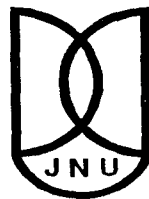


**FEMINIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIAN
SOCIOLOGY: A STUDY OF SELECT TEXTS**

*Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in
Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the award of the Degree
of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

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This dissertation entitled, '**Feminist Contributions to Indian Sociology: A Study of Select Texts**' submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university has not been submitted previously for any other degree of this university or other university and is my original work.

Shalinee Gusain
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We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

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To my parents.....

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Introduction

Introduction

In this dissertation, we wish to reflect on feminist contributions to Indian Sociology. We know that there is the politics of knowledge, and sociology, as an academic discipline cannot be understood adequately if we dissociate it from the political context. As women's movements are becoming overwhelmingly powerful, sociology as a body of knowledge is bound to be influenced by these new movements and associated social concerns.

In fact, a sociology of sociology is always needed for a critical self-reflective exercise. If we look at the history of formal academic sociology as it developed in the west in the 18th century, we can understand its organic linkage with the socio-political context of that era. In fact, 18th century European enlightenment and the new social reality that emerged particularly after the two revolutions namely, Industrial revolution and the French revolution provided the social context in which sociology was born. Early sociologists like Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte were trying to make sense of the new modern age, its problems of order, models and value systems. In fact, this attempt to cope with modernity and make sense of it was that gave a distinctive identity to even classical sociology as developed by Durkhiem, Weber and Marx, in the late 19th and early 20th century.

All of them in their own ways were also thinking of a new method of learning based on scientific objectivity and rationality. As sociology, as a discipline

developed, and grew in the twentieth century, many critical questions began to emerge relating to its political character. Particularly after the two world wars critical theorists questioned the functionalist, instrumental, positivistic sociology for its close affinity with the establishment. And they proposed a new radical sociology for overcoming a technocratic, bureaucratic, social order. Likewise, phenomenologists and Hermeneutic thinkers raised new questions relating to subjectivity, self-reflexivity, and authentic interpretations. In other words in contemporary sociology we see a distinctive critical turn which has been developed by divergent schools of thought like critical Marxism, Hermeneutics, and then recent Post-Modern sensibilities.

It is in this critical milieu, that the feminist question in sociology has to be addressed. In fact, a critical tradition has already been developed that makes it relatively easier for feminists to intervene in the domain of sociological knowledge and restructure its trajectory. The feminist movements and the resultant feminist literature began to raise a series of critical questions. Is sociology sensitive to women's voices? Is a sociologist primarily a male, constructing an ethnography of a community essentially through male biases? Is the positivistic method sensitive to emotive domain of pain and anguish that women in a patriarchal society experience? Is it possible to reinterpret modernity, science and development through feminist sensibilities? These questions become important and since, late 60's and early 70's we saw the active presence of feminist writers and their contributions in the field. With the criticality that many of them inherited from their affiliation with Marxism,

psychoanalysis, existentialism, environmentalism and radical politics, they began to give a critical touch to the discipline. It would be difficult for a student of sociology, particular one who is the gender sensitive, to escape the celebrated feminist text by Simone de Beauvoir, 'The Second Sex' (1949). A student of sociology will also be stimulated to read the entire trajectory of feminist thinking from liberal feminism to radical feminism to Eco Feminism. With Durkhiem, Weber, Marx and Parsons, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, or Sandara Harding emerged as sociological icons. Research centers at universities would not escape courses on gender studies. The similar kind of thing began to happen in Indian Sociology too. We know that a major pre-occupation, of Indian Sociology was the study of caste, social stratification, family kinship ties and village studies.

From Ghurye to M.N.Srinivas to Andre Beteille, Indian Sociology developed and matured itself through these studies. From Bombay University and Lucknow University to Delhi School of Economics the major centers of sociological learning were engaged with these studies. Sociology enriched itself by collecting a huge stock of data and information on caste and hierarchy, demography and population. But since early seventies Indian Society too began to witness the feminist movements. Women's groups and organizations articulated the voice of dissent against the patriarchal subjugation of women's domestic violence and other evils like dowry, and objectification of women. These movements also enrich the intellectual climate, and feminist scholars ranging from Veena Majumdar to Neera Desai contributed

significantly the growth of a new awareness. Sociology was becoming increasingly sensitive to these issues and it could also accommodate growing interest in gender related issues as research themes. In other words, feminist contributions to Indian Sociology began to become visible. Not just M.N.Srinivas and Andre Beteille, but also Neera Desai, Leela Dube, Vandana Shiva became new forces to reckon with. It is in this context that we can recall the seminar that took place in Jawaharlal Nehru University in March 1997 on 'Recasting Indian Sociology'.

Mary E. John argued that sociology has undeniably been one of the most reflexive disciplines among the social sciences and humanities in contemporary India. There is ample and wide-ranging scope for intra-disciplinary introspection. She opines that sociologists studied the issues of gender, feminism and women studies on a number of occasions than any other social scientists did. She feels that the term 'women's studies' is ambiguous in its task, boundaries, break-through and limitations. It was important to define its own curriculum, field of scholarship, subject with its own outreach and advocacy on women's issues.

The pressure to consider 'gender' as area of research was existing both at institutional level and at the level of mass movements, locally, nationally and internationally in 1970s. For example the establishment of 'women studies' as an area of research by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) in 1978 and subsequently via the offices of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in

1983, feminist movements in the western world and in Asia; and the United Nations (UN) women's decade was inaugurated in 1975.

Mary E. John also felt that the location of women's studies needed to be projected as a parallel discipline in social sciences. She feels that a history of women's studies would ideally need to address the questions like, How and where do 'women' figure in the social sciences? What sorts of problems relating to women could not be easily 'housed' within academia? Which feminist issues have become dense subjects of inquiry and debate over the last three decades? Where are the major gaps and impasses today?

Mary E. John highlights that 'following de Beauvoir many feminists felt the imperative to break the association between women and nature (subsequently articulated in the sex versus gender distinction) in order to prove that the structures of patriarchy and sexual difference are fully social and cultural, and are therefore open to transformation. Sociology and anthropology have played very crucial roles in this campaign.¹ She also feels that the direction and logic of 'recasting (of) women' in India was significantly different. 'Feminist historical researches provided insights into the complex battles and negotiations between reformers, nationalists and colonialists; they critiqued the role of the middle-class Hindu upper-caste home and family as a privileged site of nationalist culture.'²

¹ Mary E. John, The encounter of sociology and women's studies: Question from the borders, In: *Contributions to Indian sociology* (n.s.) 35:2 (New Delhi, 2001), p. 251

² Ibid. p. 252

She concludes the gendered aspects of caste inequalities minority rights, ideologies of the family, the regulation of sexualities and so on—that have acquired a decisive importance of contemporary society. The real challenge, she analyses, goes much deeper. As in all genuinely creative interdisciplinary work, what is at stake is the *transformation* of the field of women's studies through the creation of new subjects of analysis.

The symposium on 'Knowledge, institutions, practices: The formation of Indian Sociology and anthropology' was organized at the Institute of Economic Growth, during 19-21 April 2000. Sharmila Rege, Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune located herself as a student of feminism and sociology, a lecturer and an activist in the above-mentioned symposium. She sought to include/incorporate feminism in sociology and found herself on the margins, along with those who experienced the academy as an alien terrain.

She locates a feminist as an outsider in the academy and gives him/her a vantage point that binds epistemology and ontology such that all knowledge emerges as located, grounded and limited. She rebuts the changing conceptions in a profession journal, 'viz. *Sociological Bulletin* (the official journal of the Indian Sociological Society) in the period 1952-96.

None of the articles that appeared in the *Sociological Bulletin* during 1952-70 were thematically concerned with women. Most obviously one begins to trace the

presence of women in the area of marriage and family.³ In the first decade, after the inception of the journal in 1952, most of the writings on the family were concerned with the transition from 'institutional' to 'companionship' marriage, the changes in sex roles and the impact of female education on familiar interpersonal relations.

A similar invisibility of women could be noted in articles on caste/class patterns, social mobility, community development programmes and in the increasing number of articles on panchayat raj and trade unions in the post-1965 periods. In studying urban social problems especially beggary and prostitution, the stereotypes about 'female vices and immoral practices' were reiterated.

Regarding the visibility of women, their contribution to the journal and their membership, only twenty more had joined to the previous five life-members by 1970 that wrote mainly on fertility, marriage, divorce and changes in familial relationships. The presidential addresses of the period saved the address by K.M. Kapadia at the Rajasthan Sociological Conference (where the issue of social change was addressed via an inquiry into the impact of the Widow Remarriage Act, 1956) were silent on women. The panels at conferences held in 1967, 1968 and 1969 reiterated the same story. Here it is worth noting that 'the publication of report of the committee on status of women in India (1975), and the resurgence of the second

³ Sharmila Rege, *Histories from the borderlands* (Seminar, No.495, 2000), p. 57

wave in the women's movement in India were, however, missing even as passing references.'⁴

In a later development, 'a panel on 'Changing status of women in India: Tara Patel organized Policies and problems', probably for the first time in the history of All India Sociological Conference. This conference focused on invisibility of women in sociological research and decreasing political participation of women in post-independence period. Despite being an overwhelmingly a male profession, women have been office bearers of Indian Sociological Society and have served as editorial advisors of the Bulletin since 1975. The debate on a sociology of sociologists in India concluded that sociology was an overwhelmingly male profession.'⁵

Further, social movements and theoretical frameworks to study them became a major area of concern in late seventies with the peasant and dalit movements included along with the earlier interests in reform and religious movements. There was an era when 'a more direct challenge to the dominant paradigms was posed in a critique of the biologicistic assumptions of the structural functionalist approach to explaining the inequalities between the sexes. A case was made for setting aside male centered categories in Marxist analysis for a more gender sensitive frame of socialist feminism'⁶

Probably for the first time, 'Gender' as a theoretical category came to be employed, in the study of change in family structures and in drawing up of profile of

⁴ Sharmila Rege, op cit. 2000, p.58

⁵ ibid. p.58

⁶ ibid. p. 59

women as actual agricultural producers. The relationship between the segregation and seclusion of women and the invisibility of their work came to be highlighted.

The founding fathers of Indian sociology were not oblivious to the situation that was demanding their attention in this regard. M. N. Srinivas, in his inaugural speech at the XIth World Congress of Sociology, underlined the significance of women's studies in highlighting the androcentric bias in the social sciences. Significantly he viewed women's studies as one more trend in Indian sociology, among other trends that sought to comprehend Indian society from the point of view of the oppressed.

The working paper for a panel on 'Gender and Society' organised at the XXth All India Sociological Conference (AISC) at Mangalore in 1993 underlined the ways in which gender perspectives could reorganize and reconstitute sociological discourse.

Discussions on feminist pedagogy and the sociology of emancipation, conceptual issues in theorizing patriarchy, feminist social theories, women's narratives of pain were all packed in single issue of *Sociological Bulletin* Vol. 44, September 1995. In his presidential address at the XXIIth AISC, Yogendra Singh highlighted the importance of gender sociology as a form of doing 'activist sociology'.⁷

During 1990-96, there was greater presence of feminist scholarship in the *Sociological Bulletin*. Though topics related with matriliney, nude worship, political

⁷ *ibid.* p. 60

patriliney, social history of the Age of the consent Bill were discussed, yet, gender, as an analytical category was never considered. The focus was taken over by dalit movements, dalit resistance, social mobility, and ethnicity in the larger part of the discursive space.

While concluding after giving a long list of examples about invisibility of women in the discipline and research, Sharmila Rege felt that the impact of feminism or other engaged sociologies like Marxist Sociology on the discipline (at least as it appears in the Sociological Bulletin) has been negligible.

‘The ‘origins’ of the sociological study of gender in sociological study of family and marriage (largely within a functionalist frame) have left an imprint in terms of basic conceptualisations and assumptions. The conceptualizations invariably fall into a frame of ‘sex roles’, and there is lasting assumption that ‘gender’ operates primarily in the private sphere. This had a very de-politicising effect for all those striving towards feminist sociology’⁸

In feminist scholarships, it has been customary to speak of ‘paradigm replacements’. It is assumed that feminist interventions would gradually move from making women visible to documentation of inequality, conceptualizing gender as social structure, and finally to a stage of conceptualizing of the complex matrices of gender and other structure inequalities.’⁹

⁸ ibid. p. 60

⁹ ibid. p. 61

It is now clear, that this dissertation acquires its relevance in the changing context in the discipline. Furthermore, violence against women continues. It becomes all the more important to examine sociology as a body of critical reflexive knowledge. In a dissertation of this kind for which only limited period of time is allotted, it becomes quite difficult to offer the entire canvas of feminist thinking in Indian Sociology. We have chosen only three feminist thinkers: Leela Dube, Tanika Sarkar and Vandana Shiva, looked at their select texts and examined their distinguished contributions to Indian sociology.

