

**RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM
AND
GENDER ISSUES**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that the dissertation entitled **Religious Nationalism and Gender Issues** submitted in partial fulfillment for the M.Phil degree of this university has not been previously submitted for any other university and is my original work.

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

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CHAPTER I

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Today as we are moving into the twenty-first century, a large number of scholars have pointed out that we are approaching towards a post-national era where a large number of changes are taking place that recede the ethnic conflicts and nationalism to the background. Yet, an equally large group of scholars have pointed out with an equally strong conviction that the ethnic conflicts are taking place with greater intensity and pose an important hindrance to the process of globalization. Until now there are no signs of a lessening of ethnic and nationalist fervour. Yet only time will tell and till then 'nation and nationalism' will continue to remain an important topic for research.

While scholars have extensively worked on the topic of nation and nationalism it has generated a lot of ambiguity about the concept of 'nation' itself. Ernest Renan (1991) in his article '*What is a nation*' holds the view that "a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle". Renan has provided a psychological, moral definition of the nation. He has based his definition solely on the subjective factors, with little regard for the objective criteria that constitute an important part in defining and creating a nation.

Max Weber (1948:176) on the other hand defines the nation "as a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a

state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own". Weber's definition is inherent with certain flaws. According to him, every nation must build up a separate state and that the nation's identity can only be manifested when it attains a separate state for itself. While in the European case, the principle of one nation, one state, was used to create nations, India on the other hand, provides a good example of how different nations can co-exist within a state and that it is not necessary for them to build a state of their own to preserve their identity. Weber also holds the view that a nation is not identical with a community speaking the same language. Here too, he has failed to recognize that one of the most important attributes of a nation is that the people should have a common medium of communication. Both Benedict Anderson (1983) and Ernest Gellner (1983) have pointed out the need of building a homogeneous society, and that one of the means of doing so is through a common language.

Like Weber, Karl Deutsch (1969) too has been unable to make a clear separation between the concepts of the nation and state. He holds the view that nations are formed when the people who make it acquire the power to back up their aspirations for a separate state. Thus, according to him a nation consists of a group of people who have a state of their own. Thus, he too falls in the same trap as Weber and fails to

recognize the existence of a number of nations that do not have a separate state. Infact, many nations have not aspired to attain a separate state for themselves.

Anthony D. Smith (1986) is another scholar who has failed to view a nation without it necessarily being a state. According to him, the nation must necessarily have a state of its own. Thus he too like the scholars mentioned earlier fails to account for the existence of various nations without a state of their own.

Unlike Ernest Gellner, Max Weber, Karl Deutsch and Anthony D. Smith who all have conflated the terms of nation and state, Walker Connor (1994) has been able to register a distinction between the concepts of the nation and state (Oommen 1997:55). According to him 'nation' creates a psychological bond where there is present a strong sense of belonging associated with a particular territory, considered to be its own, while state according to him is a territorial political unit. Thus he has rightly pointed out that where the state and nation coincide with each other, the result is the nation-state.

Having critically analyzed the work of various scholars in the field of defining and conceptualizing the nation, it is now imperative to

conceptualize the nation rightly taking account of the empirical experience in creating the nation.

Nation refers to a group of people who have a sense of belonging to a common territory and share a common language. Thus for any nation to exist there must be fulfilled at least two basic conditions, that of a common territory and the existence of a common language among the people. It is a psychological moral concept. The state, on the other hand, is a politico-legal concept and refers to a geographical territory where the political authority has the right to exercise power. When the nation and state coincide with one another what results is the nation-state. However, a nation need not always aspire for statehood and neither a state need always consist of only one nation, but rather may be a conglomeration of nations as exemplified by the case of India and the United Kingdom (Oommen 1997:20).

The above definitions make the terms of national and citizen clear to us. While the two may co-exist, yet there are instances where this need not necessarily be so and national citizens would only emerge in cases where the nation and state coincide. While all those residing in a territory and fulfilling certain conditions laid down by the law may be regarded as citizens and thus provided equal rights as are provided to

other citizens of the state. The nationals, on the other hand, need to fulfill certain moral-psychological conditions, such as a sense of attachment and belonging to the nation apart from the conditions mentioned earlier.

Having conceptualized the nation and state, it is now important to focus attention on the processes that help in creating a nation. A large number of theories have come up which try to arrive at an understanding of how a nation has come to exist. I would here like to review the views of three important scholars, those of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith. While it is generally presumed that these scholars have presented global approaches to the study of nation, it is important to see how their work helps in understanding the Asian case.

Ernest Gellner (1983) presented a distinction between the agrarian and industrial societies. According to him nationalism comes about in the early stages of industrialization and fades away as society becomes more homogeneous and industrial. He considers education as an important factor that helps to create a homogeneous and standardized society. Thus for the emergence of a nation, education plays a crucial role. He also presents a typology of nationalism and his first model is called the 'Habsburg' or the 'Balkan' for which he cites the example of

Africa South of the Sahara. The second model comes about if the powerless get access to education and are able to coalesce into an ethnic majority within a culturally divided society, which is the classical liberal western nationalism e.g. Italy and Germany. The third model is one where only the rest or some have the access to education while the others do not. Finally, he points out a situation where neither party enjoys the benefits of such access.

If one tries to apply Gellner's theory to the Asian case, one finds a number of limitations. His theory is explicitly based on the Islamic experience and he tries to present a picture that the Asian and African nationalism are just delayed forms of European nationalism. Thus, Gellner fails to account for the role played by local cultures and also the capacity of standardized systems of education in pre-industrial societies.

The second scholar, Benedict Anderson (1983) whose theory is considered as a global one, puts forward the view that the nation is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. According to him, this community comes to be constructed through the important role played by print capitalism. He classifies the three types of nationalism – Creole, linguistic (vernacular)

and official. These models according to him first took shape in Europe and then spread to Asia and Africa. Thus he too denies any originality to Asia and Africa of constructing their own models of nationalism; rather he speaks of these continents as 'pirating' the European models.

Anthony D. Smith (1986) in his model puts forward the view that the modern nations have ancient ethnic origins and were not invented or imagined. While many scholars share the modernist view, yet Smith does insist that nations have roots in pre-modern ethnic communities.

The work on the approaches to the study of the formation of nations has been classified into the modernist, post-modernist and ethno-culturalist approach (Tonnesson and Antlov 1996:13-19). While the modernist scholars are of the view that nationalism would encapsulate the local cultures and create the modern society and that would ultimately lead to the creation of a global culture, the post-modernists disregard historical facts. Therefore, in this approach the nations would lose the little regard that modernists have for history. The third approach, that is, the ethno-culturalist approach roots nationalism in pre-modern times. Thus here a full account is taken of historical facts. Therefore in trying to understand the case of Asia we need to adopt a synthetic approach and not any one single approach.

Nation and Nationalism had first emerged in the western world, in America and Europe. It has been pointed out that for some it was Christianity that prepared the way, for others it was education and the printing press. A large number of theories are thus ethnocentric, based on western experience where nations emerged with the process of modernity. But in the case of Asia and Africa it was more a result of colonialism and imperialism. Thus these theories seem inadequate if one applies them singly, but they would provide a better understanding when applied in combination to understand the case of Asia and Africa.

UNDERSTANDING ATTEMPTS TO CREATE RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN THE INDIAN CASE

The attempts to create a nation are based on the invoking of a large number of different factors such as language, religion, race, tribe etc. In the case of Asia and especially – India, which is a multi-religious country, we find the growing emphasis on religion to create a nation. Thus there have been attempts by religious collectivities to claim that they are nations and thereby demand for a separate geographical territory as their homeland. These claims in the Indian case have been articulated by three major religious collectivities – the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims. However such claims are untenable because of a lack

of coterminality between religion and territory. No religious collectivity can demand an exclusive territory for itself, as the other religious collectivities have an equal claim over the territory as their homeland.

The demand by the Hindus for a Hindu rashtra is unsustainable, as there are various ways in which Hindu identity can be defined. The first and foremost is the geographical dimension where the Hindus claim that they are the original inhabitants of India. According to this view all the people who inhabit the geographical territory of India are to be considered Hindus. Second is the view that India is the homeland of those who profess religions of Indian origin. Thus here a distinction is made between the Indic and non-Indic religions. Therefore here a coterminality is assumed between the territory of India and the Indic religions. The third conceptualization considers Hindus as those belonging to the clean castes and here the people of Dravidian south are excluded, while in the census they are defined as Hindus. Also, in this conceptualization there is no place for the ritually unclean castes. Even the practice of ritual purification, that is, shuddhi, is not applicable in the case of the Dravidian clean caste Hindus. Thus when the very definition of Hindu is ambiguous, with various ways of conceptualizing, one can imagine that the creation of the Hindu nation would in itself be inherent with contradictions (Oommen 1998:7).

The case of Sikhs in India too needs careful analysis as they too claim to be a nation based on religion. They too cannot claim to be a nation based on religion as no coterminality exists between territory and religion. The Sikhs who migrated to India from Pakistan have claimed that Punjab is their homeland, and on that basis they want to secede from India by creating the land of Khalistan. In the beginning the Sikhs used language to carve out a Sikh territory, and since in their case Punjabi language (written in Gurumukhi script) and Sikh religion are coterminous, their attempt to build a Sikh homeland was considered authentic by some. However in actuality the inhabitants in the state of Punjab are people belonging to both Hindu and Sikh religion, and so if the creation of 'Khalistan' is undertaken the Hindu population in Punjab would be turned into 'ethnies' by disinheritting their right on Punjab, as their homeland. If Punjab is declared the Sikh homeland, it would imply an imposition of the culture of one set of religious collectivity on those belonging to the other religious collectivity inhabiting the same geographical territory (Oommen 1990:40).

The claim by the third religious collectivity, the Muslims, has had serious implications for understanding nation and nationalism in South Asia. This collectivity claimed a separate Muslim state for itself before independence and thus in 1947, Pakistan, the Muslim state was created.

However this very state created on religious lines could not sustain itself for long as religion failed to bind together the people of East and West Pakistan, and linguistic factor became significant in their separation. Secondly, while Pakistan was conceived as the Muslim state, the large number of non-Muslim population was turned into ethnies, and the Muslim section of the population who migrated from India to Pakistan are also not accepted as natives and remain 'Mohajirs'. Thirdly, even to this day religion cannot bind together the people of Pakistan, as they are divided on linguistic lines and also because there is no one single Muslim identity as pointed out by the constant tension between the Shia and Sunni sections of the population. The partition of India did not resolve the demands of the Muslims, as they claim Kashmir too as their homeland. This results in turning the Kashmiri Pandits who are Hindus into outsiders even though they too have an equal claim over Kashmir as their homeland (Oommen 1994:463).

It has been pointed out by Callard (1957:235) that the ulema were opposed to the creation of Pakistan because they believed that nationalism was incompatible with Islam. Pakistan was for them too narrow an aim since it would not include all Muslims, not even all the Muslims of India. Now that Pakistan is in existence they are trying to narrow the effective composition of the state to exclude all but the body

of true believers. Thus they wish to establish loyalty to the one true God through the state of Pakistan, and this in effect means that it would leave no place for those who are willing to admit only the lesser loyalty, which ends with the state and the nation.

Thus all the above three attempts to build up religious nationalism and then claim a separate state on that basis are carried on but, on analysis, one finds that these claims are untenable and unsustainable in the long run because of the following three reasons:

Firstly, there is no coterminality between religion and territory as, firstly, people of different religious collectivities occupy the same territory and secondly, they are spread to different parts of the world.

Secondly, there are more significant factors other than religion that play an important role in creating a nation. These are language and territory as exemplified by the case of Bangladesh and the European experience.

Thirdly, in the event that any one religious collectivity is able to stake claim over a territory as its homeland, it would try to gain hegemony over other religious collectivities and attempt to homogenize the culture, which would be against the democratic ethos.

Thus the above argument points out that the attempt to create a nation on the basis of religious nationalism is based on certain false assumptions and therefore such a nation is difficult to create in reality, and even if it is created it is unsustainable. In the attempts to create nations based on religious nationalism, women become important signifiers of group identity and differences are maintained from the other religious collectivity by defining the women of one's own religious collectivity in a particular way, which has an important and significant impact on the issues related to women. This is the main emphasis of the present work and will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

The withdrawal of the British from the territory of India marked a significant event in South Asian history. The partition of India brought to the forefront the great divide between the two major religious communities – the Hindus and the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. It was the growth of religious nationalism that led to the creation of Pakistan. For an understanding of its growth one has to look at the historical events that helped shape it.

