growth of Hindu nationalism. The chapter unearths the global character of the VHP and contextualises its agenda of universalised Hinduism while drawing upon its linkages with the NRIs. In order to show the relation between Hindu nationalism and women, the chapter involves the analysis of two popular Hindi films. In the dearth of written material on the pertaining issue, it attempts to highlight the role of the mass media, especially cinema to look into the contemporary developments of the society.

In the concluding chapter, I make an outline of the various trends and cultural forms through which the Indian diaspora is finding an expression, thus furthering the agenda of cultural nationalism, albeit in the guise of multiculturalism. Prominent among these forms are the *Chatni Soca* debates, temple architecture, the institutionalisation of festivals and overwhelming mass participation, the spate of matrimonials specially catering to the NRI class. Through these debates we not only find an enabling mobility and freedom granted to women thanks to the new conditions of a globalised location, but at the same time, the various institutions seem to be reiterating the old patriarchal structures in newer ways.

## **CHAPTER II**

## NATIONALISM, SEXUALITY AND DIASPORA

Contemporary feminist theory with the interaction with dominant socio-political theories have considerably broadened their horizon of analysis from just male-centred patriarchal totalizing theories or what has variously been named as "malestream", "phallogentric" or simply masculinist theories to the studies of symbolism, representation, culture, identity and sexuality.<sup>1</sup> This multifaceted approach along with the turn towards culture as Michele Barrett remarks, is a source of new impetus to feminist social theory and enables it to throw light on the complexities of ethnicity, race, gender and nation. Michele Barrett discusses this paradigm shift in feminist theory in her essay 'Words and Things', and writes, "Within this general shift we can see a marked interest in analyzing processes of symbolization and representation – the field of 'culture' – and attempts to develop a better understanding of subjectivity, the psyche and the self. The type of feminist sociology that has a wider audience, for example, has shifted away from a determinist model of 'social structure' (be it capitalism, or patriarchy, or a gender – segmented labour market or whatever) and deals with questions of culture, sexuality or political agency - obvious counterbalances to an emphasis on social structure".<sup>2</sup> This paradigm of analysis provides the scope to explore the dynamics of female sexuality, national identity and ethnicity – the embodied or gendered notions of nation and nationalism, by involving gender as an indispensable concept in the analysis of socio-politico-cultural movements.

As the concept of nation is being re-examined in the light of major political upheavals, discussions of nation have necessarily assumed a macro-political status with analytic framework constantly needing to be revised in order to accommodate the different manifestations of nation and nationalism. Many feminist writings on nationalism have employed gender and female sexuality as an analytical tool and have espoused that the nation is essentially feminine in

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<sup>1</sup> See Moira Gatens, (1992) "Power, Bodies and Difference" in Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (eds.) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Polity Press, pp.120.

<sup>2</sup> Michele Barrett (1992), "Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis", in Michele Barrett and Ann Phillips (eds.), p.204.

construction.<sup>3</sup> The nation is narrated on the body of women who are an emotionally laden symbol of the nation, self, the inner, spiritual world and home. The country comes to be appropriated, represented and contained within words which have strong maternal connotation. In the rubrics of nationalism, women are mostly personified as symbolic form of nation and men are invariably the main beneficiaries and protectors. Women's sexuality and reproductive role defines territoriality and upholds the validity of national culture. Thus one can say all nationalisms are gendered and are invented.<sup>4</sup> This can be understood in the light of an argument that sexuality is culturally and relationally created. The argument will reflect that how the term sexuality is a deeply gendered construct and acquires different shapes in male-controlled social formations.

### **Notions and constructions of Sexuality and Identity**

The empirical relation between gender and sexuality, makes sexuality a crucible political issue for feminists and opens new vistas of political and social inquiry. In most common usage sexuality is considered to be a biological and psychological phenomenon. Contrary to the common understanding it is a much broader term in meaning, encompassing erotic desires, practices and identities. It sometimes reflects our sense of ourselves as men and women. Sexuality has a much larger scope and is not simply limited to the 'sex -act', it rather involves the ways in which we are not defined as sexual by others, as well as the ways in which we define ourselves. Jeffrey argues that "sexuality is shaped at the juncture of two major concerns; with our subjectivity (who and what we are); and with society (with health, prosperity, growth and well being of the population as a

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<sup>3</sup> Ann McClintock (1993), "Gender, Nationalism and the Family", *Feminist Review* 44, Summer, p.61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

whole).<sup>5</sup> Thus as a post-Freudian construction, sexuality is at the core of the individual, rooted in childhood oral and oedipal fantasies”.<sup>6</sup>

Feminist writings suggest that historically enormous attempts have been made to regulate the female sexualities as compared to men and to tie them to individual men through monogamous heterosexual relationship, in order to sustain and fulfil patriarchal needs and structures. The disciplining of the female bodies and their sexual behaviour helps in maintaining the moral uniformity, national prosperity and security which in turn gives rise to intricate methods of administration and management, to a flowering of moral anxieties, legal and welfarist interventions designed to understand and regulate the sexual behaviour and to set moral codes.<sup>7</sup> The policing of female sexuality acquires different forms in different societies yet transcends caste, class, geographical, national and cultural boundaries.

Feminist historians have employed various approaches to the analysis of sexuality and gender. The dichotomy between gender and sex have existed in social theories suggesting sex as ‘biological’ or ‘natural’ marker of sexual difference whereas ‘gender’ signifies the construction of masculinity and femininity or the social, political and cultural meanings which the sexed body assumes. This suggest that gender determines the subjective identities of men and women.

Ann Oakley’s groundbreaking work ‘*Sex Gender and Society*’ was one of the earliest attempts to assert that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and draws on cross-cultural evidence to argue that difference between male and female sexuality is a product of culture rather than nature.<sup>8</sup> Feminists

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffry Weeks, 1994, "The Body and Sexuality" in the polity reader in gender studies, Polity Press, p.236.

<sup>6</sup> Celia Kitzinger (1995), "Problematizing Pleasure: Radical Feminist Deconstructions of Sexuality and Power" in H. Lorraine Radtke et. al. (ed.), *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, Sage Publications, Delhi, p.194.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffry Weeks, Op.cit., p.237.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Oakley (1972), *Sex, Gender and Society*, London: Maurice Temple Smith, pp.3-4.



strongly believe that male-domination is sexual and men sexualize hierarchy. Catherine A. Mackinnon emphasizes that feminist theory of sexuality locates sexuality within a theory of gender inequality. While pursuing the feminist perspective on sexuality, she defines it as a sphere of interaction or feeling which is a pervasive dimension of social life, one which is not discrete and in which social relations and divisions like class and race may be played out. It is a sphere along which gender gets socially constructed. It reveals the dynamics of dominance and inequality of sexes. It is sexuality which determines gender difference where male is dominant. Thus sexuality is permeable and is whatever a given culture or sub-culture defines it.<sup>9</sup> In defining the relevance of theory of sexuality Catherine A. Mackinnon, goes on to say, “feminist treats sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women and constitutive of the meaning of gender. Such an approach centres feminism on the perspective of the subordination of women to men as it identifies sex, that is, the sexuality of dominance and submission as crucial as a fundamental, as on some level definitive in that process.”<sup>10</sup>

Sexuality itself represents the dynamics of inequality. Rosemary Pringle explains, while women are constantly defined in relation to men, as specifically feminine and strictly sexual categories.<sup>11</sup> Across cultures whatever defines women as inferior, the same defines women’s sexuality. Thus the general theory of sexuality followed by feminists, considers sexuality to be in universally variant stages and psychic representation and does not believe sexuality to be an inborn force, inherent in the individual or cultural in a Freudian sense, where sexuality exists in a cultural context. It rather appears to them as culturally specific and largely invariant because male supremacy is more or less universal though in specific forms. Although class is one hierarchy, it sexualizes yet it does not vary

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine A. Mackinnon, 1994, "Sexuality" in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Ann C. Herrmann and Aigail J. Steward (ed.), Westview Press, p.258.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.259.

<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Pringle et. al. (ed.), 1992, *Introduction in Defining Women, Social Institution and Gender Division*, Polity Press in association with the Open University, pp.2-3.

culturally determined images of feminine sexuality.<sup>15</sup> He emphasizes that sexuality is produced in historical contexts and suggests that sexuality is not regulated through proscription and prohibition but produced through prescription and incitement. He believes that power produces all sexual objects, all sexuality in its “intentional and non-subjective” interests.<sup>16</sup> Foucault gives a very complicated definition of power and argues it to be permanent, repetitious and self-reproducing. While discussing about power, Foucault mostly stresses the systematic nature of power and its presence in multiple social relations. It is Omni- presents and ‘pervades the entire social body’. Thus for him social life is a network of power relations which should be analyzed at the individual level and not at large scale social structures. As power is everywhere everything appears to be homogenous and thus draws parallels between school, prison or the development of sexuality in the family and institution of “Pervision”. Power must not be seen as either a single individual dominating others or as one group or class dominating others.<sup>17</sup>

In the history of sexuality, Foucault argues that sexual regulation by eighteenth century were not primarily meant for just preserving the paternal sovereignty but it became important for the nation as a whole. Medical and statistical norms aimed at defining ideal sexual objects in order to have healthy workers to fulfill the needs for capitalist economy. “Demography, medicine and pedagogy” formed ‘technologies of sex’ to discipline, shape and regulate bodies in the interest of power”.<sup>18</sup> Foucault in his seminal work on sexuality criticized the conventional assumption that history of sexuality was history of repression as it was nineteenth century middle class’s effort to nurture and create a specific symbolic ‘sexual body’ in their own image. For Foucault it was a use of power as

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<sup>15</sup> Lois McNay, (1992), Foucault and Feminism in: Power, Gender and the Self, Polity Press, p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn J. Dean, "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender and the history of Sexuality" in History and theory, Vol.33, p.238.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy C.M., Harstock, Op.cit., pp.44-45.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn J. Dean, Op.cit., p.279.

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he insisted that our sexuality is never outside of power and can never be liberated from it.<sup>19</sup>

Although for many feminists, Foucault's work on power and sexuality proved to be resourceful, yet certain criticisms were set forth against his work. Feminist critics claim that Foucault's work presumes a construction of men's but not women's subjectivity, thus it shows his neglect of the gendering of sexual subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> Nancy Hartsock expresses Foucault's inability to locate domination in gender relations determining sexuality.<sup>21</sup> His analysis of power allows an understanding of social formation as masculinist because he undermines the understanding of patriarchal system as monolithic and does not deny the possibility of understanding gender relations as serving specific, interlocking interests.

Thus we see, patterns of female sexuality are inescapably a product of the historically rooted power of men to define what is necessary and desirable. Sexuality becomes the site of power, desire, ideology, fantasy and feminine gendered identity.

Feminists believe that sexualities should not be solely understood as a category to define an individual or his drives or needs but we should understand it as culturally and historically defined and constructed. Both Weeks and Butler have written that sexuality must be understood as a series of cultural and social practices and meanings that both structure and are structured by social relations. Psychoanalysis is an established body of theory which accounts for both socio-cultural structures and individual agency. A large section of feminist scholars thus engaged themselves with psychoanalysis to facilitate their argument. Jacqueline Rose points out that the history of Psychoanalysis has in many ways reflected its complete engagement with the question of female sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Juliet

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.279.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.277.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock, Op.cit., p.44.

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Rose, (1977), Sexuality in the field of vision, Verso, New York, p.2.

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Mitchel, most prominent proponent of the utility of psychoanalytic theory claims in her book *'Psychoanalysis and Feminism'* that both Marxism and Psychoanalysis can be understood as concerned respectively with the economic infrastructure and ideological superstructure. This is primarily because Marxism offers an account of class and capital whereas psychoanalysis gives a reckoning of sex and patriarchy. Whereas Marxist theory offers an explanation on the basis of historical and economic situation Psychoanalysis in conjunction with the notions of ideology already gained by dialectical materialism is the way into understanding ideology and sexuality. Thus many feminists felt the appropriateness of Psychoanalysis for feminism and the move was to add sexuality to understand the link between psychoanalysis and understanding of ideology.<sup>23</sup> The two prominent school of psychoanalysis, one the Anglo-American drawing on theories of object-relation and associated with Nancy Chodrow and the other, the French school associated with the key figures like Lacan contributed exclusively on the concept of sexuality and identity as culturally constructed term.

Nancy Chodrow and her school elaborated on the conceptions of gender differentiation of sex by explaining core gender identities. She claims that the social relations of women's mothering and gender personalities produce a crucial foundation for male domination. The core gender identities develop in relation with their mothers. Both men and women identify initially with their mother but while a boy acquires his self identity by distancing himself from mother, a girl develops it through merging it completely with that of her mother and as a result her sense of identity and individuality remains weak. Thus the child is not born with perceptions of gender differences, it emerges gradually or developmentally. The gender difference is experienced relationally. It is situational as a part of a system of asymmetrical social relationships embedded in inequalities of power in our social and cultural lives in which we grow as men and women. Our own

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<sup>23</sup> Juliet Mitchell, 1974, Introduction in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, London, p.xvi, xxii.

sense of differentiation or separateness or interpretation of sexual difference are created through psychological, social and cultural processes.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand Freud wrote voluminously on female sexuality. He profoundly developed a line of thought concerned with the social repression of sexuality in European culture which led him to develop a Psychological critique of marriage and the double standards of institutions that hinge upon the suppression of women's sexuality.<sup>25</sup> Freud's view of female sexuality as shaped by penis envy is strongly rejected by feminists. Later the less literal and more symbolic reading of Freud by recognizing his difficulties by Jacques Lacan, a French Psychoanalyst made Freud's psychoanalysis acceptable to feminists.

Lacan reopened the debate on feminine sexuality by drawing a link between sexuality and the unconscious as for him the unconscious undermines the subject. In his account the sexual subject is constituted through language whereas identity is something enjoined on the subject and operates as a law. While the concept of 'desire' and 'fantasy' is crucial to Lacan's formulation of sexuality, it fails to enclose Freud's concept that the unconscious never ceases to challenge our apparent identity as subject. According to Lacan, psychoanalysis should not merely produce 'male' and 'female' as complementary entities, sure of each other and their own identities, but should expose the fantasy on which this notion emerges. Man place women at the basis of his fantasy and constructs fantasy through her. Lacan moved away from the Levi-straussian idea of women as a mere object of exchange but placed the construction of women as a category within language.

Lacan provides the psychoanalytic account of the development of Human subjectivity of reformulating it in the framework of structuralist conception of language. Human being attains 'self consciousness' when he is conscious of the

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy Julia Chodrow, *Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction*.

<sup>25</sup> R.W. Connell, 1987, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Polity Press, p.197.

'other' and the role of father displaces the unity of mother and child. At this juncture the entry the symbolic realm, language and discourse dominated by phallus takes place where women is the ultimate object of fantasy. She is not the guarantor of fantasy. It is this symbolic realm of language dominated by phallus which structures sexuality around male terms.<sup>26</sup> For Lacan, phallus is the key signifier of the symbolic order and the mark of sexual difference. "Lacan's writing gives an account of how the status of the phallus in human sexuality enjoins on the woman a definition in which she is simultaneously symptom and myth."<sup>27</sup> Thus the binary opposition between male and female exists and is a permanent aspect of human relation, as Heneritta Moore notes, bodies are divided into two mutually exclusive categories.<sup>28</sup>

Lacan like Freud, places immense importance on phallus. As women lack phallus – the positive symbol of gender-around which language is organized, they occupy a negative position in language. Women comes to be defined exactly what a man is not and within the phallic definition women is excluded by the nature of words. Lacan argues that desire is masculine and women can enter symbolic life only if they internalizes male desire.<sup>29</sup>

On this account, Lacan was criticized by various feminists. Luce Irigaray, exposes the masculinity of language from behind its appearance as universal and neutral phenomena and argues that women's lack as a consequence not of "inevitable family arrangements but of millennia of cultural subordination of women's bodies and their sexuality to the needs and fantasies of men. Phallogocentric concepts and their historical consequences can be transformed only when women find ways to assert their specificity as women, their difference from

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<sup>26</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Op.cit.*, p.52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>28</sup> Henerietta Moore (1994), 'Divided we Stand', *Sex: Gender and Sexual Difference*, Feminist Review, p.88.

<sup>29</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Op.cit.*, p.53.

men and men's system of representation".<sup>30</sup> Haneritta Moore expresses from the point of view of cross cultural analysis that Lacan's 'Law of father' is ethnocentric, abstract and is a decontextualized theory of signification and as it incorporates no reference of any form of difference apart from sex; it is exclusionary in nature. She stresses to adopt Lacan's notions of subjectivity to 'Osical discourses and discursive practices'.<sup>31</sup>

This leads to the reason why many feminists remained skeptical of the entire psychoanalytic enterprise. Since it offers a universalistic theory of subjectivity, it is very difficult to reconcile with historical understandings of sexuality as changing overtime. Even in the Lacanian version, which suggests that sexed, desiring subjects are constituted through their entry into language and culture. It is difficult to challenge its phallogentricity without assuming some essential pre-cultural female sexuality.<sup>32</sup>

A feminist theory of sexuality seeks to understand the construct 'sexuality' which defines experience, by capturing it in the world, by understanding its social meanings as it is constructed in life on a daily basis. Thus it must be studied not just in the texts of history as Foucault does or in the social psyche and language as Lacan and Derrida do rather it should be studied in its experienced empirical existence.<sup>33</sup> Sexuality as we understand by the term is basically a gendered masculine sexuality which largely depends on defiling or debasing a sexual object and so clearly reflects gendered power relation. The cultural production of sexuality should be understood to sexpress the experience of the ruling gender because the ways our culture both constructs and theorizes sexuality, expresses the dominance of men over women in the form of ideas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jones, Ann Rosalind, 'Inscribing Femenity: French Theories of Feminine' in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (ed.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, Methuen, London and New York, 1984.

