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**RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S
PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT IN
INDIA, 1905-1945**

A STUDY OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN UTTAR PRADESH

BY

SURUCHI THAPAR-BJÖRKERT

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Dedication

'Dedicated to the political engagées'

A Martyrs Wish

*'We are anxious to be beheaded
We have the will and there is no fear in our hearts
We have yet to see how much strength there is in the ruler's arms
Do not think of loved ones
Do not let their love lead you astray
If you give up now, you will never achieve the ultimate goal
Everything lies in that goal of independence
We have only one wish in our minds and one will in our hearts
- to sacrifice ourselves for the motherland'
◆ Bande Matram ◆*

(Bismils, R. P., translated from Hindi by myself)

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Suruchi Thapar-Björkert
Coventry, 9 May, 1997

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own independent research and has not been submitted for any other degrees. Parts of chapters three, four and five draws on work previously published as:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABP	Amrit Bazaar Patrika, newspaper.
AICC	All India Congress Committee.
AIWC	All India Women's Conference.
BC	Bombay Chronicle, newspaper.
BHU	Benares Hindu University
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
DSS	<i>Desh Sevika Sangh.</i>
HT	Hindustan Times, newspaper.
IOL	India Office Library.
PP	Proscribed Publication.
RSS	Rashtriya Svayam Sevak, a Hindu organisation founded in 1925.
TOI	Times of India
UP	Uttar Pradesh, a state in North India.

GLOSSARY

<i>aadhunik</i>	Modern.
<i>aagyakrini</i>	Obedient.
<i>aashrit</i>	Subordinates.
<i>aata</i>	Flour.
<i>abla</i>	Helpless.
<i>adunik</i>	Modern.
<i>adunikta</i>	Modernity.
<i>agyanta</i>	Ignorance.
<i>ahimsa</i>	The doctrine of non-violence.
<i>andolan</i>	Movement
<i>arandhan</i>	A rite where women do not light the hearth for cooking.
<i>arthashastra</i>	Economics.
<i>arya</i>	Supreme.
<i>athiti</i>	Special guests.
<i>atyachar</i>	Attack.
<i>audasenaya</i>	Loneliness.
<i>auniti</i>	To progress.
<i>avnati</i>	To regress.
<i>awarchin</i>	Modern.
<i>bande matram</i>	Love for motherland.
<i>bhadramahila</i>	Respectable women.

<i>Bharatmata</i>	Mother India.
<i>Bharatvarsha</i>	India.
<i>burqha</i>	A one-piece covering worn by Muslim women in public places. Apart from the mesh through which one can see, the <i>burqha</i> covers the wearer from head to toe.
<i>chadar</i>	A thick sheet made from cotton.
<i>chappati</i>	Pastry made from flour.
<i>charkha</i>	A wooden spinning wheel operated by hand on which <i>khadi</i> cloth was spun.
<i>chawal</i>	Rice.
<i>chayawad</i>	A style of poetry writing.
<i>chetna ka sanchar</i>	Consciousness.
<i>dacoity</i>	Robbery.
<i>dal</i>	Lentil.
<i>dasta</i>	Slavery.
<i>desh seva</i>	Serving the nation.
<i>devar</i>	Husband's younger brother.
<i>devis</i>	Goddesses.
<i>devranis</i>	Husband's younger brother's wife.
<i>dharma</i>	Can be interpreted as a doctrine of righteousness, sacred law or a general code of conduct which is appropriate to each class and each stage in the life of an individual.
<i>dharna</i>	Silent form of protest.
<i>Durga</i>	Goddess of strength.
<i>gahtari</i>	A sort of bundle.
<i>gaumata</i>	Mother-cow.

<i>ghada</i>	A round pan.
<i>ghazals</i>	Expressive poetry.
<i>ghee</i>	Butter.
<i>godown</i>	A storage cellar.
<i>Grihalaksmi</i>	Goddess of the Home.
<i>Holi</i>	The name of a festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil
<i>itihas</i>	History.
<i>jalim</i>	Ruthless.
<i>janma mata</i>	Biological mother.
<i>josh</i>	Eagerness.
<i>josh-utsah</i>	Enthusiasm.
<i>kala pani</i>	This term implied lifelong incarceration in the most brutal conditions, often leading to death. The most common cause of death was 'black-water' (<i>kala-pani</i>) fever.
<i>Kali</i>	Goddess of destruction.
<i>kamal</i>	Lotus.
<i>Kamala</i>	Another name for <i>Lakshmi</i> .
<i>kandha se khanda</i>	Shoulder to shoulder.
<i>kartavya</i>	Duties.
<i>karvachot</i>	Fast.
<i>khaddar</i>	Another word for <i>khadi</i> .
<i>khadi</i>	Coarse, hand-spun cloth from cotton. Mainly spun on a <i>charkha</i> .
<i>khadi chadars</i>	Sheets made from coarse cotton.
<i>khastriya</i>	Warrior caste.

<i>Kirti</i>	The creation of God.
<i>krantikari</i>	Revolutionary.
<i>kripan</i>	A small dagger.
<i>kumari</i>	The mode of address to an unmarried woman.
<i>kurki</i>	Confiscation of immovable property by the police.
<i>lahar</i>	Wave.
<i>Lakshmi</i>	Goddess of wealth.
<i>lal saree</i>	Red saree.
<i>lalan-bachan</i>	Children.
<i>lathi</i>	Charges from the police.
<i>ma</i>	Mother.
<i>madhurbhasini</i>	Sweet spoken.
<i>madyayug</i>	Middle age.
<i>mahila</i>	Woman
<i>mahila sudhar</i>	Women's reforms.
<i>makhmal</i>	Silk.
<i>malmal</i>	Silk.
<i>mandal</i>	Organisation.
<i>mard</i>	Real man.
<i>mata</i>	mother
<i>mazboor</i>	Helpless.
<i>mehndi</i>	Hand decoration.
<i>mela</i>	Funfare
<i>moh</i>	Lust.

<i>mohallas</i>	Neighbourhoods, small localities.
<i>mukadma</i>	Court case.
<i>murti</i>	Idol/image.
<i>nalla</i>	Canal.
<i>nanad</i>	Sisters-in-law.
<i>nari</i>	Woman.
<i>naya</i>	Modern.
<i>naya yug</i>	New age.
<i>Oudh</i>	Present day the state Utter Pradesh.
<i>paisa</i>	Indian currency.
<i>parivartan</i>	Change.
<i>paschatya</i>	Western.
<i>pashchadgami</i>	Backward.
<i>pati grah</i>	Husband's house.
<i>pativrata</i>	Devotion to one man, the husband.
<i>pheris</i>	Processions.
<i>pita grah</i>	Father's house.
<i>poplin</i>	Fine cotton.
<i>prabha</i>	The light and glory of the morning sun.
<i>prabhat pheris</i>	Literally translated it means 'morning processions'. It comprised groups of women and men going around various localities singing nationalist and devotional songs.
<i>prachaya</i>	Eastern.
<i>prachin</i>	Ancient times.
<i>protsahan</i>	To generate enthusiasm.

<i>pardah</i>	Originally derived from a Persian word meaning 'curtain', it carries an implicit meaning of subordination. For example, in Hinduism women are encouraged to remain inside the home or to cover their heads when they are in public view. <i>Purdha</i> is also the veil often used by women of the Muslim communities which leaves only the eyes showing, the rest of the body being completely covered.
<i>rakhi</i>	A symbolic thread of protection.
<i>rakshabandan</i>	Literally translated it means 'protection bond'. An annual ceremony where the sister ties a thread on her brother's wrist. The brother vows to protect the honour of his sister.
<i>randi</i>	Prostitute.
<i>rashtradhan</i>	Wealth of the nation.
<i>rashtramata</i>	Mother of the nation.
<i>rashtryiya kam</i>	National work.
<i>rath</i>	Carriage.
<i>rishies</i>	Religious men.
<i>riti</i>	Values.
<i>roopajiva</i>	Prostitute.
<i>roti</i>	Flour pastry.
<i>sahadharmini</i>	Companion.
<i>sahitaya seviyo</i>	Women specialising in literature.
<i>sahkari</i>	Colleagues and companions.
<i>samaj</i>	Society.
<i>sanghar</i>	Destructive war.
<i>Saraswati</i>	Goddess of knowledge and music.

<i>sarthak</i>	Meaningful.
<i>sasural</i>	The husband's house.
<i>satyagraha</i>	Social boycott of the legal and political institutions of the British Government.
<i>satyagrahi</i>	Protester.
<i>saubhaya kumari</i>	Respectable girls.
<i>seva</i>	Help.
<i>Shakti</i>	Goddess of strength and courage.
<i>Shastras</i>	Religious books.
<i>shochiniye</i>	Uneducated-pathetic status.
<i>Sita</i>	A woman figure from the Hindu mythology. She was noted for her obedience and devotion to her husband.
<i>sloka</i>	Two to three lines of profound philosophy.
<i>srimati</i>	The mode of address to a married woman.
<i>stree dharma</i>	Women's religious duty.
<i>suhag bindi</i>	The dot on the forehead.
<i>suruchi</i>	Good taste.
<i>svayam sevikas</i>	volunteers.
<i>swabhav</i>	Nature.
<i>swabhavik</i>	Natural.
<i>swabhavik karya</i>	Natural tasks.
<i>swabhavik sringhar</i>	Natural decoration
<i>swadeshi</i>	Indigenous
<i>swalamban</i>	Without greed.
<i>swaraj</i>	Self rule.
<i>swarth-tayag</i>	Self- sacrificing.

<i>tahsil</i>	Revenue division of a district.
<i>taklis</i>	Spinning wheels.
<i>taluqdar</i>	Landholder.
<i>tandoor</i>	A domestic oven for roasting food.
<i>thakurain</i>	Rajput woman landholder
<i>thali</i>	A plate used for eating meals.
<i>tharya</i>	Patient.
<i>toddies</i>	Slang word used by Indians to refer to British persons.
<i>toddy</i>	Liquor shops
<i>tonga</i>	Horse-driven carriage.
<i>udhar</i>	Upliftment.
<i>utkarsh</i>	Fame, prosperity.
<i>vartman</i>	Current, present
<i>vartman yudh</i>	Present struggle.
<i>vayaktitva</i>	Identity and personality.
<i>videshi</i>	Foreign.
<i>vidhusi</i>	Literate woman
<i>Vishnu</i>	God in Hindu mythology, responsible for the creation and sustenance of the universe.
<i>Viswakarma</i>	Work for the universe
<i>zamardani</i>	The lady who cleaned the premises
<i>zamindar</i>	Landholder
<i>zilla</i>	District.

ABSTRACT

The nationalist struggle in India against British colonial rule brought about the political mobilisation of both men and women. The nationalist leaders required the participation of women in the nationalist movement because the movement's importance and success was dependent on women's contribution to and involvement in it. While the existing research has contributed to my understanding of women's interaction with political life in India, this study attempts to reconstruct the dominant interpretations on women's political involvement. In doing so, it deconstructs concepts such as 'active', 'private', 'public' and 'political'.

The argument in this thesis is shaped through three inter-related themes. First, it problematises women's emergence into the public sphere from a *purdah*-bound domestic existence. Secondly, it locates the domestic as an equally important site of nationalist activities as the public sphere. Thirdly, in the light of the above themes, it is suggested that dichotomous concepts such as public/private do not help to explain the interaction between these spheres, which facilitated the complex process of women's emergence in the public sphere. Moreover, the associated concepts of political/apolitical do not take into account women's political contributions from within the domestic sphere.

Within the domestic sphere, women's nationalist identities were continuously re-negotiated to accommodate values of ancient Indian culture and the new Western influences. These identities shifted from an educated domestic woman to a non-violent and non-antagonistic public woman to a public woman aware of challenging Western ideas, yet primarily confined to the domestic sphere.

The nationalist movement also served as an important vehicle for encouraging middle-class women to engage in activities and to adopt new role models. The representations of women constructed by the nationalist project enabled women to play a political role through the avenues they opened, in both the public and domestic domains. However, women's political past and their varied contribution to the struggle was not effective in undermining gender inequalities or improving their status in society.

The ideas in this historical study are shaped primarily through oral narratives and Hindi vernacular literature. The interviews with Indian activists, as a non-Western researcher, made me aware of the negotiable category 'Other'. Official and unofficial sources provided an initial framework for the study of this historical period.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Introduction

In this chapter I identify and assess four theoretical approaches which have helped to advance our understanding of the role of women in the Indian nationalist movement. These are what I term the mainstream, the shoulder-to-shoulder, socialist feminist and the discursive perspectives. These approaches are constructed from a reading of the existing literature on gender, nationalism and political activity in India between 1905 and independence in 1947. I then consider the most recent literature and how it contributes to an analysis of the relationship between gender and nationalism.

The approaches differ from each other in how they define the issues to be investigated; the questions they raise; and the key concepts and assumptions which articulate women's political involvement. However, all four share the same definition of the political, which is one based on men's political activities in the public sphere. What is discounted in all these approaches is the idea that in the Congress-led nationalist movement, the domestic sphere was the location of significant political activities for women. In my own view, it is necessary to demonstrate the importance of the domestic sphere for women's political activities, and thus to redefine the relationships between concepts such as 'private' 'public', 'political' and 'active' as

they relate to Indian women in particular and feminist theoretical debates more generally.

My main argument is that in India in the first half of the twentieth century, the domestic sphere was a more dynamic domain for women than has been projected by previous approaches. Women utilised their existing roles in the family not only to contribute politically to the nationalist movement, but also to bring about changes in their own lives. Their roles were modified and reshaped to facilitate women's alignment with the political movement. In effect, women politicised the domestic sphere with the support and encouragement of nationalist leaders, and many significant activities were undertaken from within the domestic sphere. The trials and tribulations faced by women were also felt mainly within the domestic sphere.

After reviewing the existing literature through these approaches, I will present my argument in more detail.

Women's Political Activities in Mainstream History

As is well documented, since 1947 the study of Indian nationalism has been dominated by the three schools of thought which Sarkar labels the Nationalist, the Cambridge and the Subaltern ('history from below') schools (Sarkar, 1983b). Together they incorporate most academic historical writings on India. In the past decade the schools have debated and reconsidered their original premises on issues related to nationalism and colonialism. However, until recently, the role of women in political, economic and social processes was not addressed in these debates. I will discuss the three schools in turn and then show how their approaches have come to inform the study of women in Indian nationalism.

The Nationalist School

As its name implies, the Nationalist school analyses nationalism in modern Indian history as a collective opposition of the nation to colonial rule. The key concern for this school is to trace the history of the freedom movement from the development of nationalism in 1885 to the partition of India in 1947. Despite their differences, historians who adopt the Nationalist approach agree on the key importance of the emergence of the English educated middle-class, and its engagement in social reform activities which eventually led to the development of anti-British sentiments in India. This approach is illustrated by the works of P. Sitaramayya (vol.1, 1946 & vol.2, 1947) and Tarachand (1961-72).

Within modern historiographical trends, the Nationalist school has been criticised for over-emphasising the role of elite leaders in the movement:

‘Even in more genuinely nationalist history writing an abstract cult of the people or nation often did not prevent a basically elitist and sometimes uncritical glorification of a few great leaders’ (Sarkar, 1983b: 6).

Another inadequacy of the Nationalist school is that it contains no proper study of gender relationships; specifically women’s participation in the movement (Kasturi, 1994:1-6). This school minimises most forms of social division within Indian society, since its main purpose is to project a unified, homogeneous India against a common enemy represented by British colonial rule.

The Cambridge School

The Cambridge school to a certain extent, shares the elitist approach of the Nationalist school, but it identifies different sets of dominant elites as the key actors in Indian society. Like the Nationalist school, the Cambridge school does not attach any significance to women’s activities. This school comprises historians like J.H. Broomfield (1968), Anil Seal (1968), Judith Brown (1972), David Washbrook (1973),

C.A. Bayly (1975) and B.R. Tomlinson (1976). In this school, the British colonial elite is credited with having trained the native population in the ethics of parliamentary democracy and then having handed over power in small doses. More recent analysts such as C. A. Bayly, Judith Brown, Anil Seal and Francis Robinson, who identify themselves with what they term the 'new Cambridge school', portray the westernised Indian elite as 'clients and spokesmen' of the indigenous notables (such as merchants, bankers, business magnates, land-owning aristocracy) who controlled 'Indian society and (were) intermediaries between the latter and the British Raj' (Torri, 1990: 2-8).

To a certain extent the 'new' Cambridge school reduces the overemphasis on, and glorification of, elite leaders which characterises the rationale of the nationalist school by projecting them as mere 'middle-men'. However according to Guha, the representation of nationalist politics is incomplete because politics is unmistakably implied as an

'aggregation of activities and ideas of those who were directly involved in the operation of these institutions, that is the colonial rulers and the dominant groups in native society to the extent that their mutual transactions were thought to be all there was to Indian nationalism' (Guha, 1982: 4).

Moreover Guha argues that the Cambridge school shares similarities with Nationalist historiography in that both represent Indian nationalism as an 'idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom' (Guha, 1982: 2).

Historians within this school have investigated the nature of pre-independence Indian politics and the interaction of particular elites with the colonial rulers in different regions of India, but there have been only a few references to the role of women in Indian politics. This is surprising, since women were actively involved in nationalist politics from the middle of the nineteenth century. For example, women

formed organisations for social reform in which issues related to women were addressed (Kaur, 1968: 40-85) and women voiced their opinions and participated in the first struggle against British rule, the 1857 revolt. Perhaps one reason why the Cambridge school ignores the contribution of women is that it emphasises divisions between social sub-categories in Indian society, such as the 'westernised elite' (intelligentsia) and the 'indigenous notables' (those wielding economic power), rather than gender as a social division.

This school retains a rigid focus on economic changes and their effects on the interaction of elites representing different economic interests. It also highlights the role of mediators between state and society who either held positions in the state bureaucracy or were representatives of interest groups. Both these perspectives tend to exclude women.

Amongst these historians a few have made brief references to women's activities in Indian society, but these activities have not been adequately contextualised. For instance, there are only four short references to women in Bayly's book, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (1988). Where women are at least made visible through longer references, no particular sense of their political significance emerges. Women seem to appear and disappear in these accounts, and there is no thought given to women's consciousness of their roles. For instance in Judith Brown's (1977) analysis there are six references to women's activities, but these are subsumed within the overall character of Gandhian politics. The following quote from Brown, which is not followed by any analysis, seems like a mere insertion, to show the visibility of women in nationalist politics:

‘a sizeable bloc of women (3,630) were among the civil disobedience convicts... UP also had a large number, and the Meerut’s Commissioner reported: ‘a feature which is becoming more and more important, is the position taken up by women. All women are now becoming politicians... (and) all the younger women, whether Hindus or Muhamadans, who have received any form of education, are full of ‘nationalist’ sympathy. Being possessed of less sober judgement they are more and more led away by what they see in the papers and they are ready to believe any statement which is circulated in the English or vernacular press’ (Home Poll., 1932, File No. 14/28 cited in Brown 1977: 292).

Gender as an analytical category is overlooked, and the differences and similarities between men’s and women’s relationship with the nationalist movement and colonial rulers are not raised in Brown’s study. Also, it is not clear whether women were represented in politics as only the wives, daughters and sisters of nationalist leaders or whether there were women who participated as individuals.

Where women are acknowledged, the Cambridge school’s approach homogenises women and hence fails to acknowledge the effects of caste, class and religious differences on women’s participation in the movement. Brown makes a couple of references to the fact that the participation of Muslims was minimal, but there is no particular mention of Muslim women (Brown, 1977: 104 and 140). Nor does she examine the relationship which women from privileged backgrounds shared with other women who were either prostitutes or from the untouchable caste. There is a description of Gandhi encouraging untouchables at his meetings, but ambiguities in Gandhi’s behaviour and attitudes towards the untouchables and prostitutes are not explained:

‘There was some overt hostility to Gandhi’s insistence on introducing Untouchables to his meetings... and at Gajera on 21 March many women left rather than attend in Untouchable company’ (Home Poll, 1930 File no. 247/11 cited in Brown, 1977: 104).

Perhaps the main problem with this approach is that it makes women visible simply by inserting them into the analysis, without discussing the significance of their

participation to the broader nationalist movement or women's position in society more generally.

The Subaltern School

A very different approach from the Cambridge school is represented by the Subaltern school which originated with Guha's edited volumes under the title of *Subaltern Studies* (published from 1982 to 1989). Other scholars belonging to this school are Gyanendra Pandey (1978) and Sumit Sarkar (1984). The school's approach is critically reviewed in Mukherjee (1988) and O' Hanlon (1988).

The Subaltern school has dismissed previous historical writings as elitist, mechanical or over-materialistic. Its own conceptual framework rests on the delineation of two domains: the elite and the subaltern. The subaltern domain is seen to comprise social groups which 'represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the elite' (Guha, 1982: 8). This perspective focuses on marginal and subordinated groups and their autonomous resistance at various stages in the development of Indian politics. This seems to be close to the Marxist analysis, and there is a clear employment of Marxist paradigms:

'In fact by claiming that the term 'subaltern' is derived from the works of Antonio Gramsci... by references to the well known Marxist formulation on the need for a revolutionary party or on the failure of the working-class to give leadership to the peasantry... some indirectly and some more directly suggest that they are working within the Marxist tradition' (Mukherjee, 1988: 2109).

Although the Subaltern school sees the activities of the masses as arising independently of the influence of the elite, it does not explicitly discuss the role of

women. It remains unclear whether women are categorised as 'subaltern'¹ or 'elite' groups. Within the 'elite' domain Guha draws on a distinction between foreign (British) and indigenous elite groups (feudal magnates and leaders) (Guha, 1982: 8). However, what continues to remain unexplored is how women were affected by the distinct policies and attitudes of each of these groups during the twentieth century.

Though the Subaltern approach has helped to enlarge our knowledge of the autonomous resistance and consciousness of the subalterns, it has not helped us to project women more clearly as historical subjects, since in fact women cannot be clearly located in either the 'subaltern' or the 'elite' domains. Some of these difficulties can be seen in Gyanendra Pandey's otherwise comprehensive analysis of the nationalist movement in Uttar Pradesh in the first half of the twentieth century. While he draws on the analytical categories associated with the subaltern school and emphasises the autonomous politics of the under-represented masses (subalterns), Pandey's account ignores the fact that women also formed an important part of the subaltern masses. If we are to recover the history of the subalterns, we also have to account for the activities of women. The sub-title of Pandey's book, *A Study in Imperfect Mobilisation*, is imperfect by the lack of gender issues. Pandey's research also relies heavily on government reports which, while constituting 80% of his research data, are limited in what they can tell us about the nationalist movement. In a chapter on 'Spreading the Nationalist Message', Pandey mentions the names of a couple of women but they merely offered as additions to the main social actors who are male. For example, he states:

¹ I am aware that the term subaltern can be analysed in relation to gender, class and race. First, women as a marginalised group. Secondly, women from the lower social classes and thirdly, women as colonised subjects.

‘The Simon Commission Boycott Committee in Lucknow included not only Congressmen - Mohanlal Saxena, Khaliquzzaman, Mrs Suniti Mitter, and K. Pestonji, a happy national combination of a Kayastha, a Muslim, a Bengali and a Parsee - but also liberals such as Rahas Behari Tewari and Krishna Prasad Kaul’ (Pandey, 1978: 87).

It seems that the name of the woman is mentioned only to emphasise the inclusion of a ‘Bengali’ in a multi-caste gathering.

Even if we use the analytical categories of the subaltern approach and categorise women as a marginalised group within the subaltern domain, then the varying levels of oppression between women of different social classes and also between women within a particular class cannot adequately be conceptualised. For example, placing rural women as a singular oppressed class within the subaltern domain obscures the fact that this class of rural women was not homogeneous and that varying levels of exploitation existed within it. With specific reference to Oudh (present- day Uttar Pradesh), Kumar shows that during the 1920s there were women *talugdars* and moneylenders whose activities put them in the category of oppressors rather than the oppressed:

‘At any given time we find a sizeable number of women *talugdars* in districts of Oudh... The *thakurain* (Rajput woman land holder) of Amargarh estate... practised all kinds of oppression on her tenants. In 1936, she even had the houses of her tenants looted’ (Kumar, 1989: 343).

Kumar’s analysis can be seen as a theoretical advance within the Subaltern school because he identifies women as both oppressors and oppressed within the rural class. What remains incomplete is the categorisation of these women. Kumar does not clearly state whether women oppressors should be placed within the ‘elite domain’ or whether there is a need to redefine the rigid categories of elite and subaltern.

The Subaltern school introduced historiographical trends which are particularly useful in understanding the resistance of peasants and other marginal groups. However, the Nationalist, Cambridge and Subaltern schools share a common blindness

to the issue of how gender relations interacted with and shaped wider social and political relations in colonial India. The two examples discussed above, Gyanendra Pandey (Subaltern) and Judith Brown (Cambridge), have written on the nationalist movement, but their few references to women's activities do not provide women with the agency of independent action; nor do they discuss the interaction of gender relations with colonialism and nationalism. These schools share an excessive reliability on government records, which is particularly problematic for the Subaltern school, since one would expect it to provide information on women as a marginalised group. However, though I have outlined some difficulties with the subaltern school, these difficulties have not precluded scholars working within a feminist framework from adopting categories of Subaltern studies in their research.

The Shoulder to Shoulder Approach

Women are mentioned, albeit briefly in the three schools of mainstream history discussed above, but no particular significance is attached to their activities. I now move on to examine the work of writers who focus particularly on the role of women and I will characterise the approach of some of these historical writings published as early as 1958, as the shoulder to shoulder approach. The phrase 'shoulder to shoulder' was used during the nationalist movement in the vernacular writings of both men and women as will be discussed in chapter five.

The shoulder to shoulder approach not only makes women's activities visible, but also makes us aware that women were important to the nation, thus providing a positive view of the role of women in Indian society. Unlike the various schools of mainstream history which either ignore women or insert them without explaining their activities, the shoulder to shoulder approach provides us with comprehensive details of the nature of involvement of women in political activities. Contrary to the

mainstream perspectives, this approach documents women's awareness of the anti-colonial struggle, and the importance of their participation to the success of this movement.

Writing within the framework of Indian nationalism, the shoulder to shoulder approach also focuses on elite national leaders, in this case female participants in formal political organisations, especially the Congress and its campaigns. It celebrates rather than investigates the nature of women's activities in the nationalist movement. Thus, it projects a romanticised picture of women's participation, with women seen as nationalist heroines. Women are made visible in history, and they are shown to have taken on as much as men and to have shared the same opportunities and challenges. The nationalist movement is seen as a joint venture involving both men and women, with women's political vigour matching that of men, whether in the fight for independence or in the contest for seats in the ministries.

The main problem with this approach is that it fails to recognise any of the problems which women faced as participants in the nationalist movement. In particular it overlooks gender as a social division without recognising that women had conflicting as well as consensual interests and objectives, and did not uniformly agree or cooperate with the limits which men imposed on women's activities and identities within the movement. Consequently, this approach fails to analyse the terms on which women were integrated into the movement, which were largely terms set by men, though often challenged by women. It adds women into a struggle, defined by men, and assumes a consensus between men and women's interests

Also, when this approach assumes that men's and women's interests were the same, there is no indication that women wanted anything different from men or anything additional to what they had. Moreover, there is no indication of any ambivalence on the part of men about letting women join in the movement, though the consent and advice of men was always necessary to facilitate the public appearance of

women. Therefore, it is evident that in a relationship where no antagonism explicitly emerges between men and women, the Indian women's movement is projected by authors working with this approach as different from women's movements in the West which clearly recognised antagonistic and conflicting interests with men. Perhaps a reason why any possible conflicts of interests between men and women were not acknowledged is because it would have contradicted the primary aim of the nationalist struggle which was to project a united and homogeneous front.

The shoulder to shoulder approach is also limited by its enumerative nature. It relies heavily on the citing of the numbers of women participants to highlight the intensity of their involvement. Though this feature of enumeration assists in the task of glorifying women's activities for example by stating the large numbers of women who participated, it does not investigate the implications that participation had for the lives of individual women.

Some of these points can be illustrated with reference to Tara Ali Baig (1958), Manmohan Kaur (1968), Aparna Basu (1976) and Uma Rao (1994). Tara Ali Baig's (1958) edited book shares similar themes as the work of Basu and Kaur (as discussed later), although the glorification of women's activities is restricted in Baig's book to women who inherited political traditions from their families, such as Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Hansa Mehta and Vijaylaxmi Pandit. These prominent women facilitated the construction of images of women as nationalist heroines. In Baig's analysis, friction between women and nationalist leaders is exposed to a limited extent on issues of women's active public participation, though this seems to be resolved through women's enthusiasm and patriotic feelings towards the nation. In one article in Baig's book it is stated that:

'The Mahatma advised them (women) to restrict their *satyagraha* activities to the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops, (though) feminine eagerness and patriotism refused to recognise any bounds' (Moraes in Baig, 1958: 94).

Two points can be deduced from this remark. First, women are seen to take on as much as men in the political struggle, refusing to recognise any division of work on the basis of their sex. Secondly, when there is opposition from male leaders, this it does not take on an antagonistic dimension. The space for harbouring antagonistic feelings is also reduced through women not demanding rights or benefits from men. The relationship between men and women is seen as basically amicable. Moraes states that:

‘in no sphere-political, economic, social or educational - has any responsible Indian women’s organisation demanded special rights for women as opposed to men. What it has consistently asked for is a free field and no favours’ (Moraes in Baig, 1958: 90).

Kaur’s writing takes the form of a comprehensive, chronological narrative rather than a conceptually informed analysis. Women’s participation in historical events is traced from the 1857 mutiny to the Quit India movement of 1942. Kaur also provides detailed accounts of prominent women in different states of India, including Sarojini Naidu in Hyderabad, the Nehru women in Allahabad, Satyawati in Delhi and Durgabai Deshmukh in Madras. In her narration Kaur does not analyse the difficulties that arise with issues of gender and her main area of emphasis remains an appreciative overview of women’s contribution to the movement. Furthermore, she does not provide a clear picture of whether or not women’s motivations were identical to men’s, given their different social status:

‘Thus women showed that the winning of freedom of the country was not only the responsibility of men but that when entrusted with a responsibility they were able to steer through as successfully as the men. This added double strength to the movement’ (Kaur, 1968: 202).

The main point that can be grasped from this quotation is that all women saw India’s freedom as their goal and were willing to ‘double (the) strength’ of the movement by adding their efforts to the existing political activities of men. This perspective is

basically concerned with deflecting any criticism of women's public activities and to promote a simplistic picture of women's participation which does not seem to require any explanation.

In Kaur's account there is no reference to women's activities apart from those in the public sphere, and no investigation of the consciousness of women or how their activities affected their identities as women. For example,

'picketing of shops was not an easy thing: but these brave ladies had a lot of patience... since picketing cloth shops was declared illegal women had to suffer hard imprisonment... *lathi* charges and rude behaviour of the police' (Kaur, 1968: 180).

This quotation raises new questions if we are interested in women as subjects in their own right. It would be necessary to know more about the relationship between the women pickets and the nationalist leaders, and about the attitude of the colonial authorities towards these pickets. The latter point raises issues about the whole notion of Indian womanhood and its sacrosanct image which may have frustrated the British police, the guardians of law and order.

Aparna Basu (1976) sees women's issues developing in tandem with the stages of nationalist activity. She identifies three stages of the women's movement in India: first, the social reform activities of the nineteenth century; secondly, the increased emphasis on women's education from the mid-nineteenth century onwards; and thirdly, women's political involvement. According to Aparna Basu, it was unlikely that

'a century of preaching and social work would have brought about the same change in the position of Indian women as was achieved in the wake of the two decades of political struggle in India. By their participation in political movement, Indian women helped their own struggle for liberation' (Basu, 1976: 40).

Basu thus sees the women's movement as fully integrated with the nationalist movement in a mutually supportive relationship and does not acknowledge any form of political division between men and women. Her analysis portrays feminist interests as being no different from nationalist interests, with women having no separate agenda from men:

'feminism and nationalism were closely inter-linked. As the national movement gained momentum, the goal of independence became the only concern for both men and women' (Basu, 1976: 40).

Two particular questions remain unanswered in this context: Did the social constraints of the period inhibit women's political activity? What dilemmas did women face in the process of participation? My thesis explores these issues, and is concerned with how women in the domestic sphere, with limited choice, were compelled to take cognizance of the nationalist movement.

Basu also distinguishes the Indian women's movement from women's movements in the West, arguing that the Indian movement did not exhibit any of the characteristic Western antagonisms between men and women. Indian women, she states, were 'accepted as political comrades and given equal opportunities for participation in the freedom struggle' (Basu, 1976: 40). This assumption suggests that there were no differences between the interests of men and women, and it also overlooks the distinct characteristics of women's participation.

Basu recognises that women's participation expanded gradually and was very limited in the first two movements of 1905 and 1920. In the 1920 movement only those women participated whose male family members had joined the struggle and were serving gaol sentences. In such cases the nationalistic character of the family was clearly influential. Some women activists also suggested that Gandhi offered assurance and confidence to the guardians of women participants (Basu, 1976: 37). The underlying suggestion here is that if the nationalist movement was a mutually

supportive and non-antagonistic venture between men and women, then women would not undertake nationalist activities without the consent of men. However, although the importance of family influence on women's participation is identified in this approach, the possible complexities around the issues of respectability and domestic dynamics do not feature. For example, did all women participate with the help of guardians, or did women also resist and work against the wishes of those very guardians? This question remains unanswered, yet, is central to the complex trajectory of women's consciousness and political motivations in relation to colonialism.

On the question of why women participated, Basu suggests that women were inspired by patriotic feelings and had India's freedom as their goal. Many were initiated into political activity through the general political atmosphere expressed in books, songs and slogans. (Basu, 1976: 37). However, Basu's analysis fails to locate the specific terms on which women were integrated within the movement, and does not identify the problems women faced in the course of their participation.

Some common problems arise from the analyses of Basu and Kaur. First, women's participation is not problematised, and instead a harmonious relationship between women and nationalism is projected. One reason for this perception is that a clear definition of women's distinct interests is not offered. Secondly, their analyses adopt a woman centred approach, but no attention is given to the question of women's struggle against unequal power relations and hierarchies constructed within the nationalist discourse.

Another feature of what I term the shoulder to shoulder approach is that the issue of class structure and its implications for the relationship between men and women and also between women themselves is not discerned. This is mainly because the shoulder to shoulder approach assumes a harmonious relationship between women and nationalism and also between women themselves. On such a premise differences between women which arise in relation to class, caste, age and religion do not surface.

Basu comments that the nationalist movement broadened its class basis by incorporating peasant women at a later stage (Basu, 1976: 38). However, all the evidence she cites reinforces a picture of the mainly middle-class character of the movement and fails to substantiate her statement about the inclusion of women from other social classes. For example, with specific reference to Gujarat, which witnessed the largest women's participation in the national movement, Basu states that the leadership comprised women from business families, such as Sarladevi Sarabhai, Mridula Sarabhai, Mithubehn Petit. However,

‘thousands of women-students, teachers and ordinary housewives joined the... processions and picketed shops. All these women were not educated or sophisticated.’ (Basu, 1976: 26).

The class background of the women participants remains relatively unexplored in this analysis and thus it is difficult to ascertain whether the nationalist movement adequately represented the interests of all women. The emphasis seems to be only on prominent women, who are introduced to the reader as the wives/daughters/sisters of nationalist leaders. The other women who also participated and made just as important a contribution to the movement are introduced within statements such as:

‘among scores of Karnataka women who took part in the struggle for freedom were Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Umabai Kundapur, Krishanbai Panjekar and Ballari Siddama’ (Basu, 1976: 29).

Nearly all the oral transcripts that Basu uses in her text are of women who came from politically connected families, and the narrative is from their point of view. The question is whether the perceptions of most women who participated in the nationalist movement were the same as those of a few important women, and whether these few middle-class women could speak for all women from different class backgrounds, including peasant women. (A plausible reason why it is difficult to make class issues visible is that they are intersected by issues of religion and caste. For example, the

views of a high-caste, middle-class Hindu woman would be different from those of a Muslim woman sharing a similar background).

Uma Rao's (1994) analysis is also informed by the shoulder to shoulder approach, although unlike the accounts of Baig, Kaur and Basu, she attempts to problematise women's activities in the movement. For example, she recognises the difficulties women activists faced in their public and domestic lives. However, the evidence she cites to explain the trials and tribulations of women is used by her to reinforce the image of 'women in the frontline' rather than explaining the difficult trajectory of women's participation:

'There was no immediate personal gain for the women who came out to fight for *swaraj*. They braved official repression and accepted personal sufferings, including parting from their children for the romantic ideal of *swaraj*' (Rao, 1994: 49).

More importantly, Rao's analysis, unlike that of the previous authors, introduces us to the idea that women were beginning to realise their own rights, and also that they did not wish to be dependent on men in seeking to attain those rights. However, these ideas are not developed further by Rao, and thus any major differences between the interests of men and women are still overlooked. Rao also relies on a quantitative dimension, as for example, when she states,

'the next decade saw hordes of women pouring out of their homes. Women of all classes and castes, high and low, gave their support to the national movement. The processions taken out by women, their untiring picketing of cloth and liquor shops, their persuasive appeals for *swadeshi* are even today marvelled at' (Rao, 1994: 38).

This glorification of women's efforts is based on the large number of women who came out. However, this does not tell us anything about the social background of these women, neither does it address the problematics associated with women's emergence from the domestic sphere.

Rao's approach projects women as being capable of taking on as much as men, in part, because the feature of non-violence assisted women's equal participation:

'because the struggle was non-violent, women could participate equally. They amply possessed the qualities required for a non-violent struggle: tolerance, courage, capacity for suffering' (Rao, 1994: 41).

It may be that one reason why the shoulder to shoulder approach applauds and glorifies women's activities is because the authors do not want to project women as passive or reticent non-participants in national events. They want to stress women's active involvement as a matter of course. Consequently, their approach repeats rather than deconstructs unexamined assumptions about women and their participatory roles.

The Socialist Feminist Approach

The socialist feminist approach, unlike the shoulder to shoulder approach problematises the interaction between gender, nationalism and colonialism. It facilitates the development of a clearer understanding of the emergence of feminist thinking by recognising the context of women's assertiveness against institutions that subordinate and oppress them. While emphasising the importance of women's activities, socialist feminists also introduce the idea of women being aware of their status as women in society. Women are seen to have faced contradictions and ambiguities in their lives when they interacted with institutions and bodies representing colonialism. This in turn indicates that women were beginning to question their relationships with men and to recognise their own distinctive interests.

The socialist feminist approach presents the relationship between gender and nationalism as largely congenial, although it also identifies areas of dispute and compromise between organisations representing these interests which seem to be

resolved amicably. The clear development of an element of dissent also signifies women's discontent with the prevailing nationalist ideology.

This approach does not define or use the word feminism, primarily because the word is associated with the West. On the latter point the socialist feminist approach draws same conclusions as the shoulder to shoulder approach which also views women's movement in India as non-antagonistic unlike movements in the West.

The socialist feminist approach differs from both the mainstream approach and the shoulder to shoulder approach in one important respect. It sees women as responding to the anti-imperialist struggle and the accompanying social and political changes, as a distinct group or category and not merely as an addendum to men or in terms largely set by men, thus recognising gender as a social division. Moreover, it recognises the importance of class differences and the ways in which class informed women's consciousness towards colonialism and nationalism. The socialist feminist approach, also introduces us to the domestic sphere as an important site though its importance is not fully realised by this approach.

By way of illustration we may refer to the writings of Jana Matson Everett (1979), Geraldine Forbes (1982), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1983), Liddle and Joshi (1985) and Nandita Gandhi and Shah (1992).

The issue of an alliance between the women's movement and nationalism and the possibility of friction building within the women's movements is best reflected in the writings of Nandita Gandhi, Nandita Shah and Jana Everett. They trace the development of two distinct movements, the nationalist movement and the Indian women's movement and outline how the relationship between the two movements became stronger with women's contribution to the Civil Disobedience movement. However, on the issue of franchise the Indian women's movement was split into two factions. Women affiliated to the nationalist movement and, adhering to an equal rights approach, wanted adult franchise and gender equality, as opposed to the

women's uplift faction who were interested in limited female enfranchisement as well as reservation of seats. The interests of the latter group coincided with British interests while the former maintained good relations with Congress leaders (Gandhi and Shah, 1992: 17 and Everett, 1979: 195). The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) adopted an equal rights approach and emphasised co-education, the reform of marriage laws, and economic equality. Gandhi and Shah also recognise that women's priorities were not always the same as those of men.

Chattopadhyay was a socialist leader in the nationalist movement as well as a secretary of the AIWC. She sees national bodies like the AIWC as important to the women's movement because they 'funnelled women's aspirations, plans (and) projects' (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 7). Through these organisations, women could also voice their distinct interests which would otherwise get submerged within male dominated organisations (Forbes, 1982: 527). Chattopadhyay's approach provides a deeper insight into the interaction of women with nationalism and colonialism. While identifying women's oppression as integral to a social system affecting every individual in the society, she sees little antagonism between the women's movement and the nationalist movement. She argues that although the emphasis of the women's movement was on equal rights for women (as analysed by Nandita Gandhi and Shah), problems related to women were never treated on the basis of gender antagonism, 'but as social maladies of a common society to be cured by the efforts of... men and women alike' (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 5). The author hesitates to use the word feminist for the emerging women's movement in India because, unlike the feminists of today, Indian women sought political rights in order to perform their civil duties and not to compete with men.

Forbes (1982) provides a different perspective on the hesitation of Indian women to use the word feminist. She states that Indian women not only associated the word with the West, but believed that it conveyed unpatriotic and anti-male images. It

was unpatriotic because it suggested that women placed their own demands before those of the nation, and it was anti-male because it depicted men as adversaries (Forbes, 1982: 529).

While tracing the growth of the women's movement in early twentieth-century India, Chattopadhyay identifies the complexities and ambiguities which women's organisations experienced in deliberations with the British government around three issues: adult suffrage, the issue of a joint electorate, and the reservations of seats for women (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 100). Chattopadhyay suggests that Indian women representatives were disillusioned with the intentions of the British Government and realised that India's freedom could be achieved only by Indians themselves. The expectations from the British Government had been eroded, and

‘this conviction led larger numbers of women from all walks of life and levels of society into the Salt Satyagraha movement which now followed in the wake of the failure of Round Table Conferences’ (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 105).

Chattopadhyay's analysis exposes the contradictory position of Indian women representatives in relation to colonialism. While women were conscious of their dependence on the British Government for securing positions on various legislative councils and committees, they were also aware that it was the same government that they were fighting against for Indian political independence. In Chattopadhyay's view, these contradictory relations with the British government further strengthened women's alignment with the nationalist movement, and promoted a view of women as the political comrades of men. This approach also helps us to appreciate that women aligned with the nationalist movement to argue for their own rights as much as achieve political independence:

‘As... the wave of patriotism for political freedom began to sweep... this movement revealed a realization that this freedom should be for both men and women’ (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 99).

Forbes also argues, like Chattopadhyay, that women saw their advancement and India's freedom as being knit closely together:

‘women’s rights seemed dependent on freedom from imperialism... They (women) saw themselves as working for women’s rights when they demonstrated, marched or supported revolutionary activities’ (Forbes, 1982: 534).

Chattopadhyay’s theoretical approach, while it locates the importance of women’s public activities, also highlights the centrality of the home in shaping women’s participation. She comments that the initial act of salt-making in the homes was a visible sign of the ‘revolt (having) entered every home, nestled down in the very hearth’ (Chattopadhyay, 1983: 107). However, women’s interaction with the domestic domain is not explored in depth in Chattopadhyay’s study.

The socialist feminist approach succeeds primarily in informing readers of the impact of the nationalist movement on women’s strategies and political values. The approach problematises the interaction between gender and colonialism while presenting the relationship between gender and nationalism as non-antagonistic. Women are seen as carving an independent place for themselves within both the nationalist and colonialist discourses.

Liddle and Joshi (1985a and 1985b) and Kumari Jayawardena (1986) also work within the socialist feminist framework, though their analysis introduces us to further complexities in the interaction between gender, colonialism and nationalism. Jayawardena writes in the broader context of women’s struggles in the third world, seeking to show how the quest for female emancipation is linked to wider political and social movements for independence and reform of society.(Jayawardena, 1986: 73). She writes in the context of articulate feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and tries to show how Indian women’s struggles were forerunners of liberation

struggles in the 1970s but were limited in perspective by virtue of their close but necessary relation to the development of nationalism.

Jayawardena draws on a broad definition of feminism which not only argues for equal rights for women and struggle against all forms of oppression and subordination, but which locates women's oppression specifically in hierarchical structures of the family and gender relations. Like Chattopadhyay and Forbes, Jayawardena also challenges the idea that feminism is a western concept applicable only to the experience of western women. She states that

‘historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women, even though the impact of imperialism and Western thought was admittedly among the significant elements in these historical circumstances’ (Jayawardena, 1986: 2).

Moreover, Jayawardena's approach uses a class analysis to explain women's issues in the early twentieth century. First, she writes in terms of a burgeoning women's movement whose own problems and demands were subsumed under the nationalist movement. Even where women's issues were discussed, Jayawardena argues, they covered limited reforms around the questions of the vote, education and equality. Moreover, according to Jayawardena, these reforms

‘had little effect on the daily lives of the masses of women, neither did they address the basic question of women's subordination within the family and in society’ (Jayawardena, 1986: 10).

Secondly, Jayawardena accurately points to the importance of the ideology of bourgeois men and their attitudes towards the ‘woman question’. The newly created bourgeoisie class, trained to serve in the imperial administration as professionals and administrators, insisted that women should accept new social roles in conformity with their own ideology. In this context Jayawardena identifies the importance of the ‘new woman’ (Jayawardena, 1986: 14) as a concept which was modified and adapted in the

various countries she studies, but she tends to see this concept very narrowly in terms of how women's role was perceived by male nationalist leaders.

The role of the 'new woman' was to be seen in relation to the national identity forged by the bourgeoisie and was supposed to be representative of the national culture and traditions of Indian society (Jayawardena, 1986: 14). The 'new woman' could be involved in activities outside the homes and be 'modern' as well as preserve the traditions of the society (Jayawardena, 1986: 14). Therefore, the colonised sought to initiate reforms within society and, more importantly, to develop a national identity which would serve as a platform for mobilisation against the colonisers (Jayawardena, 1986: 3). However, these reforms did not challenge the hierarchical structures of the family. Rather they redefined the roles of women within families in accordance with changing political demands (Jayawardena, 1986: 108).

Jayawardena's ideas are not based on an analysis of a single country, but on a comparison of India, Sri-lanka, China, Japan and Indonesia. Though Jayawardena does not fully analyse the nature of women's political activities within the domestic sphere, her conclusions on the interaction between feminism and nationalism are important. She suggests that although Indian women participated in the nationalist struggle,

'a revolutionary feminist consciousness did not arise within the movement for national liberation. Women in the nationalist struggle did not use the occasion to raise issues that affected them as women' (Jayawardena, 1986: 108).

I agree with Jayawardena that women's participation was circumscribed by male nationalist leaders, and that women's roles in the family were redefined rather than completely overturned. However, I would argue that women's activities must be seen in the context of how women were also using the dominant nationalist ideology to

alter their own lives. Though these efforts did not lead to full emancipation, they did enable resistance to pre-existing familial structures.

Liddle and Joshi argue that women raised questions which not only concerned them as women but which also challenged the existing hierarchical structures. Though Liddle and Joshi work primarily within the socialist feminist approach, their analysis introduces the readers to a more complex interaction between gender, colonialism and nationalism. They recognise that the cause of women's inequality has to be located in both the colonial structures and traditional structures. They argue that women

‘saw their oppression as stemming from the impact of imperialism... but they also saw their oppression in the patriarchal organisation of the family, which they expressed through a number of demands including the Hindu Code’ (Liddle and Joshi, 1985a: 526).

Working within the socialist feminist approach, Liddle and Joshi acknowledge the relationship between women and the nationalist movement as non-antagonistic, but explain it in terms of the contextual dilemma that Indian women faced: if women over-emphasised male supremacy as one of the causes of their subordination, this could be used by the colonial rulers to justify their rule in India.

Liddle and Joshi see women in the nationalist struggle using their opportunities for political activism to raise issues which affected them as women; but they locate the success of these activities exclusively in the public sphere (Liddle and Joshi, 1986: 37-38). Although they see the domestic sphere as a site of women's struggle, they do not examine how women took the nationalist movement into that sphere (Liddle and Joshi, 1986: 227-9).

The Discursive Approach: Women as Symbols, Categories and Metaphors

Since the 1980s some Indian and European scholars have come to focus as much on discursive constructions as underlying social structures. In looking at the interaction between women and nationalism, this approach is more concerned with conceptualisations rather than women's activities in the nationalist movement. The discursive approach identifies the implicit concepts, categories and metaphors embedded in the nationalist discourse, and these concepts become the subject of investigation. What this approach shares with the shoulder to shoulder approach and the socialist feminist approach is a belief in the importance of women, in both the construction and maintenance of national identity. However, unlike the other two approaches, the discursive approach does not see nationalist politics only in terms of the political initiatives of women through women's organisations and the struggle against colonialism, located mainly in the public sphere. Rather, nationalist politics is seen to pervade not only the public domain but also the domestic domain. This approach focuses on the mechanisms through which the two domains relate to each other, and women occupy the central position in the ensuing debates. Unlike the shoulder to shoulder approach which studies the activities of individual women and projects them as nationalist heroines, the discursive approach is more interested in determining how the category 'woman' was constructed by the nationalist discourse for the purpose of its own success.

A problem that arises in analyses which adopt the discursive approach is that we know little about women's own perceptions of the gender symbolism and categories propagated by male nationalist leaders: Did women themselves see these symbols as beneficial for negotiating the boundaries between the public and private spheres?

The writers who broadly work within this approach are Gail Pearson (1981), Gail Minault (1981), Geraldine Forbes' later work (1988) and Partha Chatterjee

(1989). Chatterjee examines the redefinition of women's roles through the prevalent nationalist constructs and role-models. Whereas in the socialist feminist approach Jayawardena analyses the concept of the 'new woman' in terms of the debate between the call of modernity and tradition (Jayawardena, 1986: 14), in the discursive approach, the ideas around modernity and tradition are elaborated and explained further in relation to the changes and dynamics of the public/material and private/spiritual spheres.

Chatterjee's analysis demonstrates the importance of the reconstruction of the domestic sphere as an aspect of nationalist discourse and looks at the symbolic value of women's participation in the nationalist movement. He argues that the nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century centred around the dichotomy of the 'outer' and the 'inner domains', and the problem of maintaining a consistent balance between the two. It was through these two domains that nationalism sought to resolve the 'woman question' in accordance with the needs of its own project. The outer or material domain, represented the external reality, that is the world dominated by western science, technology and methods of statecraft: while the inner or spiritual domain represented the true identity of the Indian people. The representative of the inner domain was the woman (Chatterjee, 1989: 237). Whereas in the material domain the colonisers had subjugated the colonised non-European people, in the spiritual domain no encroachments had taken place. The spiritual domain, which embodied the culture of the nation, had to be protected and had to be more consistent with the outside world in its new ideas of equality and liberalism. Chatterjee shows how the development of the role model of the 'new woman' arose from this necessity, and how this model was assigned to middle-class women.

The discursive approach focuses its interest on how women as symbols of a unified India were essential for the strategic development of the nationalist movement. This enables us to understand how and why women as guardians of the spiritual

domain were incorporated into the political movement. However, in this approach women are not projected as independent actors. While Chatterjee writes more in terms of different constructs of women for the benefit of the nationalist project, Pearson and Minault demonstrate the importance of the category 'woman' and the associated symbols and metaphors associated with womanhood. Pearson, like Chatterjee, studies the delineation of the two domains and argues that it was because of the need to acquaint this 'new woman' with the material world that 'mediating structures between the separate world of the household and the public world of affairs' were created (Pearson, 1981: 177). I agree with Pearson that certain aspects of the domestic ideology were carried over into the public sphere, and this issue will be explored later in this thesis.

The importance of the 'new woman' to the nationalist movement has been outlined by Pearson in three ways. First, women provided cohesiveness to the nationalist movement because woman as a category was

'undifferentiated in public consciousness, (and) was the sole universal category which cut through divisions and could mean all things to all persons' (Pearson, 1981: 175).

Secondly, 'women' and the associated concept of 'sacred womanhood' were used by the nationalists to arouse the nationalist sentiments of the populace at large, and to prove the unworthy nature of the British rulers. Furthermore, this legitimised the role of women in the public sphere. Thirdly, women's support was required for effective forms of resistance such as the boycott of cloth and the picketing of shops.

Pearson's theoretical approach introduces us to the processes through which the domestic sphere was steadily politicised and how mediating structures were formed between the female intelligentsia (Congress leaders) and the women of the extended female space (Congress volunteers). The latter, unlike the female intelligentsia, had only basic education (Pearson, 1981: 177).

My thesis will demonstrate that the links between women of the extended female space (generally middle-class women) and the 'traditional power' structures in the homes did not prevent them from becoming politicised. In their traditional roles they exerted a lot of power, and their positions in the homes actually became more powerful when representations of Mother India and Sacred Womanhood were projected by the nationalist movement. From my analysis it seems that women enjoyed this 'glorification' of their womanly qualities because along with glorification came a lot of respect and awe for these qualities.

The political role offered to women during the nationalist movement and after independence did not challenge the traditional image associated with Indian women. Pearson's ideas on this issue parallel Jayawardena's. Pearson argues that women of the extended female space, on whom the universalisation had been based, gained little from the post-1947 state (Pearson, 1981: 187). The female intelligentsia achieved a political status but within only a slightly modified ideological and spatial stature. Pearson's conclusions are politically very important since they start to challenge the legitimacy of the post-independence elite's claim to represent women's interests. Her analysis challenges the writings of authors like Chattopadhyay and Kaur (the shoulder to shoulder approach) who have discounted the fact that inequalities existed and that not everybody gained equal rights. Pearson's analysis seems to be guided by a subaltern/elite paradigm where Congress leaders form the elite and women involved in supportive activities/*swadeshi* (indigenous) or ordinary women are the subalterns. The problem that arises is that if Pearson chooses to work within this framework, then it questions the 'cohesive' form that women's participation was supposed according to her, to symbolise.