Although many scholars have failed to significantly account for the role played by colonialism in the growth of nationalism, an examination of its role in the rise of religious nationalism is significant. Having conceptualized nation and nationalism in the previous chapter we must now focus our attention on how religious nationalism is significant for understanding the issues related to women – as to how the women are often perceived as important signifiers of group identity. For an adequate understanding of religious nationalism and the issues related to women with respect to the two major religions – Hinduism and Islam in the Indian subcontinent – this chapter has been divided into three parts:

Part I of the chapter will provide a historical account of the rise of religious nationalism in India beginning from the early twentieth century, with the partition of Bengal to the period upto 1947, when

partition took place. During this period not only was there the growth of religious nationalism but also a redefinition of women was taking place through the socio-religious reform movements, which had implications for women's role in the nationalist struggle. Part II will briefly examine the role played by women in the freedom struggle. Finally, Part III will briefly account for the impact of religion on women, as it became a significant factor in the construction of nationalism. Thus the interrelationship between women, nation and religion would be analyzed.

I

The community consciousness has been present among the Hindus and Muslims from way back in the historical period. The consciousness about the divide had shaped up early on, and the Hindus and Muslims had become conscious of their separate identities before the era of modern political awakening brought by the British rule. Thus as Peter Van Deer Veer (1996:20) points out that it would be wrong to see the 'foreign hand' as the only explanation of the origin of religious nationalism. One can say that the British rule only gave a greater political shape to the age-old conflict between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

The emergence of Hindu and Muslim nationalism was a result of several factors: the economic divide between sections of the two communities, the intellectual and emotional environment of the Muslim elite in the second half of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, the rising tide of Hindu revivalism and nationalism during the same period, the ethos of Indian nationalism and also the British policy of playing off one community against the other (Prasad 1999: 92).

Thus while early on the two communities had realized that there were certain divisions that existed among them, these were gradually given shape in the political sphere and greater political participation by the members of the two communities took place to advance the cause of their communities.

Going back to the historical-political antecedents one finds that it was the establishment of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875, which produced many important leaders of India's Muslim community. It was a section of the Muslims from those leaders who formed the Muslim League in 1906. Even as both the Indian National Congress primarily viewed as a Hindu organization and the Muslim League were in pursuit of self-government in India, the differences between the Hindus and Muslims widened.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 into East and West Bengal led to divisions among the Hindus and Muslims and resulted in the formation of the Muslim League in 1906. The first major achievement of the League was to make the British concede its demand for separate electorates for Muslims through the Government of India Act of 1909 popularly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms. This gave rise to the growth of centrifugal forces not only between the Hindus and Muslims but also among Muslims of different classes as this demand was vested to only some Muslims, at first only a small minority of propertied Muslims (Hardy 1972:148). Thus this Act undid the process of unification and amalgamation among Hindus and Muslims which had been going on for centuries.

However during the period between 1911 to 1922 there was an atmosphere of friendship between the Congress and the Muslim League as the Muslims were disillusioned with the British because of the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and the British attitude to Turkey during the World War I (1914-1918). At the session held at Lucknow in 1916 both the Congress and the Muslim League signed the Lucknow Pact, where they passed resolutions for a joint scheme of constitutional reforms and reached an agreement to cooperate in the political field on the basis of a common programme.

For sometime after the signing of the Lucknow Pact, the Hindus and Muslims cooperated with each other and worked together in the Anti-Rowlatt agitation (1919), Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922). However due to the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi because of the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922 once again a divide was created between the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus a period of Hindu-Muslim unity beginning with the Lucknow Pact of 1916 came to an end and India witnessed an increase in communal riots in succeeding years all over India (Nene and Barde 1947:67).

The Aligarh Movement started by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was opposed to the idea of Muslims participating in politics. It was only on the partition of Bengal in 1905, which gave them a province in which they had an overwhelming majority that Muslims began to be aware of the importance of political power.

The centrifugal tendency was reinforced by the incorporation of separate electorates and reserved seats into the reforms enacted through the Government of India Act of 1919. Separate electorates were first conceded to Muslims in the Morley-Minto reforms and later extended to Sikhs and others by the Lord Southborough Committee on franchise.

This practice of recognizing separate constituencies for some communities and separate interests was to atomize the political world into smaller particles. Thus the building blocks of constitutional politics provided a number of foci for centrifugal tendencies. They fostered communal politics and mutually conflicting groupings based on vested interests. The mere fact that Muslims and Sikhs were granted separate electorates and there was the reservation of seats on the basis of caste affiliation, encouraged caste political formations to take place at the expense of Indian nationalism. All this created further divisiveness (Samad 1995:15).

Communal riots and bloodshed marked the political atmosphere in the country around 1928-1929. At this time there was the appointment of the Simon Commission in accordance with the Government of India Act of 1919 to inquire into the working of the Act and propose reforms. However the all-white composition of the Commission caused great moral outrage among Indians. Thus the Indian leaders were asked to produce their recommendations for a new constitution under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru (Nene and Barde 1947:131). However, instead of reviving the Hindu-Muslim alliance, the Nehru Report of 1928 polarized relations between the two communities as Jinnah's earlier demands elaborated in

the Delhi proposal of 1927 were only partially met. His view that a third of the seats in the central legislature should be reserved for Muslims was rejected. The differences between the Congress and the non-Congress Muslims essentially revolved around two major issues – the nature of the central government and the electorate. The Nehru Report of 1928 recommended a unitary structure at the centre and the replacement of the separate electorates by weightages for minorities with joint electorates and reserved seats. Thus, the ultimate implication of the report was to take back all the concessions that the Muslims had gained since 1909 without giving anything in return. Consequently, Muslim opinion rallied around the All-India Muslim Conference – an organization articulating the interests of the regional parties that had emerged under dyarchy. The Conference demanded the retention of separate electorates and a federal centre with residuary powers vested in the provinces. Thus only a handful of Muslims were members of or supported the centralist parties. Neither the Congress nor the Muslim League could claim to have a substantial following among the Muslims. The devolution of power to the provinces reinforced strong sub-nationalist groupings that were keen to consolidate and expand provincial autonomy (Samad 1995:20-28).

Again, one finds that reforms were introduced through the Government of India Act of 1935, which reconfirmed and consolidated

the centrifugal developments initiated explicitly or implicitly by the reforms of 1919. Through this Act there was to be a bicameral federal legislature in which the states were to be given disproportionate weightage. Moreover, the representatives of the states were not to be elected by the people, but appointed directly by the rulers (Chandra 1990:251). Thus, the consequence of the constitutional advance from the reforms of 1919 to the India Act of 1935 encouraged in the Muslim majority provinces powerful centrifugal forces based on community and regional identity. The breakup of the Hindu-Muslim alliance was due to the use of religious and cultural symbols to mobilize the respective communities.

However, Muslims under the leadership of Jinnah began to organize themselves into a strong force in politics. They received the support of the British government and demanded the creation of Pakistan. In his Presidential address to the League in 1940, M. A. Jinnah propounded his two-nation theory, which became the basis for the demand for Pakistan. Islam and Hinduism, Jinnah declared, were far more than religions in the strict sense of the word; they were two distinct social orders, two different civilizations based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Each had its own religious philosophy, social customs, legal system, literature and sources of history. It was 'a dream' that the



Hindus and Muslims could ever evolve a common nationality and, to yoke together two such nations under a single state could only lead to disaster (Smith 1963:142). Jinnah did not state clearly the nature of the new state to be created. Consequently, this ambiguity allowed the co-existence of both the Punjabi and the Bengali interpretations, which were popular rallying calls in their respective provinces. This explained Jinnah's demand that Pakistan had first to be conceded in principle before it was precisely defined (Samad 1995:67).

Thus one finds that there was the creation of religious nationalism around the two major religious communities – the Hindus and the Muslims during the period of British rule. The British introduced measures so as to create differences among the Hindus and the Muslims in order to retain political power in their hands. Thus religious nationalism that was strongly encouraged during this period ultimately led to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim state.

II

While the national movement in India is said to have begun with the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, it was preceded

by the growth of socio-religious reform movements, which had a direct bearing on issues related to women. Since the status of women in society was the popular barometer of 'civilization' many reformers agitated for legislation that would improve women's condition (Basu 1996:24).

The nineteenth century social reformers were neither unanimous nor homogeneous in their inspiration and objectives. The common element was their preoccupation with problems that primarily affected the women in their own social class and milieu and made them vulnerable to humiliation. Thus while the modernists were reformers who were influenced by the west, the revivalists were those who looked to Hindu antiquity and tradition to bring about change in society. One such revivalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Thus, while there were changes taking place in the Indian society as a result of British rule, there were also movements launched for the liberation of the Indian women from subordination and suppression resulting from male domination. Therefore in the nineteenth century many socio-religious reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission etc. emerged. The important leaders of these movements like Raja Ram Mohan Roy,

Debendra Nath Tagore, M. G. Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati and Ramakrishna attacked practices such as sati, child marriage, female infanticide and were in favour of widow remarriage and education of women. These movements had the task of bringing about reforms within the religion as well as that of reconstructing social institutions and social relations (Desai 1948:285).

The reforms within the Muslim society took place at a later stage than among the Hindus, as the Muslims had maintained a hostile attitude towards the British in the beginning and thus did not avail themselves of English education. There were few movements within the Muslim society that aimed at combating purdah and spreading education among Muslim women. Two prominent movements among the Muslims were the Ahmadiya movement which was opposed to Jihad or sacred war against the non-Muslims and the Aligarh movement founded by Syed Ahmed Khan which condemned polygamy and the ban on widow remarriage and was aimed at spreading western education among the Muslims. These movements aimed at making the Muslims politically aware and spreading modern education among them (Desai 1948:302-303).

While these movements in the beginning took a national form, later

they adhered more to community dimensions and therefore proved detrimental to the nationalist struggle where people belonging to different religious communities worked together. Divisions were created among people based on their identification with a religious community. While the women experienced some kind of emancipation due to the reforms brought about by these movements, they were still defined within the boundary of religious communities. There was only a change in the structure but not of the structure. Therefore no significant changes in gender relations were brought about by these reforms. However, women were drawn more explicitly into public life.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a few women from within the reform movements formed their own organizations. Although middle class women's involvement with the outside world was limited by the ideology that limited their education, formal education did lead to the emergence of a group of women with a desire for organized action to improve the lot of women. Thus women also came out to play an important role in the freedom struggle. The politicization of women in the newly extended female space facilitated the emergence of members of the female intelligentsia who played an important role in both the nationalist and women's movement. Pandita Ramabai was a delegate to the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1889 along with nine other women. Sarojini

Naidu wielded tremendous influence on women and appealed them to participate in public affairs outside the home. Women started a number of associations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1875 in Calcutta and in 1896 it became a national body, the Women's India Association (WIA) in 1917, the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) in 1925 and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927 (Kasturi and Mazumdar 1994:14-15). However these associations despite efforts to be national failed to be national in orientation. They consisted of women from the upper strata of society who had the advantages of social status, education and privilege. Thus the mass of women were not represented through the associations.

The women's question occupied a focal position in the cultural conflict between the British rulers and the colonial subjects. The former, particularly the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians amongst them, in their endeavour to assert their moral superiority indulged in large scale and unabashed indictment of Indian society, especially the visibly low status of women. This attack provoked an electrifying array of counter-statements from Indian intelligentsia who relentlessly indulged in a reconstruction of India's past, wherein they conjured up an idealized portrayal and nostalgic images of womanhood in ancient India, particularly the Vedic age, as a counter to the deplorable, and

underprivileged condition of women in contemporary society (Jain and Sharma 1996:188).

Thus continuing from the period of socio-religious reform movements into the twentieth century, there was a felt need to bring in some changes in the attempt to construct the image of women to meet the requirements of the changing political atmosphere where women would participate actively in the freedom struggle. It was here that the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi had a significant impact. Gandhi's basic ideas were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self-development and self-realization (Jayawardena 1986:95). Thus he believed in gender-specific roles and was critical of those roles that cloistered women in ignorance. He encouraged women to participate in all aspects and phases of nationalist activity, particularly in the constructive programme and the non-violent satyagrahas initiated by him (Choudhuri 1993:125). Moreover, it is often pointed out that his ideas brought about a change only in the life of women who came from middle class families and whose male members were involved in the nationalist struggle. Thus while women were being symbolically presented and defined in a particular fashion, one finds that they were provided a space within the political structure. However this space did not alter the gender relations.