Selecting these three feminist thinkers, does by no means suggest that other feminist scholars are insignificant. In a small dissertation one has to choose and the reason for choosing these three feminist thinkers needs to be stated.

Leela Dube is a sociologist and cultural anthropologist who as a teacher and researcher also contributed tremendously to the growth of feminist sensibility in the discipline. She has created a generation of students and researchers who were trained in the tradition of sociology and cultural anthropology, and at the same time endowed with feminist sensibilities.

Tanika Sarkar is a Historian, but her research has tremendous significance for students of sociology, particularly who are working on Hindu Culture, Hindu womanhood, and also the meaning of being a woman the time of widespread communal violence.

Vandana Shiva is a theoretical physicist and seems to have reconciled theoretical knowledge with rigorous activism. She had contributed to the growth of eco feminism as a distinctive trend in Indian Sociological thought. In a way, Vandana Shiva, even though not a professional sociologist in the technical sense of the term has occupied the important place in feminist social thinking in India. In a way she has reconciled environmentalism and sociologically enriched feminist imagination.

A look at the contribution of these three feminist thinkers would enable us to get a reasonably decent idea about a vibrant feminist research that is enriching Indian Sociology. In the subsequent three chapters, we propose to study their contributions to Indian sociology.

Chapter 1

Leela Dube: Towards an Ethnography of Gender

1.1 Feminist Sensibilities in Field

1.2 Interrogating Stereotypes

1.3 Making of Hindu Women

1.4 Seeing Through Metaphor

1.5 Caste Confinement and Darkness of Mind

Chapter 1

Leela Dube: Towards an Ethnography of Gender

It is only recently that gender relations in kinship structures have gained importance as research themes. In matters of gender, the intergenerational continuity of the status quo and prejudices inherited by the current generations, exemplify the situation that has not changed over a period of time. Especially the status of women at home in the domain of their relationship with their natal kin and affinal kin have been the determining factors of their chances for the limited available choices.

In 1953, Irawati Karve made brief but incisive correlations between the kinship rules and practices of different cultural zones and their differing implications for women. The idea did not really become the subject of detailed discussion or debate till recently. Louis Dumont's brilliant exposition of the importance of affinity in south Indian kinship and the consequences of the associated principle of reciprocity in marriage opens tantalizing possibilities that this 'island of equality' (kinship) in an ocean of hierarchy (caste) (Dumont 1983:167) may perhaps mean a more secure position for women in the family/household setting.¹

Leela Dube was one of the core members of the group that put together the landmark report *Towards Equality* that started alarm bells ringing about the

¹ Leela Dube, *Anthropological explorations in gender: interesting fields*, (Delhi, 2001), p.14

deteriorating status of women in post-independence India. The report became a reference point for substantial research from various disciplinary perspectives and activist hold and in fact focusing on the natal household of the girl child as the prime locus of measurable discrimination. 'It thus brought a new urgency for theorizing the family-household in a manner not attempted by the traditional disciplines, which had assumed, implicitly, the model of consensual, harmonious house hold, where asymmetrical division of labour rather than hierarchy and power was seen as the operative principle.'²

In the last two decades, the interface of gender and kinship has started coming under increasing scrutiny both in women's studies and within sociology and anthropology. Leela Dube, more than any other one person, has been a catalyst in the development of gender and kinship studies in India.

While choosing various articles for reviewing and studying with gender perspective some of the articles have really led to one's deep level of introspection. Leela Dube's cultural anthropological explorations into caste, religion, womanhood, socialization and property relations as 'gendered' domains leave their indelible mark on one's psyche. She makes her point clear neither optimistically nor as a pessimist. She brings forth the cultural canvas of Indian society both sociologically and anthropologically. In her book, 'Anthropological Explorations in Gender: intersecting Fields (2001)', she presented a collection of essays published in various

² Ibid. p.16

articles and journals from 1975 to 1996 in which she undertook field research in the areas of family and kinship. Though many others have worked in this area but getting a woman's perspective was important.

1.1 Feminist Sensibilities in Field

Leela Dube carried on field research in the very initial stages on the sociology and anthropology when they were developing as disciplines in Indian social sciences. She is one of the pioneer feminist anthropologists who emphasized her studies on gender relations rather than women alone. She studied both gender and kinship relations as separate research areas with women's studies perspectives. In this book she mentioned her field experiences in three different cultural settings. She studied Gonds of Bindranawagarh zamindari (tribal community), Rankhandi village in western Uttar Pradesh (caste relations) and Kalpeni island of the Laccadive group in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep (matrilineal society).

While studying them she focused on her experiences as a woman fieldworker in three different cultural settings of her own society. Her focus was restricted only on the reactions and responses, 'to me and to my feminity, of the people among whom I worked, on how they tried to fit me into their own social and cultural worlds, and on the minimal demands of conformity they made.'³

³ibid. p.81

While conducting fieldwork she located herself with a low profile that is required in the situation whenever it needed to get the insight of an insider without compromising on her professional standards. She as an ethnographer was incorporating participant observation as a method. She was participating herself as a woman, daughter-in-law, mother, teacher and a compassionate human being, naturally gave her the confidence and the rapport of the groups she was studying.

‘Many Gond women were happy to talk to me about themselves and about others. They were also curious about my life. Did I ever get a beating from my husband? ‘Why should she? She does not cook for her husband. There is no question of her spoiling the food.’ I explained that I did cook for my husband, though not regularly.⁴

She developed a perfect rapport with the women she was studying to get a closer look into their inner worlds and sensibilities. She was also subject take some counter positions as she was looked upon as an educated woman who has no bounds.

While studying women’s domains she did not remain oblivious to Gond man’s sensibilities. She noticed a fair degree of communication with Gond men is needed to understand the position of women in their society. This is because all the expertise lay with them. She also noticed the inconvenience of men and was sensitive to their awkwardness felt while she

⁴ ibid. p.69

was exploring the areas of breaches of sexual norms and their settlement. In fact she used to get the information from women more easily in the informal sessions. The sensibilities of a Gond woman are that, 'man is brass utensil while women is an earthen pot'— that is, a women is more easily and permanently defiled than a man-and 'man provides the seed while women provides only the field'⁵

She especially regretted that she was too young to discuss freely the matters of sex and the outlook of a Gond woman. Had the fieldwork been conducted again in her later stages of her professional life, she would have explored this grey area too.

In her second encounter, she studied a Rajput community and was looked upon as an upper-caste woman. She has undergone certain amount of cultural restriction to which she was compelled to give in. Here the villagers took her as an insider. In her own words, she says that 'In this village I was essentially thought of as a young Brahman woman whom her husband's work had brought to the village along with her little son.'⁶

In her third encounter with the matrilineal society in Kalpeni island of Laccadive, she was accompanied by an interpreter as the language and culture of the inhabitants of the island was different from that of hers. The cultural setting was different and unique as the community was matrilineal. She focused her attention on the duration of marriage among the islanders,

⁵ ibid. p.71

⁶ ibid. p.72

the interplay between the matriliney and the Islamic law of inheritance, and traditional political organization. She took special care as the people of the island were not from the society in which she used to live and the anomalies were dealt with care without hurting the feelings of the people. 'I had to instruct my interpreter not to ask the informants any questions that would require rationalization and justification of their customs, and not to show any surprise or make evaluative comments on the information that was gathered. As I personally filled the schedules pertaining to duration of marriage all over the island, it did not take the people much time to see that I was conversant with their ways.'⁷

While studying these three societies she felt the working culture and the success of a woman in profession of anthropology in Indian society. The experience is different when compared to that of a western woman. She suggested a word of caution while accepting the views of Laura Nader that 'women make a success of field-work because women are more person-oriented; there is perhaps some truth in the idea that women, at least in Western culture, are better able to relate to people than men are' (1970: 113-14).⁸

She was optimistic to hold the view that woman as a better field researcher has a natural advantage. Once she overcomes the limitations of

⁷ibid. p.80

⁸ ibid. p. 82

her upbringing, her greater patience can become an asset in studying the subtle nuances of daily life and has better situational adjustability.

1.2 Interrogating Stereotypes

While studying Kalpeni Island, Leela Dube had an experience where she was also interrogating stereotypes that were held in the main land. As the population was basically Muslim, she was counter positing the Muslim population of the main land where there is visible patrilineality. For example when she removed her vermilion, from her forehead, symbol of her being a person different from a non-Muslim population, she felt her immediate acceptance as a researcher. In her own words: 'My speaking a different language and not belonging to their religion did not matter: I was accepted as a human being, especially as a woman. I had made an honest effort to play down the differences in the religion'.⁹

While studying the acceptability of matrilineality she was trying to focus on the inherent differences and conflicts though the court of law identifies the women as 'helpless and ignorant' who showed much concern in property transactions. 'The society in Lakshadweep provided an instance of the resilience of matrilineality and its capacity to adapt to a religion with a pronounced patrilineal emphasis. Elsewhere we have demonstrated the interaction between matrilineality and Islam and the processes of accommodation and adjustment between the two (Dube 1969; Kutty 1972). We have argued that

⁹ *ibid.* p.79

Islam imparted greater flexibility to the matrilineal system of Kalpeni and, thereby, helped to sustain it. All social systems are characterized by some conflict, although the kind and degree of conflict differ. Both kinds of unilineal kinship systems have conflict inherent in them'.¹⁰

She felt very comfortable in this field experience, as the women were freer and not restricted as they were in the previous societies that she studied. 'Because of the absence of purdah and the relative freedom of movement allowed to women, I did not have to worry about my own freedom of movement. I moved from house to house till late in the evenings and was always escorted back to the rest house. I generally made appointments for men to come to the rest house in the morning or late in the evening.'¹¹

The so-called seclusion was only existing in symbolic ways. 'In respect of segregation and seclusion, which are associated with Islamic populations and are thought to have religious sanction, the islanders provide a sharp contrast to mainland Muslims, especially those of non-peninsular India. The practice of purdah (seclusion) was absent. A piece of cloth carried over the shoulder was often used for covering the head as well. It was customary for a bridegroom to present such a head-cloth to his bride at their wedding and on special occasions later. In a vague sort of way it seemed to represent the Islamic notions of seclusion, modesty, or protection of females, but it did not constrain women in any way. A few of the women had also

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.207

¹¹ *ibid.* p.80

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begun to wear saris'.¹² She also noticed the 'unusual' bilaterality in the relationships of spouses. In respect of conjugal relations there is a sharp contrast between South Asian and Southeast Asian Muslims. Among the patrilineal Muslims of South Asia, the relationship between the spouses is one of superiority and inferiority. The husband is looked upon as the provider and supporter.

1.3 Making of Hindu Women

Leela Dube as such never felt like identifying her self as a Hindu woman while she was conducting research. Nevertheless she was sensitive to the societal norms expected by her. 'In most societies there are, it seems, greater constraints on women, and greater conformity to custom and etiquette is expected of them. Whenever a fieldworker belongs, or is considered to belong, to the society he/she is studying, and whose rules he/she is expected to abide by, it is a woman who has more adjustments to make. She may be there as an anthropologist or as the wife of an anthropologist.'¹³

While studying the construction of gender and socialization of girls in patrilineal India, She concentrated on various rituals existing all over the country. While doing so her attention was focused on, 'what does it mean to be a girl? At what age does a girl become conscious of the constraints under which she will have to live, of the differential values accorded to male and female children, and of the justifications behind these? When and

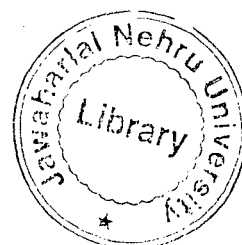
¹² *ibid.* p.194

¹³ *ibid.* p.84

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how does she learn the content of the roles appropriate to her? What are the mechanisms through which women acquire the cultural ideas and values that shape their images of themselves and inform the visions they have of the future? How do they acquire sensitivity towards the contradictions in the values and norms presented to them and towards the limits within which they have to function, necessitating the adoption of particular strategies? In other words, how are women produced as gendered subjects?¹⁴

Leela Dube studied both positive and negative norms that govern and regulate a girl/woman's behaviour in the society. In her paper, she does this by focusing on aspects of the process of socialization of Hindu girls through rituals and ceremonies, the use of language, and practices within and in relation to the family.

