

**WOMEN'S IDENTITY AND AGENCY WITHIN
'HINDU NATIONALISM'**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in part-fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

MANISHA SETHI

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi
1999



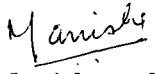
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110 067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

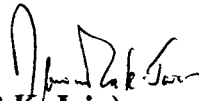
Dated: 21.07.1999

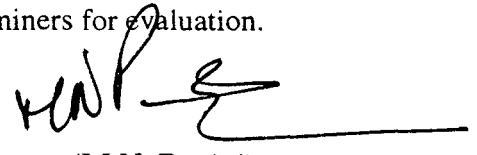
CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled “Women’s Identity and Agency within ‘Hindu Nationalism’”, submitted in part-fulfilment for the M. Phil degree of this university has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university and is my original work.


(Manisha Sethi)

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


(R.K. Jain)
Supervisor


(M.N. Panini)
Chairperson

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale...But the women seem to have taken over; they march in from the peripheries of the story to demand inclusion of their tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manners of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side. It occurs to me that the women know precisely what they were up to - that their stories explain and even subsume , the men's.

-- Salman Rushdie.

Acknowledgement

Chapter 1

Introducing the Problematique 1

Chapter 2

Some Theoretical Issues 10

Chapter 3

Tracing the Lineage of the 'Hindu Nationalist' Woman 33

Chapter 4

Avenging Angels and Nurturing Mothers 51

Chapter 5

A Summary and Some Questions 74

Bibliography 84

Appendix

Acknowledgement

For his incisive comments, suggestions, constant encouragement and incredible openness to my ideas, my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. R.K. Jain, goes beyond the customary.

For the unwavering cooperation and help extended by the library staff of central library, JNU, Nehru Museum and Memorial Library and Gupta ji of the DSA library at CSSS, I am immensely thankful. But for the hospitality and unsuspecting help from VHP and the women at Sevika Samiti, this tract could never have been written.

Thanks are also due to my numerous friends, Harsh, Udaiveer, Amir, Tabir, Bakar, Ravindra, Geetika, Khalid Akhtar, Himanshu, Ritu and many others whose names do not appear here for providing me with good cheer always and library tickets occasionally. Gopal's cassette recorder made possible the recording of interviews. To Khalid Aftab and Govind, a big thank you for helping me build my deceptions at the Samiti and VHP. To Shilpi, Alita, Pinky and Jayashree for making hostel so livable. To Tanweer for grudgingly allowing me to unleash chapters on him and to Shakti, I owe my footnotes.

Finally, all the errors therein, I claim solely as mine.

20.07.99.

Manisha Sethi

Chapter 1

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEMATIQUE

I

Acrimonious debates have raged in the academic circles over the characterisation of the increasingly militant Hindu consciousness since the late 80s. Some have labeled it as fascist while others have urged the futility of bracketing it in this paradigm.¹ Is it to be seen as an elite conspiracy or as a mass popular upsurge? Is it religious fundamentalism threatening to tear asunder the modern nation state or is itself a reawakening of a pristine 'Hindu nationalism' which alone can guarantee the boundedness of this nation state. Some would argue that it reflects not a lack of political commitment to the idea of the state, but rather acts as a buffer against the various centrifugal energies of the secessionism of Kashmiris , Punjabis and of the North east as well as the extra territorial loyalties of the Muslims.

Golwalkar, the ideological founthead of Hindu militancy, proclaimed that Hindus constituted a nation by fulfilling all the five criteria of - country, race, religion, culture and language that comprise the template of nationhood. "... The Hindus alone are the nation and the Moslems and others, if not actually anti national are at least outside the body of the nation".² In this sense, the events and episodes of Hindu assertiveness may be seen as the rousing of nationalist sentiments.

Now 'nation' is a slippery concept which defies easy definition. Oommen

¹ See for instance, Sumit Sarkar, "The Anti-Secularist Critique of Hindutva : Problems of a Shared Discursive Space", in *Geminal*, Vol. 1, (Special Issue on Fascism and Culture), pp. 101-10. Also see Achin Vanaik, "Situating Threat of Hindu Nationalism : Problems with Fascist Paradigm", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. .No. 28, pp. 1729-48.

² Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, (Nagpur : Bharat Publications, 1939), p. 53.

attacks the notion of 'Hindu rashtra' dismissing the possibility that religion can be a determinant of national identities. In the first place, he argues, even within the narrative of 'Hindu nationalists', Hinduness appears as a shifting category, alluding sometimes to simply the original and obvious inhabitants of Hindustan or India, sometimes to all Indic religions - religions that originated in India and whose followers exhibit sole and terminal loyalty to this country as their *pitrabhoo* and *punyabhoo* that is their fatherland and their holy land. It also refers finally to all those who belong to the clean castes which occupy the Indo-Gangetic belt and who speak Indo-Aryan languages. This not only effectively leaves out a large aboriginal and lower caste population outside the fold of Hindus but also coalesces territory, language, culture and caste. Moreover there exist in India today 'foreign' religions now centuries old the bulk of whose adherents comprise lower caste and tribal converts. The claim for the coterminality of religion with nation is fallacious and cannot be sustained.³ 'Hindu nationalism' therefore would be continued to be used as their own self definition.

Even though these are religious appeals being made within the grid of nationalism, it will be wise not to see it as an illustration of religious fundamentalism. For religious orthodoxy lies at the heart of fundamentalism and "... it seeks to dominate much more than the political...".⁴ The BJP/RSS/VHP are not calling for a return to the fundamentals of the faith - a defining feature of religious

³ T.K. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity : Reconciling Competing Identities*, (U.K. : Polity Press, 1997), pp. 83-5.

⁴ Dipankar Gupta, "Communalism and Fundamentalism : Some Notes on the Nature of Ethnic Politics in India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, Annual No., p. 579.

fundamentalism.⁵ We shall argue also against the self portrayal of the events such as the *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement and the eruption of riots as spontaneous and self propelling, as the fruition of mass awakening and action. While not subscribing to the conspiracy theory, it is our contention that a singular hegemonic project such as that of 'Hindu nationalism' is crafted by deploying a clever repertoire of ideas, symbols and material concerns that appeals to various sectors and groups of the society such that they can be assimilated to project a groundswell of support.

II

. Identities do not exist as primordially and eternally fixated but have to be created by selectively abstracting from preexisting tradition and inventing new ones. As Anderson reminds us, that all communities - from the 'little community' of the village, to the dialect community spanning a wide region, to the community called the nation - are imagined and moulded.⁶ Whether 'imagined' or 'invented' (Gellner argues that nations are invented where none exist), they entail relations of power and a continuous process of exclusion and inclusion suggesting the 'becoming' nature of these identities.

✓ Women appear as the central signifier in these processes, the instability and the porosity of the boundaries sought to be ossified by the figure of the woman. It is control over woman's sexuality and autonomy that marks the ethnic, cultural, racial and national purity. The collectivity itself comes to be constructed as female

⁵ T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, (Delhi : OUP, 1997), p. 26.

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London and New York : Verso, 1993).

especially the mother, susceptible to sexual defilement. The 'virile fraternity' is then needed to be mobilized to protect her honour. So the nation is embodied as feminine in the figure of the mother and in its military representatives with power of violence as hyper masculine. The condensation of the community into sexual honour achieves the purpose of obfuscating the internal contradictions to give the appearance of a 'deep horizontal comradeship'.⁷ The trope of motherhood also makes it imperative that all non productively oriented sexualities be erased out of sight.⁸

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have located five different ways in which women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and state practices on different terms to men. These are -

- as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, as 'mothers of the nation'
- as reproducers of the boundaries of the ethnic/national groups
- as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and transmitters of its culture
- as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories
- as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.⁹

Walby, however takes issue with them firstly for prioritising the realm of

⁷ Anderson cited in Parker et. al (eds.), *Nationalisms and Sexuality*, (London : Routledge, 1992), p. 5.

⁸ Recall the controversy over the film 'Fire' depicting lesbian relations within a Hindu joint household. It was labelled variously as 'unHindu' and 'unIndian'. Thackeray even called for changing the names of the central characters to that of Muslims.

⁹ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women and Nation-State", in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalisms*, (Oxford and New York : OUP, 1994), p. 313.

symbolism and relegating the real issue of sexual division of labour to the back stage.¹⁰ Secondly, she attacks them for failing to analyse the differential commitment of men and women to these projects of identity building. Are they equally enthusiastic about it and are they moved by the same considerations?¹¹ To this we might add the question whether their involvement alter in any significant way the dominant discourse? Many studies have noted that as identities sharpen, women, viewed as repositories of uncorrupted cultural values, are subjected to greater strictures and discipline. And as men engage in ethnic, communal or national warfare, women suffer the most in the loss of family, home and livelihood. Their bodies come to symbolize the land that must either be protected from the enemy or that which must be plundered and inscribed by the marks of a victory. There is then a tendency to portray women as victims and as healers who would suffuse the values of love, the 'ethic of care' and maternal thinking' into the public and the political sphere.¹² They are thus inherently suited to be the guardians of a fragile peace. This not only essentialises the category of 'woman' imputing to it eternal, unchanging 'feminine' qualities but also blinds us to the multiple intersections of race, caste, class, religion with gender.

Our concern here is however to analyse the complicity of women in these projects. The enthusiastic women supporters of Adolf Hitler immediately come to mind. What drove these women to participate so willingly in the Nazi activities? Was

¹⁰ Sylvia Walby, "Women and Nation:", in Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*. (London and New York : Verso, 1996), p. 238.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 238.

¹² Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*. (London : Bernstein Press, 1989).

For an indigenous version of the argument see, Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive : Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, (Delhi : Kali for Women, 1989).

it the vision of a distant perfect social order? The promise of 'restoration of the glory of womanhood' or something else?¹³

✓ Nearer home female militancy erupted around the issue of a temple dedicated to Lord Ram at Ayodhya, supposedly his birth place. Lakhs of women descended on this temple town to offer *kar seva*, they also incited men to loot, murder and rape the Muslims and remorselessly justified their acts as retribution for historical humiliations. These events scarred the relationship between women and pacifism. Following it there appeared a cluster of articles focussing on the women's activism within Hindu militancy. Tanika Sarkar's essay¹⁴ proved to be a pioneer of sorts in transferring the focus away from the RSS to its women's wing *Rashtra Sevika Samiti*. Incisively, she x-rayed the intricacies of the organisation, its history, its network of formal and informal ties, the Samiti's relation to the Sangh and so on. Sarkar's starting point is of course the foregrounding of women in the *Ram janmabhoomi* movement and she makes to us intelligible the shift in the iconography and symbolism from that of the 'threatened Hindu woman' which surfaced with unflinching regularity in communal discourses earlier to that of the helpless, 'cute' child imagery of the Rama who must be saved and whose birth place must be liberated by these women warriors. It thus lodges with them a unique energy and agency. This new found agency also bestows according to Sarkar, a certain if only a minimal autonomy from the professed and unprofessed patriarchy of the parent organisation in its emphasis of women's professional and

¹³ Hannah Papanek, "The Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society : Failed Visions and Broken Promises in Nazi Germany", in *Germinal*, Vol. 1, pp. 12-25.

¹⁴ Tanika Sarkar, "The Woman as the Communal Subject : Rashtrasevika Samiti and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 35, p. 2057-62.

public roles which almost approximates the model of Bourgeois feminism.

Bacchetta stretches this point further to highlight the creation of a specifically feminine 'Hindu nationalist' discourse which becomes a guide for action and practice.¹⁵ Women act and think qua women. Their differential locations and concerns necessitating this differential discourse. Placing the Sangh and the Samiti in a comparative framework, she shows how the nation, its history and territory, how Hindus and 'Others' are variegatedly constituted for men and women. For instance *Bharat mata* for the Sangh is a helpless, victimised mother requiring her son's protection, while the Samiti invests her with militant, warrior like qualities.

✓ An essay by the same author is illustrative of how a Samiti activist Kamlabehn draws upon the range of images that the Samiti chisels (differently from the men) particularly its pantheon of armed goddesses that sustain her and spur her to samiti work.¹⁶ "All are goddesses are armed", is the justification Kamlabehn offers for the militant behaviour of women.

There have been a clutch of other essays too, all focusing on the gender logic of Hindutva. All these are bound together with a string of thematic and foundational unities. They draw their main strength from their refusal to see these women as driven from 'false consciousness'. Instead they argue that women participate in these exclusivist projects for it gives to them a rare opportunity to transcend the domestic domain to forge larger solidarities, providing them with a feeling of self worth, a sense of larger purpose and a confidence and control not merely over one's own self,

¹⁵ Bacchetta, "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues : The 'Sangh' and the 'Samiti' and Their Differential Concepts of the Hindu Nation", in Jayawardena and de Alwis (eds.), *Embodied Violence ; Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, (Delhi : Kali for Women, 1996), pp. 126-67.

over one's family and children whom they must mould and make appropriately 'Hindu nationalist', but most importantly over the 'Other - namely the Muslim over whom they are endowed with the power even of elimination. Even while this allows women access to a range of actions denied traditionally to women, the process at best may be termed as "controlled emancipation" as Hansen chooses to call it¹⁷ or "feminism inverted" a phrase Basu develops to denote such activism.¹⁸ For it must forever be silent on the familial hierarchies and patriarchal practices within the community.

Profoundly telling as these are, we maintain our differences with them. Foremost, by foregrounding the *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement, they sever the links that this militancy has with the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century 'Hindu nationalism' which had already fashioned an activist warrior woman though not phasing out the emblem of 'woman in distress'. The construction of femininity that accompanies boundary demarcation, whether as militant or as docile, is indissoluble linked to a peculiar construction of masculinity, a fact that is obscured in these writings.

Also is discernible a tendency here to naturalise such activism by stereotyping it as an upper caste, middle class phenomenon. Sarkar, for example draws solace from the fact that the Samiti *shakhas* are located in the middle class areas such as Karol Bagh, Patel Nagar etc. and that its membership is moving at a snail's pace in

¹⁶ Bacchetta, "All Our Goddesses are Armed : Religion, Resistance and Revenge in the Life of Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 25, pp. 38-51.

¹⁷ Thomas Blom Hansen, "Controlled Emancipation : Women and Hindu Nationalism", in Wilson and Frederikson (eds.), *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism*, (London : Frank Cass, 1995), p. 82.

¹⁸ Amrita Basu, "Feminism Inverted : The Real Women and the Gendered Imagery of Hindu Nationalism", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 25, p. 25.

comparison with the 'radical' organisation such as AIDWA (the women's wing of CPM). Such an understanding leads to, we believe, academic as well as political complacency. Not only are their *shakhas* spreading to non traditional localities, but the sheer public visibility and aggressiveness of their cadre gives us no cause for comfort. It is only Hansen who speaks of lower caste participation in *Durga Vahini*, an affiliate of the VHP, but he too does not interrogate the reasons for their collusion with this project.

This study on the contrary aims to analyse the symbolism and the imagery that helps to establish communalism as the hegemonic discourse among women of various strata. It shall also propose to historicise it by locating the processes that constructed certain ideals of masculinity and femininity in the last century till now and how the woman of 'Hindu rashtra' was constituted by the anxiety about Hindu male effeminacy. Such activism has clearly unsettled the categories of 'agency', 'selfhood', 'subjectivity' and 'motherhood'. We shall re examine them through the lens of 'Hindu Nationalism'. And finally in what paradoxical ways is such activism bound up with the various strands of feminism.

Chapter 2

SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

I

What propels history ? Are 'men' free floating actors who by their sheer conscious will shape the course of history or are their subjectivities and actions moulded by forces beyond their control ? This debate has always formed the core of Social science tradition. Sociology particularly has long grappled with reconciling the individual/ human subjectivity with society/ collectivity, agency with structure, 'insides' of people with the discourses of their 'outsides', the material with the mental. This question has polarised intellectual production around two competing traditions- The humanist and the anti humanist.

Humanism is the belief that all values, meanings, history and culture are the products of human consciousness and individual activity.¹ It elides the subject with consciousness, prioritising the latter in making choices, judging, creating and transforming social relations. The thought of Weber, Existentialism of Sartre, and the tradition of Hermeneutics and Phenomenology are emblematic of humanism. Sartre espouses the primacy of subject's experiences in ontological, political, social and interpersonal relations. The subject is a consciousness that is paradoxically constrained to be free and it is in it's actions and choices that it receives it's identity, integrity and cohesion. Though located in the material world, the subject has the power to transcend it. It is an unencumbered self oblivious of constraints and

¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions : Three French Feminists*, (Australia : Allen and Unwin, 1984) p.6.

oppressive forces that determine the decision making process.² For Weber, the social world is comprised of the meaningful actions and utterances and gestures of actors who have reasons and motives for what they do and in some sense know what they are doing.³

The humanist assumption that individuals are the sole source of meaning and action has been fiercely contested. In delineating the nature of subject matter of Sociology, Durkheim insisted upon the twin criteria of 'exteriority' and 'constraint' which demarcate the ambit of actions that are allowed to any actor. The image of the individual that emerges in Durkheim is of one enmeshed in a system of moral duties and obligations which are accepted by him as legitimate.⁴ Marxism however is much more fraught with tensions. 'Men make history', declares Marx, 'but not under conditions of their choosing'. It effectively denied any authorship to individuals who only act using the resources, both material and cultural, that had been provided to them.⁵ For a long time, Marxism remained dominated by an economic determinism which relied heavily on Marx's metaphor of a multistoreyed edifice wherein it's economic base determines everything that is built on it 'correspond' to it in some way. All our ideas including our self conceptions emanate from the world in which

² Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, (New York : Washington Square Press, 1966-Reprint).

³ " In 'action' is included all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it", in Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, (ed.) Talcott Parsons, (New York and London : The Free Press and Collier Mc Millan Pub., 1964), p. 88. For a typology of social action, see pp. 115-117.

⁴ Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, (ed.) George E. G. Catlin (New York and London : The Free Press and Collier Mc Millan Pub., 1964), especially see pp. 1-13.

⁵ Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity", in Hall, Held and Mc Graw (eds.) *Modernity and its Future*, (U.K. : Polity Press, 1992), pp. 285-286.

we live. "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness".⁶

Along with Marx it was Freud's notion of 'unconscious' that marked the greatest rupture from humanism and most forcefully unsettled the category of a knowing, conscious being who could initiate meaningful actions and make choices. Freud displaced the centre of the human world from conscious to the unconscious arguing that the crystallisation of our identities, our sexuality and the structure of our desires hinges on the psychic and symbolic processes of the unconscious.⁷ Lacan's reading of Freud emptied the individual self of all essential qualities arguing that it is not born but made. In what Lacan calls the mirror phase of development, the infant possesses no self image as a whole person but 'sees' or 'imagines' itself reflected - either literally in the mirror or 'figuratively' in the 'mirror' of the other's look. This stage marks the primal separation of mother and child and its entry into the world of symbols, representation and images.⁸

Louis Althusser, the Marxist structuralist maintained that Sartre's notion of 'man' springs from a distinctive ideological definition of the human subject which repressed Marx's insights that the human subject is not the centre of history, and Freud's view that the subject is not centred in consciousness. For Althusser, who traced his lineage both from Marx and Lacan, 'both history and subject are equally

"... Circumstances make men every bit as much as men make circumstances". Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings* (eds.) O'Malley and Richard A. Davis (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 137.

⁶ Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings* (eds.) O'Malley and Richard A. Davis (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 125.

⁷ Hall, op. cit., p. 286.