As Gail Minault (1981:13-14) notes, Indian women in the nationalist movement followed strategies derived from their family roles. The 'extended family' provided a metaphorical construct for the women to move into arenas of public activity in the context of the Indian National Movement. Men and women both used this metaphor when articulating their thoughts about women's political participation. Liberals regarded women's political concern as legitimate extension of their nurturing roles. Radicals accepted women in public roles to the degree that they symbolized resistance to foreign, cultural as well as political domination. Women identified with these and other ideological persuasions and used the metaphor of the family to justify their action to the public and themselves.

Pratibha Jain and Sangeeta Sharma (1996:191) have pointed out that while the women were not given any active and vital role to play in the struggle against British imperialism, however their participation stimulated among them their own struggle for social justice – 'a struggle within the struggle'. Thus women became more aware and articulate about their grievances.

While women were made to become participants in the political structure, one finds there was a certain gendered construction of their

image. As religious nationalism was gaining a stronghold in Indian politics, it had its implications for women. The differences in perception due to religion also affected the motivation and nature of women's activities. Religion thus became an important focal point along which the attempts to create the nation were undertaken and the basis on which the image of women came to be constructed.

Nira Yuval and Floya Anthias (1989:7) have located five major ways in which women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes on different terms to men. These are:

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

It is important in this context to examine how far the Indian women have participated in national processes in terms of the above five ways

described by Yuval-Davis and Anthias Floya (1989). Considering the role of women as biological producers of ethnic collectivities, as mothers of the nation, one finds that India has often been referred to in feminine terms. Gandhi in 1917 stated that "woman...(is) ... mother to the nation" (Kasturi and Mazumdar 1994:19). The use of the term 'Mother India' in itself testifies the point. The politicization of motherhood is imbued with religious overtones. By bearing legitimate children for their husbands and their community it is perceived that mothers preserve the racial purity of the community. It is this very capacity of women to reproduce that is laid emphasis on in Indian society to such an extent that it is often believed that a childless woman has not experienced womanhood in a complete sense. Swami Vivekanand used motherhood to assert the distinctiveness of Indian culture. He commented that: (Cited by Choudhuri 1993:121)

The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first and mother last. The word mother calls up to the mind of the Hindu, Motherland; and God is called mother. In the west, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there as the wife. To the ordinary man in India the whole force of womanhood is concentrated on motherhood.

It is the control over sexuality of women that works on the ideology of perceiving women as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic or national groups. It is important to note here the recovery operations that were conducted after partition to facilitate the return of abducted women to their families. From the very beginning the concern with abducted women went hand in hand with alarm at the forcible conversions. Thus it was viewed that there was the loss of Hindus to Islam through such conversions in addition to the loss of territory. It was this double burden of abduction and conversion that was felt by the Hindu community. Thus the recovery of 'one's' women, if not of land, became a powerful assertion of Hindu manhood. However concern like this was not evident with regard to the abduction of Hindu women by Hindu men, or Muslim women by Muslim men, presumably because here no offense against community or religion had been committed, nor anyone's honour compromised (Menon 1998:22).

Thus as women's primary role is often seen within the private sphere, they become important agents for child rearing and thus hold responsibility for the crucial ideological role of transmitting the community's culture. Again women are often the ones who are given the social role of intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine etc. The actual behaviour of women too signifies

ethnic and cultural boundaries. Thus in a multicultural society like India, the importance of women's culturally 'appropriate behaviour' gains special significance.

Finally, one can say that the glorification of women's selflessness in the home may be paralleled by the iconized mother serving the nation, aggressively defending national honour as she would her children, or released from domestic duties to become an activist for the nation (Jeffery 1998:225).

Thus one finds that women are often viewed as signifying community identity and any attempt to crossover the 'boundary' leads to a detriment in terms of their status as ideal women of their community. They are the ones who are viewed as inheritors of a particular culture and the burden of preservation of the cultural identity of the community lies on the women.

III

Therefore one finds that there is a close interrelationship between religion, women and nationalism. Whenever attempts are made to create a nation on religious basis the women always become important

signifiers of community identity. Thus women come to be defined in terms of their religion.

Urvashi Butalia (1998) has pointed out that during the recovery operations that were conducted at the time of partition the identity of women was defined in terms of their religious communities, rather than as citizens of one or another country. They were denied the right – theoretically every citizen's right to choose where they wished to live. They did not even have the right to decide what to do with their children. Therefore, citizenship was not an entirely gender-neutral concept. Here it came to be related and governed in terms of the religious community to which one belonged.

In the case of issues related to women there is no direct relationship between women and nation, rather the identity is constructed through an interplay between religion, nation and women. The construction of nationalism took place on religious basis, which defined women as members of a particular religion and thus had a certain impact on issues concerning them. Here one finds that Hinduness or Muslimness of women is highlighted and not the womanness of Hindu or Muslim women. Therefore, here an overemphasis

is placed on one of the aspects in the identity-set while ignoring the other elements.

In these constructions of women as members of a particular religion, the concept of the 'other' becomes quite significant. Oommen (1994:161) has pointed out that it is social categorization that is the beginning of constructing 'others' who are assumed to be different based on race, religion, language, caste, gender, age, class, lifestyle etc. Thus, while examining the issue of Hindu and Muslim religion, one finds that the 'other' is constructed on religious basis and both communities see the members of the other religion as certainly different and invariably inferior from oneself.

Religion is the most important factor in constructing the external and feared other in India. When a particular religious collectivity claims to be a political community and therefore poses a threat to the larger polity, it comes to be defined as the 'other'. Thus, in India the Muslims are one such religious collectivity that becomes the most despised/or feared 'other'. Therefore they have been classified as the 'outsider-unequal other' who are not only cognized as inferior but also defined as external to the society (Oommen 1994:162). Considering the women within the framework of the 'other' one finds that they are perceived as

marginal/or inferior in a particular society by the 'superior others' who classify themselves as the 'internal other'. Consequently the women have the burden of being the 'double other'. Particular groups perceive this and make an attempt to protect their women from the members of other religion by defining and redefining their image. Kandiyoti (cited by Hasan 1994:xlii) has pointed out that:

The nature of women's relationship to religious identity and various communal projects is complex for they figure as important signifiers of differences between groups: community identities are often defined through the conduct of women, which is subject to the customary structures of tradition.

Women are considered to be custodians of cultural identity by virtue of being less assimilated, both culturally and linguistically, into the wider society, and that is particularly so for women of minority communities who retain cultural separateness to a greater extent than men.

Here Kandiyoti has raised an important point that the women come to be more rigorously defined when they belong to a minority

religion in comparison to a majority religion. Going by this view, then it should be assumed that the Muslim women are provided less space in comparison to the Hindu women in India and vice-versa in the case of Pakistan.

While scholars have presented the argument that the religious group tries to preserve its identity through a control on the activities of its women and that this control may at times prove detrimental, it is important to examine the 'nature' of space provided to women in the Hindu and Islamic constructions of nationalism. An attempt has been made to examine this issue in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER III

**PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN HINDU
NATIONALISM**

Many significant leaders who were important activists in the nineteenth century Hindu social reforms were influenced by western education and they undertook a critical assessment of Indian society as a result of its exposure to western ideas. Thus there were two kinds of reactions that developed in the Indian society and the modernists and the revivalists came up. While the former adopted models of social and political change based on western patterns, the latter looked to Hindu antiquity and included those who wanted to preserve the traditional social order as well as those who sought to reform Hindu society as a way of strengthening Hindu solidarity. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has its origin in the roots to revivalism (Andersen and Damle 1987:7). Thus an attempt was made in these organizations to blend religion and nationalism. It was in the aftermath of the Khilafat movement when the Hindu-Muslim riots broke out that the RSS emerged in the 1920's.

Religious nationalism grew during this period. It has been pointed out that the challenge to Islam in early 1920's was viewed by many as a threat to their self-esteem. The proliferation of Hindu sabhas and other 'defensive' Hindu associations were reactions to the growing communal violence, the increasing political articulation of Muslims, the cultural

'Islamization' of the Muslim community and the failure to achieve independence.

The ideology of Hindu nationalism was the one around which the various Hindu nationalist organizations such as the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha came up. The RSS, a male militaristic Hindu organization was set up because of a belief that the Hindus must be united to be able to stand up to Muslims and that they must extricate India from British rule. It was to attain these twin objectives that the RSS was founded in 1925 (Malkani 1980:14).

Hedgevar formed the RSS. He was one of the main ideologues of the organization and played an important part in the construction of its ideological stand. This Hindu organization provides physical training along with imparting strong ideological inputs to its recruits. The centrestage of the ideological stand of the RSS is governed by the desire to create Hindu nationalism. It was thus with the RSS for the first time that the demands of the Hindus came to be articulated through a special Hindu organization. The idea of the Hindu nation in the context of inter-communal competition had first acquired a formal dimension with the formation of the Punjab Hindu Sabha in 1907 and subsequently with the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 (Hanssem 1999:76). These

organizations were working in conjunction with the Congress for a long time but separated later to form the RSS. Apart from Hedgevar, leaders like Savarkar and Golwalkar also played a major role in the formation and construction of the ideology of Hindutva that attempts to create Hindu nationalism and a Hindu nation (rashtra). Hedgevar first started a voluntary organization called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Mandal, which acted as the founding stone of the RSS. While the RSS is an organization that promotes the idea of the Hindu nation (rashtra), the question of who would constitute this nation has always been a contentious issue. Writers and thinkers of the latter half of the nineteenth century were struggling with the question of how the Indian national identity might be constituted. It was only towards the end of the century that some sort of consensus was developed that this referred to all the people who lived in the territory called India, a consensus that came to be challenged in time by the proponents of the Hindu and the Muslim rashtra (Pandey 1993:244).

However it may be pointed out here that this search for identity witnessed in modern Hindu perception is a created one. This results due to the fact that it is impossible to find an all India Hindu identity. Thus Hindu identity has been created in the context of nationalist politics in a manner that 'majority' can fit under its umbrella (Steintencron 1995:52).

Thus as Panikkar (1991:2) has pointed out that there was nothing like a homogeneous Hindu religion with one set of ritual practices or religious code for all people to follow. Despite the absence of homogeneity in the past or in the present, homogeneity is now being imparted to Hinduism. This homogenization is part of the attempt to create one single Hindu community on the basis of an argument that such a community existed from the ancient past.

Thus the founders of Hindu nationalism, equate Indian Nationalism with Hinduness and to the fact that the majority should have the right to set the goals of the Indian state. However, in such a conceptualization the constitutional notion of secularism where all religions are to be deemed equal by the state loses its significance. In the context of promoting the idea of Hindu nationalism, religious minorities were required by Goiwalkar to owe allegiance to Hindu symbols of identity because he considered these to be the embodiments of the Indian nation (Jaffrelot 1993:57).

The examination of the issue of perception of women in Hindu nationalism has been attempted by looking at three important areas. Firstly, at the ideological level through examining the manner in which the RSS constructs the image of women. Secondly, examining Hindu

women in law and thirdly, the important role played by the women's movement in issues related to Hindu women, which would project the objective ground level reality.

THE ROLE OF THE RSS AS A HINDU NATIONALIST ORGANIZATION IN CONSTRUCTING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN

While the RSS initially was a male organization, women's wing of the RSS called the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti too came up in 1936 under the active leadership of Mrs. Laxmi Kelkar, the mother of an RSS member. The organization played an important role in the issues related to women as it provides insight into the relationship between gender and Hindu nationalism. This aspect becomes significant through the very analysis of the reason for the setting up of this organization. The idea behind this organization was that the Hindu man could not protect his women and so there should be the inculcation in the women of self defense mechanisms, which would help them to resist the atrocities inflicted on them by the Muslim men (Bacchetta 1996:131). This was done both at the physical as well as the ideological level by providing physical training and inculcating certain standards of defining the 'Hindu' women so that they could be differentiated from the women of the 'other'. Therefore, Kelkar cited the increasing awareness of the sexual exploitation of Hindu women and the need to fight back as the

motivation for forming the Samiti. This organization attributes the need for the Samiti to Hindu women's oppression and the failure of Hindu men, including family members to protect Hindu women (Bacchetta 1996:131). Thus the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti is a women's wing and a part of the extended family of the RSS. It is subordinate to the Sangh and subscribes to the ideology of the Sangh. The Samiti attests the Sangh's prioritization of Hindu rashtra over Indian raj, and thus de-emphasizes the secular state and government. Similarly, it remains related and distanced from the Hindu nationalist women who are in electoral politics. Yet, it continues to provide an ideological anchorage for the Hindu nationalist political parties. Thus the women have been mobilized for the communal cause.