She observes the nature and gender correlated to each other where the man is a provider to a woman and this 'natural order' is accepted as a cultural norm that translates into unequal gender relations. To give one relevant example, in patrilineal India the commonly held idea regarding the roles of the father and the mother in procreation is that the man provides the seed—the essence—while the woman provides the field which receives the seed and nourishes it.

The gender roles are always taught in a friendly, congenial and familial environment. Family as an agency of socialization should never be

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.87

overlooked because, 'a woman place' in her society is always conveyed by her family to which she belongs. 'Gender roles are conceived, enacted, and learnt within a complex of relationships. To understand this process it is necessary to keep in mind the implications of the family structure and the wider context of kinship in which it is embedded.¹⁵

The role of elders and the subliminal messages conveyed unintentionally through various ways, that sons are more preferred and daughters are a liability, and a burden to be relieved as early as possible goes a long way in the psyche of a women to accept her inferior position voluntarily. 'Elders bless young girls and women by wishing them a large number of sons (and just one daughter). The notion of the greater value of sons is further strengthened by the existence, with regional variations, of special *pujas* (worship) and *vratas* (fasts and observances) that women perform to have sons and to ensure the long life of sons already born.¹⁶

The uncertainty and temporary nature of her stay in her natal home are bombarded into her life that the girl/woman will be accepting as though they were anticipated in before hand. Such is the power of the socialization. Rituals provide one of the important means through which girls come to realize the inevitability of their transfer from the natal home to that of the husband.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.88

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.90

This is all done with certain degree of religious sanctity attributed to each and every ritual, which conveys the message. The scene is almost same all over India. The nine-day worship and 'seeing off' of goddess Durga, *Durga puja* has a parallel in Karnataka known as *Gauri puja* celebrated about a month before *Durga puja*, commemorates Gauri's visit to her natal home. *Gauri Puja* is also celebrated in parts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Some other festivals in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra also contain the idea of the coming home of a goddess or goddesses.

While a daughter is married off she has absolutely no idea what life is in waiting for her. Hence she is mentally prepared to become fatalistic about her future life and her life as a matter of 'chance' but not of choice. 'The idea of the accident of birth and the contrasting fortunes of daughters and sons is a common theme in the wailings at the send-off of a bride from her natal home and also in subsequent visits and departures of a married daughter.'¹⁷

The daughters are married off with huge sums of dowry 'for once', so that they would not seek again in her later marital life as daughters-in-law of a different family. In other words she will become 'other' from the moment she is married. 'This contributes to feelings of tension and insecurity and is one of the reasons why young men find it difficult to take

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.93

a stand against dowry, which is the easiest way to improve one's lifestyle overnight.¹⁸

The acceptance of gender roles begins in the very early life of a girl that they are 'different' from boys and do not deserve the mobility and freedom enjoyed by them. The restrictions are part and parcel of life and visibility of a role model like that of a submissive mother conveys an unquestionable behaviour which is woven in tandem to the demands of patrilineal society. 'The construction of femininity is a continuous, complex, and, occasionally, a contradictory process. The differential values of sons and daughters and the unshakable association between marriage and departure from the natal home is complemented by the motion of the intrinsic purity of pre-pubertal girls'.¹⁹

The message that the main purpose of a woman's life is to bear children and bring them up is conveyed by all means and by various concerns. The bodies of the women are seen as special domains to fulfill this obligation of child bearing (sons in particular). It is in the light of her emergent sexuality and prospective motherhood that the special diet for a pubertal girl needs to be understood. Apart from eating nourishing food, the girl has to avoid particularly 'cold' and 'hot' food items. Although the celebrations and the ingredients of the special diet may vary across regions and caste groups, the message is consistent and clear: the girl is now

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.94

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.96

equipped to become a mother and this is a matter of rejoicing, for the main purpose of the female body is to reproduce.

The ambiguities of the feeling these rituals generate on the psyche of a girl are never touched upon. Does this emphasis on fertility and marriage and the special attention, which a girl receives when she reaches puberty increase her sense of self-worth? Or does it give her a feeling of being trapped and having lost her freedom? These are some of the questions that are worth noting. In both north and south India, the onset of puberty is a turning point in the life of a girl. It is one of the important *Rites de passage* from girlhood to womanhood. During the last few decades, particularly among the middle and upper middle classes, education is one of the factors for girls, which has started deciding the age of marriage.

In case of a married woman, the *saubhagya* (good fortune) and *sumangala/suhagin* (auspiciousness of married status) have to be carefully nurtured. There are a series of *vratas* (fasts) to be observed by married women for the long life and prosperity of the husband, and the accompanying narratives contain clear messages for the women. The message is conveyed by various negative connotations by exemplifying the negative models. The lowly and inauspicious status is attributed to the widowhood by avoiding her from various family and religious rituals. Among the Iyer Brahmans of Tamil Nadu the wife continues to wear the insignia of the married state for ten days after the husband dies. These are

removed at midnight of the tenth day. This job has to be done only by other widows. *Sumangali* women have to scrupulously avoid being anywhere near the unfortunate and inauspicious woman on this occasion.

The space of a girl at home and her premises is carefully manipulated with a fear created in her mind about the vulnerability of getting molested and also maligning her name of being called as a girl of bad character. 'Which a girl tries to avoid in following a strategy that Johanna Lessinger, while describing the activities of women petty traders in Madras, has called 'public chaperonage',²⁰

The restrictions are also definitive in the dimension of time. There is a certain familiarity that girls have with the phrases 'Return before it gets dark' and 'who is going with you?' These constraints of space and time create problems for middle-class girls in terms of their choice of schools/ colleges and courses—co-education and staying out till late, which certain courses demand, are frowned upon—and, consequently, in their choice of careers.

Leela Dube also touched upon the process of socialization—training for feminine tasks. It is, of course, difficult to speak of a single pattern of gender-based division of work since it is characterized by considerable diversity across regions and social groups.

²⁰ *ibid.* p.108

An important component of this 'natural' division of work is the notion of a sense of *sewa* (service) as a necessary quality in girls. It is expected that girls should learn to bear pain and deprivation, eat anything that is given to them, and acquire the quality of self-denial. This is a part of the training for the reality that they are likely to confront in the house of the mother-in-law.

The structuring of women as gendered subjects through Hindu rituals and practices is fundamentally implicated in the constitution and reproduction of a social system characterized by gender asymmetry and the overall subordination of women.

Leela Dube, however, is not arguing that women are passive, unquestioning victims of these practices and the representation of these practices. It is suggested that 'Hindu rituals and practices set certain limits in terms of the dispositions they inculcate among women and the different kinship roles with varying statuses, which they assign to them within the family. The rituals and practices and the social system are, moreover, imbued with certain givenness and appear as part of the natural order of things. It is within these limits that women question their situation, express resentment, use manipulative strategies, utilize their skills, turn deprivation

and self-denial into sources of power, and attempt to carve out a living space'.²¹

1.4 Seeing Through Metaphor

While dealing with patrilineal India, Leela Dube analyses the construction of women as gendered subjects, through the process of socialization. She studied the popular metaphor 'Seed and Earth' which functions as a justification for the material relations inherent in patrilineal kinship.

The essential principles of patrilineal kinship and their concrete manifestations are traced back deeper into the realm of ethno-reproductive beliefs and theories of conception and procreation. The metaphor of seed and field/earth/soil for the respective contributions of a father and the mother in the making of a child is both widespread and deep-rooted in Indian culture. It seeps through into everyday language in turns of phrases, as a reference point during family crises- death, divorce, property divisions-which often become paralegal occasions of decision-making.

The patrilineality and continuation of the bloodline is looked upon as an important requirement in the life of a man, because a son is considered as the true heir of his name and property. 'Semen is commonly considered concentrated blood (although there is no agreement on the proportion of semen to the total volume of blood in the human body) and there is a clear notion of a

²¹ *ibid.* p.113

common bloodline for agnatic kin continuing through male members who serve as links for the passing of the common blood, through their semen, to the next generation.’²²

The rights of women in the matter of property and inheritance have serious implications in the context of this metaphor. When a woman is likened to the earth, she be ‘owned by man in any stage of her life’. From childhood to womanhood under the purview of her father, after her ‘*kanyadan*’ i.e. marriage under the scrutiny of her husband, in her old age under the responsibility of her son. In other words she never considered as an individual with a heart, mind, and soul. In such a system, rights of ownership, control, and use of land are governed by the patrilineal principle.

‘Like the earth, a woman too has to bear pain. The earth is ploughed, furrowed, dug into; a woman too is pierced and ploughed. A common metaphorical expression for sexual intercourse is ploughing. It may be used by a man to express sexual desire, to insinuate, and also to claim his right over a woman or over the offspring born of her. In referring to coitus as ploughing, there is often a suggestion of a passive or submissive role and inertness on the part of the woman and of an active role, domination and possession on the part of the man.’²³

²² *ibid.* p.131

²³ *ibid.* p.139

In case of an unattached woman, when she conceives, the problem of identifying the father is generally spoken of as identifying the 'seed'. In cases of mixed unions, except those in which the woman belongs to a much lower caste than the man, the children are generally admitted into the caste of the father. The justification given is the same—the child gets its status from the seed. The woman, however, is 'lost' to her own caste.

The implications of this metaphor extend to her labour power also. 'Just as he is entitled to have control over her sexuality and over the product of her sexuality, he is entitled to have control over her labour and also the proceeds of her labour.'²⁴

No wonder, it is seen that 'the non-recognition or gross under-recognition of women's contribution to the economy is not unconnected with the ideology under consideration. To conclude, the supposed unequal contribution of the two sexes to human reproduction as expressed through the symbolism of 'seed and earth' provides the rationalization for a system in which a woman stands alienated from productive resources, has no control over her own labour power, and is denied rights over her own offspring'.²⁵

²⁴ *ibid.* p.142

²⁵ *ibid.* p.142

1.5 Caste Confinement and Darkness of Mind

While considering caste as a discriminatory domain, Leela Dube in her essay titled 'Caste and Women' emphasizes 'situating women as conscious, acting subjects'. She considers the material basis of caste and the unequal distribution of resources as being interlinked with kinship. She also takes up three overlapping areas and examines how women are implicated in occupational continuity, food and rituals and their place in marriage and sexuality

While describing occupational continuity of a caste group in the presence of new professions and open recruitment to occupations, she underlined the inalienable and unchanging links between traditional occupation and caste. Women are main contributors in the matter of agriculture. There are many castes that are considered as 'traditional' cultivators. The responsibility of maintaining the caste's identity mostly relies with women. This is represented by various traits of culture adopted and interwoven into a woman's life through control over her occupation, food and rituals, marriage and sexuality.

In caste-linked occupations, women carry out work as members of households where their services are indispensable. The communities of weavers and potters have well-defined tasks in production activities and selling goods. Hence, it is common that women should establish contacts with clients and go to the market to assist with selling goods. The low ritual status and inadequate returns of the traditional occupations compel men to give up the same but women carry on the entire burden of occupational work. Sometimes the education of a girl child is

awkwardly sacrificed for the sake of carrying on this traditional occupation whereas the sons are forcefully educated.

A woman's identity in a caste with a distinctive culture imparts her a sense of identity with its members. The cultural practices, modes of worship, fasts and festivals, rules governing concerns of purity and pollution, and the organization of the space constitute interrelated and intermeshed into a life of a woman. The responsibility of maintaining the sanctity and purity of the home protecting from the 'evil eye' entail a variety of restrictions and constraints on women apart from the tasks of processing, preserving, cooking, and distributing food.

Foods consumed by women are also attributed with specific characteristics they embody—passion, anger, calm, strength, and spirituality. Foods carry the capacity to affect and transform the person who consumes them. The responsibility for who eats what, where, and when, falls upon women within the domestic space, apart from playing a critical role in the hierarchical ordering of castes. It is believed that the control over consumption of *tamasik* foods—which raise passion and desire, restrict the women from transgression of sexual norms.