Gail Minault (1981) shares similar ideas with other authors of the discursive approach on women's importance in securing national freedom and in projecting national solidarity (Minault, 1981: 6). While Pearson tries to show the significance of

women in imaging a universalisation of the nationalist movement, Minault demonstrates how this was accomplished. With specific reference to Gandhi, she argues that the symbol of *Sita*, while serving Gandhi's agenda, helped to bury the ideological differences and divisions between women (Minault, 1981: 11). She suggests that the 'extended family' provided an important metaphor in facilitating women's activities beyond the domestic sphere, and into the public sphere.

Minault's and Pearson's work draws links between the public and private spheres of activity and the processes and constructions that facilitated the tasks by which women could draw links between the two spheres without threatening the hierarchies in the public sphere at the same time as maintaining the traditional stronghold in the domestic sphere.

Minault puts forward the view that there were non-class divisions between middle-class women and that within a shared urban middle-class household there were tensions, strains and varying layers of consciousness among women. The extended family may

'look harmonious to the casual observer, but it may contain many divisions. Inside the courtyard, there are probably several hearths' (Minault, 1981: 15).

Historians like Pearson and Minault seem to be not just simply adding gender divisions to their analysis, but seek to show how gender divisions and class formation interact. They also identify other divisions not necessarily based on class. For example, the elite/subaltern division or female intelligentsia/extended space division can represent divisions among middle-class women based on education, family situation and life style.

While Minault and Pearson have drawn links between the public and private spheres, Geraldine Forbes (1988) extends their ideas further to explain why the politicisation of women was difficult in the public sphere, despite these links which

facilitated women's entry into politics. First, women leaders were unsure of their relationship with the Congress, though like the Congress they were concerned with the respectability of their participants. They were also uncertain as to whether they wanted an independent organisation or wanted to work within the Congress. Secondly, the issue of respectability within women's organisations and the Congress, while it presented women as an acceptable and thus an effective group for articulating political demands, also reinforced divisions between women. Respectability maintained limits on women's behaviour, but unrespectable women challenged the limits sustained by patriarchal ideology. Forbes comments that

'They only admitted women classified as "respectable", thereby undermining the claim that they spoke for all women. To see this as a male or Congress plot to "control" women is naive, the women leaders were themselves concerned with image' (Forbes, 1988: 89).

This suggests that the women's movement was consolidated on a narrow basis, especially when certain sections of women were consciously excluded and marginalised. Forbes argues that the initial structures employed in mobilising women were not adequate either for politicising women or ensuring their future political participation. She examines the close interaction of women who took part in the movement and their relationship with the Indian National Congress. Though women were powerful inspirational figures and their limited participation had an impact on both Indians and their British rulers, they did not have the political power necessary to influence Congress policy or tactics (Forbes, 1988: 60). On the relationship between the Congress, with Gandhi as its leader, and women, Forbes suggests that it was very complicated and that we cannot analyse it without looking at the ways feminist and nationalist consciousness developed in relation to each other. For some women political involvement gave a boost to their feminism, and for some a

commitment to improving the status of women encouraged their involvement in the movement.

The issue of women maintaining sex-segregated organisations is interesting in Forbes' analysis as it sheds light on women's political perceptions:

'Nehru wanted the *Desh Sevika Sangh* (DSS) to seek formal recognition but he was also interested in the formation of a woman's department within Congress. While this would have represented a significant step forward in terms of the integration of women and women's issues into the Congress structure, the DSS guarded its independence. The leaders of the DSS could not identify the advantages associated with closer involvement with Congress. They successfully blocked the formation of a viable women's department but retained control of their own informal sex-segregated political organisation' (Forbes, 1988: 76 and 77).

The issue of respectability and women's ambiguous attitudes towards the Congress and other women expose the problematic trajectory of women's participation in the nationalist movement.

Domestic Sphere: A Contested Site

Though my thesis is mainly concerned with the domestic and public spheres in India, I am aware of the varying categorisation of these two spheres in Western discourse, particularly in Western feminist theory.

Feminist theory has been critical of the taking for granted the separation and opposition of the two spheres. As Nicholson has put it, 'feminist theorists have correctly intuited that these categories point to societal divisions that have been central to the structuring of gender in modern Western society' (Yet, at the same time, they 'reject the claim that the separation of the private and public follows inevitably from the natural characteristics of the sexes' (Pateman, 1989: 121).

The association of women with domestic life was first analysed in the 1970s by anthropologists such as Rosaldo, Chodorow and Ortner (Linda Nicholson, 1992:

Section 1.3). They tried to provide a universal answer to women's subordination by explaining in terms of sexual asymmetry in women's relationship to public and private spheres. They argued that women 'lead lives that they themselves construe with reference to responsibilities of a recognizably domestic kind' (Rosaldo, 1980:398). Thus, for these authors, through the creation of domestic/public divisions, societies accommodated women's natural roles as mothers and nurturers. Women were identified with nature and men with culture. Moreover, 'since culture seeks to control and transcend nature, then it is natural that women should... also be controlled and contained' (Ortner, 1974:72).

These supposedly universal cultural constructions identified by Ortner have been questioned by Pateman, who argues that the dichotomies of public/men's world and private/domestic/women's life do not have the 'same meaning in pre-modern societies as in present liberal capitalism' (Pateman, 1989:125). Rosaldo has also criticised her own earlier formulations which did not account for cultural diversities in the structuring of gender relations (Linda Nicholson, 1992: Section 1.3).

On a different tack, Davidoff also demonstrates how the meaning of what constitutes the public and private shifts over the centuries. She has analysed the conceptualisation of the categories public and private with reference to nineteenth-century England. She identifies the development of the distinction between the two categories through concepts of rationality, individualism and property. Her arguments suggest that towards the end of the nineteenth century exclusively domestic issues like child care were increasingly debated publicly. This, she argues, is an example of shifts in definition of what constitutes the public sphere (Davidoff, 1995:258). Moreover, she argues that 'private' cannot be associated only with the family and the home. At the end of the nineteenth century, men spent most of their time in the public sphere of wage labour, but they also had 'access to a private life spent in non-domesticated spaces (public?) such as the theatre, racecourses and boxing rings' (Davidoff,

1995:259). Similarly, in the context of family studies, Tony Fahey's research supports mine when he attempts to show that public/private dichotomies are not rigid spheres, but rather zones of privacy are found in social life. Furthermore, Fahey locates 'internal gradations of privacy' within the private sphere and 'numerous zones of privacy embedded within the public sphere' (Fahey, 1995: 690).

The Western feminist debates concerning the public/private dichotomy take on a more complex nature in the specific context of colonial India. This dichotomy implies that most women are defined exclusively within the context of the private sphere and that political activity is undertaken only in the public sphere. Implicit within this assumption is the idea that to be both 'active' and 'political', one has to be located in the public sphere. The approaches to women and Indian nationalism that I have identified in this chapter share the same definition of what is political, i.e. one that is based on men's political activities in the public sphere. This study proposes that the political nature of the public sphere cannot be understood without reference to the importance of domestic sphere for men and women. This thesis will demonstrate that women's political consciousness was also mobilised within the private/domestic sphere. Since women undertook political activities within the domestic sphere, I will argue that such activities are not a prerogative of actors within the public sphere only. Moreover, locating women's activities within the domestic sphere makes us think beyond the fact that every man or woman in the public sphere is politically minded. Moreover, although I will not be able to discuss this, the public profile of male activists was shaped mainly by their relationship with the domestic sphere which was a site of national and cultural identity, and women the chief symbols thereof. The preservation of the domestic domain consolidated the struggle against the colonial rule located in the public sphere.

In the Indian context, Chatterjee's analysis identifies the relevance of the two domains to the nationalist project, and he locates the resolution of the 'woman

question' in terms of this dichotomy. Chatterjee's analysis of the domestic sphere is different from that of Western feminist discourse which views the domestic sphere primarily as a site of oppression, since his analysis assigns women an important role of protecting the national identity within this sphere. However, his analysis leaves some questions unanalysed which my thesis hopes to address. He understands the resolution purely in terms of mutually exclusive private and public domains and his analysis attempts to explain the process of women, whom he largely considers as custodians of national culture, stepping out onto the streets from the confines of a *pardah*-bound domestic existence. However, Chatterjee does not explain how this process was possible and how women could politically participate from both the public and domestic spheres. The question of whether women had a role to play in nationalist debates which directly concerned them also remains unexplored.

This thesis identifies an interactive relationship between the public and private sphere in the historical context of the Indian nationalist movement, in the particular region of Uttar Pradesh during the period 1905-1942. My research not only demonstrates that the domestic sphere was a central arena for women's nationalist politics but also analyses how *pardah*-bound women could suddenly transcend the boundaries. This research departs from other approaches on the basis that it emphasises the interactive and overlapping nature of domestic and public spheres. This interaction supported the aims of the movement as well as facilitated women's entry in the public space.

Gender, Nationalism and Communalism

The importance of gender and the domestic sphere has been much emphasised and explored in recent writings on nationalism and fundamentalism. In what ways are women constructed as part of national political projects and national identities? New

national identities and new conceptions of national belonging are re-negotiated at different historical junctures.

‘National identities are, of course, always in the process of constitution, never fixed and stable, though often drawing on a repertoire of traditions, myths and representations which are constantly reworked and re-articulated to different national projects’ (Hall, 1993: 99)

National identities, argues Catherine Hall, are gendered as well as shaped by racial and ethnic differences. This section of my dissertation highlights the importance of the symbolic role of women in the construction of national identities. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have identified five ways in which women tend to be projected as participants in ethnic and national struggles. These are 1) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, 2) as reproducers of boundaries, 3) as transmitters of culture, 4) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and, finally, 5) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989:7). However, as Yuval-Davis and Anthias themselves point out, different historical contexts have shaped these roles in different ways and consequently their centrality will differ. Historians researching on Indian history, especially the nationalist movement, privilege particular categories such as 1) women as communal subjects and 2) women as ‘mothers of the nation’.

Women as Communal Subjects

The colonial administrators understood Indian society in terms of two main religious communities, a majority community of ‘Hindus’ (which according to Romila Thapar (1990) incorporated the Jainas, Buddhists and the Sikhs) and minority communities of Muslims and Christians. Included under the minorities were what later came to be called the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Thapar, 1990: 365). Within this context what is communalism? Thapar argues that to support a

particular religion and articulate one's personal beliefs and practices is not 'communal'. What is communal is the manipulation of these identities for the purpose of political mobilisation, based primarily on violence and aggression. In the above context, Thapar argues that 'religious communities are imagined communities and it is therefore possible to change them' (Thapar 1990:365).

In the context of the Indian sub-continent communalism can thus be best explained as an

'intermeshing of ideology and power, where groups aspiring to power use a particular religious ideology to subvert a social order and replace it with an order that is based on sharp differentiation between those who accept the ideology and those who don't' (Thapar 1990:365).

In the definition above, communalism may stress the scriptures, but it may not. The ensuing imagined communality/ communal identity is constructed partly by downplaying internal divisions like caste and class differences and generates similar passion and sacrifice as Anderson's national 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991:6).

Fundamentalism, can be defined as the 'mobilisation of religious affiliation for political ends' (Connolly 1991:69). Connolly argues that in the process of the 'rediscovery of the fundamentals' of religious belonging, women and children are treated as communal property. One of the goals of fundamentalist project is then to protect the latter from 'unholy outsiders' (Connolly 1996:69). In a society faced with fundamentalist upsurge, it is difficult to separate the state from religion (Tohidi 1991:260).

In the context of recent political developments in India and referring specifically to right-wing mobilisation, Sucheta Majumdar labels it as the 'rise of Hindu fascism' (Majumdar 1995:1). She uses the word 'fascism' to define movements that have

ideological links with Italian and German fascism. She argues that the goal of Hindu fascism is

‘to seize political power and re-define India, not as a secular state, but as a Hindu *Rashtra* or Hindu nation. In this formulation of the nation-state, no identity other than the Hindu identity can be allowed to exist’ (Majumdar, 1995:2).

Hindu women according to Majumdar have played an important role in promoting the rise of right-wing mobilisation. Their main target is Muslims who form 12% of the population of over 850 million. Hindu women have actively led mobs and encouraged their men in carrying out heinous acts towards Muslim men and women (Majumdar 1995:2).

Amrita Chhachhi also alerts us to the significance of multiple identities, which shift not only historically but at any given point in time. For example, Muslim women in India have defined themselves as well as been defined by their communities in terms of separate identities as women, as Muslims and as a minority. Over the past twenty years these identities have been integrated so that womanhood is defined in communal terms. Chhachhi analyses this through the two examples of the Shah Bano case (1985) and the Deorala *sati* (1987). She identifies the ways in which women became the symbolic repositories of a communal identity. To take one example: the Supreme court in India was convinced that to grant a divorced Muslim woman maintenance would violate Muslim personal laws, which were an important part of the Muslim identity (Chhachhi in Kandiyoti 1991:147). To provide an answer to the question of why women become the symbols of communal and national identity, Chhachhi refers to Anderson’s analysis to state that,

‘nationalism describes its objects in the language of kinship or the home, both of which denote something which is natural and given. The merging of the nation/community with the selfless mother/devout wife evokes the obvious and necessary response to come to her defence and protection’ (Chhachhi 1991:165).

State supports communalism in two ways. Firstly, in a tense communal riot the state can express its support for a particular party or group through a policy of apathy where 'apathy means connivance' or it may not seek to punish the political groups responsible for the unrest. Secondly, it can act on behalf of a particular religious group as it did after independence to reclaim abducted Hindu women from across the borders. The post-independence state acted on its own behalf and on behalf of those communities who appealed to it and 'invested it with agency on their behalf' (Butalia 1993:19).

Gender intersects with the dynamics of a multi-religious society in a complex way. Sluga argues that 'national identity can be conflated with, or constructed in terms of, political identity and gender identity in the process of political boundary setting between 'us' and 'them' (Sluga 1996:75-85). The intervention of the Indian state not only indicates its important role in defining women's communal identities but also that the 'public is patriarchal' and when patriarchy is threatened in the family, as with the Shah Bano case or the abduction of women, the state moves in to institute its own patriarchal control (Chhachhi 1991:167).

Romila Thapar argues that the legitimation of communal ideology for both Hindu and Muslim communities draws on a conservative interpretation of scriptures and religious texts which 'requires that women be subordinated' (Thapar 1990:365). However, my thesis shows that this did not preclude women from participating in the nationalist movement, and in fact, the additional stress on their roles as mothers and wives encouraged them further. In the process of participating, some women achieved a degree of independence.

I would end this section by suggesting that there may often be differences between the way the state defines and negotiates women's identities and how women perceive their own identities. The post-colonial Indian state, argues Butalia, defines women in terms of their religious identities as either Hindu or Muslim. However,

women often see themselves differently, 'as members of a community, as a Sikh, or Hindu or Muslim, as mothers, as women- and acted upon these different identities at different times' (Butalia 1993:WS19). Religion constituted only one part of their personal identity. It is also the case that in a tense political situation, when an individual is identified as a Muslim or Hindu, irrespective of his religious convictions or political ideas, the communal identity seems to be forced on him (Hasan 1989:44).

Women as Repositories of Honour

One of the key aspects of communal identity is the 'honour' of the community. This aspect can be best explained through the demands and expectations on women from both men folk and the state in post-partition India. Women are simultaneously placed as agents and victims in historical situations. However, what becomes more important is to understand on whose behalf women exercise their agency. In the context of partition of India, in committing mass suicides, Hindu women were acting on behalf of their 'own' community to preserve its honour from the 'other' community. However, when the same women resisted rescue by the state, 'their agency was perhaps on behalf of themselves and their children born or unborn' (Butalia 1993:24).

To understand the particular concept of women's agency during post-partition period, we need to take into account the particular notions of moral order that are preserved when women act and more importantly, the ways through which family, community, class and religion intersect. When women's loyalties and interests shift towards men sharing the same class and religion, what is binding women together is not necessarily their interests as women (Butalia 1993:13). After partition the homeland for abducted women was defined in 'religious terms' (either the Hindu or Muslim homeland) by a state that professed to be secular. By referring to categories like the 'other' and 'own' communities, the state (mainly male) not only identified

women in purely communal terms but left them with no choice. The nation, equated with the families (referred to as the national-parental hold) by both the communities, came to be defined in communal terms. Thus, the questions of religion and nationality dictated the rescuing enterprise where the 'women (who) were Hindus and Muslims... had to brought back to their Hindu and Muslim nations' (Butalia 1993:WS18).

The Indian state on one hand and the community and family on the other viewed the concept of women's 'honour' as important and realised the important role of women in carrying the honour of both. Whereas women preserved the honour of their community by becoming martyrs- the state invested them with the 'task of holding up the honour of the nation... their rescue or recovery was seen as a humanitarian task, an honourable enterprise and so on' (Butalia 1993:18, Sarkar 1992: 226).

Bhutalia also points out is that the Indian state through its programme of 'recovering' abducted women restored its own legitimacy as the 'new patriarch' and for its own self-legitimation the question of gender became crucial.

Class Specific Communalism

In the specific context of India, the social composition of the communal activist groups tends to be from middle class. Thapar argues that groups that support communalism are primarily drawn from the growing middle class who feel the need to modernise to match their rising material standards of living. Such groups,

'see modernisation as westernisation and therefore an implicit contradiction between what they have been taught to think of as 'traditional' and what they believed is modern and who therefore think they are establishing a 'traditional' identity by supporting the new religious movements' (Thapar 1990:365).

In UP, the recent communal agitation led by Hindus (particularly the 1992 Babri Masjid riots) have drawn their ranks from urban high caste, middle class milieus.

Most of these men and women have been from the middle ranking service sector and trading families (Basu et. al. 1993:80, Bhutalia 1993:14).

Women as 'Mothers of the Nation'

An analysis of recent events have made us aware that nationalist projects, whether in Serbia, Finland or India, are seen to relate to women as mothers. Women are conceptualised as 'mothers of the nation'- Anderson's 'imagined community' conceptualised as family- 'an image that places their reproductive capacities at the centre of their service to the nation' (Hall 1993:100).

As early as the nineteenth century, Bengali literature used the symbol of the mother to represent the past, present and future states of India. For example, the mother of the past, was represented as a glorious figure of wealth and prosperity. This image was an antithesis to an image of ruin and chaos in the colonial present. However, the colonial present was depicted through two contradictory images, in which the mother represented both a figure of enslavement as well as an image of fearful strength (Sarkar 1987:2012). The latter was depicted through the image of *Kali*, which could be seen to represent both a woman who had abandoned her shame and femininity as well as a woman who destroyed evil. Sarkar argues that these two representations of *Kali* depict an 'inner tension within nationalism about the principles of female strength and about the violence and destructiveness latent in it' (Sarkar 1987:2012). Some of these aspects will be discussed in detail in chapter three and four. The symbols of women as 'nurturers' and 'defenders' were used by the nationalist leaders.

In the context of colonial Bengal, Bagchi argues that child bearing and nurturing became the only social justification of women's lives. Since women had no control over their reproductive powers, 'this amounted to a form of slavery, however magisterial it may have been made to look' (Bagchi 1990:WS70). In popularising the

symbol of womanhood, a specific identity of women based on qualities such as self-sacrifice, affection and kindness was created. Bagchi acknowledges the significance of motherhood as a symbol bridging 'the social, political and religious domain of colonial society' (Bagchi 1990:66). Minault's views on the significance of women in imaging a universalisation of the movement are similar (see chapter one). Bagchi also views this glorification of women only through their reproductive powers as a

'form of patriarchal control (and)... a ploy to keep women out of privileges like education and profession that were being wrested by their men' (Bagchi 1990:WS66).

On a similar tack Anne McClintock (1993:62) argues that women are constructed symbolically as 'bearers of the nation' where the nations are frequently referred to through the 'iconography of familial and domestic space'.

Similarly the rejection of communism in former Yugoslavia and a reassertion of the nationalist ideology meant that the meaning of 'patriotic womanhood' shifted from a woman whose main task was to build socialism through work towards a woman who regenerated the nation through her role as mother. This change in perception, argues Bracewell, can be seen from the mid 1980s with the growth of Serbian nationalism within the Yugoslav socialist system. This nationalism was stimulated by the fear that Serbia might lose Kosovo to Albania. The Serbian community since the 1980s was at a disadvantage compared to Albania, because of its low birth rate, and the perceived threat to its size and strength led the nationalist party to hold women responsible for not fulfilling their duty 'to reproduce the nation' (Bracewell 1996:27). In this context, argues Bracewell, 'women are valued primarily for their reproductive potential ... and as the debate over abortion suggests, the main crusade for a Serbian national rebirth has been on women.' (Bracewell 1996:28). One of the aspects of national identity of the Serbian woman was her duty as a creator of 'little Serbs'. She did not have to produce just babies, but 'to bear fighters' (Bracewell

1996:29). Her sacrifice and heroism lay in her willingness to sacrifice her children for the nation. What is interesting is that women tried to use the Yugoslavian nationalist discourse (for example the virtues associated with motherhood) to also argue against the policies of the state:

‘Because of the way in which women and particularly mothers, could be seen as symbols of the nation and its future, they were able to use that privileged status to protest against the war and for peaceful negotiations in a way in which men (even fathers) could not’ (Bracewell 1996:30).

Though women were at the centre of nationalist discourse, Bracewell argues that their individual interests were subordinated to the collective interests of the nation (Bracewell, 1996:31). In chapters three and four I have discussed the way women were constrained in participating as mother symbols.

The ideology of motherhood was important in representing the swelling tide of Indian nationalism. In the specific context of colonial Bengal, Bagchi argues that since the concept of glorification of motherhood was a part of the culture of Bengal, it did not have to be invented by the early nationalists. Motherhood was used as a symbol of an Indian’s identity and constituted a ‘domain which the colonised could claim as their own’ (Bagchi 1990:65 also see Partha Chatterjee 1989).

Many Indian nationalists represented India as a Hindu mother with divine characteristics whereby she provided not only encouragement to her sons but could also assume the role of the destructive *Shakti* (a Hindu symbol). This new identity for women incorporated both the softer virtues (as a mother and nurturer of sons) and violent virtues (as the destroyer such as *Kali*, *Durga*, *Chandi*). However, Bagchi argues that this ideology, with its exclusive focus on Hindu nationalist symbols and incorporation of Hindu goddesses implied an unparalleled divisiveness between Hindus and Muslims. From a feminist perspective, the glorification of motherhood not

only put women under pressure to produce sons but also denied these women any self-fulfilment (Bagchi 1990:67-69).

Women so often become the touchstones of a group's cultural identity, the preservers of its traditions and the nurturers of its progeny. Gender becomes the obvious symbolic marker. Einhorn argues that in these situations the cultural importance assigned to women and a 'focus on the proper role of women is often a mask or a code for the political processes of state formation' (Einhorn, 1996:1-2). These particular aspects will be discussed in detail in chapters three, four and five. In India women not only accepted their role as symbols but also participated in the process of actively propagating them and encouraged other women to do the same.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have identified four approaches to understanding the processes and areas through which gender relations intersected with wider social and political relations in colonial India. Each approach is distinct in terms of the concepts and issues which are articulated, but there are also some ideas which cut across and link the approaches. My own analysis draws upon a range of perspectives suggested by writers from the different historiographical schools.

The mainstream approach provides occasional references to women, but the main social actors are considered to be male, and no real significance is attached to women's activities. The shoulder to shoulder approach does incorporate women's public activities rather more into its analysis. Women are seen to have taken on as much responsibility as men and are portrayed as untiring nationalist heroines. But this approach still takes the political activities of men, which are essentially public, as the referent, and women's activities are also described in terms of the public sphere. The socialist feminist approach has certainly advanced our understanding of women's

interests in relation to nationalism and colonialism, and does succeed in problematising women's activities and identifying the areas of dispute and controversy between gender, nationalism and colonialism. However, the focus is still on the public sphere. All issues affecting women, from their rights to their participation in the nationalist movement, are located primarily in this sphere and in formal social and political organisations. The shoulder to shoulder and socialist feminist approaches perceive the women's movement in India as being different from the movement in the West in the sense that the latter, but not the former, was built on antagonistic and conflicting interests with men. The vernacular literature of the period also expressed a similar set of ideas.

Though the literature on the nationalist movement addresses public activities and roles that women have undertaken the domestic activities are not addressed completely in these accounts, thus leaving the representation of women incomplete. In what I call the discursive approach, women are analysed as categories and metaphors which serve as vehicles for universalisation of the nationalist movement. This approach attempts to draw bridges between the domestic and public domains, to illuminate the interaction of the political world with the domestic arena. However, the main emphasis of this approach still remains in the ways 'women' as a category were constructed for nationalist needs. The most recent literature shows the role of religious communalism in the construction of women as communal subjects - as a part of the nationalist movement.

In this thesis, I have reassessed the importance of the domestic sphere without evaporating the differences between the domestic and public domains. My primary aim is to present women in a more active role in the domestic sphere and to focus on the politicisation of that sphere. This serves to shed light on those domestic activities of women which did not surface in the public domain.

Agendas in the domestic sphere cannot be neglected during the nationalist movement because it is at this time that nearly all debates between women and male nationalist leaders on women's activities were discussed in relation to the domestic sphere. The first four approaches have briefly discussed the areas of reform which concerned the family and the domestic sphere during the social reform movement. For example, we have literature on the social reform movement, the reforms on women's education and the prohibition of harmful social practices. However, these activities were relevant to only a small elite section of women, and were not representative of the vast majority. Most ordinary women were housewives, mothers and mothers-in-law with only a basic knowledge of reading or writing. These women contributed to the nationalist movement, but in order to locate their consciousness we must look towards the domestic sphere. It is therefore important to identify the changes that the domestic sphere was experiencing, how this sphere was conceptualised, how changes corresponded with the political world. Given the social constraints of the time, every small act of resistance by women in the domestic sphere was likely to be important.

CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING OTHERNESS: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES FOR A NON-WESTERN RESEARCHER

Introduction

My privileged position as an Indian student in Britain who was interviewing women activists in India enabled me to challenge some of the dichotomies and boundaries assumed in methodological debates in Women's Studies. The two key issues that were relevant to my research were, first, the question: whether or not the category 'Other' is a fixed category. I suggest that its meaning shifts according to context and had to be continuously negotiated in my relationships with informants. These relationships with informants evolved through an interaction over time, based on trust, reciprocity and confidentiality. Secondly, in the Indian context, it was difficult to follow the precepts of what I understood to be feminist methodology because I could not write about the respondent's experiences by using their own language. At the same time, present feminist concepts such as gender-equality, oppression and consciousness had little meaning to women born at the turn of this century. For them the domestic sphere did not appear to be a site of oppression.

In the first section, I focus on the dialogue between mainstream discourse on history and a viewpoint which provides a sharper analysis of women's contribution to historical traditions. Certain issues raised within this dialogue illuminated the centrality of the domestic sphere and the significance of gender relationships within

this sphere. These issues also provided the theoretical context for my research that attempts to demonstrate the links between the domestic sphere and wider political developments.

After contextualising my own experiences in the light of wider literature, I will explain issues that arose around my interviewing. This chapter closes with a summary of the key archival sources, and the backgrounds of the women and men interviewed.

Negotiations for a Women's History

This section will deal with issues that arise when interpersonal and intellectual negotiations are made, both within women's history and its relationship to mainstream history and other dominant disciplines. The ideas in this section are discussed in relation to the two dominant approaches: a 'separatist approach' which argues for an understanding of women's history outside the traditional confines of the mainstream discipline; and the 'inclusive approach', which by locating women's history within the mainstream disciplines, tries to stretch its boundaries to include areas of social life which were previously not seen as part of the study of history.

The Separatist Approach

Feminist scholars who favour keeping women's history separate question the positivist and empiricist methods of analysis of mainstream history, primarily because these methods do not facilitate the study of women's lives and their experiences, either in the past or the present. Moreover, these mainstream methods attach privilege exclusively to 'public matters' and, more importantly, fail to examine the inadequacies of public/private divisions, which exclude women's experience. Activities in the domestic sphere, personal relations and the interaction between the sexes are trivialised in mainstream historical accounts.

Some of these ideas are illustrated in Judith Allen's (1986) analysis, which is concerned with the importance of identifying and understanding the absences and silences in mainstream history which are ignored in positivist approaches (Allen, 1986: 176). Locating these absences and silences and reinvestigating the past of women, she argues, is what distinguishes feminist objectives from those of mainstream history. The writings of feminist historians recognise the long standing historiographical traditions of mainstream history. However, to challenge the constructions of a tradition which has employed predominantly male categories of analysis is a limiting task. A more effective approach is to question the methodological tools and nature of historical investigation conducted within mainstream disciplines. A feminist historian, she argues,

'will not find the lack of evidence surprising, and probably would search the limited evidence with different questions... she would not infer that silence' (Allen, 1986: 184).

Moreover, Allen argues that feminist research which is based on a 're-scrutiny' of evidence in order to locate 'silences' will never be regarded as 'valid' history by professional historians.

She further argues that if researchers on women's history have to contribute to existing interpretations which are based on the exclusion of women and non-recognition of their past, then it is necessary to work from outside mainstream disciplines:

'Feminism seeks a knowledge and understanding of the past; the discipline of history is a poor servant in this quest. The implication of this argument is that the future of feminism lies outside the known boundaries of Western thought' (Allen, 1986: 188).

Allen's argument is crucial for all research where evidence is limited or where the available evidence is not considered important enough to be recorded.

The Inclusive Approach

The debates initiated in the 1960s by feminist historians were concerned with the 'inclusion' of women in those spheres which were excluded from historical studies such as the domestic sphere, the family and sexuality. The writings which identified with this inclusive approach also concerned themselves with the invisibility of women in most historical records. Researchers adopting this approach, such as Fox Genovese (1982), Davis (1988) and Gordon (1988), argued for highlighting women as valid historical subjects within mainstream disciplines. In doing so, contemporary feminist historical enquiries have challenged previous historical accounts which were constructed mainly by male researchers, and the methodology and tools of analysis used for research. The same problem arises in Indian historiography, where the main historical accounts of the Indian nationalist movement, written mostly by men, did not take into account women's contribution. Only when the source materials, methodological and analytical categories used by these male historians were questioned did women's social and political contribution surface.

The inclusive approach identifies specific advantages in analysing women's history as part of mainstream history. First, it questions what has traditionally been defined as important by mainstream disciplines. It is not just the omission of women from historical tracts, but the consequently partial view of what constitutes social life, that is subjected to rigorous scrutiny. For example, Linda Gordon states:

'Many women's historians work on topics that include but are not limited to women, conceptualising major historical processes differently because women are now a part of them, historicising activities not previously seen as historical because they were assumed to be natural' (Gordon, 1988: 92).

Gordon questions in particular the absence of the domestic sphere in mainstream history.

Secondly, by attaching importance to the activities of women which have not previously been seen as historical, we can see the relationship between men and women's activities. Natalie Zemon Davis comments:

'Women's history must always be comparative, women's experience compared to men's, women's experience in one class compared to that of another' (Davis, 1988: 86).

Linda Gordon supports the latter point and argues that women's resistance, conflicts and ambiguities arise during constant negotiations between the sexes, not in isolation (Gordon, 1988: 92).

Fox Genovese (1982) also argues for developing women's history within mainstream history because, for her, this addresses women's experiences within wider historical processes. Since, until now, the dominant historical subject has been male, the history, thus written, has treated everything non-male as 'Other'. The challenge for Genovese is not to substitute the female subject for the male subject, but to explore the ambiguous and unequal ways that relationships between gendered, raced and class-specific subjects are forged. She argues that making a place for women's history within mainstream history will lead to confrontation, and that this will not only provide an opportunity to rethink the premises that inform historical interpretation, but will engage both parties in a constructive dialogue. This approach asserts that to accommodate women's history within mainstream history is to challenge the latter's foundational premises. To move away from mainstream history and project women's history and women's experiences as unique and different, would be to accept the existing categorisation of women as the 'Other'.

When writings which emphasise both the public and domestic experiences of women are placed within mainstream history, they prompt us to explore the role of gender in constructing social roles for both men and women within the family. On the same point Genovese states:

‘Placing women’s history within history forces a substantive re-investigation of the nature of family relations, possibly gender conflict within the context of social, economic and political relations’ (Genovese, 1982: 17).

Some issues raised in writings which employ the inclusive approach are similar to those raised by researchers adopting the separatist approach. Both approaches agree that mainstream disciplines accord privilege to activities in the public domain during the process of documentation and interpretation of historical evidence. Some of the issues raised by writers particularly in the inclusive approach support my research. Of particular relevance are those questions which challenge the unimportance of women’s domestic lives and the subsequent exclusion of the relationship between the domestic sphere and the public sphere.

An area which will be investigated in-depth is that of the domestic sphere, and the associated strengths and dynamism inherent in the traditional roles of women. Within the context of Indian nationalism, the role of women in the domestic sphere had two major dimensions. First, women sought to maintain the harmony of the domestic sphere. Secondly, their limited but diverse contribution towards the movement within this sphere gained them social respect. Furthermore, their participation in the movement opened avenues for future development and made women appreciate the opportunities available to them in the broader public sphere. This progress of women continued even after independence, and I am myself a product of that progress. The fact that today I can discuss feminist theory in the West is due to my grandmother’s efforts and her real, if limited, encouragement to my mother. The relevant point is that, although, my grandmother’s small changes in consciousness may not have altered her status in society, they did lead to a change in the status of my mother and myself. Thus, that first step taken by my grandmother led to a chain reaction which has continued in subsequent generations.

Genovese's point about women's history slotted as the 'Other' in relation to mainstream history, as discussed earlier, can be understood in the context of wider historical debates where the very construction of 'Other' creates the norm that centralises some piece of social life. For example, categories like 'third world' and 'third world woman' tend to be used to emphasise departure from existing western norms, and thus reinforces western (often male) assumptions and stereotypes. This leads to the need to explore methodological issues which arise with constructions of the 'third world' and 'third world woman' as analytical categories.

Construction of the Category 'Third World'

In recent writings there has been an attempt to examine the use of the phrase 'third world' both in relation to theoretical texts on 'third world' history and in the construction of the category of 'third world woman'. This attempt stems from the need to challenge assumptions of the superiority of western modernity and the centrality of western culture, against which the indigenous 'third world' culture is seen as the 'Other', and 'third world woman' is seen as an undifferentiated historical subject. The earlier debates were initiated by historians like Said (1978), Chris Bayly (1988) and Yapp (1988) who examined how the West wrote the history of the rest of the world in relation to the construction of its own standards and categories and the assumptions that were formulated as part of that comparison.

Edward Said explains the representation in colonial discourses of the 'colonised as a fixed reality' (Bhabha, 1983: 23), stressing at the same time the construction of the Orient as separate and exclusive (Said, 1978: 206). In the colonial discourse the point of reference was always that of the West, from which was depicted the contrasting 'backwardness' and 'degenerate conditions' of the colonised. The Oriental was often identified with those elements within western society which were seen as

problematic, and it was associated with what was denied and marginalised. Furthermore, the Oriental was also feminised, as women became emblematic of the exotic 'Other'. It is within this Orientalist discourse that historical texts have tended to construct accounts of colonial territories and later the 'third world'.

Historians like Bayly and Yapp question the use of the term 'third world' in understanding non-European history. Bayly argues that in European writings, there has been a widespread attempt to combine the histories of India and the countries of Africa and Latin America in a general 'third world' history. These 'third world' countries tend to be defined not in terms of their own self-perceived 'identities', 'histories' and 'traditions', but in terms of what they are not. For example, there is often reference to colonies being poor, underdeveloped and stagnant (Gardiner, 1988: 85 and Bayly, 1988a: 157).

Different continents have had their own specificity of historical experience which is denied when they are amalgamated into a unified category of the 'third world', thus reinforcing the erroneous assumption that these continents share a unity of language, religion, culture and a common political tradition (Johnson, 1988: 162). Moreover, some critics argue that this amalgamation is 'merely the latest, condescending device for disposing of the perennial problem of describing the history of the non-European world' and the term can be seen 'as little more than a modern, progressive variant of colonial or 'native' history' (Yapp, 1988: 156 and Bayly, 1988a: 157).

While, to a certain extent, it can be said that these continents shared some similarities arising from their common experience of colonial rule, nevertheless it cannot legitimately be argued that they shared a similar history.

Construction of the Category 'Third World Woman'

I was also concerned with how to relate my identity in relation to wider feminist literature. Mohanty's analysis raises questions which are pertinent for my own analysis. Within writings on women in the third world, it is clear that the previously discussed problems assume great importance. It also needs to be emphasised that the western relationship to its 'others', codified in implicitly hierarchical terms, is present within western feminist discourse. Chandra Mohanty (1988) has argued that the analytical categories of recent feminist texts create a 'singular', 'monolithic' category of 'third world woman' (Mohanty 1988: 62). These categories construct 'third world women' as a coherent group sharing uniform oppression, articulating negative images of them as uneducated, traditional (thus conservative), poor and victimised. The historical heterogeneities and specificities of the lives of women in the third world have been colonised by feminist scholarship, which has not offered an adequate critique of the Orientalist discourse and has therefore worked within it (Mohanty, 1988: 62). Western feminist discourse sets itself as the normative referent.

What is relevant in terms of my own research is that the widely acknowledged participation of women in the nationalist movement in India has long stood out as evidence against this western feminist construction of Indian women as victims but it has been little mentioned in western feminist texts on third world women. The articulate bourgeois Indian woman is seen as atypical and her political participation as exceptional.

Non-Western Feminist Insights

Another debate relevant to my research was concerned with the difficulties in studying the lives of non-western women in terms of western feminist knowledge. Uma Narayan (1989) examines the problems in standpoint feminist epistemology for non-western feminists. Narayan's analysis and her own experience as a non-western

feminist in a metropole reflects the uneasy dilemma of working in the West and finding it difficult to relate the issues of feminist epistemology adopted by Western feminists to women in colonised nations. She argues that it is difficult to accept the privileging of women's different standpoint in non-western societies like India because of their specificity of experiences. Where traditions do oppress women but also accord them a high status, primarily through their roles as mothers and wives, it is counterproductive to adopt the values of western feminist epistemology that seek to privilege women's distinct 'ways of knowing'. She suggests that in,

'cultures that have a pervasive religious component, like the Hindu culture... everything seems assigned a place and value as long as it keeps to its place. (Women are) confronted with a powerful traditional discourse that values women's place as long as she keeps to the place prescribed' (Narayan, 1989: 258).

In other words, she argues that women are supposed to maintain and protect the roles assigned to them by the traditional discourse of the domestic sphere, and this discourse confers value to those roles. This is important because while conducting interviews, I expected that most respondents would have a desire to move out of their circumscribing traditional roles in the domestic sphere, but in fact I encountered an unquestioning acceptance of the norms assigned to these women by society. Women respondents said:

'If we went out, then who would look after the *lalan-bachan* (children). We know men can handle outside work, but they cannot handle children.'

This status of women nurturers was accepted as natural both by men and women.

Most women were comfortable in the position assigned to them by their traditional discourse, and within that position they managed to perform activities that raised their status in their own eyes and in the eyes of society. For example, a respondent who managed actively to support terrorists is also proud that she managed

the home and always cooked dinner on time for her husband. This not only draws our attention to the fact that the impact of traditional values is felt most strongly in the domestic sphere, but also reveals that whatever ideas and expectations are generated in the domestic sphere, do influence women's outlook in the public sphere. For example, if a woman is accorded high status for being a good mother or a helpful wife, she will conform and maintain that particular image in the public sphere and will rarely challenge it. As I will document later, during the nationalist period, dominant symbols often pictured women as nurturers of a healthy progeny and as good mothers preparing their sons for the battlefield.

Uma Narayan also offers useful insights into the importance of emotions in facilitating a better understanding of women's experience. (Narayan, 1989: 262). This is significant because in my interviews the respondents' description of their subjective feelings revealed tensions and conflicts in their lives which were more important than a chronological narrative of the nationalist movement. Subjective feelings are bound to affect the physical response of an individual to a particular situation and in the nationalist movement women's emotions invariably dictated their actions. For example, feelings of anger towards police brutalities made women respondents more fearless and willing to court danger. According to Indian tradition, a woman is supposed to leave her husband's home only upon her death. A recognised saying in India is:

'Jo Sati hai vo to doli me aati hai aur uski arthi hi uske pati ke ghar se jati hai' (A woman who is faithful to her traditions will uphold that tradition of Indian womanhood until her dying breath).

Under such circumscribing circumstances only a strong emotional response on the part of women could have driven them to leave their homes in such large numbers.

As an outsider conducting interviews, I may have failed to understand fully the emotional complexities of living as a woman in the early twentieth century, but since

these women respondents did not see themselves as oppressed, it may be said that they too were as comfortable with their own situation, as I am with mine. Thus, I came to realise that I could not completely identify with the feelings of these women since I had not shared their experiences of the nationalist movement. However, I did expect a certain awareness on the part of these women of the disadvantages of their conditions because, as Narayan argues,

‘It is easier and more likely for the oppressed to have critical insights into the conditions of their oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures’ (Narayan, 1989: 264).

In my study women respondents had little consciousness of their oppression, although most of them exhibited a strong nationalist consciousness. This was a learning process for me because it made me realise that I had failed to perceive fully the complexities of these women’s lives. At the same time they could not perceive the complexities of my own life, and to them I was more an object of pity. For example, respondents could not comprehend why a single unmarried girl should travel and conduct interviews alone, without the protection of men. I agree with Narayan that there will always be a gap in our perception of the other person’s experience, although I am uncomfortable with her idea that every individual from an oppressed class will necessarily have a consciousness of her oppression (Narayan, 1989: 264).

Dilemmas as a Non-Western ‘Other’

It was also apparent to me that there were bound to be limitations in writing about ‘third world women’ from a location in a western country. This problem surfaced with my understanding that the category ‘Other’ is not a fixed category, but its meaning shifts according to context. As a non-western researcher, I could identify ‘otherness’ at two levels. As a researcher who was born and brought up in India, I could accept that in the process of conducting my interviews I would be subjected to

the same social constraints as any other Indian woman. However, there were times when I was faced with the problem of being positioned as 'Other' by my respondents because I was a researcher from Britain and had what was perceived as the advantage of being able to return (to Britain) to write about my investigations. My nationality was subordinate to my social position. The respondents perceived me as someone from the West first and as an Indian later. Secondly, I found it difficult to follow the precepts of what I understood to be feminist methodology. I became aware that I could not write about the experiences of these women by using only their own language and categories. But this involved the risk of 'othering' them.

The respondents were impressed when they realised that I was doing my research degree in England. This might have worked to my disadvantage had the respondents tried to give a 'good impression' of themselves and not mentioned negative experiences as nationalist activists. I had to make a concerted effort to convince them that it was not the 'glamour' of their participation that I was interested in. Instead, I wanted to produce an account of their anxieties, problems in their familial lives and, more importantly, their distinct experiences as women in the nationalist movement. I had a torn consciousness of being both the 'Other' (as a researcher from Britain), and one of those 'others' whose history has often been misrepresented by dominant cultures, in this case Britain. To a certain extent, I was in an advantageous position because I could draw on both these perspectives.

From my knowledge of feminist debates on gender inequalities, resistance and oppression, I expected the respondents to challenge the constraining norms and unequal relations in both the public and domestic spheres. However, on the contrary women were proud of the fact that they were able to take on domestic roles which men were unable to undertake. For example, women did not consider their roles as wives, mothers and nurturers to be inferior. Instead, they were confident that through these roles, they could contribute to the nationalist movement. Respondents were also

aware that without their help, men themselves could not participate effectively. Though in the early stages, many women did not come out of the domestic sphere, their consciousness within the domestic sphere changed during the nationalist movement.

My analysis of the interviews raised the question of who exercises the right to decide who is oppressed? For example, who is constructed as the 'Other' when feminists attempt to deal with these questions? I face the dilemma of being, in one respect the 'Other' (since I am from a formerly colonised nation), but at the same time I am less of an outsider in Indian society and with the women I interviewed than western white researchers who have framed theories of feminism. I struggled with this conflict of being a non-western researcher equipped with western methods of analysis and trying to understand the lived experiences of non-western Indian women belonging to a different generation and historical context.

Research Values

Oral narratives have been used in feminist research as tools for empowering the researched, illuminating the subjectivities of women and understanding and empathising with narrators' life experiences. Beginning with Oakley (1981) whose critique of conventional sociological interview methods raised the idea of non-hierarchical interactive and reciprocal research, others like Hanmer and Saunders (1984), Lather (1988), and Sanghatana (1989) have looked at the relationships researchers are involved in when constructing oral narratives and subjective accounts from women's point of view.

Patti Lather (1988) offers useful suggestions for carrying out feminist empirical research. First, she puts forward the idea of pursuing research from a post-positivist perspective in which the unchanging and established truths and rigid techniques of

acquiring knowledge- features of a conventional positivist paradigm- are challenged. In the post-positivist approach, more dynamic forms of learning are encouraged which take into account the complexities of human experience. Secondly, Lather argues that our perceptions and knowledge as researchers should reflect the participatory values of anti-racism, anti-classism and anti-sexism (Lather, 1988: 570). Thirdly, she supports a praxis-oriented methodology that successfully empowers the researched, enhances our knowledge of the world and disclaims exploitative methods for acquiring knowledge (Lather, 1988: 570). A praxis- oriented paradigm involves an analysis that is critical and emancipatory and is guided by appropriate theory (Lather, 1988: 573). Emancipatory skills seem to be the main requirements for feminist research in Lather's analysis.

However, I would emphasise that it is difficult to say whether, as researchers, we are always successful in carrying out emancipatory research. Lather recognises this problem to some extent when she comments that we should continuously scrutinise our theoretical demands and their impact on empirical research (Lather, 1988: 576). However, it is not clear whether Lather is suggesting a universal method of research for both the west and the third world.

Lather, like Hanmer and Saunders also assumes the idea that when women are interviewed by other women, the respondents are eager to establish a dialogue which is both interactive and reciprocal.

'Interviews that entails self-disclosure on the part of the researcher foster a sense of collaboration' (Lather, 1988: 574).

Developments Within Feminist Methodology

However, the woman-to-woman relationship in research that aims to be emancipatory has been brought under scrutiny in recent feminist literature. Issues of

oral narratives as a site for interpretative conflict as well as a form of academic appropriation even by feminists are raised by researchers like Judith Stacey (1991), Sherna Berger Gluck (1991), Daphne Patai (1991) and Katherine Borland (1991). Looking specifically at ethnographic methods of conducting research, usually seen as the method most consistent with feminist principles, Stacey argues that this method encourages a collaborative and interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the researched (Stacey, 1991: 112). While agreeing with Lather, Hanmer and Saunders and Oakley on the collaborative and liberatory advantages of woman-to-woman research, Stacey focuses on certain contradictions in the ethnographic research process and feminist ethics. First, where the process of research involves a close interaction with the subject of study, there is always a possibility of manipulation by the researcher, who not only intrudes in the personal lives of the respondents but also runs the risk of failing to respect the confidentiality of information received. At the same time the exploitative consequences of sharing an extended period of intimacy 'seem unavoidable' since:

'the lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data-grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power' (Stacey, 1991: 113).

Secondly, Stacey points to the dilemma a researcher faces when writing a permanent document, which she describes as the 'dissonance between fieldwork practice and ethnographic product' (Stacey, 1991: 114). The written document, she argues, is structured, moulded and interpreted by the researcher, and although the researcher can discuss the final narrative with the respondents, it 'does not eliminate the problem of authority' (Stacey, 1991: 114).

Gluck and Patai (1991) also argue that in the triangular relationship between the narrator, interviewer and the text as final product, the narrators are left with little

authority once the interview is over and their narration is structured by the interviewer. Gluck and Patai state,

‘Whatever control they exercise during the interview, when they are able to negotiate the terrain, usually ends once the session is completed. This shift in control over the narrative reveals the potential for appropriation hiding under the comforting rationale of empowerment’ (Gluck and Patai, 1991: 1-5).

The problems of ‘authority’ and ‘appropriation’ that Stacey, Gluck and Patai discuss have been analysed in terms of interpretative conflict by Borland. Borland perceives the interview process as a terrain where meanings are constantly negotiated between the researcher and the narrator. As researchers, Borland argues, our consciousness is a product of our social environment and we tend to read our narratives through feminist concepts. For example, we may perceive a particular social event in which the narrator participated, as a challenge to patriarchal structures. However, what we have to consider is that the narrator may not have seen her actions in a similar way. In these situations, she argues that researchers should avoid misrepresentation by trying to fit the collected data ‘into their (own) paradigms’ and instead grant ‘interpretive space’ to the narrator (Borland, 1991: 70).

In my experience the effort to establish a non-hierarchical relationship based on empathy and collaboration made me continuously question myself. I often used to ask: whose voice am I representing? Is that what she actually said or is it my interpretation? I often struggled with the moral dilemma of wanting to achieve something concrete from the interview through the production of a written document, while the researched subject had not gained such an outcome. My other worry was while I interviewed women in the role of a feminist researcher, it was difficult for me to use a feminist vocabulary, as for many of the interviewed women concepts like consciousness and gender-equality made no sense. Thus, on many occasions I had to use the language and categories familiar to the respondents.

Interpreting Memories

Although oral narratives provide insights into the subjectivities of women, these narratives are also shaped and influenced by the memories of the respondents. A methodological issue that arose during my interaction with the respondents was associated with their 'partial memories'. I was aware that I must continuously question what is being narrated and ask whether the respondent was consciously or unconsciously blocking some events and feelings from the past. What made matters difficult specifically in my study, was that the respondent's memory was shaped both by events in the previous historical period (colonial India) and her particular experiences in independent India. I realised that activists who received government pensions tended to stress the positive aspects of the nationalist movement. For example, a respondent who was a pensioner described the movement and her role in it with no mention of any tension, distress or turmoil. A particular non-pensioner described similar activities, but highlighted the difficulties of participating, the upheaval caused in her personal life and the financial difficulties she experienced. She also stated that the Indian government should acknowledge the sacrifice she has made. Moreover, some respondents who were employed and were now relatively independent did not want to articulate their experiences when they had been in strict *pardah*. They clearly did not want to remember those days and my enquiries about *pardah* seemed quite painful to them. I also discerned that sometimes the respondents did not feel very strongly about the past in their present situations but were really being forced by my enquiries to recall their past or risk being considered unpatriotic. It is for some of these reasons that historians who rely on 'facts' and 'hard evidence' would find it difficult to negotiate with narratives shaped by 'memories'. June Purvis cites Seldon, who argues that:

'Failure of memory is a serious criticism which can be levelled against oral history. In addition there may be retrospective editing, self-justification, myth building and other evils' (Seldon in Purvis, 1987: 75).

Life narratives are also influenced by the imagery and nationalist symbols which dominated during the period in question and which influenced women's lives. In the Indian context, respondents were often inspired by such imagery and symbols. The nationalist movement was successful in achieving mass mobilisation through imagery and symbolic representations both of which are components of the myth-making process. The use of imagery and symbolic representations can be traced at both the national and personal levels. At the national level we had symbols of woman as the 'saviour of civilisation' and 'mother India', to cite just two examples. On the personal level the images of mythological goddesses, *Durga* and *Kali*, goddesses who shared attributes of courage, destruction and victory were vivid. Such imagery symbolised for my informants the intensity and enthusiasm generated by the nationalist movement.

Passerini has also identified the symbolic use of representations by women in their life stories, arguing that a particular representation of women as rebels was used by her narrators to symbolise a reversal of gender roles rather than any concrete reality:

'If today we find affinities in the individual life stories with that age old image, we can conclude that individual mythology may draw its power from the fact of not being true but rather from acting as a source of inspiration, encouragement and excitement in the face of a different social reality' (Passerini, 1989: 191).

Even historians tend to use symbolic categories such as the 'nation' and 'common people' to add emphasis to their historical tracts or to understand popular movements (Samuel and Thompson, 1990: 4).

This leads me to the final dilemma: How do we know what is the truth and what is a false reconstruction of the past? and how do we identify the unconscious and conscious repressions of the respondent?

Truth

The truth of oral narratives, unlike the 'reassuring truth of the scientific ideal' (Personal Narratives Group, 1989:261) is constructed through interpretation and more importantly through a close scrutiny of the contexts that influence the narration of personal testimonies. The reliability of people's own perceptions of their experiences rests on the reality that as narrators human beings can be unpredictable as well as inconsistent and therefore in 'relying on them as sources of information one has to consider the issues of memory...[and] subjectivity' (Fleischmann, 1996:363). I will discuss the reliability of oral narratives in my research in relation to the issues of subjectivity and memory, since the construction of memory is a continuing part of the construction of self.

Subjectivity is rooted in time, place, historical context and individual experience. Paul Thompson has argued that in recording an oral testimony an interviewer learns to exploit the subjective knowledge of the narrator, concentrating more on what the respondent wishes to remember and wants to share, rather than on what the interviewer wishes to know and hear (Thompson, 1988:110). However, I found that one still has to help the narrator to focus on the past and explore incidents and feelings in depth. One could enable the respondent to remember and share more both by phrasing and placing questions carefully as well as by not forcing the respondent to commit herself to statements of unorthodox values or admissions of unconventional behaviour. For example, a respondent would make a particular statement that was loaded with information but would then suggest it as something she had heard from another source. However, her answers to other questions would suggest otherwise.

Social location as well as individual outlook shape subjectivity, perception and memory. These in turn affect the nature of the narrative. For example, respondents outlook towards nationalist politics was no doubt influenced by their economic and

social status in post-colonial India. It was however difficult to distinguish failures of memory from what Fleischmann calls 'faking' (Fleischmann, 1996:363). However, although in principle informants may tell conscious or unconscious falsehoods, my informants characteristically kept silent on certain parts of their stories. Though on many occasions I noticed discontinuities in narration and displacement in facts (when compared with newspaper reports for instance), I could not put these down as lying.