The motive for attempting to construct the image of women in religious terms can be gauged by looking at violence against women in communal situations. The identity formation of a community can be constructed on the bodies of women in two ways. Firstly, this identity is constructed through the rape of women of minority or subordinated groups, which is also the rape of the community to which the woman belongs. The second way in which identity is constructed is through the allegation by the dominant group of the rape of and aggression on 'their' women by men of minority communities, which justifies community

hegemony by transforming the 'lack of character' of minority men who show scant regard for women. This affects the perception about minority women as ones who by virtue of belonging to 'characterless' men, become women without character (Kannabiran & Kannabiran 1995:122).

The Hindu perception of the 'other' is based on such a premise, as the Hindus perceive the Muslim 'others' as violent men who inflict atrocities on 'their' women. Thus Hindus justify the defining of their women in religious terms in order to protect and differentiate their women and community from the Muslim 'other'. One may point out that the existence of the RSS is particularly based on its perception of the 'particular other', which in this case is the Muslim community (Gupta 1993:132). Here, there is a negative connotation of Muslim men and women. While the Muslim men are depicted as being rapists or murderers, the Muslim women are represented as weak, victimized, socially and ethnically inferior to Hindu women and a threat to the unity of the Hindu family (Bacchetta 1996:155).

The training of the women recruits of the RSS is guided by the ideology of Golwalkar, Savarkar and Hedgevar who also provided an ideology for the functioning of the male wing of the RSS. This is the Hindutva ideology that is propagated by them. They are in favour of

creating Hindu nationalism and establishing a Hindu nation, thus rejecting the idea that India is a multi-national state. This ideology is imparted through the training programme so that these men and women work towards the programme of creating the 'Hindu rashtra'. With their training, they are supposed to become true guardians of Hindu nationalism and important role models for others to emulate for them too to become important agents of Hindu nationalism to create the Hindu nation.

It is this very training that has been a contentious issue among those fighting for the rights of women. Many are of the view that through this training is provided a gendered construction of men and women. They are of the view that the manner in which Hindu nationalism creates the image of women is detrimental for women's advancement in society and a hindrance to the cause of women.

The Rashtriya Sevika Samiti members are provided physical training including martial exercises. They are also made familiar with samaskars, which is the moral teaching of the duties and obligations of women, especially emphasizing their role as mothers and caretakers of the family; and the bauddhik sessions inculcate Hindu nationalist ideology in the volunteers, the rashtrasevikas (Hansem 1999:98).

Thus within this discourse a strong Hindu woman is essential to a strong Hindu society, particularly since women are responsible for raising the next generation, with appropriate values, discipline and culture. M. S. Golwalkar, the supreme ideologue of the RSS said that the life of the Hindu woman is about “a call to motherhood”. He laid down their duties thus: “Let our mothers make the children wake up early, make them salute their elders and offer worship to the family deity. Let them engage in a bit of social work here and there but let them never question or defy the family or its assigned duties and let them never question the merits of the Hindu nation. For a threat to the family is a threat to the social order itself” (Sarkar 1998:99). It is this desire to see the Hindu woman as performing her role as a mother, wife and daughter efficiently that dominates the ideology of the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, on which is based its training programme.

The RSS provides physical training to women because it believes that although they are constituted as different from men they must not be weak. However, the women’s strength is constituted not in individualistic terms, but in strictly familial terms. Women’s strength is located and contained within the confines of the family – their strength is intended to serve the higher cause of the family, and through it, the

higher cause of the community and the nation (Kapur and Cossman 1996:252).

In an earlier article Sarkar (1991:2060) points out that if the family obstructs a girl's desire for further studies, a particular profession, or a late marriage, the Samiti at first tries persuasion. If this fails completely, the decision of the family stands. The same policy is followed over problems of the girl's self-choice in marriage. This kind of activity of the Samiti brings out the fact that there is no space for individuality in the Samiti's conception of Hindu women.

In the RSS view the family is considered above the desires of the woman, therefore these women should view conformity to the wishes of the members of the family in a positive manner. Golwalkar (1966:124) has pointed out that every woman, whatever her age or status in life, except a man's wife is a manifestation of the mother to that man. Thus, ideologically in its approach to women the Sangh parivar sees women's primary role as being confined to the family and their identity as being linked to the concept of woman as an appendage of the male – only as wife, daughter, mother and sister. The RSS and its wings believe in 'Nari Shakti' which has two purposes, to educate and strengthen the family on

the one hand and to propagate Indian tradition on the other (AIDWA report: 1993).

Thus summing up the objective of the training programme of the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti one can say that it is to inculcate in the woman a sense of selflessness and sacrifice so that she can become a good mother and wife. Therefore, according to them a true Hindu woman should possess these important attributes.

In the RSS view while women's bodies would be shaped up for healthy reproduction, the daily bauddhik or ideological training that the organization provided is to open women's minds to the basic lessons of Hindutva politics, primarily its fierce and aggressive Hindu supremacism. This education was meant to impart an uncritical admiration for Hindu scriptures and customs, without familiarizing women with the texts themselves.

However, the RSS has been an organization that has confined itself to urban, middle class milieus. As Sarkar (1998:91) has pointed out that the upper middle class Hindu women acquired a threefold importance, as she firstly, was the object of Muslim design. Secondly, she was perceived as a powerless figure within the community and thirdly, she had to be an

active inventor of the new imagery as mothers. In the 1980's the issue assumed a different form as the question came up as to how women could become active participating subjects without going all the way to claims of emancipation challenging patriarchy. Hansem (1993:2272) points out that the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti acts through 'control strategies' and so attempts at 'controlled emancipation'. Therefore, inside the Sangh parivar women can 'go public' – become visible – without risking an exposure to the so-called larger, uncontrolled immoral public sphere. He further points out that the Sangh parivar offers a public sphere of its own, a language and a sense of security under its 'institutional patriarchy', where women's purity and chastity is guaranteed by the RSS discipline, by its ultimate control.

Therefore one finds that the RSS as a Hindu nationalist organization has had serious implications on the issues related to women. Through its ideological stance and training programme it does not alter gender relations and leaves little ground for women to come together on the basis of their gender identity. Women thus come to have divided loyalties and such attempts to create Hindu nation emphasize on the primacy of religious identity. Thus, where religion becomes the important basis of solidarity of the community, women too become the perpetrators of it. Therefore women become important agents in

propagating patriarchal ideology and structure. However one cannot deny that this organization brought women out of the domestic set up and provided them opportunities for education and helped to build up self-confidence in these women which is an important founding stone laid by this organization. It is, therefore, important to understand the significance of this kind of work and its long-term implications for the women's cause.

The Rashtriya Sevika Samiti's gender ideology is a form of surrender to patriarchy. However, the local samitis do offer some valuable resources for women to get integrated with the family and the community: physical training, a political identity, acceptance and even encouragement of education and jobs if their parents agree. The samitis help women to achieve the transition from a domesticated to a more public domain with the support and consent of the family and with the comforts of the old, inherited, safe and uncontested values intact (Sarkar 1998:101).

While the RSS as an organization did not believe in political participation, yet the various other organizations that were set up as part of its family had got involved in politics. Significant among these is the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP has furthered the Hindutva

ideology of the RSS and was set up in the 1980's. Many of the prominent BJP members have been trained in the RSS and so the ideology of the RSS trickles down into the BJP. The BJP is the direct descendant of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) that was formed in 1951. However, in an attempt to depart from the chauvinistic Hindu nationalism of the Jana Sangh and to present itself in a more moderate and humanistic guise, the BJP leadership adopted Gandhian socialism as the cornerstone of its new political ideology (Malik and Singh 1993:37).

Certain significant changes have come about with regard to women and Hindu nationalism in the earlier context and the present one. While Hindu nationalism has sought legitimacy in notions of selflessness, sacrifice and martyrdom, today, a number of women enjoy greater prominence in Hindu nationalism than have women in the nationalist movement. Secondly, the female leadership of the Hindutva movement does not advocate pacifism (Basu 1995:158-80). This is clearly brought out by looking at three prominent women, involved in the propagation of Hindutva ideology: Vijayraje Scindhia, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara. They defy gendered images of earlier movements in a number of ways by depicting themselves as powerful agents rather than passive victims. Basu (1995) has pointed out that all these three women have transgressed gender roles in both private and public domains.

Unlike the vast majority of Indian women, none of these three women is economically dependent on fathers, husbands or sons; none of their identities is defined by their roles as wives and mothers. All the three have realized considerable political ambition and yet masked it with the aura of religious and nationalist commitment. They do not conform to a singular model of Indian womanhood. The message they convey is that women can assume activist roles without violating the norms of Hindu womanhood or ceasing to be dutiful wives and mothers.

Thus the analysis of the ideas surging through the ideological stance taken by the Hindutva forces reveals a dichotomous view of human nature, with a decided preference for the masculine traits of domination and aggression. It contains pre-meditated role expectations, which deny individuals the freedom of self-determination, and offers little scope for women's liberation. (Poonacha 1993:438).

The construction of the woman by the Hindu right opens up another field for analysis – the legal and political concept of equality and particularly of sexual equality. These become important sites for struggle. The Hindu right is seeking to redefine these concepts in accordance with their visions of the role of women in Indian society. This is a contest over

the constitution of gender identities, that is, over the power to define who and what Indian women should be (Kapur and Cossman 1993:37).

HINDU WOMEN AND LAW

The understanding of law in relation to the issues of women is a crucial area. This is so because, firstly, for a secular country the most important indicator of justice and equality is the legal structure. While on the one hand, the Hindu nationalist organizations are working on a strong ideological base and are involved in the inculcation of this ideology, this being a voluntary subjective area without adequate means of understanding, how far this ideology has penetrated the Indian psyche cannot be understood. Law on the other hand, provides an objective basis for understanding its role in the issues of women. Secondly, while the organizations are popular within a certain section of the society, they are unrepresentative of the whole society. Law is applicable to all Hindus and so the issues related to all Hindu women come to be governed by these laws. Thus, it is important to understand how through law attempts are made to define the Hindu women and various issues related to them. Therefore law too is an area through which attempts are made to govern the issues of women based on their particular religious

secular country has been able to keep its laws secular?

It is the personal laws dealing with personal matters such as inheritance, succession, marriage and divorce etc. that have been an area of contention between those who are fighting for the rights of women across religions and those who see religious identity over and above gender identity.

The English administrators first introduced the division between the personal and other spheres of law in India. They decided early on to leave the personal laws of the natives undisturbed because they formed a part of the religion of the natives. Meanwhile over a period of time, all other aspects of law, which were equally religious under the Hindu and Islamic systems were modified by the British administrators. The introduction of this distinction and the subsequent differential treatment of personal laws from all other aspects of law form part of the foundation for present day claims that religious personal laws cannot be modified by the state (Parashar 1992:46). Parashar (1992) points out that in actuality the personal laws as they are today have come about due to changes over time. Further, while the reforms made to the Hindu law were designed to give women more legal rights, it was never the intention to give complete

legal equality to women. The state did not want to alter the power structure of the family. The state only wanted to make uniform law that was to be applicable to the members of the Hindu (majority) community.

The Hindu Committee presented the Hindu Code Bill in February 1947, which was divided into five parts dealing with marriage and divorce, succession, minority and guardianship, maintenance and adoption and Mitakshara joint family. However finally in 1956 separate bills on all the above issues were passed.

While on the face of it the Hindu Code Bill seemed to be a progressive one from the point of view of women, in actuality one finds that there were certain underlying areas of gender inequality in the Bill. This becomes clear in the area of divorce, succession and monogamy as pointed out by Agnes (1999:82). According to her the Hindu law reforms were 'stilted efforts at gender justice'.

The aim of the Hindu Code Bill was to unify all Hindus, as Hindus irrespective of their sects and castes were to be governed by this law. According to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, daughters and sons were to get equal rights in respect of parent's property. However if the property were to come into the common stock, the woman would lose this right

(Agnes 1999:80). Here again laws providing for the fragmentation of agricultural holdings were left out or exempted from the appropriation of the Act. The second aspect of the Hindu Code Bill that had a significant impact on the understanding of the issue of gender equality is the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. It is pertinent to note that the enactment of 1955 did not grant Hindu women the right of divorce by mutual consent, which had already been introduced under the Special Marriage Act in 1954 as it was considered radical for the conservative Hindu society. However, the courts decided that the woman had no right to retain her job against her husband's wishes. The concept of monogamy, which is the marriage of one man with one woman, was introduced as an important aspect of Hindu marriage in this Act. While analyzing this aspect, Agnes has pointed out that there are many situations where the marriage cannot be proved, as Hindu marriages are community practices and less institutionalized.