<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *op.cit.*, p.73.

<sup>32</sup> Joan W. Scott, 1988, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" in *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, p.38.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Mckinnon, *Op.cit.*, p.260.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartstock, *op.cit.*, p.44.

This leads us to two basic arguments, first that sexuality emerges out of power relations, it is the male understanding or conception of the term which gives rise to female sexuality, that is, it emerges completely in relation to men which can vary from culture to culture. Secondly, sexuality is an ideological, political, universally variant and gendered concept and is a site where power relations are defined. It defines the very notions of masculine and feminine identity and is repressed for various reasons, be it for the survival of civilization or to maintain fascist control or to maintain racial boundaries, etc. It needs society to take socially specific forms.

It is evident that sexuality and identity share a definite relationship and are inherently interrelated terms. Since Simone de Beauvoir, various feminists whether cultural feminists like Nancy Chodrow, Carol Gilligan or post modernist and post-structuralist theorists like Luce Frigaray. Julia Kristeva are united by the common assumption, that identity is necessarily a product of repression, of difference, the domination of the other and the negation of non-identity. It clearly reflects that patriarchal social system, men decide or set the roles for women. They are the legitimate protectors of the given culture and the ones to derive benefits. Though women signify and transmit culture yet they are subordinated and deprived of equal rights.

The construction of femininity or female identity is the product modelled by the male dominated society and its representations of women. The different representations of women's sexuality and their bodies expose that 'women' is not a homogeneous category and differences among women "establishes the fact of separate identities, but also raises the issue of the relational nature of difference when we ask how nineteenth century white women dealt with black women, or English women with Indian women, we imply that they were not only interconnected socially but definitionally. Part of being white, in other words, meant not being black; Englishness was established in contrast to Indianness. Identity did not inhere in one's body or nationality but was produced by contrast



with others. And these contrasts, whether of race or class or gender, have had a history".<sup>35</sup>

De Lauretis argues that differences within women can explain differences between women. She stresses, the difference between race, class, sexuality etc. are constitutive of gender identity. She says:

"The female subject is a site of differences; differences that are not only sexual or only racial, economic, or (sub) cultural, but all of these together and often enough at odds with one another .. once it is understood... that these differences not only constitute each women's consciousness and subjective limits but all together define the female subject of feminism in its very specificity.. only these differences.. cannot be again collapsed into a fixed identity, a sameness of all women as woman, or a representation of feminism as a coherent and available image".<sup>36</sup>

It can be argued from the above discussion that the female identity and sexuality is contingent on the male notions of femininity and female sexuality and make them acquire subordinate positions in society. On the one hand they are glorified as the mothers and the repositories of culture whereas men are the agents and the main beneficiaries, on the other hand their sexualities are controlled and defined by the male-centric society where they are denigrated if they assert their sexualities, breaking the codes established by men. Thus feminine identities are constructed under patriarchal conditions.

It is essential to note that issues of sexuality appear to be indispensable in the construction of national or racial identity. It involves links between hostility, violence and sexuality. The connections between racial hostility and sexuality makes a clear-cut case that "the gratification in sexual conquest derives from the experience of defilement – of reducing the elevated woman to the 'dirty' sexual level, of polluting that which is seen as pure, sexualizing that which is seen as unsexual, animalizing that which is seen as "spiritual".<sup>37</sup> The women – a symbol

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<sup>35</sup> Scot, Joan Wallach (ed.), *Feminism and History*, Introduction, p.8.

<sup>36</sup> Henerietta Moore, *Oppicit.*, p.94.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock, *Op.cit.*, p.29.

of purity and piety of a particular culture, a signifier of racial boundaries is defiled by sexual violence to express the racial hostility. As the honour is the sexual purity of woman and thus she has to be protected and caged through moral codes to control her sexuality. It is in this context that women's sexuality becomes signifier of nation and becomes indispensable for nationalism.

### **Nationalism and Sexuality**

The study of identity formation, especially ethnic identity in particular have always attracted the attention of social scientists. Identity in its broadest sense includes race, gender and ethnicity as well as belief-systems, religion, ideology etc. both at the group and individual level. Identity plays a major role in the modern nationalism Patricia Uberoi points out "Undoubtedly the nation is the most significant focus of identity in the modern times".<sup>38</sup> The contemporary notions of identity as examined by Andrew and Parker, are strongly shaped by national affiliation and sexual attachments thus making it necessary to draw linkages between the two. Their emphasis that sexuality and nation are interrelated and cannot be treated as autonomous or discrete terms explains an important aspect of the study of nationalism.<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey J. Santa Ana and Saining C. Wong also recognize the rise of satisfactory theoretical vocabulary for the mutual simultaneity and interconnectedness of race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality as in academic investigation each of these have a history of serving as a discrete analytic category. They emphasize on the interrelatedness of these terms and show how Asia-American cultural critics have long struggled to resist their separation.<sup>40</sup>

Identities can be reformulated, reshaped by the external forces bent on their own agendas of building new solidarities, new group boundaries. It is important to see how women are used in ideologies and in defining group

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<sup>38</sup> Patricia Uberoi, (1990), "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calendar Art", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 28, 1990, p.42.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew and Parker et. al. (ed.), *Nationalism and sexuality*, Routledge, p.3.

<sup>40</sup> Sau-Ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana, 1999, *Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.25, no.1.

identities. Sexuality and reproduction (as related to morality and purity are of central importance to women's identity and is also central to state and movement policies to practice core of identity, politics is determined by characteristic such as race, rationality, ethnicity and gender. Control and conformity over female sexuality is closely linked to the question of identity. Hannah Papanek while discussing about identities, talks about exercising control over women for defining individual and group identities and explains that certain ideals of womanhood are cultivated as indispensable for an ideal society. These ideals develop by restricting women's personal behaviour dress, sexual activity, choice of partner and reproductive options. These stringent controls on women defines the collective identity and maintains difference from the other.<sup>41</sup> They signify, embody and transmit national culture and tradition and also demonstrate modernization through change in their behaviour. The concept of "purity" whether of race, nation, group or personal level gets defined through female sexuality and thus it is required to control it through coercion.

Many writers have thrown light on the complex relation between women and nation and the ways in which 're-describing women' formed the part of re-defining national and other community identities. Most of them share the view that no nationalism in the world has provided equal access of the nation – state's resources to both its men and women and also that women have only been symbolically subsumed into the national body politic.<sup>42</sup>

Hitler's politics of racial purity to maintain the German identity or his fascist ideology was purely carried out by women and had special implication that affected their sexual and public behavior. In most of the fascist regimes where men are portrayed as able soldiers and killers, women are invariably expected to be able-bodied or healthy to ensure the production of most efficient

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<sup>41</sup> Hannah Papanek (1997), "The Ideal Women and the Ideal Society: Control and Autonomy in the construction of Identity" in Valentine M. Moghadam (eds.), *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions, and Feminism in Internal Perspective*, Westview Press, p.58.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

soldiers – the protectors of the nation.<sup>43</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti in her study of Turkey, shows that Turkey’s debates on cultural identity and national integrity circled around the women’s question.<sup>44</sup> Gerldine Heng and Janadas Devah describes the case of Singapore where the father of the nation Lee Kuan Yew, outlines the “reproduction crisis” and accused women of the nation as responsible for the decline of the quality of Singapore’s population. The reason construed was extremely patriarchal and openly reflects how women’s sexuality is completely controlled by the state for its nationalist project. The “reproduction crisis” emerged as most of the highly-educated women with university degrees in Singapore were not producing babies in sufficient numbers for the self-replacement in the population. The problem according to Lee was because graduate mothers produced genetically superior offspring as eighty percent of the child’s intelligence is predetermined by nature. While female sexuality was held to account, men did not figure at all in the Prime Minister’s chargesheet. In the Indian context, Indian feminist scholars provides varied accounts which reflect on the relation between nationalism and feminism.

Partha Chatterjee observes how the rhetoric of nationalism makes use of inner/outer dichotomy to cope with the attacks from the west and thus uses women for its own ideological perspective as it makes, “woman” the pure and ahistorical signifier of interiority. He suggests that Indian nationalism selectively borrowed some ideals of material progress from the west but at the same time, keeping its ‘inner’ domain of native ideals intact, in order to cope and at the same time resist the ‘west’ respectively.<sup>45</sup> The ‘outer’ domain reflected change, progress etc. represented by masculine efforts whereas ‘inner’ domain constituted of home, spirituality, culture, etc, represented by femininity or the figure of woman. As Chatterjee puts it:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>45</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1989, On the resolution of women's question, in Sangari, Kumkum and Valid, Sudesh (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, Kali for Women.

“Now apply the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living and you get a separation of the social space into ‘ghar and bahir’, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material, the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of materials interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and woman is its representation”.<sup>46</sup>

This distinction of outer/inner provided a false sense of identity to Hindu nationalists and creates a ground where woman is both victimized and treated as mother Goddess. The split is an epitome of conformity and controlling of female sexualities and identifies social roles by gender, inventing nation, culture and tradition. Kumari Jayawardena also notes the role of nineteenth century social reform movement in India to improve the status of Indian woman. The social reformists or Hindu nationalists worked towards the reformed status of Indian woman in their colonized country primarily because "the status of women in society was the popular barometer of 'civilization' ".<sup>47</sup>

Zoya Hasan while discussing Muslim women particularly focusing on the Shah Bano case argues that though the subordination of gender loyalties takes place when religious identities are heightened yet women are not of less focus and importance. They continue to be important ‘signifiers of the group as the community identities are often defined through the conduct of women as they remain central to communal political imagination and of redefinitions of national identities.<sup>48</sup> Hasan’s argument of feminine constructs, race and nation is followed by Amrita Chhachhi who draws heavily from Anderson when she describes how nationalism in order to appear as both natural and given, appropriates the feminised language of 'kinship' and ‘home’. The nation and community merges with and gets represented by the images of the selfless mother and devout wife which evokes the desired response of defence and protection by the male national

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>47</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, 1989, *Feminism and Nationalism*.

<sup>48</sup> Hassan Zoya, 1994, *Foging Identities Gender Communities and the State*, Kali for Women, p.61.

subject. The linking of nation with 'mother', 'family', 'home', 'nature' provides authenticity to nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

Chachi's contribution to this framework is her concern of women's strategic locations with respect to these symbolic construct. She also emphasizes that woman marks the contour of national border and identity which in turn regulates their conduct and sexuality but they need to assert their role in the process of defining the nation or community identity and should counter the myth of monolithic community.<sup>50</sup>

Mrinalini Sinha endorses Chachi's commitment to show the role of women's bodies in defining national identity and culture. She examines that similar roles were invested in bodies of women during the colonial period too. She points out how both reformists and nationalists focussed on the redefinition of women's bodies to signify the national cultural identity.<sup>51</sup> Lata Mani's study of the discourse to sati (widow burning) in colonial India elaborates the project of Sinha where she focuses how norms of nationhood and womanhood emerged out of the struggle between the colonialists and nationalists resulting in new traditional scriptural and legal knowledge about sati which the became then basis for laws and normalizing the practices affecting the lives of women.<sup>52</sup>

It is the female body's capacity for reproduction that makes women a crucial symbol of a particular community or nation's integrity and purity. It can be explained by Urvashi Butalia's comment on the violence during partition of 1947 where she shows that bodies of women become arenas of violent struggle. Women were humiliated, tortured, brutally raped and murdered as part of the process by which the sense of being a nation was created and reinforced. The

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<sup>49</sup> Amrita Chhachhi, 1991, *Forced Identities: The State Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India*, pp.163-64.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>51</sup> Sinha Mrinalini, 1997, *Colonial Masculinity: The manly English man and Effeminate Bengali in late 19<sup>th</sup> century*, *Kali for Women*, p.217-231.

<sup>52</sup> Mani Lata, 1989 *Regenerating the date on Sati*, in Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, *Kali for Women*, p.58.

purity and the honour of both Muslims and Hindu community was marked by women's bodies. Women were killed in order to save them from being polluted or to save the community's honour and purity and at the same time raped to defile the purity of the other community. Mass suicides committed by women to protect their own status as pure were valorised as the acceptable face of women's agency. Butalia writes, "it is women who become the symbols of the honour of the family and community and their act of offering themselves up for death becomes an honourable one, not only because they have saved themselves from conversion to the 'other' religion, but also because by doing so, they have saved the community from dishonour and dilution of its purity, which could have happened only through them".<sup>53</sup>

In the same light Patricia Uberoi argues that as the maintenance of cast system is based on the control over the purity and sexuality of its women, in a similar fashion "women may signify the religious community, the race and the nation while these new identities themselves come into being through reconstructions of femininity".<sup>54</sup>

The formulations of identities through female sexuality makes women's bodies useful in highly constrained ways and draws an attention to women's subordination with an acknowledgement of the ways in which they are also enabled, foregrounded and made central to the process of identity constitution. The appropriations of birth and the mother-figure for the nationalist sentiment and integrity also leads to the controlling of female sexualities. Others trace the passive role of mothers which has an effect on the agency. Jasodhara Baagchi notices the importance of the mother figure for national identity and national mobilization and points that incorporation of Hindu mother-goddess as central to the image of Indianness helps to disintegrate Muslims from that 'imagined community', thus giving rise to the Hindu nation. Loomba on the other hand

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<sup>53</sup> Urvashi Butalia, 1993, "Community, State and Gender On Women's Agency during partition economic and political weekly April 24, 1993, pp.ws-14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Uberoi, Patricia 1990, "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calender Art", in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XXV, No.17, pp.ws-41-47.

forwards the view that "the image of nation as mother both marshals and undercuts female power. As mothers of the nation women are granted limited agency".<sup>55</sup> Sarkar unearths the different images of motherland. She notes a never ending tension between the two layers of the image of the country as mother whereas in the first case she is portrayed as a violent militant mother goddess to provide defiant response to the colonizers and on the other a figure of innocent, nurturing mother who passes power back to her sons. Thus a figure of women being both militant defiant and at the same time submissive to male-patriarchal structure.<sup>56</sup> It is important to reflect on the fact that the emergence of mother-figure in India, maintains the simultaneity with the growth of Hindu nationalism which took its shape in the fight against colonialism. Susie Tharu while discussing the 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction, depicted Indian women urgently in need of reformation or correction whereas in early twentieth century fiction they reappeared as mothers, the "sustainers of social order and indispensable resource for nationalist struggle". Thus the focus was on women with elaborated and broader logic of Hindu nationalism.

The recent, post-independence rise of Hindu nationalism also uses symbolic constructions of motherhood. Bharatmata, a goddess symbolizes the territoriality of the Hindu nation and the ideal model of femininity to hold the hegemonic Hindu nationalist agenda.<sup>57</sup> Hindu women thus appears as an important political source for Hindu nationalism since the nineteenth century.

What surfaces out of these writings is that female sexuality and femininity is constructed, "that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism) and therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that

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<sup>55</sup> Eoomba, Ania 1997, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London and New York, Routledge, p.216.

<sup>56</sup> Sarkar, Tanika 1992, "The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal", in *Studies in History*, 8,2, pp.213-35.

<sup>57</sup> Basu, Amrita 1993, "Feminism Inverted: The Real Women and Gendered Imagery of Hindu Nationalism", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.25, (Special Issue on Women and Religious Nationalism in India), pp.25-36.



representation both signifies and serves Kumkum Sangari further elaborates it when she argues, “female-ness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of female-ness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretations, and see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be.”<sup>58</sup>

This constructed femaleness or the sexuality is ineluctably linked with nationalism which most of the feminists have explored and which can be summarized in five processes which Nira Yewal-Davis and Floya Anthia have suggested to signify women’s relationship to nationalism. These are:

- As biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities.
- As reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups.
- As participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and the transmitters of its cultures.
- As signifiers of ethnic/national difference – as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories.
- As participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.<sup>59</sup> What is important to notice here is cultural constructions of collectivities through female sexualities as woman often symbolizes the national collectivity, its roots, its honour, spirit and national project.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, Kali for Women, p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Sylvia Walby, "Women and Nation in Gopal Balakrishnan (eds.), *Mapping the nation*, verso, p.236.

<sup>60</sup> Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis 1994, "Women and the Nation-State", in Hutchinson John and Smith, Anthony, D. (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, pp.312-315.