Women do not attending domestic rituals, but give specific attention in making arrangements and their performance. There are some special pujas and fasts observed for the welfare of the husband, children and for the prosperity of the family. The key place of women in this arena along with limitations imposed upon them underscores their value and places them into subordination in relation to the men within the family.

Regarding marriage and sexuality, the cultural perception of the word 'endogamy' has got strictly observable connotations. The hierarchy between sexes within a caste is clearly distinct in matters of choosing a spouse and sexual involvement. Brahmins and other higher caste men do not incur any kind of pollution during the life processes. Nevertheless, their women are involved in pollution incurred through bodily processes, mainly menstruation and childbirth. The sources of impurity for the women include the state of widowhood. The impure status renders women into hierarchically low status.

Another discriminating impurity that leads to subordinate position is through sexual intercourse. The sexual involvement affects woman internally whereas it affects only externally to a man. In case of inter-caste sexual relation, a man incurs external pollution, which can be washed off easily, but a woman incurs internal pollution, which pollutes her permanently. Indeed, sexual transgressions within the caste are treated more leniently, particularly among those castes that allow secondary unions. The women's entanglements with men of castes lower than their own which are taken very seriously. Hence, upper caste women are much more vulnerable to permanent pollution than lower caste women.

Caste thus imparts special characters to the process of growing up as a female. All these do not end with marriage. Women need to be controlled, their sexuality contained at all times. This is achieved by proper social control, idealization of familial roles and with emphasis on female modesty. The clear demarcation of caste hierarchy that negotiates and contains the threat posed by the

female sexuality rests upon different phases of women's life. Special ritual value accorded to virginity, a glorification of the married state and motherhood, a clear distinction between a primary and a secondary marriage constitute institutionalized mechanism for the containment of female sexuality.

The relationships between upper caste men and lower caste women need to be mentioned here. The pollution he gathers does not have serious implications as that in case of woman. The dominance on the body of a woman is claimed, as a right of upper class and a low caste woman can be enjoyed at one's discretion. The offspring born out of this sexual union is considered as low caste and ridiculed through out one's life.

The relational idiom of food, rituals and sexuality always places woman in a position where she is restricted to the boundaries of caste, religion and society that are predominantly patriarchal leaving her with minimum of choices.

Leela Dube has left many loose ends for further exploration and analysis for those working in the area of gender and kinship. Some of them appear as suggestions in her work and others arise through extension and extrapolation from it.

Chapter 2

Tanika Sarkar: Nation, Culture and Femininity

2.1 Age of Consent Bill as a Turning Point

2.2 Listening to Rashsundari Debi: Emerging Feminist Voice

2.3 Bankim and Search for Hindu Male Order

2.4 Rethinking Gandhian Solution

Chapter 2

Tanika Sarkar: Nation, Culture and Femininity

Tanika Sarkar has considerably dealt upon the various aspects of Hindu cultural nationalism, which was revived in late nineteenth century Bengal of Hindi belt. During this process she studied how the feminine gender of the nation as 'motherland' had played a very important role in the process of invocation of goddess worshipped in Hindu households and glorified the deprivation for women of various generations.

In her collection of essays from the book, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (2001), she encompasses various aspects of those trying colonial times, which have triggered a self-introspective feeling among the educated middle class gentry of colonial Bengal. To exhibit these traits, she takes the help of various press reports, official documents, richly carrying the times and facts of life and society of Bengal in late nineteenth century. The people in her discussion include non-elite, Muslim, low castes, peasants and labourers juxtaposed against landlords and ruling class elite, in constant presence of colonial rulers and their perspectives of reforms in the immediate society.

Like in any society the representatives of social norms at any given point of time is determined by is the social elite of that society. She concentrated on works of two main responders to this social milieu, firstly, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya in his various stages of intellectual metamorphosis and his representative literary works.

An autobiography of an elite, upper caste woman, Rashsundari Debi that was published in 1876, follows this. These two contributors seem to have developed their thoughts that go antithetical to each other. For example, Rashsundari trying to come out of her dark world of ignorance through her persistent effort and determination, by trying to learn the printed word. This situation contrasted by Bankimchandra again belonging to elite, educated, upper caste strata trying to revive Hinduism in the name of nationalism which dictates high standards and restricting women to various types of subordination.

Tanika Sarkar's previous concern was 'Words to Win: The making of *Amar jiban*-A modern autobiography' (1999) in which she built up the background to the text through five essays, to seventy-six page long abridged translation of the original work of autobiography of Rashsundari Debi. She also contextualised the text to present day and critical ways in which it can be approached.

Tanika Sarkar's current book 'Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation' (2001) focuses on a very fundamental transformation in the structures of political-cultural sensibility that occurred in late-nineteenth-century Bengal, she tries in this work to collate certain changes in relations of property, land and enterprise in those times. These developments relate to the abandonment of liberal reformism in favour of Hindu cultural nationalism. This is one of the reasons why it was decided to discuss 'Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation (2001)' rather than 'Words to Win: The making of *Amar jiban*-A modern autobiography' (1999).

Almost this entire book deals with Hindu middle-class people in late-nineteenth-century Bengal, when they were quite decisively towards a Hindu cultural indigenism and nationalism, from a more socially questioning and self-critical earlier era. As Sarkar says “I wrote this out of dissatisfaction with the parameters of feminist cultural studies which seemed to me to reiterate the recast presence of patriarchy within male discourses in the form of very similar images of women across history and geography.”¹ She also tries to establish the correlation between these variables, which are showing up in today’s revivalist politics, and their roots of origin.

While documenting the social conditions, she addresses various issues occurred in those times which have caused turmoil and sensation. These also acted as triggers to various introspective exercises among the middle class Bengali culture. This includes the change in the literature and creation of protagonist heroines in plays, dramas enacted, mainly usage of theatre as a medium of conveying social messages. In her book, she discussed about people who belong to various classes who are non-elite, Muslim, low caste, peasants and laborers and also the colonial ruling classes. These are the people who keep constantly responding to the immediate social condition, who also surface in the satires and plays of novelist, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya.

¹ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Nation, Hindu Wife*. (Delhi, 2001), p.6

2.1 Age of Consent Bill as a Turning Point

Tanika Sarkar begins with studies of the 1870s, when the public sphere registered a broadening of liberal commitments, as well as the emergence of a hard and closed nationalistic culture. She, then, exemplifies the direction and extent of the later shift in the chapters, which focus on the two phases of Bankimchandra's writings. Tanika Sarkar develops these themes in the chapters on the Age of Consent Bill, its responses within the public sphere, and its import in making of a militant Hindu cultural nationalism. As a contrast, as well as a sequel, she looks at the religious imagining that structures the cultural production of Gandhian Nationalism.

She observed the visible changes in the society and its response to two events in the 1870s. Each was a scandal in its own way—that is, each transgressed the limits of the 'normal', and therefore gave rise to interpretive communities that reflected upon these exceptional occurrences. In one, a young wife was seduced by the Mohunt of a great Shaivite pilgrimage and then subsequently killed by her husband. The other was the publication of an autobiography by a housewife whose family held extremely strict views against female literacy. The autobiography added the perception and opinions of a woman on the controversies about the mode-of-being of upper-caste Hindu women. It was also living proof of how a woman, finding received wisdom and prescription unsatisfactory, instead on developing an individual social and theological understanding for herself.

The second event deals with a case of murder and adultery. Through this modern legal-judicial processes, as well as custom and religion, were put on trial in public

performances, cultural productions and writings. They were discussed from a variety of finely graded differences in perspective on Hindu marriage and pilgrimage, religious and state authority, morality and law.

The property laws were not in favour of women. In any stage of her life she was compelled to live at mercy of her male relatives in both her natal and affinal home. In fact her stay in her natal home would be so insignificant to her life history, that women's autobiographies express the sense of a rather thin integration with family and lineage, and with the land that these women possessed on both sides of the line. Under the Dayabhaga system of Hindu law that prevailed in Bengal, women neither inherited their father's land nor had a definite right to the land of their husbands. At most, they had usufruct rights, as trustees until their sons grow up, on behalf of minor sons if they were widows. If for daughters and wives of landowners the absence of property rights led to a somewhat ambiguous class status, it was compounded by larger ambiguities about the notions of land and home. The larger prevalence of child marriage and the early departure of the bride would ensure that women knew nothing about what is being owned and what is disowned in their families. They would remain somewhat incomplete class and caste subjects, permanent refugees, in a sense, in both households.

The introspective exercise of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia in Bengal involved interrogating power relationships within indigenous customs and traditions—especially gender norms within such customs- though there were definite patriarchal limits to this interrogation. Simultaneously, questioning the connections

established between the local and the metropolitan-in short Bengal's overall colonial connection. The problems so interanimated and complicated one another that, far from reaching a resolution, that it was leading to a chaotic situation with out any absolute certainty. In addition to this emergent nationalist consciousness, which straddled a complex range of forms and possibilities, posed yet more questions and doubts to settled convictions instead of offering any clear answers.

The new intelligentsia was English-speaking natives working for their colonial bosses were always under dilemmas offered by their double status of a 'native 'as well as a '*saheb*'. The tyrannies of aftermath of 1857 left little doubt about the coercive and violent aspects of colonial rule. The sense of racial discrimination was heightened steadily through Lyttonian repression in the 1870s: the vernacular press and the theatre were muzzled; the Indian population was forcibly disarmed. The racist rhetoric during the Ilbert Bill agitation of the 1880s and a relatively moderate government's capitulation to it was a visible proof.

The demystified colonial myths about their non-discriminating fairness and the existence of rule of law brought hopeful youth into the field of national politics. The reformist Brahmo Samaj were split right down the middle and leaders like Vidyasagar were subject to bitter disillusionment over their own agendas. Earlier creative innovations within the new arena of education lost their initiative: a standardised and officialised uniform education policy proceeded to unfold itself

from the 1880s². The initiative would not be recovered till the time of the Swadeshi Movement.

The formation of a nineteenth-century political sphere is usually located within the religious and political associations that began to acquire pan-Indian aspirations from the 1870s. An alternative and often opposed area is seen as constituted by mass protest movements – tribal revolts, the Indigo mutiny, the Pabna riots, the post-1870s agrarian unrest within which sections of the *Bhadralok* could participate as critical/sympathetic observers, active sympathisers and sometimes even as leaders.

The vernacular press played very important role in reporting each and development to the utmost detail ‘The debate did not stop there. The public sphere, at this stage, remained integrally linked to domestic issues. A substantial number of journals and newspapers came into existence to debate issues of *Sati*, kulin marriage, widow remarriage.’³ The domestic issues generated a wide range of authors and readers, from Bankimchandra to Rashsundari Debi.

The agency of communication, for the masses was through street plays written by educated intelligentsia triggered patronage from the uneducated masses and, in its turn, stimulated the growth of print through the continuous turnout of play scripts. Print revolutionized reading habits and possibilities. The growth of vernacular prose and the press made possible the incorporation of a new range of themes within literate culture which neither the English works, nor classical Sanskrit/Persian

² Romesh Chandra Mitra, Education: 1883-1905, in N.K. Sinha (ed.) *The History of Bengal, 1757-1905* (Calcutta, 1967).

³ *ibid.*

education, nor theological and imaginative literature could have included within their scope: themes concerning everyday life.

Now there is some expression pertaining to the colonial outrage and justification of indigenous revivalist culture was gaining ground. Spectacular changes, technological growth and breakthroughs that were revolutionizing their own lives and experiences and the mobility and positive incentives provided by railways, electricity, telegraph, urban growth, city crowds, street scenes – were steadfastly refused recognition into the symbolic order of these sections of people. Middle-class Bengalis became obsessed with the literature that features physical and economic environmental changes and symptomatic elements, as metaphors of their larger condition. From the late seventeenth century, and especially throughout the eighteenth century, the very land itself went through a major crisis.

Interestingly even though children, young women and agricultural labourers were the worst victims of fevers and epidemics, it was the vulnerability and degeneration of the body of the Hindu male *babu* that became the most significant sign of the times. One might even say that this is how the Bengali middle class sought to express its hegemonic aspirations; not by attributing to itself political or economic leadership roles, not through claims to power, but through ascribing to itself all the ills and deprivations that marked nineteenth-century Bengali society as a whole.