Therefore one finds that while the Hindu Code Bill tried to bring in reforms in relation to women's issues, they were basically only changes at the conceptual level and did not prove effective in reality. Moreover the Bill took little regard of the internal differences in customs and practices of the women of different sections of Hindu society. Thus while the provisions took women's legal position within the family forward, it by no

means granted women complete equality. Despite this many provisions remained in the law books and were hardly operated (Chakravati 1997:16). Therefore, while the Hindu Code Bill was instituted mainly with the purpose of removing the legal disabilities of Hindu women in certain personal matters, it only created a new set of other ones.

After the 1950's these laws have remained largely static. Some reforms were brought about in the Hindu Marriage Act when divorce by mutual consent and on grounds of cruelty and desertion was admitted in 1976. However, women have not received any financial benefits under these laws. They continue to be without any right to share in the property acquired after marriage. Singh (1993:191) has pointed out that not only have the Hindu laws remained static, they have retrogressed in certain ways. In 1976 an amendment was introduced in the Special Marriage Act under which if the two parties were Hindus, the Hindu Succession Act would apply to them and not the civil law of inheritance and succession, the Indian Succession Act. Since the Indian Succession Act is the only law that can be defined as non-discriminatory, as it gives equal inheritance rights to men and women, this was a great step backwards.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE ISSUES RELATED TO HINDU WOMEN

After independence it was with the Hindu Code Bill that the women's question became a silent issue as many viewed the Bill as having solved the gender issue. Thus till 1970's the women's question took a backseat. It was only in the 1970's with the United Nations declaration of 1975-1985 as the decade for women that stimulated the appointment of a government commission to prepare a report on the current status of women in India for submission to the UN. Therefore it was the United Nations International Women's Decade that brought the women and their issues once again to the forefront. The Commission's report *Towards Equality* revealed that the ratio of women to men had begun to decline from the 1901 census when it was 971 women to 1000 men. Further research ascertained that despite legal equality this drop reflected continuing malnutrition and higher rates of mortality among women, girl babies and very young girls. It was also found that there was a declining number of women in paid employment and women were mostly employed in unskilled work and only a small group of women were employed in professional services (Ramusack 1999:68).

This report also brought forward another important aspect of the Hindu Code Bill that despite legal acts with regard to personal matters, it

was these areas where women suffered the most as these are the most directly related to the lives of women.

It was found that the women's backwardness was because of illiteracy, unfavourable sex ratio, domestic violence and dowry. Thus a number of important women's organizations, which together constituted the women's movement came up that addressed these important issues.

In 1975, soon after the submission of the report, women activists were protesting against the police rape of women detained in local jails and dowry deaths. Laws were enacted with respect to these, but they were of no significant consequence. While a law was passed on custodial rape in 1983, it remained silent on familial or marital rape (Ramusack 1999:69).

At this time of the beginning of the women's movement gender was the main concern and not religion. Therefore, it was gender identity and not religious one that became the important basis of solidarity. Thus one finds that women came together to fight for their rights and equality on the basis of sharing a common identity based on gender rather than religion.

To deal more effectively with the issues of women a large number of women's organizations had come up in the 1970's. Neera Desai and Maitreyi Krishnaraj (1987:343) have outlined six types of women's organizations besides mainstream groups such as the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). They include agitational consciousness-raising groups; mass based organizations, including trade union and tribal associations; groups that provide service to needy women; professional women's organizations; women's wings of political parties; and research networks that include both academicians and activists working to provide documentation on women's issues. These different organizations worked in different ways to raise the consciousness with regard to women and the issues related to them.

The women's movement was thus actively involved in trying to bring about a consciousness with regard to women's issues. In this context the role of the state too becomes a crucial area for analysis. The state comes to play an important role in the area of trying to preserve traditions. One finds that even in the so-called secular countries there are attempts to support such practices. India provides a good example of this. In India the recommendations made by the Status of Women Committee (1975) and the subsequent suggestions for the National

Perspective Plan for women (1988) have either been ignored or ineffectively implemented. The apparent contradiction between special programmes for women's employment and skill training and the passing of restrictive laws can be seen as two sides of the same imperative to control and direct women's labour, fertility and sexuality to suit both capitalist and patriarchal interests (Chhachhi 1989:567).

The religious revivalist movement among the Hindus was brought to the forefront by the case of Roop Kanwar's sati at Deorala in 1987. This incident also brought the role of the state in women's issues with regard to religious nationalism to the public eye. The Roop Kanwar case among the Hindus and the Shah Bano maintenance case among the Muslims were juxtaposed and brought into prominence the role of the state and so aroused a lot of controversy. Roop Kanwar was an eighteen-year-old girl whose husband died just eighteen months after their wedding. She committed sati on her husband's funeral pyre. Many are of the view that she was under tremendous moral-psychological pressure to undertake such an act.

This issue on the one hand, outraged a certain section of the population who opposed such acts, while the traditionalists valorized the sati of Roop Kanwar and portrayed her as a true Hindu wife. Thus in the

name of religion such an act was undertaken. Therefore Roop Kanwar sacrificed her life for the cause of proving that she possessed the virtues of a true Hindu woman as advocated by many, who are believed to be guardians of Hindu religion. The state could do little in this regard. Even while Roop Kanwar was consigned to the flames the agents of the state were unsure of whether to support such acts or criticize them due to pressure from the traditionalists on the one hand and from those who were fighting for the cause of the women's issues on the other.

Dowry is another crucial area with regard to which legislation have been brought about and which is an important issue that governs the women and their lives in a significant manner. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in the year 1961, but in fact there was a spread of giving of dowry even to new areas in South India. Consequently, even the cases of dowry deaths increased, however it was difficult to obtain evidence to establish that these were murders (Ramusack 1999:68).

However today one finds that the women's movement has started attacking the Hindu right and its attempt at constructing the image of women. Therefore the women's movement has undergone a change in its character and nature. The active participation of women in the public arena of violent politics under the aegis of a Hindu fundamentalist

organization is an unusual social phenomenon. While the Hindu right has never officially critiqued the patriarchal norms that delegate women to the private sphere where their primary roles are as wife and mother, the various other techniques such as the training of the RSS signals that the politics of Hindutva is creating a social niche for women that challenges the notion of female emancipation Indian feminists have been trying to disseminate in India. They view such successful mobilization of women as a direct threat to their efforts as it only offers a limited sense of emancipation and ignores the larger issue of patriarchal oppression (Banerjee 1995:218). Therefore one finds that Hindu nationalist organization and the women's movements are working in opposite directions. What one is trying to construct the other is trying to deconstruct.

In spite of all this significant changes have resulted with regard to women. Women are increasingly getting educated and so are seen moving out of the private sphere into the public arena. On the other hand, the ascriptive differences in the status of Muslim and Hindu women because of personal laws have been seen as demonstrating the supposed relative traditionalism or modernity of each community. This conveniently overlooks the similarities that are imposed by class, region

and culture that influence the achieved status of all Indian women (Lateef 1998:268).

Here it is important to look at the achieved status of women in terms of four criteria – their educational status, their employment status, their electoral participation and their representation in bureaucracy

Table III A - Distribution of Population by Educational Level (%)

Educational Level	1971		1981		1991	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Illiterate	81.3	60.6	75.2	53.1	67.8	47.3
Literate without educational level	6.8	12.2	8.6	14.4	8.9	12.6
Primary	7.1	13.7	8.1	13.6	10.1	14.4
Middle	3.0	7.5	4.2	8.4	6.6	11.2
Matriculate/Secondary	1.5	4.9	2.3	5.9	3.6	7.6
Higher Secondary/ Intermediate/ Pre University	—	—	0.8	2.2	1.4	3.2

Source: Women and Men in India. 1998: New Delhi: Central Statistical Organization, Government of India.

Looking at the educational status one finds that there is an increasing trend towards the number of girls getting educated, however the increase is taking place at a slow rate. Moreover the drop out rate of girls is significant so that a large number of them are only primary school educated.

Table III B - Workforce Participation Rate (%) by Sex

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
1972-73	31.8	54.5	13.4	50.1
1977-78	33.1	55.2	15.6	50.8
1983	34.0	54.7	15.1	51.2
1987-88	32.3	53.9	15.2	50.6
1993-94	32.8	55.3	15.5	52.1
1994-95	31.7	56.0	13.6	51.9

Source: Women and Men in India. 1998: New Delhi: Central Statistical Organization, Government of India.

The statistics on the employment status of women reveals that there is no trend towards an improvement in the number of women getting employed. Infact there is a fluctuation in employment in both the rural and the urban areas. However at all times the number of employed men has been greater than the number of employed women.

Table III C - Number of Electors Voting in Various General Elections

General Election	Year	Total number of electors (million)		Percentage of Females
		Female	Male	
Seventh	1980	170.3	185.2	47.9
Eighth	1984	192.3	208.0	48.0
Ninth	1989	236.9	262.0	47.5
Tenth	1991	234.5	261.8	47.1
Eleventh	1996	282.8	309.8	47.7
Twelfth	1998	287.5	314.8	47.7

Source: Women and Men in India. 1998: New Delhi: Central Statistical Organization, Government of India.

Note : Data relates to Lok Sabha elections.

If one considers the third aspect one finds that there is not a large gap between the position of men and women in their capacity as voters. However it is often observed that the women are not independent decision-makers when casting their votes.

Table III D - Personnel by Sex in All India and Central Services

Central Services	Year	Women	Men	Total	Percentage of Women
Indian Administrative Service	1994	483	4427	4910	9.8
	1995	492	4473	4965	9.9
	1996	501	4576	5077	9.9
Indian Audit & Accounts Service	1994	89	458	547	16.3
	1995	95	439	534	17.8
Indian Customs & Central Excise Service	1994	112	1519	1631	6.9
	1995	117	1520	1637	7.1
	1996	130	1531	1661	7.8
Indian Economic Service	1994	76	326	402	18.9
	1995	82	341	423	19.4
	1996	64	330	394	16.2
Indian Foreign Service	1994	59	489	548	10.8
	1995	66	461	527	12.5
Indian Forest Service	1994	68	2328	2396	2.8
	1995	73	2390	2463	3.0
	1996	78	2387	2465	3.2
Indian Information Service	1994	80	424	504	15.9
	1995	76	417	493	15.4
	1996	74	400	474	15.6
Indian Police Service	1996	64	2883	2947	2.2
Indian Postal Service	1994	68	276	344	19.8
	1995	70	256	326	21.5
	1996	77	282	359	21.4
Indian Revenue Service	1994	246	2022	2268	10.8
	1995	276	1980	2256	12.2
Indian Statistical Service	1994	35	550	585	6.0
	1995	35	481	516	6.8
Central Secretariat Services	1994	-	-	688	-
	1995	-	-	678	-
	1996	51	657	708	7.2

Source: Women and Men in India. 1998: New Delhi: Central Statistical Organization, Government of India.

The situation of women in bureaucracy or policy-making capacity also reveals that though the number of women inducted into these services is rising over the years yet there is a huge gap between the number of women in these services as compared to the number of men. Further the male-oriented services such as the Indian Police Service; the Forest Service etc. have a much lower number of women in comparison to the other services as these are often considered as posing a hindrance to their familial roles.

However one important aspect is that to what extent the average, everyday affairs of women are governed by issues of religious nationalism? Here one finds two contrasting facts. On the one hand, one finds a greater adherence to religious based identity constructions, which tend to confine women to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, one also finds a set of women who are getting educated and hence moving into the 'public' sphere and so are able to somehow move away from the domestic confines. Yet, they are under constant pressure to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity and have been unable to break completely the shackles of 'patriarchy'. Thus though a certain space is being made available to women from families who see the benefits of education, yet complete emancipation of women requires a change in the

mindset and ideology, which till now has really not manifested itself in the Indian psyche.

The impact of all this has also been that while earlier the women's movement was concerned with issues of gender equality, today with religious revivalism and reassertion the women's movement has started addressing the issues concerning the Hindu right. Thus changes are required at the level of ideology, only then substantial changes will result with regard to women's actual position in society.

CHAPTER IV

PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN MUSLIM NATIONALISM

In the previous chapter we looked at the case of Hindu nationalism and the manner in which it defines and constructs identity, and the impact it has on the issues related to women. The 'other' of the Hindu religion as perceived in South Asia is Islam. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt has been made to understand the case of the Muslim community in Pakistan, which provides a concrete example of a state based on religious nationalism and in India where the religious collectivity tries to maintain a separate identity from the other religious collectivities that inhabit the state.