⁸ Ibid., p. 286. See also Moore, *A Passion for Difference : Essays in Anthropology and Gender*, (Cambridge and Oxford : Polity Press, 1995), pp. 42-44.

decentred'.⁹ It is in his essay especially 'Ideological State apparatuses', where he differentiates between ideological and repressive state apparatuses (henceforth ISA and RSA respectively). that the dialectic between ideas and matter, base and superstructure is most sharply explored.¹⁰

Beginning with the key question, of how a social formation produces and reproduces itself, Althusser suggested that it required not merely the technical means of production but also and equally importantly, construction of socially appropriate subjects.¹¹ Retaining the Marxist notion of ideology as an illusion and an expression of interests of social groups, he however added that they work through and upon individual people or subjects. In fact subjectivity or personhood is itself formed in and through Ideology.¹² Thus opened up new vistas of enquiry such as how ideologies are internalised, how dominant ideas are made to appear 'their own' and how socially determined views are naturalised and expressed 'spontaneously'. Althusser was interested in how subjects and their deepest selves are 'interpellated' and 'positioned' by the social practices for their discourses.¹³

The subjects' subjection to the dominant ideology cannot be adequately explained in terms of coercion or force alone. While hegemony through RSAs such as police and army functions by violence¹⁴, hegemony through consent is achieved by

⁹ Madan Swarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 51.

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy* (Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 126-186.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.162.

¹³ Influence of Lacan is palpable.

¹⁴ Althusser, *op. cit.*, p.143.

ISAs such as school, family and the church. Ideology 'hails' or interpellates individuals as subjects in a double sense- as authors and centres of initiatives, as well as beings subjected to a higher authority, free only to submit to this authority. So in normal course the subjects 'work by themselves' requiring only occasionally the invocation of RSAs.¹⁵

But if Althusser rejected the equation of subjectivity with consciousness, he equally forcefully argued not only for 'relative autonomy' of the ideological and cultural relations from the material base but also a reciprocal action¹⁶ in that material production forces both produce social forms of consciousness and are constantly produced by them. Thus ideology did not have a spiritual existence but was inscribed in the material practices.¹⁷

In saying so, Althusser is merely following the lead of Gramsci who was the foremost Marxist to recognise the interpenetration of base and superstructure. Much before Althusser, Gramsci argued that hegemony is achieved not by direct manipulation or indoctrination but by playing upon the common sense of people - what Raymond Williams calls - 'lived system of meanings and values.'¹⁸ Marking a break from traditional Marxism which espoused that men are compelled to act as they do, coerced as they are by the dominant in society, Gramsci instead stressed the incorporation and transformation of the ideas and practices of the former rather than a simplistic imposition from the above. Human agents are not according to Gramsci,

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London and New York : Routledge, 1997), p. 29.

merely the bearers of ineluctable forces but are striving to realize their creativity and autonomy even within the structurally determined limits.¹⁹

In many formulations that followed Althusser, the material and the ideological became increasingly indistinguishable. The 'material in its effect' began to be read as 'material in itself'. The notion of materiality of ideology reinforced the claim for an equal status to ideology alongside 'material conditions' in these analyses.²⁰ Discourses and texts could be understood on their own terms, and only on these terms marking the preeminence of the ideological over the material. Indeed several later writings served to subvert and invert the economic theory of reflection to propose that the superstructure or some aspect of it determines everything else by making everything that which is subject to it 'correspond' to it in some way. It picks its argument from Marx's observation in the 'German Ideology' that 'Ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are in general subject to it'.²¹

Located at the intersection of innovations in ideology, language and subjectivity, the works of Foucault, Derrida and Saussure proved pathbreaking. In Saussure and later Derrida and Foucault, language is evacuated of all innocence as a mere system of communication, instead Saussure holds that 'language speaks us rather than we speak it'.²² Meanings are established through a process of exclusion and association in a social setting so that we are not in any absolute sense the

¹⁹ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought : Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 119.

²⁰ Mich'ele Barrett, "Ideology and Cultural Production of Gender", in *Women's Oppression Today*, (NLB, 1980), pp. 89-90. Barrett identifies this tendency most particularly in the theory developed by Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst and the Feminist appropriation of this theory by the editors of the journal *m/f*.

²¹ Marx (1970b:64) quoted in Trevor Bannel, *Post Cultural Theory: Critical Theory After the Marxist Paradigm*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.6.

²² Saussure cited by Madan Swarup, op. cit., p. 46.

authors of the statements or utterances we make. Derrida too emphasises the multiaccentuality of words, instability of meaning and the inability of the subjects to arrest these which constantly slip out of the speaker's control.²³

Likewise, Foucault announces the death of the author, for no single individual is the sole source of any utterance, all human ideas and all fields of knowledge are structured and determined by the 'laws of a certain code of knowledge' Abandoning the category of ideology altogether, he adopts instead the notion of 'discourse'.²⁴ Discursive practices make it difficult to think outside them - hence they are also exercisers in power and control. Foucault conceives of a new type of power that is typical of the contemporary times that is, disciplining power, that springs not from a central, hierarchical structure (such as the state in Marxist formulations) but oozes from everywhere. It operates by regulating entire populations as well as by working insidiously upon the human subject especially the human body.²⁵

²³ Hall, op. cit., p. 288.

²⁴ Foucault writes, "What in short we wish to do is to dispense with 'things'... to substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse", cited in Michele Barret, "Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis", in Barrett and Phillips (eds.), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Debates*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 201. There is much ambiguity about the ways in which 'Discourse' is used. It is most often defined as a "...group of signs...", in Barrett, p. 203.

²⁵ Foucault in his varied works such as *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977) etc. traces the 'genealogy' of the subjects and how it is created in and through workshops, barracks, schools, prisons, hospitals and clinics - institutions of modern society. By focussing on repressive aspects of everyday life, it became a powerful weapon in the hands of the Feminists. For an excellent introduction to Foucault, see Lois McNay, *Foucault: A critical Introduction*, (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

In privileging the unconscious, discourse, and language as crucial in determining subjectivity and agency contrasts sharply with the Marxist notion of economic foundations but they all had the effect of shaking the category of a fully knowledgeable actor in whom inheres the centre of all initiatives. We still realize that the problem of reconciling the mental to the material, real to the imagined, base to the superstructure continue.

The concept of 'representation' can be fruitfully used to serve as a mediating function between the two ²⁶positions - foundationalist and the superstructural. Our understanding of the 'real' cannot lie outside the 'imagined' in and through which subjects are formed nor can we make text the privileged site of our analysis divorcing it from 'it's conditions of production and existence'.²⁷ The contention that the real can not exist prior to it's representation or that the signifier does not exist prior to it's signification does not rule out the existence of a material referent of the sign as a whole. Representation, Barrett argues, is linked to historically constituted real relations.²⁸ Ideologies in themselves are never simply free to set their own terms but are always marked by a process of struggle between competing ideologies striving for hegemony. The major site of contestation and negotiation is the realm of culture which as 'the product of beliefs and conceptual models of society and as the destination where the trajectory of it's desires take shape, as well as the everyday

²⁶ Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.9.

²⁷ Barret, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender", in *Women's Oppression Today*, (NLB, 1980), p. 100.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, P.92.

practices, the contingent realities and the complex process by which they are structured, is the constitutive realm of the subject'.²⁹

It is important to break away from a simple economic base/superstructure formula or the denial of a distinctiveness of matter and ideology and to firmly implicate ideology and relations of production in a reciprocal relationship. It is desirable to operate with a notion of materiality wherein relations of production are not reduced merely to class relations but also incorporate the division of gender, of race and of caste and religion. It will be of some interest to explore how these different structures articulate with and are imbricated in each other and how ideology operates at multiple sites simultaneously.

II

The above discussion allows us to comprehend how identity is acquired not simply passively via internalisation of norms and values through socialisation (as functionalists would argue), but through a practical engagement in lived lives and through constant interpretation, struggles and negotiations over representations on the ideological terrain.

One problem that promptly presents itself is how the social representations of any identity impact upon the subjective representation and conversely how these self representations then mould its social construction. It would do well to relinquish a conceptualisation of the individual and the social as irreconcilable antinomies, existing prior to and independently of each other. Only such an approach facilitates

²⁹ Sunder Rajan, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

the explanation of their 'mutual construction'.³⁰ Secondly, it places at the centre of our analysis, a theory of subject which is multiply constituted. What emerges in contrast to the singular, fixed and stable identity is the fractured, fragmented identity which is lived in as a 'kind of disassembled and reassembled unity'.³¹ Some of the subject positions may be contradictory and conflicting necessitating what Kobena Mercer has called 'the mantra of race, class and gender'.³²

It would now be appropriate to introduce the problematique of gendered aspect of identity. How do we conceive of ourselves as embodied beings and come to have a realization of our gendered existence. For a long time, social science has operated comfortably with a sex/ gender dichotomy such that sex concerns the body, biology or nature while gender has to do with ideology, conditioning and enculturation and the very construction of feminine/ masculine subject. Thus gender identity could be easily and unproblematically explained away as cultural sheen on fundamental biological differences.³³ Within feminist thought this question has been sought to be resolved in a variety of ways.

An important project of Feminist anthropology in the 1970s and 80s was the investigation of the symbolic and cultural construction of gender, An important gain of this kind of research was that it could explain cross cultural variations while still

³⁰ Moore, op.cit., p. 54.

³¹ Haraway (1991:174) quoted in Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?" in Stuart Hall and Paul duGay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (London: Sage, 1996), p. 91.

³² Mercer (1992b:43) in Grossberg Ibid., p. 90.

³³ Such an understanding fails to take note of the ways in which values are embedded in social practices that take the body as their target. See Moira Gatens, "Power, Bodies and Difference", in Barrett and Phillips (eds.) op. cit., 126. Feminists are particularly indebted to Foucault for bringing the body with its differential constitution of capacities and power to the centre stage of analysis.

not losing the implicit unity across them. In her now legendary essay, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture”, Ortner passionately advances the argument that biological differences between men and women acquire significance only within culturally defined value systems.³⁴ Gender, sexuality and reproduction are treated as symbols invested with meaning by the society in question as all symbols are.³⁵ While not precluding the questions of social, political and the economic contexts in their analysis, they did tend to privilege one over the other. For instance, prestige and status are crucial referents for Whitehead and Strathern while Poole and Shore privilege organisation of marriage and kinship relations.³⁶ It should be of some value to note here that the emphasis on inter cultural variations tends to obscure the variations within a culture or society. The implicit assumption being that though all cultures “... defined, constructed and enacted gender in specific ways...”³⁷ a culture developed a simple, single, monolithic gender system.

Marxist feminists taking a more historical and materialist view of construction of femininity and feminine identity, sought to supplement the traditional Marxist preoccupation with capitalism and mode of production by adding to it patriarchy and a mode of reproduction. While they may have been forwarded as distinct and interacting systems but the final causality lay with mode of production and patriarchy

³⁴ Sherry B. Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture”, in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1974), P. 71.

³⁵ Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, *Sexual meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

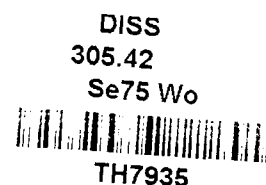
could not compete on an equal footing. With Joan Kelly's essay, 'The Double Vision of Feminist Theory', new ground was broken in her suggestion that both economic and gender systems 'operate simultaneously to reproduce the socioeconomic and male dominated structures of ... (a) particular social order'.³⁸ She introduced the idea of a sexually based reality.

The concept of sexuality forms the crucible as well as the site at which various new issues crystallized opening up ever new avenues of inquiry. Most particularly, it led to questions of fantasy, power, desire and the unconscious in the formation of feminine identity. Initially Marxist feminists espoused faith in a harmonious blending of the need to study the psychic ordering of gendered identity with the staple materialist analysis which could be broadened to subsume the discussions of ideology, culture and psychology. Juliet Mitchell's 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism' is symptomatic of this approach. Mitchell claimed that whereas Marxism could provide an adequate analysis of class and capital, the particularities of sex and patriarchy required the aid of psychoanalysis.

The two theories then were understood as being related to economic infrastructure and ideological superstructure respectively. What this achieved effectively was to banish gendered identity to the domain of ideology and superstructure which could be used potentially to 'justify the postponement of women's struggles or more benignly to the outcome of women's struggles to that of class struggle'.³⁹ Several feminists therefore veered towards a purely psychoanalytic framework. Among the most prominent was the Anglo-American school of object

³⁸ Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 19), pp. 51-64.

TH-7935



relations drawing inspiration from the work of Nancy Chodrow and the immensely influential French school taking after Lacan.

Chodrow and her followers explain the distinctive identities of men and women through the relations with their mothers. Both sexes identify initially with their mother, but while a boy develops his self identity through separation from the mother, a girl acquires her's by completely merging her identity with that of her mother. As a result her sense of autonomy and individuality remain rather weak.⁴⁰ Joan Scott accuses Chodrow and other relational theorists for limiting the experience of gendered identity to domestic sites without linking it to issues of power and economy.⁴¹

Lacanian theory of subjectivity has proved to be particularly alluring for feminists since it stresses on the production of subjects through social, cultural and historical systems of significations. Lacan reworks the Freudian concepts of 'unconscious' and 'sexuality' through his understanding of the symbolic which is the realm of language and the social. Both sexuality and the unconscious are structured, organized and made meaningful only in terms of a key signifier which embodies the 'father's law- the phallus'.⁴² It divides the sexes into two oppositional categories and governs the relation between them. The masculine is positioned as **possessing** the phallus and the woman is positioned as being the phallus by virtue of her anatomical sex being regarded as the absence or loss of the (male) organ.⁴³ Gender identification

³⁹ Moira Gatens, op. cit., p. 126.

⁴⁰ Nancy J. Chodrow, "Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1995, pp. 516-544.

⁴¹ Joan W. Scott, "Gender, a Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *Gender and the Politics of History*, (Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 38.

⁴² Grosz, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

is an unstable process requires as it does the suppression of desires, wishes and ambivalences of the unconscious which constantly threaten to burst out to subvert the unity and coherence of this identity. This implies that gender identity is a continuous process of becoming and any suggestion of an essential or inherent identity is a fiction. Revolutionary though it may sound initially, there are obviously problems with this position.

Lacan provides 'no convincing account as to why the phallus should be the key signifier of the symbolic order, nor why it should stand as the mark of sexual difference'.⁴⁴ He universalises once for all the constitution of the sexed subject in terms of the binary of to "be" or to "have" the phallus'.⁴⁵ Although it is a theory of social constitution of the subject, it remains an abstract subject dislocated from social and historical contexts flattening out the many differences. For this reason, Moore argues that we have to reground Lacan in social institutions, practices and power relations. A new re thinking on the experience of a gendered subject is clearly discernible in the work of feminist film theorist- De Laureates. She writes-

For it is not the fragmented, or intermittent, identity of a subject constructed in division by language alone, an 'I' continually prefigured and preempted in an unchangeable symbolic order. It is neither, in short, the imaginary identity of the individualist, bourgeois subject, which is male and white; nor the 'flickering' of the posthumanist subject, which is nearly too white and at best (fe)male. What is emerging in feminist writing is, instead, the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity... an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Moore, *op. cit.*, p.44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

We are advancing two interrelated arguments here- firstly, that gender discourses are internally differentiated such that different gender positions are available to individuals in the multiple discourses and practices that they inform. Thus both sacralization and commodification of women are features of our society.

And secondly, all the major axes of difference; race, class, ethnicity, religion, and caste etc. intersect with gender in ways that proffer a multiplicity of subject positions within any discourse. So while we can speak of a variety of ways of being a man and equally rich ways of being a woman, we can also speak of gender enmeshed in other differences such that one form of difference can be invoked for another. For instance, race and class ideologies are steeped in and spoken through the language of sexual difference. The sexualisation of race, caste etc. more than anything brings home the fact that identities more often than not are about questions of power, and gender exists as a signifier or as what Patricia Uberoi calls a 'trope' in these power relations.⁴⁷ In signifying these differences, gender may also considerably reconstitute them.

Not very rarely there is an uncoupling of discourses and actual practices. The fact that cultural notions about gender seldom accurately reflect male female identities and relations, their activities and contributions in a given society, has been posed as a tension between myth and reality. Some argue that we must focus on the

⁴⁷ Patricia Uberoi., "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calender Art", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. , WS-41-46. For the tropising of women as signifiers of caste status in South Asia, see Nur Yalman, " On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylone and Malabar", in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 93 (1), 1968.

myths, that is, the cultural representations and ignore the realities; others argue the obverse.⁴⁸ But the question is not simply one of privileging one over the other, but of grasping how gendered subjects actually come to have representations of themselves and how these are shaped and how they in turn resist, reproduce and transform the cultural constructions. The idea then is to place 'agency' at the centre of our analysis.

III

Like most other concepts, agency is also a gendered concept. Discourses about sexuality and gender frequently construct men and women- the gendered persons- as inhabiting different domains of agential capacities. In many cultures there are explicit associations between men, virility, activity and aggressiveness on the one hand and identification of women with utter passivity, servility and receptivity. As Leela Dube shows the metaphor of seed and earth functions as a mechanism for appropriating women's resources and denying her control over these.⁴⁹

Sherry Ortner attributes women's supposed lack of agency to the prevalence of the notion widespread across the cultures that women are closer to nature while men reside in the realm of culture. So women are associated with the 'domestic' or 'private' rather than the 'public' domain of social, political and economic life which only men animate and transform.⁵⁰ Michele Rosaldo also claimed the salience of this

⁴⁸ Ortner and Whitehead, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴⁹ Leela Dube, "Seed and earth", in Dube, Leacock and Ardner (eds.), *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development*, (Delhi:OUP,1986), p. 38.

⁵⁰ Ortner, *op. cit.*, p.72.

distinction in different social and ideological systems which provided 'a universal framework for conceptualising the *activities of the sexes*'.(emphasis mine) The opposition, says Rosaldo, between domestic/public or nature/culture which stand in a hierarchical relation to another derived intimately from women's role as mothers and bearers of children. She defines the domestic as the activities organized around mother child groups, while public refers to activities, institutions and forms of associations that link rank and organizations as well as subsume the mother child groups.⁵¹

Arandt's writings conflate biology, passivity and the private realm and located political action firmly in the public sphere. Citizenship is constituted by the transcendence of the private. This negotiation is however not possible by women who are bound by the condition of embodiment.⁵²

Overemphasis on overt political action, capitalist labour process and devaluation of women's procreative activity, household and other forms of sexual division of labour not only obfuscate women's agency but also foreclose the possibility of a rigorous interrogation and historicisation of the public and the private itself. They are mute about the sites of their interpenetration such as the state, kinship and local power structures and so on and so forth. This division should be seen as concomitant to the rise of public market economy as opposed to the 'private' domestic economy.⁵³

⁵¹ M.Rosaldo, "Women, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview", in Rosaldo and Lamphere, op. cit., p.23.

⁵² B.Honig, "Toward an Agnostic Feminism: Hannah Arandt and the Politics of Identity", in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (London: Routledge, 1992)

⁵³ Eleanor Leacock, "Women, Power and Authority", in Dube, Leacock and Ardner, op. cit., p. 111.

It has as been pointed out is itself a preeminently modern construct and can not be understood without reference to the influence of the nineteenth century western social theory. Social theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw in the transformation in the relations between the sexes, epitomised in changing family structure, the clue to historical development. The idea of the struggle between the sexes - where the 'mother right' eventually ceded to the 'father right' - as the motor of historical change conceived of a particular notion of the term 'rights'. The prevailing ideology of the day was that men were to govern society, and women would be the undisputed mistresses of their homes.⁵⁴ So men were seen as exerting authority through publicly recognized institutions while women exercised power through informal channels.⁵⁵

An understanding of political rights defined was thus arrived at and this was reflected in the political discourse as well as the cultural understanding of what it was to be a woman or a man. The modern state which remains imbued with familial ideology has also served to harden this boundary between public and private. It assumes a masculinist subject and not rarely takes upon itself the mantle of a patriarch. Carole Pateman has problematized the notion not only of 'governmentality' but also of 'fraternity' - literally brotherhood - which formed the underlying principles of the social contract theory. The rhetoric of 'fraternity' serves to naturalise the belief that only men are political actors, that it is they who have created the state and civil society and they alone have the power and the right to represent or

⁵⁴ Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), p. 22.