The debate also reflect the fact that most of these writings derive heavily from Anderson's 'imagined community'. Though Anderson speaks relatively very little about gender or sexuality, it was recognized by feminists that most of the aspects of Anderson's account of the nation relates or raises the issues of gender and sexuality. His key position about nationalism is the fact of the nation being a cultural artifact that is created and imagined. The communities are distinguished by the way they are imagined by their members. He considered it "not as an ideology" but "as if it belonged with 'kinship' or religion, rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'".<sup>61</sup> Parker and Andrews point that Anderson observes that everyone in this modern world has a nationality as they have a gender. Nationality also become a relational term like gender and its identity becomes contingent upon a system of difference. Nation is "shaped by what it opposes" and its representation as 'community' expressing a kind of unity which is displayed in various 'national cultures on gender and sexual norms'.<sup>62</sup>

The above discussion suggests clearly the link between female sexuality and national identity and honour. It exhibits how nationalism through coercion or by glorifying certain models of womanhood, controls sexuality to keep its honours, geographical boundaries, national culture intact. In the age of globalization when identities are becoming fluid, the erosion of national boundaries and deterritorialization is taking place and when the concept of nation is re-examined, it would be significant to contextualize Diaspora to explore how female sexualities or control over women is exercised to assert national identity and culture, amidst racial discrimination and in foreign locales.

The relationship between nationalism and sexuality becomes more sharper in terms of Diaspora.

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<sup>61</sup> Parkar and Andrews, op.cit., p.4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.6.

### **Contextualizing Diaspora:**

The concept of Diaspora has remained the centre of attraction of many social scientists. It has become a point of wider interest that how diasporic communities address the question of nationalism and how in diasporic nationalism the question of sexuality emerges.

As rhetoric gives way to socio-political reality and economic necessity, many of the boundaries that separated nations in the past are eroding. As a result we are witnessing an unprecedented movement of peoples all across the globe in the form of immigrants, refugees, temporary workers and political exiles. With this movement of people, the concept of Diaspora emerges. The constant movement of these Diaspora across the globe is creating a new social dynamic and raises the issues of identity. Diasporas are not merely communities on the move; they are also living embodiments of particular socio-cultural histories carrying with them cultural and ethnic heritages that have been handed down through generations. Thus, Diasporas, while negotiating and seeking a new linkage, also maintains a firm attachment with the past, a link to a collective not necessarily defined by geographical boundary but by its culture and tradition. In Diaspora, thus the creation of another nation is not the issue but it is the abandoned "home" nation that in fact generates nationalism in the expatriate or immigrant imagination.

Huge numbers of immigrants and refugees in the second half of the twentieth-century, sharing the condition of migrancy but arriving out of very different economic and political conditions, often retaining strong political, cultural and emotionalities to their country of origin. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and bear upon them "the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped". It is this link with the homeland which decides the diasporic nationalism.

Immigrants develop networks, activities, patterns of living and ideologies that span their home and the host society. They display patterns of loyalty and

affiliation to the lasting attraction of nation as imaginary home, and to the appeals of nationalism. Home remains no longer just a village or city where family is located, it becomes a part of much larger entity, a 'motherland'.

In the 'Age of Empire 1875-1914' Eric Hobsbawm points out how in fact 'exile' has always been the "main place of incubation" for "new national movements".<sup>63</sup> Behind this phenomenon, he explains, the urgency of national sentiments felt after immigration. Hobsbawm further elaborates that, "nationality 'becomes a real network of personal relations rather than a merely imaginary community, simply because, far from home, every (immigrant of a particular ethnicity) has potential personal connection "with like immigrants".<sup>64</sup> The greater the migration, he says, the greater the basis of national consciousness, so that finally, "in so far as (nationalism) rested on an ambiguous and double-edged nostalgia for the old ways emigrants had left behind, it had something in common with a force which undoubtedly fostered nationalism at home.. This was neo-traditionalism, a defensive or conservative reaction against the disruption of the old social order".<sup>65</sup>

This view stands closer to the dominant theories of nationalism of all sorts of right wing nationalist, as pointed out by Appadurai as he explains that most of these theories, "see nations as products of the natural destinies of peoples, whether rooted in language, race, soil or religion. In many of these theories of the nation as imagined, there is always a suggestion that blood, kinship, race, and soil are somehow less imagined, more natural than the imagination of collective interest or solidarity."<sup>66</sup> This gives legitimacy to the rhetorics of 'motherland', to homogeneity, to racial superiority and to popular sovereignty, which is also the basis of diasporic nationalism.

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<sup>63</sup> Hobsbawm Eric, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, p.154.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155

<sup>66</sup> Appadurai, Arjun (1993), *Patriotism and its futures, public culture*, The University of Chicago, pp.711-429.

The other set of writing on nationalism by modern writers like Anderson, Habermas etc. emphasizes that modern state grows less out of natural facts – such as language, blood, soil and race – but is a cultural product or a product of the collective imagination. Anderson’s formulation of nation in imagined communities is also pertinent to diasporic scenario. He formulates the nation as an imagined political community –

“Imagined as it is both inherently limited and sovereign... It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communism.. The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations.. It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born than age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely ordained hierarchical dynastic realm.. Finally it is imagined as community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.<sup>67</sup>

The two criteria which stand out (imagined , community) apply equally to diasporic national identification. According to Anderson, the imagined community grew out of and replaced older systems like religious community and dynastic realm, and the basic impetus behind this transformation was the growth of print culture.

The novel and the newspaper, according to Anderson, provided the technical means for representing’; the kind of imagined community that is the nation”<sup>68</sup> In the novel, “national imagination” is at work” in the movement of a solitary [picaresque] here through a sociological transcape of a fixity that fuses

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<sup>67</sup> Anderson, Benedict 1993, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York, Verso, p.7.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.25.

the world inside the novel with the world outside”.<sup>69</sup> And the newspaper, which Anderson characterizes as an extreme form of the book, creates an extraordinary mass ceremony; the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (imagining) of the newspaper.. as-fiction.. The significance of this mass ceremony.. is paradoxical. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident... (The newspaper reader.. is continually measured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life”.<sup>70</sup>

This reflects upon that with the increasingly centrality of electronic news media, this measureance of nation becomes reinforced through the more public methods of communication and consumption (i.e. people gathered in groups along with friends and family around radio or television). The example of Gulf war indo-pak war or conflict like Kargil will be relevant where the revival of discourses of nation continues older forms of nationalities propaganda through print (and electronic) media during wars. This in the age of diasporic national culture, the centrality of print media in maintaining the boundaries of the imagined community is very much operational as a Anderson’s definition nation aims always a construct and not natural’ fact. These collective experiences Anderson calls as” print capitalism” and “electronic capitalism”. This makes diasporic communities to imagine themselves to belongs to national society. Anthony D. Smith talks about the “territorialization of shared memory which inspires historical claims to historic homelands and sacred sites”.<sup>71</sup> The sacred sites are often holy rivers, tombs, moments etc. He historicises the importance of collective memory in the constructions of nation had understanding of nationalism. He points out that the “process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former becomes ethnic landscapes (or ethnoscaples) and the latter becomes historic homelands, can be

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> Anthony Smith (1996), *Culture, Community and Territory: the politics of ethnicity and nationalism* International Affairs 72, 3 454

called the 'territorialisation of memory'.<sup>72</sup> This also advances the myth of common ethnic descent' and urges for the purity of indigenous culture to strengthen the communal solidarity.

This becomes equally pertinent to the diasporic nationisms and their imaginations of the homeland. The example of Hindu community in USA and their overwhelming reaction to the Babri Masjid demolition back in 'Hindustan' throws light on how the "territorialisation of memory" operates. The fundamentalist or fascist organizations in the name of national culture and identity harp each upon these sentiments to gradually legitimize their kind of nationalism based on religious and cultural revivalism. The post-independence Hindu nationalism of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh exemplifies this pattern as it has attracted a large number of diasporic Indian communities to their fold and perpetrate the jingoist nationalism among them.

In the debate which revolves around the concepts and construction of national identity in the diasporic context, questions of gender and female sexuality forms an important and inevitable dimensions of the whole issue. The whole concept of 'motherland' attached to the nation and the idea to interpret nation as the family highlights the inherent relation between nation and women even in diaspora.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 454

## **CHAPTER III**



## ISSUES OF FEMALE SEXUALITY AND INDIAN NATIONALISMS: A CASE OF CARIBBEAN AND FIJI:

The present chapter focuses on the overseas Indians who migrated under the system of Indenture during nineteenth century to British colonies to work as plantation labourers. The purpose is to uncover the issues which led to the unending agitation against Indenture system by the Hindu nationalist forces back in India. The sexual virtue of Indian women labourers on plantations formed the centre of nationalist discourse and discourse against Indenture which eventually led to the abolition of the system. The attempt is to cite the case of the Caribbean and Fiji to elaborate how dominant narratives of nationhood keeps women's sexuality central to the analysis and appropriates women's sexuality for defining the territoriality, national honour and national identity.<sup>1</sup> The overwhelming response from both nationalist leaders and a large section of Indian bourgeoisie on the issue of sexual abuse of Indian women on plantations ushered a huge public debate, thus making the agitation against Indenture system the most powerful weapon in the hands of a nascent nationalist movement against imperialism. For the nationalist movement, it turned out to be the entry-point to overthrow the colonial domination. Tinker describes it as 'the first major Indo-British political and social issues to be decided in Independent India and not in metropolitan Britain'.<sup>2</sup>

The industrial revolution followed by a large scale production affected the then existing economy of Europe and led to the larger-struggle for territories and exploitation at colonies to meet the growing demand of raw materials and labour. This paucity of labour in this countries gave birth to the system of slavery. The British colonies were first among the recipients and thrived on the system. The problem of labour intensified with the abolition of slavery in 1833 as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> Various scholars (Partha Chatterjee, Kumkum Sangari, Urvashi Butali and many others) who have drawn relation between woman and nation have highlighted this relationship between nationlism and gender.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Tinker (1974), "A new system of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920" published for Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, pg. 288.

massive outcry from different parts of world. The crisis in the British colonies erected a new 'coolie system' which carried on the legacy of slavery. Though Britishers tried to prevent the perpetuation of slavery yet it continued in its new form. Rhoda Rheddock notes, 'this initial phase of indentured Indian immigration followed fast on the heels of the abolition of slavery.'<sup>3</sup> Thus the foundation of a new system of recruitment called 'Indenture system' was laid.

In this system of recruitment,<sup>4</sup> Indians voyaged across the sea, crossed 'Kalapani' (Black Waters) to work as plantation labourers to British colonies.

'Indenture' was basically a contract where a labourer was expected to migrate as a plantation labourer to work for a period of five years for one particular employer or labour unit where freedom to change employer was denied. C.Kondapi describes it as 'the chief feature of the Indenture system were five years of stereotyped state regulated labour, denial of the right to change the employer or employment, recruitment of labour units and not families, gross disproportion of men to women emigrate, payment charges for recruitment by the employer and the denial of increased wages inspite of the increased prices and profits. The employer was under a legal obligation to provide fixed wages, medical attendance and other and other amenities.'<sup>5</sup> At the expiry of the period of five years of apprenticeship the labourers were expected to reindenture for the same period or to work elsewhere in the plantation. After the completion of ten years the free passages or subsidized return passage to India was allowed.

Indians popularly called 'East Indians' in the western hemisphere as plantation labourers under the system of Indenture, migrated to Mauritius, south

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<sup>3</sup> Rhoda Rheddock, (1985), "Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship 1845-1917", Economic and Political Weekly vol. XX, No. 3 and Review of Women Studies pg. WS-79.

<sup>4</sup> The two other kinds of system also emerged called 'Kangany and Maistry System, where labourers were bound to the state as to the middleman-employer since the very beginning was inevitable Kangany-system was restricted to mainly Malaya and Ceylon and Maistry of Burma. See R.K. Jain (1993), Indian Communities abroad themes and Literature, Manohar Publisher, Delhi

<sup>5</sup> C. Kondapi, (1951) "Indian Overseas 1830-1920", published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, pg.2.

and east Africa, the Caribbean, Srilanka, Malaysia and Fiji at different periods as a part of nineteenth century migration. They formed the cheap labour to produce sugar coffee, tea and rubber.

Indentured emigration began in 1929 – but was not an established practice until 1834 and despite strong resistance from Indian nationalist it continued till 1917. In this period starting from 1838 to 1917 nearly half a million East Indians were transported as labourers to British West Indians plantations. East Indians as ‘coolies’ migrated in large numbers to various parts of Caribbean. British Guyana imported 240,000; Trinidad 143,000; Jamaica 36,500; Grenada 2,570 Saint Vincent 1820 and St. Lucia 1,550 Coolies.<sup>6</sup>

The early phase of Indentured migration to Caribbean started as early as 1838 when East Indians were loaded to British Guyana and later in 1845 first boat load arrived in Trinidad.<sup>7</sup> The statistics indicate a total of 143,959 Indians were brought to Trinidad between 1845 and 1917. At the end of their period of Indenture about 22% (twenty two percent) of them returned to India while several of them chose to reindenture and return to plantation. These indentured labourer in Trinidad and their descendents now constitute over one-third of the population of the island.

Fiji, situated in western Pacific turned into a British colony in 1874. Five years hence in 1879, the East Indians arrived in ‘coolie ships’, to be employed on sugar plantations. They choose to call themselves as ‘girmityas’ (meaning contract or agreement) and by 1919, the end of Indenture in Fiji their number went up to 60,000.

The Indenture labourers migrated to Trinidad mostly from the northern part of India. 90% (nineteen percent) were from the Gangetic plain, that is, the former United provinces, Central provinces and their South. In the year 1871, the

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<sup>6</sup> The figures are mostly taken mainly from John La Guerie (ed.), 1974, 1985, Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad, University of West Indies, Extra Mural Studies Unit.

<sup>7</sup> Rhoda Rheddock, *opcit.*, p.79.

total number of population from Central India, Agra and Oudh was 16,027 or 41.7%; from Bihar about 11,278 or 29.3% and from West Bengal it was 8,396 or 21.9 %. Most of the emigrants were Hindus. Out of the total 15% were Muslims whereas 40% Hindus and a very small number of Christians. The Hindu population constituted artisan and agricultural castes like the Kurmi and Ahir, more than 40% were Chamars or “untouchables” and about 18% from the upper castes like Brahmins and Kshatriyas. In Fiji the migration took place from both northern and southern part of India. Three-fourths of the immigrant population, recruited from North, departed from the port of Calcutta and were called ‘Kalkatiyas’ whereas remaining one-fourth were called ‘Madrasi’ as they were from Madras, migrating from the port of Madras. The terms were prevalent in most of the plantations. Out of the total indentured population in Fiji 80% were Hindus and 15% Muslims.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the Indians who offered themselves as plantation labourers were poor agricultural peasants fatigued and pauperized by intermittent famines and drought situation. A large number of them were low caste Indians surviving in inhuman state of slavery as bonded labourers under the conditions of extreme poverty, thus any possibility for better living was acceptable to them. Ironically, it involved the ‘exchange of one situation of abject poverty in the form of extreme low paid labour for the similar situation on the new lands.’<sup>9</sup>

The experience of Indentureship was traumatic for Indians due to the rigorous and coercive features of the system. The whole process of selection and recruitment was marked by deceit and enormity. The recruiters appointed by the British planters made false promises of plenty to the Indians at the time of recruitment. The recruitment was thus a ‘dirty trick’ played on Indians, a ‘sham’ and completely an unfair one.<sup>10</sup> On reaching the plantation they faced

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<sup>8</sup> J.C. Jha, 1984, "The Indian heritage in Trinidad" in John La Guerie (ed.), Calcutta to Caroni, University of West Indies, Extral Mural Studies Unit.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Tinker, *opcit.*, p.xiii.

<sup>10</sup> John d. Kelly (1991), "Indenture and the Discourse that ended it: Sexual Exploitation and a Hindu Moral Rhetoric" in *Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality and Counter colonial Discourse in Fiji*, The University of Chicago Press, p.28.

inexplicable torturous conditions of existence and were entrapped in unnecessary prosecution.

The Indians inhabited the same old quarters of the slaves or the barrack ranges similar to the slave quarters called 'coolie lines'. Three people were huddled in one room midst poor sanitation, unhygienic environment, scarcity of water and endemic diseases. The immigration laws designed particularly for labourers were repressive and expressed the racial discrimination blatantly. According to the laws labourers were expected to work for 45 hours in a week and it was extended upto 54 hours at the time of crop-season. Thus it amount to 8-9 hours daily normally and about 15 hrs. during the harvesting season when all the labourers including men, women and even children were expected to work. The most obnoxious part of the system was the system of prosecution where they were prosecuted trivial infringement of immigration laws. They were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for minor "offences" such as crossing the highways, absenteeism, disobedience towards employer. Official passes were issued from the plantation officers for their movement outside the plantation. Thus the movement outside the plantation was restricted and the labourers were deprived of social contacts with the outer world.<sup>11</sup>

The Indians formed the bottom of the social ladder on the plantation. The Europeans shared the view as put forward by the missionary writers that the Indian labourers were physically, morally and mentally upgraded by the process of Indentureship. They were trained in the modern methods and skills of agriculture, learned to maintain sanitation laws and in turn also learned to look after their families in a proper manner. Thus a more useful and much better human being was carved out through the process.<sup>12</sup>

The most striking feature of the system which caused a wide gamut of problems and serious consequences was the highly skewed sex ratio. From the

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<sup>11</sup> Bridget Brereton (1985), "The Experience of Indentureship 1845-1917", in John La Guerie (ed.), Calcutta to Caroni, University of the West Indies, Extra Mural Studies Unit, pp.22-23.