The domain of women however was limited to home and family. There was little she could do even if she wished to do so. The negative image created by society

about an educated woman, discouraged any trait of individuality for them, left no choice but to accept the role model of good woman who is sanctified 'self' belonging to *swadeshi* ritual. Women were primarily responsible for deciding household purchases. They, therefore, served as the target of both nationalist appeal and blame. A large body of reacts and folk art depicted the modern woman as a self-indulgent, spoilt and lazy creature that cared nothing for family or national fortune. This charge encompasses the triadic relationship between women, gold and servitude—*kamini*, *kanchan*, *dasatva*—that the nineteenth-century saint Ramakrishna was to engrave so deeply upon the Bengali moral order⁴. The typical evil woman of these times was not the immoral or the economically independent one, but one who, inspired by modern education, had exchanged sacred ritual objects for foreign luxury ones. There was thus an interchange between economic compulsions and pleas for feminine commitment to ritual. While its chief intention is to portray the husband's tyranny at home, the poem simultaneously refers to the colonial order that has deprived him of everything except the right to domestic oppression.

As we have already seen, Hindu nationalists needed to naturalise love as the basis for Hindu marriage, a higher form of love that excelled allegedly utilitarian, materialist and narrowly contractual Western arrangements. They argued that non-consensual Hindu marriages could, indeed, be more loving than the Western pattern of court courtship based on class and property qualifications more than on love. In the Hindu case, a lifetime of togetherness beginning with infancy guaranteed a

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyug, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 July 1992

superior and more certain compatibility. Nationalists denied that the production of sons was the sole aim of Hindu marriage: they argued it was a complete spiritual union through perfect love. 'It was also kinder to women since it ensured not just a hold on the husband affection but an integration with the family which gave her greater security. While the entire system of non-consensual, indissoluble, infant marriage was to be preserved intact and inviolate, each aspect of The Hindu marriage needed to be written as a love story with a happy ending'⁵.

At a time when traditional Hindu sacred authorities were facing a series of defections and challenges from reformers and Christian missionaries, even the orthodox faithful were finding it troublesome to defend or argue in favour of their continued leadership. While the sexual and financial corruption of holy men in control of sacred places had long been common knowledge, the new challenges made their continued acceptance in such locations embarrassing.

'The nineteenth century was in Bengal the century par excellence for a through review of conjugality. The century had more or less started with the sati issue that split Hindu society right down the middle. The agitation in support of widow remarriage had widened cleavages. Around the time of the Elokeshi scandal, huge controversies were going on over the Brahmo Marriage Bill of 1872 that had initially proposed a radical package of reformed marriage laws for all Hindus. Since, at this point, Brahmos insisted on classifying themselves as Hindus, the reforms threatened to revolutionize marriage laws for all Hindus. Eventually, Law Member Henry

⁵ Tanika Sarkar, *Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism* '

Maine agreed with an enraged Hindu orthodox that Brahmos constituted a separate sect and that Manu's prescriptions remained canonical for Hindus. The aborted prospects of a fairly revolutionized conjugality still rolled on towards a thorough review of marriage norms and practices that preoccupied Hindus for the rest of the century⁶.

The chain reaction which was triggered by the age of consent bill led to rigorous introspection among the educated, elite and any change from 'normal' was quickly reinterpreted to suit and readjust the new patriarchal and Hindu revivalist order. The law and order situation had very serious implications for the society and people were exposed to choices whether to support liberal reformism, Hindu revivalism or Gandhian nationalism

2.2 Listening to Rashundari Debi: Emerging Feminist Voice

Since the beginnings of the women's studies as a discipline in India, the translation of Rashundari's autobiography—the first women's autobiography in Bengal—has been awaited with great eagerness. The importance of the text lies in the way in which it maps one woman's committed struggle to teach herself to read. The process was hardly an easy one. The text stresses that apart from traditional prohibitions on reading for women, the burden of her household duties hardly granted her the much-desired leisure to read. It was her deep desire to read the *chaitanya bhagbat* that

⁶ Amiya Kumar Sen, (Delhi, 1993), Chap. 2

provided the main motivation. Her autobiography thus has a larger significance in studying the reactions of a woman in the age social reformation in colonial India.

The dilemmas of being an upper caste woman were totally unique to that of a normal woman. With an upper-caste, affluent gentlewoman like Rashsundari, who published the first autobiography in the Bengal language in 1876, we find a far more complicated and compromised relationship with the distribution of social and economic power and influence. On the one hand, they were women of high caste, important families, enjoying economic security and solvency that fell to the lot of relatively few Bengalis of their times. They had power over their servants and even over their tenants and labourers. On the other hand, they had little money to dispose of on their own.

The property rights were always in the favour of men, and woman is left with absolutely no say in the property matters. The Dayabhaga system had since the sixteenth century reduced the woman's access to *stridhan* or bridal gifts considerably. Nor did women have absolute ownership rights over any form of property. They were people without incomes, more economically dependent on their families than labouring women. Within their families they were subjected to severe discipline and constraints on mobility, they provided service and deference through sings that were quite similar to those that low castes and classes expressed towards their social superiors. They were certainly not as implicated in the relations of class and caste domination and in the exploitation of tenants and labourers as their husbands and fathers.

At times the quality and standard of living is so low that she was required to provide heavy unpaid and often unacknowledged labour at home. Rashsundari's memoirs show that she was as familiar with enforced starvation as the poorest labourer would have been. Such subordination within the family– to the same men who stood above low castes and peasants – ensured a space of relative autonomy, unmarked by the vested interests of family. The autonomy was another name for sharing some of the marks of subordination with men and women of other castes and classes. Here men guarded more jealously against her education than they could against the literacy of poor-people. Liberal reformers were mocked, lampooned, outcasted and physically attacked for starting schools for girls. The autonomy gave a somewhat different slant to the writings of women, after the 1860s, on the theme of the Hindu family. Precisely at a time of cultural nationalism that valorised the non-reformed woman as the residue of past freedom and the nucleus of the future nation, women were sometimes outspoken in their criticism of past custom and in their celebration of modernity and its resources for women like themselves⁷.

The woman is located in society by various determinant factors. Her power and powerlessness of the woman made up a changing cycle, depending on the status of her husband, her possession of sons, her fertility, looks, health and capacity for domestic labour. 'The middle-aged mother of grown-up sons could be a powerful matriarch and elderly mothers-in-laws could command and oppress young wives. The woman would get more securely stitched into the fabric of lineage, caste and

⁷ Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win*, (Delhi, 1999)

class at a later stage in her life cycle. We tend to absolutise male and female domains—this is so in much feminist writing—and see them as seamless blocs, forming opposites of total power and total powerlessness. Patriarchy, however, operates through far more complicated trajectories, with crisscrossing power lines that fracture both domains and that, at times, unite segments across the blocs. The same woman, depending on the presence of sons, her husband's status and fortune, and her age, gets to know both subjection and rule. This is why, and how, perhaps, women are, much of the time, complicit subjects of patriarchy.

This construction of the Hindu wife could also bind wide-ranging social segments around her practices and norms in order to formulate a middle class, which, in colonial Bengal, lacked a clearly articulated economic base⁸. Since the new economic man did not appear in Bengal, it would be the new domestic woman who had carry the image of a class. Male authors to express a profound sense of bleakness about her existence had frequently borrowed women's voices. Jayadev's Radha had remained implacably angry about sexual double standards⁹.

The alternative, challenging description gained in authenticity once Hindu women began to write about themselves from the 1860s. They wrote about the trauma and not the beauty of infant marriage, the deprivations of the widow, the absence of love in the lives of wives. The Hindu household was described as 'a most terrible mountain range, infected with wild beasts. Another woman said nothing in her life—neither conjugal love nor children—could compensate for the deprivation

⁸ Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1981), pp. 36-44

⁹ S.K. De, *Early history of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1961) pp.9-11

of knowledge. Ignorant and cruel men have segregated us from this priceless and endlessly pleasurable jewel that is knowledge, and yet foolish women serve them and care for them like servants¹⁰.

All varieties of women's writing unanimously identified and condemned two problem spots within the Hindu woman's existence—the pain of patrilocality and the longing for knowledge. Whatever was the format and whatever the basic political stance towards patriarchy, women's writing at this time agreed on these points of criticism. The longing for systematic learning was not a desire implanted by male reformers, missionaries and colonialists. A pious Hindu housewife, spending her life in a non-reformed domestic environment where no woman ever learnt to read, was so driven by this sharp desire that she taught herself the letters in great secrecy and with difficulty. She taught herself to read by repeatedly looking at the alphabet, visualizing and tracing them without having an opportunity. When she finally started reading, a measure of her triumph was conveyed by her coining of magnificent new word' to describe her own achievement and 'mastery over the word'- *jitakshara*¹¹.

Instead of reducing the pain and the triumph of the whole process to yet another form of male patriarchal manipulation, we need to explore what historical conjunctures gave focus and direction to certain kinds of diffused experiences of deprivation among women themselves-- why at this time, and why in this form.

The narrative of Hindu marriage could no longer use the language of love; it had to be rewritten in terms of force and pain. If the element of difference from other

¹⁰ *Narishiksha*, part I, (Calcutta, 1884) p.134

¹¹ Rashsundari Debi, *Amar Jiban*, 1876, reprinted in *Atmakatha* (Calcutta, 1981)

systems was so obviously seen to lie in discipline, then Hinduism had to be celebrated as a superior coercive power. The Hindu truly very severe, even cruel, exulted Chandranath Basu in 1892 in his rejoinder to Rabindranath on the question of '*Hinduvivaha*'¹². Self-fulfillment and pleasure were now demoted to a rather lower order of values. Of infant marriage led to violence, even to bloody death, then it was the unique privilege and strength of the Hindu woman to accept the risk. Its practice could lead to weakened progeny and racial degeneration. But the Hindu prizes his religion above his life and short-lived children¹³. Hindu scriptures did impose harsh injunctions on the wife as well as the widow. Yet this discipline is the prize and glory of chaste women and it prevails only in Hindu society¹⁴.

Hindu woman ultimately became a symbolic icon of a wife, mother and embodiment of culture, which is represented in her passiveness to increasing male order.

2.3 Bankim and Search for Hindu Male Order

The upper middle class and the middle class play a significant role in moulding the social opinion of the society and press. The reachability to the educated crowd is through the written word, and only the elite seem to be having the privilege of education. Hence she has taken up the reactions of two representative Figures, who had access to express their feelings through written works. The autobiography of the

¹² Chandranath Basu, *Hindutva (Hindur Prakrita Itihas)* (Calcutta, 1892)

¹³ *Bangabashi*, 25 December 1890. *Report on Native Papers*, Bengal 1890

¹⁴ *Dainik O samachar*, 14 January 1891, Bengal 1891

women who struggled for her whole life to express her self as an educated one is first of its own kind.

On the other hand Bankimchandra's novels, the woman's representation in his themes, plays has suggestive elements, according to author, who encourage the women to see them selves as the nation themselves. She also notices various intellectual metamorphic stages the novelist had undergone during his lifetime. In her own words, 'For Bankim was, acknowledgedly, real maker of the Bengali novel, of mature and serious Bengali prose, and the founder of literary journalism and the literary criticism. His writings, therefore may be taken to express more decisively than those by others of his period, the process by which intellectual opinions are made'. She also acknowledges the fact that Bankim is no exception that has undergone the pangs to come out of the 'derived meanings imposed by a European Enlightenment epistemology'. She highlighted how in Bankim's early writings and his dominant concerns are muted as well as insidiously reinserted by narrative and discursive devices.

Tanika Sarkar concludes in a chapter on the cultural politics of contemporary Hindutva. This relates not merely to a fundamentally transformed post-colonial context and predicament, but also to a very different North Indian political formation based on a social milieu of urban traders and manufacturers and the service sector. Its cultural politics has been historically bred on the tensions between Arya Samaj reformist chauvinism and Sanatani conservatism, each trying to grapple with the

development of low-caste separatist sects and cults, their defection from Hindu caste controls, their cultural and political self-assertiveness.

The Arya Samaj and the Sanatanis eventually converged on a shared anti-Muslim politics and sought to short-circuit internal faultlines within the Hindu community via the image of a threatening Muslim. More distant from a cosmopolitan English education than the Bengali middle classes, refusing the established Urdu-based cultural style of North India, and equally distant from rural-popular cultural traditions, the emergent politics may be usefully categorized as emanating from the ‘vernacular elite’¹⁵. This formation shares not so much its material-cultural experiences with the Bengali middle classes as certain discursive and ideological terrains. Here the continuities and departures in the sensibilities that used the hymn ‘Bande Mataram’—so central to both its author, Bankim, and to Hindutva today—constitutes the mediating link.