⁵⁵ See Leacock, op. cit., p. 109 and Perrot et al., "Culture and Power of Women : A Historiographical Essay", in Aymard and Mukhia (eds.), *French Studies in History*, Vol. II. (Delhi : Orient Longman, 1990), p.461.

act on behalf of the rest of the population. The state too sees itself as a rational institution viewing women as objects and recipient of welfare sops, rather than as full participants in political processes.⁵⁶

However women should not be seen as passive receptacles of these discourses which are situated at the intersection of patriarchy, caste, class and so on. It is possible to retrieve the agential capacities of women that may sometimes defy neat women's public roles are characterized by a politicisation of their private roles. Agency is usually visible in 'specific articulations of consent and resistance'⁵⁷ which enables as well as constrains women from making their own history.

Like all systems of inequality and subordination, patriarchy too functions and is sustained simultaneously through domination or threat of coercive violence and by extracting a wide social consensus weaved from and diffused over many realms of social life and through obtaining in numerous ways, varying degrees of consent from women - what Gramsci has called hegemony. The recognition of consent and internalization of ideological domination should not however be reduced to the crude formulation of 'false consciousness' or 'misrecognition' of one's interests⁵⁸, what is required instead is a shift towards an understanding of the larger social processes of stratification, religious, cultural practices, political structure etc. which impinge upon patriarchy and which have the power to generate in their specific permutations of

⁵⁶ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), especially Ch.1. "Contracting In". Also see Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson, "'Women's Interests' and the Post-structuralist State", in Barrett and Phillips (eds.), op. cit., p. 57.

⁵⁷ Kumkum Sangari, "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXVIII, No. 18, 1993. P. 867.

⁵⁸ Michele Barrett, "Ideology and the Production of Gender", op. cit., p. 110.

ideologies and material practices- actions ranging from active collusion to passive, even indifferent acquiescence - which sustain and reproduce patriarchal systems.

The forging of this consent may be explained through the related concepts of 'investment'⁵⁹and 'compensation'.⁶⁰ Women act in certain ways or choose certain subject positions , such as that of a good mother or a faithful wife, because Wendy Holloway says they have an 'investment' in doing so or as Perrot et al argue, they are able to extract 'compensations' from the system in doing so. Holloway's notion of investment rests precariously at the border between vested interest and emotional commitment. Such interest or commitment resides in the domain of power - either as satisfaction, reward or payoff which a particular subject position promises but does not necessarily fulfill.

The notion of *ardhanarishwar* within Hinduism is a powerful ideological weapon and a compensatory mechanism which invokes the images of idyllic complementarity beneath which lie the relations of subordination.⁶¹ Consent deriving from such ideological ensembles must be distinguished from consent which is garnered by the allure of immediate tangible compensations such as economic benefits, physical protection and some limited rights and freedom. Quite obviously, the benefits women are able to seize from the system vary greatly across time and space as well as across classes. Enmeshed as they are in specific production relations, consent to patriarchy also entails active acceptance of other forms of inequality.⁶² It is

⁵⁹ Wendy Holloway, "Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity", in Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit (eds.), *Knowing Women*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 240-274.

⁶⁰ Perrot et al., op. cit., p. 470.

⁶¹ Wendy O Flaherty, *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbolism in Indian Mythology*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1980), p. 315.

⁶² Sangari, op. cit., p. 869.

in this light that women's collusion with exclusivist and inegalitarian projects must be understood.

But hegemony, as Gramsci has pointed out, is marked by 'superficiality of consent'⁶³ and beset by contradiction and tempered with resentment. All systems of domination and subservience are fraught with tensions and have their moments of resistance, subversion, and transformation.

Resistance is a much more difficult concept to define and identify than is consent. For almost any act can be perceived as resistance. Behaviour and sets of activities can be read against the grain of dominant discourses to make sense of the constitution of subversive activity in the field of power relations.⁶⁴ It is important however to maintain a distinction between the transformative potential of individual acts of resistance and collective, organized resistance.

A culturological argument that does not negate but rather celebrates women's agency projects the realm of cultural and literary production as the privileged site of transgressive energies of women. Patriarchies come to be seen as ideological constructs or as a set of more or less customary constraints which women can privately and individually transcend through their creative agency. They assume a

⁶³ Femia, op. cit., p. 43.

⁶⁴ A powerful trend within the traditional domain of the study of social movements, perceptible most notably within the writings of James Scott, has focussed on the more 'enduring' everyday forms of resistance by which the subordinates are able to escape the hegemonic domination in the cultural sphere.

James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985). In an obvious deference to Gramsci, the 'Subaltern' school of historiography has brought onto centrestage, those modes of collective action which were popularly dismissed as riots, aberrations in the otherwise non-violent nationalist movement. The subalternist project of countering an elite historiography had the effect of creating the figure of an autonomous free agent. See Ranjit Guha (ed.), *Writings on South Asian History and Society, Subaltern studies, Vol. 1*, (Oxford: OUP, 1982). Also see Rosalind O Hanlon, "Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia", in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. XXII, 1988, p. 191.

noncongruence between the ideological/cultural and the more mundane material, while patriarchies are lived in the both.⁶⁵

A parallel trend is perceptible among the anti-modernists who valorise female spheres of power within tradition by making alternative readings of it. Most spectacular has of course been the feminist rediscovery of the Hindu goddess, especially as shakti, which is used to contrast the singular patriarchal God of the Judeo-Christian tradition with the plurality of Vedic Hinduism and its plethora of female deities taken as representative of a matriarchal culture.

Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi are oft quoted-

the worship of the mother goddess does not constitute a matriarchy, but it does constitute a matriarchal **culture**, in the sense that it preserves the value of women as life-givers and sources of activating energy, and it represents the acknowledgment of women's power by women and men in the culture.⁶⁶

The point is not only that iconography of powerful women may not correspond to or may even conflict with the reality, but also that consent to tradition and patriarchy has empowered women for certain selected and sanctioned forms of social agency and that while this may appear on the surface of it as radical, unless conjoined with collective, confrontative forces of change will only end up perpetuating existing power structures. The most favoured form of agency for women is that which appears as impersonal- in service of a larger abstract cause like family, religion, community honour. All those actions that interrogate the material basis of

⁶⁵ Sangari, op. cit., p. 868.

⁶⁶ Liddle and Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India*, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1984), p.55.

patriarchy as well as the social values that uphold it must be made taboo and occluded from sight.⁶⁷

For instance, Draupadi, the shared wife of the five Pandava brothers in the epic Mahabharata, epitomises the courage to question blind orthodoxy and the shallow claims of moral superiority made by the elders and the divines, and yet she remains within our society an embarrassed silence. Girls, upper caste girls at any rate are rarely named after her, while the figures of Sita, Savitri and Anusuya continue to be circulated amongst girls for emulation.⁶⁸

In conclusion, we want to reiterate the urgency of overcoming simplistic generalisations of women as either victims or transgressors in order to appreciate the multilayered nuances of women's agency, implicated as it is in an array of social relationships. It is important to unmask the interlocking of identity, politics, and location. Whose agency? On whose behalf? And most importantly, should we celebrate all forms of women's activism as liberating? These are some of the questions that we will constantly return to in the following chapters.

⁶⁷ Sangari, op. cit., p. 873. We have benefited immensely from Sangari's discussion which forms also the basis of my argument here. See also Sangari, "Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, Nos. 51, 1995.

⁶⁸ Purshottam Agarwal, "Savarkar, Surat and Draupadi: Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon", in Sarkar and Butalia (eds.), *Women and the Hindu Right - A Collection of Essays*, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995), p. 55.

Chapter 3

TRACING THE LINEAGE OF THE 'HINDU NATIONALIST'

WOMAN

I

In this chapter, the attempt is to make two arguments. Firstly, much of the existing literature on women activists within the Hindu Right, tends to, even if unwittingly, see such activism as a relatively new phenomenon that gathered momentum around the period of *Ram-Janmabhoomi* movement which saw at an unprecedented scale the participation of women in actual episodes of communal violence. It is argued instead that it was neither sudden nor new but that rather it has to be traced to the cultural nationalism of late nineteenth and early twentieth century which moulded a particular image of Indian (read Hindu) womanhood. Secondly, that the social, religious reformist and nationalist movements did not evoke “woman” merely as “sites of contestation”¹ but also drew them into this process as active agents.

Chatterjee argues that by the end of nineteenth century, the woman’s question had been resolved within the nationalist discourses by demarcating the domains of private, spiritual and the feminine on the one hand and the public, materialist and the masculine on the other.² Not only is such a rigorous division untenable (see last chapter), but also that woman’s question did not silently fade away as he implies. It continued to figure prominently in the public debates. Women, their bodies and their

¹ This is the general tenor of the arguments in the collection of the articles in Sangari and Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women).

sexuality continued to inform the nationalist discourses and fore grounded publicly despite their so called relegation to the private sphere even well into the twentieth century.

This has to be situated in the context of the creation of a unique historical consciousness by the nationalists and the complex of common sense about what it was to be a Hindu, what it was to be an Indian and what it was to be Muslim at that time. The search for the community's and the nation's roots acquired a sense of urgency in the late nineteenth century when an explicit connection was being made between national pride and history writing. Wrote Bankimchandra :

One of the main causes of national pride is the creation or the improvement of a peoples history. History is one of the main sources of both social science and social aspirations. A nation without history is doomed to eternal despair. There are a few unfortunates who do not know who their parents are; and a few races who are unaware of their illustrious fore fathers.³

Indigenous historiography of that time reflected both the two major European trends, namely, orientalism and utilitarianism and in fact represented a unique amalgamation of the two. Orientalists reveled in the greatness of the Vedas and the unsurpassed achievements of the Aryans in the vedic age. Max Mueller, the foremost orientalist established a spurious commonality of racial origin between the Indians and the Europeans,⁴ even though it had no effect on actual race relations. But it was

² Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question", in Sangari and Vaid, op. cit., pp. 243-53.

³ Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Bangaler Itihas", quoted in Somnath Zutshi, "Women, Nation and the Outsider in Hindi Cinema", in Niranjana, Sudhir and Dhareshwar (eds.), *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, (Calcutta: Seagull, 1993), p. 93.

⁴ Uma Chakravarty, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past", in Sangari and Vaid (eds.) op. cit., p. 40.

the notion of an ancient golden vedic age that continues to exercise a hegemonic spell even over contemporary thought. While the woman's question itself was peripheral to Mueller, later orientalists under his influence converged on three issues - that of great Aryan genius and valour, higher spiritualism, and the revered status of women in this mythicised past. The undisputed opinion was that the west had much to learn from the east. In the more romantic orientalist writings, a dichotomy came to be created between the spiritual east and the materialist superficial occident. India was cast in the role of a spiritual heroine that could with her exotic Hindu spirituality, quaint civilization and profound philosophical traditions redeem the west from its banal existence.

The east and the west came to be essentialised in the orientalist production of knowledge as femininity and masculinity respectively. India was imagined foremost as "irrationality and superstition, the predominance of imagination and fantasy over thought and reason ... as a feminine sponge or jungle".⁵

Ironically while the romantic orientalists posited their understanding of India as an "organic, feminine, unfragmented community"⁶ as an antithesis and critique of masculinist, individualist and fragmented nature of the west, the utilitarians too characterised the Indian men as unmanly, of soft body, given to sensual indulgences ; the effete Bengali baboo being its epitome. The Indian's 'lack of masculinity' was

⁵ Ronald Inden (1990:), cited in Thomas Blom Hansen, "Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim 'Other' ", in *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 16(2), 1996, p. 141. Such romantic orientalism shares a discursive space with the present generation of anti-modernists and the Subaltern school of historiography who assume an idyllic pre-colonial past shorn of its feudal, patriarchal oppressiveness. Nandy, for example has consistently spoken of the native innocence that confronted Western colonialism. See Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism*, (Delhi: OUP, 1983).

⁶ Inden in Hansen, op. cit., p. 142.

cited as evidence of their unfitnes for self rule and trumpeted repeatedly by the British to justify foreign rule. In contrast, the English man was characterised by 'manly reserve' and 'self control'- the attributes of 'civilised men'.⁷ An Indian commentator wrote :

Europeans even of a friendly type lament the want of manliness in Indian nature and conduct. It would be strange if after so many centuries of coercion by religion, spiritual and political teachers, and of demoralising social conditions, any manliness should survive especially as when any sign of it is displayed by individuals. It's discouraged by parents, teachers, spiritual guides and political rulers as impertinence and disloyalty.⁸

The question of a precarious sexuality and loss of manhood came to seize the nationalist imagination which in variegated degrees co-opted and sometimes inverted both the orientalist and the utilitarian logic.

Gandhi's nationalism deepened the oriental distinction of a materialist colonial rule and an innately superior spiritual and moral force of the colonised population. He was led by this belief to launch a passive resistance to the British rule, a project for which women were supremely suited because of their innate propensity

⁷ Suruchi Thapar, "Women as Activists; Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement", *Feminist Review*, No. 44, Summer (Special Issue on Nationalism and National Identities), 1993, p. 83. For a detailed analysis of the colonial discourse on Indian masculinity see, Mrianalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late 19th Century*, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996).

⁸ Manneth C. Mallik (1913) IN Northeocote Parkinson, *East and West*, (London: John Murry, 1963), p. 183.

for sacrifice. Gandhi is credited with feminising nationalism by employing traditionally feminine symbols and modes of resistance such as spinning wheel, wearing *khadi* and so on and to a large extent legitimised political activity for women.⁹ However, in Gandhi, spiritualism was enmeshed with sexuality through the circuit of sacrifice. He was preoccupied with the ascetic suppression of libidinal desires and in him one found a complete abrogation of women's sexuality.¹⁰ The Gandhian strategy of non violent satyagraha did not so much alter the Victorian division of public and private than legitimated it by constructing an ideal of a woman-in-home (even when she had to actually physically negotiate the public spaces) who appears as the conscience keeper of her people, of the men, the nation and the society.¹¹ It is not difficult to see how this ideal coincided with an upper caste urban Hindu woman at a time when there existed a large working class women population. Indeed it served to write many women off the nation's script and effectively robbed them of their agency. For instance, Gandhi had refused to accept prostitutes as Congress members unless they gave up their 'unworthy profession'. They were deemed to unfit to sit next to the 'ladies' during an agitation in the course of civil disobedience movement.¹²

⁹ See Sujata Patel, "Construction and Reconstitution of Women in Gandhi", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, 1988, p. 377.

¹⁰For Gandhi, women had a natural inclination towards abstinence and were made the unwilling objects of man's lust : "Does not man by his subtle and unscrupulous means first rob woman of her noblest instincts and then make her partner in the crime committed against her ?" in Zutshi, op. cit., p. 107. See also Katrik, "Gandhian *Satyagraha* and Representations of Female Sexuality", in Parker et. al , op. cit., pp. 395-9.

¹¹ It makes us sensitive to the process coalescence and connivance of colonial and local patriarchies. The nationalist imagining of womanhood was imbued with notions of Victorian morality and the notions of public and private.

¹² Cited in Suruchi Thapar, op. cit., p. 86.

Meanwhile, there was a strand of nationalism, both within and outside of the Congress which was engaged in fashioning a distinct, even virulent and masculine Hindu identity.

The urgency for a united militant Hindu community was spurred by the success of *Khilafat* movement and by the Moplah revolts in Malabar that evoked fearful visions of an organized and violent Muslim community.¹³ *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* programmes launched by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj embodied many of the anxieties and aspirations of upper caste Hindu elite. Earlier in Punjab, the land alienation act of 1901 adversely hit the commercial interests of the urban based Hindus while benefiting a largely Muslim peasantry. If the principle of separate representation of Muslims(1908-09) prompted the stirrings of unease among Hindu elite, the Montague Chelmsford reform(1919) by extending the franchise to the affluent sections of rural India considerably threatened the preserve of urban Hindu privileges. A conflation of political, commercial and religious interests and identities was being carved. Simultaneously, the Hindu society appeared to be ridden by internal schisms of caste conflicts and lower caste assertions.¹⁴

To this was added the anxiety about declining Hindu numbers as indicated in the colonial classification of census around which was created a stereotype of

¹³ Gyanendra Pandey, "Which of Us Are Hindus?" in Pandey (ed.), *Hindu and Others : The Question of Identity in India Today*, (Delhi : Viking, 1993), p. 243.

¹⁴ T.C.A. Raghavan, "Origins and Development of Hindu Mahasabha Ideology : The Call of V. D. Savarkar and Bhai Parmanand", *EPW*, Vol. XVIII, No. 5, 1983, p. 598. Tanika Sarkar also reminds us that in colonial Bengal, the question of masculinity was intrinsically tied with the ownership of property. So land and property alienation must have implied a kind of maiming--physical and material such that the elite Hindu male must have begun perceiving himself as not man enough. See Sinha, op. cit., p. 5.

emasculated Hindus.¹⁵ H.H. Risley, Home Secretary, government of India wrote- “Can the figures of last census be regarded in any sense the forerunner of an Islamic or Christian revival which will threaten the citadel of Hinduism or will Hinduism hold it’s own as it has done through the long ages of the past”.¹⁶ ‘Dying race’ became common parlance as visions of a shrinking Hindu population were repeatedly evoked. Some samples are UN Mukherjee’s, “Hindus- A Dying Race” and Swami Shraddhanand’s,” Hindu Sanghathan- Saviour of a Dying Race”. Lala Lajpat Rai in his correspondence to Madan Mohan Malaviya during the communally charged mid Twenties wrote- “The chief hope (of the British) seemed to have so far been on the chance of thinning their (the Hindus) numbers with a view to make them politically impotent”.¹⁷ Physical impotency thus came to stand in for political impotence and inertia. Within this discourse, the Muslim with his alleged ‘hyper fertility’ and ‘proclivity for violence’ came to occupy the position of the predominant “Other”-- more dangerous and hated than even the Britisher. The Muslim was characterised primarily by his ‘excesses’- ‘sexual excess’ and ‘martial excess’. As Slavoj Zizek argues -

We always impute to the “other” an excessive enjoyment, s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and / or his access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short what really bothers us about the “other” is the peculiar way it organizes itself, it’s

¹⁵ It is not our argument that Hindu or Muslim or any community identity was the product, as Kaviraj argues of a colonial classificatory exercise. We are in agreement however with Arjun Appadurai when he says that these communities were not a figment of the British political imagination but overlapped with indigenous classification. What they did do was to map these differences onto a matrix of administrative apparatus and political life. See Kaviraj, “Religion, Politics and Modernity”, in Baxi and Parekh (eds.), *Crisis and change in Contemporary India*, (Delhi : Sage, 1995). Also see Arjun Appadurai, “Number in Colonial Imagination”, in Breckenbridge and Van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Post Colonial Predicament*, (Delhi : OUP, 1994), p. 319.

¹⁶ Quoted in P.K. Datta, “*Dying Hindus*, Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in the Early Twentieth Century Bengal”, in *EPW*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 25, p. 1306. Fantastic estimates began to proliferate predicting the decline and ultimate demise of Hindus.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1315.

enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the “excess” that pertains to it- the smell of their food, “their” noisy songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work.¹⁸

In 1924, an Arya Samajist composed an Urdu booklet titled, *Rangila Rasul* (The Playboy or The Debauched Prophet) - a perverse and fantastic detailing of the Prophet’s sexual life and tastes. It represented the ultimate polemical exercise against the Muslims and immediately created a furore at a time when communal relations were already very strained. The opening lines of the booklet were written in *Gazal* style-

*If someone is out of sorts, marry her!
To light an extinguished lamp, marry her!
If she is a beauty, marry her!
She has a treasure, marry her!
Let the flowers in the garden entice the Bulbul (bird)
I am enticed by my Rangila Rasul!*¹⁹

This stereotype was to be approximated by the mediation of Hindu women as potential sites of sexual and religious defilement by the libidinous and lustful Muslim. The *Masjids* became phallic symbols penetrating the pure and virtuous motherland. “Motherland has verily become an object of bargaining, only a land for enjoyment, *Bhogabhoomi*, just like a hotel, and not a *Dharmabhoomi*, *Karmabhoomi* and *Punyabhoomi*”²⁰-- The associations of *Bhoga* and hotel with cheap sexual interludes being played out on the motherland is being made explicit here.