<sup>12</sup> John D. Kelly, *Oppcit.*, p.32.

very inception and till the end of the system the numerical disparity between the sexes remained a permanent feature of all the recipient territories including Trinidad and Fijji. There was consistent disparity between the numbers of the women labourers and contracted men. The ratio among the first immigrant batch which reached Guyana in 1838 was approximately 100 women to 6000 men and it varied from time to time. the percentage set by government of India with the consent of recruiters was 40 women to every 100 men but this was always disobeyed by the recruiters and varied according to their preferences and need. However no legal restrictions existed on the proportion of males to females till 1948. According to Rhoda Rheddock, the ratio of women to men changed at least six times during the period of 1857 to 1879. She indicates about the proportion in 1857 which was one woman to three men. This changed in 1859 to one woman to two men according to the need and it came down to one woman to four men in 1860.<sup>13</sup>

The reason construed for this disproportion and imbalance was precisely that planters and recruiters considered women as unproductive labour and they discouraged the growth of family life which could have led to child bearing and child rearing activities involving economic risks and in turn discouraged the permanent growth of Indian community in the plantations. There was a search for the 'right kind' of women as the 'natural weakness' of the woman was threat for producers. They qualified woman unfit for production whereas men constituted the cheap, stable and long term productive labour. Thus only 'able bodied' woman wee encouraged to migrate and the search for 'right kind of woman' continued throughout the system, giving rise to disproportion of sexes.<sup>14</sup> The other reason for the low percentage of women was the reluctance of Indian men to expose their wives and children to new environment on the new land. They were averse to the idea also because of their poor economic status and severe family ties. Yet about one -third of the approximate 25% women who migrated

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<sup>13</sup> Rhoda Rheddok,, *Oppcit.*, p.ws-80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

were married, who followed their husbands.<sup>15</sup> The remaining population constituted mainly widows, 'unfaithful wives', disowned by their husbands, runaway girls and a considerable number of prostitutes who chose to immigrate to get rid of the promiscuous and exploitative life of prostitution. Thus a section of migrant women constituted of beggars, widows, prostitutes or those for whom life ended as they were least likely to be received back in their families and migration appeared to be an alternative to start a new life and a desired permanent break from a condition that seems to offer many problems but few possibilities. This composition of migrant women established a view that woman migrated not as wives, daughters or sisters but as independent labourers. Women who drifted independently were considered to be immoral.<sup>16</sup>

The disparity in the sex-ratio led to the sexual division of labour on plantations. There were some jobs strictly allotted to women like weeding, maneuvering, supplying and cane-cutting but this was not strictly maintained as sometimes women took up jobs meant for men. The wage differentials existed and due to less payment of wages to women they normally earned 25 cents, whereas men earned 50-75 per day. Women endured more risks and hardship.

The Askewed sex-ratio violence against women - the perennial shortage of Indian women resulted in sexual exploitation of women giving rise to sexual violence and violent crimes. The patriarchal colonial order realized the need to control the sexualities of woman as labourers. As Rheddock explains the exploitation of women was characterized in terms of their morals and not in respect to their work. For men it was exploitative work and for women, it was their sexualities. Thus according to Kelly there was a 'sexual side' to the whole system of exploitation of Indian labourers'.<sup>17</sup>

The low proportion of women and sexual exploitation of Indian woman by the Europeans on the plantation generated an extraordinary violence on the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.85-85.

<sup>16</sup> Bhiku Parek ) "Some Reflection on Indian Diaspora", p.9.

<sup>17</sup> John D. Kelly, *Oppcit.*, p.31.

plantation. The non-recognition of customary marriages due to European controlled laws, the changing of Indian family structure and erosion of traditional marriages, restraint amounted to the increase in violence. The Europeans called it 'sexual jealousy'. There was a tendency of establishing temporary relationship with the Indian woman labourers by the European overseers, estate managers and even sardars. In terms of sharing of women, they were shared one to three even four men at a time and were also forcibly shared sometimes. The British overseers 'assigned' women to men and the ratio varied from plantation to plantation. Thus Indian labourers resorted to violence, sometimes to save the chastity of their wives and daughters and sometimes to take revenge. They killed and wounded women labourers, the overseers and even themselves. Thus there were innumerable incidents of wife-murders.

The Europeans or the Britishers easily justified the sexual abuse and exploitation of Indian women labourers. In congruency in the cultural construction of sexuality of Britishers and Indians us as very much visible. Britishers were completely ignorant about the Indians. They operated according to the stereotypical image of labourers and considered migrated Indian labourers as low class, low caste people, "Scum" of the society who were fortunate enough to get the opportunity to work in the estate and to improve their wretched lives. The construction of stereotype of the cultural "others", led them to attribute low moral nature to these low-caste 'girmityas' though they belonged to different caste groups. The Britishers believed that they recruited labourers from the labouring class or caste and totally remained ignorant of the fact that the process of Indenture carved 'coolies' out of them.

The Britishers came up with their own very 'natural' explanation of the increase in wife murders and violence which was the outcome of their stereotypical notions. They believed that the problem was highly contextual as it emerged due to the low proportion of Indian women and their availability. Secondly it was the result of the racial character and temperament of the low caste Indians. The summary article by Cyril Bavin, a Methodist missionary in 1914 expresses it. He wrote, "Indian violence may have been contextually



determined by the scarcity of women, but fundamentally it was produced by the Indian temperament that was excitable and condoning of sexual violence, and by the 'low class' of Indians in Fiji".<sup>18</sup> J.W. Burton, another Methodist writer described Indian men as 'quick-tempered, diabolical and revengeful'. In the same light, Henry Worrals who worried about the rights of indigenous Fiji characterized Indians as hereditarily degenerated. The racial characteristic of women was also highlighted to justify the violence as 'natural' to the Indians. Bavin described Indian women as dark and with degraded minds. Britishers supported this view by considering Indian women as degenerated and alluded to their morality.

What they adroitly skipped was the exploitative system of Indenture, which enabled the colonial patriarchy to control the Indian women's sexuality. The British overseers exploited Indian women by sexually assaulting them. What strikes one's attention is the general silence about the sexual relation of British overseers with the coolie women. Though a great deal of evidence prove this, yet Court records completely ignore the involvement of British overseers or sardars in the matters of sexual abuse. Burton endorses this part of exploitation but saw it as a result of 'Indian morality'.<sup>19</sup> It is also pointed out by various writers on Indenture that Indian morality was not the matter of public discussion and the colonial connection was not publically recognized.

Thus according to the colonialistic the cause of Indian women's degradation was as not the European institution of Indenture but skewed sex ratio, of natural law, an effect of environment and Indian racial character. The role of Europeans in the sexual exploitation and degradation of Indian woman is denied in most accounts on Indenture by Europeans except few.

The role of the British overseers and their activities reflects the British construction of Indian sexuality and morality. They branded the Indians as culturally primitive natives, as animals and sub-humans. They called them

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.35.

'sinister orientals' and were charmed by the oriental notion of sex which Kelly writes "was beyond the constraining bounds of the European civil society" and referred Indian women as "oriental thing of pleasure".<sup>20</sup> The Indian women figured in their imagination as highly erotic and exotic from the seductive East. Gill one of the overseers, found Indian women as "joyously amoral as a doe rabbit".<sup>21</sup> The oversees were of the opinion that East Indian women enjoyed their company. They ridiculed the moral codes of Indians and were selfishly confined to their own image building in the so called civil society. The relationship between overseers and Indian women labourers led the Europeans in to conflict with Indian men. The sexual exploitation resulted in the virulent behaviour on the part of Indians and gave rise to the anti-indenture campaign back in India. There was yet another aspect of this issue of sexual virtue. Indian women adopted an unconventional life style due to the prevailing circumstances. The occupational and sexual freedom, where she was a wage-earner and could change one partner for another with greater ease consolidated their individuality and independence. Some of them underwent profound re-evaluation of their roles and could continue the independent life brought from India. The sexual freedom was exercised by Indian woman labourers thus challenging the traditional structure of Indian families. Jeremy Poyting notes how one of the Indian women labourers in 1870's in Trinidad expressed to Sarah Morton, a missionary, "when the last ship came in I took a papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once".<sup>22</sup> Parekh also notes that on the plantation practice of one woman marrying, sharing or living with several men or lovers developed.<sup>23</sup> This was unacceptable and did not match the traditional attitude of patriarchal Indian men who could not envisage the Indian woman leading an independent life out side the domination and authority of men. This led to wife-beating and violence.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Poynting (1987), "East Indian Women in the Caribbean: Experience and Voice" in Dr. David Dabydeen et. al (ed.), *India in the Caribbean*, p.233.

<sup>23</sup> Bhikhu Parek, *Oppcit.*, p.9.

## Nationalist Response

The issue of sexuality of sexual abuse of Indian women was central to the campaign against Indenture and acted as a catalyst to attract a large audience to unite to fight against the exploitation of Indian labourers on the British colonies. Indenture never figured as an agenda of broader anti-colonial campaign in the early nationalist uprising before 1917. In the year 1917 the prime agenda against imperial domination appeared to be anti-indenture campaign which attracted a wide-range of audience from all over the country. The country was set ablaze with the issue of sexual abuse on the colonial plantation and even some of the British officials sympathized with the issue and were in favour of abolition. A public opinion put an end to the system as entire country was charged with an anti-indenture campaign.

Before this period a number of leading nationalists supported and encouraged immigration of labourers as they believed it to be a relief for the growing population and a better source of living.<sup>24</sup>

It was much later than the evolution of working class movement in India, that the Indian nationalist leaders could conjure the problems of overseas Indian labourers and could develop sympathy for their cause. The reform and revivalist movement provided a broader vision to the nationalist movement and enabled the nationalist leaders to envisage the plight of Indian labour on the new lands. What turned the sentiments and moods of nationalist forces towards the deplorable conditions of overseas Indians was the moral depravation of immigrant Indian women labourers on the colonial plantations.

Eventually due to European critics like C.F. Andrews and W. Pearson and the role of overseas Indian M.K. Gandhi, the issue of indenture came to the limelight and hit the agenda of anti-colonial movements. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya along with many others played a decisive role in the whole episode. Among the Europeans who sympathized with the Indians over the issues, were Lord Curzon and Lord Hardinge. Gandhi's entry in the Indian

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<sup>24</sup> See Tejaswini Niranjana, "Left to the Imagination's: Indian Nationalism and Female Sexuality in Trinidad".

politics inspired the Indian nationalist leaders to pursue the issue of Indenture, as a part of struggle against imperialism.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi made a grand entry in the Indian national politics with his anti-indenture ideas. He was the first Indian who raised questions against the very existence of the system. He protested against emigration of labour since his stay in Natal. He founded the Natal Indian Congress on 22 May, 1884. Henceforth, with the help of the congress members, Gandhi organized an effective protest against the ill-treatment of Indentured labourers from Indian and called the system as unjust and inhuman. In 1896 he returned to India and issued pamphlets about the state of Indentured Indians in Natal. He met several eminent members of the Indian National Congress and thus laid the communication lines between Indians in South Africa and Indian National congress. He also wrote a letter to Bombay government for the changes in the Indian legislature policies for the improvement of the condition of Indians in south Africa. He met G.K. Gokhale along with many others and expressed his interest in the overseas Indians, the project appealed for Gokhale and he cracked the issue in the legislative council. With the help of Gokhale in 1911, Gandhi got a ban imposed on the recruitment of labourers in Natal. The protests and ban in South Africa motivated sporadic protests in Mauritius. In south Africa the system ended with the outburst of publicity and mass campaigns resulting out of Satyagraha. It was also brought to an end in Mauritius and Malaya. Finally it also came to an end in Fiji, Trinidad and in all the recipient colonies in the year 1917. This was the outcome of consistent campaign, huge mass-mobilization and sharp public opinion with the efforts of Gandhi and few other nationalists.<sup>25</sup>

The realization about his task getting over in south Africa made him move to India where he championed the causes of Indenture and initiated the campaign against which he carved out a national opinion in favour of anti-indenture. As a part of their campaign protest meetings were held at different places. Gandhi

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<sup>25</sup> Karen A. Ray, (1995), "The Abolition of Indentured Emigration: The Race for the Spoils", Paper presented at ISER-NCIC Conference on challenge and change: the Indian diaspora in its historical and contemporary contexts, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Trinidad, pp.1-30. The entire debate on anti-Indenture campaign is taken from this paper and Hugh Tinker's System of Slavery.

delivered speeches in almost all parts of the country and also wrote at length in the newspapers to arouse anti-indenture sentiment.<sup>26</sup>

In early 1915 the Indians were still not fully conscious about the indenture and were not so devoted to the cause but towards the end of 1915, with the increase in protest meetings etc. the issue surfaced as central to the issue in the entire Myriad groups and autonomous organizations took up the issue in the entire country. Among them the prominent ones were the “Indian coolie protection society”, ‘The anti-indenture emigration League of Bengal’ and many others. Saints like ‘Satyananda’ in Bihar preached against indenture and also issued pamphlets. It was also widely taken up in the women’s organizations all over the country especially by those which were associated with the nationalist movement and meetings were held by them throughout India where the audience was mainly middle and upper class ladies. The public meeting in Ahmedabad organized by women resolved to appeal to lady Chelmsford by submitting a memorandum. The portion of which as quoted by Rhoda Rheddok is as follows: “The system of Indentured labour under which Indians are taken to Fiji compel them to lead a bad and immoral life and subjects them to indignities and outrages...., we are confident that as a woman and as a mother, Her Excellency will appreciate the deep feelings of Indian women on this subject and we pray that Her Excellency may be graciously pleased to lay before His Excellency, the Viceroy, the supplication of women and children in India...”<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile on the other hand, C.F. Andrews took up his independent campaign against indenture and landed in Fiji along with W. Pearson to prepare a report on the prevailing situation of the indentured laboureres in the colony. They published their independent inquiry report which appeared on February 19, 1916 and expedited the process of consensus building in India against Indenture. Gandhi made a powerful speech in Bombay on October 28, 1916 where he announced his one-year ultimatum to the British Raj to end this system. He

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<sup>26</sup> See. M.K. Gandhi (1927), *The Story of My experiments with Truth*, Navgivan Mudranalaya Ahemdabad, p.333.

<sup>27</sup> Rhoda Rheddok, *oppcit.*, p.ws-86.

recalled the efforts of G.K. Gokhale who gave up his life fighting for this issue and described the situation of women and men on plantation equivalent to a 'broken vessel'. He appealed to the Indians to unite to overthrow this system of Indenture.

As a result in December 1916, the Indian National Congress reunited, i.e. the moderate and extremist factions came together and a resolution was passed calling for the abolition of the system. Thus anti-indenture resolution was passed at the Lucknow Congress in 1916. There was a spate of public meetings of protests all over the country and it coincided with the campaign through new papers. Newspapers like 'the Advocate', 'the Nai Roshni', 'News India', 'Hindustani' (in urdu) etc., played active role in the campaign and attacked the colonial rule with their sharp biting language..<sup>28</sup>

All the same time Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya a congressist and a member of a legislative council continued his struggle inside the council following the path of G.K. Gokhale who while pressing upon the issue warned the legislature of continuous repetition of the same resolution if not once passed. Like Gokhale, Malviya was also bent upon the complete abolition of the system. But Malviya's motion was disallowed for the next time. This boggled Gandhi and he felt the need of the radical tactics call for an all-India, non-cooperation movement to protest the system and put the deadline for May 31 1917.<sup>29</sup>

Chelmsford realized the importance of the anti-indenture movement but Chamberlain was not to be moved. But as Karen A. Ray writes, "Suddenly on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1917, with the full - if grudging - permission of the Secretary of State, the Commerce and Industry Department of the Government of India issued Notification No. 1227 under the Defence of India Act 1915, Prohibiting any further emigration from India under the Indenture system".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Karen A. Ray, *Oppcit.*, p.8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

## Hindu Nationalism and Women

The brief historical description enables us to ponder over some key issues pertaining to the conjecture where 'women's question meets up with nationalism'. The subject which needs elaboration here, is the relation between Indian women and anti-colonial nationalism. It leads to the basic inquiry why Indians women's identity was a crucible for the early nineteenth century nationalism, which appeared to be a unilinear, two-dimensional process to combat British colonialism and to evolve the national culture to assert itself as nation.

An answer to this query might provide an explanation to the problem raised here, why Indian women's sexuality formed the core of the outrageous response of nationalist leaders against the system of Indenture or why the protest and concerted efforts to organize against the deplorable conditions of Indian laborers on British plantations foreground the sexual issues. The answer can be explored by using 'gender' as an analytical tool and by contextualizing the issue with the socio-politico-religious developments of the period and its impact on Indian national movement.

The nineteenth century marks the beginning of the revival and reform movements within Hinduism in an effort to define Hindu dharma in relation to colonial or 'other' world. The need for a definition emerged as Hindu religion became part of the Indian nationalism and with it the need to assert Indian nation as the most moral and religious nation in the whole world, thus incomparable with any other nation area.<sup>31</sup> The nationalism and social reform movement appeared side by side. It manifested itself as an active political force with the advent of Raja Rammohan Roy and bore the principles of Humanitarianism and Universality.<sup>32</sup> The early and late nineteenth century reformist agenda emerged with the nationalist agenda to unify Indian nation on modern lines. The idea was

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<sup>31</sup> Sumit Sarkar, (1997), "Identity and Difference: Caste in the Formation of the Ideologies of Nationalism and Hindutva" in *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, p.358.