The two chapters on Bankim capture two distinct and opposed discursive-ideological moments in the writings of the same individual. This master of satire and polemic against class, gender and the caste power of the Hindu educated gentry, this novelist experimenting with transgressive forms of love across religious divides, later came to found a Hindu imaginary of disciplined, warlike, chauvinistic nationbuilders reared on a pedagogical apparatus of martial, scriptural and nationalistic values. Tanika Sarkar looks at the changes as well as at the internal

¹⁵ Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth-century North India* (Bombay, 1994)

fractures within Bankim's later writings that implicitly blocked the operations of this change.

It was the nature of the women's commitment to the conjugal order that bound the system together. Moral initiative therefore passes on to the woman, uniquely privileging her activism. If the household was the embryonic nation, then the woman was the true patriotic subject. The male body, having passed through the grind of Western education, office, routine, and forced urbanization, having been marked with the loss of traditional sports and martial activities, was supposedly remade in an attenuated, emasculated form by colonialism¹⁶. The female body, on the other hand, was still pure and unmarked, loyal to the rule of the *Shastras*.

Woman's chastity had become a keyword in the political vocabulary of Hindu nationalism, which had begun to develop at about this time. The Hindu woman's unique steadfastness to the husband in the face of gross double standards, her unconditional, uncompromising monogamy, were celebrated as the sign that marked Hindu claim to nationhood. The chaste body of the Hindu woman was thus made to carry an unusual political weight since she had maintained this difference in the face of foreign rule. The Hindu man, in contrast, as noted earlier, had allowed himself to be colonized and surrendered his autonomy before the assaults of Western power-knowledge¹⁷.

She tries to correlate the present political system where woman represents the 'icon' created and campaign to elaborate them in representative terms.

¹⁶ Tanika Sarkar, '*Conjugal and Hindu Nationalism*'

¹⁷ Tanika Sarkar, (Delhi, 2001), op. cit., Chap.1

2.4 Rethinking Gandhian Solution

Tanika Sarkar then takes up a later and very different moment in nationalism—one connected with Congress mass movement and the popular literature and iconography that it produced. Gandhians believed in an ideology of the separate spheres of male and female activities, of upper-and lower-caste functions. However, they insisted that social asymmetries of class, caste and gender implied a moral vision of trusteeship for the privileged as much as they enjoined obedience for the subordinated.

Moreover, the practical experience of mass struggle opened up fairly equal political functions for men as well as women, for low-caste peasants and upper-caste proprietors. The women and the peasants were, moreover, valorized as ideal *satyagrahis*, as already-constituted ideal political subjects by virtue of their nurturing functions, their moral resistance strategies, and their meekness. Ironically, this privileging doubly confirmed their social subordination and submissiveness. At the same time, such idealizations of their functions came into conflict with their newfound political activism, and with the many breaks with convention and prescription that this required in practice. Discursive images thus need to be qualified by the realities of political practice, especially among women themselves, whose initiative often overran the boundaries set by the Congress leadership.

There was a constant metaphorical tug-of-war between Hindu revivalists and liberal reformists, which maintained the tight rope of changing cultural settings. These situations churned out of the constant pressure, had serious implications in

today's politics. The prejudice and values were carried on over a period through generations. In today's context of communal politics, riots and lobbying for saffronised educational system the situation where history seems to have taken a full circle to repeat it self, needs special attention. Tanika Sarkar was successful to bring to everybody's these finite points.

Chapter 3

Vandana Shiva: Ecofeminism and Critical Awareness

3.1 Critiquing Reductionist Science

3.2 Saving Mother Earth—Interrogating the Prevalent Mode of Development

3.3 Ecofeminism is Decolonisation

Chapter 3

Vandana Shiva: Ecofeminism and Critical Awareness

These two selected books: Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*; and Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's *Ecofeminism* are remarkable ones that can tempt individuals to come out of one's cocoon. There could be two reasons: academic background and research interests; which for many reasons one cannot relate oneself with the remaining world-views for various reasons. These books try to discuss about and explore conflicting ideas about managing the intellectual stagnation. The concept should trigger to shed one's personal mental blocks, to network and rethinking the worldview from a different point of view.

Vandana Shiva's book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* is cogently written, empirical sensitive and draws on a lot of relevant literature and is marked by a good deal of passion and conviction.¹ Inspired by women's struggle for the protection of nature as a condition for human survival, this book goes beyond a statement of women as special victims of the environmental crisis. It attempts to capture and reconstruct those insights and visions that Indian women provide in their struggles for survival, which perceive development and science from outside the categories of modern western patriarchy. These oppositional categories are

¹ Rajni Kothari, in the *Foreword* of Vandana Shiva's book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, (New Delhi, 1988), p. ix

simultaneously ecological and feminist: they allow the possibility of survival by exposing the parochial basis of science and development and by showing how ecological destruction and the marginalisation of women are not inevitable, economically or scientifically.²

This book is an attempt to articulate how rural Indian women, who are still embedded in nature experience and perceive ecological destruction and its causes, and how they have conceived and initiated processes to arrest the destruction of the nature and begin its regeneration from the diverse and specific grounds of the experience of ecological destruction arises a common identification of its causes in the developmental process and the view of nature with which it is legitimised.

The argument that science is not gender neutral as it claims to be but patriarchal in nature is carried on throughout the book and her perception. Vandana Shiva represents the trend of feminists who with more of holistic views nurturant and non-dualistic perspective society. This book is an important contribution of this line. The ecological stance, she has taken, leaves behind the attitude of western conservationist who blame the third world nations demanding too much from planet earth and responsible for pollution in atmosphere and depletion of water table. She is successful in highlighting who actually the culprits are. The development project's of the World Bank, corporate interests of Multinational Companies (MNC's) and ideologues of technocrats and their recent appropriation of environment vocabulary and metaphors by governments and elite whose co-optation of those issues is

² Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, (New Delhi, 1988), p.xviii

dangerous enough to depoliticise the voices of protest and struggle making, environmental protection a surrogate for developmental project. Though it may appear as though she is exaggerating her argument, but to make the voice clear enough to be heard to wider audience she has indeed made a real effort.

3.1 Critiquing Reductionist Science

In the current trends of sociology the feminist sociology has contributed to recognition of major issues like symbiotic relationship between human and natural environment. However, feminist perspective has really changed the way we look at things and challenged various currents of sociological perspectives. Being very recent and contemporary this book addresses several burning issues, which were taken for granted in previous days. Among the many works, which looks at this 'taken for granted' knowledge, Vandana Shiva's book is an eye opener in many ways.

Vandana Shiva traces the historical and conceptual roots of development as a project of gender ideology, and analyses how the particular economic assumptions of western patriarchy, aimed exclusively at profits, have subjugated the more humane assumptions of economics as the provision of sustenance, to make for a crisis of poverty rooted in ecological devastation.

The rise of a patriarchal science of nature took place in Europe during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as the scientific revolution. During the same period, industrial revolution laid the foundations of a patriarchal mode of economic

development in industrial capitalism. The scientific revolution transformed nature from *terra mater* into a machine and a source of raw material; with this transformation it removed all ethical and cognitive constraints against its violation and exploitation. The industrial revolution converted economics from the prudent management of resources for sustenance and basic needs satisfaction into a process of commodity production for profit maximization. 'The new relationship of man's domination and mastery over nature was thus also associated with new patterns of domination and mastery over women, and their exclusion from participation as *partners* in both science and development.'³

'Development' was to have been a post-colonial project without having to undergo the subjugation and exploitation that colonialism entailed. Development, as the improved well-being of all, was thus equated with the westernisation of economic categories. Concepts and categories about economic development and natural resource utilisation that had emerged in the specific context of industrialisation and capitalist growth in a centre of colonial power were raised to the level of universal assumptions and applicability in the entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction for the people of the newly independent Third World countries.

Development was reduced to a continuation of the process of colonisation; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern western patriarchy's economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women, on the

³ *ibid.*, p. xvii

exploitation and degradation of nature, and on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures. 'Development' could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugated cultures, which is why, throughout the third World, women, peasants and tribals are struggling for liberation from 'development' just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism. It is thus not just 'development', which is a source of violence to women and nature. At a deeper level, scientific knowledge, on which the development process is based, is itself a source of violence. Modern reductionist science, like development, turns out to be a patriarchal project, which has excluded women as experts, and has simultaneously excluded ecological and holistic ways of knowing which understand and respect nature's processes and interconnectedness *as science*.

Further, Vandana Shiva addresses the myth of the neutrality and universality of modern science. She traces its beginnings in the scientific revolution that, on the one hand, subjugated nature, and on the other hand, excluded women as knowers and experts. The structure and methodology of modern science is reductionist; further, she shows how reductionism as a patriarchal mode of knowing is necessarily violent to nature and women.

Modern science is projected as a universal, value-free system of knowledge, which has displaced all other belief and knowledge systems by its universality and value neutrality, and by the logic of its method to arrive at objective claims about nature.

During the last few years feminist scholarship has begun to recognise that the dominant science system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole, but as a masculine and patriarchal project, which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women. Harding has called it a 'western, bourgeois, masculine project'.⁴

The awakening of gender and the feminine principle has as essential ingredients of upsurge of ethnicity-ecology and share a lot on a common ground. Feminist movement should also be able to resolve the issue of class at theoretical basis. Women as victims of modern technology and development are reduced to that level of class. The false assumption that if it cannot be so reduced then it is not a real issue but a result of some version of 'false consciousness' with no historical relevance. The issue of class is as central to the historical process as are the issues of femininity, ecology and ethnicity. To avoid to be called as *Petit Bourgeoisie*, the feminists should go more and more and delve deep into people's struggles apart from being identifying themselves with ecology, ethnicity, class and human rights in a shared conception of restructuring the human enterprise for the sake of the future for the feminist movement.

'Ecofeminism' is a jointly authored book by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. Vandana Shiva, a theoretical physicist from the ecology movement, had looked at the capitalist world system from the perspective of the exploited people and nature of the southern hemisphere of the globe; whereas Maria Mies, a social scientist from

⁴ Susan Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, (Ithaca, 1986), p.8

the feminist movement, had studied the same processes as they affect women from the viewpoint of someone who lives 'in the heart of the beast.'

Modern science is project as a universal, value-free system of knowledge, which by the logic of its method claims to arrive at objective conclusions about life, the universe and almost every-thing. This dominant stream of modern science, the reductionist or mechanical paradigm, is a specific projection of Western man that originated during the fifteenth an seventeenth centuries as the much acclaimed Scientific Revolution. Recently, however, Third World and feminist scholarship has begun to recognize that this dominant system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole but as a Western, male-oriented and patriarchal projection which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women.⁵

Central to his domination and subjugation is an arbitrary barrier between 'knowledge' (the specialist) and 'ignorance' (the non-specialist). This barrier operates effectively to exclude from the scientific domain consideration of certain vital question relating to the subject matter of science, or certain of non-specialist knowledge.

Since the scientific and industrial revolution technology and economics have mutually reinforced the assumption that nature's limits must be overridden in order to create abundance and freedom. Agriculture and food production illustrate how overriding these limits has led to a breakdown of ecological and social systems.

⁵ Harding, Sandra, *The Science Question in Feminism*. (Ithaca, 1986)

Patents have become a major means of establishing profits as a measure of value. To patent an object/material excludes others from creating/inventing a novel and useful variation of the patented object/material, usually for a specific period of time. Thus, to assess intellectual property claims in these processes are far more difficult, if not impossible.

The economies of many Third World communities depend on biological resources or their sustenance and well-being. In these societies, biodiversity is simultaneously a means of production, and object of consumption. The survival and sustainability of livelihoods is ultimately connected to the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources in all their diversity. Tribal and peasant societies biodiversity-based technologies, however, are seen as backward and primitive and are, therefore, displaced by progressive technologies that destroy both diversity and people's livelihoods.

In third World situations, sustainability has therefore to be achieved at two levels simultaneously: sustainability of natural resources and sustainability of livelihoods. Consequently, biodiversity conservation must be linked to conservation of livelihoods derived from biodiversity.

Women's work and knowledge is central to biodiversity conservation and utilization both because they work between sectors and because they perform multiple tasks.