¹⁸ Slavoj Zizek, “Eastern Europe’s Republic of Gilead”, in *New Left Review*, No. 183, p. 54.

¹⁹ Cited in Joshi and Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920-47, Vol. II*, (Delhi : Sage, 1994), p. 218. See pp. 134-257 on how the construction of stereotypical Muslims and Hindus was built assiduously through the figure of the woman. For communal constructions in popular literature, see Sudhir Chandra, *Communal Elements in the Late 19th Century Hindi Literature*, Occasional Papers on History and Society, NMML, No. XV, 19984.

²⁰ M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, (Bangalore : Vikrama Prakashan, 1966), p. 93.

The Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh set themselves the task of creating a mythology beginning from Allaudin Khilji to the present about the forceful abduction of Hindu women, their rape, pillage and conversion and were considerably facilitated by the growth of the print media. Widows, especially were viewed as especially vulnerable to the Muslim avarice not only because they were sometimes forced to lead lonely existence but also because of repressed sexual desires. Mukherjee in his "Hindus - A Dying Race", implicated the widows' desire for Muslim males in the proliferating numbers of the latter.²¹ This marked a rupture from the earlier nineteenth century conception of desexualised, impregnable, and pure chastity of the Hindu woman which alone remain unmarked by the corrupting Islamic and western influences. More importantly, this complicity necessitated regimentation and control and not merely protection for these women. Pamphlets outlining warnings and instructions to isolate.

Hindu women from Muslim men began to be circulated.²² Women were advised not to let any Muslim selling bangles etc. Inside the house, not to approach any Muslim for help even if they lost their way and so on. It is of some interest to note that Hindu men were also advised in a similar manner against the Muslim women, especially prostitutes and singing girls (who were generally invited home on joyous occasions and whom Hindu men also frequented) who were seen as partners in the proselytizing mission of Islam. The following fictional conversation reflects the popular Hindu imagination of the 1920s :

Prostitute : O peasant, embrace our religion.

²¹ Datta, op. cit., p. 1307.

²² Charu Gupta, "Articulating Hindu Masculinity and Femininity : *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* Movements in United Provinces in the 1920s", in *EPW*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 13. 1998, p. 731.

Prostitute : It is the order of our Pir of Delhi that we should bring our friends within the folds of our religion by blandishments, coquetry, display of development of breasts and pit in the chin, redness of lips, glow of cheeks, net of locks and dagger of eyebrows.

Peasant : How nice is your Pir who gets such unbecoming acts committed by you. If he is so fond of converting Hindus to Islam, Why does he not start his work at his own house.²³

These tensions were sought to be resolved by the Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj through an articulation of a united and strong Hindu community identity which was nonetheless couched in the language of social reform. Emphasis was laid on softening of caste strictures and encouraging inter caste commensal and marital ties in order to consolidate the community by ironing out internal fissures. Secondly uplift of the conditions of the Hindu widow began to be argued and accepted. The prospect of widow remarriage gained considerable legitimacy because it aimed primarily at harnessing the reproductive capacities of the widows and arrested their possible seduction and conversion by the Muslims. Such was the hype surrounding the dwindling numbers of the Hindus that Dayanand even offered the option of *Niyoga* - the cohabitation of a woman with man/ men other than her husband in order to conceive and add to the strength of the community. However, it was resisted and could never be accepted except by the most loyal of Arya Samajists, even as it became the butt of jokes and ruthless satire in the Muslim press.²⁴

But it was not merely that numbers had to be increased, but the quality of the stock had to be improved too - to produce brave and fearless children who could

²³ Cited in Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India : A Study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-28*, (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 37.

²⁴ See Anshu Malhotra, "The Moral Woman and the Urban Punjabi Society in the late 19th Century", in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 20, nos. 5-6, pp. 34-61.

protect their women and religion. Devratan Sharma, secretary, Hindu Mahasabha, in a meeting asked rhetorically, "What could be expected of the nation composed of such weaklings? So when calamities like that of Kohat, Saharanpur, Malabar and Ajmer befall them they were defenceless".²⁵

Women were thus approached as 'breeders' and their bodies seen as vessels or reservoirs of future Hindu warriors. This phase of reformism was purged of the humanitarianism of Vidyasagar and Ram Mohun Roy but driven by pragmatism articulated most honestly in this statement of Shradhdhanand - "... But if the drain upon the depressed classes (untouchables and other lower castes) continues and they go on leaving their coreligionists, and the onrush of Hindu widows towards prostitution and Muhammadanism, on account of brutal treatment of (by) their relations, is not stopped by allowing them to remarry in their own community, the number of beef eaters will increase".²⁶

The thematic of Hindu impotence from now would be employed not as defeatist resignation but as a clarion call for action and preparedness for a war of apocalyptic proportions. The charge of Hindu effete-ness was countered by a rhetoric of decline and degeneration from an Aryan past which is made to be inhabited by fierce and vigorous men and spiritual and learned women..²⁷ Communities such as the Marathas, Sikhs and Rajputs which had a recent history of combat with the Muslim rulers were extolled for their valour and welded into a single collective Hindu identity. A Hindu martial tradition, harking back to the ancient past was invented.

²⁵ Quoted in Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 1315.

²⁶ Cited in Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

²⁷ Chakravarty, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Shivaji and Maharana Pratap became the favourite heroes.²⁸ This original virility of the Hindu male had to be recuperated for the present by conjoining the textual *Brahminism* with 'true *Kshatriyahood*'. If centuries of 'Muslim oppression' and British rule had emasculated Hindus and made them *nirveerya* and *napunsak* ie, sterile and impotent, it would be retrieved now by fighting and defeating the British but most importantly the Muslim.²⁹ Issuing a warning to the Hindus, Savitri Devi, a European lady settled in India and a firm believer in Aryan supremacy, wrote -" It becomes more and more clear that what the Hindus need, is to recover along with their national consciousness, their military virtues of old: and to become a military race".³⁰

The Mahasabha sought to rally the Hindus to the cry of "Hinduise all politics and militarise Hindudom". But even before Hindu men could be masculinised, the feminine Gods of the Hindu pantheon had to undergo this exercise. Bankim Chandra's Krishna was not the childlike innocent stealer of milk and butter, sometimes immoral and sensual being who cavorted sexually with the many *gopis* he was surrounded by. He was not too the androgynous subject of romantic love tales or the friendly and personalised God of the folk lore. He was instead a righteous, serious, warrior God head fighting for the glories of Hinduism.³¹ Much more recently the VHP-RSS felt the need for masculinising Ram by representing him in his *ugra rupa*, rather than the conventional tranquil, placid, *shanta rupa*. In the VHP posters,

²⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction : Inventing Traditions", in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 7.

²⁹ Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology : Essays in Politics and Culture*, (Delhi :OUP, 1980), p. 86.

³⁰ Savitri Devi, *A Warning to the Hindus*, (Delhi : Prammila Prakashan, 1953), p. 31.

³¹ Kaviraj, *The Myth of Praxis : The construction of the Figure of Krishna in Krishnacharita*, Occasional Papers in South Asian History and Society, NMML, Delhi, 1987.

Ram adorns martial gear, acquires musculature and is shown frozen in mid action.³² He seems not to belong to the divine realm at all but rather to the genre of the He-man, Terminator and WWF wrestlers- the new icons of masculinity for urban middle class boys.

The cult of physique entrenched itself and a premium began to be placed on physical prowess and training for the Hindu male in the 'art' of wrestling, *lathi* wielding and sword fighting. Numerous *akharas* for young men sprang up and at the times of communal clashes provided a ready force of marauding gang.³³ The RSS too styled its *shakhas* combining elements of the traditional *akhara* with games like *kabbaddi* and sessions of ideological training called *baudhik* in order to generate in their young men, a *volk geist*, a national spirit. It was this national will that made the potency of the Hindu men superior to that of brute Muslim aggression. This is expressed most clearly in Golwalkar's headline "Potent Men Versus Patton Tanks".

It has once again given glowing evidence for the irresistible valour and virility of the children born and bred in the bosom of our great Motherland: The way our jawans crushed scores of patton tanks - considered invincible - as so many empty match-boxes and reduced the much vaunted armoured divisions of the enemy to shambles has made many, even its Western masters, sit up and ponder...But they have ignored the fact that it is the 'man' and not the 'machine' that counts. Our superior 'man' has proved to be far superior to the 'machine' of the enemy...³⁴

Clearly two hegemonic ideals of masculinity could be discerned. One that was available to the lower classes that allowed them an unabashed display of their

³² Anuradha Kapur, "Deity to Crusader : The Changing Iconography of Ram", in Pandey, op. cit., pp. 74-109.

³³ Charu Gupta, op. cit., p. 730.

³⁴ Golwalkar, op. cit., p. 300.

manhood, either by violence or by sexual prowess³⁵ and the other that required men to sublimate their sexuality through abstinence and self control.³⁶ This was more typical of the upper caste elite leadership of the RSS. Despite the split, the masculinist ideology of Hindu nationalists, came into direct conflict with the gentle feminised nationalism of Gandhi. The ideologues of RSS campaigned that the Congress leadership of Nehru and Gandhi was making the Hindu society impotent and 'imbecile'. Complained Golwalkar,

"The exhortation of the leaders did not stop at that. The Hindus were asked to ignore, even submit meekly to the vandalism and atrocities of the Muslims. In effect he was told: 'forget all that the Muslims have done in the past... If your worshipping in the temple, your taking out Gods in procession in the streets irritates the Muslims, then don't do it. If they carry away your wives and daughters, let them. Do not obstruct them. That would be violence!' To cite an instance, in those days a Hindu girl was abducted by a Muslim in NWFP and the problem was posed before the Central Assembly where our prominent leaders were present. A Muslim Congress leader lightly brushed aside the incident saying: 'After all boys will be boys and girls are girls'. At that insulting remark not one of the Hindu leaders present there raised a voice of protest. None dared to ask why, if it was just a case of boys and girls, it always happened that the Muslim boys kidnapped only Hindu girls, and not Muslim girls? On the other hand, they enjoyed it as apiece of humour!"³⁷

Gandhian philosophy of ahimsa, they charged, "would ultimately result in the emasculation of the Hindu community".³⁸ Gandhi in a sense represented neither *purusatva*- the essence of masculinity, nor *naritva*- the essence of femininity, but

³⁵ See Bharucha, "Dismantling Men : Crisis of Male Identity in *Father, Son and Holy War*", in *EPW*, Vol. XXX, No. 26, 1995, p. 1611. Bharucha dissects Patwardhan's documentary, *Father, Son and Holy War* which explores the overlap between patriarchy and communalism by focussing on masculinity. Bharucha reminds of the nonchalance with which a rioter says, "I am having fun".

³⁶ Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁷ Golwalkar, op. cit., p. 150.

³⁸ Godse quoted in Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva", in Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu : Religion, Community and the politics of Democracy*, (Delhi :OUP, 1992), p. 275.

rather *klibatva*- the essence of hermaphroditism, ie, femininity in masculinity- which was the ultimate indictment.³⁹ Virility for Hindu men had to be seized from the Muslim male and an attempt was made to invert the image of manly Muslim and effete and cringing cowardly Hindu in the popular literature, poetry and propagandist accounts. The Hindu male was presented as sexually desirable by not only Hindu women, who had earlier lusted for the Muslim, but also by the Muslim women. The feminine overtures were however to be met by stoic self control.⁴⁰ *Organiser*, the mouth piece of the RSS continues to routinely list stories of Muslim women desiring to marry Hindu men not only for their potency but also because of the 'liberal' Hindu society which far greatly respected womanhood and granted them the autonomy that was impossible within the Islamic parameters. If Muslim women were seen as aligned with their men in the project of Islam, a simultaneous split was also effected in the community along gender lines to appropriate the women into the Hindu fold. This was to be the biggest blow on the Muslims and a victory for the Hindus who could now control the sexuality and the reproductive energies of the Muslim women.

³⁹ See Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, op. cit., p. 7. Men are shown by Patwardhan in his film as taunting secular politicians as women, fit only to wear saris and bangles. It is for them the greatest insult that they can offer to these 'Muslim appeasers', See Bharucha, op. cit., p. 1611.

⁴⁰ Golwalkar describes how Tantiya Tope resisted the charms of a Muslim *nautch* girl and instead make her dedicate herself to his cause of nationalism. See Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, op. cit., p. 413. What occurs now is an inverse kind of 'imaginary castration'—this time of the Muslim. Kishwar quotes the local Shiv Sena leaders on Maharashtra exhorting the Hindus to "send these *landias* to Pakistan...", in Kishwar, *Religion in the Service of Nationalism*, (Delhi : OUP, 1998), p. 154. *Landia* refers to the circumcised male. Circumcised penis becomes the object of mirth among these 'nationalists' as does their own organ a source of pride and symbol of their own manhood. In North India too, Muslims abusively as *katua*, *possessing an organ that has been cut in size*..

II

Were women then only to appear as 'tropes', boundary markers of a community, as symbols of its collective honour and shame, as eternal victims - weak suffering and vulnerable. On the contrary, they were to be empowered for self defence (*atmaraksha*) by manifesting valour (*virya*). A new image of woman embellished by arms and preying on the predatory Muslims began to be cultivated. The propagandist book of the *Sangathan*, "*Sangathan Ka Bigul*", addressing itself to the women urged that "Every sister who joins the army of this revolution called the *Sangathan*, should have a sharp knife with her which she can use whenever she needs. The knife should be made like house hold knives, which can be used immediately. Every sister should practice for ten to fifteen minutes with this knife. And this can be easily done by cutting various fruits like *kashifal* (custard apple) and *tarbooz* (watermelon). It is a prime religious duty of all the women who enter the army of *Sangathan* to be able to defend their chastity and honour."⁴¹ The need for women to stop depending on men for 'protection' and instead to defend their own honour was also the guiding principle of the *Rashtriya Sevika samiti*, founded in 1934, by Lakshmibai Kelkar.

Early Twentieth century witnessed too, a perceptible shift within the conservative ambit of women's education which hitherto was driven by the motive of producing 'good' wives and mothers. *Panchal Pandita* - a monthly magazine of the *Kanya Mahavidyalaya* run by the Arya samaj reflected this changed mood in the emergence of the new fictional heroine 'Suvira' (the brave woman). An appeal was

⁴¹ Charu Gupta, op. cit., p. 732.

published in the beginning of the article for the girls to emulate her. 'Suvira' was also played out as a game about a warrior girl who was brave not only in the defence of her religious rights but who could also wield modern weapons, by enacting battle scenes complete with fire crackers for real life effect.⁴²

The emergent ideal was far removed from the soft and delicate home bound Hindu woman. Emphasis came to be placed on a strong female body with regular and rigorous physical training, even in martial arts and shooting. The threat of the Muslim notwithstanding, it must have been difficult in the conservative society of that time to gain support and sanction for the women to go through such a physical regimen as that of men, for bodies of women connoted spaces of inviolable tradition and cultural sanctity. So the traditional figures of fiery and armed mother Goddess - Kali, Shakti were evoked as was the historical genre of *virangana*, *Rani of Jhansi*, being the most favoured subject of secret nationalist literature.⁴³

This is not to suggest that the conventional roles of mother and wife were cast aside as women took on the mantle of valiant warrior and a sister - in - arms in this war, indeed crusade of Hindu nationalism. On the contrary, it was their foregrounding as Hindu mothers and wives that made possible this shift to militancy. By their courageous and brave deeds, they were to strike terror in the hearts of the Muslims and evoke awe and inspire action among the Hindu. As wives, their bravery was to shame and shake their men out of their slothful cowardliness by putting into question their masculinity and ability to protect their women and religion. It was as if the

⁴² Kishwar, "Arya Samaj and Women's Education : Kanya Mahavidyalya, Jalandhar", in *EPW*, Vol. XXI, No. 17, 1986, p WS-13.

⁴³ Kathryn Hansen, "The Virangana in North Indian History : Myth and Popular Culture", in *EPW*, Vol. XXIII, No. 18, 1988, WS-25-33.

woman was the agent, herself endowing agency to her man and claiming the Muslim as her 'victim'.

As mothers, they were perfectly suited to nurture in the young, the qualities of fearlessness, patriotism, love for the nation and of course hate for the Muslim. The example of Shivaji and Jijabai was rampantly quoted. But for that, the mother would also have to be transformed, from a silent, suffering, tender woman ignorant of national and world affairs, she would have to be a confident woman well versed in all matters - religious, political and social. Savitri Devi outlining the duties of the Hindu woman wrote:

"We would first of all like... the Hindu woman to 'feel' personally insulted whenever they come to know of any such action (reference here being made of course to the Muslim tyranny-MS); that is an insult, not merely to such and such family or person but to the Hindus as a whole. They should feel ashamed and they should feel indignant; they should promote to action their husbands, their brothers, their sons."⁴⁴

Further, it was her task to see that little Hindu boys played "Indian and *Mlechha* soldiers with two batches of toy soldiers" and little girls revered Durgavati, Padmavati and Laxmibai as their role models.

This activism of women was to be contained within a mode that did not subvert the traditional power dynamics either within the family, the community or the nation - the notion of *izzat* being the dominant leitmotif.

⁴⁴ Savitri Devi, op. cit., p. 128.

Chapter 4

AVENGING ANGELS AND NURTURING MOTHERS

I

The most chilling and also the most impressive spectacle of the *Ramjanma bhoomi* movement of the RSS-VHP-BJP apart from the pulling down of the mosque itself was the omniscient presence of Sadhvi Rithambara's impassioned outpourings to large gatherings creating mass hysteria. That she was addressing primarily men to arouse their '*purusatva*', exhorting them to assert their manhood and speaking largely in terms of the masculinist ideology of retribution and blood feud¹ in order to avenge the '*Babar ki aulads*' did not deter women from participating in the *kar seva* or discourage their complicity in actual episodes of communal and even sexual aggression against the Muslims.²

Of the estimated two lakh *Kar sevaks* at Ayodhya, some fifty five thousand were women.³ Maharashtra followed by Andhra Pradesh accounting for the bulk of it. A pamphlet distributed by the *Durga Vahini*, the women's wing of the VHP, urged women that at this time of *agni pariksha* (trial by fire), women must become *viranganas* and *ranchandis* (warrior women).⁴ In several other towns like Bijnore too, women were at the forefront, leading and mobilising processions that fomented violence.⁵ This high visibility of women in the

¹ Sangari, "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement", op. cit., p. 878.ss

² See Kishwar, '*Religion in the Service of Nationalism*', (Delhi: OUP, 1998). She details how women in Bombay and Surat urged their men to murder and rape Muslims without the slightest trace of remorse.

³ Diva Arora, "The Rise of the Durga Vahini", in *Deccan Herald*, 11 Jan. 1993.

⁴ Chakravarty et al, "Khurja Riots 1990-91 : Understanding the Conjuncture", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 18, 1992.

⁵ Amrita Basu, "When Local Riots are Not Merely Local : Bringing the State Back in, Bijnore 1988-92", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 40, 1994, p. 2609.

pacifism and jolting the political activists as well as the academicians alike from an easy complacency about the democratic and feminist potential of women.

There was a veritable explosion of literature seeking to explain this phenomenon and it became almost mandatory for writers commenting on communalisation of society and polity to comment also on the role of women in this entire period.⁶ While indeed it is important to focus on moments such as these, it is more fruitful to emphasise and understand the processes and structures during periods of relative quietude that enable these women to take up particular subject positions - as *Ram bhaktas*, as Hindu nationalists and as Hindu nationalist women - and allows them expression of certain kinds of agency - virulent and avenging, seemingly independent and spontaneous and yet not upsetting the traditional hierarchies of personal relationships.