<sup>32</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 1989, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question", in Sudesh Vaid et. al. (ed.), *Recasting Women*, p.235.

to construct modern nationhood, thus social reform animated by the progressive, liberal, modern ideals of egalitarianism, individualism etc. these ideals and progressive attitudes according to Chatterjee, were selectively borrowed to suit the nationalist project.<sup>33</sup> As borrowed from the West, reformist believed, the modernity of any nation is indicated by the position of its women. So redescribing of the status of Indian women was the most essential agenda taken up by the reformist and in turn the nationalists.

It is essential to note that strength to the indenture movement was provided by the reform movement. It formed the backdrop for the sympathizer for the indentured labour and thus affected anti-indenture campaign in a significant way. Partha Chatterji writes, “the ‘women’s question’ was a central issue in the most controversial debates of social reform in mid-nineteenth century Bengal-the period of its so called renaissance”.<sup>34</sup> The women’s question emerged out of the colonial discourse which branded Indian tradition and rituals as oppressive for women, categorizing them as barbaric and backward. The reformist as well as the nationalists took up the issue of the woman to combat the political encounter by colonial state. The need emerged for modernizing the Indian nation by retaining the traditional cultural values to assert the distinct Indian identity. Thus philanthropic concern of women’s question was not merely out of humanitarianism but became an ineluctable part of broader political agenda of asserting nations identity central to “constructions of self in selfhood and projections of otherness, consolidating the rise of Indian nationalism.”<sup>35</sup>

The public/private dichotomy appeared in sharp contrast, the public was represented as male and modern whereas the private depicted as female and traditional. The need to assert the purity, piety and cultural superiority of Indian womanhood enclosed in the modern framework gave rise to spiritual and maternal domain as pointed by Chatterjee.<sup>36</sup> The spiritual was essential to assert a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.233.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.236.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.245.



cultural and distinct Indian identity different from the external material domain adapted to the modern world, women reflected inner domain unaffected by European woman and western culture where no encroachments from the colonizer were allowed. Thus a new form of patriarchy emerged to suit the nationalist agenda giving rise to 'a new women' essential for nationalism. This inner domain reflected the 'space of uncontaminated purity' and 'new woman' was the pious Hindu' Indian pativrata woman imbued with Satitva, symbolic of recovered Indian (or Hindu) traditions and culture. This new woman was educated to fulfill the requirement of nationalism. She appeared as the repository of culture capable of transmitting it to future nation. Now when we go back to the original problem, it is significant to note that this inner domain was encroached upon by colonizers on the plantations. The chastity and the 'satitva' of Indian women was encroached upon and the domain which existed on the wishes of the Indian male was not protected by colonizers. This represented the national tradition under extreme crisis. As mentioned above, the skewed sex-ratio resulted in the distribution of Indian woman among Indian males varying from plantation to plantation and were at the same time sexually assaulted by the colonizers ie. the planters. This threatened the national Hindu ethos and national honour as colonials forced Indian woman to moral depravity legitimately by branding it as part of Indian culture. This boggled the minds of Indian nationals as for them purity and unconditional chastity becomes the site of difference and superiority of Hindus from 'others'<sup>37</sup> the result was the huge outcry by nationalist forces which turned it into an issue of an all India concern.

The story of Kunti from Fiji written by a missionary named Monoharananda Saraswati of Arya Samaj, in the form of a letter and published in Hindi newspaper called "Bharat Mitra", drew wide attention from all kinds of audience and became the centre of discussion against indenture. In short, the letter as published in another Indian newspaper called 'The Leader' on August 13, 1913, describes the story of a woman called 'Kunti' from a small district of Gorakhpur, who along with her husband 'jai was induced by the emigration

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Uberoi.

agent for emigration to the Fiji islands. They were huddled together in a ship and amidst great difficulties reached the islands. As a female indentured Indian she faced great difficulty in protecting her chastity from the planter. She was sent alone to weed an isolated banana patch where later in the afternoon, the overseer caught hold of Kunti and made improper suggestions to her. Kunti struggled and ran towards the nearby river and jumped into it to save her purity. Later she was saved from drowning by Jagdeo, a boy who happened to be in a dinghy nearby.<sup>38</sup>

This story 'sparked off an unprecedentedly intense campaign' against the emigration of the Indian labourers. What is important here, is to note that Kunti's name joined the list of brave ladies in Indian history. The Indian woman is completely valorized in this story depicting the very Indian culture where women in the past have committed suicide to save their chastity. It epitomized the ideal Indian woman who offers herself to death to save the dilution of her purity. This act of hers becomes an honourable one, as by doing so she not only saves herself but also saves the nation or community from dishonour and dilution and is thus confessed upon with martyrdom.<sup>39</sup> This whole concept becomes extremely relevant in this context as Kunti is considered to be the ideal Hindu woman whose chastity is in danger on the alien land where she exerts her pious and sacred Indian identity by resorting to suicide to save her piousness. Thus she symbolized the national honour and her body became the site of difference and community identity which she defined through her conduct. It thus struck a wave of sympathy for Indian women labourers among the Indians generated the feeling against emigration of Indian labourers to plantations. This story portrayed Indian women labourers completely as victims of colonial domination struggling hard to protect their Indians their Indianness and national identity.

The other issue which forced the Indians nationalists to keep the sexual abuse of Indian women as central to the discourse of indenture was the debate over modernity. The geographical displacement of both men and women as

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<sup>38</sup> Brij V. Lal, (1990), Kunti's cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations, in Krishna murty ed. Women in colonial India p. 163.

<sup>39</sup> Urvashi Butalia (1993), "Community, State and Gender on Women's Agency during Partition", Economic and Political Weekly, April 24, 1993, p. ws-13.

indentured labourers and new social and political context enabled them to adopt and become modern.<sup>40</sup> The new locations, plantation systems, displacement, racial politics, disparate sex-ratio, colonial domination, scarce resources etc. completely transformed the lives of Indian women working as wage earners, coming out of traditional household. The distribution of women among men, erosion of caste boundaries etc. ended a traditional Indian lifestyle and evolved new contours of modernity. The Indian women were becoming modern and emancipated from traditional structures of family and household due to occupational freedom. Indian women exercised the sexual freedom with the financial independence and arrested her identity in foreign lands. Niranjana says “the indentured women labourer was shaping her own relationship with the ‘west’ in a distant land.”<sup>41</sup>

This modernity was a sharp contrast with the one adopted by nationalists to resolve women’s question in India. Partha Chatterjee points out that nationalism in the nineteenth century resolved the women’s question in an attempt to make “modernity consistent with the nationalist project”.<sup>42</sup> A new modern Indian women emerged with the ‘bhadramahila’ image to maintain the material and spiritual distinctions and to uphold the nationalist purpose. The concept of new women which evolved with the nationalist agenda projected middle class Indian women to be modern, educated and more responsible towards familial and household duties, maintaining the traditional social relationship of male dominance. The ‘new women’ imbibed with ideals of modernity was expected to practice self control and was supposed to operate within the models of domesticity, motherhood, femininity and modernity as set by nationalists. The so-called ‘new women’ was characterized by ‘newly acquired freedom’ marked by education which provided new virtues of cleanliness and companionship.<sup>43</sup> A woman had to be educated to be civilized, but she should not become free in the

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<sup>40</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Oppcit.*, p.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Partha Chatterjee, (1993), *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton University Press, p.121.

<sup>43</sup> Suruchi Thapar, (1993), "Women as activists; Women As Symbols: A study of the Indian Nationalist Movement", *Feminist Review* 44, Summer, p.83.

same way as the modern western women (the memsahib, the wife of the colonial official being the negative stereotype but as a true Hindu, that is as a modest and auspicious woman entirely devoted to her husband.<sup>44</sup> This men women in contrast with Indian women labourers on British plantations was 'modern' but not 'needlessly westernized'. Neither was she like the 'uneducated, vulgar and course lower caste, class working women.<sup>45</sup> Thus the modernity adopted by Indian women labourers was considered as illegitimate as it did not suit the nationalist ideology and did not represent the tradition and culture of Indian nation. The very 'national identity' was in crisis and the impossibility of the reform was felt. The only solution was to focus Indian women labourers as victims of colonial rule and to strive for the complete abolition of the system.<sup>46</sup> They blamed colonization for the depravity and degradation of Indian women labourer and thus regarded the system as inhuman. The Indian nationalism rejected the 'new freedom' acquired by Indian immigrant women who exercised the freedom of controlling their own sexualities and bodies which could never have been part of nationalist project as nationalism repressed women's sexuality to suit its own purpose of defining national boundaries and culture.

Gandhi, the main protagonist of the anti-indenture campaign completely rejected the life style of Indian woman labourers as for him it stood in contrast to the figure of virtuous and Pativrata women back in India. He condemned the system primarily of this and wrote, "the system brings Indian's womanhood to utter ruin, destroys all sense of modesty. That in defence of which millions in this country have laid down their lives in the past is lost under it."<sup>47</sup> For Gandhi it became the most pertinent question as for him female virtues: Chastity, purity, self – sacrifice, suffering were essential for his nationalist non-violent strategy. He mythologised the Indian woman as Sita, Savitri and Draupadi and embodied

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>46</sup> tejaswini Niranjana, *Oppcit.*, p.

<sup>47</sup> M.K. Gandhi, (1964), "Indenture or Slavery?" in Gujarati, Published in *Samalochak* December 1915, Reprinted in English Translation in collected works Vol.III (Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India).

role for women in the nationalist struggle. "Gandhi evoked 'tradition' by a historicising its tenets and mythological figures".<sup>48</sup> He glorified Indian woman's sacrifice and their role as mothers and wives to inspire their husbands and sons for national duty. This change of woman had a strategic function in the political movement. This role was unaccomplished by the Indian woman labourers and thus they appeared unfit for Gandhi's national agenda.

Indian women labourers failed to uphold the nationalist project by their capacity to maintain the national identity. Superior and different from the other. They could not identify with the Indian nation that the nationalists constructed to present to the British as well as to the rest of the world with common past and future – an 'imagined community'.<sup>49</sup> Thus they became the sick of wider political claims. The department of these Indian woman labourer attracted important focus of nationalist attention primarily due to anxiety awakened as it posed threat on national identity and so sexuality formed the centre of debates on indenture.

It is significant to mention that discourse on sexuality continued in places like Fiji even after the abolition of the system. Kelly writes, "In a time of political, economic and social crises in Fiji and in India, the Fiji Indians focused their energy and attention on religious disputation about sexual immorality.

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<sup>48</sup> Ketu H. Katrak, (1992), "Indian Nationalism, Gandhian 'Satyagraha' and representations of Female Sexuality" in Andrew Praker et. al. (ed.), *Nationalism and Sexualities*, Routledge, p.364.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict Anderson.

## **CHAPTER IV**

## HINDU NATIONALISM AND WOMEN A CASE OF NRI'S OF USA.

"If I am in transit my heart remains in my homeland,  
Consider me there also, where my heart is".<sup>1</sup>

Migration is the essence of all the diasporas and serves as an important factor for the expansion of religious as well nationalist sentiments. If we look at the history of Indian diaspora we could see the broad phases it has gone through, as it has been a phenomena of the last one hundred and fifty years, starting from indentured migration to the recent twentieth century migration.<sup>2</sup> Thus there are various ways to look at Indian diaspora. Here the emphasis is to examine the new type of immigrant group from Indian sub-continent, which is educated, technically trained, and is gaining more prominence in the world migration streams. This group occupies the middle and upper ranks of the host society and plays an important role in the political and social affairs of both host and as well as former native societies. This group of twentieth century migrants is designated as Non Resident Indians (NRI) who draw attention of the public in India itself due to their investment capacities. In recent years this NRI community has also gained prominence because of their economic and political support to Rightwing Hindutva forces. It is ironic to note that these NRI's who left India and have little intentions of returning to India, constitute the strongest pillar of the post Independence Hindu nationalism propagated by supremely nationalist Hindutva brigade i.e. the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) the electoral wing and Vishwa Parisahd (VHP) the religious and cultural wing. Since the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 when the world witnessed the terrifying unleashing of Hindu communal and fascist violence, the blatant resurgence of these forces resulting in the construction of strong Hindu identity, has profoundly impacted the social and political sentiments of overseas

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is a Persian Couplet taken from Arthur W. Helweg and Usha M. Helweg (1990), *An Immigrant's Success Story*, Hurst and Company, London.

<sup>2</sup> Binod Khadria (1994), "Brain Drain or Brain Bank? Aspects of professional Indian Immigration to USA", Paper presented at the International Conference on Indian Diaspora, at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India.

Indians and especially non-resident Indians. Therefore, the purpose here is to highlight that how twentieth century migration constructs a public sphere outside the homeland in which new forms of national and religious identity can be imagined. To put it simply, the aim is to see the link between NRI's and these forces that is, how these forces cash upon the sentiments of the immigrants to serve their fascist goals and also to analyse that how even in this form of diaspora the formation of national identity is contingent upon the women of the nation. To elaborate on this point the attempt has been made to review some of the popular Hindi films namely; *Purab aur Paschim* (1970) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Pardes* (1997).

### **Historical Background: Tracing the roots of immigration**

It is difficult to trace the exact origin or lineage of east Indian emigration to America, yet statistics reveal that one of the first east Indian to migrate to America was a man from Madras, who accompanied colonial sea captain with a desire to expand trade relations between New England, Britain and South Asia. His entry, in the colonial books is recorded to be in the year 1820.<sup>3</sup> Prof. Jain throws light on the entry of the Indians when he writes " From 1820 onwards a trickle of Indians entered United States, although over a period of eighty years, from 1820 to 1900, their numbers were fewer than 700"<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, other scholars reveal that from 1871 to 1899 a total of 491 Indians were recorded and by 190, the US census reported the presence of 2,050 east Indian resident in United States.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Helweg and Usha M. Helweg. (1990), *An Immigrant's Success Story*, (Hurst and Company, Publishers Ltd.), p.95

<sup>4</sup> Ravindra K. Jain, (1993), *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literatures*, Manohar Publishers, Delhi, p.37.

<sup>5</sup> See Sucheta Majumdar's (1989), *Racist Responses to Racism: The Aryan Myth and South Asians in the United States*, *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol.9 no.1 p.49. Roger Daniel, (1986), *History of India Immigration to the United States, An Interpretative Essay*, Presented to the conference "India in America: The Immigrant Experience." The Asia Society, New York, p.11.



It was reported that before 1905, the immigrants from India were primarily merchants, travellers, professional men and a few Asian religious leaders, largely settled in eastern part of America or New York.<sup>6</sup> By 1904, the immigrants from rural Punjab began to flow from Vancouver to the United States of America especially to Washington and California. This spill-over was the result of increase in violent attacks on incoming South Asians in Canada.<sup>7</sup> These Sikh males from the villages of Punjab in California and Washington came alone without their families, with a hope to return with their "hard-earned saving". The immigration data reveal that perhaps the ninety percent of immigration arrived after 1905 which is also the time since when it was noted that the great influx was of the coolie class.<sup>8</sup>

Majumdar estimates by analyzing various sources to approximately 1000 emigrants entered United States per year between 1907-1910 and so by 1910 the approximate population of east Indians in United States went up between 5000-10,000, out of these majority were Punjabi Joint families and over one-third Muslims, but they were all clubbed as "Hindus". Both media and Federal and state agencies. This number alarmed the racist organizations like "Asiatic Exclusion League". Asiatic Exclusion League along with American Association of Labour named east Indians variously as a: tide of Turbans", "rag-heads" and even as a "distinct menace"<sup>9</sup> They agitated against the arrival of South-Asian immigrants and expressed the undesirability of "Hindus" by every part of coast, stating the reason as "their lack of cleanliness, disregard of sanitary laws, petty pilfering, especially of chickens and insolence to women". The result was riot in Bellingham, Washington in 1907 and live oak, California in 1908 and the victims were the agricultural labourers from India and not the professional or academic class, located primarily in the cities of North-east and west-coast".<sup>10</sup> Thus

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Helweg, *oppcit.*, p.48.

<sup>9</sup> Sucheta Majumdar, *oppcit.*, p.49 and Ravindra K. Jain *oppcit.*, p.37.

<sup>10</sup> Sucheta Majumdar, *oppcit.*, p.52.

since 1910 Asian immigrants to the United States gradually declined and only small number remained during the 1930's and 1940's .The immigration revived only in the year 1965 when United States repealed a half -century old immigration policy and flung open its shores to the populations of Asia. "It triggered the major upward surge unequalled in the history of Asian Indian Immigration to the United States".<sup>11</sup> In 1945 at the time of

Independence, a quota of hundred was allotted to both India and Pakistan. This system of quota remind in affect till the year 1965, the year of liberalization of immigration laws and since then the immigration of 20, 000 immigrant from each south Asian countries were allotted to migrate to United States. After the reversal of the law it took few years to regain the descent flow of the immigrants. In 1965 only about 600 East Indian arrived in United States, in 1970 the number increased to roughly around 10,000. <sup>12</sup> It was only between 1980 and 1984 that the number increased incredibly and at present it is thought to be around 600,000. The majority of the Indians are "Hindus" from urban professional background and according to the recent study as Majumdar mentions, the majority of Indian population is between 25 a 44years old and the composition of men and women is 81.5 and 46.4 respectively.<sup>13</sup> Most of them come from middle-upper-middle class background from urban and semi urban areas. The largest numbers of the Indians are engineers and physicians, among other professionals are professors, accountants businessmen and the students. It is said that Asian Indians are the largest immigrant community in United States of America but yet the number of East Indian immigrants to this country is a point of controversy.