The advocacy of the two-nation theory, which views Islam and Hinduism as signifying two different cultural traditions and hence two different nations, resulted in the creation of Pakistan. However, Pakistan only resulted in being a state and failed to become a nation as it only recognized the original Muslim inhabitants as its 'true citizens', with little regard for the other sections of the population.

Thus religion was used as a basis for the creation of Pakistan. This religious basis for creating a nation is an untenable and unsustainable one as has been advocated in the previous chapters. Not only did the movement for the creation of Pakistan gain momentum gradually over a period of time from 1940-1947, there was also a divided opinion among

the Muslims into those who supported the formation of a separate homeland and those who opposed it (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:7). However, much against these two divergent trends Pakistan emerged as an independent Muslim state.

After independence much like India, Pakistan too was involved with the task of building up a nation towards the path of progress. Pakistan did not inherit functional administrative, political, economic and military structures from the withdrawing colonial power. Therefore, significant developments took place in Pakistan after independence. As a result two important factors emerged in Pakistan, one was the phenomenon of Islam becoming central to the political debate in Pakistan and the other was the formation of new economic and social structures. Both these factors had a significant impact on women in Pakistan (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:8).

Therefore, in any study of the present kind it is imperative to first of all trace the political history of Pakistan from the time of independence. For an analysis of religious nationalism in Pakistan it is important to understand the role of various political regimes there as Pakistan has adopted Islam as its state religion. This will help us to arrive at the impact of these political developments on the issues related

to women in Pakistan, at the status and role of women and the manner in which Islam plays a significant role for identity construction of Muslim women in Pakistan, a state constructed on the basis of Islamic religious nationalism.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE VARIOUS POLITICAL REGIMES IN THE ISLAMIC STATE OF PAKISTAN

Going back to the objective of tracing the political developments in Pakistan one finds that the first Government was that of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. While Islam as a state religion only emerged later over a period of time and was never a part of the earlier governments and politics, one finds that Islam was never conceived of as being an obstacle in the development of Pakistan.

With the military leadership of Ayub Khan taking over as the political regime in Pakistan from the period 1958-69, the regime had to work within the confines of the Islamic framework. It was with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as the Prime Minister of Pakistan that democracy returned to Pakistan in 1969.

During Bhutto's period a woman's wing was formed in the Pakistan peoples party (PPP). It was to this party that Bhutto belonged. The

women's wing of the PPP encouraged women from all social classes to participate in the general elections (Zafar 1996:43). A large number of measures with regard to the issues concerning women were undertaken. Administrative reforms were undertaken in 1972, which opened administrative services to women. For the first time a woman was appointed as the governor of a province and the vice-chancellor of a university. A large number of women's organizations also came up during this period. Women became more aware and conscious of their rights and came to be recognized as important citizens and agents in the development of Pakistan.

However, the developments made with regard to the women's issues during Bhutto's period experienced a reversal and downsliding process as a result of the policies of Zia-ul-Haq who imposed martial law in Pakistan from 1977-1988. Zia-ul-Haq wanted to establish Pakistan as a truly Islamic state and inducted members from two political parties – the Pakistan Muslim League and the Jamaat-e-Islami - into his government. The Jamaat-e-Islami is a religious party that ever since the creation of Pakistan has tried to Islamize the country. In such an Islamic society it considers the family as the basic unit and a woman's natural place. Maulana Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami considers woman's rightful place in society to be as follows: "From the Islamic point

of view, the right sort of education for woman is that which prepares her to become a good wife, good mother and good housekeeper. Her sphere of activity is the home" (Maududi 1979:152).

Thus one finds that in both India and Pakistan there exist certain organizations that are involved in the process of creation of religious nationalism. This is exemplified by the case of RSS in the Indian context and the Jamaat-e-Islami in the case of Pakistan. Therefore, in the two states, the first a secular one and the other a theocratic state one finds the existence and persistence of such organizations that have an impact on issues concerning women.

While General Zia-ul-Haq's assumption of power in July 1977 did not, at the outset, appear to have profound consequences for women in particular, it was his implementation of an Islamization programme in February 1979 that unequivocally changed that view (Weiss 1998:133). According to Weiss (1998), what is important to note is that by the end of Zia's regime in August 1988, a set of laws had been put into place which constructed an image of women as not having identical civil liberties as men and which justified such laws in the name of Islam. Women saw this increased emphasis during Zia's period on national dress and covering the head (with a veil and scarf) as symbolizing a reinforcement

of traditional repressive attitudes and customs towards women that reduced them to second class citizens (Esposito 1994:359). The Zia government idealized the image of women faithful to 'chador aur char diwari' – remaining veiled and within the confines of the four walls of one's home.

This construction and definition of the role of women in Muslim societies is undertaken much for the same reasons as is done in Hindu society as seen in the previous chapter. The women gain symbolic value and are perceived as important symbols of group identity. This identity is constructed in a manner such that they can be differentiated from women of the other religious collectivity.

The election of Benazir Bhutto as the Prime Minister of Pakistan was an important fact as it, firstly, symbolized the return to democracy where in principle all citizens are to be considered equal and secondly, it also symbolized the victory of women. As Fareeha Zafar (1996:49) has pointed out that her election had two implications, which are unique to Pakistan. Firstly, it symbolized the rejection of the majority of the policies of Zia-ul-Haq's regime, which were aimed at undermining the status of women, as in her party manifesto she resolved to remove all

discriminatory laws against women. Secondly, her victory in an environment of entrenched religion was itself cause for optimism.

While the Pakistan Peoples Party's winning platform in the 1988 election included the needs of progressive assertions that had endeared the party to the masses in the past, it promised to include the needs of previously disenfranchised groups, especially women and the poor. To empower women the PPP manifesto pledged it would eliminate inequitable practices that handicapped women by promising it would improve the working conditions, repeal discriminatory laws, reform Muslim Personal Law, and promote the literacy of women (Weiss 1998:134). However, the ruling party in actuality did not take any measures to improve the condition of women.

Thus one finds that there have been mixed reactions to the issues related to women from the different political regimes that have dominated in Pakistan.

STATUS AND ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

Much like the fight of women for the rights and recognition of their identity all over South Asia, Pakistan too has not remained untouched by

this phenomenon. The status and role of women in Pakistan is a complex one because the forces of modernization and those of traditionalism are working at crossroads with each other. Thus, even when we are moving into the era of globalization and greater development the conservatives are holding on more stringently to tradition. A small section of women in Pakistan try to find a solution to this by blending the aspects of tradition and modernity.

For most women in Pakistan there is a small choice except to submit to the conditions of Islamic morality. These conditions differ as a result of the differences of class among these women.

Ayesha Jalal (1991:77) has pointed out that so long as they do not transgress social norms, women from the middle and upper strata in rural and urban areas alike are accorded respect as well as privileges within the sphere of the family and depending on their generational and marital status also in wider social networks. Most of these women actually endorse the state's Islamization programme with a few notable exceptions of dissent – like a refusal to accept the institution of arranged marriage or the defiant pursuit of a professional career. Most of the women from these social segments have chosen the path of least resistance, because so far the most retrogressive 'Islamic' laws have not

affected them in any appreciable manner. Thus while the class position of these women have helped them to toy with the notions of female emancipation, they have resisted challenging their prescribed roles in society.

They are the beneficiaries of social accommodations, which has been worked out over long periods of history. The middle and upper class women also have a stake in preserving the existing structures of authority and with it the 'convenience of subservience' that denies them equality in the public realm but also affords privileges not available to women lower down the rungs of the social hierarchy. Therefore Jalal (1991:79) talks of the 'convenience of subservience'.

Many scholars studying the Muslim women in Pakistan have pointed out that purdah has become an important means to segregate and seclude the women. The justification for the practice of purdah is given by reference to Islam. It is through the observance of purdah that women are made to become invisible and there are restrictions placed on the regulation of their interaction with men.

This entire identity construction for women can be seen in the structure of buildings in the city. The segregation of women is taken so

seriously that many houses are surrounded with high walls. All rooms face inward, with windows on the ground floor either built close to the ceiling or with frosted glass to ensure that the women who live there are never seen by passing male guests or tradesmen (Goodwin 1994:66).

This seclusion of women takes different forms among women belonging to different socio-economic groups. While the women of upper classes can afford to remain within their house, those of lower classes have to move out due to economic compulsions but may therefore remain veiled. In order to justify keeping women secluded and veiled, the entire social fabric of the society in Pakistan seems to be woven around a woman's chastity (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:30).

One often finds that in the case of women in Pakistan there is a major conflict between the norms prescribed by the Islamic religion and the cultural deviations being followed. Table IV A compares the prescribed norms from the Quran and Sunna with the ones being followed.

The table reveals the Islamic prescriptions and how there is a deviation from them, which is brought out by the actual behaviour. Those women who have been able to do away with their seclusion and

the rigid manner by which they are defined in terms of the so called Islamic parameters are those who have been able to do so only due to support on the basis of secular credentials like education, occupation and positions of power.

Table IV A: Conflicting Prescriptions, Values and Perceptions for Seven Roles of Women in Pakistan

ROLE	PRESCRIPTIONS(ISLAMIC)	VALUES	PERCEPTIONS (ACTUAL BEHAVIOUR)
Parental Role	1. A woman must be paid Haq. Mehr before divorce. 2. If infants/young children are to be cared for by the woman the father must provide the compensatory maintenance to her.	In many cases the family of the divorced woman considers the demand for maintenance to be below their dignity.	Few divorced women are actually provided maintenance for themselves and their children.
Occupational Role	A woman has the right to do work other than house keeping.	Female work beyond household work is generally perceived as status reducing and not a preferred role.	According to census data, only 5% to 10% of women are involved in work outside the home.
Conjugal Role	A woman has the right to divorce her husband under specified conditions.	In some cases, husband or other family members actually control the finances as well as making decisions.	In cases where women do not have any income of their own, they are completely dependent on the husband for maintenance.
Kin Role	A mother-in-law and daughter-in-law should treat each other with affection and respect.	In many cases, the daughter-in-law is expected to give unconditional obedience, while the expectations about the reciprocation from mother-in-law are less rigid.	Quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are commonplace.
Community Role	A woman has the right to appear as witness and express opinion on community related developmental issues.	Cultural values strongly discourage the appearance of women in a court of law; it is considered dishonourable.	Very few women actually appear as witnesses.
Individual Role	A woman has the right to receive education; own and dispose off property; approve/disapprove the mate chosen for her.	Some girls believe they are not smart enough to receive education; parents in some cases discourage education and have lower aspirations for the education of daughters than for sons.	Only 11% of the Pakistani women aged 10+ are literate; less than half of the urban; and 1/10 th of the rural school-age girls are in school.

Source: Shah, Nasra. M. (ed.), 1986: Pakistani Women: A Socio-economic and Demographic Profile, Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Page 29-30.

Some women have been able to breakaway from the rigid Islamic definition of their role in society. Yet, a large number still need to be

emancipated which can only be done by improvement in the secular aspects of a woman's life. The examination of the four crucial areas of education, employment, electoral participation and the representation of women in bureaucracy is important to understand women and the issues related to them in Pakistan.

Table IV B – Enrolment Rates at Primary, Middle and Secondary Levels of Education By Sex: 1992-1993 and 1993-1994

Educational Level	1992-93			1993-94		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Primary (Class I-V)	68.9	84.8	53.7	70.8	86.3	54.9
Middle (Class VI – VIII)	44.3	57.5	30.0	44.7	58.0	30.5
Secondary (Class IX – X)	28.1	37.0	18.4	29.1	37.9	19.4

Source: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. 1995: Statistical Profile No. 8

The statistics on education reveals that the low government spending on education, lack of adequate access to educational opportunities and consequent low enrolment rates has resulted in very low educational attainment of the population, which is reflected in a number of relevant indicators. In particular the educational status of women in Pakistan is among the lowest in the world. There is a negligible increase in the percentage of women getting educated by joining the primary, middle and secondary or high school.

Table IV C – Percentage Distribution by Labour Force Status and Sex: 1961 to 1991-92

Year and Source	Male		Female	
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed
1961 Census	98.1	1.9	99.4	0.6
1981 Census	97.1	2.9	92.5	7.5
1990-91 Labourforce survey	95.4	4.6	82.5	17.5
1991-92 Labourforce survey	95.8	4.2	86.4	13.6

Source: UN Economic and Social Commission For Asia and the Pacific 1995: Statistical Profile No. 8.