Prior to 1992, scant attention was paid to the women's organisation within the Hindu Right despite the fact that *Sevika samiti* had been founded in 1936, only some years after the formation of the Sangh. Our attempt in this chapter will be to outline the insidious ways in which the *Samiti* functioned to create a committed cadre force or the many means by which the *Durga Vahini* was able to consolidate and rally young girls and women around the image of the fiery Durga in mid battle.

Founded on the *Vijay Dashmi* day, marking the triumph of goddess Durga over evil,⁷ the *Samiti* was conceived by Laxmi bai Kelkar, also the first *pramukh*

⁵ Amrita Basu, "When Local Riots are Not Merely Local : Bringing the State Back in, Bijnore 1988-92", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 40, 1994, p. 2609.

⁶ Several reports in *Economic and Political Weekly* which chronicled the period around this mobilisation have hinted at the participation of women.

⁷ The Sangh too celebrates its founding day on *Vijay dashmi*, but depicts it as the victory of Ram over evil. Bacchetta outlines how Sangh and Samiti constitute the same events and symbols. Bacchetta, "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues: The 'Sangh' and the 'Samiti' and their Differential Concepts of the Hindu Nation", in Jayawardena and de Alwis (eds.), *Embodied Violence : Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), pp. 126-67.

sanchalika, a post subordinate to that of the *sarsangh chalak*. The crucible for the Samiti's foundation is explained variously in the several oral and published accounts of the Samiti.

Some attribute it to Kelkar's propensity towards nationalism. Her participation in Gandhian programmes of picketing and spinning during the course of which she had some bitter experiences impressing on her the imperative of an independent women's organisation for awakening women to the cause of the nation.⁸

Other sources describe the pathos and pain she felt at the defencelessness of Hindu women in face of male sexual advances and the cowardliness of their husbands. Interestingly, while a Samiti publication depicts Kelkar being moved by the plight of orangepickers and Rekha Raje speaks of a hapless woman traveller in such a predicament that enraged the founder, neither is speaking of a Muslim aggressor.⁹ It is the Hindu woman being oppressed by the Hindu males and failure of the other Hindu men to protect the former that is seen as precipitating the need for an organisation to train women in self defence on the lines of the Sangh.

Still other accounts list the influences of Tilak and Vivekananda on her, especially latter's conception of an 'ideal Hindu women'¹⁰ and traces the origin of the Samiti to the need to defend and resurrect cherished Hindu values being frittered away by women seeking to 'compete' with men. It was the task of the Samiti to wean away women from the 'western' women's movement to their

⁸ *Pratah Smarniya Mahilayen*, (Nagpur : Sevika Prakashan, 1995), p. 77.

⁹ See Bacchetta, op. cit., p. 131 and for Rekha Raje's comment, see Tanika Sarkar, "The Woman as a Communal Subject : Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ramjanma Bhoomi Movement", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 35, 1991, p. 2061.

¹⁰ "60 Years of Rastra Sevika Samiti : A living Example of Slow and Steady Wins the Race", in *Organiser, Nari Shakti Special*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 14, Nov. 3, 1996, p. 7.

traditional tasks of imparting *samskaras* to children in order to mould them into 'patriots' and 'men of character'.¹¹

Kelkar initially approached Hedgewar to allow women into the Sangh, but was turned down. She was asked instead to start a similar society for women as their "life, psychology and activities are different".¹²

Thus was born the *Rashtra Sevika samiti*. "The Sangh and the Samiti should go forward along parallel lines like railway tracks - in the same direction, with the same aim".¹³ This has not only to do with the notion of separate but complementary gendered domains of concerns and activities but also with the conception of Sangh as desexualised space and control over one's sexuality as a necessary precondition for devotion to Hindu and national cause.

In fact, Asha Sharma incharge of Sevika Samiti, North India said that intermingling between sexes leads necessarily to perversion and all organisations that did not practice sex segregation - as in a Buddhist *math* - were bound to fail.¹⁴

The samiti has at it's avowed aim, the development and honing of the woman's ability for leadership, the arousal of the sense of duty and motherliness - *Kartatva, Netratva, Matratva* - to enable her to dedicate herself at the feet of mother India - *Bharat mata*. The next aim however outlines her duties as daughter, sister, wife and mother, i.e., to inspire their father, brother, husband and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 7. Also see, "Women - The Mother of Nation", Interview with Usha Tai Chati, the present Pramukh Sanchalika of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti in the *Organiser*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹² Ibid., "The Better Half", Hedgewar's speech at a Baudhik delivered at the Samiti Shakha on June 24, 1938.

¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴ See Appendix.

son to take to the path of Hindu nationalism.¹⁵ While men may be viewed as individual entities, it is rare to view women outside of their familial ties. Several Sevikas also pointed out that women enjoyed a unique power owing to their task of infusing values in the family and especially the children and thus they could shape the nation and its citizens.¹⁶

It is this complete effacement of self that is also absent in its name. The *swayam* of the *Rashtra swayam sevak sangh* is conspicuously absent here. However this argument is appropriated and invested with a new meaning. For this very purpose, argued Asha Sharma, women organisations like Samiti are even more important than the Sangh. Sevikas were asked to affirm faith in their own selves in taking up and fulfilling the duties of the Samiti. They are also asked to seek inspiration from the memory of Kelkar who dared to set up the organisation against all personal odds. “*Mein kar sakti hoon*”, I Can do it, they are constantly urged to remember.¹⁷

The internal structure of the Samiti is similar to that of the Sangh, where the *pramukh sanchalikais* not elected to office but is nominated to the office by her predecessor and the most basic unit too remains the *shakha*, where the members meet daily or weekly. The *paddati* or the pattern is identical to that of the Sangh with its emphasis on ideological indoctrination - *baudhik*, intellectual discussion - *charcha*, which allows for discussion issues of political significance, considered usually a man's preserve. The training is referred to as *varga*, literally

¹⁵ Rashtra Sevika Samiti : Ek Parichay, (Mathura : Sevika Prakashan, n.d.)

¹⁶ This point was made by sevikas during a *baudhik* session which the author attended as well as in personal conversations with her.

¹⁷ This is constantly reiterated. In the introductory speech by Asha Sharma welcoming the girls and women to a 15 day shivir as well as in the *Baudhik*.

a class and represents a typical pedagogical situation with a teacher - the disseminator of knowledge and the students - the uncritical recipients of that knowledge. A theme is constantly played upon until it becomes part of the common sense.¹⁸ Even poems and songs are worked around this theme. Girls are made to repeat the songs and slokas until they have learnt them 'by heart'. Many poems are the staple of nursery school rhymes but with a twist in the end to reiterate the topic of Hindu rashtra.¹⁹ Neither is *charcha* a free wheeling discussion on any topic. It is gently guided by a *pramukh* where arguments are built and opinions invited around these basic issues. It is here that the *sevikas* learn to sharpen their skills for arguing, convincing and awakening the Hindu people for the cause of Hindutva. The *shakha* also includes physical training - *sharirik* involving Yoga, games and learning skills in wielding *churikas* and *lathis* and judo karate. While the practical utility of knowing how to use a *churika* may be restricted, the attendant confidence of the knowledge that she can use the knife is immense. As a VHP pamphlet claims, it is this knowledge that is supreme.²⁰ The *shakha* then holds out a promise for young women to negotiate public spaces traditionally monopolized by men.

The Samiti also offers correspondence courses to women who are unable to attend regular *shakhas* as well as to those women who independently run *shakhas* to help them organize their activities through pamphlets sent every three months.²¹ Annual camps or *shivirs* are also held and these last from two to fifteen

¹⁸ Sarkar, op. cit., p. 2060.

¹⁹ For instance a poem depicts the characteristics of passengers in a train hailing from different states such as the Bengali's love for the Rossugulla (a sweet). In the end it speaks of *Sevikas* travelling in the train and their love for the nation that pervades the atmosphere.

²⁰ Mahila Vibhag, Parichay Mala, Pushpa - 2, 1998, VHP.

²¹ Baudhik Patrak (Nov., Dec. and Jan.), Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Kendra Wardha.

days. Records of membership are not kept (no formal memberships are given) but the office bearers reckon that about 3,500 to 5,000 shakhas are being run today.²²

Matrishakti, mother power defines itself in active and explicit opposition to those women's organisations which offer women only an illusion of rights and equality with men but undermine their glorious status and divine duties as mothers.²³ It calls upon the woman to expand her own self beyond the family to the nation, society and to ultimately engulf God.²⁴ It operates largely like a welfare organisation running schools, arranging for tuitions in slums, constructing hostels, libraries, setting up blood donation and medical camps in tribal areas. It also recognises the urgency of economic independence for especially for destitute women and organises income generating programmes.²⁵

However the need for all these programmes is underscored by the task of defining the boundary of the Hindu community and protecting it from the designs of the Muslims and Christians. Their forays in the areas of health and education have been spurred by the need to repel and counter the missionary activity of the church.. Economic independence is necessary for women to ward off the overtures of Muslim men. The critique of dowry and untouchability emerge with the same logic.²⁶

While *Matrishakti* casts itself in the mould of a charitable organisation, it is left to *Durga Vahini* to pursue agitational programmes on issues such as dowry, pornography, cultural corruption from the west and so on. Not surprisingly since the *Durga Vahini* came into being at the height of the *Mandir* agitation to recruit

²² In conversation with Asha Sharma.

²³ *Matri Shakti*, Parichay Mala, Pushpa - 3, 1998, VHP.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

young women and girls and was given an organisational structure and form much later in 1994. Service, Self defence and Values - *seva, suraksha samskara*, it takes as it's founding and guiding principles.²⁷ Service to the family and the nation, defence of the self and also of the religion and community (Durga Vahini was at the forefront of the attack on M.F. Hussain's paintings of nude Saraswati and the film 'Fire' depicting lesbian relations in a joint household), values are to be imparted not only to one's own family and children but also to all those who have not as yet been touched by the Hindu Values and are 'uncultured'.²⁸ The large network of schools and medical assistance thus allows the expansion of the Hindu Right vertically downwards to assimilate sections of society, hitherto outside their ambit. In migrant slums of metropolis and in tribal areas, these Durgas reach out in the spirit of 'civilising mission'.

Thus the Vahini makes mass recruitment from among the lower caste women, while retaining an upper caste leadership drawn from traditional Sangh families.²⁹ The contrast in the membership between the Samiti and the Vahini could also account for the difference in the strategies, one eschewing agitation, the other being born out of it. The Durga Vahini almost entirely replicates the basic unit and the working of the Samiti *shakha* but chooses to call it *shakti sadhna kendra*.³⁰

There are other striking similarities too between all these organisations. In all three, religiosity and nationalism coalesced and indeed religiosity is sought as an entry point into the woman's world. A *Matrishakti* pamphlet recognizes that it

²⁷ Durga Vahini, *Parichay Mala*, Pushpa - 3, 1998, VHP.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ Thomas Blom Hansen, "Controlled Emancipation : Women and Hindu Nationalism", *op. cit.*, p.91.

³⁰ Durga Vahini, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

would be best to begin with religious programmes, *satsang*, and to only gradually introduce a slot for discussion or *chintan* on problems confronting the neighborhood, society, nation and women.³¹ The Samiti could escape organisational collapse after the ban on RSS following the assassination of Gandhi, by keeping alive its mass contact through *bhajan mandals* and discourses on the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.³² In the Shakha the cry of *Bharat mata ki jai* is promptly followed by *Hindu dharma ki jai*. Ram is repeatedly cited as the national hero thus erasing the distinction between *Ram bhakti* and *desh bhakti*.

Traditional networking has been deployed by all three to expand the work and idea beyond the shakha and satsang. The first phase of growth was made possible by the young sevikas of Wardha - the nerve centre of the organisation, who spread the ideas and the work in places where they married. These women were instrumental in spreading the ideology of the Samiti among the women in their marital homes and in setting up shakhas in their localities.³³ Not only is the *shakha* or the *satsang* to be developed like a family wherein women display mutual love and trust, the volunteers are encouraged to foster close families ties and expected to enquire about the well being of those who absent themselves from the *shakha*. The old and the sick are nursed by them.³⁴ For this reason, families do not hesitate in sending their girls to *Shivirs*, when usually the only visits allowed to the girls are to the homes of the relatives. Despite their opposition to the liberal and left women's movement in India, they tend to appropriate many of their concerns and agenda, peppering their rhetoric with these issues thus making secular feminism redundant. Samiti publications particularly laud women

³¹ Matri Shakti, op. cit., p. 6.

³² "60 years of Rastra Sevika Samiti", op. cit., p.8.

³³ Samiti : Ek Parichay, op. cit., p. 2.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 3 and also Matri Shakti, op. cit., p. 5.

professionals. Many articles and fiction describe women in their professional roles such as teachers, doctors and even sportspersons. They are shown as exercising choice in matters of marriage. Thus women are reinstated in their positions as *swayambara*. As in a *Swayambar* where the participants were carefully scanned for ancient and proud lineages, skills in warfare and the like, where choice was thus restricted, the women in these stories and articles also do not break class and caste barriers, indeed the choice for their mate even belong usually to the Sangh background. The choice of issues is also ruled by political expediency. The Sangh and its female affiliates are the most vociferous advocates of the Common Civil Code. The Sangh's critique of the Muslim personal law betrays a hint of hostility against a privilege that has been denied to the Hindus but still lawfully enjoyed by the Muslims - Swami Muktanand Saraswati of the VHP complained "... Today a Hindu can marry only one woman while a Muslim can have five wives. Why should a law be there? If a man wants to have 25 wives let him".³⁵ The campaign for uniform civil code serves several purposes. For one, it allows the constant reiteration of Sangh's ideology of 'one nation-one culture' with an added 'one code'. It makes possible also the repetition of the stereotype of Muslim male as insatiable and lustful whose sexual appetite demands many women. Islam can then be established as disrespectful and oppressive to women in comparison with 'tolerant' Hinduism which has accepted change within its personal laws with considerable ease. The logical next step for the samiti and the Durga vahini is to project the Muslim woman as suffering, weak and oppressed and themselves as the vehicle of awakened conscious Hindu woman.

³⁵ Cited in Manini Chatterjee, "Strident Sadhus : Contours of a Hindu Rastra", in *Frontline*, Jan. 29. 1993, p. 5.

II

'Hindu nationalist' women emphasise the futility of secular feminism by privileging India's ancient' and 'glorious' culture and religion (Both are invariably elided) as the most favoured terrain for women's self realization of her potential and agency. Their interpretations of Hindu texts and understanding of history while operating within the overall framework of the Sangh ideology departs significantly by placing women at it's centre. Women are the primeval source of all creation *Nirmatri* and motion *gati* and power as *Prakriti* and *adi shakti*. For a *Nimratri* to demand rights equal to her own creation (men) is to taint the divinity attached to her status. Thus their conception of activism is guided by the ideal of '*nari shakti*' rather than '*nari mukti*'.³⁶ The latter evokes the vision of an anchorless, rootless woman bereft of her duties as a mother and home maker - precisely those qualities that make her so revered.

The Samiti has two mutually exclusive yet interpenetrating temporal frameworks.³⁷ The Hindu categories of *Yugas* such as *sapta yug and kaliyug* constitutes one cycle of time while the linear historical shift from "Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'Christian' periods represents the other.³⁸ In both of these women appear as key figures. In the Saptayug which corresponds to the Hindu period (see last chapter for the characterisation of the Vedic period which is compared to the degeneration in the non Vedic age), women were revered as seers, engaged in

³⁶ This is the title of several articles published by the Samiti.

³⁷ Bacchetta, op. cit., p. 139.

³⁸ The Sangh too believes in the latter even though Golwalkar critiqued James Mill on account of his characterisation of an 'unending Hindu history' as interspersed by Muslim and Christian periods. For Golwalkar, they represent merely phases of conflict between Hindus and Muslims and Hindus and Christians respectively where the Hindus emerged victorious. See Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, (Bangalore : Vikrama Prakashan, 1966), p. 140.

spiritual pursuits - Maitreyi and Gargi being the epitome of Vedic learning . “The *Mahanirvans* and many other Vedic texts laid stress on the importance of educating women. They were also eligible for *Upanayana* or initiation into a life of *bhramacharya* or the study of *bhrama vidya*”.³⁹ In contrast *Kaliyug* is represented as inversion of this moral order but one which has been brought about by certain historical events, namely the Muslim invasions and Western imperialism. Imperialism implies here not a political economic process but rather a state of mind which is enamored of the Western lifestyle and ideals of women. All oppressive practices such as child marriage, *sati* and *purdah* can thus be safely adduced to the ‘Barbaric’ Muslims (See Appendix). If the Muslims treated women as mere ‘objects’ of their lust, then with the impact of the West the commodification of women was complete. Her body began to be used for selling products.

It is women alone who can by their actions restore the morality and correct this dystopia.

Julia Kristeva says that women have a peculiarly cyclical notion of temporality that corresponds to the recurrence of biological rhythms. The linear movement of time is replaced in female subjectivity by an “...all encompassing, infinite like imaginary space...”.⁴⁰ Announcements by the sevikas during kar seva that “... *Hindu hi adi ant hai...*”, or that “... *Poora vishwa badal ho jayega, ek naya srishti ka narman hoga...*”,⁴¹ do connote sweeping millenarian visions of an eternal religion and resurrection that defy the category of temporality altogether but they are not uniquely feminine imaginations. Both men and women were

³⁹ *Organiser*, op. cit., p. 1.

⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time”, in Keohane et. al, (eds.), *Feminist Theory : A Critique of Ideology*, (Brighton : The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 35.

⁴¹ In Sarkar, “The Woman as a Communal Subject”, op. cit., p. 2057.

driven by the belief in the timeless *Hindu rashtra* (Besides of course numerous other reasons).

These organisations deploy a whole repertoire of images and symbols to connote the qualities desirable of a woman. They range from the warrior queens like Rani Laxmi bai, Durgavati and Vishbala to the able women administrators like Ahilya bai and Rani Chennama to the *Bhakti* poetess Mirabai, without however giving up the traditional figures of Sita, Savitri and Anusuya. Two unorthodox figures have been sneaked into this list of role models - Kaikeyi and Mandodri. Kaikeyi has been traditionally and popularly reviled as the woman whose greed brought about so much grief to everybody she knew, her husband, her sons and the subjects of Ayodhya. And yet she is admired in the pages of Samiti publications for her skills in the battlefield which saved her husband's life and earned her boons through which she could exercise her power over him. Mandodri on the other hand was the virtuous wife of Ravan, whose words of wisdom went unheeded by her husband and led to his ruin. She is admired for her vision and fore sightedness.

Women of 'Hindu nationalism' also lay claim to an ancient lineage of mother goddesses to empower themselves. India has had a rich tradition of mother goddesses dating back to more than five thousand years. A split is often made between 'unhusbanded' goddesses like Kali whose powers are pregnant with dangerous and destructive potential and those goddesses who have been 'spousified' and purged of their martial, sexual and ethical autonomy and who emanate a mellow benevolence.⁴²

⁴² Lynn Gatwood, *Devi and the Spouse Goddess*, (Delhi:Manohar, 1985), pp. 1,4. See Kamla Ganesh, "Mother Who is Not a Mother : In Search of the Great Indian Goddess", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXV, No. 43, pp. WS-59. The cult of the mother goddess has also been studied in some depth by Kosambi, *Myth and Reality : Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture*, (Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1992).

Almost invariably, goddesses are usually shown with two arms, the single goddesses possess four arms or more.