Indians in the United States have emerged as an ethnic category by asserting their own cultural and religious identities and also by deconstructing the stereotypical orientalist image formed during the early years which is replaced by immigrant virtues of hard work, thrift and material success.<sup>14</sup> They are one of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ravindra K. Jain, oppcit, p.37.

<sup>12</sup> Sucheta Majumdar, oppcit, p.49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>14</sup> Romila Thapar, (1985), "Syndicated Moksha" Seminar, pp.14-22.

highest income earning groups of United States and are the best educated.<sup>15</sup> The living pattern of Indians in America clearly show as Rajgopal writes that in a situation of relocation identities take such different shapes and gets so differently reformulated that it is hard to predict. IN case of Indians, in an alien atmosphere the relocation has led them to stick to their class and caste identity, to religious practices and rituals and to the formation of individual identity in relation to family and to the larger society.<sup>16</sup>

### **Cartography of Indians in the United States**

The Indian community though appears to be homogenous, yet is greatly stratified on the lines of religion, regional, linguistic and caste distinctions. The complexity in the size and growth of community leads to more and more of regional, caste and language associations among them and at the same time maintaining the links with the broader network of community developed on the same lines. It suggests that the purpose is to maintain a separate Indian identity and to provide "a setting for meeting people coming from the same region who also speaks the same language". Thus language and religion becomes important symbols of the formation of Indian identities.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the Indians who migrate to the United States do not face much of the problems in terms of nuclear family as they mostly do not belong to joint families back in India. However they feel a sense of alienation due to lack of primary or peer group relationship and community support. Though new environment forces both husband as well as wives to work, the traditional commitment to marriage and family helps them to create a balance between family and social life and helps to avoid strain in the relationship patterns.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis is on strong emotional commitment to their families; both here and in

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<sup>15</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, (1997), "Transnational networks and Hindu Nationalism" in Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol.29, no.3, p.48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>17</sup> Ravindra K. Jain, oppcit, P.39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.40.

India and a strong propensity towards practicing Indian religion, food habits dress habits, rituals, marriage patterns etc. Rajagopal writes " The national cultural distinction that Indians abroad tend to idealize most is the strength of their family relationships and the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of their families". It is American couples who demand to get divorced at the drop of that, in this view; Indians stick it out through thick and thin. It is in American families that parents and children go their separate ways Indian families hang together ".<sup>19</sup> The concern to maintain their identity leads to those aspects of life that are maintained privately in an alien society. Children are socialized at an early stage within a family sting. It provides the basic needs for inculcating a sense of Indian-ness. In the upbringing of children also, the traditional Indian pattern of male dominance is reflected. Fathers become the object of respect and obedience whereas mothers are the source of nurturance and the transmitter of culture. Control over children is preferred to socialize them in Indian culture is prevalent in few cases. But mostly parents find their children becoming alien to hem and his is commonly understood as the result of he inadequate Indian upbringing . It is where Indian often look home ward to "an idealized site of acculturation" one where patriarchal system dominates the family life which relatively endorses patriarchal authority. Stress is made towards learning Indian languages and children are sent to special classes to learn heir regional language

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Indian identity is also fostered through maintaining membership of various religious and cultural association. Fisher emphasizes on the role of Asian Indian associations. These associations are basically concerned with fulfilling the social needs of the members but their agenda is much wider as hey also help in maintaining ties with respective home states and hey are mostly founded on the lines of religious affiliations. Participation in these associations helps in maintaining a strong sense of community. Fisher describes in detail about the various social and cultural activities like organising picnic, get-togethers, etc. of

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<sup>19</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, oppcit, p.54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

these organisations, which bind together. By citing the different roles of such organisations she asserts their primary goal to be the maintenance of ethnic identity. This role she attaches to both regional and pan-Indian associations. They also take up wider political goals that are of major concern to all the members of the Indian community.<sup>21</sup> Los Angeles based Federation of Hind Association (FHA), clearly illustrates the religious and political agenda of these organizations when it confers the awards upon Ball Thackeray, a Hindu politician in Mumbai, an avid admirer of Hitler who has been responsible for instituting pogroms against Muslims, and Sadhvi Rithambara who has openly declared that Muslims in India cannot expect to live there except on terms dictated by the Hindu community.<sup>22</sup>

### **Growth of Hindu Nationalism**

Vander Ver exerts the importance of migration for the construction of nationalism. The experience of discrimination in North America led to nationalist activity that centered on India. Eric Hosbawm describes that expatriate nationalism takes its form in the defense of the national identity amidst discrimination.<sup>23</sup> And thus migration plays a role in the spread of nationalism. In recent years one can notice a major popularity of Right -wing Hindu nationalist forces among the non- resident Indians.

The explanation of this evident paradox may lie in the very nature of expatriation. Most of the contemporary world's migrants are people in quest of material improvement, urge for financial security and better professional opportunities which they could not achieve in their own country. Most of them leave to acquire these material gains and with an intention to return. They intend to increase the dollars in their bank, for hat few more years in the alien world and then to return with triumph and prosperity.

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<sup>21</sup> Haxine P. Fisher, (1980), *The Indians of New York City*, Heritage Publishers, 1980, pp.55-57.

<sup>22</sup> Material utilized from Internet. "Indian in U.S." from an article from the Hindu.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Vander Veer (1994) "Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India, University of California Press, p.117.

But the new location poses its own problems and the years keep on stretching as the desired amount is still not achieved or their needs mounts up with the achievement of material gains, or they develop new ties (career, wife, children, schooling) of their new land, and then gradually realization seeps in that they never return to their homeland. And with this realization which is often not fully acknowledged, comes the welter of emotions: a sense of guilt at the abandonment of motherland, mixed with rage that motherland has somehow-through its own failings, political economic social forced them into this abandonment. Shashi Tharoor writes. " The attitude of expatriate to his homeland is that of the faithless lover who balms the woman has spurned for not having

Sufficiently merited his fidelity. That is why the support of extremism is doubly gratifying: It appears the expatriate's sense of guilt a not being involved in his homeland. And it vindicates his decision to abandon it. (If the homeland he has left did no have he faults he detests, he tells himself, he would not have had to leave it)" <sup>24</sup>.

But this is not the only reason for expatriate attachment to extremist Hindu nationalist forces like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The unequivocal needs to define himself in the alien land as he distinguishes himself from the inhabitants of the new land. The identity crisis arises de to continuous pressures of assimilation, racial hatred and discrimination. Thus in the midst of racism and alienation, second class citizenship and self hatred, he needs an identity to assert a label which he can be proud of yet which does not undermines his choice of immigration . Discriminations faced at many levels, for example in the form of raises and promotion being passed over in favour of white Americans, refusal to rent out houses, apartments and market places etc. The Indian women face dual discrimination of gender and race. Th e crisis is also due to increase in racial violence against south Asians which have occurred in places like New Jersey,

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<sup>24</sup> Shashi Tharoor, (1993), "Growing up Extremes On the Vicious Fanatism of Expatriates", Washington Post, 25, July, 1993.

Philadelphia, New York City, California etc.<sup>25</sup> The attachments with the religious and cultural associations is a manifestation of the sense of helplessness, psychological deprivation, and identity crisis that prevails among immigrants, and one way to cope with the crisis is to reinforce their Indian-ness. They left the reality of their country but not the essential values derived from their root. Thus they became even more assertive of their Indian-ness or Hindu identity.

But this nostalgia is based on the selectiveness of memory; is a simplified, idealized recollection of their roots, often reduced to their most elemental family, caste, region, religion. Amongst foreigners the immigrants cling to their "desi" image that admits no foreignness. This sense of guilt, desire to go back to their roots, to bring up their children in the midst of Indian culture and Indianness, the urge to be an organic part of culture, to feel closer to their soil and strengthen the linkages with their motherland leads them to cling to their religious and cultural identity. The link between emigrants and their homeland exists in the realm of imagination instead of a direct physical link. Indian-ness is felt and dreamed of. His view of what used to be home is divorced from the experience of home. The culture which is imagined in nostalgia, evolves in interaction with others on his native land which is different from what he imagined after years of expatriation.

Religion becomes the expression of distinctiveness among the immigrants, which evades issues of race and ethnicity. It becomes a significant factor not only in maintaining ties with their homeland but also away in which they could orient their lives in an alien land. The question of identity is at the forefront amidst the racial discrimination and religious conversions, which leads to reformulation of old cultural and religious identities. This also enhances the strong grounding of religious practices and rituals which serves as a cultural market of Hindu nation. Thus syncretic Hindu practices is followed by most of the Indian population which is defined in spiritual rather than racial terms to assert cultural differences.

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<sup>25</sup> Sucheta Majumdar, *op.cit.* P.50.

"The context of rituals and the ways in which they are enacted and the means by which people's cultural, religious and national identities are renewed and adjusted to their changed circumstances in foreign lands". This is the most favoured way of exercising difference.<sup>26</sup> Hinduism thus in the process becomes "ethnic religion and is not a single thing, rather it becomes amalgamation of sects, deities, sacred texts, temples, institutions, cultural practices, beliefs, rituals etc."<sup>27</sup> This has led a veritable religious revival among the expatriate community in United States which is dominated by upper caste Hindus. This religious identity articulates with a religious politics back in India. Thus instead of encouraging a sense of world citizenship the transnational experience seem to reinforce nationalist as well as religious identities.

Hinduism acquires a universalistic and nationalistic character, which hits the agenda of right-wing Hindutva forces as the very construction of Hindutva should be seen in the backdrop of emergence of Hinduism as a homogenous religion. The RSS and the paraphernalia of its affiliates -the core of Hindutva forces claims Hinduism to be universal religion and have consciously worked on to prove its universal and modern character, Vishwa Hind Parishad defines Hinduism as a civilization rather than as a religion.<sup>28</sup> The concept of large Hindu world emerges which completely excludes Muslims and Christians community. The base for this Hindu India and ethnic Hinduism emerges with this exclusivist character as these forces proclaim that "the Hindus are the obvious, the original, the natural inhabitants of this land as the very names Hindus and Hindustan testify... The Hindu race (is) united together by common traditions, by memories of common glory and disaster, by similar historical, political social religious and other experiences".<sup>29</sup> They say Hindu society has to be defended

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<sup>26</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, *Oppcit*, p.54.

<sup>27</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *Diaspora, India today: Come to History*, The Millenium Series, Vol.II.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Vander Veer, *oppcit*, p.134

<sup>29</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, (1991), "Hindus and Others: The Militant Hindu Construction", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 28, 1991, p.2997.



against "external" as well as its "internal" weaknesses, external weakness caused by religious conversion

And internal by the existence division within the Hindu community. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad perpetuates an argument about the decline from a golden age in which a society was based on Hindu Dharma and gave way to long period of barbaric oppression, first by Muslim rulers and then by Britishers .<sup>30</sup> This decline has to be stopped and Hindu society should be redeemed. By the successful marketing of this logic, VHP/ RSS in contemporary period champions the cause of Hindus outside and thus have considerable support. It successfully claims to counter the given crisis of Hindu Indian population abroad as their transnational network provides its members across the borders with a syncretist identity that represents all Hindus- indeed all Indians despite the differences which exists between them.<sup>31</sup>

Vishwa Hindu Parishad and World Hindu Council a so- called cultural organization provides a cultural and religious platform to the Asian Indians for whom the cultural nationalism is way to express their anxiety, to maintain their apolitical but cultural intentions or to avoid any links with the political problems back in India . VHP largely enchases upon this tendency which has become fairly "attractive" to large sections of Hindu population in United States. It has been entrusted with the task of creating a synthetic and monolithic "Hindu" identity; like its other counterpart which is a crucial prerequisite for the establishment of a hegemonic upper- caste dominated exclusivist Hindu Rashtra. With this agenda it operates among the "Hindu" expatriates of United States and all other places.<sup>32</sup>

Vishwa Hindu Parishad was founded in Bombay on the birthday of Lord Krishna 29 August 1964. A conference was organized at Sandeepany Sandhanalaya , the centre of Hindu missionary movement headed by Swami

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Vender Veer, *Oppcit.*, p.134.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>32</sup> Manini Chatterjee, (1993), *Saffron Scourage: The VHP's Communal fascism*, Frontline, September 10.

Chinmayananda. As his role was instrumental in organizing the conference where 150 religious leaders were invited, he became the president of the organization, Shivaras Shankar Apte an activist of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or national volunteer corps, was elected its general secretary . The objectives of the organization were:

1. to take steps to arouse consciousness, to consolidate and strengthen the Hindu society,
2. to protect , develop and spread Hindu values of life - ethical and spiritual ,
3. to establish and reinforce contacts with and help all Hindus living abroad,
4. to welcome back all who have gone out of the Hindu fold and to rehabilitate them as part and parcel of the universal Hindu society,
5. to render social services to humanity at large,

It has initiated welfare projects for the 170 million downtrodden brethren who have been suffering for centuries. These projects include schools, hospitals, libraries etc.

6. VHP , the world organization of six hundred million at present residing in eighty countries aspire (sic) to revitalize the eternal Hindu society by rearranging the code of conduct of our age old Dharma to met the needs of the changed times.
7. To eradicate the concept of untouchability from the Hindu society.<sup>33</sup>

It has recently been found VHP was founded on the initiative of M. S. Golwalker in order to provide an opportunity to the RSS to work with the religious leader also.<sup>34</sup> Hindutva forces i.e. VHP, BJP and RSS retain the upper

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Vander Veer, *Oppcit.*, p.130.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

caste hegemony by making out of the minority as an enemy and creating a superficial Hindu identity but they do work among the minorities to avoid conversions with the purpose to sanskritize them and use them in the immediate battle against Muslims and secularists. They operate with a political agenda to practice new form of synthesized Hinduism.

Romila Thapar "explains the real meaning of new Hinduism when she writes ' Hindu missionary organizations taking heir cue from Christian missionaries are active among the *adivasis*, untouchables and economically backward communities, converting them to a Hinduism ' as defined by the upper caste movements of the last two centuries. What is important to such missionaries is that these communities declare their support for the Dharma. That this " conversion" does little or nothing to change their status as *adivasis*, untouchables and so on and that they continue to be looked down upon by upper caste "Hindus " is of course of little consequence ".<sup>35</sup> Thus it is the low caste Hindus who are the ultimate sufferer at the time of riots, and upper caste Hindus who are part of the Hindutva forces, who enjoy the privileges of society.

It is no coincidence therefore that the "Globalisation 2000", a conference organised (in the name of celebrating a hundred years of Vivekananda's address to the parliament of religions in Chicago 1893), the crowd was predominantly of upper middle class NRI's, who is unaware that chronic poverty and inequality is one of the constant problems of India. What he seeks is an emotional compensation through the "Hindu" cause abroad. In 1982, it claimed to have three thousand branches in 23 countries.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad which has penetrated thoroughly in the daily lives of NRI's was founded in 1971, seven years after its founding in India.<sup>36</sup> Then the VHP of America is one branch of global network established by India's Hindu right over the years. It has largely formed its base among the first generation NRI's who are mostly professional, commercial or working class and capitalize

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<sup>35</sup> Romila Thapar, *Oppcit.*, pp.14-22.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Vander Veer, *Oppcit.*, p.132.

effectively on their yearnings to retain their cultural identity and to associate with people of common origin. Among these Indians they operate through multiple ways, including *Gita* reading groups, Mahila Sabhas, temple based functions and pujas.<sup>37</sup> It also organises festival celebrations, family counselling, social service programs and lecture courses. To attract second and third generation Hindus and to help these Indians to pass on their culture to the new generation in an alien atmosphere, they have opened the "Hindu student council". The council is part of the VHP and was formed in the year 1990, with the youth membership of second generation Indian in high schools and in campuses. It organises youth summer camps for children of primary section and for second generation immigrants, it provides forums where they can discuss common concern. The forum also provides a system of scholarship where they send students back to India to imbibe Indian culture and tradition.<sup>38</sup> The first Hindu students council was formed in 1987 at North-Eastern University (Boston) and by 1995 there are forty five campus chapters across the US and Canada. VHP utilizes the HSC's to further its programme, being the primary organisation which provides ideological directions. These HSC 's also draw upon multi-culturalism and champion Hindutva ideology by portraying it as the neglected culture of Hindu-Americans. They flourish in American universities.<sup>39</sup>

In addressing the women's question, the VHP which operates actively through HSC's, sets a different agenda from Hindutva back in India. Mathews and Prasad state the difference as "one component of the neglected culture is the idea that women are the embodiment of tradition: the Hindutva ensemble deploys such unreconstructed sexist ideas with the "allowance " that women should have a career. These unbalanced and uneven notions let the HSC's to inaugurate a project on status of Hindu women whose first outcome (a conference at MIT in 1996) ended in confusion and rhetorical declarations (" the Hindu system suggest

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<sup>37</sup> Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad (1996), "The Saffron dollar: Pehle Paisa Phir Bhagwa", Himal South Asia, p.39.