Looking at the employment statistics one finds that the employment percentage is higher among men and lower among women since the 1981 census. The recent surveys show far greater unemployment rates of women, reflecting a trend in increasing number of women seeking employment. It has been found that unemployment levels have been higher in the urban than in rural areas, and an overall unemployment rate of urban females (19.2%) was considerably higher than the rate of 13.5% for rural females.

It is also important to analyze the two areas, that is the percentage of women voters and secondly, the number of women in bureaucracy and civil services. It is important to analyze these two areas as the first one

explains the potential that women have of affecting the political power through their voting capacity and the second one brings forward the percentage of women who are actually in policy making capacity.

Table IV D – Registered Voters by Province/Area and Sex: 1988 and 1993

Province/Area	1988			1993		
	Male	Female	Percentage of Females	Male	Female	Percentage of Females
Islamabad	103	87	45.8	120	97	44.7
Punjab	15325	13553	46.9	16550	14350	46.4
Sindh	5731	4873	46.0	6620	5400	44.9
North-West Frontier Province	3370	2585	43.4	3734	2688	41.9
Federally Administered Tribal Areas	34	-	-	-	-	-
Baluchistan	1253	1132	47.5	1499	1277	46.0
Pakistan	25816	22230	46.3	28523	23812	45.5

Source: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. 1995: Statistical Profile No. 8.

According to the data available from the election commission of Pakistan, women accounted for 46.3% of all registered voters in 1988 and for 45.5% in 1993. In both years the percentage of female registered voters was highest in the Punjab and lowest in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). It is generally believed that most women do not exercise this right. Moreover given the largely feudal/tribal structure of the society, there are 'vote banks' comprising both men and women who do

not have the freedom to exercise independent judgement when casting their votes.

Table IV E: Distribution of Federal Civil Service Employees by Grade and Sex: 1989

Service Grade	Number of Employees			Percentage of Females
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	
Grades 1 – 15	203430	193822	9608	4.7
Grades 16 – 19	19475	18056	1419	7.3
Grades 20 – 22	995	972	23	2.3
All Grades	223900	212850	11050	4.9

Source: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. 1995: Statistical Profile No. 8.

According to the 1989 census of federal government civil servants, women constituted only 4.9% of all federal government employees. However the proportionate share of women employed in the middle ranking grades (grades 16 to 19) was higher (7.3%) than the average (4.7%) at the lower grades (grades 1 to 15), and the average (2.3%) at the higher grade levels (grades 20 to 22). This brings out the fact that women are confined mainly to the middle ranking positions and key decision-making position in executive and judiciary branches (grades 21 and 22) are male preserves.

Effective implementation of change can only come about when there is an acceptance and internalization by the community of the need for educating women so that they can play an active public role. The fact is that the numerous difficulties encountered in securing education, labour force participation and the society's willing acceptance of woman as an individual and as one with an identity of her own are the problems that women face and the solutions for which have to be found to ameliorate their present socio-economic predicament.

RESPONSE OF WOMEN TO THE PROCESS OF ISLAMIZATION – THE RISE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women have participated variously in political life under different political regimes as a result of which a large number of women's organizations have come up since the time of independence that have tried to raise various issues related to women in order to improve their position in society. The rise of various women's organizations is largely a result of the fact that where a state sponsors a particular religion the organizations come up in response to the acts of the state.

Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, wife of the first Prime Minister of Pakistan organized women together by starting the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) in 1948 to help those, whose life was disrupted due to

partition. While this organization was mainly seen in conjunction with the woman's role, it was the formation of Pakistan Women's National Guard (PWNG) and Pakistan Women's Naval Reserve (PWNR) in 1949 where women were given training to use guns, learn signalling, typing etc that marked a significant change and achievement from the point of view of women. But as a result of tremendous opposition from the religious orthodoxy to such public participation of women these organizations did not survive for long. Begum Liaquat Ali Khan also laid the foundation stone of the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). It was seen as a measure to adopt a progressive attitude towards female emancipation (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:51).

The APWA was set up because at the very first session in 1949 the All Pakistan Muslim League's council refused to consider electing a woman candidate for the office of joint secretary. In response to this incident within days the APWA was set up. It was described as a non-political organization of women, irrespective of caste, creed or colour and was seen to be the 'clearest indication' thus far by the Pakistan government to adopt a progressive attitude. The extensive official publicity given to APWA is an indication of the state's eagerness to support women's right activists willing to work within prescribed limits (Jalal 1991:90).

This group was dominated by the upper class women from families of those in positions of political power. Almost all the women's organizations that were set up around the time of the formation of APWA were concerned with issues of motherhood and child rearing or with goals so specific as to make them wholly marginal or at best an extension of APWA.

During the early years of society in Pakistan only a few laws were passed to bring about a change in the status of women. Two most important laws were the 1951 Muslim Personal Law of Shariat according to which women were given the right to inherit agricultural property and equality of status and opportunity. The other was the reservation of special seats for women in the National Assembly passed in 1956. However in actual practice they were not implemented properly and hence were ineffective (Weiss 1994:416).

It was actually the passing of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance in 1961 under Ayub Khan's rule that was widely regarded as the first attempt by the state to provide women some form of economic and legal protection from their husbands. This act discouraged polygamy and regulated divorce. Although there was tremendous opposition for the implementation of this law, yet it was passed though not put into

practice. Thus no substantial changes were brought about during this period in the position of women and these legislations failed to improve the actual conditions of women in Pakistan (Weiss 1994:416).

During Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rule substantial changes were made with regard to women's rights and position in society. There was a marked increase in women participating in politics and trade union activities and an overall more empowering attitude towards women. Thus women got a new boost to fight for their rights. In 1973 as part of Bhutto's administrative reforms, women at long last became eligible to join the superior civil services. The political activity of this period had its impact on women's organizations in two ways: firstly, existing organizations like All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) began to shift from being largely welfare organization to becoming more development and issue oriented. Secondly, new women's organizations such as Women's Front, Aurat, Shirkat Gah etc. were formed (Zafar 1996:44). This politicization of women created a new awareness among them, which led to certain changes in the actual condition of women.

It was under Zia-ul-Haq and against his Islamization programme that a number of women's organizations came together to protest against the policies of the government. Thus in 1981 was formed the Women's

Action Forum (WAF) which played an important role in mobilizing support against Zia's policies. WAF charter begins with a 1944 quote of Muhammed Ali Jinnah in which he explicitly supports the empowerment of women and their participation in a wide range of pre-independence nationalist movements. "No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life" (cited by Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:183).

The charter asserts that the WAF is 'committed to protecting and promoting the rights of women by countering all forms of oppression' by being a consciousness raising group as well as a lobby cum pressure group. It would use these two foci as well as the media, meetings, workshops and the like to create a heightened awareness of women's rights and to mobilize support for promoting these rights as well as to 'counter adverse propaganda against women' (Shah 1986:40).

WAF also began to turn its attention to the government's idea of establishing a separate women's university, to the ban on spectators at

women's sports and to the Hudood laws in general, all of which it roughly condemned. WAF has constantly been challenging the institutionalization of religion and has succeeded in raising people's consciousness generally by organizing meetings, seminars and launching petitions (Bano 1997:205).

Thus in response to the harshness of Zia's repressive laws regarding women, the 1980's witnessed the emergence of urban grass root women's movements that publicly exposed the controversy over interpretation of Islamic law. Cries of discrimination over women were raised (Weiss 1994:431).

It was the emergence of a woman Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, in the political scene in Pakistan that was viewed by many as an achievement for the gender cause. One of Benazir Bhutto's first acts as Prime Minister was to free all female prisoners from the Pakistan jails. This was followed by the government's request in late December 1988 to the Women's Division to provide a list of all laws that were discriminatory against women. The government lifted press censorship and there was a marked difference in the media's portrayal of women (Weiss 1994:431). However, it was seen that gender issues were not a priority for the

members of the newly elected parliament even though women's issues did find a place in the manifesto of the party.

Benazir Bhutto's rise to power in Pakistan was an achievement from the women's point of view as she was the first woman Prime Minister of the country. However she failed to change much of the state policy with regard to women and issues concerning them. Thus many WAF activists expressed disappointment at Benazir Bhutto's efforts to present herself as a national leader rather than as an advocate of women's rights (Jalal 1991:108). Subsequent governments too have failed to do much in the direction of improvement in the issues that concern women.

Thus one finds that it is the constant revival of Islam that works against the interests of the Muslim women. The identity construction of women in terms of Islamic definition creates a boundary much like is done in the case of the Hindu women. Any attempt to cross over this boundary only leads to a degradation of women in terms of Islamic religion and hence leads to their derecognition as true Muslim women by those who view themselves to be the guardians of Islamic religion and tradition.

Thus it has been pointed out that under the impact of Islamic revivalism many women have donned Islamic dress and sought to redefine their identity in a manner that they perceive as a more authentic accommodation of modernity to their religion and culture. Like many of their male counterparts in the Islamic movement, they constitute a newly emerging alternative elite, modern, educated but more formally Islamically oriented than their mothers and grandmothers. This clearly points out that Muslim women are trying to strike a balance between tradition and modernity and so the area of gender relations and the roles of women in Muslim societies become an important area for analysis (Esposito 1998:x).

THE CASE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA

After having examined the case of Muslim women in Pakistan we must now turn our attention to the case of Muslim women in India. The attempts to define women within certain Islamic parameters have been undertaken across the border of Pakistan in India too. However while Pakistan has claimed itself to be an Islamic state, India believes in the policy of secularism, where all religions are considered equal, hence there is no one particular official religion in India. Under the constitution, India became a secular state, in that religion and the state, function in

different areas of human activity, each with its own objectives and methods. All religions are subordinate to as well as separate from the state; the state views the individual as a citizen and not as a member of a particular group, nor is there any compulsion in religion (Smith 1963:3). Therefore, in this context, there was a felt need by the various religious communities to try to maintain a separate identity for themselves. Thus here too women and their identity become significant.

The attempts to politicize both Hindu and Muslim religion have had a significant bearing on issues concerning women. As Kandiyoti (1991:3) has pointed out that the status and role of women in a minority community is affected by their perception of themselves as a minority, entrusted with the unique responsibility of preserving and protecting the community's identity in a society undergoing major social, political and economic changes.

The partition of India and Pakistan did not solve the problems of the Muslim community in India. While the community lost numerically and became a minority, was further faced with problems of maintaining and preserving its identity.

Community leaders have generally tended to disregard the socio-economic problems of Muslim women. These problems have manifested themselves in the lack of accommodation to women's rights within the community and, specifically in the post-independence resistance to legislative changes in the Shariat Application Act of 1937 and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939. The community's conservative leadership also played an important role in getting the Muslim Women's (Protection on Divorce) Act of 1986 enacted. This Act sought to limit the divorced wife's entitlement to maintenance to only the iddat period and even impose a restriction on the entitlement of a child to receive maintenance while in the custody of his/her mother to a period of two years. Therefore, this enactment overthrew the secular judgement passed by Supreme Court to grant maintenance to Muslim women (Lateef 1998:252).

In pre-independence India two laws of great importance regarding Muslim family laws were enacted. One was the Shariat Act 1937 which was passed to make the law applicable to Muslims in those matters where they were governed by a different customary law, while the other was the Muslim Women's Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 which was to stop Muslim women from converting to another religion in

order to terminate their marriage as conversion automatically dissolved the marriage (Singh 1993:192).

In India it is within the context of the Muslim Personal Law that Muslim women maintain a separate identity for themselves. These laws are used to govern the lives of the Muslim women in conjunction with the 'so-called' Islamic parameters. Therefore this leads to a strong reaction from the Muslim conservatives against the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), that is, where the same laws in relation to personal matters would govern all religious communities.

After the passing of the Hindu Code Bill in 1956 which was perceived as having given Hindu women legal parity with Hindu men, the Muslim women's legal status became a matter of controversy because they did not have legal parity with the Muslim men. Muslim attitudes based as they are on concerns of ethnic identity have the support of Muslim women in resisting legislative changes. This has created the impression that real changes have not taken place in the community. Therefore one cannot ignore the role of education and economic independence in the life of the Muslim women.

After 1947 the Muslim community in India has faced a dilemma between the need to maintain its identity on the one hand and on the other hand to modernize its social structures by bringing in legislative changes. However while the community has in fact accepted secular legislation on women before 1947, further changes are being resisted by arguing that the Shariah represents a widely accepted basis for Muslim differentiation, which would otherwise be eroded (ICSSR report).