The Personal Narratives Group argue that women respondents in the interview situations reveal their own 'truths'. Though these truths do not reveal the past 'as it actually was', they 'are neither open to proof nor self-evident' (Personal Narratives Group, 1989:261). I also realised that sometimes respondents camouflaged important feelings with misleading statements which can be interpreted as conscious distortions of the past. For example a respondent Sridevi Tewari tried to disguise from me her commitment to the nationalist cause after her marriage. She had married a lecturer with anti-nationalist sentiments and initially she refused to talk to me about her nationalist feelings even after marriage and seemed merely enthusiastic about her father's encouragement regarding her nationalist activities. It was only after a few meetings and her growing trust that she said:

'I was not allowed to express my emotions on the movement and often cried at night. I hated to be married and to operate under restrictions of such kind'

I could sympathise with the feelings of women from conservative households who would hesitate to reveal aspects of their domestic lives and their individual emotional stress. Stree Shakti Sanghatana suggests that,

'What we remember is, by and large, though not entirely, culturally sanctioned (even those memories we preserve in the secret recesses of our minds are ideological in that they are what is socially tabooed)' Hidden conventions and models shape the 'fiction' through which we grasp and project our lives' (Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989:3).

It could be said that sometimes a respondent recounts different sets of details to different interviewers. For example, one of my respondents had provided an articulate narration to a newspaper on her specific activities in the movement (which I discovered much later) whereas, when I interviewed her a few months later, she seemed not to remember the same details. Memory is subjective and the above example can either be interpreted as for instance, a failure of memory, a reaction to tiredness, a conscious effort on the part of the respondent to hold back some aspects of the past or simply a different focus on the part of the interviewer. However, in other cases respondents told me of details that did not appear in published newspapers.

Memories are also shaped by myths and rumours, emphasising the complexities in all narratives. Myths are part of a domain in which the past and present, the conscious and the unconscious, and the real and imaginary intersect. Passerini defines myth as 'collective, shared by many, super-individual and inter-generational, beyond the limits of space and time' (Passerini, 1990:50).

The world of the imaginary, 'of dreams, images (and) fantasy' in Passerini's (1990:54) analysis is an important component of myth-making and effectively shape reality. I was faced with the question of where to draw the boundary between the imaginary and the real. For instance, a few respondents narrated daring accounts of their activities during the movement, for example being chased by an army of police, jumping over rooftops while ones's house was being searched by the police or eating sand for dinner instead of food. I found it difficult to differentiate between what actually happened, how much was imagined and how successful these women were in achieving what they dreamt of doing.

Sarkar suggests that in the Indian context there has been a close relationship between the imaginary and ideas which circulate as rumour. For example, in the nationalist movement, the rumour that the arrival of the 'Mahatma' (Gandhi) would end landlord oppression affected the subalterns' reactions (especially from Bihar and

eastern UP) (Sarkar, 1982:181, Amin, 1984:3). The peasants in eastern UP stopped paying rents to *zamindars* and violated *panchayat* rules, interpreting their actions as 'Mahatma's orders' (Amin, 1984:35).

Our task as researchers should be to listen carefully and identify how omissions and displacements shape a narrative. Some of the data we collect from oral narratives can be validated with the help of official documents. For example, the Intelligence files of the police in the state archives corroborated some of the political details given by the respondents. For example, Sushila Misra would not talk to me about an incident in which her husband, Brahmdutt Misra, had at first turned state informer but later refused to help the British government by testifying because she and her mother-in-law had disowned him. Sushila Misra told me the year of her husband's arrest, but nothing else, implying that it was of no importance. A fuller story was narrated to me by an associate of Brahmdutt, Shiv Verma, who had been arrested for the same offence. Shiv Verma was a witness on the morning when Brahmdutt received a letter from his mother and wife, chastising him for his unpatriotic conduct. What is remarkable is that Sushila Devi, an ordinary woman with traditional values, could rise to the occasion and question her husband's political integrity. What stopped Sushila from narrating the other half of the incident is not entirely clear even though her role was commendable. It is likely that she considered that it would be inappropriate for a woman of traditional values to criticise her husband, even though she believed that what he did was wrong or was ashamed of it. This incident also reveals the silences of memory or the unconscious and conscious repressions of the respondent.

Disciplines that highlight the importance of certain 'truths' because they conform to established standards of validity should recognise that such elevation serves 'to control data, control irregularities of human experiences and ultimately control what constitutes knowledge' (Personal Narratives Group, 1989:262). Moreover, a narrowly defined understanding of what constitutes 'truth' may lead us to

exclude experiences which can only be explained by an in-depth analysis. The Personal Narratives Group suggests that the existence of 'multiple truths' in all life stories. The different angles of interpretation created when we delve into the 'relationships' that influence the narrative, the 'conditions' that affect them and the 'forms' that pilot them - these not only impart varying perspectives but 'reveal multiple truths of a life' (Personal Narrative Group, 1989:262).

An understanding of the sources of the 'truths' of individual women's experiences tells us something about the social constraints that form part of women's experiences. Moreover, we need to understand that 'truths' result from the interaction of the person (self) with society and the ways in which reality is constructed for individuals. As Frieden says:

'In acknowledging her own shaping of events and characters, the narrator does not presume to convey an objective 'truth'; rather, she acknowledges the frightening possibility incurred by writing, both in terms of a truthful rendering of another's life and in terms of authorial projection' (Frieden, 1989:173).

Researcher, Researched and Research Techniques

In the following sections I will discuss the process of contacting and interviewing respondents who had been influenced by or participated in the Congress led nationalist movement from the Civil-disobedience (1930-32) to the Quit-India movement (1940-47) in Uttar Pradesh. The process of obtaining access to respondents, brought me to interview women who were not participants, but I found their perceptions of the prevailing social environment interesting. There was, however, considerable variation in their depth of knowledge on participation. Some women had not even seen a *charkha* (a spinning wheel and a nationalist symbol) and had been ignorant of the achievement of Indian independence. Others had known all

about the nationalist movement, but still did not feel motivated enough to participate in it. It was difficult for me to make the respondents understand the interest that these small details have for feminist research in the way they reflect their subjectivities.

Initial Fears

In the initial stages I was unsure how to conduct an interview and used a pre-planned formal questionnaire to overcome my uncertainty but certain factors convinced me of the non-feasibility of this method. First, the long series of questions made the respondents impatient. On many occasions they wanted to see the end of the questionnaire, with some of the respondents impatiently asking for the next question or looking into my notes to see how far I had reached. Secondly, my own capacity to respond to what they were saying or ask different questions was unconsciously limited, and I could not think beyond those questions. It seemed that with set questions, I could gather a lot of data, but on closer scrutiny I realised that the resulting accounts were very superficial, with the respondents having said very little about their own perceptions of their experiences and having talked more in terms of the general activities in which they had happened to take part. Furthermore, the way I had thought through and structured my questions did not necessarily help the respondent to recall and narrate her life experiences. The inadequacies of a questionnaire (see appendix A) circulated (by the organisers) among participants in the National Freedom Fighters Conference, held at Chandigarh in 1993, convinced me to adopt other interviewing methods for obtaining information.

An informal conversational approach proved to be fruitful because women were often encouraged to discuss certain key moments of their lives indepth. Often these were incidents which even the most thoroughly planned questionnaire might have overlooked. For example, one of the interviewees, Smt. Vijay Devi Rathore, narrated an incident which was not even related to what she had previously said but which, she

felt, had left a deep impression. She recalled that in the Farrukabad Jail the women prisoners were monitored by an English woman jailer. Once, the *zamardani* (the lady who cleaned the premises) was instructed by the jailer to inspect the prisoners. The *zamardani* even saw the sanitary napkin that the respondent had on, she recalled. But instead of expressing shame the respondent had become very angry and asked the *zamardani* 'have we committed a *dacoity* (robbery) that you are searching us?'

This incident was narrated when the respondent tried to tell me about the *josh-utsah* (enthusiasm) women had for the nationalist movement. While framing the questions I myself could not have predicted a situation like this; and secondly, most planned theoretically-informed questions omit these small realities of existence, assuming that women are some sort of nationalist heroes:

'If we want to know how women feel about their lives, then we have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities... Women's oral history requires much more than a new set of questions to explore women's unique experiences... we need to (see) whether our interviews create a context in which women feel comfortable exploring the subjective feelings... whether they encourage women to explain what they mean in their own terms' (Gluck and Patai, 1991: 17).

I was also distracted by worry about completing my PhD project and anxieties about whether the interviews would be successful, whether the respondents would provide me with answers which fitted my planned theoretical framework. As a historian moving from an orthodox mainstream disciplinary training towards interdisciplinary research on women, I was usually unsure whether my research would be 'feminist' enough to be accommodated within the current debates of feminist theory and practice.

I realised that feminist consciousness is derived from the daily lived experiences of being a woman. I was in the advantageous position of being not only a woman but also working in the specific field of gender relations. This reflected on my research practice. For example, as a woman I realised the importance of emotions and feelings

in shaping our lives. Although feminist research is best carried out by women, I was aware that not all women researchers are feminists or equipped with feminist methodological tools. Similarly, on the nature of feminist research, Lather points out that ,

‘feminist researchers see gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives’ (Lather, 1988: 571).

This is also how I saw gender, and in my oral interviews it was important to understand the nature of women’s participation and how gender intersected and mediated with nationalist and colonialist impulses. Feminist research entails not only an awareness about correcting our marginal status in mainstream history through different research methods and techniques, but also the identification of cooperation and conflict in relations between the sexes. In this respect it was important for me to interview men who were willing to talk about their own activities as well as their perceptions of women’s activities.

During my research I came to understand that feminist research, while acknowledging the role of men in constructing hierarchical structures, should not be oblivious to the fact that women also create, maintain and resist unequal structures. In the context of Uttar Pradesh, age differences facilitated the construction of unequal relationships not only between women but also between men. For example, a woman might be encouraged by her mother to participate in the nationalist movement, but might be discouraged by her mother-in-law. I should also point out that once a woman was married, the parental influence decreased and she was expected to abide by the regulations of her husband’s household.

Recording Information

In my interviews I wanted to illuminate the emotions, desires and feelings of the women being interviewed. Most women were nostalgic and often broke down while discussing their activities. For example, some respondents became tearful while others became sad at the thought of the hardships they had faced during nationalist days. However, the respondents would have hesitated to express themselves had I tried to record their statements on tape. Indeed, as an expression of respect for the feelings of the respondents and their privacy, I did not use a tape-recorder and used to elaborate my handwritten notes later in private. Sometimes the respondent needed the help of a family member to translate my questions into her own dialect; or if she was deaf, a loud voice was required and a family member generally assisted. However, I tried to conduct each interview on a one-to-one basis, and did not encourage much family participation if it was not required. This is because I wanted the respondent to 'speak for herself' as far as possible and not to be dictated to, or interpreted, by family members.

After my informal, more conversational interviews I faced the task of separating, sifting and rearranging the information I gathered. For example the respondent would often like to discuss the nature of work in which she was currently involved, or the health problems she faced in her old age. Then she might remember a song or a nationalist slogan, and would want me to first make a note of this before she discussed her participation in the movement. It was then my task to locate the song within the respondent's subsequent account of her nationalist activities.

Duration of Interviews

In my research repeated interviewing of each informant was useful. My interviews were completed over a couple of days and each interview session lasted from three to four hours. No particular time schedule was followed. I had to be

flexible according to the routine of the respondents. The first meeting was sometimes particularly uncomfortable if the respondent could not be informed beforehand of my arrival because she could not be reached by phone. However, if it was convenient, some respondents liked to talk straightaway, or some, like Narayani Tripathi spoke for a few minutes and then said:

‘now you have initiated my memory. If you come again, I will be able to tell you more. I will now start thinking about (those) days. Sitting out here I cannot remember much’ (Transcript of interview).

There could be a gap of a few days before I could interview the same respondent again. One reason was that respondents would often need some time to recollect their memories. In addition, they had not spoken about their activities to anybody for a long time. I am also trying to make the point that the respondents’ stories had not been rehearsed in their minds over and over again for public consumption. This part of their lives had apparently not become central to their own sense of self identity in the present.

Often the women were old, and I could not pursue the interview at great length because they found it tiring. For example, one of the respondents, Sushila Devi, used to go to rest in her room for fifteen minutes before resuming conversation. They would often go off at a tangent and break the continuity of the conversation. They were forgetful and sometimes they started recanting, that is they denied what they had said. In order to be sure of what they really meant, I had to re-confirm the statements originally taken down by myself. This increased the length of the interviews.

For women to discuss what they considered to be crucial and intimate moments of their life required more than a couple of meetings with them. For example, Vijay Devi Rathore, an activist, narrated an important incident only in my fourth meeting with her. The essential elements of building trust, confidence and intimacy could only be gained by allowing the respondents their own time, space and vocabulary. Several

meetings with the same respondent demonstrated a constant and sustained interest on my part to learn more about her activities. My desire to fully comprehend the respondent's life story generated enthusiasm in her too.

What struck me was that women from the lower middle-class were more hesitant in narrating their life stories than women from the upper middle-class. A plausible reason is that most upper middle-class women, being politically connected, were accustomed to making public statements and so most of their answers to my queries were probably well rehearsed. Women from lower middle-class backgrounds, though initially self-conscious and inhibited, became much more open and relaxed after the initial anxieties receded. They were ready engage in a process of discovering their own memories and emotions.

Relating to Informants

When I was conducting the interviews, I always felt that I was an outsider approaching an unknown territory. The interview involved both an intrusion in the respondent's space and then the dilemma of interacting in that space. I found myself confronted and drawn into the whole family nexus, which to the respondent was as important as her own activities. The extended family is usually seen as a formative influence on women in India. Gail Minault analyses how an 'extended family' is still regarded as 'the norm' in India and enables every individual to have 'essential points of reference' (Minault, 1981: 3). For example, advice is taken on the type and level of education a family member should receive, and whether it is appropriate for the daughter-in-law to work outside the home. Minault argues that while such a set-up might curtail the freedom of an individual, it strengthens the ties of kinship and offers a refuge when trouble befalls a family member. In my own family I have seen that no major decision can be taken until all the family members have given their opinion.

It is thus important to note the significance of the family nexus for the interview. For example with reference to the interaction of the interviewer with the respondents' family and social surroundings, Judith Stacey argues that

'no matter how welcome, even enjoyable, the field-worker's presence may appear to 'natives', fieldwork represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships, a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave. The inequality and potential treacherousness of this relationship is inescapable' (Stacey, 1991: 113).

In every interview, the interaction with each respondent and her family, gave me a certain status. For example, in some cases I was a social worker, researching as well as trying to improve the position of under-represented Indian women. Sometimes I was given the status of a daughter of the family. Most of the respondents were surprised that an Indian woman working in a foreign country was still interested in Indian women. The respondents would say, '*Tum bahut mahan kam kar raye ho*', which means 'you are doing work for a great cause'. However, they feared that whatever they said would be carried over as data to an 'alien' country. This fear was reflected in many questions by them concerning the purpose of collecting this data, what I would finally do with it, and in which part of the world it would be read. My answers did not always make much sense to them. Nearly all of the respondents interpreted the research as being for some kind of book in which their names and photographs would be published. However, the fact that what they were saying would be read by many others made them slightly uncomfortable and cautious in the first few meetings. Sometimes, in order to avoid the interview, women outright denied that they had anything to do with the movement. In such situations, I had to gently persuade them to tell me something. This sometimes worked. I was also sure that even though all the women did not take an active part in the movement, they had definitely heard about it.

It was only after frequent meetings that the initial fears and hesitation of the respondents were partially overcome. Also, in many traditional homes the women of the family do not come out to speak to strangers or to be interviewed by them. Women researchers encountered a similar problem while interviewing women who had participated in the 1946-51 Telengana struggle in the princely state of Hyderabad:

‘The women we interviewed were opening doors on their private lives, often drawing on areas of experience that had never been exposed to scrutiny before. And in doing so they were challenging centuries of silence’ (Sanghatana, 1989: 27).

Here, two factors supported my research. Being from a different generation has its own disadvantages when conducting interviews, but on many occasions younger generation women (like me) are seen as less threatening than older women. Also, the fact that I am female facilitated my entry into conservative homes.

Deference towards elders, expected of any Indian woman, was also expected of me. I had to comply with the wishes of the respondents, so that, for example, they could speak for twenty minutes and then ask me to come again in the evening, or they could express anger if my questioning was too intense, or they could treat me like a little daughter. The point that I am trying to make is that as an Indian researcher, it was taken for granted that I would respond to the fluctuations in mood and behaviour of the respondents. I doubt if any Indian woman would expect so much flexibility in behaviour if she was being interviewed by a European white researcher. Perhaps the situation would have been different had I been older with more research experience behind me.

Though I established relationships with each respondent and her family, I was anxious not to interfere or be too familiar because I had not been brought up within that familial nexus. At the same time I did not discuss the family situations of one respondent with other respondents.

Most of these women lived with their sons and daughters who had shown no particular interest in their earlier nationalist activities. In India, old members of the household are looked upon with veneration rather than as responsible contributory members. Their basic needs, for example for food at the right time or sufficient sleep, are considered by family members to be more important than their accomplishments in their early lives. Thus, one reason why most of the respondents had not spoken about their activities was because they never had anyone who wanted to listen to them.

Differences with western society were sharpened in relation to the family situation. For example, women respondents in western society could demand a level of privacy when being interviewed, and they could expect not to be interrupted by their husbands or their children. In an Indian household that privacy is continuously invaded by other family members. On all occasions, within a few minutes of my presence in the home of the respondent, a male member of the family, usually the eldest son, introduced himself. The son would either leave, after enquiring about my purpose, or on some occasions would say, '*Ammaji's* memory has become weak though she can still try'. Sometimes, he would casually return to the room on some pretext. What I found interesting was that through these small acts the male member of the family seemed to be exercising a silent authority over myself and the respondent: over myself because I was an outsider and had no rights in the family, over the respondent because in her old age she was dependent on these male members of the family. Another reason could be that the son of the respondent was understandably protective towards her because, first of all, at her age she was vulnerable to the manipulation of people who were not a part of the family. Secondly, the respondent might be considered incapable of sitting through an interview or her health was unable to withstand it.

Sometimes, the husbands of these women would come to sit with us. Nearly all the Muslim men and some Hindu men adopted a patronising attitude when their womenfolk were being interviewed. The response of most Muslim men was, 'What is the use of interviewing them (women)? They are womankind. They have not stepped outside'. These men had a limited idea of women's access to, and knowledge of the outside world. The Muslim husbands and sons stayed throughout the interview and kept answering questions on behalf of the women. For example,

Question to woman: Did you hear your husband discuss the nationalist movement with his friends?

Answer from man: 'How could she? Women were not allowed to come and sit with men in the house.'

Answer from woman: When the food was ready, I used to stand behind the curtain to catch his eye and then I would hear his conversation with his friends.

If a man kept interrupting, I would ask another question, then wait and ask the same question in a different manner.

However, it was not only males in the family that interfered with the interviewing process. In the case of a well-known activist (later a prominent Communist Party member), the daughter-in-law objected to my presence in the house. One reason was that the daughter-in-law was a journalist herself and did not appreciate anybody else recording her mother-in-law's life-story, because she wished to publish it herself. The respondent realised the nature of this problem and arranged to meet me when the daughter-in-law was away at work.

Sometimes, if a sentence had to be translated, the tone of the family member or his or her way of asking the question was enough to stifle the respondent's free and open response. It was difficult to discern what the family members were trying to prevent, but sometimes my repeated presence in the family (for the purpose of interviewing) was looked upon suspiciously by both male and female members alike.

Two reasons can be given for this. First, I was a young researcher interviewing an aged lady and secondly, for some respondents and their family members it was difficult to accept that I was eager to listen to accounts of nationalist activities, since nobody had expressed an interest before. I realised that these women were conditioned to the 'silences' that were imposed on them by the power of the well-documented life histories of more prominent women. Until recently, it was only the activities of these women which were taken into account in the analysis of women's participation in the nationalist movement.

My research and presence provided these women with an opportunity not only to speak their minds but also to interact with someone who was genuinely interested in their experiences. On certain occasions I realised that some of the women felt personally insecure. The primary reason was their age, but some of them were also not in good economic situations, being dependent on their family members. Some widows whose late husbands had been freedom fighters received a small monthly payment of approximately five hundred rupees from the Government of India. The rest of the respondents were totally dependent on their families. My own economic status was seen in relation to that of my father, a doctor. A lot of women asked me, 'Does he have a private practice?'. They felt reassured that my father was a doctor and that he would be willing to render his services (free of charge) in times of need. This is based on the strong tradition of reciprocity in India. Some of the Kanpur respondents were already patients of my father, who had provided the initial introduction to them. At the same time my background helped to bolster the respondents' feeling of trust in me. They felt that since I came from a 'respectable' doctors' family, they could speak to me without fear. Some of them expressed their reservations about journalists and reporters whose backgrounds were less impressive, and who they said had fabricated details in order to complete their stories.

Non-Journalistic Interviewer

My specific interest in gender relations distanced me from media representatives such as newspaper-, radio- and television-reporters who had interviewed these women in the past. (Purvis, 1987 faced a similar problem). Initially, most of the respondents took me to be a journalist and were willing to speak only in general terms. I do not blame them, because the few historical reviews published by the newspapers are interested in small bits of information to add local colour. For example if a particular newspaper requires personal testimonies to supplement a special feature on centenary celebrations, then it will prefer to include as many activists as possible, but the accounts will be sketchy (although glorified) and will tend not to look at the dilemmas and problems that a particular participant faced. The focus will be mainly on what the participants did as part of the movement, rather than on what they could not do. Challenging participants to go beyond hackneyed accounts of a journalistic kind helped me to sustain the interest and respect of the respondents.

Gender and Generation

In oral narratives generational identity is as important as gender and influences the relationship between the researcher and researched. Most respondents were separated from myself by two to three generations. I am writing in the 1990's, looking at women's lives and activities from the 1930's. Some informants were born as early as the 1890s. Age is significant in India and I always felt uncomfortable with the thought of being treated as a child who needed encouragement. I had to think in terms of reducing the social distance between myself and the respondents and also deal with my initial discomfort at interviewing older women.

Some initial dilemmas of generational difference were to do with the use of categories and concepts. The meanings of gender, indeed the concept itself is a product of time and place. Most of the women respondents could not relate to the

notion of consciousness or gender inequality. Respondents were comfortable with their roles in the domestic sphere and did not see it as a site of oppression.

Ideas of respondents are shaped and influenced not only in terms of structural categories like class and race, but also through the mediation of culture, the social environment and generation. In the Indian context, issues perceived to be non-gender linked could be more salient for the respondent than her gender. For example, economic status and religion were clearly more important to some respondents than 'being a woman'. Judith Allen's (1986) observations are very relevant in analysing the lives of Indian women activists, particularly her suggestion that feminism should be able to explain women's experiences in different cultural contexts as well as in different periods of time. She argues that women before the 1950's should not be considered as 'backward' if they could not analyse their situation in feminist terms (Allen, 1986: 175). Instead it is a more useful exercise to study the constraints and limitations that groups of women experienced in different cultural contexts,

'that have made the same basic situations be experienced by masses of women as endurable oppression in some places and periods, in others less so, or not at all' (Allen, 1986: 175).

This would provide their past with a clearer perspective. In the context of my own research, women activists in India were subject to a different set of social relations and norms from those of the West or from Indian women today. The political context was different (India being under colonial rule) and the cultural context can be studied by analysing the construction of gender relations within the tensions between colonialism and nationalism, both of which were dominated by men.

Some of these ideas are also discussed in the writings of Nancy Chodorow (1989) and Sara Suleri (1989). In relation to gender consciousness of 1930's women psychoanalysts regarding their own professional lives, Chodorow states:

‘We can understand this low gender salience not only in terms of the internal structure of the interviewee’s gender consciousness, but also in relation to other aspects of social location and self categorisation. (For example) she (a interviewee) felt handicapped by being Polish and Jewish, but not as a woman’ (Chodorow, 1989: 214).

Similarly, there are situations where the ‘concept of woman’ is not significant. Sara Suleri’s autobiography refers to her situation in Pakistan as a child where women’s identities are constructed as mother, daughter and sister:

‘My reference is to a place where the concept of women was not really part of an available vocabulary. We were too busy for that, just living and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant’ (Suleri, 1989: 1).

My main intention was to hear the voices of subjects, but never in an unmediated way. I found our common anti-colonial experience to be the chief aligning factor after gender and my anti-colonial perspective was deepened by the actual experiences of the women respondents.

Interactive research

Each interview was different from the others, and I cannot see any single pattern in these interviews. With some respondents I was more sympathetic, with others more formal and with some a ‘family’ atmosphere was maintained. I also could not adhere to a bias-free textbook interviewing technique. On the contrary I encouraged the respondents to ask questions regarding my research, its purpose and methods, and sometimes personal questions relating to myself and my family. I came to understand that in order to tell a complete stranger like myself details of her life, an atmosphere of reciprocity and confidentiality had first to be created. In retrospect, I think if I had not attempted to answer the respondents’ questions, they would not even have bothered to make an effort to remember since most of the women interviewed found it very difficult to recall details of what took place sixty or seventy years ago. Some women

used to start by saying, '*kya kahen bhag to liya tha*', which means, 'What to say: yes we took part', in a reluctant tone. In such cases, I often used to speak to them about myself, partly because the 'researched' women should be given space to express their curiosity about the 'researcher'. Also, an initiative from my side alleviated the feeling of being a distant interviewer. In circumstances where I knew something about the respondent and the kind of information I required, but where the respondent did not know anything about me, it was helpful to speak about myself. Their ability to ask me questions also diffused the power hierarchies erected by traditional methods of interviewing, where only the interviewer asks questions and the respondent provides the answers.

I also realised that I was as eager to discuss my research and its future implications as the respondents were to tell me of their past. Moreover, the questions that the respondents asked could be seen as a reflection of support and interest towards my research. Their interest often led them to ask me to send drafts of my work to them. They wanted to know when the book would be out! Some expressed disappointment when I said that the book would be in English. Manavati Arya, a respondent and a highly educated lady, offered to help me in publishing the work in Hindi.

I was particularly concerned with the smallest details of their existence and to construct an overall picture of women's involvement in the nationalist movement. Respondents agreed that most of their activities they engaged in from within the domestic sphere had never been mentioned in conventional historical accounts.

Sensitivity to the feelings and emotions of the respondents was also an important aspect of my research tasks. The South Indian women's organisation Stree Shakti Sanghatana has analysed its experience of documenting the experiences of women activists in the Telengana peasant uprising, experiences (1946-1950) which add a different dimension to historical narratives.

‘The real value of these oral testimonies lies in their ability to capture the quality of women’s lives. Women are not spoken about, they speak for themselves. As we heard the life stories we began to build a sense of what the movement was for women; a sense of the pain, the isolation, the courage, the ingenuity’ (Sangatana, 1989: 27).

The nationalist movement was a complicated phase in many respondents’ lives and was a traumatic experience for some of them. Memories from that historical period were bound to bring back emotions, feelings and reactions which are certainly as important as the ‘hard’ data recorded in most of the archives. In other words, in order to ‘write’ about a movement you first have to ‘feel’ it.

Limitations of Interviews

Giving the respondents the opportunity for a free-flowing narration, does not imply that I was just a listener. The dilemma was of not knowing where to draw the line, of when and how to end the conversation. Sometimes, this process of learning about the respondents’ lives caused me anxiety, as I found that my attention was diverted to interesting tangents away from the focus on nationalism.

However, I realised that there were disadvantages of not using a questionnaire. For example, my time was restricted and I realised it would be difficult for me to return to India to undertake more research. With limited time, efficiency was important for me and I realised that a free-flowing narration would need a structure. This was achieved by having supporting questions for providing answers in my research. Questions such as, ‘is this what you are trying to say?’ and ‘is this what you mean?’ helped to clarify statements and elicit further information, both for me and the respondent. I tried to keep my talking to a minimum, but I also tried to give the interview some direction, for example by asking the respondents to elaborate their ideas or explain the meaning of certain words which I thought could help to clarify the character of the social and political environment.

Often, it was necessary to bring the respondent on track again. For example, if the respondent had started narrating a story about her neighbours' activities and not her own, then a question like, 'did your own family (uncles and aunts) share similar activities?' would be useful because it shifted the focus of the conversation back to the respondent and her immediate family.

Some problems arose because I thought of questions in English and then translated them into Hindi. Although all the interviews were conducted in Hindi, some respondents only understood words in their own dialect and here I found the task difficult. I had to translate from English to Hindi, then to the particular dialect. Sometimes I found it difficult to translate a question and retain the original meaning of some of my ideas.

Data Sources

My intention was to create a carefully researched nuanced picture of women's relationship to the nationalist movement. My initial survey of both official and unofficial records helped me to identify issues and key events, which could be interpreted in different ways, and to pose questions for myself, the answers to which would provide a better understanding of the movement.

Official Sources

Official written texts provide an initial framework for studying a specific area of research, and enable the historian to explore the past and to situate herself within a particular historical period. Writing on the nature of evidence used by historians, June Purvis observes,

‘for historians studying the past, written texts are usually the main and often the only source of evidence. During the period of collecting evidence, the historian usually develops a ‘feel’ for the period being studied’ (Purvis, 1987: 67).

To take the example of the Indian nationalist movement, the official sources that proved to be useful in my research were police intelligence reports, proceedings of the Government of India, fortnightly reports, the All-India Congress Committee papers and judicial papers. However, most of these records were written by men (either by British colonial officials, people appointed by the Raj or men associated with nationalist parties such as Congress Party) and tend to focus on what these men thought should be documented.

There has also been a significant amount of research undertaken on the nationalist movement specifically in Uttar Pradesh, by historians such as Gyanendra Pandey (1978), Stephen Henningham (1983) and Shahid Amin (1984). Their writings are guided by the subaltern approach discussed in chapter one, which focuses on marginalised and subordinate groups and the autonomous resistance offered by these groups in various stages of Indian politics, based mainly on official records. But, one has to look very carefully for any mention of women’s activities in the nationalist movement. They collected oral histories only as a supplementary method. Regarding his informants, Gyanendra Pandey states that

‘their rambles and recollections, unsupported by contemporary writings, might not be used too readily as ‘evidence’ in my work, but I felt they would provide many useful leads and a ‘feel’ for the time which written accounts could scarcely convey’ (Pandey, 1978: preface).

While Pandey used oral evidence to provide useful leads to other data and evidence, for me the official records (which were used extensively in his work) provided leads to the respondents. In ‘Mass Mobilisation’, an important chapter in Pandey’s book, there is no mention of women’s activities, ironic since the subaltern

school assumes that women are part of the masses. Earlier sources share the same inadequacy. For example, the historian D. A. Low's account does not include any reference to women's contribution to the nationalist movement in Uttar Pradesh. (Low, 1977).

Official texts do not problematise women's activities. For example, we cannot understand from these records how these women saw themselves as participants in a volatile political situation, and what it meant for them to be political actors in a male-dominated space. From these texts it is also difficult to assess the motivations of these women.

Unofficial Sources

Unofficial records of the nationalist movement include an assortment of private papers, correspondence between nationalist leaders and government officials, and the committee papers of nationalist parties. However, like the official sources, these unofficial sources tend to be written by men or are concerned primarily with men's relationships in the public sphere.

Although unofficial records are more useful than official records, they may not facilitate the study of all historical topics. For example, unofficial reports, and private papers such as those of William Malcolm and Graham Haig, or the correspondence between Jawaharlal Nehru and Motilal Nehru may be useful sources for documenting certain sections of the history of the nationalist movement, but they will definitely not be of much help in documenting the history of marginalised groups and especially of women. These accounts are concerned with only activities in the public sphere, especially the decisions taken by male leaders and to have a fuller account of the movement, we also need to study the domestic sphere and the less prominent.

These, official and unofficial sources need to be studied together with other written sources of information such as newspapers, autobiographies, vernacular magazines and, to some extent, other non-fictional literature relating to the period.

Newspapers

National and regional newspapers in either English or Hindi proved to be very helpful. I found the vernacular newspapers (mostly from the Uttar Pradesh region) particularly useful in providing political information about the state in which they were published, and they also furnished small details of events in the districts and *mohallas* (small localities) that comprise that state.

Another set of materials published in newspapers which became important sources for my research were poetry and cartoons from the nationalist period. Poetry and cartoons have often been seen as casual and fictional material, and have thus been regarded as unsuitable for historical research. Only recently have they come to be seen as useful sources of data (Rao, 1994: 36). Poetry, for example, reveals emotions of anger, love, distress and pain articulated through a particular nationalist vocabulary. Cartoons disclose the political mood of the time, and their specific humour reveals the political language and symbolism employed to convey the nationalist message. For example, a dog in chains and tied to a tree, which was labelled 'colonial rule' vividly symbolised the political situation of India and the plight of a country in distress (see figure 1).



Figure 1. 'A specimen of independence' (*Hindustan Times*, 27th May, 1945: 3).

The material, in newspapers particularly, gave me a general idea of the nature of women's activities and provided leads to politically active women. These were mainly women from well-known political families. My focus was not only on these few particular women, but also on the 'nameless' accompanying women, who to me, were as interesting as the ones who were more visible. However, a newspaper report or a fortnightly report would mention the name of a woman leader or two and then mention that they led a procession of women, a crowd of women or that many women accompanied these leaders. The task of looking for the 'others' that followed these women leaders was difficult because the newspapers often chose to state the activities and names of only those women whose menfolk were important nationalist leaders. For example, the Allahabad newspaper, *The Leader* stated,

‘about 5000 Indian ladies assembled to participate in a demonstration arranged by the local ‘dictator’ of the nationalist movement, Mrs. Uma Nehru. At the head were 2 wives of respected citizens of Allahabad, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Pandit Motilal Nehru’ (July 9, 1930: 13).

In this example, we do not know anything about the rest of the ‘5000’. Although, realistically, the newspaper cannot mention the names of all 5000, nevertheless to list the names of only those women whose menfolk were nationalist leaders is very restrictive. There must have been many in the 5000 whose menfolk were not leaders but whose contribution to the movement was as important as the ‘two wives of the respected citizens’. A relevant factor is that it was probably considered to be respectable and non-intrusive to identify a woman by her husband’s family name rather than including her personal forename.

Oral Narratives

Oral narratives provided the crucial link between all the other sources of evidence described above. I used the explanations and ideas offered by women narrators to ‘unpack’ the knowledge acquired through existing data.

Since I was more interested in the undocumented histories of the ‘others’, I thought that the best approach would be to talk to the older local people in the key areas. It was easiest to start with my own district, Kanpur, and to begin with my own mother’s contacts. I was surprised at the number of women she knew from this one district who had contributed to the movement, but whose names I had never seen in any official record. I also asked my father to put me in touch with all his old women patients. Not all were willing to speak to me but I was amazed to find how widespread nationalist feelings had been. Completely illiterate women from remote villages had at least heard of the movement, even though they had never participated in it and their villages had never been visited by a nationalist leader. The husbands of these rural

women were bonded labourers to the high caste land-lords. The husbands would come and narrate incidents to their wives which they witnessed at the landlords' houses. For example, Gulabo Devi, a washer woman from Uttar Pradesh, told me about her husband viewing *khadi*-clad (*khadi* is coarse hand spun cotton) men arriving in jeeps at the landlord's house. Long discussions used to take place. Money would change hands and often the landlord provided money to the local leaders of the district Congress. Sometimes these Congress men used to come late at night and leave without being seen by anyone in the village.

While travelling in India, I used to pay particular attention to women who were aged sixty years or more. Since I am Indian, my task was facilitated because talking to strangers was not seen as a sign of disrespect.

I was also helped by the most unlikely informants such as domestic servants and the milkman, people who offer their services to a number of households and have been working for, or supplying milk to, the veterans of the nationalist movement for years. Although they knew little about the nature of the political activities of possible respondents, they could provide excellent information on the approximate location or the house number of these respondents.

At this stage I think that although the number of interviews conducted is important, it cannot be taken as a basis to judge the validity and importance of the research. I have conducted fifty interviews of men and women but still feel that all of them in some respects are incomplete. A lot of questions have been left unanswered, not only because of time constraints but also because the respondents could not answer them. From my own experience I can say that no interview (no matter how many sittings one has done) is ever complete.

The thirty eight women and twelve men are all middle-class. The interviews are mainly with Hindu men and women. I was also able to interview a few Muslim women, though I could not interview any Muslim men. Most of the Hindu

respondents are from the Brahmin caste and others from Khatri, Bania, Rajput and Kayastha castes. The class and caste standing of these women meant that before the movement they would not have participated in public life. Family wealth, ownership of property and a high standard of living defined their middle-class status from those of lower class women. The former were not expected to work outside the home, unlike women from the lower classes.

Within these parameters, their social backgrounds were diverse. A sizeable proportion came from land-owning families, a smaller proportion were from business backgrounds and the smallest group comprised women from the professions. The literacy levels of women varied, but the majority had an elementary education up to class five standard, which was considered high for colonial times. Though a privileged class background helped women to acquire education, we cannot assume that all middle-class women were literate. Many did not know how to read or write.

Magazines and Proscribed Literature

The analysis of Hindi language magazines have been important to my research in illuminating women's perceptions of their roles within the domestic sphere. Most of the magazines were published in Uttar Pradesh from 1920 till 1947. The articles were written in Hindi by a small section of the educated middle-class men and women. This vernacular literature has provided contemporary views on the changes in the status and position of the woman in the family and the emerging new ideas in the public world. A more detailed discussion of Hindi language magazines as a source of data will be outlined in chapter five.

Proscribed literature (proscribed by the British government) is written mainly in Hindi and gave access to women's nationalist activities in public and private spheres. This literature has been particularly useful in constructing the analysis in chapters three and four.

Conclusion

A movement consists of individuals. When we study archival evidence, we analyse the movement as a whole and tend to forget that participants are individual people. Documenting oral life histories opened a new world before me: a world more real than official records. It was like reading the fine print. It was like a rich tapestry unfolding before me in which I could feel the texture, the weave and the variety of stitches. I also realised that as a non-western researcher I had to continuously negotiate 'otherness', both in relation to my social position in Indian society and also my status as a researcher equipped with western methods of analysis.

Though oral narratives do not provide all the answers, as a methodological tool they come closest to revealing the true character of the nationalist movement. These narratives, when placed within a specific historical context, advance our theoretical understanding on issues of gender, colonialism and nationalism. The narratives drew me closer to the individual subjectivities of individual participants in the nationalist movement. They provided useful insights into both the domestic and public spheres. More importantly, I learned about the domestic sphere as a site for different forms of political activity. Through the understanding I developed from narratives, I could problematise the definitions of terms like 'political', 'public' and 'active'.

However, oral narratives have to be studied in conjunction with other sources of evidence like official and unofficial records, newspapers and magazines. The latter provide the initial framework as well as helping to locate the historical context of the research. Early feminist debates focused on the differences between traditional oral history and feminist oral history. Distinctions have also been made between oral histories documented by men and women researchers. These debates have moved on and now even feminist oral history is questioned for its emancipatory practice. .

CHAPTER 3

DOMESTIC VALUES AND PUBLIC LIVES: THE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF WOMEN

Introduction

The most important aspect of the movement for the independence of India, from a women's history point of view, was that it saw the mass participation of middle-class women, women who until then had been confined to the domestic sphere. The two mass movements through which women emerged into public life were the Civil Disobedience movement (1930) and the Quit India movement (1940). This chapter draws on newspapers, magazines and oral narratives. All of them have their own limitations (as discussed in chapter two) since authors have their own political interests that shape their narratives. For instance, autobiographies of nationalist leaders minimise the divisions among people. Poetry is another source which I have used to provide an interpretation of the nationalist movement and undoubtedly there could be other interpretations of the poems.

Women's emergence into public politics was problematic. The political upheaval was a difficult and trying period in most women's lives. Women did not take to nationalist activities as if they were born nationalists or activists. In fact, both men and women were ridden with conflicts and ambiguities on the issue of women's public participation. However, the participation of the mass of middle-class women was made possible through what I term the domestication of the public sphere and this

chapter analyses this domestication as a process whereby women were able to enter the public domain without disassociating themselves from the domestic ideology. I will argue that women were able to take the values of the domestic sphere and their secluded existence into the public sphere and at the same time could bring some features of the public sphere into their domestic lives. This chapter identifies several ways through which the public sphere was domesticated. First, the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and the precedent provided by female nationalist leaders encouraged other women to participate in the movement. Gandhi's political language brought about a steady reconciliation of domestic and public values. For example, he insisted that women should come out only after fulfilling their duties at home and respecting their guardians' wishes. Hence, women would be able to carry over their domestic respectability when they participated in street demonstrations. Once women were on the streets, they maintained the non-violent, self-sacrificing benevolent image of the domesticated wife and mother. Secondly, the nationalist symbols created by the leaders facilitated women's entry into politics. Thirdly, domestic items like salt, liquor, and foreign cloth, were given symbolic and nationalist significance. The spirit of sacrifice was also stretched across the negotiable boundaries of the domestic and public spheres. In the public space, the spirit of sacrifice was demonstrated by women who faced the atrocities of the police, bore hardships encountered while picketing or demonstrating, courted arrest and served prison sentences. However, it should be recognised that there were some women who refused to follow the feminised Gandhian politics and instead adhered to a revolutionary ideology.

Closely associated with women's public participation were the themes of segregation and respectability. These can be best understood in the context of family dynamics. For example, the institution of *purdah* in India was originally a form of sex segregation practised only within the domestic sphere. However, when women began to participate in political demonstrations they maintained features of *purdah* by

keeping their heads covered, or by performing selective nationalist activities in women-only groups, for example, leading *prabhat pheris* (morning processions).

This chapter will also discuss the close association between the nationalist movement and nationalist households. Their daily existence as well as participation in the public domain was intricately tied with familial symbols and household dynamics. Consequently, we need to understand women's public participation in relation to their family nexus. Women's activities in the public domain did not bring any disharmony in their domestic lives primarily because most women came out of their homes only with the approval of their guardians and the support of their families. This may indicate that women who encountered difficult familial situations were unable to participate.

It was also the first occasion when women were exposed to a male-dominated public space and the male gaze, and it was thus essential that these women maintain their domestic values on the streets. By doing so, women not only stepped onto the streets, but also carved a political space for themselves within the male-dominated public domain. This also helped to dispel British stereotypes of their downtrodden and degenerate status (Liddle and Joshi, 1986: 24 and 32). I conclude, in this chapter, by pointing out the ways women experienced features of their domestic lives in some areas of the public sphere. This was specially true for women who were imprisoned for their political activities.

The analysis in this chapter is based on the reported experiences of women who were active in the movement, in the public domain between 1925 and 1945. Most interviewed women adhered to the Gandhian ideology of non-violence but some took to revolutionary activities. Official documents have also been useful.

Before I discuss the family dynamics I would like to provide a brief background on Uttar Pradesh which situates the specificity of this district in the socio-political conditions of the time.

Uttar Pradesh - Socio-Political Conditions

The North Indian state, now called Uttar Pradesh² (UP), has played a central role in Indian politics and is considered by historians as the Hindi speaking heartland of *Bharat* (India). Until the 1940s, it was divided into two distinct regions, firstly, western UP and the *doab* (the fertile tract of the country between the two rivers, Ganga and Yamuna) and secondly eastern UP and Awadh³. In the 1920s these two main administrative divisions were referred to as United Provinces of Agra and Awadh (see Kumar 1983 also see figure 2).

A brief analysis of the agrarian structure is important to understand the social basis of support for the nationalist movement. In the 1920s, out of a population of 46 million, 89 percent lived in rural areas and for the first half of the century, agriculture accounted for 74-76 percent of the workforce, though the districts of Western UP (for example Meerut) had a relatively low percentage of the workforce in agriculture (about 66 to 67%) and a higher percentage in manufacturing. In contrast eastern UP (for example Gorakhpur), due to uneven capitalist development, had a higher percentage (about 80%) in agriculture⁴. Despite some industrial advancement in the first half of the twentieth century, UP remained a largely agrarian province.

² North India included the United Provinces (Awadh and the Ceded and Conquered Provinces), the Central Indian States, the Central Provinces, Punjab, Rajputana and Kashmir (Kumar, 1983:242).

³ Districts that fell within these broad divisions in UP and were politically active were Allahabad, Aligarh, Muttra, Bara-Banki, Benares, Bulandshahar, Pratabgarh, Cawnpore (present day Kanpur), Farrukahbad, Faizabad, Rae-Barelli, Jalaun, Lucknow, Mainpuri, Shahjanpur, Meerut, Mirzapur, Moradabad and Sitapur (See Bayly, 1983).

⁴ Since Pandey's analysis does not take into account women's activities, one can assume that these percentages refer primarily to the male work-force (Pandey, 1978:12).

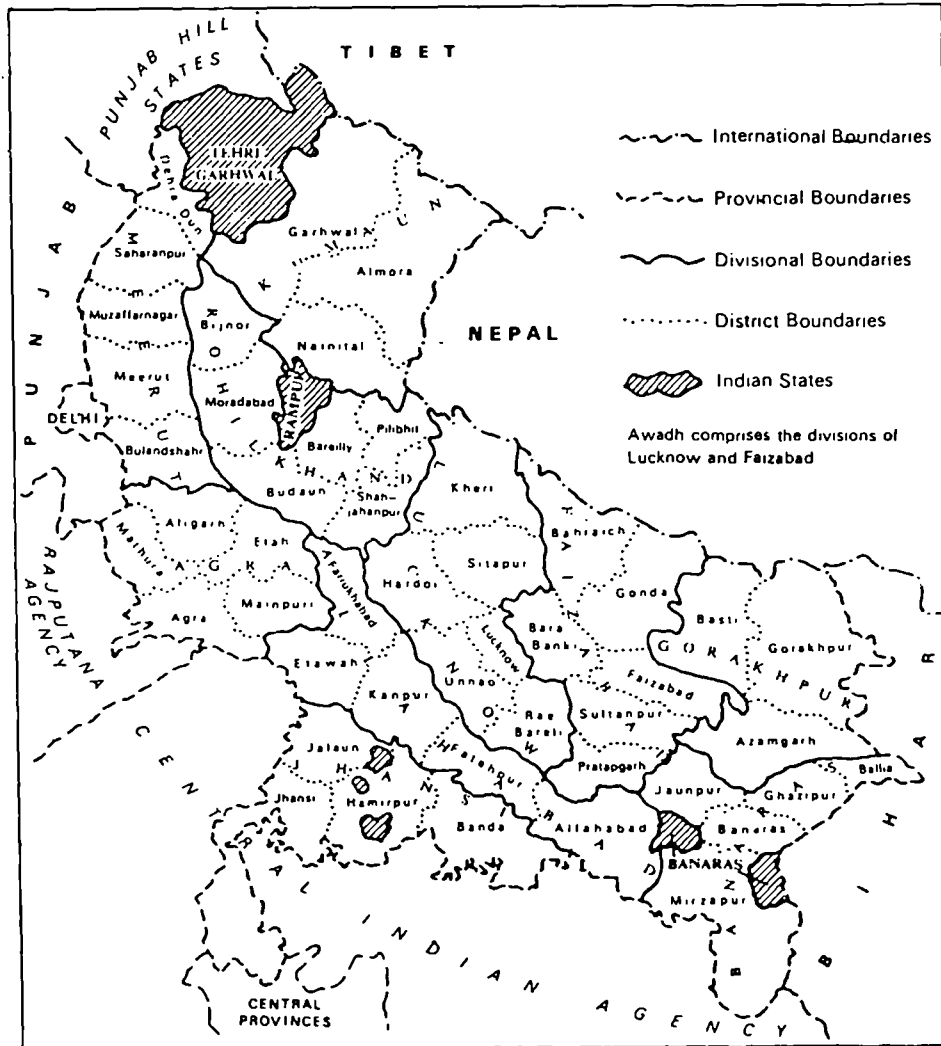


Figure 2. The United Provinces of Agra and Adwadh in 1926-34: Administrative divisions (Pandey 1978).

Social Background

In the 1920s the population of UP was 46 million with a substantial Muslim population. For example, in 1921 Muslims constituted about 14.5 percent of the population (Pandey 1978:25). Uttar Pradesh had three distinct tenurial arrangements under British annexation. In eastern UP, the British made arrangements with individual land-owners called *zamindars* (on similar lines as Bengal) whereas in western UP the village communities (*mahal*) rather than individuals were responsible for revenue to the British. In Awadh, after the scare of the 1857 uprising, the British

resumed the *taluqdari* settlements, the Awadh equivalent of the *zamindars*. Lower down in the hierarchy, in these three tenurial arrangements, were smaller landlords and rich peasants who held substantial land-holdings. Further below were middle peasants who cultivated their own land and lived on its produce and a large number of poor peasants who worked on the lands of other peasants and the landless rural proletariat. There was not much distinction between the poor peasants and the landless rural proletariat (Pandey, 1978:17)⁵. The prevalent caste-system was also significant and people under the category 'untouchables' were debarred from holding land.

The biggest spur to political protest was the economic crisis which followed World War I, leading to industrial retrenchment and the closing down of mills and factories. A wide spectrum of the population from the peasants to the lower middle classes in the cities were affected and in particular the unprotected tenants rose in protest in 1920-1 (Pandey, 1978:24). The landlords did not reduce their demands, despite these conditions of scarcity, and exacted higher revenues from the tenants, who sometimes were forced to give up their land. The tenants

'protested against the immediate oppressor, the landlord and the rich peasant. but they protested also, by implication and to some extent consciously, against the oppressor's protector, the British Raj' (Pandey 1978:23).

The UP Congress leadership was responsive to the growing peasant unrest and the landless and smaller peasants joined Congress ranks with the hope that Gandhi would restore their lands back to them (Sarkar 1983b:224).

The 1921 Census of India included under the category 'urban', the city, district headquarters, suburbs and smaller market towns. These 'urban' areas, many barely distinguishable from their rural surroundings, were the home of the earliest nationalist agitators.

⁵ For more details see Stokes (1975).

‘Teachers and journalists from petty landholding families who had sought alternative employment, either to supplement their agricultural incomes or simply because they would not touch the plough, minor lawyers, students and other men of rural back-ground provided a good number of non-cooperators’ (Pandey 1978:11).

In the cities and towns the economic dislocation affected not only lower middle class men with inelastic incomes but also the poor section such as petty vendors and errand runners. Along with the peasants they provided the social basis of political mobilisation in Uttar Pradesh.

The *Swadeshi* agitation in Bengal and campaigns for the boycott of foreign cloth (during Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements) favoured the Indian commercial and industrial bourgeoisie as against foreign capital and encouraged them to ally themselves with the Congress (Pandey 1978:55).

Education and Leadership

To develop political consciousness literacy was important, though the chief beneficiaries of education were men and women from the middle class. Pandey argues that the

‘growth in literacy and education helped to spread political consciousness, and young men and women with some English or vernacular education provided most of the active cadres of the Congress and other parties in the 1920s and later’ (Pandey 1978:27).

The number of educational institutions in Uttar Pradesh (universities and affiliated colleges) as well as the students enrolled in them increased between 1917 and 1927. Prior to this period, the one university in UP was at Allahabad. This explains to some extent why the latter was referred to as the city of intellectual elites.

‘Allahabad can boast of having been the home of many a prominent political and literary figure. (It) takes pride not only in Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, in Madan Mohan Malviya, C.Y. Chintamani and Tej Bahdur Sapru but is equally proud of its literary giants, Nirala, Pant, Mahadevi and Akbar Allahabadi’ (Rao 1994:29).

Further universities were established at Benares, Aligarh, Agra and Meerut. Nationalist leaders regarded education as important for understanding the significance of the nationalist movement. At a conference in Allahabad presided over by Dr. Ganga Nath Jha, Mrs Atiya Begum of Bombay said that

‘the present system of education was the chief cause for the demoralisation of Indian nationalism and until it was revolutionised there can be no hope for improvement. Students’ aim should not be to obtain degrees for service as slaves but to discharge their duty towards their motherland’. ‘Service as slaves’ referred to Indians who sought employment with the British Raj’ (Police Abstract of Intelligence, United Provinces, Allahabad, Saturday, Jan 17, 1931 p.60).

The rise of the incidence of unemployment among the educated youth also increased the count of people available for political work.

Key Political Parties in UP in 1920s and 1930s

The 1920s were important for the development of a broad-based Congress organisation and its accompanying Congress committees. The Congress made direct efforts to involve ‘broader masses’ (workers and peasants) through its policy of Harijan uplift (*acchutoddhar*) and through the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (founded in 1934) (Pandey 1978:32).

The United Provinces became one of the strongholds of the Congress during the Non-Cooperation campaign and the party held a leading position with a membership of 328,966 in July 1921 (Sarkar 1983:222). One of my respondents Shri Durgadas Bhattacharya stated that

‘during the 1930s the Congress was considered to be a large organisation and many people were attracted towards it. They thought that it was only Congress that could take them ahead. This had an effect on myself and I joined the Congress ranks’ (Transcript of interview with Shri Durgadas Bhattacharya).

Alongside the efficient volunteer organisations associated with the Congress party (mainly Hindu) was the Khilafat (Muslim) organisation, with the latter attracting Muslims exclusively. The Congress and Khilafat leaders worked together ‘for common aims but through separate organisations’ and though many Muslim volunteers joined the Congress ranks, ‘the initial separation of the volunteer association along communal lines was bound to be divisive in the long run’ (Pandey 1978:37).

The Non-Cooperation movement precipitated the widening gulf between religious communities. The Hindu Mahasabha and other sectarian organisations like the Rashtriya Svayam Sevak (RSS), founded in 1925, (the leading figures of the RSS tended to be from the upper castes) strongly advocated the formation of the ‘Hindu Raj’ which reflected only Hindu culture (Pandey 1990:235)⁶. In the 1930s, at a few public meetings, prominent leaders associated ‘the coming of swaraj’ with ‘the conversion of Muhammedans into Hindus which would serve as a revenge against the tyrannies perpetuated by them in olden times’ (Police Abstract of Intelligence, United Provinces, vl. XLVIII, Allahabad, Saturday, January 11, 1930, No.1, p.2). In response to Hindu communal associations, the Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah sought to preserve the Muslim majority areas from domination by Hindus and also

⁶. Since then these organisations have formed coalitions and promoted communalism (Basu et. al., 1993:2). In 1989 the Vishva Hindu Parishad was an important sectarian organisation and was supported by the political party Bhartiya Janata Party (Thapar, 1990:365). One of the programmes of the VHP for mass mobilisation has been to convert Dalits and tribals to Hinduism.

raised demands for separate electorates, a demand 'that would remain basic to Muslim communalism till the 1940 demand for Pakistan' (Sarkar 1983:235).