Economists tend to discount women's work as 'production' because it falls outside the so-called 'production boundary'. These omissions arise not because too few women work, but too many women do too much work too many different kinds. Statisticians and researchers sufferer a conceptual inability to define women's work inside and outside the house – and farming is usually part of both. This recognition of what is and is not labour is exacerbated by the great volume and variety of work that women do. It is also related to the fact that although women work to sustain their families and communities, most of what they do is not measured in wages.

3.2 Saving Mother Earth—Interrogating the Prevalent Mode of Development

With her often explicit and often implied equivalence between women and nature as if all women are by definition conservationist, life enhancing and equity seeking which can be authentically attributed to rural and tribal women who unlike their urban counterparts who are 'devoured' by 'conservationist ethics'⁶. Another important aspect of worldview is that Vandana Shiva is interested in the deeper meanings of femininity and '*Prakriti*' and in asserting these as far more humane and natural than the dominant 'scientific' paradigm, which is essentially 'macho' in its conception.

Vandana Shiva largely puts her effort into organically relate the concerns of ecology with the feminine principle. With this approach she has broadened the arenas of both the environmental and feminist movements and given a composite

intellectual meaning to both.⁷ If restructured to the major grounds the human enterprise which is currently underway, this framework being a 'holistic perspective' and inclusive agenda should be able to include the wider logic and agenda of concerns for the whole issue of ethnicity, the struggle of minorities and marginalized communities for their rights of inclusion as autonomous and self-governing entities in the larger political community. Even in the ethnic struggles like in environmental movement the prime movers and victims are women. Even if they survive the limitless atrocities, the women who pickup the shattered pieces and rebuild the shattered communities never allowing the mere anger of incensed young men or the cynical manipulation and trickery of those bent on dividing communities to cow them down.

Women, as victims of the violence of patriarchal forms of development, have risen against it to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance. Indian women have in the forefront of economical struggles to conserve forests, land and water. They have challenged the western concept of nature as an object of exploitation and have protected her as *Prakriti*, the living force that supports life. They have challenged the western concept of economics as production of profits and capital accumulation with their own concept of economics as production of sustenance and needs satisfaction.⁸

In their fight to survive the onslaught of both, women have begun a struggle that challenges the most fundamental categories of western patriarchy-its concept of

⁷ *ibid.*, p.x

⁸ *ibid.*, p. xvii

nature and women, and of science and development. Their ecological struggle in India is aimed simultaneously at liberating nature from ceaseless exploitation and themselves from limitless marginalisation. They are creating a feminist ideology that transcends gender, and a political practice that is humanly inclusive; they are challenging patriarchy's ideological claim to universalism not with another universalising tendency, but with diversity; and they are challenging the dominant concept of power as violence with the alternative concept of non-violence as power.

The everyday struggles of women for the protection of nature take place in the cognitive and ethical context of the categories of the ancient Indian world-view in which nature is *Prakriti*, a living and creative process, the feminine principle from which all life arises. Women's ecology movements, as the preservation and recovery of the feminine principle, arise from a non-gender based ideology of liberation, different both from the gender-based ideology of patriarchy which underlines the process of ecological destruction and women's subjugation, and the gender-based responses which have, until recently, been characteristic of the west. A science that does not respect nature's needs and a development that does not respect people's needs inevitably threaten survival.

The displacement of women from productive activity by the expansion of development was rooted largely in the manner in which development projects appropriated or destroyed the natural resource base for the production of sustenance and survival. It destroyed women's productivity both by removing land, water and forests from their management and control, as well as through the ecological

destruction of soil, water and vegetation system so that nature's productivity and renewability were impaired. While gender subordination and patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions, they have taken on new and more violent form through the project of development. Patriarchal categories, which understand destruction as 'production' and regeneration of life as 'passivity' have generated a crisis of survival. Passivity, as an assumed category of the 'nature' of nature and of women, denies the activity of nature and life. Fragmentation and uniformity as assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces that arise from relationships within the 'web of life' and the diversity in the elements and patterns of these relationships.⁹

Vandana Shiva introduces her theory of feminine principle of *Prakriti* the nature being exploited by science and development projects mainly the natural resources and people attached to them have symbiotic relations with the same for generation develop a science of their own and develop in their own natural way in dangerous implications, leave bleak chances of revival once these natural resources are destroyed. In her words, 'the sanctity of life been substituted by sanctity of science and development.' The death of the nature has increased the threat of survival. The biodiversity is rich in tropical forests that hold enormous capacity to sustain itself with multiple food chains and matrix of river water resources. Destruction of any of these would lead to dessication and desertification.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.3

Nearly seven million hectares of land in India brought under irrigation have already gone out of production due to severe salinity, and an additional 6 million hectare have been seriously affected by water-logging. Green revolution agriculture has decreased genetic diversity and increased the susceptibility of crops to failure through lowering resistance to drought and pests.¹⁰ With the destruction of forest, water and land in the name of 'development' and progress it is clear that there is something wrong with the concept of progress. Vandana Shiva insists this kind of violence is equally violent for women who depend on forests for sustenance.

The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families, and their societies. This violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the current development paradigm.¹¹

Contemporary development activity was successful to superimpose itself with its scientific and economic paradigms that are created by western, gender based ideology on communities of other cultures. Women as victims of violence of patriarchal forms of developments have risen against it to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance.

Vandana Shiva goes on to describe the world that Indian women inhabit, both philosophically as a world-view, and in their daily practice, in the production and renewal of life. For the women who are leading ecological struggles, the nature they

¹⁰ Vandana Shiva, *op. cit.*, p.xvi

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.xvi

protect is the living *Prakriti*. It is the awareness of nature as a living force, and of themselves as partners with her in the production of sustenance that guides their ecological struggles. These movements, while dependent on women's insights, are not based on a gender ideology, and make for an oppositional category, conceptually.

Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practise. At one level nature is symbolised as the embodiment of the feminine principle, and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance. Nature as *Prakriti* is inherently active, a powerful, productive force in the dialectic of the creation, renewal and sustenance of all life.

W.C. Beane says, '*Prakriti* is worshipped as *Aditi*, the primordial vastness, the inexhaustible, the source of abundance. All the forms of nature and life in nature are the forms, the children, of the Mother of the Nature who is nature itself born of the creative play of her thought.'¹² The nature of Nature as *Prakriti* is activity and diversity. Nature symbols from every realm of nature are in a sense signed with the image of nature. Contemporary western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy or duality between man and woman, and person and nature. In Indian cosmology, by contrast, person and nature (*Purusha-Prakriti*) are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. Every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle, and dialectical harmony between the male and female principles

¹² Quoted in Vandana Shiva, p.39

and between nature and man, becomes the basis of ecological thought and action in India.

Indian women stood up against the western concepts, which look at nature as object of exploitation and protected nature *Prakriti* as a living force that supports life. The concepts of economics in western patriarchy as production of profits and capital accumulation are contrastingly opposite to the concept of economics as production and sustenance.

Women share common concerns that emerge from an invisible global politics in which women worldwide are enmeshed in their everyday life. These shared thoughts and concerns aim not to demonstrate uniformity and homogeneity but rather a creative transcendence of their differences.

As activists in the ecology movements, it became clear to these authors that science and technology were not gender neutral; and in common with many other women. In their words, “we began to see that the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature, (shaped by reductionist modern science since the 16th century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women that prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, were closely connected.”¹³

The dilemmas of a modern woman, who is urban, do not coincide with that of rural women. Still both are experiencing this soulless development at different scales. Some women, however, particularly urban, middle class women find it

¹³ *ibid.*, p.3

difficult to perceive, commonality both between their own liberation and the liberation of nature, and between themselves and 'different' women in the world. This is because capitalist patriarchy or 'modern' civilization is based on a cosmology and anthropology that structurally dichotomizes reality, and hierarchically opposed the two parts to each other: the one always considered superior, always thriving, and progressing at the expense of the other, thus, nature is subordinated to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global, particularly the structural division of man and nature, which is seen as analogous to that of man and woman.¹⁴

Rather than attempting to overcome this hierarchical dichotomy many women have simply up-ended it, and thus women are seen as superior to men, nature to culture, and so on. An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology that recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of cooperation, and mutual care and love. Freedom versus emancipation involves rejecting the notion that man's freedom and happiness depend on an ongoing process of emancipation from nature; on independence from, and dominance over natural process by the power of reason and rationality. Most feminists also shared this concept of freedom and emancipation, until the beginning of the ecology movement.

¹⁴ Ortner, S., 'Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?' In: Rosaldo, M.Z. & L. Lamphere, *Women, Culture and Society*, (Stanford, 1974) p.16

The new technologies are making their greatest 'progress in plant biotechnology and reproductive technologies – the boundaries between what is, and what is not nature, what is and what is not a right are being redrawn.

The feminist perspective is able to go beyond the categories of patriarchy that structure power and meaning in nature and society. It is broader and deeper because it locates production and consumption within the context of regeneration. Not only does this relate issues that have so far been treated as separate, such as linking production with reproduction, but more significantly, by making these links, ecological feminism creates the possibility of viewing the world as an active subject, not merely as a resource to be manipulated and appropriated. It problematizes 'production' by exposing the destruction inherent in much of what capitalistic patriarchy has defined as productive and creates new spaces for the perception and experience of the creative act.

Firstly, nature's, women's and children's contribution to the growth of the market economy is neglected and denied. Secondly the negative impact of economic development and growth on women, children and environment goes largely unrecognised and unrecorded. Both these factors lead to impoverishment

Both traditionally, and in the context of the new poverty, women and children have been treated as marginal to food systems. In terms of nutrition the girl-child is doubly discriminated against in such countries as India.

Denial of nutritional rights to women and children is the biggest threat of their lives. As Maria Mies has pointed out, this concept of surplus has a patriarchal bias

because, from the point of view of nature, women and children, it is based not on material surplus produced over and above the requirements of the environment or of the community, it is violently stolen and appropriated from nature (which needs a share of her produce to reproduce herself) and from women (who need a share of nature's produce to sustain and to ensure the survival of themselves and their children).

The water crisis contributes to 34.6 per cent of all child deaths in the Third world. The declining availability of water resources, due to factors related to deforestation, desertification and drought, is a severe threat to children's health and survival. 'Development' in the conventional paradigm implies a more intensive and wasteful use of water – dams and intensive irrigation for green revolution agriculture, water for air-conditioning mushrooming hotels and urban-industrial complexes, water for coolants, as well as pollution due to the dumping of industrial wastes.

Putting women and children first needs above all, a reversal of the logic, which has treated women as subordinate because they create life, and men as superior because they destroy it. All past achievements of patriarchy have been based on alienation from life, and have led to the impoverishment of women, children and the environment.

Dams, mines, energy plants, and military bases – these are the temples of the new religion called 'development', a religion that provides the rationale for the modernizing state, its bureaucracies and technocracies. What is sacrificed at the altar

of this religion is nature's life and people's life. The sacraments of development are made of the ruins and desecration of other sacred, especially sacred soils. They are based on the dismantling of society and community, on the uprooting of people and cultures. Since soil is the scared mother, the womb of life in nature and society, its inviolability has been the organizing principle for societies which 'envelopment' has declared backward and primitive. But these people are our contemporaries. They differ from us not in belonging to a bygone age but in having a different concept of what is sacred, what must be preserved. The sacred is the bond that connects the part to the whole.

Gender studies now being published, confirm that women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and hours worked. Women's knowledge has been the mainstay of the indigenous dairy industry. Dairying, as managed by women in rural India, embodies practices and logic rather different from those taught in dairy science at institutions of formal education in India, since the latter is essentially an import from Europe and North America. Women have been experts in the breeding and feeding of farm animals, including not only cows and buffaloes but also pigs chickens, ducks and goats.

3.3 Ecofeminism as Decolonisation

Vandana Shiva traces the beginning of the destruction of forests and women's expertise in forestry with the colonization of India's forests. She shows how what is called 'scientific forestry' is actually a narrow, reductionist view of forestry that has

evolved from the western bias for maximization of profits. Chipko, the famous movement of the peasant women of Garhwal is viewed as a response to this paradigm. The destruction of forest ecosystems and the displacement of women who generate survival through the forest are structurally linked to this reductionist paradigm of forestry. Responses to the severe repercussions of deforestation that emerge from centres of capitalist patriarchy deepen both the ecological and survival crisis. These attempts are contrasted with women's initiatives at forest protection and regeneration, which are sustainable and just, recovering both the diversity of forest as well as sharing the wealth that they produce.