The most important goddess of the Samiti is Bharat Mata. The daily salutation dedicated to Mother India is emblematic of the conception of the Goddess, the nation and the awakened Hindu woman - the Sevika. The prayer may be sung individually but maximum benefit accrues when sung in a collectivity, when the 'I' is drowned in the 'we'. The prayer begins by reaffirming Savarkar's conceptualisation of the sacred geography of the nation, the citizenship of which rests on the devotion to the 'sacred land' (*Punyabhoomi*). Motherland is the origin of all divinities and is boundlessly affectionate - a quality of all mothers, is auspicious and the very embodiment of power. As her daughters, Sevikas are replicas of the mother - chaste, selfless, fearless, capable and united. As power she is Durga and auspiciousness she is Parvati.⁴³ In fact Bharat Mata, Durga, Parvati and the physical mother all elide easily into each other. Durga, created from the combined energies of all Gods wields weapons and battles alone, unaided she slays the buffalo demon Mahisha to claim the title of '*Mahishasur Mardini*'. It is her horrific form and the destructive principle that is most evoked by the Durga Vahini in its theme song. It is highly evocative of bloodshed and death. The virulence of women Kar sevaks immediately springs to mind.

Kelkar had wished to provide the samiti with a spiritual base and hence created a goddess, Devi Ashtabhuja, the eight armed goddess. She represents an assimilation of Mahalaxmi's wealth, Mahasaraswati's intellect and Mahadurga's power. Her status in the Samiti pantheon is lower to that of Bharat Mata - who is alone to be worshipped. Ashtabhuja is above all a model of virtues to be emulated

⁴³ "The Prayer", in *Organiser*, Op. cit., pp. 19-24. It is a detailed translation and explication of the prayer.

by the sevikas, each of her hands representing one virtue - chastity, power, dedication and so on.

It can be suggested as Paola Bacchetta does, that these images of goddesses as placid, bounteous to tempestuous and out-of-control allows women a wide array of role choices. I argue instead that they are not so much different roles as one single and harmonious whole which may manifest different characteristic or forms at different times. A woman must straddle the poles of fecundity and destruction by directing the latter towards the 'other', namely the Muslims. Hindu nationalism deploys this iconography to empower women in socially acceptable ways.

Durgas, Ranchandis and *Bharatmata* are not the only images of women's activism offered by 'Hindu nationalism'. Religious renunciators especially after the rise of *Sadhvi Rithambhara* and *Uma Bharati* have emerged as powerful icons of the movement. The notion of renunciation has been prevalent in India since before the composition of the *Dharmashastra*. It implies the voluntary ejection of an individual from the world in a personalised quest for an individual and private *Moksha*.⁴⁴ Louis Dumont views renunciation as the only avenue open in a holistic society like India that deemphasises 'individualism' to give expression to individual autonomous self.⁴⁵ In that sense he says that the status of the renouncer remains always in an antithetical relation with that of the householder for he must leave the world and adapt an entirely different mode of life. Thapar says that renunciation does not imply denial of reciprocity and social action. On the

⁴⁴ Romila Thapar, "The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahminical and Buddhist Traditions", in Madan (ed.) *Way of Life : King, Householder, Renouncer - Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, (Delhi : Vikas Publishing House, 1982), pp. 274-76.

⁴⁵ Louis Dumont, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (4), 1960, pp. 33-62.

contrary, isolation from public performance suffuses the renouncer with a charisma that is most effective in its public role.⁴⁶ Sadhu and sants have always engaged themselves in a range of activities as traders, mercenaries, moneylenders, landlords and as leaders in social and religious reform movements. Their actions have been guided by motives not always saintly.⁴⁷ Any accusation of hunger for political power is however rebuffed by them by taking recourse to lofty ideals and values. They argue that they have been forced to tread out of their spiritual pursuits to purge the social order of its current immorality and indeed in this sense, it is an extension and fruition of their spiritual journey.

Charges Sadhvi Rithambara, *Are hame vote chahiye? Hum sadhu mahatma Vyas gaddi pe beth kar puri kaynaat ke badshah ho jate hein. Hame tumhari Delhi ki satta nahi chahiye. Hame Ram Janmabhoomi chahiye.* (Do you think we want votes? We sants can become the emperors of the universe simply by virtue of our claim to the omniscience of Vyas. We do not want political power in Delhi. We want our Ram. We want our *Ram Janma Bhoomi*).⁴⁸ In popular imagination then renunciation does connote emptying oneself of the values of *artha* and *Kama* that is, profit and pleasure, which tie a householder to the mundane worldly affairs. Not coincidentally in India many social reformers and politicians the most famous example being that of Gandhi, have taken on the mantle of renouncers.

⁴⁶ Thapar, op. cit., p. 276.

⁴⁷ The religious specialists outside the world of caste, politics, economy is largely a figment of the Orientalist imagination. Van der Veer illustrates how internal dynamics of caste and most importantly among the *mathas*. Profit guides the involvement of various religious heads in any movement such as the *Ram Janmabhoomi*. See Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth : The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre*, (Delhi : OUP, 1989). Also Virginia Van dyke, "General Elections, 1996 : Political Sadhus and Limits to Religious Mobilisation in India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 49, 1997.

⁴⁸ Rithambhara's speech cited in Sangari, op. cit., p. 878.

Renouncers thus create around themselves an aura of great selflessness and other worldliness. Being herself outside the grid of *Kama*, Sadhvi Rithambhara nonetheless uses explicit sexual imagery to incite and provoke the Hindu Men to prove their 'manliness'. "... If you do not awaken, cows will be slaughtered everywhere. You will be responsible for these catastrophes for history will say, Hindus were cowards. Accept the challenge...".⁴⁹ It is clearly a challenge that is thrown at the men by a woman, whose approval they can win only by proving their virility (which is synonymous with killing Muslims). The duty of incitement which lay with the wife is taken over by the Sadhvi whose speech serves to incite the entire community. Her carefully modulated voice, the starkness of her yellow robes and her self imposed chastity all elevate her to the status of a screen goddess, visible and desirable but out of reach. Conversely the graffiti inscribed by karsevaks in Ayodhya read "I sleep with Zeenat Aman" or "I sleep with Saira Banu", both highly successful and glamorous actresses from Bombay. The Muslim woman is made accessible in the individual and collective fantasies of Hindu men.

⁴⁹ Kakar refers to Rithambhara's speech in *The Colours of Violence*, (Delhi : Viking Penguin, 1995). An identical tenor is struck by Uma Bharati when she urges Hindu men to "...Throw off the cloak of cowardice and impotence...learn to sing songs of valour and courage...", in Kishwar, "In Defence of Our Dharma", *Manushi*, No. 60, 1990.

III

In the narrative of 'Hindu nationalism', the family comes to stand in for the nation. Just as family is the site of mutual love and trust, so must be the nation. More significantly as the power relations within the family can be obliterated, the hierarchies of caste, class and gender can be easily and forcefully naturalised. The supreme responsibility of ironing out the difficult creases that might arise owing to these hierarchies lies with the woman who must also burden herself with the task of ensuring that families do not splinter.

Nation in this sense is not a terrain fraught with political battles and fissured with opposition of interests but rather marked by an idyllic harmony - *samrasta*. Given here the coterminality of religion with nation, it is at once a homogenous and non conflictual 'Hindu nation' but also eternally in conflict with an equally monolithic Islam. It is not simple however to constitute this smooth and unfractured 'Hindu nation' in face of real oppressive high caste practices and equally powerful lower caste resistance. Virtually everywhere a reference is made to caste in the discourse of the Sangh or any of its affiliate, a distinction is made between *varnashrama* and *jatipratha*. It is the latter that presupposes hereditary, endogamous and hierarchical castes. The tendency to split the two may be traced back to Dayanand Saraswati who added a social dimension to the myth of the 'golden vedic age', an age which did not exhibit the rigidity of the *jati* but deployed the ideal four fold *varna* governed by merit alone and which sprung

from the collectivity's need for socio economic complementarity. Status distinctions were later aberrations.⁵⁰

In recent times caste acquired an urgency following the announcement of Mandal Commission report recommending reservations for Backward castes. The Sangh 'parivar' perceived as threat to the prospect of Hindu unity and a reinvigorated Hindu identity. It was at the forefront of the anti-Mandal agitation.⁵¹ It's notion of mitigating caste strictures is confined to organising *sahbhoj* -- commensal eating with the lower castes and *upanayana* ceremony for women and lower castes ritually excluded from these ceremonies. It also borders on some symbolic gestures as inviting a Dalit to lay the *shilanyas* of the proposed temple in Ayodhya.⁵²

A jarring note is struck by Uma Bharati, a backward caste Lodh woman leader, herself a rarity in the upper caste dominated leadership of the Sangh. She argues for reservations and is almost radical in her rhetoric of social dignity, economic and political power sharing for the backward castes.⁵³ But this is appropriated in terms of Hindu values of *prayashchit* - repentance and familial ideology of paying off the debts of one's ancestors - *poorvajon ka rin*. Thus the upper castes must concede their privileges in favour of those who have been oppressed by their ancestors. Ultimately these privileges must be forsaken to consolidate the Hindus.

⁵⁰ Christopher Jafferlot, "Hindu Nationalism : Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 12-3, 1993, p. 518.

⁵¹ See for instances Chakravarti et. al, "Khurja Riots", op. cit.

⁵² Tapan Basu et. al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags : A Critique of the Hindu Right*, (Delhi : Orient Longman, 1993), p. 91.

⁵³ Rithambhara's speech in *Sammelan Vrita : Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Sammelan*, 1994, pp.16-7.

Mothers must teach and emphasise the filial ties between the lower and the upper castes.⁵⁴

Rithambara's opening lines of a carefully orchestrated speech which nonetheless appeals as spontaneous has the effect of welding the Hindu identity and demarcating its boundary.

Hail mother Sita! Hail brave Hanuman! Hail Mother India! Hail the birth place of Rama! Hail lord Vishwanath of Kashi (Benaras)! Hail Lord Krishna! Hail the eternal religion (*dharma*)! Hail the religion of Vedas! Hail Lord Mahavira! Hail Lord Buddha! Hail Banda Bairagi! Hail Guru Gobind Singh! Hail great sage Valmiki! Hail the martyred Kar sevaks! Hail Mother India!⁵⁵

This begins with the invocation of Sita, the wife of Rama. Interestingly some of the anti-modernist critiques of Hindutva are premised on the position that it is a spurious Hinduism, that it has little to do with religious traditions in its pursuit of political power.⁵⁶ While Hinduism in its pre Hindutva gentler forms acknowledged Sita before Rama in the traditional greeting of '*Jai Siya Ram*', the battle cry of *Jai shri Ram* masculinises Hinduism encroaching upon the space given to women traditionally. In their view Hinduism is only to be recovered and saved from *Hindutvavadis* and all shall be well. But they do share with the latter a belief in 'tolerant Hinduism' as against the fanaticism of Semitic religions. The journal *Manushi* regularly features articles that stress on the cultural and

⁵⁴ Ibid., Bharati has opposed 33% reservation for women in parliament in present form for it would only she fears, swamp the parliament with upper caste women. She stands thus in a strange solidarity with her caste brethren but political opponents – Mulayam Singh and Laloo Yadav in demanding a reservation within this for O.B.C. women and in opposing the entry of *par kati*, a euphemism for urban elite women.

⁵⁵ Kakar, op. cit., p.200.

⁵⁶ This is the argument forwarded by Kishwar in "In Defence of Our Dharma", op. cit. Ashis Nandy too makes a distinction between faith and ideology. Hindutva pursues religion not as a faith, as away of life, but as an ideology, that is as a "...sub-national, national or cross national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting anon religious, usually political or social, economic interests". See Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance", in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, (Delhi : OUP, 1996), pp. 70-2.

traditional resources that may sustain women's struggles. Rithambara's address may seen as a redressal of this lament.

Also significant are the references to Valmiki - the author of *Ramayana*, now elevated to the status of patron saint of the Harijans and to Buddha - towards whom Ambedkar and his followers turned rejecting Hinduism as the religion of their oppression and humiliation. Thus fervent appeals are being made to lower castes and Dalits to mitigate caste boundaries and merge into this melting pot of Hinduism.

Jafferlot notes the presence of these castes in the *shakhas* as proof of it's social inclusiveness.⁵⁷ Rioting mobs have been known to comprise of a large spectrum of castes to give the illusion of a united Hindu community identity and action.⁵⁸

How is the Sangh Parivar' able to draw upon the support of from these castes even as it continues to resist privileges granted to them. The problem may be approached through the concept of 'majoritarianism'. Indian democracy has remained mired in the idea of numerically dominated bloc voting in contrast to the idea of an autonomous bourgeoisie individual casting his vote as a citizen.⁵⁹ The Indian political scene has witnessed two strikingly even opposed notions of 'majority'. One is of course the RSS/BJP version of a pan-Hindu majority (recall it's advertisements splashed across all weeklies and dailies to the effect - democracy is the rule of the majority : Hindus are the majority, implying in the course that only a rule of the Hindus or a Hindu *rashtra* that could be a truly

⁵⁷ Jafferlot, op. cit., p. 521.

⁵⁸ Chakravarti et. al, op. cit., p. 529. The authors note how the rioters composed of a combined front of "...Malis, ahirs, khattris, valmikis, jogis and banias...".

⁵⁹ Arjun Appadurai, "Number in Colonial Imagination", in Van der Veer and Breckenbridge (eds.), *Orientalism an dthe Post Colonial predicament*, (Delhi : OUP, 1994), p. 331.

democratic state). The other refers to the concept of 'Bahujan' popularised by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which rode to limelight on its daring slogan of '*tilak, tarazu aur talwar, inko maro jote char*' referring to the dwija castes.⁶⁰ It not only delimits itself from the upper castes but also provokes them and challenges their political hegemony. The alliance of Chamars and Muslims won the Bijnore Lok sabha seat for Mayawati of the BSP in 1991 while differential and non conflictual appeals were made to the different sections of the Bahujan Samaj by Mulayam Singh Yadav. To the backward castes were promised reservations in government services, to the Muslims, the promise of the safety of Babri Masjid whereas the Dalits were to be won over by an anti-upper caste rhetoric.⁶¹ This 'Bahujan' thus militates against the BJP's version of the 'majority'.

When does this Bahujan identity dissipate to fuse into the Hindu one? How are caste alliances forged against the Muslim 'Other'? How are caste riots against reservations directed towards the Muslims? When does caste consciousness assert itself and when does a Hindu identity emerge?

May it be explained by the concept of Sanskritization - the urge of the lower castes to emulate the lifestyle of the ritually superior castes. As a Durga Vahini activist condescendingly explained the lower caste membership of the organisation in terms of "... the latent desire among the hitherto unenlightened sections to have (upper caste) cultural values and high culture inculcated in the girls and the families through the encounter with the RSS".⁶²

Such a position is justifiable if one accepts that the caste system in true

⁶⁰ R.K.Jain, "Hierarchy, Hegemony and Dominance : Politics of Ethnicity in Uttar Pradesh, 1995", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXI, No. 4, 1996.

⁶¹ Jeffery and Jeffery, "The Bijnore Riots, Oct. 1990 : The Collapse of a Mythical Relationship", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 10, 1994, p.552.

⁶² Hansen, op. cit., p. 92.

Dumontian fashion is a system of encompassment. That it is the ideology of hierarchy, defined as the opposition of the pure and the impure prescribing the actions of men "... which in the eyes of those who participate in it legitimizes their respective positions...".⁶³ Mouffat's study of an untouchable community in South India confirms the shared space of consensus and hierarchy among the castes. Then of course it becomes possible to understand the lure that high caste rituals like *upanayana* may hold for a lower caste attending *shakha*. Dipankar Gupta argues for displacing the proposition that there exists a universally valid and believed in true hierarchy with that of a multitude of hierarchies and discreteness of caste. Sanskritisation for Gupta implies indeed the opposite of what Srinivas means - it is not the acceptance but the rejection of one's position in the caste hierarchy that spurs sanskritisation.⁶⁴ In any case it does not involve the eschewing of one's identity, but rather an attempt to relieve oneself of the duress that such an unfavourable hierarchy places on them by asserting what they always believed to be their rightful status, hitherto denied to them. If such an alliance launches an attack at Dumont's principle of encompassment, it allows us to analyse the forging of alliances in terms of political and economic exigencies of that time. But the question is, can we afford to ignore either culture or material factors at the expense of each other?

Our decisions about choosing a particular identity from the multiplex of identities available to us are not simple ones and are influenced by a whole range of issues, both cultural and those having to do with the political economy. The crucial point to remember is that at any given moment, there are a number of identities to choose from and no identity is terminal and permanent.

⁶³ Dumont in Madan, "Dumont on the Nature of Caste in India", in Dipankar Gupta (ed.), *Social Stratification*, (Delhi : OUP, 1992), p. 72.

⁶⁴ Dipankar Gupta, "Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes", in Gupta (ed.), *Social Stratification*, op. cit., p. 132.

Chapter 5

A SUMMARY AND SOME QUESTIONS

I

In this tract, we have attempted to understand how and why women align with the project of 'Hindu nationalism' and work with it in active collusion. Our proposition has sought to draw away from the coercion/ misrecognition thesis and has instead situated their complicity in the active choices the women themselves make.

Women play a central role in identity politics. They define the boundaries of the community and represent its honour. The definitions of masculinity and femininity intercut and crisscrossed. We have traced here the foregrounding of sexuality in the discourse of 'Hindu nationalism' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and how the perceived threats of Muslim lust to the Hindu women's virtue shaped the debates of social reformism in that period and necessitated the emergence of the militant Hindu woman. In a sense, this militant woman was the forerunner of the *sevikas* and the *Durgas* that made themselves so visible during and around the *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement. The spectre of Hindu impotency and defilement by the Muslim was raised once again. Again the sexual and the communal hierarchies looped together. However, women are drawn into the processes of identity formation and demarcation not merely as tropes but as active agents. Indeed they sustain such a politics through their actions. Identity and agency are bound in many myriad ways. Acquisition of a particular identity, say that of a *sevika* or a 'Hindu nationalist' woman allows for the unfolding of agential trajectories that would lie dormant otherwise. It means

simultaneously that women **choose** this identity of a *sevika* for the compensations it affords them and are already exercising an agency in the choice of an identity. The two are interlinked propositions. It is chosen over other possible identities because it gives them an access to a world of action and catapults them into a public life. The *shakha* becomes site of bonding - a female bonding outside of the context of oppressiveness of the joint family structure in the immediate sense and a bonding with the community and the nation in the larger sense. The *baudhik* and the *charcha* quench the thirst for intellectual and political discussion when otherwise women are thought of as apolitical beings. Such activism also if only momentarily allows for the inversion of traditional familial structures and division of labour (A *sevika* attending a fifteen day *shivir* with her daughter gleefully told this author that her husband and son would have to learn to manage without them and cook during her absence). There exists an entire oeuvre of compensatory mechanisms ranging from the deployment of the icons of powerful female goddesses that provide them with a strong self identity to the real possibility of participation in public activities, hitherto denied to them - all of which give the women in 'Hindu nationalism' a sense of power and autonomy without having to relinquish the comfortable protection of family life. Indeed their traditional roles of mother and wife are invested with a new weight and significance.

This is not to suggest that all that women have to do is to simply make a decision or choose an identity from a multitude. Rather the choice is shaped by a variety of social processes, both material and discursive located as women are at the intersection of multiple axes of power - such as caste, class, race, religion and so on, all sites of enactment of gender ideology.

That fact that participation in ‘Hindu nationalism’ exposes women to a domain of actions beyond their grasp before, also simultaneously forecloses any possibility of a rigorous interrogation of the patriarchies in which they are embedded. The ‘tolerance’ of Hinduism and the ‘fanaticism’ of Islam become universal truths. It is towards the latter that the women’s wrath must be directed.

What is being argued is that identities are acquired in practical engagements with life and are not simply passively assumed. Questions of identity can not be disentangled from those of agency.