The Family Dynamics Behind Public Participation

Women as individuals had to deal with different social situations specific to their particular households. The dependence of women's participation on family decisions made their entry into the public sphere a complicated business. The dynamics of the family influenced the level of commitment and motivation which a particular participant could express towards the movement. Sometimes the initiative came from women themselves but other individuals were introduced into political activity by a family member. Though it was still difficult for women to adjust to political changes in the public sphere, it was less difficult for those born or married into politically active households. Women required the support, and to some extent the initiative, of their guardians.

One activist expressed her feelings on the political environment by stating that 'It was in the atmosphere: You could breathe the movement' (transcript of interview with Promilla Loomba). The environment was charged with anti-colonial propaganda, and activists believed that nearly all the households in Uttar Pradesh knew about the political crisis. However, there were differences between households which determined how easy it was for women's public participation. In one category were households that resisted any form of nationalist activism. They were anti-nationalist and supported British rule. The primary reason offered by respondents for this specific political attitude was that some members of their families were employed by the British government. The other kind of household within this category were those characterised by total political indifference. Some households were not in the least bit interested in the political activities developing around them. In a second category were

households which were fully immersed in nationalist activities and encouraged participation from individual family members.

The respondents and their political convictions and activities have to be located within the context of their social worlds. The general picture that emerges is that women required the support and co-operation of some male members of the family in order to participate. Women were often prevented from participating if the male members of the family were not themselves involved in some form of political activity.

The Unmarried Girl

The initial awakening towards political issues can be traced to the parental home where the respondents were primarily in contact with their father and mother. When it was a joint household, the respondents came in contact with the ideas of their grandparents and other family relations such as paternal uncles and aunts. Sometimes the father, a member of the Nationalist Party, encouraged all the members in his family to contribute politically. Many respondents remembered their fathers encouraging everyone in the family, irrespective of age and sex, to participate in the movement (transcript of interviews with Sridevi Tewari, Kaushalya Devi, Uma Dixit, Narayani Tripathi and Sushila Rohatgi). One activist explained:

‘The main inspiration in my life was my father. He had given me a *kripan* (a small dagger) to wear and used to exhort me to emulate the Rani of Jhansi. My father used to write fiery patriotic speeches and ask me to read them aloud. My mother was completely illiterate even though she came from an affluent background of *zamindars*. My mother was mainly a passive spectator though she did attend a few political meetings on the urging of my father. My father also insisted that she wore *khadi*’ (Transcript of interview with Sridevi Tewari).

There were also households in which the father was a member of a political party and supported the activities of his daughter but not those of his wife, or where

all the male members in the household were supporters of the Congress Party but did not encourage political activities by women in the family.

Elder women also exercised varying degrees of control over younger male and female members in a joint household. For example, if the male head of the household tried to suppress any form of nationalist activity in his house, the senior woman (mother, grandmother or mother-in law) could allow it to go on surreptitiously (transcript of interviews with Urmilla Goorha and Ganga Devi). On the other hand, elder women could also stop younger female members from participating. For example, one activist narrated how her female friends were stopped by their mothers and often locked in their rooms so that they could not escape. One mother⁷ commented on a respondent's activities:

'Neta ki Ladki, vo to neta he banegi, tumhe kya karna: A leader's daughter will always become a leader, but what do you have to do with it' (Transcript of interview with Uma Dixit).

The mother made this comment to stop her own daughter from participating. This draws attention to the perception of political involvement as a family concern rather than a purely individual political conviction. It was taken for granted that in most situations a political leader would encourage other members of the family to support the emerging nationalist tradition. In some instances a male leader would encourage his daughter or wife to take a leading role or follow a similar party ideology as his own. In general the unmarried girl faced less restrictions than did married women:

'We as young girls were free. As mentioned earlier, though a particular code of conduct was expected from married and unmarried women, the latter were not always expected to conform' (Transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha).

⁷ Madhuri Singh's mother and her other friends such as Danavati Saxena, and Kamala Shukla. These names were provided by Uma Dixit.

The woman's life had two parts 'one spent in her *pita grah* (father's house)' (as discussed above) and 'the other spent in her *pati grah* (husband's house)' (Upadhyay, Dev Narayan, 1921: 99).

The Married Woman

Most of the respondents had been married between the ages of 12 and 16 years and moved on to live with their husbands' families and to thus encounter a new social environment. Some respondents had to move from the politically charged atmosphere of their parental homes to their husbands' homes, where they had to stop all their previous activities. For example, some women stated that their husbands were officers in British government bodies and did not encourage any affiliation with the nationalist movement. In two cases, the respondents took the opportunity, on visits to her fathers' home in Aligarh, to participate in Congress processions (transcript of interviews with Kaushalya Devi and Sridevi Tewari).

There were also situations where women who, in their parental homes had limited opportunities to actively participate, but were encouraged to do so by their husbands after marriage (transcript of interviews with Brij Rani Misra, Vijay Devi Rathore and Usha Kumari Azad). For example, one activist, whose mother had supported her limited involvement in the movement despite her father expressing displeasure, married a man who fully supported her involvement:

'Sanskar Ma ne diye; Sahyog pati ne diya (My mother gave me the values and my husband the support). However, this was at a cost. My father, Arjun Singh stopped me from visiting my mother, Bitiya in their village and I could not even see my mother when she died' (Transcript of interview with Vijay Devi Rathore).

In certain circumstances the husband's immediate family (father and mother) could object to their son's activities (transcript of interviews with Usha Kumari Azad, Gayatri Dubey, Kishori Dixit, Talsa Devi and Usha Krishna Azad).

To facilitate women's participation from different social circumstances as well as to keep it segregated and respectable was a part of a much wider process of the domestication of the public sphere.

The Construction of a Domesticated Public Sphere

The process of the domestication of the public sphere can be traced, in the first place, to the personal and political beliefs of the nationalist leaders, particularly the two Congress Party leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. In this section I will discuss the ways these two leaders' ideas bridged various aspects of domestic ideology and women's public participation. These leaders anticipated the important contribution of women from both their own and other families, to the nationalist movement. In the early years the leaders and their female family members such as Uma Nehru, Kamala Nehru, Kasturba Gandhi and Vijaylakshmi Pandit provided the context within which other Indian women could participate. The womenfolk of male leaders were the first to step out onto the streets, thus setting a precedent for other women.

The leaders understood the importance of family dynamics in encouraging and inhibiting women's involvement in public activities. Their dual stress on women fulfilling their duties as mothers within the homes as well as serving the nation was important because it enabled women to participate in the public sphere without threatening the domestic ideology or dismantling the existing family structure. The two leaders agreed on the importance of recognising the social acceptability of women's public activity, undertaken in the nationalist cause.

Gandhi and Nehru emphasised different aspects of domestic ideology and familial conditions. Gandhi tried to use their traditional qualities and extended the traditional roles of women into the political sphere. He stressed the equal legal rights of women and men, arguing that women 'must labour under no legal disability not suffered by man' (Hingorani, 1964: 61). However, the contradiction in Gandhi's thought lay in the fact that while emphasising equality and dignity for women in the household, he argued that it would be difficult for women to participate in politics if this produced conflict with their family responsibilities, including the duty to look after children and aged parents in the household. Gandhi's ideas called for no reorganisation of the family or of the role of men within it. During the civil disobedience movement, Gandhi clearly instructed two women leaders, Chattopadhyay and Khurshedben, that while recruiting female volunteers, women should have the permission of their guardians, and that only those with alternative arrangements for the care of their children should participate (Aaj, 29 March 1930: 4). Those with children were needed at home to provide support for their menfolk's participation (Gandhi, 1942: 202). An article in a magazine, Kamala, entitled 'Gandhian Ideology and Women's Revolution', looked critically at Gandhi's views and considered them to be obstacles to women's progress in society, particularly his opposition to modern machines, technology and the new techniques of birth control. It was argued by the writer that without birth control women would be tied to their homes, and it would never be possible for them to be productive members of society. Gandhi's notions were seen as 'patriarchal' and expressive of the idea that women were 'inferior'. His vision of establishing a 'pastoral' society and 'drowning the new machines in the oceans' were seen as 'revivalist' and utopian (Prasad, Bhuvneshwar, 1940: 232-233).

Gandhi's personal life was also ridden with contradictions. This is best illustrated by his relationship with his wife Kasturba. While he advocated equality in

the household, he continually referred to the intellectual differences between himself and his wife and left no space for Kasturba to express her individuality. She thus played a secondary role in his life and only assumed leadership in the nationalist movement when Gandhi was in prison. Even in such cases, she appealed on behalf of her husband. There is no evidence of her trying to cross the boundaries set by her husband.

If Gandhi emphasised the moral and traditional qualities of women, Nehru emphasised the economic content of women's rights and obligations. His approach was based on more practical considerations (Luthra, 1990: 5). Nehru's earliest political awareness was purely through his academic knowledge of socialist philosophy of the Fabians in England. This early contact made Nehru view Indian society critically. His speeches reiterated his faith that without economic freedom, other aspects of gender equality would prove superficial. Family responsibilities were much less important than the economic independence of women. In a speech to women of the Prayag Mahila Vidyapith (printed in the magazine *Saraswati*), Nehru stated,

'If a woman is not economically independent and does not earn money herself, she will have to be dependent on her husband or some other man. I realise that your Vidyapith stresses that women should be accomplished in housework and undertake the responsibilities of one's marriage. However, women should be given the highest education to enable them to undertake other occupations' (Shukla, 1934: 229).

Nehru acknowledged the contributions of women within the household but he wanted women to participate in occupations apart from being good mothers and wives. He expressed displeasure at the fact that women's education facilitated women in being proficient at domestic duties only and that the education did not intend to further their mental and economic freedom. For example, he stated,

‘The truth is that women will not be independent when marriage is seen as an occupation and the source of women’s monetary protection. More than political independence, the independence of a woman is dependent on her economic situation. The relationship between man and woman should be based on full freedom and co-operation in which nobody is dependent on the other’ (Shukla, 1934: 229).

With respect to his personal life, Nehru wrote that the political participation of his wife and sisters gave him a special satisfaction and brought them closer together.

He was impressed by his wife’s organizational skills:

‘We felt proud of our people, and especially of our womenfolk, all over the country. I had a special feeling of satisfaction because of the activities of my mother, wife and sisters. We grew nearer to each other, bound by a new sense of comradeship in a great cause’ (Nehru, 1962: 224).

Both Gandhi and Nehru recognised the essential contribution of women and, to limited extent, realised that women did not take to nationalist activities unproblematically. However, it is the later research that has been unable to identify the difficulties women encountered when they left the domestic sphere. The movement produced a great deal of stress for women. They were compelled to readjust, both mentally and physically, to the demands of the changing political environment. This is best illustrated in the experiences of women in the Nehru household, a household in which three generations of women participated in national political life during the Independence struggle. Anand Bhawan, the Nehru home in Allahabad, became the central point for all nationalist activities, not only in Allahabad but for the whole of Uttar Pradesh.

Setting the Precedent

Vijaylakshmi Pandit (Nehru’s sister), in her memoirs, describes the conflict and tension in her parental home when her brother, father and later she herself joined

Gandhi. Her mother, Swarup Rani, found it difficult to adjust to the changed lifestyle and the constant infringement of her privacy:

‘This was a time of great domestic strain, and constant adjustments were asked for. Mother felt acutely miserable over all that was happening. How could she take sides (with husband or son) or understand this new ‘Mahatma’ whose business, if anything, should have been to look after people’s morals instead of meddling in family matters’ (Pandit, 1979: 69).

There is no mention of how this conflict was resolved. However, in the end Swarup Rani had to come round to the view of her husband. In the course of time she encouraged her son to make big sacrifices.

‘So says the mother of Jawahar,
Give up your life for the nation, my son,
Then only will I be a proud mother.
When one has taken the vow,
Then give your life to the nation.
Never worry about your happiness,
Nor worry about your old mother’.
(PP.Hin.B. 146, 1931a)

Vijaylakshmi, in the course of her participation, regretted leaving her daughters without adequate care.

‘I had not allowed myself a moment to consider whether my decision to take a more active part in the struggle would be harmful to my children’s interests.... I have never quite forgiven myself for that jail term which broke my home when my children most needed its security and comfort’ (Pandit, 1979: 109 and 110).

Women’s adjustment to the demands of the political movement was costly, especially when the demands could upset the domestic context of stability and comfort. Contrary to the impression given by Aparna Basu (1976), Vijay Agnew (1979) and Uma Rao (1994), women did not take to nationalist activities naturally, automatically or without conflict. Women were not born to be nationalist heroes. Some, like Swarup Rani found it hard to imagine sacrificing the family interests for

the sake of the nation. Political activities were seen as ruinous for the sanctity of the household. However, eventually women like Swarup Rani came to terms with the activities of her son and husband in order to preserve domestic peace, and, as mentioned earlier, her encouragement to both her son and husband can be seen as a significant dimension of her contribution towards the nationalist movement. On the other hand, this also reflects the significance and authority male members of the household could exert on women. Swarup Rani could not resist the changes in her private existence and thought it best to flow with the political tide.

Both Swarup Rani and Vijaylaxmi Pandit were members of the same Nehru household and shared a middle-class background. Nevertheless, they perceived the change in their private lives differently. This difference in perception can be attributed partly to the generational difference between the two women. Swarup Rani, who was from an earlier generation and whose 'horizon did not extend beyond the family' (Pandit, 1979: 39), found it difficult to fully comprehend the changing political reality and new ideas (Thapar, 1993: 13). However for the younger generation of women like V. Pandit, the consequences of political developments on their personal lives were brought to the forefront. V. Pandit, in her personal memoirs, refers to her loss of satisfaction 'through domestic duty'. Moreover, she also accepted that without her husband's consent she would not have participated (Pandit, 1979: 69 and 70).

The nationalist leaders recognised that the quality of women's domestic sacrifice could be an advantage if mobilised by the nationalist movement in the public sphere. The self-sacrifice of the domestic mother, nurturer and guardian of the home was carried into the public sphere and refigured as national sacrifice. Through a concept of sacrifice previously defined in the domestic sphere, Gandhi and Nehru conceptualised the nature of women's participation in the public sphere. The women family members of the nationalist leaders set a precedent by embodying notions of familial sacrifice. It was initially difficult for these women to adjust to the demands

that the political situation placed on their personal lives. However, through compromises in their lives, these women did adapt to the situation and set an example for the larger populace, encouraging them to do the same. Some of this data supports Chhachi's argument that 'nationalism describes its objects in the language of kinship or the home' (Chhachi, 1991:165).

The initiative had been taken by the women of the Nehru family and the task now for both male and female leaders was to mobilise the masses.

The Nationalist Symbols

The leaders realised that creating and enlivening nationalist symbols would facilitate women's entry into politics, especially if symbols could be transferred from the domestic to the public sphere. Symbols could thus contribute to both the politicisation of the domestic sphere and the domestication of the public sphere.

New representations of the mother as the 'defender of civilisation', which suggested the defence of the nation or motherland, were particularly popular during this period. These representations were popularised through the vernacular literature written by both men and women, through the media and through the speeches and meetings of nationalist leaders. Sarojini Naidu made a statement in a newspaper to women involved in similar struggles in the rest of the world, expressing solidarity in terms of a common conceptualisation of motherland:

'I am a Indian warrior, who is fighting for the freedom of my motherland. All of you (global) are fighting for the protection of your own motherlands. In other words our cause is the same. Consequently, we belong to the same family' (Vartman, 18 October 1931: 3).

This quote is significant because it expresses women's role globally as guardians and saviours of their respective nations. The word 'warrior' implies that women have accepted the challenge of defending their nation and should now

shoulder the same responsibilities as men. The saviour of the nation was a powerful symbol. Often, pamphlets were distributed exhorting women students to join the struggle. In one pamphlet the message from Sarojini Naidu stated:

‘Till now we have been spectators, but now we have to do something.
What your duties are you all know.
You have to displace the throne of Britain
Do not think of yourselves as small girls
You are the powerful *Durgas* in disguise
You shall sing the nationalist songs wherever you go
You shall cut the chain of bondage
And free your country.
Forget about the earth
You shall move the skies’.
(PP.Hin.B. 215, 1930)

This verse captures the spirit of resistance and hope for an independent India. *Durga* was the Indian goddess of destruction and throughout the nationalist movement vivid imagery was used to carry the nationalist message across. The poem is rich in expression and the varied messages it tries to convey. The ‘we’ used is significant for the unity expressed by women and at the same time imparts a message for women to come together and contribute towards the nation. The poem is inspirational and invokes religious images of powerful women, the poem is empowering because it makes women realise their significance for the nation. The status of ordinary middle-class women is exalted to saviours of the nation with statements like ‘free your country’.

One of the respondents, Sharad Kumari Sinha saw herself as a sacrificial mother offering her sons to the the nation. Mothers whose sons were killed or hanged by the British were venerated and exalted to the status of ‘mothers of the nation’. One male activist stated that ‘no mother ever told her sons to ask for pardon from the Britishers’ (Transcript of interview with Mr. P.C. Mitra).

The 'mother' role model was also identified with the 'motherland' or '*Bharatmata*' (mother India). This idea aligned the duties and responsibilities of the mother with the duties of a woman towards her nation. Mrs. Motilal Nehru, presiding over a meeting after a *satyagraha* march, said:

'If you are true to your motherland, then you should start manufacturing salt in every home' (The Leader, 20 April 1930: 10).

Some activists used the word *mata* (mother), when referring to the 'soil' of India. For example, one activist recited a poem written by her husband⁸ when she was released from Kanpur jail in 1943:

'Welcome back, welcome back
You have showered like the rain on the dense clouds of the enemy
You have risen like the morning light on this dark empire
Oh! *Bharatmata*, the nurturer of competent sons'
(Transcript of interview with Narayani Dixit).

The poem is rich in expressions of the political state of the nation. For example, everything dark and gloomy is associated with the British Empire and the woman-mother-nurturer and *Bharatmata* is associated with the brighter and more positive aspects of life.

Sometimes women were told that their 'mother India' was in distress during meetings, and women who heard this would break down (transcript of interview with Madhavi Lata Shukla). Songs were strung together around the theme of 'mother India' and prayers offered to the motherland. For example:

⁸ Narayani Dixit's husband was Kalka Prasad Tripathi, a Congress member.

‘We are born in your house,
We are born on your land,
That is why we are blessed,
The mountains, lakes and forests all are beautiful
In this nation of ours’
(Transcript of interview with Mrs. Gauri Devi Bajpai).

Land, as referred to in this poem, is symbolic of a mother’s body which is endowed with gifts from nature, such as the mountains, lakes and forests, and it is to the same land that a mother is expected to express her gratitude through the sacrifice of her body. Women would recite these prayers during *prabhat pheris* (morning processions) or close a meeting with a prayer to the motherland. Within the nationalist movement, women’s roles as mothers, wives and nurturers were given much respect, and women were often exalted to the status of *devis* which means goddesses.

The nationalist leaders realised the significance of the concept of a unified motherland, a motherland that stretched from the ‘Himalayas to the Indian Ocean’. The symbolic representation of the *Bharatmata* effectively controlled the feelings of resentment and disappointment felt by women towards the nationalist leaders for encouraging their menfolk to fight the British or when their sons/fathers/brothers were hauled in to gaols or thrown in *kala pani* (black water; imprisonment for life). Also, the image of the one mother of the whole nation who was ‘pure’ and ‘untouched’, and whose honour had to be protected, aroused the national sentiments and emotions of the population as a whole. The idea of the *Bharatmata* was important partly because it enabled women to feel comfortable and protected in their participation. It also built on the respect for women as ‘wives’ and ‘mothers’. In the Indian context women continuously strived for this exalted status.

The idea of the *Bharatmata* was propagated through poetry, literature and the cinema. The image was invariably that of a crowned and beautiful woman in ‘shackles’ weeping ‘tears of blood’ or of the same woman holding aloft a trident and leading her countless sons and daughters into battle. Poets like Bal Krishna Sharma

Navin (1898-1960), Harbans Rai Bachan (1907-) and Mahadevi Verma (1907-87) disseminated the concept of *Bharatmata*. One poem by Bal Krishna Sharma, 'The song of the morning breeze', highlights the idea of a mother in distress

'May the nectar like milk of the mother turn into bitter gall
May the tears of her eyes dry up to leave a stream of blood behind
Hey poet, string together the words that will be cataclysmic'.
(Sharma, 1989: 20)

There are many examples where mothers sacrificed their sons for India's freedom. I will illustrate the representation of the 'sacrificial mother', 'mother India' and 'defender of civilisation' through two life stories which were a source of inspiration for the nationalist movement.

In post-independence India and nearly half a century later, surviving activists vividly remember the details. A male activist, Ram Krishna Khatri stated that 'the role of mothers whose sons were killed has never been recognised'. In this context he narrated two incidents which recapitulated the decisive role of mothers in the nationalist movement. The first took place in 1897 in the Chapekar family. The Chapekars were Chiplunkar Brahmins from the city of Poona. The three brothers, Damodar Hari, Bal Krishan Hari and Vasudev, were hanged for conspiring and killing a British official, Mr. Rand. Their mother, Lakshmi Bai, whose name has not been documented in any historical record, projected a brave profile. A wave of sympathy arose for the mother throughout the country and she was referred to as the 'sacrificial mother' who sacrificed her sons for the nation. She was visited by Sister Nivedita, one of Vivekanand's disciples and a participant in reform activities in Bengal, who was impressed by Lakshmi Bai's moral strength (Kumar, 1993: 41).

The second incident relates to the mother of Ram Prasad Bismil who was hanged in Gorakhpur Zila jail (district of Uttar Pradesh) on 18th December, 1927. He belonged to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The night before he was

hanged, his mother visited him. According to a male activist, Shiv Verma, R.P. Bismil had tears in his eyes when he saw his mother. The mother asked him: '*Ho gaya Inquilab,? Ho gaya Kranti?, Kyo kayaro ki tarah aasu baha rahe ho?*' 'Is this revolution?, Is this revolt? Why are you shedding tears like a coward? Bismil replied,

'Tumara beta kayar nahi hai. Assu to is liye hai ke tumari jaisi ma na tumari jaisi god milagi (Your son is not a coward. He has tears because he knows that he will neither get a mother like you or a mother's lap like yours)'

Bismil's mother had never actively participated in politics but her consciousness was kindled by her son's death. In a nationalist speech she said:

'I have one more son to give to the nation (she raised the hand of Bismil's brother). I want nothing in return for my son's blood' (Transcript of interview with Ram Krishna Khatri).

This story was also told to me by a male activist, Shiv Verma, from the same political party as R.P. Bismil. Though there is a larger theoretical issue concerning who actually tells the story and how interpretative difficulties arise, this example shows how ordinary people viewed mothers who sacrificed their sons in the political struggle. It also shows how mothers understood their roles in relation to the nation. With reference to the projection of women in the political struggle, Shiv Verma said:

'Women were not recognised through their family names. They were referred to as *Ma* which means mother' (Transcript of interview with Shiv Verma).

This statement makes us aware of the vivid imagery associated with women as mothers.

Women leaders from politically active households, like the Nehru household, had taken the initiative and set a precedent for the mass of middle-class women to follow. The nationalist symbols further facilitated women's entry into the public

sphere, through popular images of the mother and defender of civilisation. In the next section I shall discuss some of the specific activities in which women engaged, the code of conduct assigned to them and the actual details of their activity.

Women and Non-Violence: Family Dynamics and Gandhian Ideology

Women's activities in the public sphere had to be organised in relation to both the family and Gandhian ideology of non-violence. The nationalist movement set a precedent for achieving independence through non-violence, and thus a whole new philosophy based on *ahimsa* (non-violence) was born. Men and women leaders of the Congress Party, the dominant nationalist party in Uttar Pradesh, adhered strongly to a non-violent ideology. The image of an ideal activist constructed by the leaders of the movement was of a woman who in her political activities symbolised the virtues of non-violence.

The Gandhian ideology portrayed the struggle against the British as a moral battle, in which the moral and spiritual strength of Indian women was supreme. Ravinder Kumar has argued that Gandhi constructed a moral stance which cut across class, communitarian and rural-urban differences to create an anti-imperialist front (Kumar, 1983: 43). Metaphorically, the streets were viewed by men and women as moral battlefields and consequently were seen as an acceptable location for women's activities. This ideology assisted women to step over the thresholds of their homes for the first time.

Women entered the public sphere without completely disassociating themselves from the domestic ideology. They carried domestic values into the public sphere. Individual political convictions were expressed in terms of binding familial demands. Women's participation was conceptualised in terms of the relationship between the private and public domains. The home represented the culture of the Indian nation and

the woman was an integral part of the home. Her primary duty was to preserve the culture of her nation by upholding the tradition and values that constituted that culture. Therefore, when women stepped onto the streets, they brought the values of the domestic sphere with them. As Partha Chatterjee argues:

‘The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality’ (Chatterjee, 1989: 243).

Thus women were expected to adapt to the changes in the public domain without compromising their feminine qualities within the domestic sphere. Their involvement in the public sphere stretched from the Non-Co-operation movement of the 1920s to the Civil Disobedience movement of the 1930s and the Quit India movement of the 1940s. In the 1920s women’s public participation was limited, but during the next two decades the constraints diminished. The primary reason was that a precedent had already been set by the bolder women who had participated in politics earlier in the century. In the latter half of the period, women were more politically aware and their households found it easier to accept women going outside their homes, since many had already done so. For example, the same women who were not allowed to participate in the 1930s, were not stopped from stepping outside during the Quit India movement. Some activists said that their fathers had prevented their mothers from participating in the Civil Disobedience movement, but did permit participation during the Quit India struggle. The 1940s witnessed not only an increase in the number of women activists but also an increase in violent activities by women as compared to the 1930s.

Political continuity cannot be discerned in individual women’s participation in the nationalist movement. Political activities could be sporadic, with women involving themselves in a nationalist activity for one day and then not thinking about

any further participation. On the other hand, there were women who participated throughout the nationalist phase, until India's independence in 1947.

In the next two sections I will discuss the issue of segregation and respectability which provided the framework for women's public participation. In the sections that follow I focus on women's involvement in non-violent activities and will discuss specific features of each activity in four sections.

Segregation of Women

The segregation of women was a feature carried over from the domestic sphere. Its significance can be understood by examining the broader social context. *Purdah* defined the lives of most women from the middle-classes. They led segregated lives even within their homes, and most women did not appear before or have any social contact with any of the men in the family except their husband. Within the homes Hindu women kept their heads covered. A respondent describes the environment in her house where *purdah* was rigorously enforced:

'My *devar* (husband's younger brother) talked very rarely to the womenfolk of the family. He was a strict traditionalist and enforced *purdah*. Women of the house could not even stand openly over the balcony. We did not dare to listen to any political discussions of the men but could discuss amongst ourselves' (Transcript of interview with Godavri Devi).

Some women were secluded and confined to a room after marriage. They were not allowed to show any part of their body or appear in front of other members of the joint household (transcript of interviews with Ganga Devi and Kaushalya Devi). Accordingly, the key difficulty for women was to come onto the streets, without challenging the prevalent domestic customs and traditions. The public sphere was not seen by women participants as a space for completely flouting customs and traditions, but as a space where the rigid rules of society and religion could be renegotiated, so as

to enable women to step outside their homes. For example, some Hindu women kept their heads covered with their sarees, some kept half their faces covered with their sarees in processions, and those who came from extremely orthodox households wore a *chadar* (a thick sheet) over their sarees. Minute alterations in demeanour had to be carefully negotiated (transcript of interview with Sri Devi Tewari).

Muslim women in the public sphere maintained the segregation they experienced in the domestic sphere and wore the *burqha* (a long piece of cloth that covers every part of the body). At certain times, the practice of wearing the *burqha* was an advantage. While describing her participation in the 1942 movement, an activist, Tara devi Agarwal, explained:

‘I used to distribute seditious literature while wearing the burqua or distribute weapons. Sometimes I secretly used to carry letters and things from and to the jails from friends and relatives’ (Transcript of interview with Tara Agarwal).

Tara devi was a Hindu lady who did not practice *purdah*. However, she adopted the Muslim dress of segregation which helped her to both conceal her identity and transport goods and literature from one place to another. This reflects how an oppressive practice like the *purdah* could be used to one’s advantage.

Women leaders in their meetings suggested that women should discard the *purdah*, but that was to do more with the symbolic implications of women leaving their isolated and segregated lives at home and stepping onto the streets. A degree of sex segregation was maintained in public, and this can be discerned in the nationalist activities that were specifically allocated to women in the public sphere by the nationalist leaders. It was easier for Hindu women to maintain segregation than it was for Muslim women. This is reflected in the different levels of participation of Hindu and Muslim women in the nationalist movement. A strong deterrent to Muslim women’s participation (in both the middle- and working-classes) was the attitude of

their menfolk, who were suspicious of any outsider. They were also afraid that by speaking and interacting with 'liberated' women, their own women might start challenging domestic norms. This attitude was apparent when I interviewed Muslim women. The men in the household would sit next to these women for most of the time and would interrupt the conversation.

The participation of middle-class Muslim women was minimal throughout the nationalist movement. In larger meetings it was easier to spot a few, but those who came did not take to the streets to carry out an activity. They used to come to listen, in *burqhas* and often they would go back home immediately. However, if a Muslim woman leader, like Aruna Asaf Ali, came to their district, then the number of Muslim women attending would increase.

A Muslim respondent from the middle-class mentioned that the role of working-class Muslim women in the nationalist movement was also negligible, although these women would take part in processions for wage increase and the shunning of discriminatory practices in the factories. Working-class Muslim women did not initiate processions for nationalist demands, although they realised that India had lost its political power to the British (transcript of interview with Hasra Begum).

A form of segregation which was a distinct advantage to women was their residency in women's student hostels. These hostels were completely segregated from the men's hostels, and interaction between the sexes was restricted. However, the segregation was often exploited to perform clandestine activities like editing, printing and publishing proscribed literature. For instance, once the magazine *Ran Bheri* (the Bugle of War) had to be published in cyclostyled sheets from the women's hostel of Benares Hindu University (BHU). A male activist, Professor M.P. Singh, who was a student at BHU at that time, provided details of clandestine political activities taking place in the male and female hostels. During the Quit India movement, he formed the

Azad Government, a secret organisation of BHU. With reference to publishing activities, he stated:

'In 1942 the bulletin of Ran Bheri was taken over by women comrades in arms. Women used to print, edit and cyclostyle it. The bulletin came out daily from the women's hostel. All women involved were BSc or MSc students. I think in this job women were more capable than men. Once the Mughul Sarai Battalion came to arrest us. One of the trucks went to the women's hostel and one to the men's. Unfortunately, the Ran Bheri had already been published. At the women's hostel, the battalion was stopped by a lady superintendent who said, 'the women are not dressed: when they are, you can come in'. Within the boundaries of the women's hostel was the Govind *nalla* (canal) and in the meantime all the machines and issues of the bulletin were thrown in the *nalla*' (Transcript of interview with Mr. M.P. Singh).

Respectability

Linked to segregation was the issue of respectability. The male and female nationalist leaders projected the politics of street demonstrations in terms of its high morality and sacrifice, but such a view could not accommodate women of low caste and 'inferior' characters. Only the right kind of respectable woman was positively encouraged to participate (Forbes, 1988: 69). This issue of respectability touched every middle-class family. Women 'on the streets' had to be distinguished from women 'of the streets', who were primarily women who had to earn a living by coming out of their homes. The women 'of the street', a label that distinguished these women from respectable middle-class women, were from the working-class and low castes. Prostitutes were located in the latter category.

Women respondents of the middle-class who came out in public also realised that their newly realised freedom had to be couched in an aura of respectability. *Khadi* added to the image of respectability. A woman dressed in coarse handspun clothes and projecting a plain, unadorned image was more charismatic and respectable than a

woman dressed ornately in fine silks. Respectability was associated with home-based tradition-bound women. The tenets of Hindu religion attached importance to the idea of women as protectors of the home and the family whose male guardians should protect them from the harsh public reality. In the earlier section, I pointed out that the woman grew up in the protected environment of her father's house and later married into the protected environment of her husband's house. It was thus important that women's entry into the public sphere, a predominantly male sphere as well as one associated with women from lower classes and castes, should be adequately justified.

The justification was provided on two grounds. Firstly, women's activities were projected to be for the liberation of the nation, and this meant that they tended to be viewed by the Indian populace as patriotic and respectable. This belief was intended to facilitate women's entry into the public sphere without creating disharmony in their domestic lives. Women could step forward into the public sphere and step back into the domestic sphere without endangering their honour and pride.

Secondly, both male and female nationalist leaders provided assurances to the guardians of ordinary middle-class women, and also projected their own image of respectability. If women stepped out of their homes to attend a public activity hosted by prominent women leaders, it was unlikely that their movements would be scrutinised and questioned. Nearly all respondents referred to these leaders, and it seems that their presence not only gave credibility to a particular activity but also facilitated the respondents' public appearances. For example, one woman stated,

'I often used to go to attend the meeting given by Vijaylakshmi Pandit in Zhandewala Bagh, Lucknow. Pandit used to come and talk to my mother about the number of women required to organise a procession. Also, Swarajwati Nehru came to our house and ate food' (Transcript of interview with Ganga Devi).

In this quotation eating food with prominent, highly respectable and committed leaders signified that these women respondents had important local connections with

nationalist leaders, and gained respectability through the recognition from other locality dwellers of their connections with elite women leaders. These women leaders established contact with a few women at the local level in order to mobilise other women from their localities and *mohallas*, in organising a nationalist meeting or propagating nationalist ideas. The presence of women leaders both personalised and legitimised activities like hoisting the national flag or breaking the salt law.

Most of my respondents mentioned the names of two or three women leaders who visited their cities and created an impact on them through their speeches and meetings. Often cited are Kamala Nehru, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Krishna Nehru, Aruna Asaf Ali and Uma Nehru. The charisma of nationalist leaders pulled crowds of women together. Nearly all respondents had memories of people rushing to see and hear nationalist leaders. It was a combination of general enthusiasm and curiosity which encouraged women to go to political gatherings rather than any particular political ideas or nationalist sentiment. For example, one respondent stated:

‘I did not have much understanding of the movement, I was doing it more out of *Josh* (eagerness). I knew that Gandhiji wanted independence and I had complete faith in him’ (Transcript of interview with Sridevi Tewari).

Another traditional value associated with respectability was that of sacrifice and purity. Participation in the movement had religious connotations. A story that several women recounted, and which provided an impelling force for these women, was that of Azizan *Randi* (transcript of interview with Sridevi Tewari). *Randi* means prostitute. Azizan was a prostitute in Bithoor, Kanpur during the years leading to the 1857 revolt. She used to dance with a *Kamal* (lotus) and a *roti* (flour pastry) in the army camps. If a soldier accepted the *roti*, then he was willing to participate in the struggle for freedom, and if he accepted the *kamal*, he was not. Often, Azizan used to go on horseback and feed the wounded soldiers. Azizan, through her sacrifices, became pure in the eyes of Indian people and was exalted to the status of a goddess. The moral

behind this life story was that one could acquire purity and cleanse oneself of all past sins in the sacrificial fire of freedom. The newspaper, *Dainik Jagron*, in a feature article on the nationalist movement in 1992, mentioned the contribution of Azizan, but instead of being called *Azizan Randi*, she was addressed as *Krantikari Azizan*, 'warrior Azizan' (18 October 1992: 2). This shows that Azizan was exalted to the status of a warrior through her contribution to the nationalist movement.

Violation of the Salt Law

The most important and well documented public activity that women were involved in was the breaking of the salt law. Gandhi attached great importance to this issue. First, there was a moral emphasis, including special stress on the suffering of a helpless population and the suggestion that the resistance to the tax on salt must touch everyone, and certainly the starving millions. Secondly, it had a maximum appeal for the masses because salt was a commodity consumed daily by them. Moreover, this was an issue directly related to women's lives. Salt was a commodity which women from all classes bought, a homely domestic object symbolising everyday ordinary needs. It was precisely because of this that the act of breaking the salt law appealed to their imagination (CWMG, Vol. XLII: 500-501).

This campaign commenced on 12th March, 1930 with a march from Sabarmati to Dandi, a village on the Gujarat coast. Here Gandhi and his followers made salt in violation of the laws. Initially, Gandhi did not want women to accompany him on the march. He stated:

'I am not interested in inviting them [women] to offer civil disobedience against the salt law. Even if women participate in this, they will be lost amongst the men. For I expect that at every place large numbers of men will come forward. I do not believe that women will come forward in such numbers' (CWMG, Vol. XLIII: 190).

Gandhi's suggestion that women might be lost in the crowds of male volunteers was connected with his strong conviction that women had a more important role in picketing liquor and cloth shops than in breaking salt laws (Kumar, 1993: 74). Gandhi was interested in including women only in very specific activities. Also, he did not want to be accused by the British government of hiding behind the protection of women. Gandhi remarked:

'Just as Hindus do not harm a cow, the British do not attack women as far as possible. For Hindus it would be cowardice to take a cow to the battle field. In the same way it would be cowardice of us to have women accompany us' (CWMG, Vol. XLIII: 12).

However, women pushed themselves into the salt satyagraha. Women like Khurshedbehn (grand-daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji) and Mridula Sarabhai demanded that

'no conference or commission dealing with the welfare of India should be held without the presence of women. Similarly, they must ask that no marches, no imprisonment, no demonstrations organised for the welfare of India should prohibit women from a share in them' (Stree Dharma, Vol. 13, 1930: 247).

Referring to the part played by women in the historic Dandi march, Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, herself a strong activist, observed:

'women who had never looked upon a crowded street, never beheld a strange face, stripped aside those silken curtains, threw off their gossamer veils and flung themselves into the blinding glare of day... They faced perils and privations with a happy light in their eyes and a spring in their limbs. Almost overnight their narrow domestic walls had given way to open up a new wide world in which they had a high place' (Sridevi, 1969: 76-77).

This description relates to the institution of *purdah* and is gender-specific. Though the quotation provides an overview of women's constrained and

circumscribed domestic existence, it romanticises women's emergence in the public sphere. Furthermore, it does not problematise this emergence.

The next quotation describes the struggle in which thousands of enthusiastic women went to the sea-coast.

‘They strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper and, instead of uniforms, the simple cotton saris of village India. One watched them fascinated and awe-struck’ (Baig, 1958: 19).

Here women are commended for their brave ‘warrior’-like personalities. At the same time, by stressing women's gender-specific roles, the movement is being constricted in a certain direction by the nationalist leaders. For example, the sentence ‘instead of weapons they carried pitchers of clay’ suggests that women are better suited for non-violent tasks instead of violent deeds. What is more significant is that the quotation portrays the steady domestication of the public sphere as well as women's public participation. For example, in public processions women carried domestic objects like claypots and wore simple-home made clothes like cotton saris.

The previous two quotations are also important because they reflect on Hindu middle-class women in purdah. Most of these women were also urban-based. Paradoxically, it is suggested that although women strode down like ‘proud warriors’, it was not easy for many women to do so because of the sheltered lives of confinement that they had led. Chattopadhyay's comments also suggests that it was exciting for women to break free. The willingness of women to come out when given the opportunity indicates that there was nothing inherent in being female which prevented women from participating.

Women Take the Lead

The male leaders could foresee that they would require the help of women associates in continuing nationalist work once they (the men) were arrested. Before their arrests, Gandhi and Abbas Tyabji appointed Sarojini Naidu to lead the raid on the Dharasana salt works, 150 miles north of Bombay. Before taking charge of the raiding party she declared in a public speech that

‘the time has come in my opinion when women can no longer seek immunity behind the shelter of their sex but must share equally with their men comrades all the perils and sacrifices for the liberation of the country’ (TOI, May 8, 1930).

The raid was led on May 15th, 1930. In a letter from Camp Untadi (Bulsar) to her daughter, Ms Padmaja Naidu, Sarojini Naidu commented:

‘After prayers, songs, flag salutations and a *benediction from Ba*, I led my army across a mile of muddy lanes to the vicinity of the salt depot.... Lorry loads of armed police arrived’ (The Leader, May 23, 1930: 9 and Bombay Chronicle, May 26, 1930).

Salt was manufactured in various districts of Uttar Pradesh such as Benares, Lucknow, Agra and Allahabad. It was prepared both in public places and in homes. Women often carried the earth from which salt was made to their homes, from the nearest sea-coast (PP.Hin.B. 33, 1931: 8-14). I will now take the particular example of activities in the district of Allahabad.

In Allahabad the whole Nehru family had plunged into the satyagraha movement. The salt law was broken at Handia, a *tahsil* (revenue division of a district) headquarters about twenty miles east of Allahabad. It was arranged that the earth from which salt was to be produced would be brought from somewhere in the district and manufactured in the neighbourhood of Hewett Road (The Leader, April 9 1930: 11). Over 10,000 people gathered to witness the satyagraha campaign. Among the lady volunteers was Mrs. J. Nehru (she also manufactured salt at Katra crossing in

Allahabad). As she prepared salt, the police watched the proceedings without interfering (The Leader, April 21 1930: 10). Ms. Krishna Nehru, Mrs. Motilal Nehru and Mrs. Pandit Narsingh Dayal also participated. Mrs. J. Nehru picked up the fuel, put it into the furnace especially prepared for this purpose and lit a fire (The Leader, April 12 1930: 10). Homely salt suddenly became a mysterious word: a word of power (Nehru, 1962: 210). Uma Nehru led a march to the manufacturing ground and a small meeting was held. Mrs. Motilal, presiding over it, said that 'if you are true to your motherland then you should start manufacturing salt in every household' (The Leader, April 20 1930: 10). After appealing to women to enlist as volunteers, since without their co-operation the attainment of *swaraj* (self rule) would be impossible, Uma Nehru (who had led the procession) auctioned a packet of the newly made salt. Mrs. Motilal Nehru's old age had a special impact on the masses. Krishna Nehru, describing the impression created by her mother, said:

'That was one of the most extraordinary things. A tiny fragile Hindu lady, born to the luxury and seclusion of strict orthodoxy, suddenly became a revolutionary orator. Her fiery speeches swayed and roused the crowds to a high peak of emotion' (Hutheesing, 1967: 103).

A respondent recalled the arrival of some women members of the Nehru household in Kanpur, where Vijaylaxmi Pandit and Krishna Nehru prepared salt from sea-water brought from the coast:

'In Shradhanand Park sea water was boiled after the meeting. We then sang the song, '*Zhanda Ucha rahe hamara, Vijayi visv tiranga hamara*' (May our flag always fly high, In a free country, this three coloured flag)' (Transcript of interview with Sridevi Tewari).

The British district authorities responded to salt-making activities by circulating a notice that zamindars who allowed salt to be made on their zamindaris would be fined for breaking the salt law. Towards male and female activists, the reaction of the British authorities was ambiguous. Not the slightest hesitation was shown in arresting

male volunteers, though women's activities were watched with some trepidation. This partly explains why women were encouraged to lead the processions. In one instance, at Faizabad, a district of Uttar Pradesh, men who were manufacturing salt were immediately arrested while only a strict eye was kept on women (Aaj, April 9 1930: 1).

The Boycott of Foreign Cloth

Women also participated in the boycott of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops in various districts of Uttar Pradesh. Just as foreign cloth had long been important as a symbol of all foreign domination, so the maintenance of the cloth boycott became a symbol of all resistance. Gandhi realised that for mass mobilisation, the nationalist symbols had to *relate to the private lives of people and must touch their daily existence*.

Cloth was an essential household item and, like salt, could be prepared within the domestic sphere where *khadi* was spun on the *charkha*. The significance of cloth was also carried over to the public sphere where men and women wore it as a mark of national pride. The symbolic and nationalist significance of domestic items like salt and cloth was re-emphasised when they were picketed in the public sphere. The power of charisma and mass mobilisation under Gandhi's leadership can best be understood through his ability to translate ordinary domestic items like salt and cloth into effective political symbols.

Women's participation was seen as crucial for the success of these campaigns:

'In this struggle for freedom, the contribution of women will exceed that of men. *Swaraj* is tied to a strand of yarn. Hence, whether we wish to boycott foreign cloth through the means of *khadi* or through mill made cloth, it is women who are the spinners. Therefore it is women who will play a larger part in the non-violent struggle for *swaraj*' (CWMG, Vol. XLIII: 154).

Women could spin on the *charkha* in their spare time using most of the finished cloth for household consumption and selling any extra cloth to other families or in the market. Through this activity, women could be economically self-sufficient, and it would also help the nation. Gandhi addressing a women's conference in Dandi said:

'Women are more fitted for the delicate non-violent picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops than men. If the women of Gujarat successfully organised the two boycotts of foreign cloth and liquor they would spread throughout the length and breath of the country' (The Leader, April 16 1930: 11 also see CWMG, vol. XLV: 309-310).

In other words, he was trying to suggest that successful picketing of the stores would dramatize the effective and important role of women.⁹ The issues of salt and cloth affected women because if women could make their own *khadi* cloth and salt at home, then their household expenses would be reduced.

Gandhi outlined a clear and specific programme for action based on women's special virtues of patience and forbearance in their dealings with the resisting shopkeepers. Inherent in this was the idea that although men could participate in picketing, they would be less effective because violence was more likely to result. For Gandhi, picketing was more a matter of moral persuasion and conversion and not coercion. Accordingly it could be carried out most effectively by women.

Gandhi chose symbols with a special appeal to all women. He managed to give them a power that inspired women and prompted them to adopt a method of action which did not exclude their efforts and abilities, but allowed for their development within a distinct political programme (For details see, Prabhu, 1959). The *charkha* and

⁹ Gail Pearson, with reference to Bombay city, says, 'The importance of women to the boycott, in Bombay particularly cannot be overemphasized. At many stages they were the only ones picketing in the cloth market. They were far more effective than male volunteers, for what cloth merchant would keep his shop open if he felt that he would be responsible for the arrest and outraged modesty of Indian womanhood?' (Pearson, 1981: 177).

khadi were powerful symbolic domestic images which could be used by middle-class women with little or no formal education. For example, a middle-class respondent with little formal education, mentioned spinning on the *charkha* because she liked to wear clothes spun by herself, and she also had strong faith in the Gandhian ideology. To this very day, she spins on her *charkha*. For her *charkha* is associated with the nationalist movement, economic benefits both for the nation and for herself and the personal satisfaction of being self-sufficient:

‘Middle-class women spun *charkha* only because Gandhi had said so, not because they wanted to earn money. Gandhi said that our nation is an agricultural economy and if we bring in machines, people would become useless. Gandhi realised that if a woman from a less privileged background could sell her spun cloth, she could bring home a few extra pennies as well as gaining some economic independence’ (Transcript of interview with Sridevi Tewari).

In general, middle-class women with formal education used the *charkha* to align the symbolic significance of this domestic object with the nation and the political struggle. On the other hand, women from rural classes could earn their own money by spinning and serve the nationalist cause as well. However, for some women, the *charkha* was just another ordinary household item like other domestic objects. For them the *charkha* had no political significance and no political symbolism associated with it.

In Cawnpore city the picketing of foreign cloth shops and the task of organising the volunteers were initiated by Mrs. Jawaharlal Nehru . The volunteers marched in the streets carrying placards which proclaimed, ‘Trade in foreign cloth is sucking the life-blood of India’ (The Leader, May 1 1930: 11 and IOR: L/PJ/7/293, Telegram from the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of the United Provinces to the Sec. of State of India, November 12 1932). Similarly, in Lucknow the chief organiser of picketing was Smt. Shuniti Debi Mitra. Her campaign made a dozen shopkeepers at Aminabad offer the foreign cloth in their shops for sealing by the Congress Committee, and at Chowk

Bazaar some customers returned the cloth they had bought (Hindustan Times, Jan 15 1930: 9).

The newspaper, The Leader, reported on the success of women pickets:

‘During the last five days picketing of cloth shops has been so intense that not one yard of foreign cloth has been sold. In Allahabad startling stories of their [women’s] successes in preventing people from buying is heard. Mrs. Uma Nehru and Mrs. Kaul are the main organisers’ (April 29 1930: 9).

On certain occasions the volunteers were so convincing that shopkeepers sought their help in removing the foreign cloth to the *godown* (The Leader, April 29, 1930: 11).

The volunteers used three tactics in conducting their foreign cloth picketing. First, they walked up and down in front of the cloth shops, advocating the use of only swadeshi cloth. Apart from preventing the sale of foreign cloth, the volunteers pursued those who did buy until they handed back their purchases. Lord Irwin wrote to Wedgwood Benn, the Secretary of State for India of a case he had heard where the picketers followed home women who had bought foreign silk for a wedding. They frightened the mother with tales of an unlucky marriage if the silk were used. ‘The old lady burst into tears and insisted on her daughters taking the stuff back to the shop’ (Mss.Eur.C.152/6, September 5 1930)

Secondly, women *satyagrahis* extracted pledges and signatures from dealers that they would not sell foreign cloth. The dealers were fined if they broke the pledges. The district of Agra was most efficient in disrupting the sale of foreign cloth (PP.Hin.B. 33, 1931: 48). With the leadership of Ms. Parvati Devi, Smt. Sukhdevi Paliwal and Smt. Damyanti Devi, women volunteers managed to get 150 signatures in a single day. The pledge paper said that there would be no sale of foreign cloth for six months. The volunteers called on a *dharna* in front of the houses of people who did not sign until they finally relented (PP.Hin.B. 33, 1931: 47).

Thirdly, if reasoning and pleas with the shopkeepers failed, women would lie down in front of the stores and dissuade the customers from making purchases (transcript of interview with Sri Devi Tewari). They would often sit outside the shop, plying their *taklis* (spinning wheels), silently suggesting to every Indian that they must not buy cloth from that shop.

The following poem, compiled in a collection of proscribed literature by Govind Ram Gupta and published by Lala Sawaldam from Bukselar, traces the whole range of nationalist activities. It emphasises the fourth tactic of moral persuasion used by *satyagrahis*. Paying tribute to Mrs. Urmila Devi, foremost leader in Meerut, it states that women are becoming so politically aware that they are leaving their homes and purdah behind. The poem praises the nationalist activities of making salt and picketing foreign cloth shops and *toddy* (liquor) shops. Finally, it suggests that women should be prepared to be arrested for their activities.

‘Sister Urmila awakened the whole of Meerut,
The whole nation is manufacturing salt, so should we,
When it came to the question of nationalism,
She planted the tree of freedom.
Hey! Womankind, leave your comfortable homes,
Give your bangles to the men-folk,
Leave your veils behind,
Come out in the streets and bazaars,
Leave the task of making *chappatis* to the men,
Let us go out and make salt.
Do not let one *paisa* worth of foreign cloth be sold,
Sit on a *dharna* outside the toddy shops,
Do not be afraid of bullet or stick, Sing happily once behind the jails’
(PIB. 67/19, 1931).

The poem is rich in patriotic expressions. The Indian nation is a metaphor for a single family and all women are seen to relate to each other as sisters. The three tactics already noted involved persuasive methods to make the opposing party see the logic and purposefulness of picketing. However, if arguing logically was not effective,

then, women would try to dissuade customers by moral persuasion. For example, bangles would be sent in envelopes to men who expressed loyalty towards the British government. Sometimes pickets would force these men to wear the bangles. The sentences, 'Give your bangles to the menfolk' and 'leave the task of making chappatis to the men' projects women as stronger than men, and if the men are not ready to support the movement, they should stay at home and do women's household chores. On the other hand, women will go out on the streets and conduct nationalist activities. One respondent told me,

'We used to put bangles in envelopes and put it in the post to loyal Indians. Once in Mall road, Kanpur we went to T.D. Kochar's place, a senior executive officer and forced him to wear bangles. He felt shy and wore them' (Transcript of interview with Satya Saxena).

The suggestion that men should wear bangles is shameful because it questions the masculinity of Indian men in terms of both their failure to protect their own women in the prevailing political crisis and their cowardice in relation to other dauntless men who are fighting for the nation. Women have taken the initiative to protect their honour and stepped outside their homes. Women's personal honour and the motherland's honour were used as interchangeable symbols.

At the end of each day the pieces of foreign cloth were burnt in public bonfires. This was referred to as *Holi*, the name of a festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil. The good was the Indian nation and the evil was the power of the colonial rulers. Dismantling the sales of foreign cloth and wearing home-spun cloth were a means of support for the national boycott as well as symbolic acts of pride in the indigenous industries. The public burning of cloth referred to as *Holi* was also an instance of 'propaganda by deed', used effectively by the Congress for mobilisation (Pandey, 1978: 84). The task of picketing relied on the social pressure it could exert. The women were often drawn from the same caste as the men frequenting the stores

(Agnew, 1979: 46). In certain places there would be social boycott with the help of caste panchayats of merchants who refused to comply (Brown, 1977: 127).

The Picketing of Liquor Shops

The picketing of liquor shops was important since tax on liquor was a major source of revenue for the British. Liquor, like salt and cloth, was closely associated with the domestic economy. Picketing was mainly a task for women. If women could successfully stop the sale of liquor, they would improve the financial conditions of many households with male drinkers. Moreover, opposition to liquor sales was symbolic of the purity of the nationalist movement. The movement's purity was enhanced by the sacrificial and selfless attitudes of women. As Gandhi stated,

‘If men approach drunkards, the latter will resort to obscene language; however, if young girls approach them as to why they drink, ask them what indeed they are up to, whether it befits them under the influence of drink to fail to recognise a mother or a daughter, then on hearing such words steeped in affection, even the worst of drunkards will hang his head in shame’ (CWMG, vol. XLIII: 154-5).

Inherent in this conviction was the idea that a woman could more easily bring about a change of heart than a man. More importantly, the images of mother and daughter consistently generated a lot of respect in the nationalist movement and the symbolic power of those images was enormous. At the same time, some respondents mentioned problems which arose during liquor picketing. One of them stated:

‘I picketed foreign cloth shops but never gave dharna in front of liquor shops because we were young and sometimes the customers were anti-social elements’ (Transcript of interview with Sri Devi Tewari).

The tactics of women pickets were usually the same as those in the picketing of foreign cloth shops. Women would go in deputations to the owners of liquor booths and ask them to give up this trade. Women would also visit the homes of drinkers and

try to persuade them to give up. The most intense picketing took place at Agra. Men and women *svayam sevikas* (volunteers) sat on a *dharna* at 22-23 shops and they were clearly successful since the sale of liquor declined. *Dharna* was a form of silent protest in which the sevikas would sit in front of shops and obstruct their normal activities. Sevikas who sat on the *dharna* displayed qualities of self-sacrifice, forbearance and bodily sacrifice. The sufferings of the sevikas through fasting or enduring bad weather were effective for the moral persuasion of the relentless shopowners. On certain occasions, however, the shop owners resisted. In a particular instance, Saurabji and M.S.P. Ganju, owners of a co-operative store in Agra, asked their servants to bodily lift the volunteers out of the way.