<sup>38</sup> Krishna Kumar, (1993), "Behind the VHP of America", Frontline, September 10, p.11.

<sup>39</sup> Biju Mathews and Vijay Prashad, Oppcit., pp.39-40.

not only equal rights for women but gives more respect and reverence"). Eager to be "relevant", the HSC /VHPA uses the question of women's liberation to obscure its own conservative agenda towards women. In the US, Yankee Hindutva understands "women" as a resource by which the community might increase its earnings capacity and its power: this is the motivation rather than any feminist ideal for the difference in the agendas and *desi* Hindutva".<sup>40</sup>

It reflects that it adopts popular issues and the popular medium, given the time and space, to gain popularity and to spread its nationalist agenda. It is significant to note that towards the end of the Eighties Hindu Right underwent considerable changes as it adapted popular religious rituals and symbolism in a systematic fashion. The VHP designed its strategies carefully, drawing on local and regional dialects and idioms rather than high caste and elite forms. The publicity tactics which is media-oriented and changed according to the given situation has been successful in offering a range of identities- from a spiritual to a politicized Hindu identity. These changes broaden their appeal and militant Hindu rhetoric attracted a whole range of people especially small town youths and thus Hindu Right could come close to the electoral arena.<sup>41</sup>

The transnational character of Hindu nationalism also reflect upon their "syncretized Hinduism" or the universalised Hinduism which these forces claim. Hinduism becomes a homogenous religion, acquires global character.<sup>42</sup> It is a major component of VHP's refined cultural nationalism as it claims this new Hinduism to be a national religion. VHP's global network and its presence in United States helps it in raising funds for its party programmes and acquires an international face. The funds are collected in the name of charitable donations and also used for funding the VHP organisations in India.

Over the years, these NRIs have been funding VHPA, which is then transferred to India. It is well known that for *shilapujan* ceremonies, millions of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>41</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, *Oppcit.*, pp.47-48.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Vander Veer, *Oppcit.*, p.134.

dollars in cash and kind reached India. Between 1990-92, the average income of VHPA was \$385,462 and by 1993, it went up to \$1,057,147.<sup>43</sup> This funding serves the political purpose back in India as it legitimises the activities of the Hindu fascist forces. The BJP has worked out various policies to attract the intellectual and financial resources of NRIs and to increase its popularity amongst Indians abroad.

The above discussion reflects upon the relationship between Hindu nationalism and expatriate Indian community in United States. The upsurge of Hindu nationalism in the form of cultural nationalism is completely the result of the quest of identity in the large racial community. The imagery linkages with the motherland helps in the assertion of national identity. It should be noted that the homeland is always imagined as 'motherland " a feminine figure which is pure, pious and virtuous. In Indian nationalist discourse women is the mother of the nation, the repository of the national culture and begetter of the future sons of the country. Hence she has to be controlled, checked and at the same time worshipped as the Goddess. This image of the motherland provide a homogenous and monolithic picture of Indian nation. VHP and other Hindutva forces are successful in their design to portray India as a Hindu nation with a homogenous Hindu culture. This is primarily why it gains importance among the NRI's because the maintenance of national identity for them is equal to asserting Hindu religious and cultural identity. This identity or national culture is represented by women of the nation. In an attempt to show the relation between women and nation, and to explain how institutions like family, marriage and religion utilize the female body as the popular vehicle for cultural assertion of national identity even among NRI's. I take the case of two commercial Hindi films here.

### **Popular Hindi cinema and representation of national culture**

Before involving ourselves in the process of analysis, it should be pointed out that sociological analysis have since long shown a sense of reluctance towards the usage of print literature or any other art form as a primary source of

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<sup>43</sup> Biju Mathews and Vijay Prashad, *Oppcit.*, p.42.

analysis as it also points out towards its drawbacks or methodological pitfalls. But the rise of cultural studies, critics are interested not only in print literature but also theatre, film, video, photography and other visual arts, performance arts, popular culture, mass culture etc., which opens up an arena of a new kind of data which might focus on new dimensions of human social behaviour and experience, useful for sociological analysis and "otherwise relatively inaccessible".<sup>44</sup>

In India the mass media are primary technologies of ideologies with the Hindi popular cinema standing in the forefront, as it adopts a totalist framework and its potential to be enthusiastically received by a large section of the population. Leaving the great works of art, most of the conventional Hindi films become subservient to the dominant ideology as it fails to critique it or distance from it with the fear of unacceptability in the mainstream. Thus instead of challenging the contemporary ideological construct, it tends to perpetuate and reinforce them.<sup>45</sup> It highlights the outward change in the Indian situation restricting itself to popular constructions. The reflection of contemporary problems and new developments do get reflected in new thematic concerns like criticism of political system, women's role and identity, patterns of urban and rural migration, economic changes like opening of the market and its impact on common man, rise in violence, etc.<sup>46</sup> But they finally endorse the mainstream ideology.

Contemporary Hindi popular cinema as pointed out by various writers, focuses on the web of relations particularly on the relations of the sexes, relations

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<sup>44</sup> Patricia Uberoi (1998), "The diaspora comes home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ", *Contribution to Indian Sociology* 32, 2, p.306.

<sup>45</sup> Fareeduddin Kazmi (1981), "How angry is angry young man? Rebellion in Conventional Hindi Film", *India International Centre quarterly* 8,1, p.137.

<sup>46</sup> Aruna Vasudev (1986), *The New Indian Cinema*, Macmillan India Ltd.

between the social classes, relations within the family, etc. It acquires various narrative strategies to show the concern, anxiety and dilemma related to morality in the every day life of the Indians. These narratives are linked with the ideas of tradition and nation.<sup>47</sup> Thomas considers Hindi cinema as an arena of expression related to discourses like 'female chastity', nationalism, "morality", national identity which intersect with each other and have definite political implications. She argues the film is a strong medium of the construction of national identity. The three important ways in which it is involved in doing so are, first the usage of nationalistic and patriotic themes, second through the construction of ideal moral world through the notion of a third set of Indian conventions of film form which are drastically different from other foreign films.<sup>48</sup> Thus Vasudevan rightly points out that the role of cinema when he writes "The institution of cinema has certain distinct presence in society. It not only affords us the ornate indulgence of our desire to look, it also positions itself to other institutions and representational drives. This placement may be in relation to certain other media such as broadcasting central because of the importance of film songs. But more complexly the cinema is aligned with encompassing images of society figuration which present it in relation to definite discourses about tradition, modernity and formations of subjectivity and identity".<sup>49</sup>

This sets the background to look into the case of the popular Hindi films chosen here for analysis. The films as mentioned earlier are *Purab aur Paschim* (East and West, Director Manoj Kumar, 1970) and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (those with heart will win the bride, Director Aditya Chopra, 1995). These films are one of the fewer efforts made to look at the Indian experience abroad i.e. look straight into the issue of Indian diaspora. This constitutes one of the major reasons to study them. The reason behind choosing a film from the 70's

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<sup>47</sup> Patricia Uberoi, *Oppcit.*, p.306.

<sup>48</sup> Rosie Thomas, 1996 (1995), "Melodrama and the negotiation of morality in Mainstream Hindi Film", in Breckenridge A. Carol (ed.) *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in Contemporary India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.159.

<sup>49</sup> Ravi Vasudevan (1991), "Cultural Space of a film narrative, Interpreting *Kismet* (Bombay Talkies, 1943)", *Occasional paper on History and Society*, Second series, Number XXXVII.



is to show how mainstream Hindi cinema became the main source of celebrating "indigenous" cultural populism and how it portrayed the West as "the other". The films from the last two decades have played a significant role in propagating a sense of nostalgia. They also reveal how political parties create an aggressive new frontier of Right-wing Hindutva for indigenous populism. This kind of nostalgia has played in the rhetoric of an Indian diaspora which is well reflected in the other film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. It is also significant to know that portrayal of women in these films makes the task of the filmmaker easier to explain and to put across the agenda of the films to the audience.

*Purab aur Paschim* was a stridently nationalistic melodrama within which Manoj kumar launched himself as good patriotic hero 'Bharat'. The very title of the film suggest that sharp contrast is drawn between east and west where east is posed to be the better option for Indians abroad. A small patriotic family is portrayed which upholds strong Hindu traditional and religious values and is ideal for the society and in large for the nation. Bharat (Manoj Kumar) is a posthumous child of a patriotic freedom fighter who dies in an encounter with the British police when he visits his pregnant wife (Kamini Kaushal) for a short while. Harnam (Pran), a close family friend and neighbour is the informer who informs about Bharat's father in exchange of large sum of money. The informer is condemned by his father (Ashok Kumar) and wife (Nirupa Roy), as a traitor and his wife takes up extreme step of severing material ties by rubbing away her vermilion (Sindoor). Being rejected by his family, he abandons both his wife and father, takes away his son silently and migrates to London, where his son grows up as Prem Chopra in western tradition. On the other hand Bharat grows up as an ideal Indian male imbued with nationalist sentiments. He happens to get a chance to study in London at the earnest request of his father's childhood friend (Madan Puri) - an NRI who had left India and settled down in London with a second-generation Indian wife. Consequently they had a daughter (Saira Banu) and a son (Rajendranath) brought up in the western tradition. Preeti (Saira Banu) gets attracted by Bharat's simplicity, ideals and patriotic zeal and so gradually falls in love with him. This fact is disliked by Prem Chopra who considers his

friend Preeti as his beloved. Although the love between Preeti and Bharat blossoms and gets parental consent, tension creeps in as Preeti abhors the idea of migrating back to India. However, Bharat persuades her to give in to a trial trip, failing upon which they would return to London. Preeti agrees for a short trip to India. On reaching India, Preeti travels extensively all over India. The family developments, rituals and tradition marked by love and sacrifice makes Preeti realize the richness of the so-called Indian culture. She decides to stay back as she transforms into a pure 'Bhartiya Nari', Prem Chopra fails in his unscrupulous designs and is sent behind the bars as he kills his grandfather (Ashok Kumar). In the end Madan Puri along with his family and also Harnam (Pran) decide to stay back and the film ends with a note of happiness and pride in Indian culture.

The film raises several issues pertinent to the diasporic Indians. It reflects the guilt, anxiety and restlessness of the NRI through the character of Pran who betrays his nation and migrates. Though he emerges as one of the most affluent Indians, he has no peace and hence tries to overcome his guilt by resorting to drink. The film also attempts to counter the stereotypical notions of the East as the land of the maharajas, nawabs, yogis, snake-charmer, rope-trick and sacred cows. As against these stereotypes, it highlights India as the land of Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash, as the land of civilizations like the Indus valley, a land which invented zero. The song, *Hai preet jahan ki Reet, mein geet wahan ke gata hun/Bharat ka rehne wala hun, Bharat ke Geet sunata hun* glorifies India for its rich tradition and culture, projecting it superior to the West. The song is placed in a situation where Indian culture is ridiculed by the Indians themselves, who are abroad. "Bharat" Manoj Kumar as a true patriot asserts his presence and by implication, the Indian presence by replying to this insult in the form of the song. The lyrics written by Indivar, have played a significant role in conveying the message of the film.

The film draws a sharp contrast between the East and the West through various narrative strategies. It blatantly portrays the West as the other where the life is strange, with no respect for elders, lack of family values and all that which India feels proud of. It is portrayed as villain. It takes away their Indianness. It is

individualistic, impersonal and virtue-less. India, on the other hand stands for collectivity, high moral values, strong family bonds, respect for elders and women and a place with a high sense of brotherhood. For example, Harnam (Pran) who is condemned for his act of infidelity by the society becomes a symbol of Indianness through his rejection. What is significant here is the way the opposition between good and bad is shown. This film like the other popular Hindi films adopts the popular dichotomy between moral and immoral. Thomas suggests that 'good' is mostly the male protagonist or the ideal Indian and is always associated with the traditional. The 'bad' is the villain, associated with the western or non-Indian<sup>50</sup>. Here in the given film, Prem Chopra the villain portrays the west and Manoj Kumar, The patriotic Indian hero stands in sharp contrast as the East. The contradiction is apparent in various episodes of the film. The audience is continuously made to realize the glory of Indian culture and is provided with a sense of pride in being a Hindu or Indian. The film strengthens the notion of the Hindu Rashtra- India as the land of the Hindus.

Through out the film the centre of activity in India is shown around the temple with the popular *bhajan* "Om jai Jagdish hare" going on in the background. The priest of the temple, Ashok Kumar, clad by the 'Hare Rama' shawl is the ultimate preacher, the one who shows the right path. Thus the film's agenda is a straight cut endorsement of Hinduism as the religion of India. It also reflects its universal appeal by showing its ISCKON followers located in London.

The other striking feature of the film is the portrayal of women. As in most other films, here too, the different female characters have been used to uphold the Indian culture. The popular constructions that one finds here are as the signifier of nation, begetter of future citizens and the symbol of honour. There are four major female characters in the film. Nirupa Roy plays the wife of Harnam (Pran) and the mother of Prem Chopra. She symbolises the ideal Hindu *pativrata*, who despite her subservience to her husband dutifully shows him the right path of service to the nation when he strays. She refuses to wear *sindoor*. She is thus an

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<sup>50</sup> Rosie Thomas, *Oppcit.*, p.160.

ideal Gandhian women, imbued with the virtues of sacrifice, obedience and purity. At the same time, she refuses to be the wife of a traitor.

Kamini Kaushal, mother of Bharat, like Nirupa Roy is an ideal Hindu woman too. She is the wife of a patriot and gives birth to a patriot. The martyrdom of her freedom fighter husband is immortalised by the *sindoor* or vermilion mark on her forehead. She wears it defiantly upon being a widow too. The accent is on her identity as mother. Both Nirupa Roy and Kamini Kaushal symbolise the mother-nation trope. They complement each other. While the widow, dressed in white wears *sindoor*, the married woman in coloured saree doesn't wear any. While upholding Indian tradition, love, maternal protection, they become speechless when confronted with the aggressive West. At the same time, they assert their Indianness through silent gestures. Thus both these mothers symbolise the two different models of motherhood- the icon of motherland with religious symbolism and the future mother India taking upon herself the role of bringing up the future citizens of Bharatvarsha.<sup>51</sup>

The other two female characters are Bharathi, daughter of Nirupa Roy and the heroine Preeti (Saira Banu). Bharathi appears as an educated Indian woman. She is the image of the new woman who is not only educated but also possesses the inner spirituality and greatness of Hindu culture. That this Indian culture is based on patriarchal relations is evident from the fact that she never expresses her love for Bharat and in the end, she agrees to marry Vinod Khanna on Bharat's orders, as an act of sacrifice. In the process, she becomes the ideal example with which Bharat can beat Saira Banu or Preeti. Thus the woman's sexuality is always compromised, her fate decided by the men in her life.

Unlike Bharathi, Saira Banu, a second generation NRI, is a chain smoker and addicted to alcohol. She hates the very idea of settling down in India, but in the end she discovers her true identity as an Indian woman. According to Mridula Sinha, "Nature has endowed women with the responsibility of motherhood and

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<sup>51</sup> Mridula Sinha, (1996), "Woman Command equality, respect and security", Organizer, December 15, 1996.

this makes her different from man. This also accords her a higher place in society. In Indian philosophy and society, a young unmarried girl is worshipped. She is the potential mother (goddess). The two words 'mother' and 'goddess' are synonymous. Mother is the goddess because she helps mankind to survive."<sup>52</sup>

Manoj Kumar as a director propounds his Hindutva philosophy in the film. He portrays women as nation through various methods. In the famous song, *Dulhan chali, Pahan chali, Teen rang ki choli*, woman becomes the signifier of the tri-colour flag. The song expresses the relationship between nationalism and gender as it describes the nation by juxtaposing it with the characteristics of the Indian woman: *Mel milap ki Mehendi rachai/ Balidan ki murat/ Mukh chamke jaise Himalaya ki choti// Dushman ki neeyat khisk.../Aur chamkegi, Aur Nikhregi/ apni Azadi ki Dulhaniya/ Deep ke upar Holi/Desh Prem ki Azadi dulhaniya ka var hai/ Uske liye Jawaan baha sakte hain khoon ki Ganga/ Sena leke chalti hai Tiranga/ Ho koi bhi Bhasha-bhashi/ Sabse pehle hai Bharat vasii*. The song openly expresses the Indian nation as woman. This construction fits in the logic of Hindutva forces and hence it appeals to a large section of non-resident Indians. As Sunder Rajan writes, "She is Indian in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal and linguistic specificities, but does not thereby become 'westernised'"<sup>53</sup> Hindu nationalism emphasises on such images of women for political purposes.

The new form of 'syncretised' Hinduism establishes the patriarchal set-up where women are not only the victims of patriarchal authority but act as agents for the system. Not only the signifiers but also the agents of culture and tradition. If one explores the role of women in the neo-fascist Hindu rashtra, one "that had kept its women in obscure and unknown positions in keeping with its generally orthodox gender perspective",<sup>54</sup> one discovers that the RSS was an all-male

<sup>52</sup> Indira Chowdry (1998), *The Frait Hero and Virile History: Gender and Politics of Culture*, Oxford University Press, pp.95-96.