II

What does research of the above kind entail? What promise does it hold out? What methodological implications does it have? Does it become ‘feminist’ simply by the virtue of the fact that women are the “subjects of enquiry” as well as “active agents in the gathering of knowledge”?¹ Does being a woman give the author insights that are denied to men? Does this study merely correct a skewedness in the large body of literature that exists on communalism and nationalism that shores up its boundaries traditionally to exclude women? Or is it a project with its own self worth independent of main stream studies? These are some of the questions raised but not necessarily answered here.

In a sense these questions have been pregnant in the feminist engagement with theory, philosophy and epistemology itself. Feminist scholarship has had to grapple with the dilemma of whether to pursue autonomous research, to remain a

¹ Strathern defines this as the project of Feminist enquiry. See Marilyn Strathern, “An Awkward Relationship : The Case of Feminism and Anthropology”, in *Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1987, Vol. 12, No. 2.

highly specialised sub-field or to work across disciplines and change or rather 'revolutionise' them from within.² This dilemma has unfolded itself as a quagmire of debates that remain still unresolved. For years, feminists have attacked classical theory for excluding women from scientific enterprise, not merely as legitimate researchers with faculties of reasoning and objectivity, but also as genuine subjects of enquiry. Edwin Ardner, for instance lamented that women unlike men were reluctant to provide cultural models for the anthropologist.³ Even when they have been, women have been relegated to mandatory references in the chapters on kinship and marriage - in a way of central significance to anthropology. Indeed even here male notions and evaluations of women were replicated. What happens when women begin to go to the field and study women. (This is parallel to the movement in anthropology when 'natives' begin to study not only their own society but even that of the West, armed with their copy of Foucault, as Mascia-Lees and others put it)!

Clearly then anthropological texts claim to the status of 'objective and true accounts' was put in a jeopardy. Objectivity comes to be seen as just a mask for male subjectivity. The unitary authority of the male anthropologist (invariably also white) to speak of and for the natives(both men and women has come under attack from a new generation of anthropologists, influenced by Postmodernism but as has been pointed out that some of the issues raised by them, such as the relation between power and knowledge, ideology and representation and the

² Ibid., p. 276.

³ See Kamla Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, (Delhi: OUP, 1996), p. 30.

relations of domination between the 'knower' and the 'known' have been voiced by feminists repeatedly since much earlier.⁴

Feminists have explored this issue in a variety of ways. Some have condemned all theorising as atypically masculine endeavour and called for women to eschew it in favour of *praxis* which alone should be the concern of women.⁵

But as Le' Doeuff says,

Whether we like it or not, we are within philosophy, surrounded by masculine-feminine divisions that philosophy has helped to articulate and refine. The problem is to know whether we want to remain there and be dominated by them, or whether we take up a critical position which will necessarily evolve through deciphering the basic philosophical assumptions about women. **The most metaphysical positions are those which one adopts unconsciously whilst believing or claiming that one is speaking from a position outside philosophy.**(emphasis in original)⁶

Equally importantly, it creates the dichotomy of theory and practice which loses sight of the subversive potential of feminist writing and the fact that

⁴ Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a feminist Perspective", in *Signs*, Vol. 15, No. 11, p. 11.

⁵ Moira Gatens cites the writings of V.Solanas as symptomatic of this trend. See Gatens, "The Dangers of a Woman-centred Philosophy", in *Polity Reader in Gender Studies*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), p. 93.

⁶ M. Le' Doeuff (1977), *Ibid.*, p. 95.

feminism as scholarship has evolved confronting its politics, its research agenda has been motivated by its “explicit political structure”.⁷

There are others who have argued for a distinctly feminist epistemology. This is by no means claim of a monolithic feminism but straddles different strands. Feminist empiricism calls into question not the basic tenets of philosophical systems which are seen as sex-neutral but the androcentric biases of particular male philosophers and theorists. If only their subjectivity could be controlled by a more rigorous adherence to these neutral methods of enquiry, misogyny could be eliminated.⁸

Feminists like Mary Daly, on the other hand were skeptical of the possibilities within philosophy as it existed and called for a rejection of this patriarchal theory and philosophy in favour of a ‘woman-centred’ theory.⁹ The impulse towards conceptualising a ‘woman’- universal and unchanging who could stand in for all women has been present in feminism from its birth and has continued since. Here the ‘experience of being a woman’ becomes the fundamental category of knowledge and the field becomes the site of ‘every day experiences’. Thus ‘direct experience’ and ‘emotions’ come to be preferred over the idea of objective scholarship. Value free commentary and academic prose are jettisoned for the more personal autobiographical narrative feel. One of the main projects of feminist epistemology was to recover women’s voices as well as silences, to instate them at the centre of the text. Dialogue with the informant, self

⁷ Mascia-Lees et al, op. cit., p. 22.

⁸ For elaboration, see Mary E. Hawksworth, “Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims to Truth”, in *Signs*, 1989, Vol. 14. No. 3, p. 535.

⁹ Gatens, op. cit., p. 94. In a sense Daly is closer to the nihilism espoused by Solanas than with other Feminists who seek to accommodate themselves within conventional philosophy.

reflexivity, polyvocality and heteroglossia (the Bakhtinian term for interplay of voices) were employed by feminists but condemned even by the practitioners of 'new ethnography' as fables of rapport or confessional literature, while terming their own work using the same methods as 'experimental'.¹⁰

Feminist theory is identified as fundamentally experiential.¹¹ The experience of being a feminist is elided with the experience of being a woman - a process which Mohanty calls "osmosis", i.e., "females are feminists by association and identification with the experiences which constitute us as female".¹²

Invariably these are the identical experiences of oppression and resistance. It is these that bestow on the oppressed groups in society a kind of epistemological privilege that has the ability to pierce ideological distortions produced by the oppressor (male) to ascertain a more sophisticated and holistic account of social and political relations.¹³ Thus a logical corollary to the victimhood and transgressive potentiality is their truth telling capacities. Ironically, this only "reifies the nature/culture dichotomy that is at the root of exclusion of women from scientific enterprise".¹⁴ In imagining a universal self (women) and 'other' (men), feminism was being blind to the internal differences of race, class and so on that riddled this 'global sisterhood'. The explosion of literature from women

¹⁰ See Julia Stephens, "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category of 'Non-Western Woman' in Feminist Writing in India", in Guha (ed.), *Writings on South Asian History and Society, Subaltern Studies VI*, (Delhi: OUP, 1998), p. 93. See also Alison M. Jaggard, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology", in Meyers (ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 384-405. For the new reflexive turn in Feminist works, see Visweswaran, op. cit.

¹¹ See "Foreward", in Keohane, Rosaldo and Gelpi (ed.), *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. vii.

¹² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience", in Barrett and Phillips (eds.), op. cit., p. 77.

¹³ Gatens, op. cit., p. 94 and Hawkesworth, op. cit., p. 536.

¹⁴ Hekman (1990) quoted in Meenakshi Thapan, "Partial Truths: Privileging a 'Male' Viewpoint", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 23, 1995, p. 1400.

of colour and from third world foregrounded this fact rather rudely. White feminists now despair of the description of women from other cultures as “ourselves - undressed” - heroines with less sophisticated tools than we but fighting the same battle against male oppression”.¹⁵

What happens to the relations of power and domination between the researchers and the informant when women take to the field and seek out women informants. Do they bond qua women, is it possible to base the study in a common understanding of systems/structures of oppression? Judith Stacey denies the possibility of a fully egalitarian research process despite intersubjectivity between the researcher and her subject. The research subjects are vulnerable to ‘manipulation’ and ‘betrayal’ by the ethnographer in the face of highly personalised relationship amongst the two which actually masks the real differences in knowledge,¹⁶ power and structural mobility. Notwithstanding the feminist penchant for polyvocality, the research product belongs finally to the researcher. Moreover, there is no guarantee as Visweswaran says that women, more than men can elicit responses from women about themselves their lives and society. It depends on, among others things, the degree of freedom they possess, what control is exercised on them and so on.¹⁷

To this dyad of researcher and subject, must be added a third angle of the ‘reader’. If for Strathern and Mascia-lees et al. It is necessary for feminist scholarship to keep in mind the reader who may well belong to the community

¹⁵ Visweswaran, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁶ See Mascia-Lees et al, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁷ Visweswaran, op. cit., p. 30.

they write of and possess the ability to contest the authors claim,¹⁸ Julie Stephens
views this as a vicarious identification of the reader with the subject brought about
by the author.¹⁹

These are typical situations when a white women researcher is
investigating non-whites. How do these problems present themselves when both
the researcher and the subject belong to the same society. This brings us back to
our research at hand.

It is true that by focusing our attention on women, we have arrived at an
understanding of how women are drawn into the project of 'Hindu nationalism' as
against the men. What unique discursive and material persuasions are at work.
This gives us insights into not only the processes by which 'Hindu nationalism' is
able to mobilise different sectors of the society with its agenda but also tells us
something about women that an automatic association between women and
pacifism, non-violence, nurturance and victimhood cannot be made.

What relation did this author bear to the women at Sevika
Samiti/Durgavahini ? Gender was an issue here certainly, for these were
exclusively female spaces of shakha prohibited to men, but it was not the sole
issue. Women and girls were willing to talk for they believed that the researcher
shared their ideological and political stance, was in complete sympathy with their
cause.

That such a feeling was fostered by the researcher does validate Stacey's
point of manipulation. In that sense there did exist a differential knowledge and

¹⁸ Mascia-Lees et al approvingly cite Strathern when she says, "I must bear my Melanasian readers
in mind. That in turn makes problematic the previously established distinction between writer and
subjects..." in Mascia-Lees et al, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁹ Stephens, op. cit., pp. 117-18.

power. This research makes one skeptical of the 'common understanding of domination' that feminism is supposed to engender. For the sevikas, male oppression within the Hindu community was almost non-existent and in any case a result of Islamic influences. Oppression evokes a singular meaning, the oppression of Hindu community. Is it possible then to speak of an unproblematic bonding with one's subjects ?

One problem with feminist epistemology is that even while interrogating the researchers' situatedness in webs of power, they continue to operate with the victim/transgressor dichotomy about the non-western women. It becomes urgent then to develop an epistemology that makes no claims for the 'feminist consciousness' of women, that also locates the subject matter in the hierarchies of gender, class, caste, race and indeed all socio-cultural divisions that allow sometimes the subject matter to invert the relations of domination.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agarwal, Purshottam 1996, "Surat, Savarkar and Draupdi : Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon", in Sarkar, Tanika and Butalia, Urvashi (eds.) *Women and the Hindu Right - A Collection of Essays* Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.29-57.
- Agnes, Flavia 1996, "Redefining the Agenda of the Women's Movement Within a Secular Framework", in Sarkar, Tanika and Butalia, Urvashi (eds.) *Women and the Hindu Right : A Collection of Essays*, Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.135-57.
- Althusser, Louis 1971, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy*, Monthly Review Press, pp. 126-186.
- Anderson, Benedict 1993, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York, Verso.
- Anderson, Walter K. and Damle, Shridhar D.1987, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi, Vistaar Publications.
- Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis 1994, "Women and the Nation-State", in Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony D. (eds.) *Nationalism*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, pp.312-315.
- Appadurai, Arjun 1994, "Number in Colonial Imagination", in Breckenbridge, Carol and Van der Veer, Peter (eds.) *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 314-40.
- Arora, Diva 1993, "The Rise of the Durga Vahini", in *Deccan Herald*, January 11.
- Assayang, Jackie 1998, "Ritual Action or Political Reaction? The Invention of Hindu Nationalist Processions in India During the 1980s", in *South Asia Research*, 18,2, pp.125-147.
- Bacchetta, Paola 1993, "All Our Goddesses are Armed: Religion, Resistance and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.25, (Special Issue on Women and Religious Nationalism in India), pp.38-51.
- _____ 1994, "Communal Property/Sexual Property : On Representations of Muslim Women in Hindu Nationalist Discourse", in Hasan, Zoya (ed.) *Forging Identities : Gender Communities and the State*, Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.188-225.

- _____ 1996, "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues : The 'Sangh' and the 'Samiti' and their differential concepts of the Hindu Nation", in Jayawardena, Kumari and de Alwis, Malathi (eds.) *Embodied Violence : Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.126-67.
- Bannel, Trevor 1993, *Post Cultural theory: Critical Theory After The Marxist Paradigm*, London, MacMillan.
- Barrett, Michele 1992, "Words and Things: Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis", in Barrett, Michele and Phillips, Anne (eds.) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press, pp.201-19.
- Basu, Amrita 1993, "Feminism Inverted: The Real Women and Gendered Imagery of Hindu Nationalism", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 25, (Special Issue on Women and Religious Nationalism in India), pp.25-36.
- _____ 1994, "When Local Riots are Not Merely Local : Bringing the State Back In, Bijnore 1988-92", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 40, pp.2605-22.
- Basu, Tapan et. al 1993, *Khakhi Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, New Delhi, Orient Longman.
- Bharucha, Rustom 1995, "Dismantling Men: Crisis of Male Identity in Father, Son and Holy War", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 18, pp.1610-16.
- Bock, Giesla 1983, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilisation and the State", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp.400-21.
- Breckenbridge, Carol A. and Van der Veer, Peter 1994, *Orientalism and The Postcolonial Predicament*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Calhoun, Craig et. al 1993, *Bourdieu : Critical Perspectives*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Chakravarty, Uma 1983, "The Development of the Sita Myth : A Case Study of Women in Myth and Literature", in *Samyashakti*, Vol.1, No.1,CWDS, pp.68-75.

- _____ 1989, "Whatever Happened To The Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and A Script For The Past", in Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, Kali for Women, pp. 27-87.
- Chandra, Sudhir 1984, *Communal Elements in Late Nineteenth Century Hindi Literature*, "Occasional Papers on History and Society", Delhi, NMML.
- _____ 1993, "Of Communal Consciousness and Communal Violence: Impressions from Post-riot Surat", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 36, pp.1883-7.
- Chatterjee, Manini 1993, "Strident Sadhus : Contours of a Hindu Rashtra", in *Frontline*, January, pp.16-29.
- Chodrow, Nancy J. 1995, "Gender As a Personal and Cultural Construction", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 516-44.
- Coburn, Thomas B. 1994, "Experiencing the Goddess: Notes on Text, Gender and Society" in *Manushi*, No.80, pp.2-10.
- _____ 1995, "Sita Fights While Ram Swoons: A Shakta Version of the Ramayan", in *Manushi*, No. 90, pp.5-16.
- Cohen, Anthony P. 1994, *Self Consciousness: Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, London, Routledge.
- Curran Jr.,J.A. 1951, *Militant Hinduism in the Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS*, New York, International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations.
- Das, Veena (ed.) 1996, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, Susmita 1995, "Redeploymnet of the Feminine", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 25, pp.1529-30.
- Datta, Pradeep K. 1993, "Dying Hindus : Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in The Early Twentieth Century Bengal", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 25, pp.1305-19.
- de Lauretis, Teresa 1993, "Upping the Anti (sic) in Feminist Theory", in Diring, Simon (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.74-89.

- Deoras, Balasaheb 1990, "Bharat Bhoomi is Hindu Bhoomi", Address at Vijay Dashmi function in Nagpur reproduced in *Organiser*, (October), pp.19-4.
- Devi, Savitri 1953, *A Warning to the Hindus*, Delhi, Promilla Paperbacks.
- Dube, Leela 1986, "Seed and Earth", in Dube, Leela et. al (eds.) *Essays on Women in Society and Development*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp.22-53.
- Dumont, Louis 1960, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 4, pp.33-62.
- Durkheim, Emile 1964, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (ed.) Catlin, George E., New York and London, The Free Press and Collier McMillan Publications.
- Femia, Joseph V. 1981, *Gramsci's Political Thought : Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Freitag, Sandra B. 1990, *Collective Action and Public Arenas in the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Gabriel, Karen 1998, "Manning the Border : Gender and War in 'Border'" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 15, pp.828-32.
- Ganesh, Kamla 1990, "Mother Who is Not a Mother: In Search of the Great Indian Goddess", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXV, No. 43, pp.WS 58- 64.
- _____ 1995, "Feminism at the Margins of Anthropology, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 34, pp.2146-8.
- Gatens, Moira 1992, "Power, Bodies and Difference", in Barrett, Michele and Phillips, Anne (eds.) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press. pp. 120-37.
- _____ 1994, "The Dangers of a Woman - Centred Philosophy", in *Polity Reader in Gender studies*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press, pp.95-107.
- Gattwood, Lynn E. 1985, *Devi and the Spouse Goddess : Women, Sexuality and Marriage in India*, Delhi, Manohar.
- Gold, Daniel 1991, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation," in Marty, Martin E. and Appleby, R.Scott (eds.) *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago, University of Chocago Press, pp.531-93.

- Golwalkar, M.S. 1939, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, Bharat Publications.
- _____ 1966, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore, Vikrama Prakashan.
- Grossberg, Lawrence 1996, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?", in Hall, Stuart and du Gay, Paul (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage, pp.87-107.
- Grosz, Elizabeth 1984, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Australia, Allen and Unwin.
- Guha, Ramchandra 1999, *Savaging the Civilized : Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Gupta, Charu 1998, "Articulating Hindu Masculinity and Femininity: 'Shuddhi' and 'Sangathan' Movements in United Provinces in The 1920s", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 13.
- Gupta, Dipankar, 1991, "Communalism and Fundamentalism: Some Notes on the Nature of Ethnic Politics in India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, Annual No., pp.573-582.
- _____ 1992, "Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes", in Gupta, Dipankar (ed.) *Social Stratification*, Delhi, Oxford University.
- _____ 1995, "Feminification of Theory", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, pp.617-620.
- Hall, Stuart 1992, "The Question of Cultural Identity", in Hall, Stuart, Held, David and McGraw, Tony (ed.) *Modernity and It's Future*, U.K. Polity Press.
- Hansen, Kathryn 1988, "The Virangana in North Indian History, Myth and Popular Culture", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXII, No. 26, pp.WS25-33
- Hansen, Thomas Blom 1995, "Controlled Emancipation: Women and Hindu Nationalism", in Wilson, Fiona and Frederikson, Bodil Folke (eds.) *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism*, London, Frank Cass, pp.82-9.
- _____ 1996, "Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and The Exorcism of The Muslim 'Other'" in *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol.16(2), pp. 137-72.
- Hawkesworth, Mary E. 1989, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 533-57.

- Haynes, Douglas and Prakash, Gyan (eds.) 1991, *Contesting Power : Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Hedgewar, Dr. Kesahav Baliram 1996, "The Better Half", Text of Baudhik delivered at Wardha samiti shakha, June, 1938 reproduced in *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 14, (Nari Sahkti Special), pp.5-6.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds.) 1998, *Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Holloway, Wendy 1992, "Gender Difference and The Production of Subjectivity", in Crowley, Helen and Himmelweit, Susan (eds.) *Knowing Women*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press. pp. 240-74.
- Honig, B. 1992, "Towards an Agnostic Feminism: Hannah Arandt and The Politics of Identity", in Butler, Judith and Scott, Joan W., (eds.) *Feminists Theorize The Political*, London, Routledge, pp. 215-35.
- Illiah. Kancha 1994, "Caste and Contradictions", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 43, pp.2835-6.
- Jafferlot, Christopher 1993, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 12 and 13, pp.5172-24.
- Jaggat, Alison M. 1997, "Love and Knowledge : Emotion in Feminist Epistemology", in Meyers, Diana Tretjens (ed.) *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York and London, Routledge, pp.384-405.
- Jain, Ravindra K. 1996, "Hierarchy, Hegemony and Dominance: Politics of Ethnicity in Uttar Pradesh, 1995", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXI. No.4, pp.215-23.
- Jaiswal, Suvira 1998, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Delhi, Manohar.
- Jeffery, Roger and Jeffery, Patricia M. 1994, "The Bijnore Riots, October 1990: Collapse of a Mythical Special Relationship", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 10, pp.551-8.
- Jenkins, Richards 1996, *Social Identity*, London, Routledge.
- John, Mary E. 1995, "Indisciplined Outpourings: Myths and Bathos of Male Exclusion", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 25, pp. 1133-6.