In Agra, in the smaller towns of Pinhat, Dhimishri, Faihabad and Samshabad, volunteers began to destroy the palm trees from which toddy was prepared. In Jagapur the toddy trees were cut down by the volunteers. In Manoharpur and Sikandpur pledges were taken from zamindars that they would not lease out their toddy trees to anybody (PP.Hin.B. 33, 1931: 52-54). Every year the toddy shops were auctioned to prospective buyers at good prices. However, during the civil disobedience the picketers disrupted these auctions, bringing the prices down. The best example was that of Allahabad where over successive years the prices fell (See Figure).

An activist from Kanpur referred to the word toddy in her slogans. She stated:

‘One of the popular slogans of the time was, ‘Toddy bacha hai hai’ which means Toddy babies, be doomed , be doomed. I used to shout these slogans’ (Transcript of interview with Sushila Devi Misra).

The British were called *toddies* because of the revenue they earned from encouraging liquor sales.

Public Processions

Women volunteers who did not participate in specific nationalist campaigns like breaking the salt law or picketing the foreign cloth and liquor shops participated in processions. Traditional forms of women's public appearance in festivals were incorporated and politicised by the nationalist leaders. A particular form of processions were the *prabhat pheris*. The *pheris* demonstrated Gandhi's ability to use conventional religious symbols for new and revolutionary ends. They could be performed in the public sphere with women carrying over their traditional religious values from the domestic sphere. Political themes were substituted for traditional religious hymns, asserting the feelings of nationality and patriotism of the women.

In the morning, groups of women would leave their homes and walk to the temple. *Pheris* were only taken out in the early hours of the morning and were religious in nature. Women would sing devotional songs which concentrated largely on the grievances of the people and the injustices perpetuated by the government and the police. One of the most popular songs, as reported by the Times of India (TOI), dealt with Gandhi's themes of *charkha* and *swadeshi*. (TOI, August 11, 1930: 4). Nearly all the activists were aware of the *pheris* and many participated along with their mothers.

Pheris were a non-violent protest against colonial rule and were purposeful in increasing women's awareness towards their public surroundings. A lot of women mentioned peeping out of their houses to witness a *pheri*. Some women were in strict *purdah* but were generally allowed to go to a seasonal *mela* (funfare) accompanied by other members of the household. For these women participating in a *pheri* or an ordinary procession was as if 'going out in a mela' (transcript of interviews with Sridevi Tewari and Uma Dixit).

Pheris would end at a temple. There were similar processions on the streets organised by women leaders. Such processions of women would end in a meeting.

These meetings gave '*protsahan*' (they generated enthusiasm) to women who attended. Women leaders would give provocative speeches on issues concerning the political situation, and a range of issues related to the political, social and economic lives of the populace were raised. A typical exhortation was:

'British Hukumat Ka man, dhan aur jan se madat karna haram he (To support the British with your mind, wealth and populace is the most evil thing)' (Transcript of interview with Kishori Dixit).

The speech brought in the issue of women's *dharma* and the moral duty which would enable her to see the difference between good and evil for the nation. The concept of *dharma* within the domestic sphere was associated with women maintaining healthy households and offering support to their husbands. When women stepped out onto the streets, the domestic values of the *dharma* were transformed into duty towards the nation and the expectation that women would uphold nationalist values.

Women and Violence

There were some women who broke the boundaries constructed by non-violent Gandhian ideology. There were political parties, like the Communist Party, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, Chittagong Revolutionary Army, and the Indian Independence League, which argued that the doctrine of non-violence was not effective as a political strategy seeking to overthrow the colonial rule. Revolutionary activities were undertaken by women in the public sphere and unlike the experience of the non-violent *satyagrahi*, women who took the revolutionary path were exposed to various degrees of violence.

Family support for violent activities was important. In relation to the activities of women who were members of revolutionary parties, Vijay Agnew notes:

‘Their involvement is independent of any support from their family members or of the leadership’ (Agnew, 1979: 62).

However, a few activists involved in revolutionary activities strongly believed that without adequate family support, they would not have achieved very much. Some members in respondents’ families were politically active. A particular activist recalls her days of political activity:

‘Women were not supposed to do anything outside four walls. However, my father was keen that I should be able to move about freely and engage in whatever activity I liked. Also, in those days, no wife could do anything that her husband did not like’ (Transcript of interview with Manavati Arya).

Traditionally, women have been associated with non-violence and feminine activities. But there are in fact two contrasting images: one of an ideal non-violent woman and another of a revolutionary woman undertaking violent activities. Violence has tended to be the male sex’s prerogative so that women’s involvement with violence and sabotage raised new questions about the definition of middle-class femininity. For example, the feminine trait of sacrifice was expressed very differently in a silent suffering *satyagrahi* on the streets compared with revolutionary, dangerous action and a woman’s sacrifice of her body for the nation.

Women revolutionaries believed that their activities served the nationalist cause more effectively than non-violence. The difference in perception concerned the nature and time-scale of acceptable resolutions of conflict. Revolutionary women argued that through their activities, their plans materialised more efficiently than with peaceful *satyagrahis*. They drew a distinction between revolutionary activities and terrorism, a distinction blurred in the statements of non-violent activists. For example, it was believed that terrorist activity entailed the indiscriminate killing of innocent people, and often the purpose of such killings was not clear. Revolutionary activity was seen by the respondents as serving the freedom of the nation and involving the killing of

targeted English administrators. With every killing, the national cause was being served. A respondent remarked,

‘As long as the action is for the nation, everything is alright’ (Transcript of interview with Narayani Tripathi).

and a male activist commented:

‘Nehru’s sisters were not doing any work. Just joining a procession is no nationalist work. When you are under foreign power, nationalism cannot be confined to non-violence and passivity. Honesty should not be tried when stratagem can succeed. In this connection, Aruna Asaf Ali and Manohar Lohia went underground. They were wise because they did not want to be arrested and thus went underground. They said that they wanted to do maximum damage’ (Transcript of interview with Dr. Bhawani Shankar Joshi).

Age was a strong determining factor in the activities of women from the middle-class. The younger generation were more inclined towards revolutionary activities. The leaders of the first nationalist generation were quick to identify the potential in the younger generation. When Pandit Nehru and Subhas Bose, constituting the radical wing of the Congress, founded the Independence League in 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru commented:

‘After long suppression the spirit of youth is up in arms against all forms of authoritarianism and is seeking an outlet in many ways and in many directions. Youth leagues have sprung up in all parts of the country and individual young men and women, weary of the continual and barren strife of many of their elders, are groping for a path which might lead them to a fuller realization of themselves....’ (The Leader, March 24 1928: 10).

The outlet, according to Nehru, was to be through his ideas on internationalism and socialism, the ‘only ideals worthy of the fine temper of the youth’ (Gopal, 1980: 452).

Addressing a youth congress at Calcutta in December 1928 and aware of the swelling discontent among the younger generation, Subhas Bose declared:

‘The youths of India are no longer content with handing over all responsibility to their elders with folded hands. They have realised that it is for them to create a new India - an India free, great and powerful’ (Bose, 1964: 152-155).

Women engaged in revolutionary activities devised no special programme, nor did they believe in any kind of organised administration. These women believed in ‘maximum sacrifice by a minimum number’, not the building of a mass movement (Basu, 1979: 33).

Religious imagery was given political significance across the national spectrum, irrespective of political divisions. However, as with the satyagrahis, revolutionaries used religious imagery to rationalize and explain their activities. The aggressive, violent and destructive qualities of the feminine deities of *Shakti* and *Kali* were stressed. They were seen as symbols of the motherland and the nationalist spirit (Gordon, 1974: 112).

The most detailed account of a particular sabotage activity, is the Benares bomb case, reported in the local press. Bomb making materials were found in the house of two women associates, Ms. Mrinalini and Radha Rani Debi. It is interesting to note that both of them were members of the Benares Youth League and had earlier taken part in picketing. However, disenchantment with the non-violent programme caused them to resort to terrorism. The other person accused was Mrinalini’s daughter, Jogmaya. All three were arrested under sections 4 and 5 of the Explosive Substances Act and section 19F of the Arms Act. One cannot be sure of the women’s social origins, although there is one reference to Radha Debi owning two houses, one at Kalichpura and one at Bhilupura in Benares. It can be conjectured that she came from an upper middle-class background (HT, April 22 1931: 5 and ABP, May 5 1931: 10). No other details are available on Mrinalini.

Women also engaged in blowing up railways, shooting targeted English generals and disrupting parliamentary sessions.

Women in Jail

Sending male and female activists to jail was seen by the British authorities as a deterrent, which would inhibit further nationalist participation. They were as keen to arrest local and national Congress Party leaders as the revolutionaries involved in sabotage and espionage against the state.

Besides being a site where segregation between men and women (like *purdah* was in the domestic sphere) was reinforced in the public sphere, it became a temporary residence for many women activists, replacing for the time, the family home. This is one of the reasons why it was easier for these *purdah*-clad women to court arrest. Generally imprisoned women came from large joint households and carried over domestic features such as giving moral support to other women, participating in discussions and disseminating information and sharing a communal space. I will argue that for these women the jail (normally associated with the public sphere) shared similarities with their normal domestic environment although the dynamics were different. They resisted colonial rule through nationalist activities from within the domestic sphere (such as spinning and weaving) as they did through their imprisonment and their activities within the jail (such as writing poetry). Women's consciousness burgeoned and the jail became a site where identities were continuously shaped and restructured. Feelings of pride, resentment, honour and humiliation were all experienced by women prisoners and were continuously sharpened.

The British attitude towards men and women differed. In the initial years of the movement, from 1925 until the 1930s, the British police feared the political impact of any misbehaviour by their men towards Indian women. The fear of the 'sacred' Indian womanhood affected their attitudes as well as their actions. However, by the 1940s, the British authorities were to realise that they could not enforce law and order without arresting women activists. In her memoirs, Krishna Nehru Hutheesingh, one of Nehru's sisters, wrote this about fellow women activists:

‘For weeks they had joined in processions, attended meetings and braved lathi charges. At last the mighty government considering them to be too dangerous and a menace to the public peace had issued warrants for their arrests’ (Hutheesingh, 1946: 25).

A few respondents described in detail angry confrontations with the British police. In all their statements the respondents were aware of the symbolic power of purity and sacredness attached to their womanhood. For example, a respondent in an encounter with the police stated:

‘Go away or stay at a distance from me. Don’t dare to touch me. If you ever touch me, it will be the worst mistake you will make and things will become bad. The police did not dare to touch me but arrested me’ (Transcript of interview with Vijay Devi Rathore).

What made matters more difficult was the lack of women police. Until now the jail had been a site for male prisoners or women convicts from the lower classes. Consequently, it had not been necessary to have a separate women’s wing in the police force. Whenever women were arrested, Congressmen used to accompany them as bodyguards to the jail so that the policemen would not touch their mothers, wives and daughters. In one particular instance, a respondent refused arrest by the police. She stated:

‘The police came looking for our family members. I had made my mother leave earlier. I was left alone and to protect myself, I brought out my father’s revolver. I told the police that I was willing to be arrested, but only when my father returned’ (Transcript of interview with Narayani Tripathi).

Before I discuss the dynamics within the prison, I will briefly identify the main reasons for women’s imprisonment.

Reasons for Arrests

Women were arrested by the custodians of law and order for any form of nationalist activity. They could be detained in the prison from one day to one year. About a quarter of my women respondents went to jail for up to one year, and a very small number served two sentences. The menfolk were informed when women were arrested, and on almost all occasions a prominent Congress leader, generally from the elite-class was present on the day the imprisoned women were released. This was primarily to pay the fine of these women, to bail them out, as well to play the role of the guardian (transcript of interview with Satish Saxena).

Arrests were made for leading processions, holding meetings and giving provocative speeches against colonial rule. Other nationalist activities were picketing, staging boycotts or distributing proscribed literature (Transcript of interviews with Devi Rathore and Gayatri Dubey). Arrests were also made when activists planted nationalist flags on government buildings.

The standard action would be that the *satyagrahis* were fined by the police for breaking the laws. The choice for the *satyagrahis* was to either pay the fine or be arrested. In some instances, if the *satyagrahis* did not stop their activities after paying their first fine, on the second occasion they had to give a fine as well as serve a sentence (see appendix B).

Sometimes, if the activists could not be arrested immediately, the police would come searching for them in their houses and would seal the house. This was called *kurki* under which, depending on the nature of offence, the family had to pay a monetary fine. In many accounts, the doors of the houses were broken, family crops were set alight and domestic animals were auctioned (transcript of interviews with Uma Dixit, Tulsa Devi and Gayatri Dubey). Even if the family had only one politically active member, the actions of the police affected the entire family. This explains why male activists were asked to leave their father's house if they were

taking part in the nationalist movement. The families of activists lived under constant tension and stress, and to avoid this many government officials discouraged any form of nationalist activity in their families. For instance, a participant whose father-in-law was employed by the Imperial Dock Company explained that if she or her husband had had any involvement with the movement, then the father-in-law would have certainly lost his government job. Her husband corroborated this and said:

‘An ordinary middle-class man always had the fear of earning a livelihood. So one was scared of participating. In the service middle-class, if one earning member was imprisoned or killed, there would be a calamity in their house’ (Transcript of interviews with Satish Saxena and Uttara Saxena).

Classification in Jails

In a mixed jail, men and women were completely segregated. Otherwise, there were separate jails for men and women. In Uttar Pradesh, near the Fategarh (district of UP) jail was the *Mahila* (women) Central jail, the only women’s jail where all categories of prisoners were kept. A distinction was made between political prisoners and convicts according to the nature of offence as well as the class background of the offender. The convicts were arrested for criminal charges and were from the lower classes, while the politicals were arrested for participating in the nationalist movement and were generally from the middle-classes. The convicts were classified lower than the political prisoners and had to undergo more hardships in the jails. We can get a general picture of life within the jail from the recollections of a political prisoner. She described the situation every Monday when the Superintendent of the jail came to the women’s prison for inspection:

‘All the convicts had to wear their clean pair of spare clothes used only for such occasions and squat on the ground with bent heads; their iron plates shining brightly were held in front of them. Their whole attitude had to be one of servility and cringing, to make them feel that they were the lowest of God’s creatures. If any one of them sat a little erect or refused to adopt a cringing attitude, the Matron’s cane came down upon them’ (Hutheesingh, 1946: 30).

The convicts were placed in a ‘C’ class while the political prisoners were assigned the ‘A’ or ‘B’ class. The ‘A’ class was the best according to one activist’s recollection:

‘I was given ‘A’ class. In those days there was a distinction between ordinary prisoners and political prisoners. I was given one single ward. I had one sweepress (a lady to clean her daily ablutions), one lady warden and other ordinary prisoners used to come and do my work’ (Transcript of interview with Srimati Rama Devi Chaudhuri).

Ordinary prisoners were women who were imprisoned for criminal activities like theft, murder or fraud as opposed to the political prisoners who were in jail for activities related to the nationalist movement. The political prisoners received a slightly better treatment than other prisoners. This can be seen from a matron’s reaction in Sultanpur to a threat from an inmate:

Inmate: I am not one of your wretched convicts to be used at your sweet will and pleasure. I am a political prisoner and you must not touch me.
Matron: You think you are too high and mighty for me because you are a political?’ (Hutheesingh, 40: 1946).

Sometimes ordinary prisoners had to render their services to the political prisoners at the matron’s behest.

The male and female leaders of the movement were generally assigned the ‘A’ class. The main criterion was that the political prisoner should be a graduate and an income tax payer. Only the elite fulfilled these requirements. The ‘B’ class was for ordinary middle-class citizens and the ‘C’ class was specifically for convicts,

labourers and peasants (transcript of interview with Shiv Singh Verma). There are many instances of men being placed in the 'C' class, although no women activists were placed in that category. The age of women prisoners varied from adults and teenage girls to small babies who accompanied their mothers.

Understanding Prison Dynamics

Women's experiences in jail can be placed into six categories. These experiences are personal and unique to these women respondents. However, some broad generalisations can be made from the common accounts of political prisoners.

A Segregated Site

The life in the jails featured segregation at two levels. First, the inmates had no contact with the outside world beyond the four walls of their cells. The prisoners were allowed limited access to letters that were written to them by their friends and family members who were either themselves serving jail sentences or participating in nationalist activities in the public and domestic spheres. The letters were general letters about the welfare of the parties involved and did not contain any information of political significance. One woman remembered:

'The only bright spots of jail life were letters that came once a fortnight and interviews that could also be had once a fortnight' (Hutheessingh, 28: 1946).

The inmates did not have access to any other sources of information. They were not allowed to read any national or local newspapers. If the jail matron was good, she would smuggle a newspaper inside for the prisoners to read, but often the newspaper was a fortnight or a month old (Hutheessingh, 28: 1946).

Secondly, women were segregated from men. Their segregation was sometimes broken when British male administrators visited the jail to ask these women questions about their activities and the whereabouts of their friends and family members who were participating in the nationalist movement. Otherwise, women came in contact only with other women prisoners. At times even that access was denied, and some women were placed in solitary confinement. Women sharing the same environment relied on each other for support and solidarity. They developed strong feelings of sisterhood, evident from their shared hunger strikes, boycotts and mutual emotional support.

As a Communal Site

The jail was a social space, in which women enjoyed some degree of freedom of expression and speech. Most of the women came from conservative *pardah*-practising households.

Women were kept in barracks, and in one barrack there could be up to fifteen women from different *zillas* (district). Since the jail turned into a communal site, the jailer (usually an English woman) always attempted to separate the women in order to keep a check on prisoners talking and socialising. Respondents have narrated a range of experiences. For example, some respondents who were imprisoned together talked about the arguments they had with the jailer. The jailer insisted that they should use individual boxes to perform their morning ablutions and should not meet in the open grounds. These women insisted on going to the grounds in the morning since that was the time when they met everybody and talked. The same group of respondents mentioned how they harrassed the jailer by calling her names: for example, '*Lal muh valey bandar, tera nash ho*' which means, 'red faced monkey may you perish'. The jailer finally removed the locks from their barracks (transcript of interview with Vijay Devi Rathore).

Sharing a space encouraged a feeling of collective struggle and solidarity against colonial rule as it did in the domestic sphere. Within this communal space of the jail women also experienced regional differences apart from differences on the basis of age, religion and caste, but these differences did not affect their feeling of unity.

As an Intellectual Site

Women used to read and write within the four walls of the jail. As an activist stated, 'The political prisoners spent their time reading, writing and discussing the future' (Hutheesingh, 1946: 27). Women respondents recalled hiding and taking some of the nationalist literature to read. On one occasion some literature was also handed to the matron by a political prisoner (transcript of interview with Vijay Devi Rathore).

Women also composed poetry and wrote radical nationalist tracts. This written material was smuggled outside from the jail and published in national newspapers and vernacular magazines. This literature was inflammatory, was confiscated by the British and categorised as proscribed literature. One such tract was called 'Bahin Satyavati ka Jail Sandesh' (The Message of your Sister from the Jail) and was published by Pandit Babu Ram Sharma. Satyavati was the grand-daughter of Swami Shraddhanand and a founder member of the Naujavan Bharat Sabha, a youth organisation in Delhi. She was imprisoned several times. An extract from her prison writings reads:

‘This is a message from your jailed sister
Sister Satyavati appeals to you
Do not slacken from your work
Jump if required into the burning flames
The sacred battle should be full of strength
Once you have stepped forward, never retreat
Die before the men in the battlefield
Do not fear bullets or sticks
Put your head forward before the men
Once lit, the fire should never go out
I have full faith now
Because the women have prepared themselves’
(PP.Hin.B. 146, 1931b).

This poem is inspirational and its emotional appeal serves as fuel for mobilising and motivating women to participate. It is about sacrifice and commitment to the nationalist cause. Women are depicted as wanting to show themselves as stronger than men, as wanting to take up the challenge first. The battle is given both religious and moral significance.

In a movement which involved the masses, it was natural that participants would exhibit different levels of commitment and motivation. The poems tried to keep the nation’s commitment to the movement high by resorting to personalised appeals and stressing the idea of sacrifice to the motherland. They were written to touch the emotions of the populace and enhance their nationalist fervour.

A Site for Moral Battle

Women undertook tasks that involved both their physical and moral strength. The best example is provided by the hunger strikes within the jails. There were two kinds of activities around the issue of food. First, women would voluntarily stop accepting food to express their resentment towards the matron or wardress. This would lead to the matron cajoling as well as coaxing these women to resume eating. For example, an English matron in Farrukabad jail said to one respondent:

‘You are intelligent, you should start eating’ The respondent replied, ‘That means the rest are idiots!’ .If that is so, then I am more of an idiot than them’ (Transcript of interview with Vijay Devi Rathore).

Secondly, the jailer would not give food to women if they did not ask forgiveness for misconduct within the premises. The women who could control their hunger helped the other inmates who were unable to sustain for a longer time. For example, the women with infants were secretly given food, and those women who could not control their hunger were fed secretly so that they did not have to ask for forgiveness (transcript of interview with Vijay Rathore).

Women with Children: Courage and Fortitude

Pregnant women were never imprisoned. There were exceptions to this rule, and this indicated the determination of politically active women to serve the nationalist cause. Mothers often left their young children with relatives or family friends. However, small infants accompanied their mothers to jail. Some mothers took their six month old infants to jail (transcript of interview with Brij Rani Misra, Tara Devi¹⁰ and Vijay Kumari). A few women with young babies died in prison (Hutheesingh, 42: 1946).

One activist, Tara Devi Agarwal, was arrested under sections 126 and 129 of the Penal Code and locked in Lucknow jail. She recollected, ‘Along with me was my one year old son and he stayed with me throughout’ (Dainik Jagron, 1972: 65). In one particular instance, a newly born child of an undertrial political prisoner, Sarla Debi, died within the walls of the prison. The injustice and tyranny of the government in arresting a pregnant woman was condemned by the whole society. Sarla Debi was arrested on a warrant from Farrukabad and confined in the Cawnpore jail for eighteen

¹⁰ Vijay Rathore’s sister-in-law.

days. In a condolence meeting in Cawnpore, presided over by Dr. Hulas Rai, it was said:

‘The government has lost humanity and chivalry. Why did the jail doctor report not the case to the civil surgeon? In jails one may be beaten to death and then declared as having died of pneumonia, but the neglect of the child was new. This kind of treatment will have to bring swaraj’ (Police Abstract of Intelligence, United Provinces, Allahabad, Vol. XLIX, No.3, 1931).

Women’s Presence: A Challenge to British Rule

Women’s entry into male dominated spaces dispelled the British stereotypes about Indian women as subordinate, weak and docile. By entering the jails, women proved their courage, determination and strong commitment to an end to British rule.

On the other hand, the British could no longer talk, unabashedly, about their civilised behaviour once Indian women protesters were physically assaulted and manhandled by the guardians of law and order and ‘by clearing protesting women off the streets they (British) had to give up their image of being supporters of social progress and the women’s cause’ (Engels, 1989: 432). Women exposed the brutality of the British government. Women were also aware that by endangering their womanhood on the streets and putting their bodies under risk of attack, they proved that they could share common experiences with their fellow men in the public sphere.

As a Site of Humiliation

Up till now I have drawn upon similarities that prison life had with women’s domestic lives. However, there were certain aspects that were remote to the domestic existence. The main feature is the humiliation that inmates experienced. Even though the jail inmates were all women, power hierarchies were enforced between women

who were a part of the British system (for example, the matrons and the wardress) women who were citizens of a colonised nation (India), and who made their entry into the jail as political prisoners.

Forms of humiliation were both physical and psychological. The body of the political prisoner could be inspected without the prisoner's consent, by the superintendent or matron of the jail. One of the reasons for this inspection was to check any hidden articles of food or clothing which the prisoners might have. Occasionally, in order to increase the feelings of humiliation, women who cleaned the jail courtyards and toilets were asked to inspect the prisoners. The former belonged to the untouchable castes, and it was sacrilegious for these women to touch women prisoners from the middle-classes. For example, an inmate in Farukkabad jail was inspected by an untouchable on the instructions of the English matron. The inmate was on her periods and stated:

‘she inspected me and even saw the pad I was wearing. But instead of shame I became very angry and said to the untouchable, ‘Have we committed a *dacoity* (robbery) that you are inspecting us’’ (Gulabo Debi, name changed).

The woman prisoner understood that the Indian untouchable was herself in a difficult position and could not refuse to carry out the orders of the British representative of law and order. She said for the untouchable, ‘She was doing her duty. She had been ordered to do so.’ (Gulabo Debi).

There were instances of a matron forcing herself on a young girl prisoner. This matron would come and explore the body of the prisoner and when her actions were resisted by the political prisoner, she would physically torture the prisoner by cane beatings. For example, one former political prisoner recollected:

‘The Matron’s coarse hands slipped down the young girls shoulders and passed over her full breasts while she cuddled up closer muttering words of endearment all the time. Chitra screamed, ‘Don’t touch me, you wicked woman. How can you be so evil?’ (Hutheesingh, 1946:39).

These examples speak for the powerlessness of these women and the consequent humiliation and discomfort which they suffered.

Conclusion

The Indian Nationalist Movement liberated the nation from three centuries of colonial rule and also brought Indian women out into the public domain for the first time in the history of India. All movements are culturally specific, and this gives them their distinctive flavour. The Indian nationalist movement was important because it witnessed the participation of women in large numbers on the streets. A mass movement like the Indian Nationalist Movement projected a unified image in front of both the colonial rulers and the Indian populace. It also claimed to represent every section of society, irrespective of class, caste and religion.

The nationalist leaders, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, formulated a political ideology that in its effects built bridges between the domestic and public spheres. The womenfolk associated with these leaders set an example for the general populace by taking bold initiatives. With this precedent, it was easier for other women to step over the thresholds of their homes. A gender-specific non-violent programme and sex segregation in the public sphere were some values that were transferred from the domestic sphere. A large percentage of the respondents were aware of the significance of the freedom struggle, both for the nation and in their personal lives. The nationalist struggle sought the liberation of the country from the colonial rule, but the struggle also provided opportunities for women to experience a new sense of freedom by stepping out into the public sphere. This sphere offered a challenge and an exciting alternative to their tradition-bound lives. Also, women for the first time could

associate with other women without the supervisory gaze of the males in their families. However, women did not take to nationalist activities unproblematically. They faced conflicts, ambiguities and contradictions in their lives, and these had to be resolved as part of the process of developing women's consciousness.

Gandhi incorporated domestic imagery in his political discourse, and this enabled women to come out into the public sphere. He used ordinary household items, like salt and *charkha*, to ignite the imagination of the masses. Women from different social backgrounds could identify with these issues. Other notions of familial sacrifice and nationalist symbols helped to associate domestic values with those of the public sphere.

However, non-violent resistance was not the only fundamental and unrivalled form of anti-colonial resistance. There were some women activists who engaged in a more revolutionary programme. The latter form of resistance which employed violence as a tactic was clearly at variance with the Gandhian prescribed mode of anti-colonial resistance. Women revolutionaries not only went beyond the limits prescribed by the leaders but also challenged the construction of a non-violent nationalist woman. Women involved in sabotage stressed the destructive, aggressive and violent qualities of the feminine deities (*Shakti* and *Kali*), thus constructing a different notion of femininity.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICISATION OF THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the activities of middle-class women in the public sphere. Given the opportunity by the nationalist leaders to make political contributions to the movement from within both the public and the domestic spheres, women were able to enter the public sphere without disassociating themselves from domestic ideology. Instead, they were urged to carry over values from the domestic sphere into their new public roles. Gandhi's non-violent programme facilitated this process. Not only did this participation deny the West's claims that Indian women and gender relations were backward, it also allowed the nationalist movement to create a form of resistance which was demonstrably superior (to Western movements and violent struggles) in terms of its respect for human life, and its reliance on persuasion rather than force. The domestication of the public sphere made it safe, indeed desirable, for women to participate and come out of their homes. This feature has to be studied in conjunction with the parallel process of the politicisation of the domestic sphere. For many women, social constraints did not allow any form of public activity. Yet, women's lives within the domestic sphere were being affected by changes in the public sphere. As discussed in chapter 3, it was not the individual but the whole household which got involved in the movement. If members of their families were participants in the movement, *purdah*-bound women were compelled to take

cognisance of it. With limited choice, women had to adapt to the changes brought about by the nationalist movement as well as to adhere to certain role-models constructed by nationalist leaders. They had to face the hardships and the traumas of an uncertain domestic existence while remaining good wives, nurturers and mothers.

In retrospect, the domestic sphere, for these women, was a centre of political activity and involvement with the public world. These women now see their support for family members as their contribution to the nationalist movement. If some women could not participate in the public sphere, their activities within the domestic sphere facilitated the process of its politicisation. Women maintained traditional virtues like *purdah*, yet gave support to their husbands' nationalist activities. They managed their households and looked after the children during an economic crisis caused by their husbands' political commitment to nationalism, or gave moral support to women activists and *looked after their children while they were away from home*. These are some examples of how women engaged emotionally with the movement. Those who shared a strong political commitment had to conduct their activities clandestinely.

My argument differs from most other writings on women and nationalism in India, in which women's political involvement is implicitly defined as an activity undertaken in the public sphere (Basu, 1979, Jayawardena, 1986 and Uma Rao, 1984 & 1995) and concepts such as political activity, public participation and active role are associated with women 'coming onto the streets'. However, no in-depth analysis of their participation is proposed. Women's achievements in leading processions and demonstrations, holding meetings and giving speeches were important, but they have been overemphasised in academic history in relation to their activities within the domestic sphere. For example, a woman marching in a street demonstration is typically taken as an example of a politically active woman but while demonstrating she may not have been thinking of the nationalist movement. We need to reconsider

whether the heroic portrayal of women leaving their homes and coming out on the streets really provides an adequate view of the movement.

This chapter seeks to understand women's politics of this period (from 1905 to 1947) as a dialogue between feminist ideas and nationalist feelings established through acts which conventionally have not been seen as forms of political activity. For example, writing poetry and prose, reading nationalist literature, and giving support to another male or female activist, were political acts undertaken by women in the domestic sphere. A political act is here understood as one which supported the nationalist cause or expressed nationalist feelings, irrespective of whether it was located within the domestic or public sphere. Furthermore, this chapter identifies the domestic sphere as a dynamic site of contradiction and ambiguity, a site where women were subjected to oppressive practices but also resisted those same practices.

The domestic site underwent significant changes as a consequence of developments in the public-political world. First, the domestic sphere became a significant location of women's nationalist activities, and this chapter will identify those domestic values that helped women to contribute from within the domestic sphere. Secondly, there were debates and discussions about whether domestic roles should reflect political demands and new ideologies. This aspect will be discussed in chapter five.

The bulk of evidence in this chapter comes from oral narratives but my analysis is limited to what was told to myself. For example, certain areas discussed later, such as communal antagonism, were not expressed by most of my respondents.

Domestic Voices

My emphasis on the domestic as a site of political activity has its own history. I grew up in a household in which both my grandmother, Iqbalwati Handa, and mother,

Kamala Thapar, saw themselves as having made significant contributions to the nationalist movement. Yet my grandmother was confined to the domestic sphere, and her activities have never been acknowledged within the dominant public discourse.

My maternal grandmother's husband, a state public prosecutor during British rule, did not allow her to leave the house. But she overcame the restrictions imposed by her husband and taught her children, especially her daughter, about the freedom movement. She was an avid reader of Hindi newspapers like *Dainik Milap*, a local Lahore publication, and the other vernacular magazines to which her husband subscribed. Occasionally, she was allowed to attend meetings of the *Arya Samaj*, a Hindu organisation where women sang patriotic songs. She memorised these songs and used to sing them at home to her children.

My grandmother found herself in a more difficult position than many other women because she was positioned in a household that was pro-British while she herself harboured strong nationalist feelings. My mother Kamala talks about her parents:

'My father used to read the English newspaper, *The Tribune*, and he also had access to secret information about the activities of anti-British leaders and the files about who would soon be arrested. My mother was very inquisitive and kept prodding my father for more information on the current situation, which he supplied willingly. Often their discussions used to become acrimonious because my mother was strongly anti-British and pro-Hindu while my father was pro-British and even seemed to like the Muslims' (Transcript of interview with Kamala Seth¹¹).

As part of his professional duties my grandfather had to keep himself informed of vernacular news and the latest developments in the nationalist movement.

¹¹ She also told me that at various stages of the nationalist movement, the British and Indians working for the British, sought an alliance with Muslim leaders. This was a conscious strategy of the British because, while it gained them the support of a minority religious group, it also maintained the communal divisions between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Ironically, he used to make his wife read aloud the latest news in Hindi, since he had a poor command of the language. Despite her husband's opposition, Iqbalwati created a nationalist environment within the home and infused her children with patriotic feelings. She would memorise the nationalist details which she discussed with her husband, and in his absence would narrate these details to my mother and her other sons or to other women at an Arya Samaj meeting. My mother recalls:

'My mother used to become very excited reading from the newspapers about the exploits of Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders. She used to call all of us and give us details of the activities of Kamala Nehru and Sarojini Naidu. We were inspired by her stories of Bhagat Singh and Jhansi ki Rani and Hari Singh Nalva (a general in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army), who fought valiantly against the British. She used to say to us, 'See what sacrifices our countrymen are making to drive these Britishers out. How brave Indians are' (Transcript of interview with Kamala Seth).

A recent article 'Narratives that never surfaced', by Jagdish Prasad Gupt Jagesh, in a special Independence Day feature of the Kanpur newspaper Dainik Jagron, also suggests that women's activities within the domestic sphere have not been recognised as an integral part of nationalist activity.

'The tears of *pativratas* (a woman whose love for her husband is unchanging and who serves her husband throughout her life) do not fall on their motherland without any significance. In our long nationalist struggle for independence, the widows and companions of nationalist men have shouldered extraordinary pain without a sigh, without complaining. However, the nation has not realised it, neither has anybody remembered it. The names of men who sacrificed their lives for the nation have been recorded in books, in memoirs and biographies, inscriptions and writings on slabs of stones. However, those wives, mothers and nurturers who agreed with their husbands and who transformed the oil of their tears to light the paths of their husbands - their names are never mentioned' (Dainik Jagron, 18 October, 1992).

The article seeks to make its readers realise that women's contributions as mothers and nurturers were important to the movement, though they have not been adequately documented. While men's contributions, primarily in the public sphere, are

celebrated, there is no mention of their womenfolk, who stood as pillars of support for these men throughout the movement's development. In the last few decades, however, women's roles have at last gained recognition in vernacular literature and newspapers. After independence, articles containing reminiscences of the nationalist movement were published. Examples include 'There were dreams in our eyes' (Saptahik Press, 29 January, 1984), 'The struggle for independence gave birth to the murmur of women's independence' (The Times of India, 28 August, 1985) and 'True Grit' (The Week, May 30, 1993). The prestige accorded to women participants may explain to an extent, why more domesticated women, in retrospect, want to insist that their own roles made an important contribution.

Family Dynamics

Western political theory distinguishes between the public (political) and private (domestic) spheres and political contributions have exclusively been associated with the public sphere. Though much Indian academic literature does the same, the idea that women could contribute to the nationalist movement from within the domestic sphere has a long history in India. It first surfaced in the first decade of the twentieth century at the time of the partition of Bengal in 1905. An important act of protest by women was to conduct the ritual of *arandhan* whereby women did not light the hearth for cooking food on a publically named day (Basu, 1976: 17). At the turn of the century, the participation of women in the public sphere was limited and so women could identify with the political decision of partition by focusing on an important activity in the domestic sphere.

During the non-cooperation movement (1920), the first organised mass campaign against the British Raj, Gandhi sought to mobilise large number of women

in the movement. However, he was acutely aware of the social status of women. In her brief discussion of Gandhi's role in mobilising women, Rao states:

'Gandhi's approach was pragmatic, he did not shut his eyes to the actual situation of women. He laid stress on that part of the Non-Cooperation movement in which women could participate without having to make the attempt to break free of their fetters'. (Rao, 1994: 33)

The direct participation of women in the public sphere was not significant during the non-cooperation movement, and women were encouraged by nationalist leaders to make their political contributions from within the domestic sphere.

Women's public activities were more pronounced during the civil disobedience movement (1930). However, many upper caste women were still confined to the domestic sphere. In these circumstances family dynamics were important in encouraging women to express themselves politically. As discussed in the previous chapter, women who were exposed to nationalist family attitudes in their parental homes and in conjugal households were in a very different situation from those women who faced unfavourable family attitudes and circumscribed family circumstances. The latter were compelled to adopt the domestic space as a site of nationalist activity.

A broad generalisation can be drawn from my interviews with women in Uttar Pradesh who had been active in the domestic sphere. *Purdah* was practised in these households, though the degree of restrictions could vary across households. Thus, 'women were limited within the four walls of their homes with no opportunities for education or economic independence'.¹² In other situations women could make limited visits outside the home, if they were escorted by male members of the family.

¹² This information is from a 'Report of the participation of Women in Azad Hind Movement led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in South East Asia', written by a respondent, Manvati Arya.

In the parental home, an activist often gained support from the womenfolk, primarily from the mother. For example, if the father was involved in the public sphere or serving a long jail sentence, the mother was the primary source of emotional support (transcript of interview with Uma Dixit). She was also responsible for the family's livelihood. In other circumstances, where the father or husband opposed any nationalist activity within the house, women conducted activities clandestinely (transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha). For example, my own grandmother paid no heed to her civil servant husband's pro-British stance, and continued with her activities. Occasionally, men tried to persuade their womenfolk to participate or encouraged them to leave the *purdah*. Often, when this happened, women refused to come out of the domestic sphere because

'us samay aache khandan ke aurate ghar se bahar nahin nikalti: in those days women from good families did not come out'. (Transcript of interview with Kishori Devi)

The effects of the joint family were contradictory. Some women did not come out because the elder women (grandmother, mother-in-law, old aunt, sister-in-law) in the household objected to younger women discarding *purdah*. On the other hand, women were able to enjoy the company of other women (sisters, aunts, sisters-in-law) in a joint household, and it was possible for them to organise and conduct activities as a group. The element of solidarity and sisterhood was stronger in a joint household. One activist commented:

'I do not remember my mother either encouraging or discouraging me. Purdah prevailed in sasural (the husband's house) and I could only go out with my mother-in-law. However, there was lots of conversation between the womenfolk about the prevailing political atmosphere' (Transcript of interview with Avadh Rani Singh).

Communal Feelings

It could be argued that the symbols and domestic values that drew women from the domestic sphere into the movement were based on a specific Hindu religious vocabulary. While they drew Hindu middle class women into the movement, however, they excluded participants from other minority communities such as Christians and Muslims. The construction of a specific Hindu communal identity was another and perhaps a more malignant aspect of the nationalist discourse.

Women left with limited choice, not only had to take cognisance of the movement (see introduction of chapter four) but were also expected to embody the identity of the community. The dominant community was the Hindu and the religious imagery and symbolism used by nationalist leaders was borrowed from Hindu religion. In the context of Bengal, Bagchi argues that this imagery helped to 'Hinduise the tone of nationalism' (Bagchi, 1990:66) The women supported the movement by adopting Hindu religious role-models of *Sati*, *Kali* and *Durga*, (the latter two being manifestations of the mother goddess *Shakti*) and the duties associated with these models such as the 'creator and nurturer of progeny' (*Sati*) or 'the defender of civilisation' (*Kali*). She asserted her gender through these role-models of a Hindu woman. Through her association with the dominant Hindu community, the woman also served her nation at the same time. She was a nationalist if she was a Hindu and vice versa- the identities were often equated with each other. In other words because of the communal way the national identity was created, the Hindu woman had little choice but to become a nationalist. In this context the Hindu woman's emerging national identity was 'not always a freely chosen option', though it cannot be said to be 'false' either (Hasan, 1989:44). The women's nationalist identity (constructed on religious grounds) was on many occasions forced on them.

Though most of my Hindu respondents adopted the identity of their community, they did not play as self-conscious or active a role in promoting Hindu communalism

as women during post-partition and the more recent 1984 riots (for details see Majumdar, 1995:1-28, who highlights the ‘vicious’ role that Hindu women played in these riots). A few Hindu respondents (Transcript of interviews with Satya Saxena and Madhavi Lata Shukla) mentioned the riots which started in late 1920s (for more details see Pandey, 1990:24), the gradual build up of tensions between the communities and the atrocities she suggested to have seen, committed by Muslim men towards Hindus:

‘When Bhagat Singh was hanged¹³ on 23 March 1931, a procession was taken out by the Hindus and the tensions between the communities escalated.¹⁴ there were riots and we were locked up in a building by our men for safety. In the field next to the building, there was a plot where they used to kill Hindu children. They used to press the child with one foot and tear him with their hands. There was so much smell that Hindu women used to throw *Miti ka tel* (a derivative of petrol) to quench the smell’ (Transcript of interview with Satya Saxena)

The respondent stated that ‘initially we never felt hatred for the Muslims but slowly we developed antagonism towards them’. It is not clear what the respondent meant by this statement but it could be implied that a lot of animosity towards Muslims was built through rumours and tales shared by Hindu households.

My Hindu women respondents did not mention taking any active part in these communal situations. A few (mentioned above) claim to have observed the atrocities and developed a dislike for the Muslims, but most respondents did not comment on their feelings towards Muslims or their communal identities in any way. Why they

¹³ Bhagat Singh was a member of the militant organisation Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, founded in 1928. He was tried and found guilty for throwing bombs in the legislative assembly, an attempt to blow up Lord Irwin’s train near Delhi and a whole series of ‘terrorist’ attacks in Punjab and UP towns (Sarkar, 1983:268)

¹⁴ The riots were sparked off by the effort of local nationalists to achieve a *hartal* (a close-down of shops and sale of merchandise) in protest against the execution of Bhagat Singh. However, because some Muslim shop-keepers resisted these attempts, they incurred the anger of Hindu nationalists (Pandey, 1990:243)

didn't is difficult to explain. Their silence could be interpreted as their acceptance of a communal identity that was not 'freely chosen' or it could be that they did not want to disclose their feelings, which could be perceived/interpreted by myself as malicious and bigoted or there could be other explanations.

It could also be argued that the vectors of women's 'multiple identities' are different in different socio-political situations. For example, for most of the women I interviewed, who had participated in demonstrations against the British and other such activities, it was the anti-colonial feelings that shaped their identity rather than religious differences. But there were a few women respondents who saw British presence as a help in maintaining stability. A respondent stated:

'Though we did not have any hard feelings towards Muslims, nonetheless the relationship was maintained on a delicate balance. The British were good administrators because they put behind bars my Muslim neighbour, who we suspected had poisoned our dog' (Transcript of interview with Kala Tripathi).

The same respondent also mentioned that both the Hindus and Muslims did not eat each other's food and that no Muslim women entered their house, though the Hindu women visited Muslim neighbours. However, whenever there was a political meeting in a Muslim woman's house, 'the host had a Hindu *halwai* (cook) to make sweets and hand them to Hindu women' (Transcript of interview with Mazma Begum).

In my interview data there is some support for the emergence of a specific religious-based nationalism in colonial India. Many recent commentators (Basu, 1993, Pandey 1990 and Thapar, 1990) suggest that the movement served largely the interests of the majority Hindu group and this was articulated by a small number of my respondents. The specific symbols and interpretations adopted by Gandhi from Hindu religion provided a vocabulary for the Congress-led nationalist movement.

The identity of middle-class women in the domestic sphere as Hindu was taken for granted - for instance in the daily Hindu rituals and them adopting Gandhian symbols. However, women respondents did not articulate it in the interviews.

Domestic Values

As mentioned in chapter three, the nationalist leaders, Gandhi and Nehru, expected women to contribute to the nationalist movement. While Gandhi expected women to contribute to the political cause primarily from within the domestic sphere through their roles as supportive wives and mothers, Nehru's views were more radical (see chapter three). However, Nehru's approach was not widely shared, and my survey of the Hindi literature (see chapter five) and the respondents' opinions suggests that many women saw their roles as mothers and wives as allowing for significant contributions to the movement. One particular Communist Party activist remarked on Nehru's 'unpractical' approach and said that

'Jawahar was a mixed-up man, partly because of his westernised outlook. His Fabian socialism was airy-fairy. He was not in touch with ground reality' (Transcript of interview with Lakshmi Sehgal).

In the following sections I will identify the seven main ways in which women participated in nationalist activities from within the domestic sphere. These activities were: (i) spinning *khadi*, (ii) keeping fasts, (iii) being supportive wives and mothers of activists, (iv) being nurturers, (v) being pillars of support to friends and neighbours, (vi) acquiring and sharing information on political events, and (vii) conducting secret activities. These activities demonstrate the political significance of the domestic sphere during the nationalist movement.

Gandhi and the Constructive Programme

The concept of *swadeshi* (indigenous) was aligned with the political liberation of the country. Mahatma Gandhi politicised and popularised domestic objects like the *charkha* at both national and local levels. Spinning *khadi* on the *charkha* was a powerful nationalist statement, which showed that not only could domestic values be associated with nationalist activities in the public sphere such as in the picketing of foreign cloth shops (as discussed in chapter three), but also that nationalist activities could be taken into and performed within the domestic sphere. Not only did it serve the nationalist cause, it also generated a small income for women of the lower classes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, men and women wore *khadi* in the public domain as a mark of national pride. The *charkha* was the 'symbol of the unity of the people and their respect and dignity as a nation' (Agnew, 1979: 37). Women's role was significant in this constructive programme because they were expected to be responsible for spreading both the message of *swadeshi* and emphasising its importance in India's struggle for independence. For example, it was said by Shri Yatindra Kumar in the magazine Chand:

'Delicate sisters of ours are wearing coarse *khadi*. The modern Indian woman has sacrificed all means of luxury and old archaic rotten traditions into the sacrificial fire of freedom. This is an absolutely new fact in the history of the world' (Kumar, Yatindra, 1930: 72).

Ideas about spinning and weaving *khadi* were propagated through the literature. By spinning, weaving and selling *khadi*, women could help in their own liberation by gaining a modicum of economic independence. The self-sufficiency achieved through producing *swadeshi* cloth also helped the struggle for national liberation. Women could bring *swaraj* to the household.

‘Womankind, it’s time to be alert,
Wake up from your slumber,
Leave your laziness behind,
Call *swaraj* to the household yourselves,
In your free time move the *charkha*.
Make your clothes yourselves’
(PP.Hin.B. 3121, 1922).

In another poem entitled ‘*Swatantra ki Devi*’ (The Goddess of Independence) published from Agra by Girij Kishore Agarwal, a woman tells her husband:

‘Why don’t you get me a saree of *khaddar*
I no longer like the foreign silk sarees
Nobody wears *videshi* (British) clothes
Get me a *charkha*, on which I can spin’
(PP.Hin.B. 66, 1931).

In another poem, ‘The jingle of the shackles’, by Jagannatha Prasad Arora, the links between national independence and the spinning of the *charkha* are again drawn. Although written by a man, the poem is spoken in a woman’s voice and addresses women:

‘Now we shall spin on the *charkha*
Silk sarees made in London
And the satin threads will all be boycotted,
All foreign clothes will be burned
Their place will be taken by our pure *khadi*,
India will now save its money.

If you want to liberate yourself
If you have the feeling of *swaraj* in your hearts
Then wear the coarse *khadi*
And spin the *charkha* in your homes’
(PP.Hin.B. 298, 1930).

This poem suggests that elements of nationalist activity could be brought within the domestic sphere through the constructive programme.

In another poem addressed to women and written by Kasturba Gandhi, women's contribution to the nation through the use of the *charkha* is stressed. The poem also seeks to encourage communication amongst women:

'Move the *charkha* my sisters
Whenever you have spare time from domestic chores,
Spend the day on the *charkha*.
Do not wear *makhmal* (silk)
Instead stitch *chadars* (sheets) made from *khaddar*,
The nation became poor from its own carelessness.
However, you can increase India's wealth by spinning on the *charkha*,
In the ancient manuals of work, it is directed that the *charkha* should be worshipped
Do not forget your old *riti* (values)
Do *desh seva* (serve your nation),
This is the best opportunity
Do not waste time
After you have heard this message from me
Spread the message around other sisters
And all sisters should spin on the *charkha*'
(PP.Hin.B. 462, 1923).

Individual women respondents spun on the *charkha*. One respondent said,

'When I was twelve years old my father's elder brother used to tell us to spin on the *charkha*. Even at twelve years, I was very conscientious about my nation. Everyday we used to spin after school' (Transcript of interview with Dr. Kusum Agarwal).

Another respondent said that she used to spin on the *charkha* everyday. She would start her morning by spinning and would not let anything interrupt her activity. The *khadi chadars* that she made were given away to revolutionaries in hiding (Transcript of interview with Ganga Devi).

To support and co-ordinate the efforts of women involved in spinning and weaving, it was necessary to form local organisations which encouraged constructive work and also had access to *purdah* bound women. For example, the *Mahila Mandal* (Women's Association) in Benares was established in 1934 by Srimati Ratneshwari

Devi when she was 27 years. She started thinking along the lines of women's welfare and was supported by her family and elder brothers. The Mandal developed gradually into a small organisation. Its first agenda was to introduce *purdah*-clad women into some sort of social and economic activity. Ratneshwari had a strong belief that if women became educated and economically independent, they would be able to be of greater help to the nation. The initial committees within the organisation were formed primarily to educate women, and to develop their consciousness towards both their status in society and the broader political situation. For example, there was a *charkha* centre, a home nursing centre, a music department, a painting school, a rifle club and the magazine *Vidhusi* (literate woman). Women who joined this organisation 'were enlightened towards the notion of loving one's nation' and made monetary contributions towards the Azad Hind Fauj (Army for India's Independence) (Transcript of interview with Srimati Sulbha Gupta¹⁵)

Symbols of nationalism were also popularised through cultural themes. The political situation was illustrated by cartoons in magazines and newspapers. Plays were staged in public places, often based on nationalist themes associated with the domestic sphere, such as spinning and weaving of *Khadi*. The nationalist symbolism associated with domestic objects like the *charkha* was made of public interest.

Familial Sacrifice

The domestic-based qualities of sacrifice, the good nurturer, strength of will and fortitude were linked by the key concept of 'service (*seva*) to the nation'. The vernacular literature acknowledges some of these qualities. In one article, Vidyavati Sahgal states:

¹⁵ Managing director of Mahila Mandal.

'In this short time this *andolan* (movement) despite repression has created an extraordinary awareness and given new life to the women of India' (Sahgal, Vidyavati, 1930: 4).

She emphasises that 'in a few months this movement has liberated women from centuries of subordination' (Sahgal, Vidyavati, 1930: 4). Quoting from an Indian Mahila Sangh's magazine, Stree Dharm she states that

'the weapons of the movement like truth, patience, sacrifice, purity of soul are only of women and it is thus no surprise that women are taking the main part in the movement' (Sahgal, Vidyavati, 1930: 4).

Fasting is the best example of sacrifice within the household. In their own homes, women fasted and conducted nationalist religious prayers. Fasting is associated with the Hindu religious beliefs of purification of the body, mind and the soul. Gandhi advocated fasting for men and women to enable them to have greater control over their bodies and the senses that generate pleasure:

'Gandhi viewed the body as inextricably linked to the soul and spirit, and also as a microcosm of the social. It is thus not surprising to find that his political campaigns were often intimately linked with bodily functions. He used fasting as a weapon in his political armoury' (Caplan, 1989: 277)

Fasting for self-purification as well as for the general prosperity of one's own family is still practised in India on a wide scale. For example a popular fast, *Karvachot*, is still kept by married women for the well-being and long life of their husbands. Thus, it is not surprising that during times of political upheaval women fasted for the well-being of their own husbands, sons and brothers who were serving jail sentences, and then extended this to the idea of fasting for the nation. Fasting was associated with the Hindu concept of *dharma*. *Dharma* can be interpreted as a doctrine of righteousness, sacred law or a general code of conduct which is appropriate to each class and each stage in the life of an individual. Through fasting women were completing their essential religious duties (*dharma*).

I will illustrate the importance of fasting through an interview I conducted. Dhirendranath Pandey says that his mother died in 1930 after fasting for an extended period of time. He was one year old at the time and does not remember his mother. However, his father, Surendranath Pandey, had told him that he, along with other associates, were accused in the Lahore conspiracy case and were imprisoned in the Lahore Borstal jail. During this time his mother fasted 'and the day she died, all the accused in the jail wore black bands and did not eat for the whole day' (transcript of interview with Dhirendranath Pandey¹⁶). In this particular example, the wife, in *pardah*, fasted within the confines of the domestic domain as a way to identify with her husband's suffering in prison. According to the respondent, his mother, through fasting for her husband, identified with the nationalist movement as well. His mother was also aware that her husband was repeatedly undergoing hunger-strikes, and her own fasting enabled her to support her husband's struggle. Fasting and repeated hunger strikes were often used by male and female prisoners to initiate reforms in the jails.

Women conceptualised their roles as wives in accordance with political demands. For a woman to bear stoically a long separation from her husband, and to face the mental and physical trauma of his imprisonment and his disappearance for weeks on end, was to undertake another form of sacrifice which showed strength of will, steadfastness of purpose and fortitude in the face of adversity. In the above example of the imprisonment of a family member in jail (a public site), other members of the family within the domestic sphere were also affected. As one male activist commented:

¹⁶ Son of Surendranath Pandey.

‘There were thousands of women whose sacrifice and contribution has never been mentioned, women who were offering silent contribution. It is hard to realise how women would have led their lives, once their husbands went to jail or were killed. These middle-class women had to face many problems. Not only were they bound in *purdah* and conservative traditions, but most of them were economically dependent on their menfolk’.¹⁷

Separation from their husbands increased women’s social burden and her political responsibility got re-organised by the necessity of her assuming the place of the absent men. Women were left to manage the household finances and to raise children when their menfolk were active in the nationalist movement. Since most of these women were in *purdah*, they felt they could not seek employment outside and had to manage as well as possible. However, circumstances forced a few women to step out into the public domain. Another male respondent’s narrative about his grandmother illustrates this. Mr. P. C. Mitra’s grandmother,¹⁸ Sharad Kumari Sinha, was an ordinary housewife in *purdah*. In 1925 her eldest son, Raj Kumar Sinha, was imprisoned in the Kakori Case.¹⁹ Soon after, her husband, Markhandya Sinha, died from depression due to his son’s arrest. The respondent gives an insight into the changes in his grandmother’s life:

‘My grandmother kept strict *purdah*, so much so that when she visited Balika Vidyalaya (educational institution), she used to hang a *chadar* (sheet) on the *tonga* (horse-driven carriage). But once her sons (the second son was arrested for the Lahore conspiracy case) were imprisoned, she left her *purdah*. She mortgaged her house and struggled financially. She had never travelled alone on a train, but now she started travelling to Lahore for her son’s *mukadma* (criminal case). Political circumstances and difficult times changed my mother’.