<sup>53</sup> Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan. 1993, *Real and Imagined women: Gender, Culture and postcolonialism* Routledge p: 5

<sup>54</sup> Tanika Sarkar (1993), "The Women of the Hindutva Brigade", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholar*, Vol.25, p.17.

organization until 1936, as it refused to allow women in its fold. In 1936, a separate women's wing was established in order to meet the crisis of "a poor mass base."<sup>55</sup> The acceptance of women was primarily because Golwalkar decided that "women are predominantly mothers who could help the sangh cause most by rearing their children within the RSS framework of *samskaras*- a combination of family ritual and unquestioning deference towards family elders and RSS leaders."<sup>56</sup> This confirmed the role of women as mothers, on the one hand responsible for transcending and perpetuating its ideology and on the other hand restricting them to the familial structure of rearing and bearing children. Thus it prevented them from seeing the larger issues of women or the problem of their exploited sisters. The RSS drew its inspiration from the revivalist Hindu nationalism in imagining Hindu women as a pure space unaffected by colonialism. The future nation was an imagined one but it added new meaning to the role of women by involving them as comrades or sisters at the level of the VHP and the BJP, its cultural and electoral wings respectively. The absence of women clearly signifies the lack of women in the highest decision making body.<sup>57</sup> The role of decision making was entrusted to its men, who were the head, the supreme beings. Parents too had complete authority. It also included elements of the modern philosophy such as the empowerment of women through education, strict physical training etc. But ultimately it confined women to the mother role to protect the Hindu nation from its Muslim oppressor and to save Hindu women from Muslim brutalities.

Thus for all their visibility and vocalness, women within Hindutva had to operate within the boundaries made by the all-male body of the RSS. They have to extol the ideology of domesticity. Tanika Sarkar points out:" In very recent times, the accent on conservative domesticity threatens to drown out the modernistic elements and to return women to a far more rigidly and sternly defined home-making role that begins to smack of a determined fundamentalist

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

patriarchy. The veteran VHP leader Bamdev has demanded the restoration of polygamy and the abolition of divorce among Hindus, and BJP women leaders like Vijayraje Scindia and Mridula Sinha have defended widow immolation and dowries and have asked women to retire from paid employment into domesticity."<sup>58</sup>

In a similar vein, the other film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* expresses thematic concerns related to transnational location and problems related to the "internationalism of the middle class family" and for the "articulation of Indian identity in a globalized world."<sup>59</sup> The film also addresses the problem of diaspora but differs from the earlier film even as its narrative revolves around the institution of marriage, family and kinship. It highlights the articulation of an Indian identity through these institutions. Discussing DDLG with *Pardes*, Patricia Uberoi points out, "Both are love stories involving Indians settled abroad. And both identify a specific set of 'family values' with the essence of being Indian. Or to put it the other way around, both define Indianness with reference to specificities of family life, the institution of courtship and marriage in particular."<sup>60</sup>

Like most other commercial Hindi films, this film also provides an urban, quasi-westernized, culturally vague background for an immediate audience identification. The film revolves around the cultural reproduction of Indianness which gets typically focussed around the female body and sexuality. The film highlights the traditional family values and reiterates the importance of customs and rituals.

In DDLG, Chowdhry Baldev Singh (Amrish Puri) is a London based owner of a general store. He wants to return to his roots by forcing his daughter Simran (Kajol) to marry the son of his old friend, Ajit (Satish Shah), whom he

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Patricia Uberoi, *opcit*, p.305.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., *Pardes* was another film with the same theme as DDLG, Director was Subhash Ghai and was released in 1997.

has not met for the last 20 years. The marriage has been fixed without Simran's consent. Simran goes on a trip to Europe along with her friends with a promise of not committing any "wrongs". While on the tour, she meets Raj (Shahrukh Khan) and they fall in love. On discovering this, Simran's father feels completely cheated. He uproots his family overnight and returns to Punjab, where they are welcomed by dancing peasants in yellow mustard fields. Raj too follows suit, promising to rescue Simran from her intended marriage, but only by seeking the approval of her parents. Very soon, he manages to integrate into the groom's household and become a family member of sorts. He takes Simran's mother (Farida Jalal) into confidence and promises to marry her daughter in the right way. With the turn of events, the marriage date is postponed by the wishes of Simran's elderly grandmother. However, when Baldev Singh discovers the truth, out of sheer hatred, he kicks out and humiliates Raj. While Raj and his father (Anupam Kher) are waiting in the platform, Kuljeet (Ajit's son) along with his friends attacks them in order to avenge the insult to them. The fight ends when the two sets of parents arrive and Baldev allows Simran to go into Raj's arms as he has changed his opinion about him after seeing his sacrifice in the wider interest of the family.

The film also begins with the note of the NRI'S anxiety and restlessness. Baldev Singh, though the owner of a general store and therefore quite prosperous is unhappy in an alien atmosphere. His conversation with himself where he says: "Everyday I pass down this road and it asks me 'who is Chowdhry Baldev Singh, where has he come from? What is he doing here', what can I reply? I have spent so many years of my life here and still this land is alien to me", explains his urge for an identity, a sense of belongingness which he is unable to get in an alien land. His cultural roots call him back. This is the dilemma faced by many Indians abroad-the dilemma of having to choose between money and homeland. This leads to the exercising of old and conservative rituals and traditions which becomes the most acceptable way to assert the Indian identity.

The second important thing which the film highlights is the elaborate rituals of marriage. Of late the Hindi film narrative has involved portrayal of



elaborate Hindu rituals to assert Indianness, *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* (Director: Suraj Barjatya) is another film which as Barucha notes is "a family entertainment par-excellence, celebrating one supremely human event-*shaadi*, with all the conventions, rituals and merriment surrounding it."<sup>61</sup> These films are pointed out to be clean films, fit for family entertainment and are big hits. What one notices is the extra glorification of ritual and a presentation of the ritual as a part of a homogenous Indian culture. This clearly serves the ideology of Hindu Nationalism. Though brought up in London, Simran is shown as practising "Karva chauth"(a religious ceremony during which women fast for the long life of their husbands.)

The film endorses patriarchal structure completely where the father is the ultimate decision-maker. Baldev Singh arranges his daughter's marriage without her consent and when she is upset her father interprets it as 'her shyness.' He says, "See, Lajo, She is feeling shy. This is our culture, our Indian culture. "He feels proud of bringing up his daughter to feel shy at any reference to the subject of marriage. The role of Simran's mother is minimal. She herself is a victim of patriarchy and has had to sacrifice her life for her father, husband and brother's sake. She is caught between her husband and Raj who refuses to heed her suggestion to elope with Simran. She stands by her daughter (a supposedly progressive stand taken by the director) but fails to convince Raj. This shows that only the consent of the father can legitimize the relationship. The right way for a marriage is only with the consent of the parents, and especially the father. This is the culture and tradition of India. The tussle is between two male characters and the females are rather like puppets completely relying on the decision of the patriarch. At the end when Baldev rigidly maintains his stand, Raj succumbs to him and refuses to marry against Simran's father's wishes. Simran's wishes, desires and expectations are of no importance and she is expected to sacrifice them at the altar of Baldev's and Raj's wishes and for the sake of her family's

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<sup>61</sup> Rustam Bharucha (1995), "Utopia in Bollywood 'Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!'", Economic and Political Weekly, 30,15, p.801.

honour and pride. It's ultimately the woman who is controlled and is expected to act within the framework provided by man. Thus female sexuality is curbed in order to maintain honour and to preserve Indian culture and identity.

Both Baldev and Raj make great efforts throughout the film to assert the Indian identity and to express "Indianness". Baldev negotiates the marriage with his friend's son and is proud of it. Simran's marriage with Raj could subvert the concept of marriage as an alliance. The arranging of marriage at Simran's childhood is quite natural as it is shown as an essence of Indian culture where children abide by their parents' decisions. Baldev takes pride in his daughter's "purity" and "chastity" considered to essential to Indian womanhood. Raj, while opposing the tradition of parents' arranging marriages for their daughters without the consent of the daughters strongly believes in the Hindu way of marriage that can take place legitimately only with the parents' consent. Raj is even willing to sacrifice his love for the sake of this particular aspect of Indian culture. He expresses his Indianness when he returns Simran to her father:

Our mother and father gave us life and love,

We have no right to disobey them.

(to Simran) I have no right over you.

Your father was right. I am a nobody.

I should have known that love can't fix everything.

(to Baldev Singh) Here, she is yours.

Thus the whole concept of Indianness gets defined by controlling the woman's body and using the woman as a symbol. *Purab\_aur\_Paschim* confirms it even more strongly. A sequence in the film shows a man, (Manmohan) named Mohan who comes as a student to England. Though he is married, he woos an English girl. Bharat, on knowing this, reveals Mohan's secret to the girl who calls

his wife and child. In their presence she asks him whether they are his family. Manmohan, on seeing his wife, hits her in a rage. The English girl reacts immediately and asks his wife to "hit him back". The father of the wife intervenes and tries to say that Indian women worship their husbands. She cannot hit her husband as her place is at the feet of her husband.

These sequences from the film clearly reflect the director's intention of portrayal of patriarchal structures, which are considered to be normative, and a way of life in the Indian culture.

Thus it can be seen that patriarchy acquires a new meaning in the twentieth century marked by the forces of Hindutva which empowers women with certain modern principles and at the same time pushes her to the realm of domesticity, an important factor necessary for the strengthening of the family. The Hindu Right glorifies the role of the family in the making of the nation. Mridula Sinha in an article in the Organizer says, "For the progress of any society, the strengthening of the family as an institution is necessary. If the families gets broken, nothing would be left with women or society."<sup>62</sup>

What is important to note here is that these films and also *Pardes* appeal doubly to Indian diaspora as it grafts the sense of belongingness, warmth and togetherness and at the same time strengthens the Indian identity by portraying Indian culture as a monolithic Hindu culture. It caters to the need of the Indian population abroad, which easily identifies itself with the thematic attempts. As Patricia Uberoi points out that these films highlight the "contradiction between transnational location and the retention of Indian identity."<sup>63</sup> Both the films use the female character to portray the Indian nation- a nation of sacrifice, love and high moral values.

Hindu nationalism taps the sentiment of NRIs to the hilt. It hits at the exact point and gains popularity by appropriating various popular media like the

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<sup>62</sup> Mridula Sinha, *Oppcit.*, p.26.

<sup>63</sup> Patricia Uberoi, *Oppcit.*, p.306.

films and songs. It captures the urge of Indians to preserve their Indian culture as distinct in the "melting pot." "This nationalism rises with its new package of culturalism, which focusses on the NRI nostalgia for India, the cherished homeland. Appadurai explains this phenomena when he says, "deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, art, impresaios and travel agencies, which thrive on the need of the deterritorialized population for contact with its homeland. Naturally these invented homelands, which constituted the mediascapes of deterritorialized groups often become sufficiently fantastic and one-sided that they provide the material for new ideoscapes in which ethnic conflict can begin to errupt".<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 1997 (1996), *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*, Delhi Oxford Press, p.53.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

In the following work the attempt has been made to study the dynamics of nationalism and gender. The attempt is to highlight the presence of Hindu nationalism in Indian diaspora and its impact on Indian immigrant women. The study highlights the fact that the constructions of Hindu nationalism, necessarily involves the redefinition of Indian women. It uses the symbolic constructs of femininity for its nationalist project and hence controls the Indian women's sexuality. The attempt is also to understand the complex and contradictory relationship between nation and women.

The women question has always arisen in tandem with the national question and nationalism has a way of resolving it in keeping with the political agenda central to it. The 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonial Hindu nationalism resolved the women's question not on a humanitarian basis, but to suit its long drawn agenda of cultural nationalism. The same can be said of the Post-Independence Hindu nationalism, which continued the accent on 'motherhood', thus glorifying women not only as mother of the nation but also as goddesses. It calls for racial purity and return to the golden age in order to save the country from "external" forces. While it appears to allow women to step into the public arena, this is circumscribed by a well-defined patriarchal boundary. It tries to explode the myth of women as victims and healers and tries to give them agency. But this agency is only with respect to the defence of the woman against the foreign oppressor. Thus Hindu nationalism endorses contradictory relationship between nationalism and women. In the process, it appropriates women's sexuality by portraying women as the signifier of the nation's honour, culture, prestige and purity.

This work makes an effort to understand the reciprocity between nationalism and sexuality and shows that one can't be studied without the other. Thus neither nationalism nor sexuality is a discrete or autonomous entity. Keeping this in mind, the attempt is to explore this relationship in the newer context of "Diaspora". How does Diaspora provide an even more fertile ground for nourishing this relationship?

In Diaspora, the urge is to cling to the "national" culture as a ploy to assert one's national identity and racial superiority. This leads to the reformulation of the same patriarchal order in newer ways. The growth of Hindu nationalism among the expatriate Indian community thus throws open the question of the relationship between women and Hindu nationalism in both pre and post-independence India.

The Indian diaspora, which emerged as a result of the Indentured labour system to the plantations of British colonies simultaneously, involved the growth of an anti-colonial struggle. The present study reveals the concerns of the Indian Nationalists back home, their concern about the honour of the Hindu *jati*, which dominated as a monolithic structure to combat colonialism. This effort to maintain the image of a pure and culturally superior nation was reflected in the anti-Indenture campaign back in India. The emphasis throughout was to save the honour of Indian woman abroad from the clutches of the colonial patriarchs. This threat was then extended to imply a threat to the chastity and virtue of the entire collective of Indian women.

The growth of militant Hindu nationalism, i.e., the Post-Independence Hindu nationalism perpetrated by Hindutva forces like the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad among the 20<sup>th</sup> century diasporic Indian communities is phenomenal. The VHP has spread its tentacles among the Indian diaspora. The culture and religious alternative proffered by the VHP has led to its immense popularity among the non-resident Indians. The NRIs of the US assert their identity in the form of cultural and religious practices in order to maintain their links with the homeland. This assertion finds its manifestation in the family values, customs, rituals and even marriage patterns. Thus this confirms the patriarchal order where men are the protectors and beneficiaries and women the reproducers and signifiers, who strengthen the cause of Hindu nationalism.

In this context, an attempt has been made to look at the causes of the popularity of two commercial Hindi films, which centre around the lives of non-

resident Indians. It can be said that the popularity of these two films both overseas as well as in India is contingent upon its portrayal of man's relationship with the nation as woman. It endorses the dominant Hindu culture and glorifies the Hindu family system, its rituals, customs and tradition as the national culture. Woman is pure and virtuous and thus worshipped. Though this new woman is educated and enjoys a measure of freedom, this is an index of modernity's trappings, the economic necessity generated by modernism. Hence the need to frame her within the patriarchal order.

The study expresses its limitation as far as it is unable to do an in-depth analysis of the various cultural forms which diasporic nationalism has taken in the contemporary period. The need is to go beyond the paradigm of woman as victims and to re-locate the question of women's consent within patriarchy which further perpetrates oppression and strengthens the relationship between women and sexuality.

Thus the need is to explore the contemporary developments taking in the field of Indian diaspora. In this context, it becomes crucial to give an outline of the various trends and cultural forms through which the Indian diaspora is finding an expression. The *Chutney-Soca* debates which emerged in the Caribbean in the 80s involves the issue of female sexuality vis-à-vis Indian women. The carnival time in Trinidad is filled with *soca*, the distinct Trinidadian rhythm with "Calypso". The carnival is said to be the liberated spirit of the slave society. It gives voice both to Trinidadian as well as Indian culture. The objection raised by various Hindu religious and cultural groups on such an expression where both music and dance are used need to be explored. Even though it has been studied by various scholars, it is still relevant, seeing the unprecedented growth of Hindu nationalism in the Caribbean.

In the same light, the spate of matrimonials which cater to the needs of the NRI's also raises pertinent questions. Unlike in the 70s, when there was a trend to marry the foreigner, among the Indian expatriate community and thus assimilate with the society there, the recent trends reveal an increasing desire for the *desi*



*bahu* or the traditional bride. This has also been derogatorily referred to as housemaid shopping. The increase in the availability of educated, skilled, professional class of NRI grooms and their need for a traditional house keeper, who can make Indian food and preside over religious and cultural ceremonies has made explicit the relationship between women and national expression in foreign locales. The 'need' leads to a certain denial within orthodox traditional structure. In other words, the tradition that is so eagerly sought and projected is itself compromised as conditions for its reproduction are not available in overseas context. For example, the joint family set up that is idealised becomes an impossibility as conditions of work and residence do not permit it. Similarly, while some aspects of tradition are accepted, others are condemned as "too traditional". The celebration of romantic love in Hindi films, while it poses a threat to the traditional patriarchal authority is at the same time a desired thing. This desire is then negotiated in such a way that female sexuality and female agency are inscribed or moulded in selective and appropriate ways, thus minimising the threat to the patriarchal locus. The bogey of Indian identity becomes the crux around which these negotiations take place.

Again, the increased institutionalisation of Indian festivals, the overwhelming participation and mass mobilization in them, not seen back home is also reflective of a certain display mentality that places its identity in the image of itself. Thus the grandiose scale and showmanship exhibited in these festivals is meant to be an indication of their commitment to Indian culture. Take for instance, the massive scale in which the "Mahashivratri" festival is celebrated in Mauritius, where Indians enjoyed an "official holiday". For the Hindu political organisations, these rituals and festivals become an occasion to strengthen their base and derive monetary collections. Thus it becomes very important to study these cultural expressions of the diaspora and the simultaneity between these trends and the growth of Hindu nationalism.

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