The Shariat is the central core of Islam but the jurisprudential law Fiqh is the name given to the knowledge and obligation derived from the four sources of Islamic law – Koran, Sunna, Ijma and Qiyas. The Koran is considered the highest source and the divine revelation of God, while the Sunna refers to the living traditions of its adherents or the traditions of the prophet. The third source is Ijma, which comes about through agreement among legal sources. The last source of Islamic law is Qiyas, which is reasoning by analogy and is more a matter of interpretation (Utas 1983:10).

While some Islamic countries have retained the fundamental structure of the traditional family law of Islam yet have adapted the various locally prevalent versions to the contemporary social

requirements. Thus laws have been enacted or changed relying upon the principle of Ijtihad (reasoning) within the broad framework of Islam itself.

Although the Muslim law contains several positive provisions, which would safeguard women's rights, these have deteriorated due to socio-cultural reasons and patriarchal subversions of a later period. Practices like seclusion (purdah) and child marriage have rendered women vulnerable and dependent on their male relatives. Poverty and illiteracy have further contributed to the subordination of women. The amount of Mehr, which is fixed at the time of marriage has been reduced to a mere token and has ceased to be a safeguard against arbitrary divorce. The custom of dowry has also crept into Muslim communities (Agnes 1999:36).

Thus one can say that within Islam there is a scope for change of law. While the Islamic tradition allows for modification in Islamic law, one often finds that there is a resistance against undertaking such acts. This is clearly illustrated by the Shah Bano controversy that took place in 1986 in India.

In the case of Shah Bano vs Mohammed Ahmed Khan it was ruled that the husband had to provide for a divorced wife who had no means of

livelihood and that this judgement was in keeping with the true spirit of the Quran. The judgement created a furore all over India, not simply because of the verdict but because of the apparently pre-judicial remarks, delivered with the judgement, about the fairness of Muslim Personal Law with regard to women. Following the judgement Shah Bano came under pressure from several quarters to retract her claim against her husband. Those who were against the judgement perceived that the judgement was against Islamic principles.

This case thus highlighted the importance of Muslim women in maintaining minority identity in India. Here the important area is the perceived threat to the status of Muslim Personal Law and the women's status under the law. Therefore the real issue as viewed by the Muslims is the threat to symbols of Muslim identity in India. The position of Muslim women in relation to Shariat, has thus been singled out as a symbol of Muslim minority identity.

All this controversy in relation to the Shah Bano case resulted in the passage of the Muslim Women's Act of 1986. Its provisions stipulate that the only maintenance to be paid to the divorced wife by the husband is the Shariat requirement for support during iddah. In addition two years of child support are required, as well as return of dowry (mehr).

Finally all properties owned by the wife from whatever sources are to be returned to her.

Thus the woman was to be maintained by those who stand to inherit from her upon her death and if she has no relatives then support is to be provided by local boards. Thus this law absolves the husband of all legal responsibility towards the wife after the three month period of iddah expires. The Muslim community viewed this law as a great success. They perceived it as being in tune with Islamic principles and as maintaining the true spirit of Islam. In actuality the law only made the position of women more vulnerable.

The issue of Shah Bano led to a renewed interest in Muslim identity and Muslim women. All efforts at identity preservation are concentrated on Muslim Personal Law, which has become the refuge of Muslim leaders and politicians. In the present circumstances, this identity is necessarily defensive and leads to the definition of Muslim women primarily as Muslims and a minority, which imposes severe restraints on women's identity (Hasan 1998:86).

This is what has primarily drawn the attention of the women's organizations that are involved in the task of fighting for equality and the

rights of women. Thus they emphasize a change in Muslim Personal Law such that it is in tune with the principle of equality of men and women. There is thus also a divided opinion on the issue of the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code. Those in favour of it advocate that this law would help to do away with the governing of personal matters of individuals on the basis of religion and thus these issues should be governed more in tune with the secular dimensions. However, those who oppose the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code have presented an equally strong argument. They advocate that this law would dissolve the identity of their religious community and so view the desire to preserve the Muslim Personal Law in order to preserve their identity.

The very raising of these significant issues can be seen as a stepping stone to the improvement in the position of women in the future. The first step to bring about change in any structure is the questioning of that structure. This, therefore, is a step in the direction of improving the position and status of women in the Muslim society.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN PAKISTAN AND INDIA

We have already seen how religion governs and comes to play an important part in the life of those who adhere to it. Religion being a part

of the broader social structure of society is intertwined with the other structures within the social system. Thus the interplay of the religious structure with the political structure has opened up certain areas and dimensions for analysis. It is within this broad field and as a result of this interplay that the women's issues in relation to religious nationalism gain significance.

This interplay in the case of Pakistan can be seen to explicitly dominate the lives of the Muslim women in Pakistan. State policies and programmes have been undertaken with the objective of creating a state that is truly Islamic and which results in defining and perceiving the women and their identity in a particular manner. The strict governance at the level of the two structures of politics and religion has resulted in a double burden of identity construction for the Muslim women in Pakistan in comparison to the Muslim women in India.

The different conditions in the political structure in the Indian society in comparison to the society in Pakistan results in different conditions and manner in which the identity of the Muslim women comes to be constructed here. The Muslim collectivity is seen to co-exist with the other religious collectivities in the Indian State that does not sponsor a particular religion as its official religion. Thus whatever

identity constructions take place for the Muslim women, are from within, and by the religious head of the Muslim community in India. Unlike the case in Pakistan, in India the state does not try to foster policies and programmes to consciously mark the identity of members of the Muslim religious collectivity. This therefore results in the different manner in which Muslim identity comes to be constructed in the two societies.

The important fact brought out is that in both the cases the women of the dominant community become targets of state policies. While in India the state has made legislative policies with regard to Hindu women, in Pakistan it is the dominant Muslim community that has been the target of state policies. Lindsay Young (1997:89) while analyzing the case of Hindus in rural Sindh in Pakistan has pointed out that Hindu identity, is in danger of being eroded and ridiculed in the public domain where it has no legitimate or institutionalized place. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Hindu women to maintain and reproduce the community's distinct worldview. These women maintain this identity by emphasizing on their diet, dress and language. While the Hindu men develop an ability to switch codes as they move between domains, behaving according to the dominant code when mixing with other Pakistanis but behaving according to Hindu idioms when mixing

with kin, friends and neighbours. Thus the state does not interfere to mark the identity of the minority Hindu women in the state of Pakistan.

It may also be pointed out that the role of the women's organizations has been an important one in raising the issues concerning women in both the societies. In Pakistan a change has come about in the attitudes of many women and there has been an expansion of the women's movement. The movement has shifted its focus to three primary goals - to secure women's political participation in parliament; to work to raise women's consciousness, particularly in the realm of family planning; and to counter suppression by taking a stand and issuing statements to raise public awareness on events as they occur. Importantly it appears that a moulding of the women's movement's traditional social welfare activities and its newly revised political activism is occurring. Many of the large groups such as APWA, WAF etc. are supporting small-scale projects throughout the country that focus on women's empowerment (Weiss 1994: 443).

Similarly one finds that in India too the women's movement is taking up an active role and trying to fight for the rights of women. Thus greater emphasis is being laid on improving the educational and employment standards of women to raise their position in society. Thus

no real or substantial change can result in the lives of women unless there is improvement in the secular dimensions concerning their lives.

CONCLUSION

In this study a conceptualization of nation and nationalism was undertaken that has brought forward the point that any conception of a nation in terms of religious nationalism can only be a superficial and false one and thus an untenable and unsustainable one. This is so because there is no coterminality between religion and territory, the latter being essential in the context of creation of a nation. Yet, many have and many are advocating and are involved in the process of creation of religious nationalism. This has been brought out in the study where we have seen that this trend has been a predominant one in the Indian subcontinent.

This study has brought forward the fact that any attempt to create the nation on the grounds of religious nationalism has important consequences not only for all citizens but particularly so for the women of the society. The argument presented in this work has led us to conclude that religious nationalism only makes women a symbol of a particular religious collectivity of which they are members and hence is detrimental from their point of view. They lose their gender identity in the interest of symbolizing the religious identity. Thus gender identity gets submerged in community or group identity.

Religious nationalism is against the principles of democracy as it only makes the members of a nation unequal and perpetuates their inequality. No democratic nation can fall into the trap of advocating religious nationalism without losing its democratic ethos and straying from the path of democratic principles of equality.

In this work we have focused our attention on the case of the two religious collectivities – the Hindus and the Muslims who are often perceived as the ‘other’ of each in South Asia. Both these religious collectivities have much in common when seen in the context of women. Some among the Hindu collectivity in India are involved in the process of advocating Hindu nationalism and thus defining the role of women in terms of being good mothers, wives and daughters. Similarly, those advocating Muslim nationalism, both in Pakistan and across its border in India, are also defining a role for women which is subordinate to that of their menfolk. However it must be pointed out here that in comparison to the Muslim women in Pakistan there are greater attempts for emancipating the Muslim women in the Indian society. Lesser attempts for emancipating the women of Pakistan results from the fact that while Pakistan has adopted Islam as its official religion and thus the entire political and state machinery there works and operates in terms of the Islamic principles, such that it is endorsed by Islam. This is unlike the

case in India where the state has not done much to change laws related to minority communities. Thus even though there is a commitment to run the state machinery in terms of secular and democratic principles it is the majority religion that has been targeted by the Indian state. This is also the case in Pakistan where the political process reinforces Islamic principles, which define women and construct the image of Muslim women in a manner that does not support their gender interests.

Turning our attention to the different conditions in which Hindu and Muslim women are placed, we may point out that this is so because for the Hindu women the identity construction is based on mythological data. In Hinduism there is no attempt in the religious texts to prescribe the laws that would govern the life of its followers. While on the other hand, among the Muslims attempts to prescribe the acts that can and cannot be undertaken by the Muslims is present and hence corresponding punishments are prescribed. What differentiates Hindu scriptures from those of other more formalized religions is that none of this is sacrosanct. Amulya Ganguli has pointed out in an article '*Threat to Hinduism*' that this fact leaves enough space for the followers to obey or not to obey them, as there is no punishment for disobedience. Thus the absence of a prophet or Holy book in Hinduism has left it free to evolve in accordance with its own genius and has not laid it down to

specific rituals of a certain period in the past. Moreover, as only men have been assigned the role through tradition of association with religious texts, most interpretation is done by men and from the point of view of men. Therefore while religion in itself is not problematic, it is the manner in which it is interpreted that makes it so.

Another area of difference between the Hindus and Muslims as seen in the context of India is in the demand for a separate state. While the militant Hindus in India are demanding the establishment of a separate state based on Hindu nationalism, the Muslims in India only attempt to maintain their identity from the members of the other religious collectivity. Thus among the Indian Muslims the creation of religious nationalism cannot be perceived in terms of demand for a separate state, which has already been met, with the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

In drawing a comparative analysis of the Hindu and the Muslim women in India the point that must be made is that the 'greater emancipated' position of Hindu women in comparison to the Muslim women results because of the fact that, firstly, there have been attempts to construct an image of Hindu women at an ideological level by certain parties of which all Hindus are not members. Secondly, changes have

been instituted for the Hindu women in legal matters, even though the degree of emancipation through these laws is a limited one. On the other hand, if one looks at the case of the Muslim woman, one finds that her life is entirely governed by Islamic principles, which are supposed to be based on the faith, she practices. Secondly, the Muslim Personal Law has remained unchanged with changing times. Therefore, one can say that while both the Hindu and Muslim women are defined within a boundary, it is only a matter of degree.

However one does find that a small minority of women have been able to move away from this strong and rigidly defined image of women. This is particularly so for women who have been able to carve a niche for themselves in terms of secular criteria such as economic, educational and employment opportunities. However such opportunities can be and have been available only for a certain small section of women within the population, who are able to defy rigid definitions of women only by virtue of belonging to a certain social class.

Thus one finds that certain space is available for women even while there are attempts to define and construct the image of women in religious terms. Women's movements and organizations have come up and are constantly involved in the process of recognition of women and

the areas of their backwardness. These women's organizations that have come up have played an important role for they have raised the women's issue anew and thus have initiated dialogue on issues concerning them.

In a fast changing world as societies march on the path towards development this dialogue on the issues concerning women will become even more significant and require a greater amount of rethinking and analysis. Development in a true sense can only be achieved if differences among individuals on the basis of ascriptive criteria are done away with. Thus societies must realize the role that their women can play towards the path of progress and the building up of a globalized world rather than limit their role to that of signifiers of the identity of a particular religious community.

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