¹⁷ The source of this quote is an unpublished article, ‘Women’s movement in Kanpur’ by the late Govardhan Singh Swatantra.

¹⁸ The details of the narrative were provided to the respondent by his mother, Asha Lata Misra.

¹⁹ A train robbery by revolutionary-terrorists near Kakori, Lucknow in 1925. The four accused were sentenced to death (Pandey, 1978:93).

Similarly Surya Kumari, an associate of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh's mother (Vidya Devi), stated that:

'I would not have stepped outside my house if my husband had not served such a long sentence. I felt responsible for my old in-laws and two small children. Though hesitant in the beginning, I started teaching children *Itihas* (history) at a primary school. My in-laws did not appreciate that I travelled alone and taught, but they were *mazboor* (helpless) too'.

This respondent was in *purdah* during the nationalist movement and she suggested that in difficult social circumstances women were allowed to discard their *purdah*.

Adverse circumstances rendered these women vulnerable but not less patriotic. I will illustrate this through the experience of a particular respondent whose father, Chail Bihari Cuntack, spent most of his life serving jail sentences. The respondent narrated an incident when a woman supporter of the British Raj tried to draw them away from nationalist activities:

'Lady Kailash, wife of Sir Srivastava and a supporter of British rule, brought to our house expensive clothes made of *malmal* (silk) and *poplin* (fine cotton). Her intention was to brainwash my mother, so that she would become a supporter of British rule. My mother refused to entertain them'. (Transcript of interview with Uma Dixit)

Lady Kailash, a resident of Swarup Nagar in Kanpur, was held in awe by the residents because of her title and wealth. Her visit to the respondent's house indicates that Chail Bihari Cuntack was considered a dangerous political prisoner, and that the authorities thought that social pressure on his family would deter him from nationalist involvement. It was clear that the visitor tried to use the adverse circumstances of the family to her own advantage. She realised that if she could convince the mother, she could also influence the opinion of the father.

A poem entitled 'A freed prisoner' captures the effect of the movement on prisoners' perceptions of their domestic ties and extended social networks. The

prisoners recognise the suffering and sacrifice womenfolk undertook because of men's public activities. Written by Chail Bihari under the pseudonym Cuntack in 1941 in Fategarh jail, it recollects the time spent in jail and anticipates the bleak and sad future which awaits men and women. The poem exhorts his fellow prisoners as follows:

'Hey prisoner, the time for our freedom has arrived
Our only expectation for days and nights on end,
An era was spent in sorrow and happiness,
Time and again the tears have flown from our eyes, recounting our tale of
sorrow,
With stoic hearts we kept our sorrow caged in our bones as we counted
our moments of sacrifice,
The light of dawn has finally come and our shackles are breaking.

Oh! caged prisoners, fly away from this existence,
Go to your friends whom you left in this struggle of life,
Go where the lamps of hope have been long extinguished and only sorrow
and darkness encompass,
The time for our freedom has arrived

No friends are left behind
Our houses have been destroyed and mixed with the earth
There is nobody left whom we can say is ours
Oh! man is so destructive
Even though our life is so agonising
It is still attractive
The time for our freedom has arrived'
(Transcript of interview with Uma Dixit²⁰).

The poem links individual and national freedom. The first verse expresses the trauma and anxiety a prisoner experiences within the confines of the prison walls. The other two verses give messages of both hope and misfortune. On the one hand, the prisoner is being released and has a whole new life before him, but on the other hand, he has lost everything that was dear to him during the struggle. The 'lamps

²⁰ From her father's diary.

extinguishing' and the 'houses destroyed' are symbolic of the dying hope of family members who were left behind.

Chail Bihari wrote this poem when many families had their relatives and dear ones in prison or in hiding. Chail was sensitive towards the anguish individuals experienced, his own life being a prime example. He realised that that if either of the parents served long jail sentences, they would miss out on their children's development. His own children grew up without his love and security. His imprisonment resulted in a poor financial status for his family and the unmarried status of his daughter who also committed herself to the movement.²¹ His daughter (my respondent) remembers a conversation with a close aunt:

'She told me that I should get married. I said to her that as long as my father is in jail, I will not marry. She said, 'What if he is in jail for life?' . I replied, 'Then I will stay without a life-partner' .

This quote suggests that the respondent sacrificed not only marriage but also motherhood, economic security and the social status associated with marriage. She sacrificed a stable future in order to protest against her father's political imprisonment. This is an example of the association of domestic life and attitudes with the political movement.

Women respondents said that the stability of their domestic lives was wrecked during the course of the movement. Many did not see their husbands for long periods of time, and the most unfortunate of them became widows when their husbands were hanged or died after contracting diseases in jail. However, these women were expected to keep up the nationalist spirit. They did not complain, but accepted widowhood as a nationalist sacrifice. Left with no other choice, women faced their widowhood alone.

²¹ In Indian society an unmarried daughter comes under a lot of social pressure from the rest of the community.

Another article in Dainik Jagron, entitled, 'Brave feats',²² gives an account of the lives of women who were widowed during the nationalist movement (Dainik Jagron, 18 October 1992: 3). It tells the story of a nationalist, Sardar Arjun Singh, who had three sons, Kishan Singh (father of Bhagat Singh), Ajit Singh and Swarn Singh. All three sons were ardent nationalists. The narrative concerns the lives of the widows of Ajit Singh and Swarn Singh. In 1909 Ajit Singh led a peasant movement in Punjab and was exiled from the country by the British government. To alleviate her sadness and loneliness during her husband's absence, she adopted Bhagat Singh, the son of her brother-in-law. However, Bhagat Singh was hanged in 1931, and because she was not his *janma mata* (biological mother), the government refused to let her see him before his execution. Her husband returned to India only after independence in 1947. His wife had waited for 38 years, and when her husband finally returned, he died within four months. 'Her hopes were crushed. First she lost her dear one and then her husband. Tears had become the destiny for Harnam Kaur' (Dainik Jagron, 18 October 1992: 3). This article was written with the specific purpose of making readers aware of the indirect involvement of family members as well as the effects of the movement on their individual lives. This example illustrates the strength of will and steadfastness of women in adverse circumstances.

The wife of Swarn Singh met a similar fate. S. Singh served numerous jail sentences and when he was finally released, he died at the age of 23 years from an infection contracted in the jail. His wife is said to have spent the rest of her life in 'loneliness and heartache' (Dainik Jagron, 18 October 1992: 3).

The article sees women as facing all situations with courage, and suggests that what kept their spirits together was the thought that all nationalist activities were for the highest goal, the independence of India. Women assured both themselves and their

²² The issue called '*swatantra ang*' (independence issue) was published to commemorate the years of independence.

menfolk that their sacrifices were supreme. I asked a particular respondent about the most vivid memory she had of the movement. She replied:

‘Till today I remember how great my husband was. Whenever, he went to jail, I always thought he had gone for a good cause’ (Transcript of interview with Sushila Devi Misra).

Fasting, facing domestic instability and forgoing or losing their life companions without complaint were unparalleled sacrifices made by women in the domestic sphere as forms of resistance to colonial oppression.

Women as Mothers

In this section I will discuss the ideals of motherhood and the expectations held by nationalist leaders of women in their roles as nurturers. Motherhood was given political significance by linking it with the well-being of the Indian nation.

Indian motherhood had been subject to British criticism. *Mother India*, the controversial book by Katherine Mayo (1927), identified forced early motherhood as one of the features of women’s subordination in India and an indicator of India’s unfitness for self-rule. Mayo commented:

‘Force motherhood upon her at the earliest possible moment. Rear her weakling son in intensive vicious practises that drain his small vitality day by day. Give him no outlet in sports, give him habits that make him, by the time he is thirty years of age, a decrepit and querulous old wreck- and will you ask what has sapped the energy of his manhood?’ (Mayo, 1927: 25).

However, by the beginning of the twentieth century the British willingness to introduce reforms in Indian society, particularly those related to the status of women, was questioned by Indian men. As Dagmar Engels argues, this challenge to British attempts to ‘liberate’ Indian women was accompanied by the parallel development of Hindu revivalism. The latter highlighted the positive Hindu qualities of motherhood

which were given political significance by leaders, reformers and writers. For example, the Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, in his novel *Anandamath* (1882),

‘popularised the worship of the Mother, as well as female duties and power, thus laying the foundation for women’s active participation in the nationalist movement in years to come’ (Engels, 1989: 430).

In the Indian tradition the mother has always been deified. For example, goddesses like *Durga*, *Saraswati*, *Sita* and *Vaishnu* were regularly represented as mothers. This sanctified image of the mother was now considered an important vehicle for symbolising a strong civilisation inherited by the nation. Gandhi’s wife, Kasturba, was addressed by the populace as ‘*Rashtramata*’, mother of the nation (Srinathsingh, Devidutt Shukla, 1938: 212).²³ Gandhi accorded Kasturba the position of both his wife and the mother of the nation. For Gandhi it was essential for women to possess the warmth of motherhood and sustain the spirit of *seva*, which means service to everybody (Srinathsingh, Devidutt Shukla, 1938: 212). Kasturba was projected in vernacular writings as the epitomy of the ideal mother and ideal wife. An ideal wife was described in most Hindi tracts as a ‘Hindu woman who considers her husband as a god and in his welfare considers her own welfare’ (Srinathsingh, Devidutt Shukla, 1938: 211). An activist relates to the idea of *Rashtramata* and comments:

‘Children are *Rashtradhan* (children are the wealth of the nation) and are nurtured by the *Rashtramata*. We should cherish them and devote our energies to them’ (Transcript of interview with Narayani Tripathi).

The family was thus seen as an integral part of national life and the quote suggests that without children or their mothers, the nation would lose its glory.

²³ This article was written by Shrimanyan Agarwal and titled, ‘*Rastramata Kasturba*’.

Motherhood also implied that a woman not only loved and cared for her children, but also produced healthy progeny and educated them to be the future enlightened citizens of India (Thapar, 1993: 84). A contemporary article by Margaret Cousins titled 'Women and Oriental Culture', in the newspaper The Leader, stated:

'In the extremes of honour and serfdom accorded to womanhood Asia is one. It has messages concerning the sanctity of life, the vocation of woman as race nourisher... None holds this oriental culture more tenaciously, more authentically, than its women' (The Leader, 9 January 1930: 12).

A poem in a magazine, Maharathi, redefines the qualities of Indian mothers. This particular poem is entitled, 'Matra Puja' (worship of mother):

'May the womankind of India be the ideals for the world
May India worship its mothers
May our minds be full of knowledge
May our bodies be full of strength and devotion
May we gain happiness from serving our pure husbands
May India worship its mothers
May we fight with anti-nationalist people
May we crush enemies of religion within the homes
Let mothers transform from being weak to strong, and help our nation
May India worship its mothers'
(Suri, Rajrani, 1927: 624).

This poem exhorts women to change themselves from 'weak' to 'strong' individuals. They should be devoted to their husbands and should protect their religion and society from dissent and desertion. Through acquiring moral, physical and emotional strength, women would help themselves and their nation. This poem links the role of women as mothers, with women's support for the nationalist movement.

Mothers were the sole guardians of children, especially when their menfolk were busy in nationalist activities or serving long jail sentences. They acquainted their children with popular nationalist vocabulary and with the important goal of becoming

the enlightened future citizens of the nation. It was also the responsibility of the mother to create a congenial environment within the household and to inform and educate her children on the subject of political events.

Women as Nurturers

Motherhood was closely associated with the qualities of women as nurturers. I will illustrate the representations of the nurturer through the example of an activist, Sushila Devi, who was married to the late Brahmdudd Misra in 1926 at the age of fourteen. A Hindu middle-class woman, she had strong feelings about the importance and responsibilities of the mother, towards both the nation and the domestic sphere, (the husband and children). While she emphasised the importance of the home and children in women's lives, she did not hesitate to question her husband's political integrity. Sushila Devi had been confined to the domestic sphere, expressed no displeasure about this, but used her educational qualifications as a teacher once her husband started his jail sentence. However, her employment was terminated because of the revolutionary activities of her husband and her own revolutionary ideas. In relation to her burgeoning political consciousness, she said:

'In 1928, I was influenced by the political environment. Before marriage, I was influenced by Gandhi and after marriage, Brahmdudd (husband) influenced me with communist ideas. My husband used to bring home revolutionary material and I read a lot on Russian history. At this time I had mixed feelings for both the Gandhian movement and the revolutionary movement. In 1929, I was a revolutionary. I realised that non-violence was not effective' (Transcript of interview with Sushila Devi).

Despite the influence of revolutionary ideas, it was implied by the respondent that being a good housewife not only gave her personal satisfaction, but was also of political support to her husband, who was active in the public sphere: 'I never went to

jail, I never led a procession. I was actually a housewife and would prefer to serve my husband' (transcript of interview with Sushila Devi).

To my enquiry on the influence of ideas of women's emancipation articulated by male and female leaders, the respondent indicated that 'it did not affect me. The idea of emancipation was impossible for me because then and till now my home is very important'. Sushila Devi linked emancipation with the neglect of domestic duties and expressed displeasure at words like emancipation and equality. Her husband was a participant in the public sphere and she wished to support his nationalist goals by supporting him. During the movement, her husband had remarked that 'Because of you my life has become successful. You are managing the house and my children'.

Although she said that her activities had been confined to the domestic sphere, she stressed that this had not involved only domestic matters. As for other activities, like participating in processions, she said, 'Only if I had spare time from my household duties'. Up to this point, the way the interview had gone implied that participating in processions did not interest Sushila Devi, and it was suggested by her that political duties towards the nation could be fulfilled through the domestic sphere:

'Having a sense of moral duty towards the nation, a belief in right and wrong was itself an involvement in the nationalist movement'.

Then she told of this incident about when her husband was arrested in 1929 in the Lahore Conspiracy Case along with other associates. However, he turned 'approver' and gave evidence in return for a pardon from the British government. When I interviewed his then associates, they said that the reason for his political disloyalty was *moh* (lust) for his wife. The wife told her mother-in-law that she did not want to see her husband again, implying that he was not worthy if he was disloyal to his friends and supported the British government. This statement can also be interpreted as a form of moral power exercised by women in the household. Brahmdudd's mother went to the prison and said, 'Your wife prefers to be called a

widow and I without issue. You have put a blot on my (mother) name' (.Transcript of interview with Shiv Verma). Such was the impact that he tore the pages off the register and in the end refused to testify in front of the government prosecutor. In Indian households the women's power and influence over male members of the house increases with her age. This narration is an example of how good wifedom and good motherhood were constituted in the early nationalist period. A wife was expected to be obedient to her husband, but that didn't necessarily mean blind obedience to the husband without any nationalist awareness, since in this case the wife questioned her husband's political integrity and his decision to appeal for a pardon from the British.

The imagery and symbolism associated with mothers enhanced their significance for the nation and the struggle for independence. It is thus not surprising that women found it an appealing identity, and that the honour and respect associated with it enhanced their confidence.

Women as Sources of Strength and Support

As already mentioned, the nationalist movement created a stressful period for many activists' families. Political upheavals shook domestic stability and comforts in the lives of many activists. Nehru's sister Vijaylakshmi Pandit mentions the domestic strain she experienced during her participation in the public sphere. However, the Nehru women were a privileged elite who could afford attendants and nannies for their children, but not every family could risk these domestic upheavals. If a woman went out demonstrating in the streets, then someone had to be at home to support her family.

Children and elderly people were the primary responsibility within families. Children were perceived to be especially vulnerable, since it was more difficult to explain to them the reasons for the disruptions in the family. The circumstances were different for each family. For example, in nuclear families, if both the husband and the

wife went out to participate in the movement, the responsibility for the children had to be shouldered by neighbours or relatives. I will illustrate this through an example where the movement was a traumatic experience for the whole family. A particular activist narrated events from the movement through her experience as a young child. Both her parents were politically active in the public sphere. In 1931 Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev Thapar, Hindu male activists, were hanged by the British government. Hindu and Muslim riots broke out in Kanpur city. The respondent's mother, along with other Hindu women, were shifted to a safer site in Kallu Mal building in Begumgang locality, Kanpur. The father was busy defending people from the riots. The respondent was looked after in a nearby neighbour's house in Sisa Mau (a locality). When I enquired about a particular incident that had left an impression, she said:

'When I was very young, my mother was locked in the building (mentioned earlier). In the night, I used to get up and enquire from my aunt (neighbour) if my father had come back. When I did not find him, I used to cry. I wanted my mother back but could not understand what was going on. When I asked my father, he used to say, 'She will come back, she has gone for some work'' (Transcript of interviews with Satya Saxena and her mother, Vidyavati Saxena).

At other times, the neighbours took upon themselves the responsibility of feeding and clothing the children. For example, in another respondent's family, the father served long jail sentences. The mother shouldered the responsibility of nurturing her children. However, once she was arrested, the children were looked after by a family friend, who was not a public activist herself. The respondent commented:

'I was present when my mother was arrested after addressing a meeting. We children came back home and were fed by our father's friend, Narayan Prasad Arora. His wife used to buy *aata* (flour), *dal* (lentil) and *chawal* (rice) for us' (Transcript of interview with Uma Dixit).

On being asked about her feelings towards the help rendered by the neighbour, she responded:

‘Participation in the nationalist movement does not have to be ‘on the streets’ only. Krishna Arora (the wife) was serving the nationalist cause by helping another family’ (Transcript of interview with Uma Dixit).

Some women saw involvement in nationalist activities more as a way of supporting and encouraging the male members in jail, while facilitating at the same time their desire to stay close to the husband. The emotional loyalty of women towards their husbands and sons was an expression of commitment to the movement as well. I will illustrate this through the experience of an activist.

Uma Dixit, a Hindu woman, is the daughter of the famous poet, the late Chail Bihari Cuntack mentioned above. Chail Cuntack was a member of the Congress Committee in Uttar Pradesh. He had been married to Kishori Devi (Uma’s mother) when he was fourteen, before the Civil Disobedience movement started. Disagreements with his father over his involvement with the Congress Party forced Chail Cuntack and his young family to resettle in Kanpur where there was no family income and the financial condition of the household deteriorated. Chail ‘would barely come out of the jail for a few months before going back again’. Kishori Devi, however, was too scared to object to her husband’s activities because she feared that he would send her back to her in-laws in Itawah. She told him, ‘you could do something that will at least give food to the children’. The respondent, Uma Dixit, said ‘My mother may have had very little money but still she never objected to paying for our education’. Kishori Devi’s desire to maintain a good domestic environment was reflected when she used to tell Uma, thirteen years old at the time of the Quit India Movement (1942), ‘You don’t have to come out in the movement so openly. You have a younger brother and sister to look after’.

The Nationalist Movement called for upheavals and re-adjustments in Kishori Devi's life. She herself did not want to leave *purdah*, but wanted to give as much support as she could to her husband. She once said to him, 'I will bear all hardships but will not leave you alone'. In her account, Uma Dixit stated that her twelve year old brother died during the Quit India movement:

'My father was in the prison. When he was informed he sent a message 'The whole of India is full of boys. So what happens if one does not exist anymore'. Uma carries on, 'It was my mother's courage that she faced it bravely. She often used to cry silently but never in front of us'.

Though this appears to be a cruel remark from her father, the respondent herself did not express any resentment or regret. On the contrary, she implied that during the movement the fever of patriotism governed everybody's heart and her father had made this particular statement to instill her mother with courage. It was to remind her mother that the nation was like a big family, and that all the boys were her sons too.

The anguish and the sadness of a wrecked domestic life, and a husband who was always in jail affected Kishori Devi more than did the colonial crisis. What was remarkable was her ability and courage to conceal it, while still being of moral support to her husband. On this issue the respondent remarked, 'Was not so much support itself a contribution to the Movement?'. She tried to explain through her own experiences that it was possible to make sacrifices for the nationalist movement without taking on public activities for example, through activities such as looking after the children of another activist's family, facing economic adversities and long separations while the husband was in prison, or offering support and assurance to others who were involved in public activities. At no point did the respondent see this as a form of constraint on women's activities or an indication of lack of power.

Women told their husbands that they would face all kinds of hardship in their absence, as in the following words:

'Chahe hum barbad ho jaye, par maphi mang kar khar na aana: we might get destroyed but never ask for forgiveness and come back home' (Transcript of interview with Tulsa Devi).

The respondents were aware that deteriorating domestic conditions could put a moral strain on men and force them into seeking pardons.

In another instance, an activist whose domestic life was disturbed by her husband's nationalist involvement, recalls that:

'Whatever you do I will never interfere. You carry on with your activities. I will look after the children' (Transcript of interviews with Mrs. Narayan Prasad and Phul Kumari Devi).

This particular activist lived with her in-laws who strongly opposed their son's Congress Party activities. She was herself in *pardah*. This example highlights the role model of a non-complaining wife who did not resist her husband's political activities. The woman was expected stoically to bear the isolation and hardship which the movement demanded. Her response was an expression of her emotional commitment to her husband and family, as well as to the nationalist cause.

Women formed support networks to help each other through difficult times. There were instances where, if one family member was in prison, the police would come looking for other family members, break into their houses, sell their animals, burn their crops and fine them. In such circumstances the neighbours were ready to offer support. One activist remembered:

'Other women would come and praise me for supporting my husband. They used to say, 'Don't lose hope. We will all eat together and if we die we will do it together'. Women from all castes used to be present in such moments of crisis' (Transcript of interview with Tulsa Devi).

The help from neighbours was often spontaneous and unconditional. *Mohallas* (neighbourhoods) organised themselves to give nationalist support. The nationalist consciousness of a particular neighbourhood burgeoned at moments of crisis and

created an environment of neighbourhood nationalism. I will illustrate this through two examples.

A particular activist recalled an incident in Lahore. The Deputy Commissioner was passing through a street with his entourage when his car was hit by a boy's wooden ball:

'Immediately, the Commissioner ordered his car to be stopped and he sent the accompanying policemen to bring the boy for punishment. The boy panicked and fled into the narrow bylanes. Some women who were peeping through the doorways had seen what had happened. They secretly took the child and hid him in a *tandoor* (a domestic oven for roasting food) which was situated on one of the rooftops. They then placed a *ghada* (a round pan) on the mouth of the *tandoor*. The policemen searched everywhere but could not find the child and the D. Commissioner left' (Transcript of interview with Kamala Seth).

According to the activist, the women in the *mohalla* realised that if the child had been caught, his parents would have been jailed. Women were also aware of British brutality, and they sought to both resist it and save other families from being unjustly imprisoned. My mother remembers being told by her mother and other women in the locality that

'The British are very strict. They are a heartless race and the punishments they give are harsh. They are *jalim* (ruthless) and think that they are the greatest. If caught by them, one was definitely tortured' (Transcript of interview with Kamala Seth).

A second example reflects on another aspect of neighbourhood feelings in other parts of India. A Bengali revolutionary described how she and her companions hid from the British in villages near Chittagong:

'We used to hide in Khirod Prabha Biswa's (a woman's) house. Other people in the village used to make tea in large cauldrons and call us over. They used to call us *athiti* (special guests)' (Transcript of interview with Kalpana Joshi).

Although many women never crossed the boundaries from the domestic sphere to be political, they were able to identify with the nationalist movement by giving support to the husband's activities, managing the household and the children during an economic crisis, giving moral support to other women activists' and looking after their children. Such sacrifices called upon women's greatest talents. Moreover, the mental trauma of long separations from husbands, and facing adversity without complaining supported the political demands. Although it could be argued that women were compelled by their situation to support the movement, in retrospect they see it in terms of their own nationalist contribution.

Women Educate Themselves

In order to facilitate their own activities in the domestic sphere, it was important for women to maintain links with political activities in the public domain. There were three ways through which women kept themselves informed of wider political developments. They educated themselves by reading nationalist literature, by eavesdropping on men's conversations in the household and later discussing the ideas amongst themselves and by listening to the radio.

Most respondents had kept *purdah* at some stage in their lives, whether as unmarried girls in their fathers' houses or as married women in their husbands' houses. In conservative families, where strict *purdah* was enforced, women organised themselves as both imparters and recipients of nationalist information. For these women, practices like *purdah* that enforced segregation and the exclusion of women from men's affairs were not obstacles to activities of nationalist importance.

Literature

Some women were avid readers of the local Hindi newspapers and other literature obtained by their husbands. Vernacular newspapers like Viswamitra and Vir Arjun were popular at the time. One activist said:

‘From the newspapers we used to come to know the activities of the Congress and the demands of the nationalist movement’ (Transcript of interviews with Madhavi Lata Shukla and Brij Rani Misra).

Some women mention having read stories and plays of Prem Chand (1880-1936), who wrote on nationalist themes and ideas in Hindi (transcript of interview with Avadh Rani Singh). He is regarded as

‘the most remarkable figure in modern Hindi literature in the colonial era, who had a tremendous impact in North India. His work has the same historical significance for India as that of Dickens for England, Balzac for France and Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky for Russia’ (Gupta, 1991: 88).

His novels, such as *Godan*, *Vardan* and *Kafan*, address nationalist themes and ideas through fictionalised characters (Lal, 1965: 284).

Eavesdropping and gossip

The household emerged as a hotbed of discussions and conspiracy. There were many kin under the same roof. For example, one activist described the relationships in her *sasural* (husband’s house). She said that there were the two younger brothers of her husband and their wives (*devranis*), her six unmarried sisters-in-law (*Nanad*) and the father-in-law and mother-in-law. Fourteen members in a household was an average size, though it could reach upto sixty (transcript of interviews with Itraaji and Avadh Rani Singh²⁴). Although the domestic politics within a large household led to

²⁴ The latter said that there were 23 members in her house.

conflicts and disagreements, it also encouraged community feelings among family members. This was different from the case of a nuclear family, which had fewer people and more privacy.

Womenfolk in a household got together to sing patriotic songs and to share pieces of information that they acquired from various sources. One activist remembers two lines of a particular song:

‘Listen friend, Congressmen will establish a new world,
Very worthy accomplished people have lived in this country of ours’
(Transcript of interviews with Avadh Rani Singh and Kala Tripathi).

On women’s discussions in her *sasural* (husband’s house), an activist recalled,

‘The women of the house would discuss the political situation after hearing the menfolk discuss. The women gained information passively by listening to men. We had no direct discussions with men’ (Transcript of interview with Itraaji).

One woman memorised the patriotic songs she learnt from her brother, who had learnt them at school, and then recited it to other womenfolk in her family. For example:

‘*Yeh desh hamara hai*
Bharat hamara payara hai
This nation is ours
This is India, the nation we love’
(Transcript of interview with Maazma Begum).

She remembered that her parents had listened to these songs with great pride.

Occasionally, women held meetings in each other’s homes. Women of a *mohalla* would invite other women to their homes, discuss political events and sing patriotic songs, such as:

'*Mard bano mard bano,*
Be a man, be a man
Sab Hindustani mard bano,
All Indians be men
Avtar Mahatma Gandhi huye,
Mahatma Gandhi is our god
Azad Hindustan karane ko,
To liberate India now'
(Transcript of interview with Kala Tripathi).

The song is provocative and urges Indian men to act like a *mard* (real man) who is courageous and strong. The song is directed to those men who were either scared of losing their government jobs or were supportive of British rule. The impact of the song was expected to be greater if women questioned the masculinity of their menfolk.

Radio

The radio was an invaluable source of nationalist information. It broadcast patriotic songs, details of the progress of the movement, the number of imprisonments and life sentences and stirring speeches. Housewives who could not read or write could keep themselves informed through the radio. However, in a few households, women were not allowed to listen to the radio. In one household:

'When the radio was on, men of the house collected around it and listened. The women were not allowed, neither the mothers, daughters or anybody'
(Transcript of interview with Itraaji).

In this household, if women listened to the radio, it would mean that they were disrespectful and wanted to engage in activities associated primarily with the male. In *purdah* households it would also suggest that women were disrespectful to their *purdah* status.

During the 1942 Quit India struggle, most of the important Congress Party leaders were arrested. However, Congress bulletins were still published by the

'shadow' All India Congress Committee (AICC) which were 'cautious and conservative' (Agnew, 1979: 73). The bulletins were produced by a team of men and women who worked underground. Under these circumstances,

'when the press is gagged and news banned, a transmitter helps a good deal in acquainting the public with the events that occur. The Congress Radio was not one only in name. It had its own transmitter, transmitting station, recording station, its own call sign and a distinct wavelength' (Transcript of interview with Usha Mehta).

The transmitter, organised by a woman, started broadcasting on August 14, 1942. She still recalls the call sign: 'This is the Congress Radio calling on 42.34 meters from somewhere in India'. She further remembered:

'We used to relay news, speeches, instructions and appeals to different classes of women. The news item was a special daily feature of the programme. We used to receive news from all over India through special messengers. The news bulletin was supplied by Sucheta Kripalini and Aruna Asaf Ali who were in charge of the banned Congress'²⁵ (Transcript of interview with Manavati Arya).

The place where programmes were recorded was different from the broadcasting station. Vithalbhai Jhaveri was responsible for recording and Usha Mehta for broadcasting. The news explained what the Congress Party stood for and its aims (Agnew, 1979: 74). Speeches were addressed to both national and international audiences. For example, a national speech addressing the police said:

'Do you or do you not want to become good citizens of a free India? Do you want to be permanent enemies of India? It is unfortunate that you take pleasure in shooting your own countrymen' (Transcript of interview with Usha Mehta).

²⁵ Speech of Usha Mehta at Chandigarh Women's Conference in April, 1993. Manavati Arya attended the conference.

The broadcast was made twice, in the morning and the evening, in both English and Hindustani. The broadcasting activities implied a woman-to-woman public discourse, addressing both individual and national needs. The translation of the news in Hindi was crucial for women confined to the domestic sphere.

Clandestine Activities within the Domestic Sphere

The broader social atmosphere, as mentioned earlier, influenced the nature of nationalist activities that women undertook. At times, if the family dynamics did not permit such activities, then women who were politically aware tried to circumvent the constraints without challenging the familial norms. These women relied on their own will power and determination to serve the nationalist cause. I will demonstrate this through the first example.

The domestic sphere was also a useful location for secret activities since women were sometimes more effective than men in this respect. Police were less suspicious of women's activities and were wary of encroaching on the privacy of the domestic sphere, especially since it was seen as the woman's space. In a politically sensitive environment, any encounter between police and women was widely publicised by the media and could lead to further disturbances. Women were primarily involved in holding secret political meetings, shifting people and proscribed literature and passing information to men in hiding.

Urmilla Goorha and her mother, Ganga Devi, Hindu middle-class women from Kanpur district, were both involved in the nationalist movement. As a thirteen-year-old, Ganga Devi had married an eighteen year old, Triveni Shah Johari, who was literate in both English and Hindi, while Ganga Devi had received no formal education. They lived in a joint family of sixty-two people, all relatives of her husband. The household was so large that 'food was cooked in a large cauldron which needed more than two people to lift it off the fire' (transcript of interview with

Urmilla Goorha²⁶). She observed *purdah* and was confined to her room for most of the day. No part of her body could be exposed, especially in front of male cousins. A maid-servant who had come with her from her parent's house looked after her needs. A new bride was expected to stay in her own room and only come out when some form of domestic help was required of her.

Mr. Triveni enforced strict discipline over his wife and children, and did not encourage any nationalist activities. However, Ganga Devi reacted against her husband's authoritarianism and encouraged her son, daughter and nephews to support the movement. Once, when her son made a donation to the Congress Committee, the receipt was mistakenly drawn in his father's name, and the father, a government employee, was reprimanded at work:

‘His salary was cut by seventy five rupees (Indian currency) and he was nearly suspended’ (Transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha).

He thrashed his son. The mother, who witnessed this, advised her son to be cautious but not to give up his activities.

Ganga Devi avoided confronting her husband, trying to work her way around the familial constraints. She realised that all nationalist activities had to be undertaken clandestinely while maintaining a united domestic facade. For example, her husband was given no opportunity to complain when he wanted his food on time. Her daughter recalls her father's attitude:

‘My father wanted his food on time. At the same time, he did not want the name of his family to be associated with the movement. When my father came back at 4 o'clock and realised that my mother had gone outside the house in relation to nationalist activities, he would get angry and not eat food at all’ (Transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha).

²⁶ Daughter of Ganga Devi.

In Indian households, the eldest earning male member of the family is supposed to be revered, especially by the women. His domestic needs, especially for food and clothes, are well looked after by his wife, sister or daughter. For example, his clothes for the next day will be washed and ironed and his food prepared on time. For the husband to deny the women the privilege of looking after him by refusing food is taken as a serious protest. Even today, women who are financially dependent on their husbands find it rewarding to prepare and serve food. Often they prepare special dishes of interest to the male. In this light, the protest of Ganga Devi's husband was important.

This quotation demonstrates that not all women accepted the restrictions imposed on them by men in the family. Ganga Devi's consciousness of the political situation and her desire to support the nationalist cause led her to get round these domestic constraints. She started to organise secret meetings with people in hiding when the husband was away at work. Her daughter remembered:

'Sometimes my cousins held a meeting in the house from 2 to 4pm, when my father was away. My mother used to sit in these meetings and was always ready to help' (Transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha).

She contributed *khadi chadars* (sheets made from coarse cotton) and money in these meetings. For example, Ganga Devi gave 10 rupees to one of the activists in hiding from the money she had received from her husband for household expenses. She then managed the household with the remaining money since she could not ask her husband for more. She also prepared food late at night for activists in hiding. The daughter said:

'The people who visited our house were 'wanted' by the police. *Swatantra Bhai Sahib*²⁷ came to our house and told my mother that he needed food at 3 o'clock in the morning for the other inmates in hiding. When my father was asleep, my mother cooked *chappatis* worth five Kilograms of flour. After that she cleaned everything so that the *Mahri* (woman who cleans domestic utensils) did not realise the night activities. My mother gave the *gahtari* (a sort of bundle) to *Swatantra* and said to him, 'God Bless you but I should not see you again in the *mohalla* (locality)'' (Transcript of interview with Urmilla Goorha).

She did not want him to come to the house again because the police would get suspicious and this would jeopardise the domestic order.

Ganga Devi also spun on the *charkha* and she encouraged her daughter to wear *khadi* sarees. An understanding between daughter and mother facilitated clandestine activities so that everything in the house would appear to be normal. Urmilla remembers witnessing her mother's night-time activities when she was nine. Urmilla was unable to speak for the first nine years of her life:

'One evening I came down in the night and saw a man with his face covered, talking to my mother at the doorway. She was handing him a bundle of food. I screamed and it was the first time in nine years that I had spoken a word. Everybody in the house was baffled'.

The fright experienced by seeing a wrapped up face made the daughter speak. Since her mother's activities were a secret, nobody in the house could be given a reason for this amazing change, and this left all the members of the family in a state of confusion.

In their role as messengers, women, who were less suspect than men, kept people in hiding informed of political developments. This was especially the case with women whose husbands were in hiding from the British authorities (transcript of interview with Tulsa Devi). Tulsa Devi used to keep *purdah* in the joint family of in-

²⁷ The word *Swatantra* means independence and revolutionaries who concealed their identity from the police adopted a patriotic pseudonym. This prevented the police from easily tracking down the family of the activist.

laws, and her mother-in-law was specifically opposed to any political activity on the part of her son. However, he continued, in secret, to be politically active. He used to go into hiding in the jungles near their village and emerge when it was safe. Tulsa Devi used to sneak out of the house late at night disguised as a man, a beggar or a religious mendicant, and she would give her husband news of the developments of the day, concerning (for example) whether the police were looking for him or whether there was any message from his compatriots. Tulsa Devi was aware of the political upheaval and was a strong pillar of support to her husband's political practices. She said that the constraints at home did not stop her from moving outside household. She was also aware that her movement at night was more dangerous for women than was participation in daylight:

'Nearby the village there were jungles. I used to sneak out at night without informing my in-laws and disguise myself' (Transcript of interview with Tulsa Devi).

Often households were used as hideouts by political suspects or political prisoners on the run, and usually in these cases both male and female members were politically involved. Since women were less suspect, they were responsible for moving people in hiding from one domestic space to another. Women effectively used their domestic roles as wives, mothers and sisters for such clandestine activities. For example, Tara Devi Agarwal describes the activities at her residence in Kanpur city and her role in facilitating the movement of a political prisoner. The incident occurred during the festival of *Rakshabandan*, when the sister ties a symbolic thread of protection on her brother's wrist.

'My house in Latouche road was called 'Azad' because Chandra Shekhar Azad used to come and stay there. Once Azad was in my house and the police surrounded the house. Consequently, I pretended that I had to visit my brother to put *rakhi* on him. I disguised Azad as my servant and with my *Thali* (a plate decorated with sweets) went out'.

Azad, as Tara's escort to her brother's home, was transferred from one household to another and escaped arrest.²⁸

Another activist narrated an incident about an acquaintance called Durga Bhabi Vohra. During a protest march in Lahore against the Simon Commission, Lala Lajpat Rai, a revolutionary, died as a result of a police assault. His associates, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Jai Gopal, avenged his death by shooting the British official, Saunders. Durga was assigned the task of bringing Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru to her house in Calcutta. She travelled with them from Lahore to Calcutta with her infant son. The revolutionaries were safer with a woman escort than travelling alone: Another respondent comments on her activity:

‘The risk was heavy. At any stage, she could have been stopped by the police. She would have lost not only her two compatriots but also her own son’. (Transcript of interview with Ram Krishna Khatri)²⁹

Women like this put their lives at risk through their clandestine activities. Another incident narrated by an activist, Shiv Verma, concerned a Bengali school teacher who was addressed by the public as *Ma* (mother). She hid members of the Hindustan Republican Socialist Party in her house in Kanpur. The police discovered her activities and issued a warrant in 1930. *Ma* escaped, but her daughter, Khoki, was caught and imprisoned in Alipore (Calcutta) jail where she committed suicide by jumping from the third floor so that she would not be forced to disclose the whereabouts of her mother or other revolutionaries. The narrator emphasised that this tragedy wrecked the mother's life.

Women were responsible for hiding and for shifting both people and banned literature from one house to another. Women hid proscribed literature for the menfolk, and it thus became difficult for the police to confiscate this literature:

²⁸ Azad was also hidden by the respondent, Sharad Kumari Sinha.

²⁹ A male respondent and an associate of Durga narrated this incident.

'My mother used to hide my father's books and pamphlets regularly. There were difficult times because sometimes my mother used to keep the books with her women friends'. (Transcript of interviews with Uma Dixit³⁰ and Ratneswari Agarwal)

The British authorities did not suspect women as much as men, so women would carry contraband literature and distribute copies to other families in a locality. Sometimes the literature had to be moved from one hiding place to another (usually another house) (transcript of interviews with Uma Dixit, Kishori Dixit and Usha Azad). At times certain menfolk of families in the neighbourhood objected to the hiding of proscribed literature. These men would tell their wives that they would also get caught and asked their wives to return the material, which they would then proceed to do.

Some women hid ammunition, pistols and other kinds of arms for revolutionaries. A particular respondent would hide pistols in the mud, near a housewell, and bring them out when they were required by her husband or his friends (transcript of interview with Sushila Devi Misra).

Through the activities described above (for example informing, shifting people and hiding contraband literature), the domestic sphere emerged as a site of both resistance and subordination. Some of these examples are similar to the experiences of women in the Algerian revolution. For Indian women, their domestic status enhanced rather than inhibited their ability to play a vital role.

Conclusion

Changes in the public sphere are always potentially reflected in the domestic sphere. Men's and women's participation in the nationalist movement led to changes in most urban middle-class homes. It was not simply individuals, but entire

³⁰ Daughter of Kishori Devi.

households, who were affected by such political activity. Women had to resolve the conflicts and contradictions that any form of nationalist activities created for them. Some women saw themselves as pillars of support for their husbands, while some simply recognised and accepted the hardships and traumas that nationalist activities brought upon them. (The latter could be seen as a way in which women shared their husband's heroism.) Women's roles within the domestic sphere were shaped by nationalist politics in the public sphere.

Many women could not cross the boundaries of the domestic sphere in order to become 'political'. Furthermore, 'political' did not mean the same for everybody. Yet most women took cognizance of the movement and, looking back, they now see their domestic activities as an integral part of the nationalist movement. When women were asked to re-align their domestic roles to accommodate the nationalist cause their political consciousness was sharpened. In this sense the domestic sphere underwent a steady politicisation.

More outstanding than women's overt political activities was their determination and fearlessness, facing ridicule from other women relatives, and dealing with loss of income and shortages of food. The awareness that they had to survive, without inhibiting their husband's commitment to the nationalist cause, helped in the development of their own political consciousness. When women lost their family members, they suffered not only the grief and sorrow that accompanied it, but their previously routinised normal domestic lives were completely altered. In particular, the responsibilities of these women for themselves and for their nearest kith and kin had to be recognised. For example, some women had to earn the family's livelihood and take decisions about their children's education. In some instances, women became responsible for the well-being of their aged in-laws, especially if they were the oldest of the daughters-in-law, when their husbands were imprisoned. Very few women returned to their parental homes. Indian women after marriage cease to be

economically dependent on their parents. The nationalist movement did not just separate women from men or women from their own families but also helped in politicising them.

Women did not see subordinating their own lives to the husband's political activities as restricting their individual development although we might see it that way now. Rather these women saw their lives as being extended to encompass activities in both the public and domestic spheres and their self-reliance and self-confidence increased. The importance of respect for their domestic roles actually increased in this period, through popular nationalist symbols which legitimised and privileged women's contributions. The domestic sphere became such an important category in nationalist political thought that it makes us aware of new dimensions in the relationship between gender and political life. It, also, emphasised new ways of thinking about women's roles in domestic and public lives.

CHAPTER 5

RE-NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARIES OF IDENTITY: THE PUBLIC AND THE DOMESTIC QUESTIONED

Introduction

As demonstrated in chapter three, middle-class women crossed the boundaries of the domestic sphere to enter the public domain. However, these women did not disassociate themselves completely from domestic ideology, but instead built bridges between their public lives and domestic existences. Those women who could not enter the public domain initiated activities within the domestic sphere which facilitated its steady politicisation, as demonstrated in chapter four. Part of the success of the nationalist movement rested on women's acquiescence, selfless service and sacrifice to the nation. The nationalist discourse constructed Indian women in the role models of mothers, wives, companions and sisters who were endowed with 'natural' qualities like patience and perseverance, and were the chief vehicles through which Indian cultural values could be both preserved and disseminated amongst future generations. Within the nationalist discourse, women emerged as nationalist heroines.

However, in the twentieth century these traditional constructs associated with the middle class, and which linked 'woman' as mother, wife or sister with the notion of sacrifice, were threatened by the emergence of Western ideas and the creation of a new construct of the 'modern woman'. The nationalist leaders expected women to retain the values which gave their culture its traditional uniqueness and to modernise

at the same time. While women were ready to adapt to new ideas, they often expressed concern about modern (*adunik*) ideas. Drawing the right balance between the contradictory pulls of traditional Indian values and new ideas on modernity (*adunikta*) generated a dialogue between women themselves. Women writers were engaged in constant negotiation between modernity and tradition, between middle-class women and 'Other' common women, and between Western values and Indian values. While most of these negotiations reinforced conservative ideas, some led to the development of radical thought.

Chatterjee interprets the challenge presented by Western ideas to the nationalist discourse and its resolution through the 'separation of the domain of culture into two spheres - the material and the spiritual' (Chatterjee, 1989: 238). He argues that while in the material (outer) sphere adjustments had to be made in the light of Western norms,

'the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum'. (Chatterjee, 1989: 239)

Chatterjee's analysis associates changes and adjustments with the material/outer/public sphere where he sees the 'adaptation to western norms as a necessity'. However, in the domestic sphere, he argues, this adaptation was seen by the nationalist discourse as 'tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity' (Chatterjee, 1989: 239). For this reason, the domestic sphere was to remain unaltered.

Women's vernacular writings show that there were in fact intense debates about the domestic sphere and that there were major tensions between new and old ideas. Women writers were not so concerned with women's emergence from the private world as they were with the implications of the emergence of a 'modern' woman: one who aspired to progressive qualities like equal rights which challenged many aspects of the nationalist discourse. Chatterjee seeks to demonstrate the resolution of the

‘women’s question’ through the frameworks of the material and spiritual spheres, whereas in this chapter I locate this resolution through the ‘correct’ balance of modern and traditional ideas which was achieved within the domestic sphere. This approach builds its perspective predominantly on women’s ideas and their own reactions to the changing times, whereas Chatterjee constructs an analysis from the predominantly male viewpoint of nationalist leaders who advocated changes for women to suit the requirements of their own ‘historical project’.

I will trace some of the dominant themes which featured in these debates and were expressed mainly through Hindi language vernacular writings. Both male and female writers argued that Indian women had to be guarded and protected from modern ideas which were seen to originate in the West. In the process of imposing a restraint on new developments, the Hindi literature reproduced the orientalist discourse with its construct of the Eastern/Indian woman being contrasted with the construct of the Western woman. In fact, this discourse was as constraining as the ‘new woman’ and ‘common woman’ constructs in the sense that all of them contained or limited the activities of middle-class women, while eliminating ‘a public exploration of the differences and conflicts that women, in the course of their political participation, could experience’ (Thapar, 1993a: 83). The contradictions and ambiguities in male and female writings expressed women’s constant fear of confronting change. This fear was articulated through a discourse which emphasised women changing themselves rather than seeking structural change.

The official records have helped to build a story of women’s activities in the public sphere. However, these records tend to ignore the domestic sphere, which in fact is central to women’s experience and is the main concern of women’s writings. The discussion in this chapter engages primarily with magazines and journals written in Hindi and published in the state of Uttar Pradesh. I have translated the material myself, and have tried to keep the meaning as close as possible to the original. Copies

of most of these magazines are located in the local libraries of cities in Uttar Pradesh. These libraries' holdings include mainly vernacular literature from the nineteenth century onwards, although the older material is treated as being of predominantly historical interest. These libraries also subscribed to Hindi newspapers so that the general population might read them. A few issues of some of the magazines I refer to, including Saraswati and Maharathi , have been given to me by activists. I have looked at issues published as early as 1919 and extending through to 1942. Despite their utility in showing the ways in which middle class women were articulating ideas in a public forum, the political interests of editors led them to publish and encourage a certain type of material that facilitated the connection between their own nationalist politics and women's interests. Since most of the journals were explicitly nationalist-attempting to unite women in the nationalist movement-they did not address Muslim women or Hindu women but spoke in terms of 'we' women.

In the following section I will outline what is known about the readers and writers and will briefly identify the main characteristics of these magazines.

Writers, Readers and Contents

Women's writings in vernacular magazines were the first public expression of women's ideas and opinions, and reading them now also sheds light on the ambiguities and uncertainties which middle-class women expressed during the years of political upheaval. This literature also provides deeper insights into the way women in the first half of the twentieth century saw the domestic sphere and their own roles within it. In the Indian context domestic traditions have always been significant, but during the nationalist movement nearly all debates between women and the male nationalist leaders were discussed in relation to the domestic sphere.

The respondents whom I interviewed expressed varied opinions on the vernacular literature of the 1920s and 1930s. Some of them remembered hearing about the magazines but had not read them; some thought they had not been aware of them; and a few remembered reading them occasionally. Those who read these magazines had received some formal education, though not beyond school level. The specific familial circumstances were important because, while some households encouraged and subscribed to nationalist literature, others discouraged reading any literature which addressed nationalist issues. There were a few respondents who admitted that they had read some of these magazines in secret.

The Hindi literature of 1900 to 1945 reflected the political changes in the public world and parallel changes in ideas about women's roles in the domestic sphere. By exploring these writings today we can examine the relationship between the prevailing nationalist ideology and women's consciousness which women writers sought to draw. As I will demonstrate, the literature was written by men and women with the purpose of making women aware of the wider political movement and the need for corresponding changes in the social, economic and other dimensions of the domestic sphere which did not always serve women's interests. For example, many magazines discussed in this chapter linked women's and nationalist issues. There were articles entitled 'Women and *Satyagraha*' (Kamala, 1940), 'The national struggle and women's position' (Kamala, 1940), 'The significance of women in national life' (Chand, 1932), and a poem, 'The message of Mother India' (Stree Darpan, 1922).

This was a different method of promoting nationalist sentiment from the inflammatory and provocative nationalist writings which were banned by the government as 'proscribed literature' (to which I have referred in chapters three and four). For example, a poem like, 'The jingle of the shackles' (Arora, 1930) or a piece of prose entitled 'The fire of revolt' (Gupta, 1931) addressed issues of rebellion and freedom and were written with the specific aim of mobilising and inciting the

populace. The proscribed literature constitutes a separate genre of political writings. Some women were engaged in writing and editing revolutionary magazines. Ranbheri (Bugle of War), a revolutionary magazine, was published in Benares from the house of an activist, Kusum Agarwal, but the publishing work was moved from place to place in order to confuse the police. Viplav (Morning Breeze) was published from Lahore and Lucknow by a husband and wife team. Prakashvati Yashpal handled the publishing work, and she and her husband, who belonged to the Hindustan Republican Association, edited it jointly. The magazine was brought out in Hindi and Urdu. The contributors were both men and women from the revolutionary party and occasionally from the Congress Party. The magazine stopped publishing in 1949. Magazines like Ran Bheri and Viplav focussed on only political issues.

The magazines I analyse need to be distinguished from another category of monthly magazines like Manohar Tales³¹ which were intended as leisure reading for families and particularly for those women who were confined to the domestic sphere. These did not address political issues and contained fiction or writings on domestic matters such as cooking and sewing.

Contents

The Hindi literature focused on the distinction between activities that women should and should not undertake. Common themes were women's roles, education, the nation and nationality, and these were discussed in relation to new Western ideas of modernity. Some articles were well researched and analytical. Generally, each article took up only one particular issue, for example women's education, social reforms or the role of mothers. There were other articles which provided a schematic overview of

³¹ It was published from Allahabad, and information has been provided by a respondent, Avadhrani Singh.

social, political and economic developments. Occasionally an article lacked clarity about the specific topic it was discussing.

Each particular issue of a magazine was shaped through its readership, and since the majority of the articles concerned women, it follows that the readership was predominantly female. The style of writing varied from gentle urging to emphatic exhortation and was specific to the nationalist period. The purpose of prose and poetry was to stir and provoke what was perceived as 'the populace' into mobilisation for the movement. It was felt that a concerted effort had to be made to motivate and encourage women who led a segregated existence. Exhortations like 'Wake up sisters' and statements like 'We will fight together' were popular attempts to forge a sisterhood. The Hindi tracts were similar to Bengali writings of the late nineteenth century, which can be

'classified as exhortatory literature. Written as poems, stories and essays, these compositions had the express purpose of reminding the readers of their basic responsibilities in a changing environment' (Karlekar, 1991: 2).

Cover Representations

In Uttar Pradesh Hindi women's magazines and journals were first published at the beginning of the twentieth century, although they were published earlier, in the nineteenth century, in Bengal (Talwar, 1989: 207). The covers of Hindi magazines like Saraswati, Madhuri, Chand and Stree Darpan usually depicted a woman appearing as a reincarnation of a goddess of Indian mythology. For example, one issue of the magazine Madhuri had a cover image of *Kamala*, which is another name for *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth and the consort of the mythological god *Vishnu* (Figure 3). The magazine Saraswati was frequently illustrated by a drawing of the goddess of learning and knowledge (Figures 4 and 5). The goddess appears on a white swan, symbolising purity. The scroll in one of her many hands is symbolic of learning,

and the musical instrument in another hand represents her prowess in music. These are feminine images signifying powerful roles. Though these images are progressive in the way that they project women possessed with knowledge and artistic skills (such as

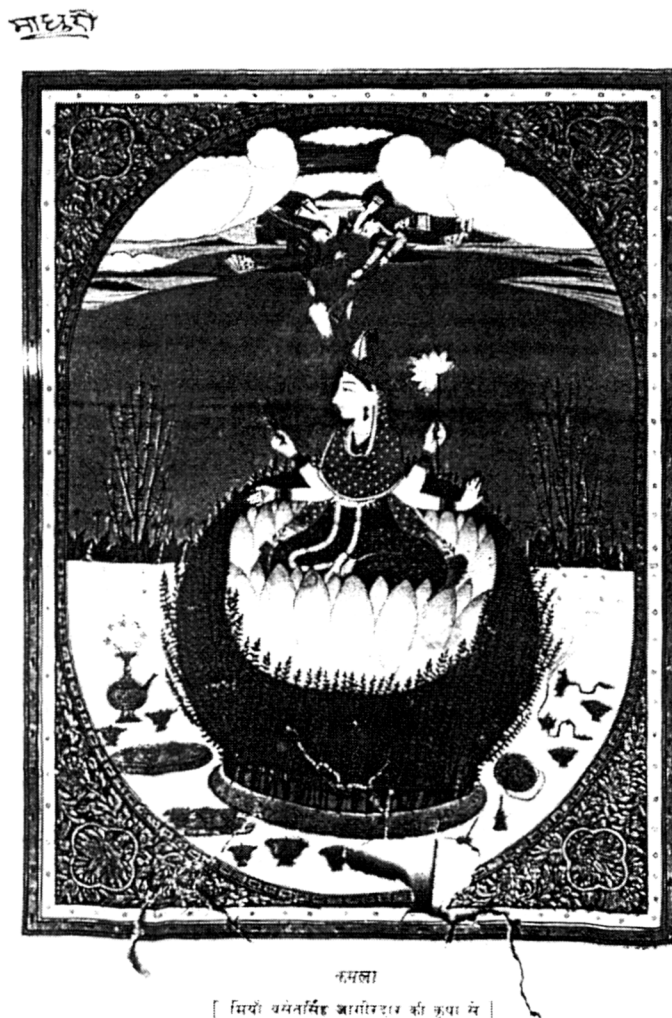


Figure 3. Goddess *Kamala* on the cover page of Madhuri.

music), they are also conservative because they create moral and religious boundaries.