The ecological struggle in India has challenged the most fundamental category of western patriarchy, is aimed at liberating nature from ceaseless exploitation and themselves from limitless marginalisation. They could create a feminist ideology that transcends gender and political practice i.e., humanly inclusive and challenged patriarchy's ideological claim to universalism not with another universalising

In this book, Vandana Shiva has accounted the women's struggle for the protection of nature as a condition of human survival. She voices the concerns of women who are special victims of environmental crisis. She has also 'attempted to capture and reconstruct the insights and visions that Indian women provide in their struggles for survival which perceive development and science as outside categories of western patriarchy. These oppositional categories are simultaneously ecological and feminist. They allow the possibility of survival by exposing the parochial basis of science and development and by showing how ecological destruction and the marginalisation of women are not inevitable economically and scientifically' One such ecological movement is Chipko movement, which challenges the view of 'scientific forestry', which is actually a narrow reductionist view of forestry that has evolved from western bias for maximisation of profits.

Further, Vandana Shiva gives an analysis of food crisis as rooted in masculinist agricultural science and development that have destroyed nature's capital and have excluded women as experts and producers of food. The violence inherent in the green revolution for food crop and the white revolution for dairying, is located and linked to shifts in the perception of food as a commodity produced and exchanged for profit.

Terming Green revolution as a western paradigm, Vandana Shiva states that masculine paradigm of food production that has come to us under the many labels of 'Green revolution', scientific agriculture, etc. involves the disruption of the essential links between forestry, animal husbandry and agriculture, which have been the basis

of the sustainable model. 'The renewable base of agriculture provided by women through carrying green manure and fodder to farms and carrying compost and organic matter to fields has been destroyed by reductionist agriculture which replaces renewable inputs from the farm by non-renewable inputs from factories, and displaces women's work in providing sustainable inputs with the work of men and machines to produce hazardous agri-chemicals as inputs to green revolution agriculture.'¹⁵

Nature and women have historically been the primary food providers in natural farming, based on sustainable flows of fertility from forests and farm animals to croplands. The food system has always included the forest and animal systems in its processes.¹⁶ The feminine principle of food production is based on the intimate links between trees, animals, and crops, and on the work of women in maintaining these links. Women's work in agriculture has traditionally been work in integrating forestry and animal husbandry with farming. Agriculture modelled on nature and based on women's participation with nature has been self-reproducing and sustainable because the internally recycled resources provide the necessary inputs for seeds, soil moisture, soil nutrients, and pest control.

Thirty five years ago, forty centuries of knowledge of agriculture began to be eroded and erased as the green revolution, designed by multinational corporations and western male experts, homogenised nature's diversity of human knowledge on a reductionist pattern of agriculture, evolved by global research centres. 'By the late

¹⁵ Vandana Shiva, *op. cit.* p.96

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.96

1950s these centres created high yielding variety (HYV) wheat which later provided the basis of the green revolution in India. Private capital and global aid provided the inputs for the capital intensive, resource intensive, profit oriented farming of the green revolution.¹⁷ The very meaning of agriculture was transformed with the introduction of the western green revolution paradigm. It was no longer an activity that worked towards a careful maintenance of nature's capital in fertile soils and provided society with food and nutrition. It became an activity aimed primarily at the production of agricultural commodities for profit.

With the shift in the nature of the activity came a shift in the nature of the actors; nature, women, and peasants were no longer seen as primary producers of food. 'The shift from thinking in the context of nature's economy and the survival economy, to thinking exclusively in the context of the market economy, created the specificity of the hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, mechanisation and large-scale irrigation. These technologies were responses to the need for maximisation profits from agriculture. They were aimed neither at protecting the soil and maintaining its fertility, nor at making food available to all as a basic human right or providing livelihoods in food production.'¹⁸ The emergence of a new breed of agricultural 'experts' with fragmented knowledge of individual components of the farm system, and with a total integration of this fragmented knowledge with the market system, led to the displacement of the traditional agricultural experts—women and peasants.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.103

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.104

The green revolution has displaced not just seed varieties but entire crops in the third world. Just as people's seeds were declared 'primitive' and 'inferior' by the green revolution ideology, food crops were declared 'marginal', 'inferior' and 'coarse grains'. Whereas these new varieties of seeds, called high yielding varieties (HYV), were not high yielding in and of themselves; their distinguishing feature is that they are highly responsive to heavy inputs of irrigation and chemical fertilizers. These were also eulogised as 'miracle' seeds. It is therefore appropriate to call them 'high-responsive-varieties' (HRVs), because with the ideal inputs, their yield is extremely low.

Vandana Shiva talks about the water crisis that is threatening the survival of plant, animal and human life on a cataclysmic scale. It is related to land and water used for profit such that limited water resources are over-exploited or diverted from survival needs to the imperative of profit maximization. The reductionist view of water and water management is contrasted with the holistic knowledge women have for conserving and using it for survival.

Citing reasons for this present book, the authors say 'one is to make visible the 'other' global processes that are becoming increasingly invisible as a new world order emerges based on the control of the people and resources worldwide for the sake of capital accumulation. Another is the optimistic belief that a search for identity and differences will become more significant as a platform for resistance

against the dominant global forces of capitalist patriarchy, which simultaneously homogenize and fragments.¹⁹

This capitalist-patriarchal perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality. The authors claim that their “aim is to go beyond this narrow perspective and to express our diversity and, in different ways, address the inherent inequalities in world structure which permit the North to dominant the South, men to dominant women, and the frenetic plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominant nature.”²⁰

Cultural relativism, amounting to a suspension of value judgement, can be neither the solution nor the alternative to totalitarian and dogmatic ideological universalism. It takes a liberal stance, but it should be remembered that European liberalism and individualism are rooted in colonialism, destruction of the commons, on wholesale privatization and on commodity production for profit. To find a way out of cultural relativism, it is necessary to look not only for differences but for diversities and interconnectedness among women, among men and women, among human beings and other life forms, worldwide.

The ‘seed wars’, the trade wars, patent ‘protection’ and intellectual property rights designed by *General Agreement for Trade and Tariffs* (GATT) are modern versions of claim to ownership through separation.

¹⁹ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993, p.2

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.2

Ester Boserup²¹ has documented how women's impoverishment increased during colonial rule; those rules who had for centuries subjugated and reduced their own women to the status of de-skilled, de-intellectualised appendages, discriminated against the women of the colonies on access to land, technology and employment.

The exclusive focus on incomes and cash-flows as measured in GNP has meant that the web of life around women, children and the environment is excluded from central concern.

The marginalisation of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. Loss of diversity is the price paid in the patriarchal model of progress, which pushes inexorably towards monocultures, uniformity and homogeneity. In this perverted logic of progress, even conservation suffers. Agricultural 'development' continues to work towards erasing diversity, while the same global interests that destroy biodiversity urge the Third world to conserve it. This separation of production and consumption, with 'production' based on uniformity and 'conservation' desperately attempting to preserve diversity militates against protecting biodiversity. Only making diversity the basis, foundation and logic of the technology and economics of production can protect it.

Diversity is the principle of women's work and knowledge. This is why they have been discounted in the patriarchal calculus. Yet it is also the matrix from which an alternative calculus of 'productivity' and 'skills' can be built that respects, not destroys, diversity.

²¹ Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*. (London, 1960)

Women's knowledge is crucial to the use of biomass for feed and fertilizer. Knowledge of the feed value of different fodder species, the fuel value of firewood types, and of food products and species is essential to agriculture-related forestry in which women are predominately active. In low input agriculture, fertility is transferred from forest and farm trees to the field by women's work either directly or via animals. In most cultures women have been the custodians of biodiversity they produce, reproduce, consumer and conserve biodiversity in agriculture.

The dominant world view does not regard these tests as scientific because they do not emerge from the laboratory and the experimental plot, but are integral to the total world-view and lifestyle of people and are carried out, not by men in white coats, but by village woman. But because it is thus that the rich biological diversity in agriculture has been preserved they are systematically reliable.

Navdanya or nine seeds are the symbol of this renewal of diversity and balance, not only of the plant world, but also of the planet and of the social world. This complex relationship web lives meaning to biodiversity in Indian culture and has been the basis of its conservation over millennia.

According to Rajni Kothari, "It is not that only women are involved in these struggles. If it is so then it is a distorted exaggeration." He maintains, "it is true that modern technological development and the scientific paradigm has affected women more and as possible deliverer and liberators from it. Women are more central than

men.”²² He feels that women have more capacity in both preserving and rebuilding communities. It is implied that femininity and ecology on one hand and femininity and ethnicity on the other hand are natural allies mutually synergizing each other and practically synonymous. This is all part of larger struggle for indigeneity in a world threatened by homogenizing thrust of modernity. It is important that one should not misinterpret holism-inspired in feminine principle with the universalism of the modern scientific era. This is because holism respects and nurtures diversity whereas universalism undermines it under its homogenizing and centralizing thrust and leading to destruction of diversity.

Vandana Shiva recapitulates the rationale behind the dominant science and technology and development paradigm that is responsible for the current economic and ecological crisis and posits the reclaiming of the feminine principle as a non-violent non-gendered and humanly inclusive alternative.

²² Rajni Kothari, *op. cit.*, p.xvii

Conclusion

Conclusion

In this dissertation, our task was to identify select texts of three thinkers who, we believe, contributed to the development of feminist sensitivity in sociology. The reason for engaging in an exercise of this type is rooted in the tradition of sociology of knowledge reveals that there are modes of thought, which cannot be adequately comprehended if their social origins are obscured.

That is why, the active presence of women in the site of knowledge we notice how the discipline begin to become more open and sensitive to their ideas. It is therefore not surprising that feminist contribution to sociology as a body of knowledge is becoming steadily feasible.

This dissertation is a modest effort to make sense of these contributions through the writings of three feminists, Leela dube, Tanika Sarkar and Vandana Shiva. When we look at their works we see tremendous significance as far as understanding of our times and context. We can contextualise their thinking and appreciate its relevance if we reflect on the following:

1. Leela Dube's ethnography reminds us of the extraordinary sensitivity that a sociologist need to be gifted with, in order to listen to inner world of the women, their pain, anguish, hope, and aspirations. In fact the sensitivity that characterizes her ethnographic work need to be learnt by every researcher in sociology who is willing to work on not just women but essentially experiences of the marginalized.

Further more, her descriptive details of the way a Hindu woman grows up would teach us how biological sex slowly gets transformed into socially constructed gender. It is important to take care of these details particularly when divergent womens groups in the country, been struggling for a gender sensitive society.

2. Tanika Sarkar is a historian having immense sociological relevance. As far as the methodology of the social research is concerned, Sarkar's interpretative study of the autobiography of an unknown Hindu woman in colonial Bengal reminds us of creative use of biographies and life histories in sociological research.

For feminists for whom personal is political and interpretative enquiries into life's history is a definitely a strong methodological scale. It is a scheme that has to be celebrated as feminist contribution to epistemology. Furthermore study of womanhood and nation making helps us to make sense of the state of women particularly at a time when Hindu nationalists have occupied a center stage in Indian politics.

3. In this age we are also witnessing the discontents of excessive techno-industrial growth and scientific reductionism. The question arises, is there an alternative mode of thinking and living? It is in this context that Vandana Shiva's Feminist thinking acquires a new meaning. Shiva's contribution lies in the fact that she debunks the neutrality of the science and sees its relationship to the rationale of the patriarchal colonial domination. As a result her feminism is in tune with environmental sensitivity or ecological consciousness. As far as the ideology of science is concerned Shiva's contribution is definitely worth studying.

Among above all mentioned feminists, only Leela Dube is from the sociology discipline, whereas Tanika Sarkar is a historian and Vandana Shiva is a theoretical physicist, have made their impact felt throughout their academic and research concerns. They have exercised their consciousness through their books, activism and faith in commitment towards their work. In the context of third world intellectuals who maintain their perseverance throughout their careers without 'settling down' or compromising over their queries these feminist thinkers become role models for those who are venturing into feminist research.

In other words, a look at these three thinkers helps us at least partially to familiarize ourselves with the rich feminists's space in sociological knowledge in India. As we have said an M.phil is a just modest beginning. In this limited time an attempt has been made to know the theoretical background in feminist sociology in India. This preparatory work is likely to help us at the stage of our doctoral work when an attempt to be made to explore a specific site of enquiry from what broadly regarded as feminist perspective

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