- Joshi, Shashi and Josh, Bhagwan 1994, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920-47*, Vol. II, Delhi, Sage.
- Kakar, Sudhir 1995, *The Colours of Violence*, New Delhi, Viking Penguin.
- Kapur, Anuradha 1993, "Deity to Crusader The Changing Iconography of Ram", in Pandey, Gyanendra (ed.) *Hindu and Others: The Questions of Identity in India Today*, Delhi, Viking, pp. 74-109.
- Kapur, Ratna and Cossman, Benda 1996, "Communalising Gender, Engendering Community: Women, Legal Discourse and the Saffron Agenda", in Sarkar, Tanika and Butralia, Urvashi (eds.) *Women and the Hindu Right - A Collection of Essays*, Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.82-120.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta 1987, *The Myth of Praxis: The Construction of The figure of Krishna in Krishnacharita*, Occasional Papers in South Asian History and Society, Delhi, NMML.
- _____ 1995, "Religion, Politics and Modernity", in Baxi, Upendra and Parekh, Bhikhu (eds.) *Crisis and change in Contemporary India*, Delhi, London and Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp.295-316.
- Katrak, Ketu H. 1992, "Gandhian Satyagraha and Representations of Female Sexuality", in Parker, Andrew et. al (eds.) *Nationalisms and Sexuality*, London, Routledge.
- Keohane, Nannerie O et al 1982, *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, Brighton, The Harvester Press.
- Kishwar, Madhu 1986, "Arya Samaj and Women's Education : Kanya Mahavidyalya, Jalandhar", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 17, pp.WS-9-24.
- _____ 1990, "In Defence of our Dharma", in *Manushi*, No. 60.
- _____ 1998, *Religion in the Service of Nationalism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Kosambi, D.D. 1992, *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan.
- Krais, Baete 1993, "Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice", in Calhoun, Craig et. al (eds.) *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

- Kumar, Nita (ed.) 1994, *Women as Subjects : South Asian Histories*, Delhi, Stree.
- Leacock, Eleanor 1986, "Women, Power and The Authority", in Dube, Leela et. al. (eds.) *Essays on Women in Society and Development*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 107-35.
- Liddle, Joanna and Joshi, Rama 1985, "Gender and Imperialism in British India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, No.43, pp. WS72-8.
- _____ 1986, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India*, Delhi, Kali for Women.
- Loomba, Ania 1997, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Ludden, David 1992, *Making India Hindu: Religion, community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Madan, T.N. 1992, "Dumont on the Nature of Caste", in Gupta, Dipankar (ed.) *Social Stratification*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Madan, T.N. 1997, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Malhotra, Anshu 1992, "The Moral Woman and the Urban Punjabi Society of the Late Nineteenth Century", in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 20, Nos. 5-6, pp.34-61.
- Marx, Karl 1994, *Early Political writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Mascia-Lees et. al 1989, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions From a Feminist Perspective", in *Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.7-33.
- Mazumdar, Sucheta 1992, "Women, Culture and Politics: Engendering the Hindu Nation", in *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. XII, No.2, Fall, pp.1-24.
- McClintock, Anne 1993, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family", in *Feminist Review*, No. 44, Summer (Special on Nationalism and National Identities), pp.61-80.
- McNay, Lois 1994, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade 1992, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience", in Barrett, Michele and Phillips, Anne (eds.) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press, pp.74-92.

- Moore, Henrietta 1988, *Feminism and Anthropology*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press.
- _____ 1995, *A Passion for difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press.
- Nandy, Ashis 1980, *At The Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- _____ 1983, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- _____ 1996, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance", in Das, Veena (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp.69-93.
- Niranjana, Tejaswani et. al 1993, *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, Calcutta, Seagull Books.
- Flaherty, Wendy Doniger 1980, *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas.
- O' Hanlon, Rosalind 1988, "Subaltern Studies and Historians of Resistance in Colonial South Asia", in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. XXII, pp.189-224.
- Oommen, T.K. 1997, *Citizenship, Nationlity and Ethnicity : Reconciling Competing Identities*, U.K., Polity Press.
- Ortner, Sherry B. and Whitehead, Harriet 1989, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Pandey, Gyanendra 1993, "Which of Us Are Hindus?", in Pandey, Gyanendra (ed.) *Hindu and Others*, Delhi, Viking. pp.238-72.
- Pandey, Gyanendra (ed.) 1993, *Hindu and Others: Questions of Identity in India Today*, Delhi, Viking.
- Papanek, Hannah 1994, "The Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society : Failed Visions and Broken Promises in Nazi Germany", in *Germinal*, Vol. 1, (Special on Fascism and Culture), pp.12-25.
- Parker, Andrew et. al (eds.) 1992, *Nationalisms And Sexuality*, London, Routledge.

- Parkinson, Northcote C. 1963, *East and West*, London, John Murry.
- Parsons, Talcott 1964, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, New York and London, The Free Press and Collier McMillan Publications.
- Patel, Sujata 1988, "Constuction and Reconstruction of Women in Gandhi", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 8.
- Pateman, Carole 1988, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press.
- Pathak, Zakia and Sengupta, Saswati 1996, "Resisting Women", in Sarkar, Tanika and Butalia, Urvashi (eds.) *Women and the Hindu Right - A Collection of Essays*, Delhi, Kali for Women, pp.270-89.
- Perrot et. al 1990, "Culture and Power of Women : A Historiographical Essay", in Aymard and Mukhia (eds.) *French Studies in History, Vol.2*, Delhi, Orient Longman.
- Pringle, Rosemary and Watson, Sophie 1992, "Women's Interests and The Post-Structuralist State", in Barrett, Michele and Phillips, Anne (eds.) *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporay Feminist Debates*, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press.
- Raghavan, T.C.A. 1983, "Origins and Development of Hindu Mahasabha Ideology: The Call of V.D.Savarkar and Bhai Parmanand", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVIII, No.50, pp. 595-600.
- Ruddik, Sara, 1989, *Maternal Thinking*, London, Bernstein Press.
- Rupp, Leila J. 1977, "Mother of the Volk : The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp.363-9.
- Sangari, Kumkum 1993, "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 18, pp. 867-882.
- Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.) 1989, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, Kali for Women.
- Sarkar, Sumit 1992, "Indian Nationalism and The Politics of Hindutva", in Ludden, David (ed.) *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp.270-294.
- _____ 1994, "The Anti-Secularist Critique of Hindutva: Problems of a Shared Discursive Space", in *Germinal*, Vol. 1, (Special on Fascism and Culture), pp. 101-10.

- Sarkar, Tanika 1987, "Nationalist Iconography : Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXII, No.47, pp.2011-5.
- Sarkar, Tanika 1991, "The Woman as a Communal Subject : Rastrasevika Samiti and the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 35, pp.2057-62.
- Sarkar, Tanika 1992, "The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation : Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal", in *Studies in History*, 8, 2, pp.213-35.
- Sarkar, Tanika 1993, "Rhetoric Against Age of Consent Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-wife", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 36, pp.1869-78.
- Sarkar, Tanika and Butalia, Urvashi (eds.) 1996, *Women and the Hindu Right - A Collection of Essays*, Delhi, Kali for Women.
- Sartre, Jean Paul 1966, *Being and Nothingness*, New York, Washington Square Press.
- Scott, James 1985, *Weapons of The Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.
- Scott, Joan W. 1988, "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *Gender and The Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, pp. 28-50.
- Shah, Ghanshyam 1994, "Identity, Communal Consciousness and Politics", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 19, pp.1133-1140.
- Siltman, Janet and Stanworth, Michelle (eds.) 1984, *Women and the Public Sphere*, London, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd.
- Sinha, Mridula 1985, "Women's Equality - Miles to March", in *Organiser*, (September), p. 7.
- Sinha, Mrinalini 1996, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in The Late Nineteenth Century*, Delhi, Kali for Women.
- Stephens, Julie 1998, "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category 'Non-western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India", in Guha, Ranjit (ed.) *Writings on South Asian History and Society, Subaltern Studies VI*, Delhi, Oxford university Press, pp.92-125.

- Strathern, Marilyn 1987, "An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology", in *Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp.276-292.
- Sunder Rajan, Rajeshwari 1993, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Swarup, Madan 1996, *Identity, Culture and The Postmodern World*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- Tambiah, S.J 1982, "The Renouncer: His Individuality and his Community" in Madan, T.N. (ed.) *Way of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer - Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, pp.299-320.
- Taneja, Nalini 1994, "Populism, Hindutva, Imperialism: An Anti-modernity Paradigm for the Third World", in *Germinal*, Vol. 1, (Special on Fascism and Culture), pp.111-27.
- Thapan, Meenakshi 1995, "Partial Truths: Privileging a 'Male' Viewpoint", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, No. 34, pp.1399-1400.
- Thapar, Romila 1982, "The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahmanical and Budhist Traditions", in Madan, T.N. (ed.) *Way of Life : King, Householder, Renouncer- Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, pp.273-98.
- Thapar, Suruchi 1993, "Women as Activists; Women as Symbols : A Study of The Indian Nationalist Movement", *Feminist Review*, No. 44, Summer (Special on Nationalism and National Identities), pp. 81-96.
- Thompson, John B. 1984, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Thursby, G.R. 1975, *Hindu- Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928*, Leiden, E.J. Brill.
- Uberoi, Patricia 1990, "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calender Art", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXV, No.17, pp. WS-41-47.
- Van der Veer, Peter 1989 *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in North Indian Pilgrimage Centre*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

- Van dyke, Virginia 1997, "General Elections 1996: Political sadhus and limits to Religious Mobilization in India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXII, No. 49.
- Vanaik, Achin 1994, Situating the Threat of Hindu Nationalism : Problems with Fascist Paradigm, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 28, pp.1729-48.
- Visweswaran, Kamla 1996, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Vogel, Lise 1983, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women : Towards a Unitary Theory*, Pluto Press.
- Walby, Sylvia 1996, "Women and the Nation", in Balakrishnan, Gopal (ed.) *Mapping the Nation*, London and New York; Verso, pp.235-54.
- Weir, Allison 1996, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and The Critique of Identity*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Wilford, Rick 1998, "Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: Surveying the Ground", in Wilford, Rich and Miller, Robert J.(eds.) *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.1-22.
- Wilford, Rick and Miller, Robert L. (eds.) 1998, *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Yalman, Nur 1968, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylone and Malabar", in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 93 (1).
- Yuval-Davis, Nira 1998, "Gender and Nationalism", in Wilford, Rick and Robert, Miller J. (eds.) *Women, Nation and Ethnicity*, London and New York, Routledge," pp.23-35.
- Zizek, Slavoj 1990, "Eastern Europe's Republic of Gilead", in *New Left Review*, No. 183, 50-62.
- Zutshi, Somnath 1993, "Women, Nation and the Outsider in Contemporary Hindi Cinema", in Niranjana, Tejaswani et. al (eds.) *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, Calcutta, Seagull Books, pp.83-142.

SOURCES IN HINDI :

Baudhik Patrak : Rashtra Senna Samiti, Uttaranchal, 1999, Rohtak, Sinha Prakashan.

- Beasant, Annie, 1992, *Vivah ka Hindu Adarsh*, Noida, Jagriti Prakashan.
- Brahmavadini - Smarika, Akhil Bharatiya Dwitya Sadhvi Sammelan*, 1996, Prayag, VHP (Mahila Vibhag).
- Durga Vahini : Parichay Mala, Pushpa -3*, 1998, New Delhi, VHP.
- Mandakini Smriti Deep*, 1998, New Delhi, VHP.
- Matri Shakti - Smarika, Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahila Sammelan*, Delhi, 1994, New Delhi, Hindu Chetna Manch, VHP.
- Matri Shakti : Parichay Mala, Pushpa 2*, 1998, n.d. ,VHP.
- Pratah Smaraniya Mahilayen*, 1995, Nagpur, Sevika Prakashan.
- Rashtra Sevika Samiti : Ek Parichay*, n.d., Mathura, Sinha Prakashan.
- Sadhvi Ritambhara ka bharat ki Nari Shakti ko ahwaan*, n.d., Sathitya Evam Drik-Shranya Sewa Nyas.
- Sammelan Vrita : Akhil Bharatiya Hindi Mahila Sammelan*, 1994, New Delhi, Hindu Mahila Sammelan.
- Santon Dwara Seva Se Samrastra Smarika No. 17*, New Delhi, Akhil Bharatiya Sadhvi Shakti Parishad, VHP.
- Vishwambhara Sammelan Smarika*, 1996, New Delhi, Rashtra Sevika Samita.
- Vishwa Hindu Parishad Pathyaya*, n.d., VHP.

APPENDIX

The following is an interview of Mrs. Asha Sharma, Chief, Sevika Samiti, North India. The interview was conducted originally in Hindi and has been translated into English by the author. Effort has been made to remain true to the original text.

M.S. : What are the main programmes and activities of the Samiti?

A.S. : For us Shakha is the only programme. Our work is to organise Hindu women through the Shakha. We train the girls ideologically, mentally and physically so that they may dedicate themselves to the society and the nation. For this we impart *samskaras* to the girls.

M.S. : What do you feel are the main challenges before any women's organisation today?

A.S. : The challenge before women are the challenges before a women's organisation. The main problem today is that women have become disparaging of the need to build their character and dedicate themselves to their family. Girls today are becoming self centered and less willing to sacrifice. They think only for themselves, what they can get, not what they can do for the family and home. Homes cannot be sustained like this. Families are breaking down, the society is coming apart. If this happens the main victims will be women. In our society, when a girl gets married she has a sense of great emotional security. She thinks this is my home, this is my husband, it will be mine forever. This sense of security will be lost. We are asking for our rights but turning away from our duties. So for women as well women's organisation this is the main challenge. This is the problem the world over. A balance between rights and duties has to be struck. It will not do to merely ask for rights, duties are important too.

M.S. : Do you not see a contradiction between your familial responsibilities and Samiti work?

A.S. : For all of us who work here, our homes come first. We never turn away from our homes, husband and children - they are our primary responsibility. For the *Pracharikas* (whole timers), this problem does not arise as they do not marry and settle down. We plan accordingly. When children are young then it is a problem but when they grow up it is possible to dedicate time towards the work for society. I have been involved in Samiti work since college days and there are many like me.

M.S. : How is the Samiti different from other women's organisation?

A.S. : The rest speak of rights alone or equality with men or take up specific issues such as dowry. We do not do this. We believe, women are the creators of this society and the creator cannot ask for rights. It is the woman who is revered after God because she has the power and ability to create. We can build the society the way we want to. Merely begging for rights will not get women anywhere. My children, my home - I can mould the way I want. If I wish to, I can make them good citizens, I can make my sons to learn to respect women. If I do not pay attention my son may turn out to be an eve teaser. So the mother has the power to create a society according to

her experience. In our country since ancient times women have been worshipped. Even today, in Bengal, even a small girl is referred to as 'Mother'. What does it mean? It means that each girl is to be revered like a mother. So this feeling of respect has to be rekindled by women themselves. If women continue to indulge in self pity and helplessness then they will be incapable of doing anything. A woman should realise her self worth and create a society that will respect women. How can a creator ask?

M.S. : Why is it that if Hinduism so revered women then that the Hindu texts like *Manusmriti* are contemptuous of women. It lays down that a woman has forever be under the care of her father, brother or son?

A.S. Have you read the *Manusmriti*? I think only a person who has read should comment on it with authority. I have not read it either, but what I have learnt from my work and experience all these years. If we read our history, woman was a *swayambara* that is she had the right and capability to choose her own husband. So when society has bestowed on her the right to choose a spouse, what does it mean? That she was considered able. Sita had a *swayambar*, Draupadi had one, Savitri's father told her that he was incapable of looking for a husband for her and that she should choose a suitable mate. She was a *swayambara*, she did not hide behind a purdah. We did not have the purdah system. So to put her under somebody else's care is out of question.

M.S. : What happened then? Why did her status degrade from that of a *swayambara*?

A.S. : The slavery of last one thousand years that this nation has witnessed, the invaders - Moghuls, Turks, Muslims-who were a kind of barbaric people. So when they attacked, their policy was to kill men, to ravage and carry off the women and property. For them women are equated with property. So, when they came to our country, however civilised we may have been, we were helpless before them. After this period of loot and pillage, gradually people began to think of keeping their women safely away. Because women are the societies 'valuable jewels which needs protection'. Tell me what do you keep in the locker? Stones or jewels? Since the basis of family and society is the women as mother she is to be kept safely. So that her dignity is not attacked. During this period when women were treated by barbarians as 'objects' and 'commodities' she had to be confined within the home and gradually and because one thousand years is a long time in the life of the nation, it became established as a practice, as a kind of stricture for women.

M.S. : Why do you place so much emphasis on physical training? Especially when there is no tradition of such a practice for Hindu women.

A.S. : We believe that the body should be healthy and capable. Women should be able to defend others and not that others should come to her defence. In strong body resides a sharp mind.

M.S. : Why are not women allowed inside the Sangh ?

A.S. : See, Sangh was conceived as an organisation for men. When in 1936, the Samiti was founded then the founder of RSS, Dr. Hedgewarji had a very clear vision about it. Samiti and RSS are two parallel organisations just as a train runs on ... no, not tyres ... but parallel tracks. Their goal is one and the same but they run parallel to each other. If the distance is narrowed then the train cannot run on it. Similarly if the distance is increased. So should the Sangh and Samiti work, neither should they close and merge nor should they move apart. If we need history, we have seen that wherever there have been such organisations where men and women work together perversion sets in. The Buddhists admitted only men as monks but once women were also allowed into the same monasteries then it became perverted. In India this is one of the major reason for the decline of Buddhism. So whenever men and women come together perversion is bound to set in . So one should be careful.

M.S. : On what issues has the Samiti agitated ?

A.S. : See our organisation is not oriented towards agitation, though on some issues we have agitated but these issues are not women's alone. Women are a part of this society and questions that confront the society are also those that touch women. For example, 'cultural pollution'. It is as much a concern for the women as for the society as a whole.

M.S. : Being a women's organisation are there times when you have tensions with the Sangh which must naturally have a male viewpoint ?

A.S. : We don't believe in confrontations but harmony. When big decision has to be taken the sisters of the samiti are also invited to the *Nirnayak Mandal* (Executive Body).

M.S. : What led to the large participation of women in the *Ram Janmaboomi* movement ?

A.S. : Ram is the life source of *Bharat Varsha*. Bhagwan Ram resides in every heart and everything relating to Him or his birthplace touches every heart. So, women don't have to be invited for this cause. Hindu society is a religious one. Dharma is the first priority, it is their very life. Vivekanandji has said that each society has its own speciality. If the religion of Hindu samaj is attacked then it will rise in anger. The English, for example, will rise up if their independence is threatened. Being a religious question, women did not have to be invited for it. May be you saw it. I was there ... women from villages, women carrying babies in their arms, old women all by themselves because all of them were moved by their emotions and faith. They came voluntarily because they felt it was urgent.

M.S. : Do you think religion and politics mixed ?

A.S. : Dharma guides all aspects of life. Life cannot move without religion. So whether it is politics or economics, only if they are guided by religion can they function properly.

M.S. : What does Devi Ashtabhuja symbolise ?

A.S. : Devi is holding something in each of her eight hands. All of these symbolise different values which a woman must try and inculcate in herself. For example, in one hand she has a *khadag* for destroying the evil. So also must a woman be powerful. In one hand, she has a lotus, which blooms amidst dirt but is untouched by it. A woman's life must be like a lotus - *pavitra*. The *Bhagwa Dwaj* stands for single minded devotion to the goal. She is an ideal for women. She is not worshipped. We are the worshippers of Bharat Mata alone.