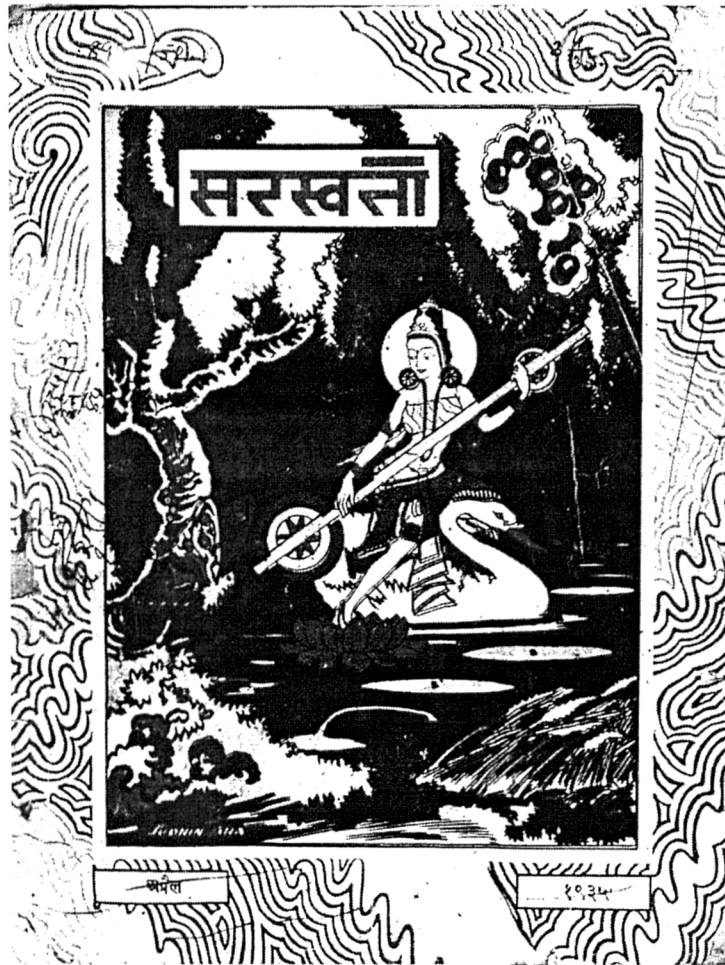


Figure 4. *Saraswati* on a white swan as shown on a cover of *Saraswati* (cf. Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Saraswati* on a white swan as shown on a cover of *Saraswati* (cf. Figure 4).

I have looked at seven journals in depth. The first, *Stree Darpan*, was published as early as 1909 and was one of the ‘three most important journals dealing with women’s problems’ (Rao, 1994: 29). It had two women editors, Rameshwari Nehru and Roop Kumari Vanchu, and was financed and published by Kamala Nehru, wife of Jawaharlal Nehru and president of the Allahabad District Congress Committee. The two Nehru women were from elite backgrounds, and Roop Kumari was from a more modest middle-class family. Rameshwari Nehru was the daughter of a renowned leader of the Punjab, Raja Narendra Nath.

‘Married to Pandit (Brahmin caste), she found her public career linked with that of the family of Pandit Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru. As early as 1909, Rameshwari started the *Mahila Samiti* of Prayag and in 1926 we see her as the founder president of the Delhi Women’s League and in 1928 she was a member of the government of India Age of Consent Committee’. (Nehru, 1950: 9)

The magazine title, Stree Darpan, means ‘Women’s Mirror’, and this magazine claimed to be the first one to represent the voice of Indian women. It did not deal only with nationalist issues, but discussion of women’s rights and certain reforms in gender relations were also encouraged. One editorial commented:

‘Today Stree Darpan has completed twelve and a half years of service to the women in society. This magazine commenced publication when no other magazine dealt with women’s opinions. The only talk during this period was on *stree dharma* (women’s religious duty) and nobody even spoke about women’s rights. However, through our labour we have managed to help the women by trying to introduce reforms for men’. (Nehru and Vachu, 1921: 329)

Apart from editorial comments, poems and short stories, Stree Darpan had well-researched articles on women’s roles in the nationalist movement. One of the reasons for this was the editorial influence of the Nehru women, who were themselves politically active. The issues of 1922 included poems like ‘The goddess of freedom’; ‘Editors’ comments on the ‘Prayag *Mahila Vidyapith* (women’s college)’; ‘The message of Mother India’; and a ‘A national prayer to Indian women’.

Grihalakshmi, meaning ‘Goddess of the Home’, was a monthly magazine published in Allahabad and edited by a man, Pandit Sudharshan Charya, and a woman, Srimati Gopaldevi, whose relationship to each other is not known. They were Brahmins and, like almost all other editors, were from the highest caste. The man had a university Bachelor’s degree and was an urban-based middle-class individual. It has been observed that the ‘issues being debated in Stree Darpan were echoed in Grihalakshmi and many debates were simultaneous, often rebuttals and rejoinders to questions raised in one could be found in the other’ (Talwar, 1989: 208).

Another magazine published from Allahabad was Chand which means 'The Moon'. (The moon is associated with the feminine world). Its editor, Sri Ramrakh Singh Sahgal, and the manager, Srimati (Smt.) Vidyavati Sahgal, were a husband and wife team. In 1935 the magazine brought out a special issue called the '*Vidhusi Ang*', which means the 'issue of the learned'. It contained articles written by women and covered many subjects. For example, Uma Nehru wrote on 'The role of women in marriage', Vijaylakshmi Pandit wrote 'Present day women's education?', and Smt. Kumari Amrit Lata wrote 'Will women remain unmarried after acquiring education?'. All these contributors were from the middle classes and were highly educated for the time; some having university degrees. The magazine received contributions from women from other parts of Uttar Pradesh, and the articles were addressed to the editor. For example, a woman wrote to the editor, Ramrakh Singh, from Gorakhpur after the city had received a visit from Swaruprani Nehru, a prominent leader of Allahabad, where the magazine was published (Anonymous in Chand 1930: 148). Letters reporting on current political events (like a nationalist meeting) or social issues (such as new reforms or legislation affecting the status of women) in the form of 'notes to the editor' appeared frequently. Other articles covered a range of issues, from women's contributions to political developments and the influence of new ideas on women to the historical participation of women. The magazine was rich in poems written on issues involving women which were seen as being related to the progress of society, like prostitution and widowhood.

Occasionally small details of a magazine like a note about the editorial board or the significance of a particular magazine for new social developments were referred to by another magazine. For example, in an article in Chand commenting on Saraswati and entitled 'Six months in India', the contributor talks about his stay in Prayag (near Allahabad) and says that it will be incomplete 'if I do not talk about the *sahitaya seviyo* (women specialising in literature)'. When I met the editor of Saraswati,

Devidutt Shukla and Thakur Srinath Singh, I realised that they are the life and soul of the magazine' (Editorial in Chand, February 1937: 396). Though this statement does not give us too much information on the magazine Saraswati, its purpose is to increase the awareness of Chand readers that other literature is available.

In 1935 the editor of Chand was a woman, Mahadevi Verma. Since Mahadevi was highly literate and a poet, she contributed numerous articles on the changing political environment, the emergence of new ideas and their effects on women.

Two magazines published from Benares were Kamala (lotus, the national flower of India and a woman's name) and Arya Mahila (a woman who belongs to the superior race). The editors of Arya Mahila were Smt. Sukha Kumari, Smt. Narayani Devi, Smt. Sundari Devi and Bindeshwari Prasad. The magazine was associated with the *Sanatan Dharma Mahamandal*, a conservative Hindu organisation.³² The title Arya Mahila was different from other titles in identifying the Vedic³³ woman as a role model. The magazine adhered to tenets of Hinduism. The word *Arya* is associated with a person with superior qualities in social, religious and political matters. During the nationalist period, the ancient values and roles of women were glorified and the magazine reiterated these dominant ideas. Uma Chakravarti has argued that the construction of a specific glorified past facilitated the representation of a particular kind of Indian womanhood (Chakravarti, 1989: 78). This representation was based on tradition, religion and mythology. In this context Chakravarti explains how organisations that were set up to help Hindu women emphasised the higher (Aryan) qualities in women. For example, the organisations were called the *Arya Nari Samaj* or *Arya Mahila Samaj*. This magazine was published from 1918 onwards and carried articles on child development, the Vedic ideals of women and every page of an issue

³² Talwar has mentioned this organisation in his work (see Talwar, 1989).

³³ The glorious period of ancient India. This period is known for religious treatises such as Rig Veda and the Shastras.

had a *sloka* (two to three lines of profound philosophy) in Sanskrit. This suggests that the magazine upheld Hindu religious ideals.

Kamala was edited by a Babu Rao Vishnu Paradkar and had an annual inland subscription of Rs 4.80, with a foreign subscription of Rs. 6.40. This was not inexpensive for that period. Babu Rao was also editor-in-chief of the vernacular newspaper Aaj:

‘The fact that it is edited by so prominent a person as Babu Rao, is in itself a sufficient guarantee of the magazine being safely put in the hands of mothers, daughters, wives and sisters in India. The aim and object of the magazine is not only to uplift the Indian womenfolk by freeing them from superstition and many other evils that have crept into the Indian society, but also to remind them of the old Indian culture and tradition of which Indian women were renowned in the past’.³⁴

This suggests that as an editor Babu Rao had an additional responsibility for incorporating material which would not be too radical and challenging for its women readers. In fact, the purpose of the magazine was to re-emphasise women’s traditional roles in the domestic sphere. I will return to this particular quotation later.

Saraswati was edited by Devidutt Shukla Srinathsingh and published from Prayag. The title referred to the goddess of knowledge and music. It was a monthly magazine and had foreign subscribers, which might explain why many articles were about contemporary political developments in Europe (Figure 6). Some form of correspondence between foreign subscribers was established through the occasional letters to the editor from European women. There is a possibility that Indians resident in European countries were subscribing to Hindi magazines.

³⁴ This quote was repeated in many issues of Kamala.

Reference to magazines like Sudha, Prabha and Maharathi are limited in this chapter. Sudha, which had a male editor, Dulare Lal Bhargava, was published from Lucknow. The title means 'pure and holy'. Prabha also had a male editor, Bal Krishna

सरस्वती के नियम

१—सरस्वती प्रतिमास प्रकाशित होनी है।
 २—डाकम्बय-सहित इसका वार्षिक मूल्य १॥) है। इसका वर्ष जनवरी से दिसम्बर तक या जुलाई से जून तक समझा जाता है। बीच में प्राहक होनेवालों को पूरे वर्ष की संख्या में ही जानी है। प्रतिमासका मूल्य ॥२) है। भारत के बाहर सर्वत्र वार्षिक मूल्य ८)। पत्र महीने का ४) और प्रतिमासका ॥२) है। बिना प्रतिमास मूल्य के पत्रिका नहीं भेजी जाती। पुरानो प्रतिपत्ति सब नहीं मिलती। जो मिलनी भी है उनका मूल्य १) प्रति से कम नहीं लिया जाता।

३—अपना नाम और पता साफ साफ लिख कर भेजना चाहिए, जिसमें पत्रिका के पहुँचाने में गड़बड़ी न हो।
 ४—जिन सज्जनों का किसी मास की सरस्वती न मिले उन्हें पहले अपने डाकघर से पूछना चाहिए। अगर पता न छूने तो डाकघर से जो बत्तर आये उसे हमारे पास—जिस महीने की संख्या न मिली हो उसके—अगले महीने की १२ तारीख तक भेजे। जिन पत्रों के साथ डाकघर का बत्तर न होगा उन पर ध्यान न दिया जायगा; बाहे के अगले महीने की १२ ता० के भीतर ही आये। उन्हें संख्या मूल्य ही पर मिलेगी। सरस्वती यहाँ से दो बार अर्धशे तरह जाँच कर रवाना की जाती है। अतएव इस विषय में पहले डाकघर से ही पूछताछ करना अच्छा होगा।

५—यदि एक ही दो मास के लिए पता बदलवाना हो तो डाकखाने से उसका प्रबंध करा लेना चाहिए और यदि सदा अपन्या अधिक काल के लिए बदलवाना हो तो उसकी सूचना हमें अवश्य देनी चाहिए।

६—लेख, कविता, समालोचना के लिए पुस्तकें और बरखे के पत्र "सम्पादक सरस्वती इंडियन प्रेस, लिमिटेड, प्रयाग," के पते से भेजने चाहिए। मूल्य तथा प्रबन्ध-सम्बन्धी पत्र "मैनेजर सरस्वती, इंडियन प्रेस, लिमिटेड, हल्दीबाघा," के पते से आने चाहिए।

७—किसी लेख अथवा कविता के प्रकाशन करन या न करने का तथा उनके रान या न प्रीटाने का भी अधिकार सम्पादक का है। लेखों के घटाने-बढ़ाने का भी अधिकार सम्पादक का है। जो लेख सम्पादक लौटाना मंजूर करें उसका डाक और रजिस्टर्ड एवं लेखक के नामों होगा। बिना उसे भेजे लेख न लौटाया जायगा।

८—अधूरे लेख नहीं छापे जाते। स्थान के अनुसार कुछ एक या अधिक संख्याओं में प्रकाशित होते हैं।

१—जिन लेखों में चित्र रहेंगे, उन चित्रों के मिलने का जब तक लेखक प्रबंध न कर देंगे, तब तक वे छेद न छापे जायेंगे। यदि चित्रों के प्राप्त करने में समय आवश्यक होना तो दिया जायगा।
 १०—पुरस्कार के योग्य लेखों पर लेखकों को यदि वे स्वीकार करेंगे, तो नियमानुसार पुरस्कार भी दिया जायगा।

सरस्वती के विज्ञापन-रूपार्थ के रेट

कथर का दूसरा पृष्ठ ...	३१) प्रतिमास
" " " एक कालम ...	२१) "
" " " तीसरा पृष्ठ ...	३६) "
" " " एक कालम ...	२१) "
" " चौथा पृष्ठ ...	४८) "
" " " एक कालम ...	२४) "
प्राथम्य विषय की समाप्ति के मामलवाला पृष्ठ ३०)	"
" " " " " एक कालम १८)	"
कथर के द्वितीय पृष्ठ के सामनेवाला पृष्ठ ३०)	"
" " " " " एक कालम १८)	"
कथर के तीसरे पृष्ठ के सामनेवाला पृष्ठ ३०)	"
" " " " " एक कालम १८)	"
रहान बिना से पहलेवाला पृष्ठ ...	३०) "
" " " " " एक कालम १८)	"

साधारण नियम ये हैं :-

१ पृष्ठ या २ कालम की सुपाई ... २४) प्रतिमास
 ३ " या १ " " " ... १३) "
 ४ " या २ " " " ... ७) "
 ५ " या ३ " " " ... ४) "

१—"सरस्वती" में चरखाने विज्ञापन नहीं छापे जाते, अतः कुरचि-पूर्ण विज्ञापन न भेजिए।
 २—एक कालम या इससे अधिक विज्ञापन सुपानेवालों को सरस्वती बिना मूल्य भेजी जाती है, औरों को नहीं।
 ३—सुपाई का रेट जो ऊपर दिया है यह अकाउन्ट (FINAL) है। इसका लिए बिल्या-पड़ी करना स्वयं है।
 ४—जितने समय तक के लिए कस्टमर किया गया है, उतने समय तक विज्ञापन सुपाना होगा। विज्ञापन न सुपाने पर भी उसका चाहे विज्ञापक का देना होगा।
 पत्र-व्यवहार करने का पता -
 मैनेजर, विज्ञापन-विभाग
 इंडियन प्रेस, लिमिटेड, प्रयाग

Figure 6. Subscription details in Saraswati. Underlined: 'The rates for foreign subscription are 8 Rs yearly, 4 Rs for six months and 1 Rs per monthly issue'.

Sharma and was published from Kanpur. Prabha means 'the light and glory of the morning sun'. Maharathi was edited by a man, Ramchandra Sharma, who held a Bachelor's degree, and was published by a woman, Chandra Devi. It was published

monthly from Delhi but had contributions from writers in Uttar Pradesh. The title means ‘a warrior’ and most covers of this magazine had mythological gods leading their chariots to the battlefield (Figure 7). Similarly, Usha was published monthly from Jammu and was edited by a woman, Shakuntala Seth, and a man Ayodhya Nath ‘Vir’.

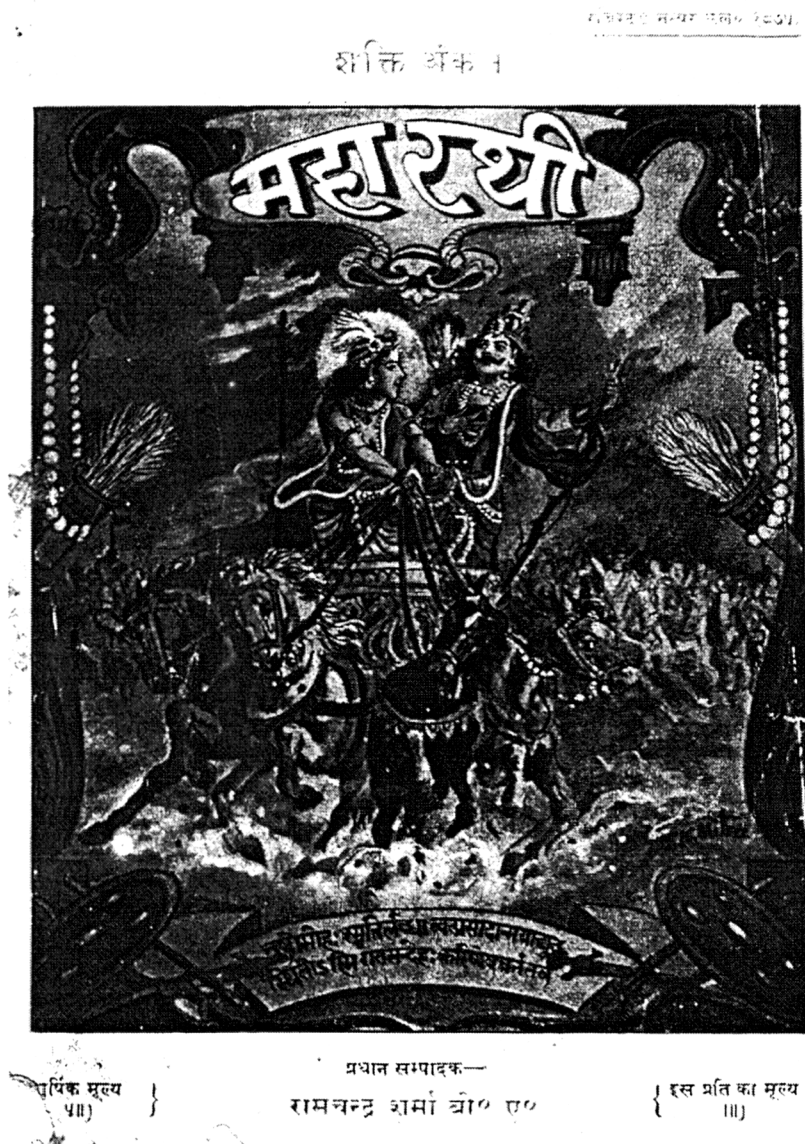


Figure 7. A cover page of Maharathi.

Vidushi (meaning ‘a learned woman’) was published from Benares by Ratneshwari Agarwal, the founder of the *Mahila Mandal* (women’s organisation) in the same city. The magazine was edited and published entirely by women.³⁵ The editorial board comprised three women: Ratneshwari Agarwal, Lalibai Pandey and Kusumlata. A contemporary commented on the magazine,

‘This was the first magazine as a result of women’s awakening. The moral of the magazine is *‘Amar jyotimah jeevan ka shubh sandesh sunayege: Vidushi ye mahila samaj ko vidushi nitya banayege’* (We will achieve the goal of a long lasting life: the magazine Vidushi will make every woman learned)’³⁶

The magazine was started in 1937 and was regarded by educated people as offering enlightenment to women on Indian Sanskritic traditions. It was published and printed every month on a full moon day,³⁷ and carried a range of articles from ‘National awakening and Women’ (1938) to ‘Man and Woman’ (1940). Another magazine called Shradhanjali (offerings) was brought out on Ratneshwari’s death. It was also edited by a woman, Lalibai Pandey, and published by Shri Sharda Mehta from Benares.

Women’s Education

Before I identify the main trends in women’s magazines, I would like to outline the educational background of women writers at the time. My attempt is not to give a

³⁵ Literature acquired through Suman Agarwal, granddaughter of Ratneshwari Agarwal. Three generations of women were involved with women’s issues.

³⁶ This extract is taken from a special issue brought out to celebrate the golden jubilee of the establishment of the Mahila Mandal (1934-1984) and left in the possession of family members. The issue was published in 1984 and entitled ‘Commemorating those years’.

³⁷ In Hindu religion it is regarded as an auspicious day for women.

comprehensive overview because this is not within the scope of this thesis. Rather, I want to highlight certain educational patterns of women on a national level.

The articles were written by women of the middle class with formal education in Hindi and often in English, and were read mostly by women with similar educational backgrounds, as well as by women whose reading skills were less developed. As Jayawardena comments, although women’s education in India (and many parts of Asia) was geared primarily to providing good wives and mothers ‘for those men who had risen on the economic and social ladder of colonial society’, it also facilitated women’s own literary activities (Jayawardena, 1986: 16). These women’s ideas were transmitted to middle-class women with little or no formal education through speeches and women’s meetings. Spokeswomen at the national and local levels wanted to share their ideas with other women. Most of the women’s magazines were published from big cities like Allahabad, Benares, Kanpur and Lucknow, where women’s education was most developed, serving the ‘needs of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie’ (Jayawardena, 1986: 89). The editors and readers were urban based, middle class men and women.

Table 1. Number of women in the educational system of India, from academic year 1923-24 to 1928-29.

	1923-24	1924-25	1925-26	1926-27	1927-28	1928-29
College	1622	1807	1881	1933	2099	2280
High School	44170	47290	51560	54826	62776	69549
English Middle School	31011	31630	34800	36605	36867	40565
Hindi Middle School	70734	69153	87424	93416	99365	101509
Primary School	1264814	1324002	1434639	1549281	1681414	1800073

Source: (Nigam, 1934: 325)

A general picture for the level of female education (from a national survey) in India during twentieth century can be drawn from Table 1 and the respondent's comments. It appears that of all girls who started primary school, only about 11% continued their education to middle school. The dropout rate at this stage was 89%. The majority of women who continued their education went to Hindi rather than English middle school. However, the figures show that the dropout between middle school and high school was only 35%, but this increased to 96% when it was time to go to college. The table demonstrates that for most women in India, education up to primary school was regarded by their families as sufficient, so only a small percentage went on to middle school. However, once the families (a small ratio) encouraged their daughters into further education, women would carry on until high school. The high dropout at college level suggests that only women who had the ability and who could afford the expenses acquired university education.

Most of the respondents I interviewed in Uttar Pradesh were educated to primary school level. A particular respondent said that 'though little education was given to girls, my father still sent me to primary school in Nigoha (Kanpur district)' (transcript of interview with Narayani Tripathi)³⁸. Another respondent was forced to discontinue her schooling after primary school by her mother, 'on the grounds that it was enough for a girl to read and write' (transcript of interview with Manavati Arya). Some respondents reached middle school³⁹ and high school. One respondent's husband, who himself was a double M.A., taught her up to High school and encouraged her in further education.⁴⁰ My maternal grandmother, Iqbalwati Handa, did not receive formal education at a school but was educated at home to the standard

³⁸ Other respondents such as Mrs. Misra, Smt. Phul Kumari Devi, Sridevi Tewari and Godavari Devi shared similar ideas.

³⁹ Middle school is referred to as eighth class by respondents

⁴⁰ Respondents like Vijay Devi Rathore, Uttara Saxana, Madhavi Lata Shukla, Kaushalya Devi, Avadhrani Singh were in high school in Hindi

of high school by a German governess. The few respondents who acquired university education were supported in their parental homes as well as in their husbands' families⁴¹ (transcript of interviews with Prakashvati Yashpal, Sushila Rohatgi, Satya Saxena and Laksmi Sehgal).

The general evidence suggests that all contributions to these magazines were made by men and women with university degrees. Some male and female writers seem to have been educated to postgraduate level, for example, Smt. Gauri Devi (B.A., M.A.). The obituary of a female writer in an issue of *Saraswati* actually emphasised her educational qualifications:

'With utmost grief, I have to inform you (readers) that Kumari Savitri Devi is no more with us. It would not be wrong to say that in our *Akhil Bharatvarsha Manvachari Viswakarma* society, Kumari Savitri occupied a high place. In May the lady had been successful in her M.A. examination and had taken it from *Arthashastra* (Economics)'. (Vishvakarma, 1935: 253)

Though specific details are not available on individual writers, it appears from clues within the text (for instance the mode of address was *Srimati* to a married woman and *Kumari* to an unmarried woman) that most of them were married and were Hindu women. Some men and women writers were also active in the public sphere. For example, the magazine *Chand* commented in its columns under 'miscellaneous events':

'Smt. Sitadevi, editor of *Mahila Sudhar* (Women's Reforms) published from Kanpur, has to undergo one year's imprisonment in Lucknow jail for her service to the nation' (Anonymous in *Chand*, April 1931: 737)

Another example was of the Nehru sisters who edited the journal *Stree Darpan* and were known better for their political activities than their literary interests.

⁴¹ The women of the Nehru household were highly educated.

In the magazines I examined, both male and female writers expressed concern about the current political turmoil and how women should respond to it. Certain trends can be identified in these writings which I have delineated under three sections.

First, I will analyse articles which are concerned mainly with women's roles towards the nation. These articles emphasise the importance of women's education for national development. Furthermore, education was seen to produce good mothers and wives. In the second section I discuss examples from the vernacular literature in which women are expected to bring about reforms within their homes in order to make the domestic environment more adaptable to the political situation. The articles set guidelines and directions for the activities which women need to undertake. There are certain issues on which the writers express certainty. For example, there is no disparity of opinion on the 'glorious past' of Indian womanhood. The writings acknowledge the changes in society which are expected with the influence of Western values. However the contents discourage the expression of overt antagonism between the sexes, and offer reasonable solutions to all social, economic and political problems. This does not necessarily correspond to the opinion of all middle-class women, who in fact kept striving for more change. Though there seems to be considerable overlap of ideas between male and female writers, male writers appear to be more conservative in their ideas about women's roles in society.

In the third section I identify some of the ideas in writings which reflect the heightened perception amongst women of their potential status as equal individuals, and which seem in retrospect to be quite radical for the first forty years of the twentieth century. However, the radicalism of these ideas is camouflaged by nationalist concern for preserving Indian cultural traditions. In this way the writings and issues seem to offer no threat to males. Even writings which are more overtly radical do not develop their analysis very far and seem to hold back from very radical

conclusions. However, some of the ideas can be considered quite feminist for their time.

Women, Education and National Development

The most important issue for the progress of both the women's and the nationalist movements which the articles repeatedly emphasise is education. Education was expected to help women adapt more easily to the changing social, political and cultural environment. From the nineteenth century, economic changes in the public sphere led to the emergence of a male middle class 'caught in the stormy days of social and occupational change' (Karlekar, 1991: 7). These men required 'intelligent companions' to help them cope with the pressures of change.

The new political situation also encouraged both male and female nationalist leaders to take a closer look at Indian society, and the 'educational and social reforms for women formed an integral part of modernizing the country and society' (Agnew, 1979: 104). Initiatives for the education of women were taken by two national organisations, the Women's Indian Association (which began in 1917) and the All-India Women's Conference (formed in 1927).

As Partha Chatterjee suggests, women's education was also expected to further the cause of the nationalist movement and to help the women's movement at the same time (Chatterjee, 1989: 246). Similarly, Vir Talwar argues that

'The nationalist movement also helped the issues of women's education to become important. Stree Darpan advocated an education that was geared to meeting the needs of the nationalist movement, in other words a social and politically sound education... The women's movement of the time (recognised this fact and) linked the issue of women's education to that of women's liberation'. (Talwar, 1989: 221)

Many magazines were aware that ‘as compared to men’s education in India, there is considerable lack of women’s education in the twentieth century’ (Nigam, 1934: 325).⁴²

This section discusses the debates over women’s education from 1920-1947 and considers its importance for the development of the Indian nation. The emphasis on particular issues such as the role of mothers and the influence of Western ideas shifted through the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. In the 1920s, the progressive character of Western women was used as an appropriate role model to encourage uneducated Indian women to become independent and self-reliant. The education of mothers was highlighted in the 1920s and again in the 1930s. The concept of motherhood was used by both male and female nationalist leaders to suggest the image of a woman not only caring for and loving her children, but also producing healthy progeny. However, in the 1940’s modern education associated with the West was questioned and seen as a threat to traditional values.

It seems that most women writers used the magazines partly as a new avenue of self-expression. This is evident from both the style of writing and the issues raised. Many were unsophisticated in style. For instance, some articles did not introduce their subjects with an introduction, or the writers would raise a whole host of different issues without indicating the links between them. It sometimes seems that a writer was masking other ideas by references to the ‘nation’. For example, a writer whose initial purpose was to discuss the role of mothers simply throws in the idea that ‘we women should keep our virginity and after marriage recognise the importance of a wife’s role as well as protect the family honour. These are the duties towards the nation’ (Kibe, 1935b: 581). It appears that the writer had hidden fears about changes

⁴² In the context of Bengal, Malavika Karlekar identified a gap of nearly three decades between the education of men and women, and it was ‘only around the 1840s that schooling for girls gained acceptability among the middle classes’ (Karlekar, 1991: 6)

which 'modern' education would introduce in women's lives, but was unable to fully articulate or give reasons for her fears.

It is also possible that women's own desires for education and self-expression were rationalised or sometimes camouflaged by writings which emphasised the national need for 'ideal and good mothers'. However, the radical implications of 'modern' education were limited by the repeated emphasis on the well-being of the domestic sphere and the general prosperity of the nation.

The discourse on education perceived women's position through such key concepts as 'to progress' (*auniti*) and 'to regress' (*avnati*). The literature is rich in ideas concerning the issue of 'modernity' (*adhunikta*). Some vernacular words were used more frequently than others to explain modernity. For example, *aadhunik*, *awarchin*, and *naya* (all mean modern) were used together with *vartman*, which means the 'current or present'. Modernity was associated with the present times (in Chand, 1938: 267).

These writings associate modernity with progress and new developments. Progress was associated with an education which could remove the extreme imbalances between man and woman and help in the development of the nation. A nation was progressive when women acquired qualities such as patience, devotion and self-sacrifice, and regressive when women were 'drowned in ignorance'. A 'modern' woman was expected to bridge the existing gulf between the educated man and his uneducated counterpart, but without displacing gender-specific roles. The relevance of this discourse was demonstrated by emphasising its importance to the nationalist movement.

The close association made between women's education and national development can be illustrated through an article in Stree Darpan entitled 'The importance of women's education in the eyes of the nation' by the male editor of Chand, Ram Rakh Singh Sehgal. This article reiterates the dominant views on the role

of education. His analysis is based on the premise that a nation's strength and weakness rest on the education of its women citizens. He argues that in the view of learned men,

'Two things are closely joined together, the education, the training and development of women; and the greatness of a nation. When those women were the Indian mothers, heroes and rishies (religious mendicants) were born and now out of child mothers, cowards and social pigmies come forth'. (Sehgal, 1921: 301)

This argument connects women's education to national regeneration and the elimination of the practice of child marriage which was seen by social reformers as a cause for the degradation of Indian women and of India's political dependence. The reference to 'cowards' implies an inability to defend the country from the British. Early motherhood as a result of child marriages was also seen by the British as one of the causes of the depraved nature of the Indian men. In the controversial book, Mother India, Katherine Mayo highlighted some of these characteristics (Mayo, 1927: 25).

The author, Sehgal argues that whenever a particular nation had progressed, its women had adopted powerful roles as the companions and trustworthy comrades of men. He quotes Aristotle, who claimed that

'On the *auniti* (progress) or *avnati* (regress) of women is dependent the nation's progress or regression.' (Sehgal, 1921: 301)

The author then goes on to argue that:

'the historian Gibbon, has mentioned that the Romans unlike the Greeks used to treat their women well and this is one of the reasons why the Romans became powerful and the Greeks had to bow in front of the Romans'. (Sehgal, 1921: 302)

What is important is that the writer identifies the qualities that Roman women nurtured when Rome was on the path of *utkarsh* (fame, prosperity). The women were *pativrata* (devoted and loyal to the husband), *swalamban* (without greed), *swarth-*

tayag (self-sacrificing) and *tharya* (patient). However, the writer argued that at the downfall of the Roman empire all these qualities were replaced by bad behaviour and ignorance (Sehgal, 1921: 302). Women's education would facilitate the construction of a strong and stable national identity.

In an article in the magazine Kumari Darpan, entitled 'Message to Indian Women', women were chastised by a male writer for their lack of awareness and inability to act independently:

'In contrast to other countries, women in India are without any ambition and neither doing anything to come out of seclusion, nor to educate and be independent, for parity with men. Leave aside uneducated women, even the educated ones go about in closed carriages and seem to be doing nothing for the education of the illiterate. Instead, they are looking to men for direction. One who wants to improve her status to obtain equal rights will have to work hard and face difficulties themselves. To be at the mercy of others will be a mere illusion. So if women have to progress and be independent as women in other countries, they will have to become self-reliant' (Sataybhakt, 1920: 331-7).

Reference to women in the West is here used to encourage Indian women to think independently. The writer seems to find present social developments very unsatisfactory and aspires for more far-reaching changes.

Another issue raised in vernacular articles was the disparity between the ideas articulated by men and the actual implementation of those ideas in practice. It was argued that while some people stated that education for women was important, their support was only at a verbal level.

'People in their speeches say that education for women is important, but when they come back home, I don't know where it goes. If the woman is educated till second class she is considered to be too educated and intelligent and the next task for her is to get married. However, if she gets too educated then she may not be able to make *chappatis* for her in-laws'. (Gupta, 1925: 164)

The author noted another disparity in the attitudes of some people: during matchmaking men looked for educated women as wives to their sons. However, these same men did not consider the uneducated status of their own daughters inside their homes (Gupta, 1925: 165). This reflected the patriarchal pre-conceptions which favoured men over women.

A particularly traditionalist article in Stree Darpan entitled 'Women's Education', articulates ideas on the effects of an incomplete education. The author argues that:

'Those of us who oppose women's education say that women tend to become very liberal after education and do not bother about their husbands welfare. They get involved in various kinds of fashion and even start considering household work as degrading. I think all these qualities do not generate from education but little education' (Khanna, 1925: 84).

The writer expresses the view that women who have little education can read a few novels or a few *ghazals* (expressive Urdu poetry) but cannot concentrate on books related to difficult matters. The author wants women to have knowledge of their religion so that they can realise their *kartavya* (duties) and domestic responsibilities (Khanna, 1925: 85). An aspect that comes across in this article on women's education is that the incorporation of new subjects in the curriculum for women could reinvigorate the domestic sphere. For example it is stated that

'Bhugol aur Itihas ki yadi unko shiksha di jaye to grihasthi ki karyavahi badi sugamta se bahut thode vayay se chal sakti hai'. (Khanna, 1925: 86)

which means that if women are given education in geography and history, then they can run their household matters more efficiently. This suggests that confinement of women to limited subjects reinforced gender divisions and excluded them from the public sphere.

The nationalist movement bore testimony to new ideas and debates that were encouraged between men and women and amongst women. During this experimentation with new ideas, contradictory messages were given on the position of men and women and their roles, both in the home and the outside world. For example, the previously mentioned article states that the domestic sphere is like a *rath* (carriage) with two wheels, and that unless both the wife and husband balance the workload between them, the domestic sphere will not run smoothly (Khanna, 1925: 86). On the other hand, the same article questions the mental and physical capabilities of women:

‘Women should not be taught those subjects that are not essential and useful for them because, of various reasons, women can neither spend a lot of their time in studying, neither can they put their minds through a lot of strain and neither can they do physical work for a long time’. (Khanna, 1925: 89)

This negates the idea expressed earlier that men and women should share the responsibility equally. It is clearly suggested that women are weaker and have less stamina, so that they should put their responsibilities for the domestic sphere first.

Another editorial informed its readers of a new university of women called *Prayag Mahila Vidhyapith*. The editorial states that at a meeting of men and women held in the Prayag municipal office, a curriculum was drawn up in which only national languages would be used, mainly Hindi and Urdu. The compulsory subjects included history, geography, housework and cleanliness, making food, spinning *charkha* and first aid. Other subjects like physics, botany and chemistry were optional (Nehru and Vanchu, 1922: 168).

It is difficult to discern from these articles why women were seen as the touchstone of national progress and regeneration. I would suggest that the roles assigned to women were so constructed that they conformed to the existing social structures. (For example, a woman was expected to be a good mother in *purdah*.)

Moreover, the articles did not perceive the existence of women's interests, and traditional social structures remained unchallenged. It also seems that the responsibility for moral regeneration was offloaded from men to women.

In the 1940s both men and women again debated the question of an appropriate curriculum for the education for women. For example, questions were raised about the necessary level and limits of education. It was clear, however, that women's education had to be beneficial for the nation and serve the immediate purposes of the nationalist movement. In the context of the wider anti-colonial struggle, the idea of a healthy nation was linked with nearly every issue, and the idea of defending the nation was the driving force behind a lot of discussions and disputes. Opinions were given on what was a complete or incomplete education and on the disparities between various proposals. Male and female writers expressed their worries and fears about 'modern' education. To a certain extent, this explains the inconsistencies and contradictions in their arguments. While these writers realised that education was good for women, they feared that modern education would make women more liberal and more aware of their rights as women. The dominant fear was of women (especially younger women) trying to subvert the old established values, becoming more fashionable, demanding liberal sexual relations and more economic freedom, and not recognising their duties as wives and mothers in married life (as discussed in the last section). The attempt was made to resist any form of change. However, the influence of Western ideas on men was rarely questioned, whereas women's mode of dress and moral direction were the subjects of constant worry and suspicion.

In an article entitled 'Women's education' in the magazine Usha, Gyanendra Kumari Sushma, a woman writer, outlines some disparities in education patterns whereby to be uneducated is not beneficial, and to have an incomplete education is regarded as dangerous. According to the writer, every man and woman has to enter the life of a householder, and if current education does not make our domestic life

successful, then it is insignificant. Referring to the curriculum that modern education incorporates, (for example, subjects like civics, politics, geography and economics), she complains that there is no place here for *domestic issues*. Since religious and domestic subjects are completely neglected, women have forgotten their true national role of being able mothers and successful housewives and instead they have moved towards 'western unbridled freedom and fashion'. She argues that the greatest harm modern education has done is to remove self-discipline and self-control from the lives of women (Sushma, 1943:94-95). Modern education is associated with the West and it is seen to encourage western patterns like fashion and lack of physical decorum among Indian women. Fashion, particularly, is associated with bringing superficiality into people's lives, encouraging consumerism, disassociating women from their modesty and viewing them as commodities.

The writer questions the validity of modern education. She wonders why women opt for it if it can be so damaging. She argues, first, that modern education is seen to be glamorous, and secondly that women have become more knowledgeable about their rights:

'Today's scientific age has produced in the woman a consciousness about equality with man. The slogan "Independence is a man's birth-right" which was only used in the political sphere against the British, is also used within the homes. For women, education is the only tool for achieving those rights which she should have got since her birth. However, both men and women should build a prosperous domestic life which also assists us in performing our duties towards the nation. This can only happen if we are 'well educated' and not simply 'educated'. Men should also change their ideas'. (Sushma 1943: 95)

This article critically evaluates the nature of modern education. The writer associates duties towards the nation with creating a right environment within the domestic space. Though women are seen to possess a consciousness of equality within the home, the relationship between the sexes is non-antagonistic. The solution to some problems

within the domestic sphere can be resolved and, as the writer puts it, 'If the man deems it desirable to think of his wife as a horse then he should be prepared to become another horse' (Sushma 1943: 95). In other words, if the man expects physical work from his wife, then he should also be ready to undertake physical work when required.

In all these articles, men were occasionally criticised, but women themselves were frequently held responsible for their contemporary situation. This is important because women's burgeoning consciousness enabled them to question themselves as well as society. The articles by both men and women expected women to be capable of changing their current situation and bringing about such changes themselves. It was also suggested that women could not depend on men for change since most of the institutions, including *purdah* were set up by men.

Another common theme in the 1940s was the link between Indian women's uneducated-pathetic (*shochiniye*) status and colonial rule. The retrogressive effects of colonialism and lack of education were given as the main reasons 'why it is expected of women to also endeavour to liberate their own country' (Devi, 1940: 167). It can be seen as an argument which women themselves could also use as a way of getting men to agree to access to education.

Education, Motherhood and the Nation

Another area in which writers drew connections between women's roles and the development of the nation concerned motherhood. The education that a modern woman required was needed to ensure that she also became a successful mother. Good education and successful motherhood would provide support to the political movement. (In chapter 4 I have specified the ways through which women could make political contributions by being good mothers). An article in Stree Darpan entitled 'The deplorable condition of women in India' expressed anxiety over the effects that

lack of education had on mothers and the health of society. Women were also advised to improve their social position, since they were responsible for the liberation of their country from the current status of *dasta* (slavery) (Devi, 1922: 172-176). The issues of health, women's progress, and future progeny were linked with national development. Besides education, food, fresh air and exercise were all important for Indian women, who were often compared with Western women and their healthier lifestyles (Devi, 1922: 174). Fresh air and exercise suggest that women needed to discard the confinement imposed by the institution of *pardah*, or that arrangements should be made for exercise within *pardah*.

On the effects of lack of education the female writer expressed the view that

‘An uneducated mother would be unable to teach her children. Secondly, if men and women are not equally educated, then love and mutual understanding are not possible and there would be perpetual fights in the house. Thirdly, men also assume that uneducated women are powerless and have to be controlled. Because of women's ignorance, our nation is under the control of foreign powers’ (Devi, 1922: 172)

In this article, the writer tries to express the problems arising from lack of education. She suggests that the emerging imbalance in education between men and women needs to be altered to facilitate a more progressive future. She tries to warn uneducated women that men falsely perceive that their energies, desires and actions have to be closely monitored. She also thinks that men should shoulder partial blame for holding preconceived ideas about women's position in society. To a degree, the writer even seems to blame women for the weakness of the nation and its subordination to Britain.

Another article in Chand, entitled ‘Education in Motherhood’, raised the issue of motherhood and its relationship to the general progress of the nation. The article emphasised that women's education should be accompanied by training in mothercraft, thus enabling mothers to nurture and raise ideal citizens. Young girls

should be trained to bring up children carefully and to prevent the development of destructive habits. The writer stated:

‘If the mothers are ignorant of the right way to bring up children then how can the children grow up to vanquish their enemies and gain victory’ (Verma, 1937b: 160-161).

The various examples from different magazines which have been mentioned above raise issues of education, motherhood and mothercraft. The purpose of all these articles was to convince the middle-class readership of the seriousness of these issues. The attitudes of both men and women were questioned in these writings. For instance, in an article in Saraswati, entitled ‘Awakened women: The lack of an ideal mother’, the female writer first questioned the attitude of women, who (she argued) tended to forget their main responsibilities after marriage:

‘With the merriment of marriage most women forget that marriage means change. The woman should have the courage to be responsible for the good and bad days of her family. She should be more proud that she is born from a woman than to be married to a high profile man. Thus she should not do any work that will bring a bad name to womankind (Kibe, 1935b: 581-584)

This article draws links between society and women’s role within the domestic sphere through the issue of motherhood. Women are chastised for being interested only in getting married, having children or being recognised as mothers. As opposed to this superficiality, women are encouraged to work towards the goal of being true and ideal mothers by becoming ideal wives. The author expresses her fear and worry about the new attitudes that the younger generation of women have adopted, though she does not specify the issues. The phrase ‘bring a bad-name’ could mean that women are adopting liberal sexual attitudes quite contrary to the *pativrata* (devotion to one man, the husband).

The writer indirectly forewarns women that they need to be morally pure and maintain an unblemished character. The writer encourages both men and women to follow a set of civilised rules and a code of conduct in their daily lives. She argues that if women are ignorant, then their menfolk should make the effort to improve their situation. She states that 'Ignorance in a man is more harmful than it is in a woman. Sometimes on seeing careless men one feels like asking them, whether they don't feel like being ideal fathers' (Kibe, 1935b: 585). The article also questions the superstitions in Hindu culture and its customs, which prevent women from being ideal mothers.

In another editorial in Chand, entitled 'The importance of women in national life', the female writer reiterates the importance of women in the domestic sphere for men and society. She adds a spiritual and religious dimension to women's roles. As in the previous example, this article emphasises the responsibility of men towards women. The different forms and roles for women are considered. For example, as a mother the woman gives birth to a man; as a wife she becomes his consort; and as a sister she offers him companionship. The sacrificial woman in every home is the moving spirit behind the three stages that the man has to go through in his life (Sehgal 1932: 12-14). The author says that God has put heavy responsibilities on the shoulders of women whom the men, in the East, do not hesitate to 'crush under their feet' (Sehgal 1932: 12-14). One should not forget that if man is the creation (*Kirti*) of God, then the woman is the idol/image (*Murti*) which he should worship. The importance of woman in national life is greater than that of the man, and every man should reconsider his behaviour towards women. The current and future situation of the country is dependent on men's attitude and behaviour towards women.

The role of mothers towards their children is also discussed. For example, if women are kept ignorant and uneducated like animals, then the children who play in their laps and who are the future foundation of the society will also be ignorant

(Sehgal 1932: 13). Even if these children are placed in the best schools, and if the fathers also contribute to their knowledge, still this will not yield the same results as the education given to the children by their mothers. The mothers should be educated because the children spend most of their time with them, and they are the ones who instill feelings of valour and patriotism. On the institution of *purdah* the writer comments that if women are kept in *purdah* and deprived of fresh air, then the development of both their soul and body is prevented. Such mothers would have only weak and sick children.

It can be seen that in the construction of nationalist identity, one key aspect was the role of education, which it was envisaged would facilitate women's progress as well as contributing towards national development. However, there was significant debate over the content and purpose of this education. The propositions put forward by male and female writers oscillated between two opposing viewpoints: while some expressed concern with the uneducated status of women, others questioned the appropriateness of 'modern education', influenced by the West. It was feared that 'modern education' encouraged tendencies such as uncontrollable freedom, lack of physical decorum and neglect of domestic duties.

It was proposed that a correct balance between these two polarities would stimulate an awareness amongst Indian women concerning the existence of harmful social problems such as child-marriage and early motherhood. Thus the negotiated identity was of a 'domestic woman' who was not only educated but could also maintain the key tenets of Indian culture, primarily through her roles as a good nurturing mother and a dutiful wife. Through these domestic values the women could both educate her progeny to be the future enlightened citizens of India and politically align themselves to the movement from within the domestic sphere. Moreover, it was hoped that women would become as 'self-reliant' and 'independent' as their Western

counterparts, by which they meant that women should be able to make decisions concerning domestic matters by themselves.

The Glorious Past

All the articles reinforced women's role in the construction of national identity, whether as mothers, nurturers, companions or helpmates. No disagreements arose among writers over the important role of women in the nationalist movement. In the 1920s the qualities of sacrifice and selfless service to the nation were identified as being ingrained in women since ancient times. This is one of the reasons that continuous reference to the traditional past was made by writers. To highlight the progressive aspects of women's development, examples were also drawn from developments in European countries. However, the attitude of both men and women towards the West displayed ambiguity and confusion. In the writings of the 1920s, Western ideas were felt to be progressive, and certain Western values were advocated in order to encourage Indian women to change without forsaking traditional Indian values. However, when an aspect of Western culture was raised in the literature for the purpose of comparison with Indian culture, it reasserted Indian role models for women. This facilitated the construction of Indian womanhood and the associated concept of 'femininity' in a way which was progressive, but not Westernised.

In the 1940s there was a growing fear that apparently progressive Western attitudes contained elements of dishonesty, untrustworthiness and antagonism between the sexes, which might adversely affect Indian culture. Western values were now contrasted with the higher tenets of Indian life. The main dilemma that arose was that of containing the nationalist activities of women once references to both the ancient culture of India and the Western world had enabled women to mobilise and

step out onto the streets. This containment was achieved by highlighting the violent aspects of Western movements.

In both the 1920s and 1940s, certain orientalist stereotypes were reproduced, and distinctions between the 'Eastern' and 'Western' constructs were reinforced. For example, in these writings the Eastern woman was frequently projected as passive, ignorant, weak, politically unaware, lazy and needing to be 'awakened' to the current developments around her. This current situation was contrasted with their better position in ancient times.

I will first demonstrate how, through comparisons with activities in the ancient past and the activities of Western women in national regeneration, writers believed that Indian women could be encouraged to take greater initiative in the nationalist movement. Women's contemporary position was judged with reference to their status in ancient times, when Indian women were progressive and enlightened. Resort to the tenets of ancient culture provided a partial solution to some of the anxieties about modern changes. Although the latter were not as great a threat to the spiritual nature of women, they did question the prevailing gender inequalities.

Women of ancient times were viewed as independent, brave, and capable of making decisions for themselves. By contrast, present day women were seen as timid and afraid of struggle. The aim was to revive women's courage in order to aid the nationalist movement. For instance, an article in Stree Darpan, entitled 'The bad condition of women in India', referred to various activities in ancient times:

'In ancient times women were so brave and full of vigour that they used to go in the battlefield and fight side by side with men and fighting the enemy with the sword was an easy task for them. However, these days women get cold feet with the thought of war. Women wake up! Mothers leave your slumber and try to liberate your country from *dasta* (slavery)' (Devi, 1922: 174).

The main reasons for women's present position were perceived to be lack of education and enthusiasm, especially in the case of mothers, as well as the apathy and physical weakness of women in general. The uneducated and ignorant status of women was one of the main causes why 'our nation is under the control of foreign powers' (Devi, 1922: 172).

It can be said that most women writers were trying to resolve various issues in their own minds. This could also be a reason why many articles tied up the themes of gender, nationalism and colonialism in a disjointed and confused manner. For example, though the previously mentioned author urges women to go to the 'battlefield' and become educated, she also wants them to manage their households efficiently because, as she puts it, 'the work is primarily associated with women only' (Devi, 1922: 172). It is not clear which issue is the most important for this particular author: women's fight against illiteracy or against colonialism or the work of running the household.

Another example of Indian values being upheld is an article in Maharathi entitled 'The role of women in various parts of the world', in which the different role models that women have adopted in three countries around the globe are discussed. For example, in America, the model is that of a sister. Everyone is referred to as a brother and sister. The husband considers his wife in the role of his sister and expects her to be obedient (*aagyakrini*), sweetly spoken (*madhurbhasini*) and capable of answering sensible questions. The husband in return offers her 'freedom, high education and help of every kind'. The brother-sister relationship exemplifies a relationship based on love, sharing and mutual bonding.

In England, the womanly ideal is that of the wife. Women are referred to as 'good wives of England'. Husbands consider them their partners and adopt a friendly attitude. The woman is independent and regarded as a helpmate, a friend and a mistress of the house. In Far Eastern countries like Japan, the women are primarily

seen as colleagues and companions (*sahkari*) who assist their husbands in all kinds of work. For example 'a politician's wife will be interested in politics and service to the nation, an editor's wife would be his co-editor and a dealer's wife will be his clerk' (Devi, 1927: 602)

In India, however, the role model of a woman is that of a re-incarnated goddess and a mother. Women are referred to as the 'mothers of India', not only because they have given birth to great men and women such as

'God Shri Krishna, Bhisma the Brahmachari, Kalidas the poet, brave mothers like Kunti and Sumitra but they also have been mothers and have educated and reared them'. (Devi, 1927: 602)

Devi states that these same mothers have fought enemies, protected their own honour and kept their ideals high. Women give birth to men and, if they are ideal mothers, then their children can never be cowardly, stupid or scared. The author identifies these features as the 'ideal of our nation' (Devi, 1927: 602-607).

This article constructs the ideal role models of women in different parts of the world, and the qualities associated with these ideals are those most beneficial to the comfort, prosperity and development of the male. Though the differences between the various role models is not clear, the attempt of the author is to project the Indian view of the 'mother' as supreme and unmatched. One of the reasons for this is that in India, the mother is associated with a pastiche of qualities that the individual role models of different countries possess. Thus, an Indian woman is her husband's companion (as in England), his helpmate (as in Japan) and sweet spoken sister (as in America). The author expresses hope that such an ideal can only be realised if, despite the influence of Western ideas, 'the modern woman has knowledge of her religion and Indian values as well as takes pride in being called an Indian' (Devi, 1927: 604). Education imparted by 'European mistresses' is not looked upon favourably:

'If you want to remove your children from the influence of women like Lakshmibai and introduce them to french lilies, you do so (go to these mistresses). If you do not want India to be called India, and you want to wipe the meaning from Hindu life, you do so'. (Devi, 1927: 604)

While suggesting the links between the domestic sphere and nationalist life, particular stereotypes were used to 'awaken' women. For example, the domestic lives of women were affected by political changes, and the article in question was written with the aim of guiding women in their goals and duties (*kartavya*) towards the nation.

'It is time to forsake a part of your peaceful domestic existence and show the world that when the time and need arises, then women of India, like men, can make the biggest sacrifice for the freedom of their nation. The nation in which we are born, whose wheat we have eaten and on whose soil we have played and grown up- that very nation's slavery and subordination would affect us' (Devi, 1940: 167-168)

In this passage, the author suggests that women should develop an awareness of the political condition of their country through '*rashtryiya kam*' (national work). Though no specific sacrifice is asked of women, it is expected that women, like men, will not hesitate to undertake any form of activity and face its consequences, whether in the public or domestic spheres.

Women's lives will become meaningful (*sarthak*) only when they are used to liberate the nation. For an effective nationalist contribution, women are expected to give up their laziness and a comfortable domestic existence:

'If we have to give any meaning to our existence, we will have to free our nation. An existence that cannot be used for the nation is equivalent to one of the small creatures who take birth in this world and somehow manage their lives. If our lives are spent within comfortable surroundings and for our own satisfaction, then there is no difference between us and the insects'. (Devi, 1940: 167)

The language here tends to exhort and caution women on their roles in nation building. Phrases like ‘an existence that cannot be used for the nation’ or ‘our lives are spent... for our own satisfaction’, try to persuade women to give up what are presented as self-centred concerns and to broaden their outlook. It is suggested that as long as the Indian populace is under colonial rule, society will not be able to get rid of its harmful customs and malpractices, and as long as society is not reformed, ‘women will not be able to progress either’ (Devi, 1940: 168). In other words, it is argued that women can help to promote their own progress and enlightenment by contributing towards the movement. The article is not appreciative of women’s work in the home, and does not explore the conflicts that will surface in women’s lives when they are asked to take up more challenging roles in national work.

An article in Kamala, entitled ‘Women and Satyagraha’, addresses some of these issues. While, in the previous article, the author was asking women specifically to contribute to the nationalist movement, this second article attempts to specify the nature of that nationalist contribution. The author raises several questions:

‘What role will the women take? Will the woman be lying in one corner of her house in the darkness of ignorance and loneliness, especially at a time when the wheel of revolution is turning for the last time. Is she right in thinking that the battlefield is the man’s domain and the woman’s domain is the home?’. (Kripalini, 1940: 295-297)

This passage, like the previous article, expects women in the *vartman yudh* (present struggle) to educate themselves about political developments and to eliminate ignorance (*agyanta*) and loneliness (*audasenaya*) from their lives. Instead women should be more involved with developments around them and also mobilise other women to do the same. Ignorance or lack of knowledge have been used in specific historical contexts. The author compares the demands on women in current times with women’s role in society in ancient times (*prachin*) and the middle ages (*madyayug*), when they were assigned (by society) tasks that complimented their nature (*swabhavik*

karya). For example, women's main tasks of reproducing and nurturing were of assistance to the nation. Through the protection of the domestic sphere, women enhanced the strength and stability of the army (Kripalini, 1940: 295). Women were not expected to be involved in destructive (*Sanghar*) warfare tasks which were associated only with the *Khastriya* (warrior) caste, that is, the caste responsible for the protection of the nation. The women from ordinary castes never took part in any destruction, but it was expected that they would render some contribution to the war. For example, women used to deprive themselves of essentials and sometimes contributed their jewels to the state. It was only the women of the *Khastriya* caste who bore the strain of the war when members of their family went to fight.

In contemporary (*vartman*) times, women who were confined primarily to the domestic sphere could not remain ignorant, and could not isolate themselves politically from the new changes and new demands on them because

‘the life of every individual is in danger and thus everybody will have to take part. Women cannot escape by virtue of their caste (by not being *Khastriyas*). Women are involved both in production and supply of weapons. She is a manufacturer of both the weapons and the fodder for it, that is children. However, the alternative of *satyagraha* is available to women’. (Kripalini, 1940: 296)

This suggests that all individuals, irrespective of the roles assigned to them earlier, must contribute to national life. However, women have the choice to participate in warfare, which is an ‘*atyachar* (on her) *swabhav*’ (an attack on her nature) or be a *satyagrahi*, which will allow her to effectively demonstrate her *swabhavik*, that is, her natural qualities of patience, kindness and sacrifice.

The phrase ‘wheel of revolution’ is a symbolic expression for the nationalist symbol, *charkha*, and also suggests that it is the last opportunity for women both to contribute to the movement and to further the women's cause. Articles published in the 1940s referred to the Quit India movement of 1942, and the expression ‘wheel...

turning for the last time' suggests both the last phase of the movement as well as urging those women who, until now, had not had the opportunity to participate, to do so, either in the domestic sphere (spinning the *charkha*) or the public sphere (joining the revolution). In an earlier chapter, I have suggested that by the 1940s the attitudes of households towards the participation of their womenfolk was more liberal than in the 1930s, and more women were thus able to engage in nationalist activities from both the public and domestic domains. On a broad level of generalisation, it can be stated that compared with articles in the early years of this century, articles published in the 1940s encourage women to step out onto the streets and lay less emphasis on women bringing changes in the domestic sphere.

Modern ideas originating from the West were expected to facilitate making the domestic sphere more receptive to political changes. The literature assumed that Indian women would be attracted towards the opportunities and freedom offered by Western values. However, women were expected to modernise without westernising, and to adopt new ideas while maintaining the cultural values that constituted the domestic space. The activities of Western women were used to mobilise Indian women to enter public space. In Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, Kumari Jayawardena notes the influence of ideas from different parts of Europe on writings in Asia

'While many of these publications discussed traditional women's topics, they could not avoid getting involved in the ongoing debate on women's subordination. In many cases they reported developments in the sphere of women's emancipation in other countries. Egyptian women, for example were told of innovations and legislative reforms in Turkey; such journals also informed their readers about the suffragist and feminist struggles in Europe'. (Jayawardena, 1986: 17)

By referring to changes and development in women's status in other countries, an international network of support was built by writers in India and other third world

countries. For example, the suffragist struggle in the early half of the twentieth century was cited to encourage women in other countries to fight for similar rights.

Western women were projected both as sources of encouragement to their menfolk in their war efforts, and as 'protectors of their nation's freedom'. The symbolic representations of women as 'sacrificial mothers, wives and sisters', and defenders of the nation were reinforced. Comparisons with the high status of both women and nations in the West were used to encourage Indian women to contribute to their own nation (Devi, 1922: 172)

I will now identify those aspects of Western society which were seen as progressive. In the 1940s, the example of Russia and other socialist countries was used as a reference point for Indian women. For example, the magazine Kamala, contained a discussion on the activities of Russian women, and it was indicated that Indian women could learn a lot from this history, especially in terms of the sacrifices made by these women (Devi, 1940: 167-8). Russia was seen as progressive in its political history and its efforts to improve the status of women.⁴³ The author argued that the condition of Russian women was poor during the reign of Jarshahi in the eighteenth century,⁴⁴ thus sharing similarities to the condition of Indian women under colonial rule. However, after the 1917 revolution 'Russia was reborn' (Devi, 1940: 168). Shiv Devi described the contribution of women:

⁴³ The nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru, in particular, was influenced by socialist ideas prevalent in Russia, 'especially in its massive and planned attack on poverty, disease and illiteracy and its push forward towards industrialisation' (Luthra, 1976: 7).

⁴⁴ It was argued by the author that during the eighteenth century, women in Russia were treated badly by men. The article describes how a father used to give a stick to his daughter's husband and asked him to use it without any fear or hesitation. Also, when a husband used to meet his wife for the first time, he would slam the stick on her shoulders twice and say to her that from now on she must forget her father and obey her husband's wishes. Property was owned by the husband and, during that century, women would accept this and suffer accordingly.

‘After decades of living under slavery, both men and women developed a consciousness and tried to reform their degraded position. On seeing the men sacrifice their lives women also took part in the struggle for independence. Women went to jail and with the efforts of both men and women, Russia gained independence’. (Devi, 1940: 168)

With respect to India, Devi argued that although the Congress movement had created a high level of awareness amongst women, the number of women taking part in nationalist activities was still inadequate:

‘We should clearly understand that as long as our nation is dependent on colonial rule we cannot remove the bad practices from our society and, unless society is reformed, women cannot progress. We should learn from the example of our Russian sisters’. (Devi, 1940: 168)

The author reached optimistic conclusions concerning the success of Russian women in gaining equal rights with men. However, the article was written with the purpose of encouraging Indian women to contribute to the nationalist movement.

While positive aspects of movements were identified in European countries, there were other features of Western society which were seen as unfavourable in the Indian context during the 1940s. In order to keep Indian women’s participation consistent with the aims of the nationalist movement and traditional culture, the violent aspects of movements in the West were contrasted with higher tenets of Indian culture. This allowed the nationalist leaders to contain and restrict women’s activities. For example, in order to explain and justify the importance of the ideas of *satyagraha* (an alternative which emphasised the feminine attributes of women), a contrast was drawn with the women’s movement in the West. The violent behaviour of women suffragettes in the West was emphasised in opposition to the non-violent but successful struggle of Indian women for their own upliftment (*udhar*):

'In India one will find very few *pashchadgami* (backward) men who would stop their women from doing what they like. A women's movement, opposed to men, is absent in India. Unlike the women in the West we have not broken windows or damaged anything to achieve our rights. We have achieved our appropriate position in this struggle which is based on the tenets of Ahimsa, love and truth. We have done our duty in this struggle and as a result have not only achieved our rights but also self-respect'. (Kripalini, 1940: 297)

The relationship between men and women was projected here as non-antagonistic, and women were seen to be ready to take on the same responsibilities as men. In their 'shoulder to shoulder' (*kandha se khanda*) participation, women underwent the same trials and tribulations as men, whether this meant going to jail, picketing or facing *lathi* charges from the police. However, this quotation appears to overstate the similarities between men and women's experiences, in comparison with women's own accounts discussed in the previous chapter.

Male writers expressed similar ideas on the specific areas in which women could contribute. There is a possibility that the editors accepted only those contributions which supported women's activities in the political upheaval. In an article entitled, 'Women's position in the national revolution', the writer took up issues raised at the fifty third meeting of the All- India Congress in Ramgarh (district). Women's contribution to national work was unanimously accepted. Examples of Indian historical traditions reiterated the idea that any national effort during a big war or religious task of any kind was incomplete without the help of women, 'which emphasises the truth that the position of women is high in our society'. Consequently,

'Today when the nation is preparing to inaugurate a new national conquest, when India is going to add a few pages to the historical book on humanity, when the nation for its freedom will sacrifice its life on the guillotines, then how can we now achieve anything without the support of our womankind'. (Shastri, 1940: 9-11)

This piece is written in the context of the current war in Europe where 'the once independent and strong nations are getting transformed and nobody knows the end

result' (Shastri, 1940: 9). The article suggests that India is one of many nations in the world which is affected by political change. Certain features of Western society are criticised to give significance to ideals upheld by Indian society, such as trust, humanism and non-violence. For example, the author states:

'We have to also show the cruel and barbaric West, who take the support of their barbarism to slice the throat of humanity, a new civilised life. We have to show that the relationship between man to man, and nation to nation cannot be based on mistrust and violence. For that we have to resort to humanism, independence and non-violence. However, remember that all this work cannot be done alone by man'. (Shastri, 1940: 10)

The Indian nation seems to be held responsible for civilising the 'barbaric' West, especially Britain. This is not only a complete reversal of the view that the British came to India on a civilising mission to educate Indians on the higher ideals of life, but also a strategic opposition to the ideology of colonialism.

With specific reference to Britain, the writer argues that its imperial domination establishes it as the leader of any force that hinders the progress of humanity. However,

'India refuses to support any such forces and for the welfare of the world, we need to make our nation completely independent. It is apparent that Britain wants to retain control over us and in this light the *satyagraha* struggle is crucial. Both men and women will have to contribute. Women should contribute to the spread of *khadi* and *charkha*, Hindu Muslim unity and Harijan⁴⁵ *seva* (help). Women should not consider themselves as *abla* (helpless) and restrict themselves to a life of fashion and laziness within the homes. The latter activities are against the pride of the nation' (Shastri, 1940: 11).

The last two quotations have to be understood in the context of the construction of colonial discourse and the challenge to it presented by the nationalist discourse. The colonial discourse was articulated through the 'civilising' mission of Britain

⁴⁵ The name given by Gandhi to untouchable castes.

towards its colonies like India and Africa. For example, the 'degenerate' condition of Indian women were used to justify the presence of the colonial administration. By comparison, the last two quotations demonstrate in part a resistance to this colonial discourse. The 'support of our womankind' and the emphasis that 'work cannot be done alone by man' are stated to deny the West's claim about the backwardness and barbarity of gender relations in India. The East is projected as adopting a 'civilised' approach to the relationships between people and nations in opposition to the violent approach of the invading colonialists. On the other hand, aspects of the Western orientalist discourse which portray women as 'degenerate' are retained, although they are explained in another way.

While the above tracts suggest that the contribution of women in nation-building, as well as in defending their nation, is invaluable, they reinforce stereotypes of Indian women as weak and lazy. It can be argued that a few male writers (particularly in this section) during the twentieth century were writing with the specific goal of encouraging women to maintain their cultural values and to be selective in their adoption of new Western ideas. The emphasis on representations of women was to encourage women to maintain their 'Indianness'. To a certain extent this would help the men to offload their worries and anxieties about western ideas onto women, and to make women shoulder all responsibility.

While Indian women were expected to adopt progressive features of western culture, they were expected to provide the right balance between their domestic and public lives through qualities such as non-violence and non-antagonism towards the male.

Oriental Woman Versus Western Woman

In the 1930s and 1940s particularly, male and female writers expressed greater concern with the specific values of Western society, especially as expressed in

fashion, norms and lifestyle. An article in Chand, entitled 'The objectives of an Indian woman', acknowledges the changes (*parivartan*) that are taking place in present society, but expresses the dilemmas faced by the exposure of Indian society to Western culture, particularly in its impact on women. With reference to influences from the West, the author argues that the changes taking place in society are not only in lifestyle, (appearances, education and societal norms of the Indian populace), but also in the tradition and culture of the nation:

'Till now the influence of this *lahar* (wave) of western ideas was primarily on men but since the last ten to fifteen years it has started affecting women too'. (Sehgal, 1937: 256)

People who desire the good of their nation have viewed these changes and their influence on women with great suspicion. This is primarily because women's role in keeping society together is seen to be more important than men's. Change is seen to be

'essential for any individual who wants to achieve his goal. The individual should change with the demands of different situations. However, it is essential that the change should be progressive and not retrogressive. We consider 'change' and 'progress' to mean the same thing and thus the consequences will push us towards prosperity'. (Sehgal, 1937: 256)

The author accepts that in European nations and America, advanced material progress and organisational skills have a lot to offer to the rest of the world. However, not all ideas from these advanced societies can be useful for India. In Indian society, the primary role of women is to manage the household and look after the children. In Western nations, by contrast, the nature of women is inclined towards jobs and leading an unrestrained life. This freedom is not suitable for women in Indian society as it lacks a specific goal and encourages women to be lax towards household duties (Sehgal, 1937: 257-259). Moreover, in current times, India has to deal with other problems of colonialism and financial deficits.

The male writer expresses pleasure at the fact that his views are also shared by English educated Indian women. He quotes an extract from the newspaper, Amrit Bazaar Patrika, written in English by Smt. Ila Sen who states:

‘From Europe originates the emancipation of modern womanhood and the women who are free in India today owe much to the example and influence of their western sisters. When this has proved advantageous in allowing Indian women to exercise their intellectual powers, there has also been a curse attached to it, under which the unbalanced have fallen. In a frenzy of achieving freedom they have sought to imitate the western women in every way, sometimes totally unsuitable to the oriental character and life. Seeking unfettered liberty the Indian woman have lost sight of the objective in a frantic desire for western moulding. They have forgotten that the East, too has much to teach the women of West, each can borrow from the other, but the absolute submergence of one into the other is bound to lead to disaster. This craze for Westernisation in all its superficiality, this loss of individual outlook has a far reaching effect and it will be a herculean task for many generations yet to come and combat’. (Sehgal, 1937: 257)

This passage constructs an image of the ‘oriental woman’ or ‘Indian woman’ on the one hand, and the Western woman on the other. This polarity helps to solidify the notion of a singular homogeneous Indian woman. In this article westernisation is associated with only educated middle class women.

The writer discusses how in relation to these ideas, Sister Nivedita compared the Western emphasis on the development of qualities associated with a wife with the Eastern emphasis on motherhood. In the *shastras* the mother is respected more than the *guru*, *acharya* or the father, who are all males. Sister Nivedita once remarked: ‘In India respect for the mother is particularly found amongst great men’ (Sehgal, 1937: 258). She narrates the incident of a Bengali judge who was highly regarded by the British for his decisions). It is believed that he was lying on his death-bed when he heard that his mother who was on her way to see him had hurt her ankle. Even though he was weak, he dragged himself to his mother and washed her feet with his ‘warm tears’. He felt bad that his mother had to suffer so much (Sehgal, 1937: 258).

In Indian culture only mothers have qualities similar to those of goddesses like *Saraswati, Laksmi* and *Durga*:

‘The land that provides grain and clothes is referred to as motherland and the cow that gives milk, *ghee* (butter) and other good products is called ‘mother-cow’ (*gaumata*). In the West the country is referred to as ‘fatherland’ but in India it is referred to as ‘mother-land’. (Sehgal, 1937: 258)

The author points out that to achieve a good status, an Indian woman, unlike a woman of the West, has to make a lot of sacrifices, one of them being complete loyalty to her husband. He further accepts that society is changing with the times, but hopes that women despite these changes, will not lose the glory of their motherhood. He quotes Sister Nivedita: ‘It is the home not the factory that fills the life with inspiration’ (Sehgal, 1937: 259). This statement is to emphasise the point raised earlier that the economic independence acquired by Western women is not as fulfilling as the domestic prosperity of an Indian home. It is also suggested that though economic earnings will give Indian women independence and power, the power exercised by women within their homes is greater and more satisfying.

Questions such as ‘what is liberty?’, ‘what is progress?’, and ‘what is meant by independence’ were regularly addressed by male and female writers. The word ‘Orient’ was compared and contrasted with the ‘West’. While the economic independence and social and political freedom of women in the West were appreciated, they were seen as distancing women from those ‘higher natural values which give life its real meaning together with economic independence’ (Shastri, 1935: 214). Freedom in every sphere of life was seen as good as long as it did not adhere to Western assumptions:

'I would like to state humbly that if this tide of independence keeps flowing westwards, then it is going to prove highly detrimental to our Indian civilisation. The western and the oriental principles of freedom are vastly different. Western modes of freedom are unrestrained, lacking dignity and unprogressive. The freedom of the West is like a cyclone, sweeping before it the inherent and natural qualities of womankind like, softness, gentleness, shyness and self-sacrifice'. (Shastri, 1935: 214)

Fashion and Beauty

Excessive fashion was associated with 'modern' ideas which had infiltrated society, and was regarded by both men and women writers as leading women astray, making them over-indulgent and acquiring a life of sloth and laziness. Recent trends in fashion were seen by many writers as *distracting women from their traditional duties as good mothers and wives. Accompanying the critique of western ways was a critique of social habits in Indian society. If fashion was regarded as Western and bad, then Indian women were also held responsible for adopting it (Bhuradia, April 1940: 57). Habits borrowed from the West were criticised:*

'In old historical times it is true that a lot of effort was made to impart education to women. But it is also true that at that time women did not go to schools in high heeled boots, thin sarees from Manchester and light umbrellas in their hands. The kind of education imparted to women with the help of religious and philosophical books, not even half of that is taught in schools today'. (Editor of Chand, November 1932: 14)

Fashion was not only about Western ideas, but could also be analysed as a form of colonial exploitation. For example, Indian goods were being displaced by Western goods such as, 'high heeled boots' or 'thin sarees from Manchester'. These writings encouraged the use of indigenous goods like *khadi* sarees and derided the

consumption of colonial goods that further drained the economy of the Indian colony.⁴⁶

Some articles by women writers criticised other women for believing that ideas of fashion meant freedom:

‘Purity of soul is losing its importance in front of bodily beauty which seems to have become the sole aim of women nowadays. This is not freedom. This is unrestrained wildness. Even the highly educated women of Indian society are showing these propensities’. (Chand, December 1935: 214)

An issue of the magazine Maharathi shows two representations of beauty. One is the Western (*Paschatya*) concept of beauty, which is shown as a completely nude woman. The Eastern (*Prachaya*) representation has a fully clothed woman who is adorned with expensive clothes and jewels (Figure). She carries a fan with her similar to those carried by upper class Victorian women (Maharathi, April-May 1927). The contrast between these two pictures suggests that Indian woman can look ‘modern’ and attractive without projecting themselves as sex objects as Western women do. Indian women should reject the nudity which is associated with Western ideas of fashion.

⁴⁶ During the mid-twentieth century, Gandhi’s constructive programme was popular among the masses, especially amongst women.

Though most of these articles stressed the good and bad aspects of modernity, some attempted to balance modern and traditional ideas. For example, adopting a modicum of Western trends of fashion such as style of dressing were acceptable. However, what was implicitly suggested was that women should not expose their bodies as demonstrated through the difference in representation between Eastern and Western beauty. Lali Prasad Pandey refers to the current ‘new age’ (*naya yug*) and its effects on women. On the issue of fashion he states that in the current age it is difficult to distinguish between a *bhadramahila*⁴⁷ and a prostitute (*Roopajiva*). Pandey argues that women can adopt new ideas of fashion but should not forget to look respectable

महारथी



महारथी



Figure 8. Two representations of beauty in Maharathi: The Western concept (left) and the Eastern concept of beauty (right).

⁴⁷ The *bhadramahila* means a ‘Bengali gentlewoman’. She was expected to be an ‘intelligent companion to her husband, who was caught up in the stormy days of social and occupational change’ (Karlekar, 1991:7).

like a *bhadramahila*, and should also 'attempt to be *saubhaya kumari* (decent girls) and keep some distance from men'. He argues that women who complain about the bad behaviour of men should realise that they are partly to blame for dressing in an 'exhibitionist' style.

On the issue of *purdah* he suggests that to do away with it completely is not very wise though he accepts that *purdah* of ancient times had not been good for women's progress. Boundaries should be drawn between *purdah* and complete brazenness. Moreover, 'everything new is not good and everything old is not bad. In the old values are hidden some gems' (Pandey, 1939a: 23). On education he emphasises the qualities of motherhood. It is essential for the mother to bring up the child and not depend on servants and maids. From healthy educated mothers healthy children can be born who will grow up to be warriors, leaders, writers and poets. However, the author expresses unhappiness with the idea of women going abroad to take diplomas. This is because he thinks that an exposure to the West changes women's priorities. For example, middle-class women with degrees who are exposed to Western culture, desire men who are well placed in society and who earn large sums of money. He mentions that some women do not hesitate to marry men who have divorced their wives, especially women who cannot come up to their high standards. In these circumstances, educated women do not offer a good example for the rest of womankind. The author proposes a right balance between being educated and uneducated (Pandey, 1939a :23-24). This reflects the fear of the writer concerning younger 'educated' women forming attachments with either married or older divorced men.

In another article Pandey elucidates his ideas through situational examples. A Maharashtrian engineer's wife was educated to intermediate level. This particular woman, who diligently does her household work, is contrasted with the wife of a rich husband who is reluctant to sweep the floors. In another example, he narrates the

incident of a less educated women who had a 'big mouth'. This woman takes no interest in household work or obeying the elders. She becomes interested in Congress *satyagraha* and gives speeches (Pandey, 1939b: 139-40). Her parents fear that if she is put behind bars, they will never be able to find a match for her to marry. So they send her to another town to stay with relatives. When she finally gets married, she creates such a horrible scene with her mother-in-law that her husband has to leave home and move to the town. In order to avoid household work the couple start eating out. In the final analysis the author points out that only if the woman realises her duty, then both she and her husband can lead a comfortable life.

The main challenge to Indian values and traditions was seen by writers to be emerging from the West. Superficiality, unfettered liberty and freedom, loss of individuality, laxity towards household duty, economic freedom, self-indulgence, pleasure loving, lack of any meaningful activity and in its place a life of gossip and idleness in women were the causes of concern expressed by the writers.

The identity of an Indian woman was continuously re-negotiated to accommodate what were viewed as the complimentary positive features of both Western and ancient Indian cultures. Women in the 'glorious past' were considered to be brave, full of vigour and not afraid of war. Implicit in these qualities was the idea that women would take the initiative to step out onto the public sphere and participate in the anti-colonial struggle. Similarly, Western women were projected, in these writings, not only as companions and pillars of support to their men in the public sphere, but also as participants in political developments.

Those aspects which were considered negative from an Indian cultural viewpoint, such as lack of education, absence of enthusiasm, and the general physical weakness of Indian women were consciously discarded. Similarly, those features of Western society which were considered inappropriate such as the use of violence in political movements and antagonism between the sexes were not incorporated.

This selection of facets facilitated the construction of a re-negotiated identity of a 'public woman' and her alignment with the nationalist movement. Like her Western counterparts, this 'public woman' was brave, 'independent', self-disciplined and ready to serve the nationalist cause through her participation and sacrifice in *satyagraha*. However, unlike her Western counterparts, she was non-violent in nature and non-antagonistic in her relationships with men.

The Radical Approach: Modernity, Liberty and Gender Relations

The ideas I analyse in this section are different from, and more radical than, those cited above. Though the more radical contributors were mainly women, some men also held less conservative views on women's roles in this period. A significant number of articles take a different approach from the material which portrayed 'passive and lazy' women needing to be 'awakened'. This approach emphasises the conflicts women faced in their daily existence. It projects women as wanting to have more control over their social, economic and public lives. Writers explore ideas on sex, love, independence and women's rights, although they are not fully developed. Some of the ideas contained in this approach are examined through vernacular writings below. These writers reject the underlying values which kept women out of public life. For example, a woman writer in an article titled 'The real problem in the life of a woman' argues that in previous times,

'the question was of protecting 'this property in the form of a woman' from anti-social elements. The solution to this problem was to keep women behind the *purdah*. The only remaining problem that surfaced was how to involve women in activities from which society would eventually benefit. This was taken care of by philosophers like Manu and Parashar who laid down the dos and the dont's for the women' (Ghosh, 1940: 228)

However, the author sees the above solutions as provided by men and serving only their (men's) interests. The author goes on to say that until recently the woman has

never taken the initiative in solving any of her problems. But the problem looks different in the 'modern age'.

'The property called woman for whom men since ages have been taxing their intelligence to develop good behaviour in her, suddenly acquired a spark of awakening (*chetna ka sanchar*) and is no longer ready to be a toy in the hands of the man.' (Ghosh, 1940: 227-229)

She sees the new problem that society now faces in terms of women wanting greater breadth of knowledge, the freedom to marry and to end marriage and like men to have property rights of their own. These, the author argues, 'are her (woman's) rights and to ask for (these) rights is natural for every human being'. In other words, she wants to eliminate all the hindrances from a woman's life. However, until today the mind of the male is not sufficiently liberated to accept the demands of women. The cause of many problems is thus the struggle between one consciousness and another:

'Unlike the struggle between the rich and the poor the struggle between man and woman is different. The inherent nature of the woman does not allow her to grab and rob (as the deprived classes do), rather because of her awakened soul she wants to get her rights and independence from the man. However, her natural inner love for the man stops her from fighting all the way through. Today the woman's own expectations are divided. In psychology you would refer to it as 'ego versus sex' and in common language as 'independence and love'. It is in the clash between the latter two that the problems in human existence emerge. However, for men and women it is manifested in different ways. For example in a physical relationship a man naturally occupies a stronger position and the woman enjoys his nature. To be close to her husband makes her lower her head down for him but the challenge of independence pulls her in a different direction. This same problem does not arise for the man because for him his pride and his sexual prowess takes him in one direction only' (Ghosh, 1940: 229)

The writer explains that a woman's love has not been respected, and instead man has considered it to be a woman's weakness. This, the writer argues, could be a reason why a particular woman who has suffered for a long time is now rebellious.

Along with a change in her consciousness, the nature of her love is also undergoing change. She is not happy with only bodily love and satisfaction, she wants respect for her love, and this is the reason why she is against polygamy and loveless marriages. She has realised that love is not greater than the soul, and to sacrifice the soul for feeble love is no longer the aim of her life. However, today the woman faces the dilemma that if she loves a man and also desires his love, then to fight against him is problematic and dangerous. The writer's solution is that for a woman's wholesome development she should not hide the good aspects of her personality by showing any impatience for love, but on the other hand she should not crush love and acquire harmful pride. Love for oneself and for the husband should be knotted together in harmony, and this will give rise to a new woman not seen before in society.

This article is more challenging than many others because it sees women as resisting hindrances like *purdah* and the inhibited identity constructed for women by men. However, the author does not provide a satisfying solution because her conclusion expects women to make adjustments which may not be what women really desire or indeed what may be feasible. It could also be that the writer is still trying to work out these ideas for herself.

One key aspect of this approach was to question men and their expectations of women. For instance 'Awakened Women', written by Kamala Bai Kibe begins by arguing that to consider the 'home to be the only world' will actually bring more disintegration to our homes. This is because we will not be able to realise the nature of our rights as women and our 'ignorance is using us as a tool to destroy our own dynasty (of women)' (Kibe, 1935a: 387). The nature of school education provided for women is questioned, since it has improved literacy but not helped in the growth of ideas. Consequently, any improvement to education will have to be brought about by women themselves. Also, with reference to those Western values 'which are peeping through the door', it is argued that men should not be the ones who make decisions

about which ideas are good or bad for women. If men make decisions for us, then 'it will be injustice and a rule of suppression' (Kibe, 1935a: 388). Moreover, the author argues that men will be able to achieve *swaraj* (independence) through *satyagraha* but women will not be able to achieve similar independence if they do not rely on their own decisions.

Similarly, when fashion is criticised, men as well as women come in for blame. In an article by a woman writer Rukmini Devi Bhargav, entitled 'Our Ideals', now familiar concerns about western influence are expressed, though the level of anxiety on the issue of fashion is higher. The article shifts the main responsibility to men, who are influenced by modern ideas and want the women to emulate them. The author mentions that there is an 'epidemic of fashion (*phasan ka bhayanak rog*) and asks who should be blamed: the present day parents or the youth?'. She sees that youth, who have no regard for their parents or their nation, want themselves and their women to adopt Western culture. Though the older generation blame women, they should endeavour to educate the boys in order to make them more aware 'towards their own and the nation's future'. This will also prevent them from 'running after' fashion. These young men should stop encouraging women to indulge in 'superficial show', because though 'paper flowers are beautiful to look at, they are without life'. Instead, these men can provide a good education for the women, and can impart knowledge about good qualities which will make these women the 'goddesses of their homes' (Bhargav, 1939: 67-68).

In other words, though young men are attracted towards modern women, they should exercise their discretion and good taste (*Suruchi*) in adopting modern ideas. The author suggests that the superficiality and ostentatious decoration associated with the new trends in fashion dissociate women from their natural beauty which women had earlier adopted as a form of art (*aek kala ke roop me apnati aayi hai*:). This art took the form of *mehndi* (hand decoration), *Lal saree* (red saree) and *suhag bindi* (the

dot on the forehead).⁴⁸ The woman, through her good taste and her skills has adapted goods aspects in nature and transformed them into natural art (*swabhavik sringhar*). Inside the home she is ,‘the human idol of nature: *prakriti ki manavai murti*’.

However, today’s youth, under the influence of modern ideas, are depriving the woman of her natural talents and making her an object of display. The woman no longer decorates for herself, but for the man. Her situation has become so pathetic that the poet Sumitra Nandan Pant comments:

‘The one who sees her body through the eyes of the man,
The one who fills her mind with the thoughts of the man towards her
She now shies away from her own gaze.
Hiding from herself
She is invisible from the society

Hey, woman, the shadow of the man
The *sahadharmini* (companion)of man
The light in the household now flickers’
(Bhargav, 1939:68)

The woman, through this new role model, appears to appease the male gaze that reduces her to a sexual object. In the process she loses the modesty and shyness associated with her femininity. The poem also suggests that the ‘woman’ has lost her own identity and personality (*vayaktitva*) as she has adopted the new ideas of fashion which men find appropriate and which appeal to their senses. What remains unchallenged in this poem is women’s traditional roles as *sahadharmini* (companion) and as his ‘shadow’, which means an ever caring wife. The next two lines suggest that due to this loss of her individuality, the woman finds her new self an embarrassment and consequently she shies away ‘from her own gaze’. The last paragraph reminds her of her roles as wife and companion, which she valued in the past.

⁴⁸ All these forms of decoration are associated with a married woman.

The author, Devi says that we are sick of these new developments, and that through our poetess, Pant, we would like to say the following to men:

‘hey mankind, free the woman and liberate her body from these jewels from her soft body’. (Bhargav, 1939: 68)

The author then goes on to say that a new voice for women’s freedom has arisen. However, like the fashion of clothes, this is a fashion of ideas. For example, in every conversation the word ‘independence’ comes up so that people are prompted to appreciate the new progressive ideas. These days the meaning of woman’s independence is being understood as similar to the independence of European women, and consequently more bad than good qualities are being adopted:

‘Freedom of a woman who has stayed behind four walls does not mean that she ruins her house-hold and starts staying in a hotel. The ideal is that women within their homes without any hindrances should administer a path of progress. We should not just be slaves but ‘house-women’. Like an ideal householder we should give up bad practices and superstitions and help in building national strength’. (Bhargav, 1939: 68)

The author’s argument is complex but the last quotation reflects her ultimately conservative attitude. However, the article is articulating a view of women’s interests which is different from earlier conservative ideas. The quotation suggests that physical and economic independence, associated with Western women, should not affect the domestic duties of Indian women. ‘Staying in a hotel’ implies that Indian women should not confuse independence and economic freedom with a neglect of the household. This is important because a few articles suggest that since Western women have started earning, they have lost their domestic values and those feminine traits associated with motherhood and nurturing. We are reminded that women should strike a healthy balance between their public and private lives. The author suggests that women should not indulge in unnecessary expenses such as expensive jewels and clothes, and should not be negligent towards their children.

The author writes with the aim of warning women that they should learn to think for themselves, even if this is against the expectations of men. The article questions the dominant male perceptions of 'beauty' and the qualities associated with it.

Issues of nationalism and colonialism were also brought under close scrutiny. In the magazine Kamala, in June 1940⁴⁹, an article by Bhuvneshwar Prasad entitled 'Gandhian Ideology and Women's revolution' argued that in comparison to Britain and other nations, the progress of Indian women's movements was quite different (Prasad, 1940: 232-233). Whereas British women got the right to vote after the 'stress' of public agitation, the women of India got the vote without much struggle, and some Indian people even said that the same British government which was against the women's movement in Britain, helped Indian women to gain education and the vote. However, a closer look at the progress of the Indian women's movement suggests that Indian women would also have to fight for their rights. The author was critical of Gandhi's views and considered them to be obstacles to women's progress in society (for example Gandhi's opposition to modern machines and the new techniques of birth control). Gandhi's vision of establishing a 'pastoral society' and 'drowning the new machines in the ocean', are seen as revivalist, dreams that will never come true. Without birth control women would be tied to their homes and unable to become productive members of society. The author concluded by suggesting that in reality Gandhi's notion were 'patriarchal' and assumed women to be 'inferior'.

Another article in Kamala 'We Women' by Meenadevi Bhuradia says, 'any nation's progress or backwardness is dependent on its womankind' (Bhuradia, 1940: 57). She goes on to say that the relationship between men and women is mutually

⁴⁹ 1940 was the historical phase when the Indian Nationalist Movement was gearing up after a period of inactivity from 1933 onwards. The Quit India movement of 1942 was the final struggle to end British rule.

beneficial. What amazes the author is that when the relationship is so mutual then why do men consider 'us' as their *aashrit* (subordinates), service woman belonging to a lower category. The author suggests that such a situation is because the woman is not progressing. She has become handicapped and has left all her burden on men. 'The man finding us incapable, has committed a lot of crimes against us; however things can be reformed. The author continues by raising a few questions. What is man? A person who has played in our laps. Then we can make him what we want to. Because of our ignorance the man thinks that he can keep us in darkness. However, we ourselves should leave this ignorance and bring 'momentum' to our lives. Man with our 'momentum' will also look progressive.

Gender issues also surfaced in debates on modernity and tradition. The woman editor of Chand, Mahadevi Verma in an article on 'The state of the modern woman', describes three categories of modern women. In the first category she places those women who have discarded the *pardah* and given unmatched support to men in order to make the political revolution successful. In the second category are those educated women who have started using their education and awakened consciousness as a tool to redeem the ills of the society. The third category is comprised of those women who have very little education but have adopted western modernity. However, the author argues that there is considerable overlap between these viewpoints, and that 'women embrace those ideas which provide a solution to their own specific problems'. Since women have different perceptions of changes in society, their ideas on what is 'modernity' also vary. For example, in the first category, the women who have joined the political movement see 'modernity in the form of national awakening'. The second category of women sees modernity as 'acquiring education and disseminating that knowledge', while the third category of women view modernity 'as decorating their homes and taking an interest in fashion'.

Verma is interested in the activities of those women who through their participation in the nationalist movement managed to discard the commonly held notion of women's weakness: The 'blot of powerlessness was removed from their personality'. Though few women were actually involved in it, the nationalist movement did manage to raise the consciousness of other women. The author argues that women through their participation contributed to the progress of the nation and managed to gain certain advantages for themselves. However, with this 'honey was also mixed some poison'. What she managed to grab was priceless, but what she lost was also priceless'. Women who took part in the nationalist movement were taught self-control and self-discipline along with the spirit of rebellion. Though these women became 'good soldiers', they forgot to be 'good citizens'. The harshness of the movement brought a certain degree of callousness and indifference to women's lives which not only became a part of their personality but also encroached on their personal home lives too (Verma, 1938: 269). This was the 'poison' that seeped through. The author argues that women experienced centuries of oppression, and with the awakening of the nation they found an opportunity for 'self progress' which was the 'honey' in their lives. What women did not realise was that rebellion could only be a tool for significant change and not a quality to be acquired.

The author avoids seeing middle-class women as a homogeneous group, and instead identifies different possible ideas and perceptions of the current situation. The resolution of individual specific problems is a personal endeavour for every woman. One of the main reasons for this individual struggle, the author argues, is that this 'modern' woman finds herself facing the same prejudices which have faced her traditional sisters. For example, she is looked at with contempt by those men who support old thoughts and traditions and even men with modern views are unable to offer any useful assistance (Verma, 1938: 267-270). The modern woman, particularly, comes under a lot of scrutiny and her defining qualities are seen to be unbridled

freedom, indifference and no sense of moral discrimination between good or bad. However, the intelligent women manages to 'marry the sword and the bangle together'. This means that a correct balance is drawn between the contradictory pulls of public participation and domestic commitments. Those who cannot achieve this balance rely more on rebellion than on their femininity. For example, women who take part in the nationalist movement (rebellion), focus their vision on the single goal of sacrifice for the nation and lose sight of everything else, including their femininity. The writer appreciates the awakening of women, but expresses fear about the non-feminine traits that women have acquired, like being apathetic, harsh and lacking concern. She suggests that though the woman is non-violent by nature, the political movement has wrecked violence on her emotions, feelings and domestic life.

The educated women of the second category neglected the ties of the home to enter the public domain. However, the author holds the view that

'these women did not follow the call of nationalism for any special sacrifice or renunciation. The truth is that their domestic life called for so much sacrifice that they rebelled against it. They realised that their restricted lives and an existence dictated by tradition, did not raise their prestige or give them a sense of dignity'. (Verma, 1938: 270)

This, the author argues is one of the reasons why, 'women turned their faces against duties at home and opted for duties in the public domain' (Verma, 1938: 270). Here again the author suggests a right balance between public and domestic lives.

This article has to be understood in the context of the educational background of Mahadevi Verma. She was a *Chayawad* poet and writer, concerned more with the softer sensibility and feminine attributes of women.

In another editorial Mahadevi Verma provides a solution to the loss of feminine virtues. She argues that a woman can stay at home and still contribute usefully to society. The woman's contribution can be in the field of literature which would not only give her fulfillment and improve her intellectual powers but will also remove the

monotony of her domestic duties. She suggests that if literature does not have any contribution from women, then it is bereft of the representation of half the human race (Verma, 1937a: 383-384).

She expects men to take the responsibility of stimulating intellectual development in their wives and providing opportunities for them within the domestic sphere. This would also prevent women from needing to work outside and meeting people from all walks of life. Her purpose is to provide reasonable solutions to the anxieties about the relations between men and women and she concludes by reiterating that time 'has washed away man's god like position and woman's position as a slave. Now both will have to behave like human beings'.

The different radical ideas highlight the heterogeneity of middle class women writers. However, we need to look beyond the individual writers to the kind of conflicts that these writers sought to resolve. Though the less conservative writers articulated a demand for more independence for women, they were sceptical as well as fearful of losing their traditional domestic roles as mothers and wives, which were perceived as a source of strength. In the context of her concept of classic patriarchy, sociologist Denis Kandiyoti has argued that women in India (as an example) and other parts of South East Asia have resisted new capitalist developments and new roles for women for alternatives 'that are perceived as in keeping with their respectable and protected domestic roles' (Kandiyoti, 1988: 280). Women resist the transitions because they 'see the old normative order slipping away from them without empowering alternatives' (Kandiyoti, 1988: 282). In the case of India, the possibility of women seeking new roles was even more fragile since the nationalist movement articulated domesticity as a source of women's power quite overtly. The margins drawn by the nationalist movement limited women's independence and self-assertion.

The writers raise new and challenging questions though the solutions they provide attempt to maintain the correct balance between modern and traditional ideas.

This can be a reason why the radical ideas are not developed fully. For example, though women writers question the conservative attitudes of men towards women, they also suggest that the relationship between the sexes should be non-antagonistic. Moreover, though the writers suggest that women should not sacrifice their 'soul for feeble love', they should also not 'crush' their love for men and acquire damaging pride. The articles constantly remind women not to accept all modern ideas and reject all the traditional ones.

The constructed image of the 'public woman' discussed earlier emphasised a non-violent woman who was self-disciplined, self-sacrificing and non-antagonistic towards men. However, exposure to Western ideas, education and their entry into the public sphere (discussed in the previous two sections) also brought about changes in the attitudes of some women. It made them question established views on love and sexual relations, marriage, independence and gender relations. The dilemmas articulated by writers encompassed not only the above issues but also the threat posed by emerging rebellious attitudes of women towards social institutions.

I would suggest that the 'correct balance' within this perspective emerged through negotiations between opposing positions. It was considered progressive for women to explore social aspects that concerned them as women (such as divorce and property rights, freedom to decide on the Western values they wanted to adopt, respect from men for her love) and also engage in public activities (like their Western counterparts). However, they were expected not to associate economic independence with neglect of domestic duties and values such as mothering and nurturing (unlike their Western counterparts). Furthermore, they could adopt certain Western trends of fashion without losing their individuality, their natural aesthetic sense and their respectability. Unlike her Western counterparts, she could still look beautiful without indulging in vulgar exhibitionism which was meant primarily to attract the male gaze. Within this balance, women were expected to select those relevant values which

positively facilitated the construction of their individual female identities as well as the national identity.

Conclusion

The growth in Hindi vernacular writing was itself a product of the domestication of nationalist politics. Writing and reading vernacular tracts were activities which women could undertake from within the domestic sphere. The literature is rich in expressions of concern about social, domestic and public issues. It was a viable medium to express conflicts and ambiguities on women's role in the domestic and public spheres. One of the most important issues was of 'modernity' and the differentiation between 'progressive' ideas and 'retrogressive' ideas, associated primarily with the West. The articles addressed women of the middle classes, and drew links with the domestic sphere and its relevance to the political changes in the public sphere. The issues of education, tradition and modernity, the impact of Western ideas, *purdah* and child marriage, which were raised in the literature, were more relevant to the experiences of women from the middle classes.

It appears that often the nationalist movement was used as an acceptable context in which to articulate more demanding women's issues. This is one of the reasons that though every article had words like nation, nationalism and political upheaval in them, it is at times difficult to understand the links they assumed between women's issues and nationalist issues.

The vernacular literature was part of a wider dialogue between the status and position of the woman in the family and the emerging western ideas in the public world. The contents of the literature offered guidance to women, to adjust to the political situation. However, domestic arrangements were not challenged though the readers were urged to give a higher meaning to their domestic existence, both by

being aware of the political situation as well contributing to the nation. All the articles emphasise that women should set their domestic space 'in order', which would enable them to take cognizance of new modern developments.

The writings of both men and women writers is constrained because issues which challenge unequal gender relations are not openly addressed and instead a reasonable solution is suggested to new trends which are seen as disconcerting. Though these solutions are to avoid antagonism between the sexes, it is not clear that the readership accepts all of them. However, it would be reasonable to suggest that given the colonial situation in which these women writers wrote and the social forces against which they had to express themselves, women raising issues about themselves is of considerable significance. It reflects the heightened perception women had of their inequalities even though it was not openly challenged in most of these writings.

In the published vernacular writings examined in the three sections of this chapter, we can see the development of nationalist constructions which negotiated the boundaries of women's nationalist identity. In the first section I outlined the construction of an educated woman who, though still confined to the domestic sphere was able to be a helpmate to her husband and impart education to her children. In the second section, I explored the constructed identity of an educated woman who was ready to step out in the public sphere while still maintaining the qualities of non-violence and non-antagonism with the opposite sex. In the third section I examined more challenging construction of a non-violent and independent 'public woman' who valued economic independence, liberty and self-assertion but still expected to maintain her domestic roles.

While analysing the debates over the correct balance between modernity and tradition within the domestic sphere, these sections also broadly highlight the interactive relationship between the domestic and public spheres. As demonstrated in chapters three and four, this interaction and negotiation was achieved through women

carrying domestic values into the public sphere and, likewise bringing features from the public sphere into the domestic sphere.

The Hindi magazines also illustrate the conflict women felt between two goals, the desire for individual self-expression on the one hand and a reluctance to challenge existing role definitions on the other. However, most of these middle class women writers were unable to produce a sustained discourse of self-assertion and self-interests.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

This thesis has traced the emergence of nationalist issues that arose with the development of the Indian nationalist movement from 1905 till 1947. I have evaluated the existing historical research on women and nationalism and tried to provide an in-depth analysis of women's relationship with political life from within the domestic and public spheres.

This study encourages the readers to look at the interaction between these spheres. I have demonstrated that assumptions about what constitutes the political/apolitical cannot be mapped on to simple dichotomous concepts of public-private spheres. By demonstrating the character and genesis of the political consciousness and political potential of women within the domestic sphere, my research challenges the view that political activities only take place in the public sphere. My analysis provides an insight into the dialectics and problematics of the relationships between concepts such as 'private', 'public' and 'political'. I have shown that women actively engaged in nationalist political activities from within both the domestic and public spheres. The symbols and domestic values that facilitated women's participation from both the public and private spheres drew upon Hindu religious symbols and therefore privileged the role of Hindu women in the nationalist

movement. This can be seen as another example of the relationship between gender and nationalism.

My research problematises rather than assumes women's emergence from a *pardah*-bound domestic life into the public sphere. Within the context of the Indian nationalist movement, whose success was dependent on women's contribution, I have also looked at how this transition was achieved. In chapter three, I have demonstrated how middle-class women carried values and symbols from the domestic sphere into the public sphere of nationalist politics. My example of the colonial jail, where women led segregated lives (in a public site) as they did in their homes also shows that private/public dichotomies are not rigid but that zones of privacy are embedded in the public sphere too. Likewise in chapter four I have shown the process whereby women brought features from the public sphere into the domestic site.

Women were aware of the significance of the freedom struggle, both for the nation and in their personal lives. The nationalist struggle sought the liberation of the country from colonial rule, but this struggle also provided opportunities for women to experience a new sense of freedom. Women who had been in *pardah* for so long managed not only to step out on the streets but also engage in public activities, face arrests and go to jail. The public sphere offered a challenge and an exciting alternative to tradition-bound domestic lives. Women for the first time could also associate with other women without the supervisory gaze of the males in their families.

Chapter five demonstrates how the resolution of the 'woman question' was based on the correct balance between tradition and modernity within the domestic sphere, rather than on a correct balance between the domestic and public spheres as earlier research argued. There was a consistent attempt to establish and re-draw the boundaries around the emerging new identities of middle-class women. These boundaries excluded negative aspects of Indian culture as well as what male and female writers perceived to be the negative aspects of Western culture. Consequently,

within nationalist terms there was no one view on what the identity of the new Indian woman should be. In the debates in Hindi vernacular writings there were a number of contending views on how far Indian woman's femininity should remain within the old boundaries or adjust to the new priorities proposed by the nationalist leaders. This process of negotiation encouraged the creation of several identities for the 'new woman'. My research also recognises that not all women accepted the new boundaries and that some challenged the nationalist construction of a non-violent femininity through nationalist activities that emphasised violence and sabotage as a mode of resistance to the colonial power.

Women never completely disassociated themselves from the domestic sphere and after India's independence in 1947, most women I interviewed continued with their domestic duties. Participation in the movement did not give women equality in the domestic sphere or the public sphere.

Research questions for the future

It is important to identify the issues which bind women together both cross-culturally and, more importantly, within a nation. It is equally significant to recognise the nature of their resistance to oppressive structures. During the nationalist movement, a sisterhood among women was essential in order to emphasise a unified national identity within the movement. However, future research should question the premise on which the definition of sisterhood, as sought by nationalist leaders, was based. Did this 'sisterhood' really bind women within the 'Indian nation'? It is a fact that nationalist leaders encouraged only 'respectable' middle-class women to participate in the movement. Why then were working class and 'non-respectable' women excluded from this sisterhood? In the post- independence period why did only a few women reach the top echelons of decision-making bodies? What happened to

the 'countless sisters' who also marched in the same movement? One observation that merits further analysis is that although women leaders were advocating a sisterhood, their elite status removed them from the reality of ordinary middle-class women. In the perception of these ordinary women there was no sisterhood. Women were projected as united in their commitment to, and extent of involvement in, the movement. However, all women did not perceive the political reality in the same way nor did they organise collectively with the purpose of resisting unequal structures either in the public or the domestic sphere.

It is equally necessary to initiate a detailed discussion on sexuality, religion and the interaction between class and caste. These issues are important in order to explain the reasons for the codification by nationalist leaders of the behaviour of women in public and private spheres, and the delineation of their roles as mothers, wives and sisters. For example, a *khadi*-clad woman on the street would represent the de-sexualised nationalist image essential to the nationalist project. Did symbolic representations of women as 'mothers' and 'saviours of the nation' replace aspects of sexuality associated with their womanhood with perceptions of their exalted status?

Many politically aware women did not consider it worth neglecting domestic duties to take a more active role in the movement, although these women lived in politically active urban areas and faced no constraints of *pardah*, low socio-economic status or illiteracy. What stopped them from undertaking nationalist participation? Was it a sense of complacency, a desire not to take chances with what they perceived as a satisfactory domestic life?. Was it a perception of where their own self-interest lay?, or was it as one of my respondents said, a 'slavery of the mind, suppressed through the centuries into an acceptance of their assigned roles?. The latter was suggested by the respondent to explain why women maintained a traditional outlook despite encouragement from their husbands to adapt to modern ideas. On the other

hand, some politically aware and politically minded men rigorously maintained and actively abetted in keeping women confined to their domestic roles.

Another aspect that could be examined further is how traditionally orthodox castes such as Brahmins adapted to the changing social milieu in some states of India (such as Bengal) and encouraged their daughters to discard *purdah*, receive education and intermingle freely with the Muslims. However, why did these same women from Bengal immediately regress back to the traditional mould once they married into U.P. Brahmin families? Although my study documents attitudes in one region, a more comparative approach is useful to highlight how regional differences shape social attitudes which affect gender relations.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

1. Name and address?
2. Name the movement and the place where you joined?
3. Age when you joined the movement and present age?
4. Age when you were arrested and the duration of your imprisonment?
5. Total number of movements in which you participated?
6. Marital status when you joined?
7. Educational qualifications?
8. The class you belonged to at the time of joining the movement?
9. The form of your participation?
10. Mention your activities after independence?

Reprint of questions from a questionnaire given at the National Freedom Fighters Conference in Chandigarh, India, April 1993.

Source: Manavati Arya, participant at the conference.

APPENDIX B

CERTIFICATE.

Certified that Srimati Vijai Debi Widow of Sri Baghura Singh (deceased) s/o Tej Singh Thakur r/o Ralseypur Mohandabad Distt. Farrukhabad, who had undergone the following conviction and sentences.

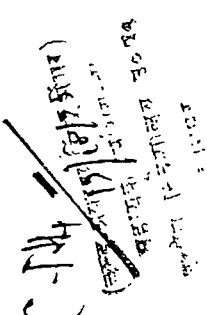
Jail Register Number.	Date of Admission into the Jail.	Date of release from the Jail.	Political conviction	Details of conviction/detention year, name of court convicting
			P.S. date of order, section, amount of sentence and modifications if any, made letter on in the sentence.	

1	2	3	4	5
Name of the Jail	reporting	Supdt. Distt.	Jail	Fatehgarh.
2717	28.11.30	16.1.31	30rd Act 6 Transferred of 1930	6 months RI & fine Rs.25/- or 6 weeks RI.
4350	21.5.32	12.9.32	17 ord Act.	4 months RI & fine Rs.15/- or 3 weeks RI- Both sentence by Sri H.S. Chauhan City Magistrate, Fatehgarh.

Sd/- (S.P. Watal)
Collector & Distt. Magistrate,
Farrukhabad.

Dated Fatehgarh
, 17/6/1956. (Seal)

COPY ATTESTED.

C-14

 DISTRICT MAGISTRATE
 FARRUKHABAD

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Pratap, Kanpur
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Vartman, Kashi
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Saraswati, Prayag
Shradhanjali, Benares
Kumari Darpan, Prayag
Stree Darpan, Allahabad
Stree Dharma, Madras

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Usha, Jammu

Vidushi, Benares

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Interviews

All interviews were conducted between October 1992 to October 1993. The respondents are all middle-class Hindu women except otherwise stated.

Agarwal, Gyan Kumari	Benares, Bania
Agarwal, Suman	Benares, Bania
Agarwal, Kusum	Benares, Bania
Agarwal, Tara	Kanpur, Bania
Arya, Manvati	Kanpur, Brahmin
Azad, Usha Kumari	Farrukabad, Brahmin
Bajpai, Gauri	Kanpur, Brahmin
Begum, Hasra	Lucknow, <i>Muslim</i>
Begum, Maazma	Madhya Pradesh, <i>Muslim</i>
Devi, Kaushalya	Aligarh, Brahmin
Devi, Kishori	Kanpur, Brahmin
Devi, Phul Kumari	Kanpur, Kayastha
Devi, Talsa	Kanpur, Brahmin
Devi, Godavari	Kanpur, Bania

Dixit, Uma	Itawah, Brahmin
Goorha, Urmilla	Lucknow, Kayastha
Gulshan	Jhansi, <i>Muslim</i>
Gupta, Ramesh Chandra	Kanpur, Bania (male)
Gupta, Manmathnath	New Delhi, Bania (male)
Handa, Iqbalwati	Ambala, Khatri
Itraaji	Faizabad, Brahmin
Joshi, Kalpana	New Delhi, Brahmin
Khatri, Ram Krishna	Lucknow, Khatri (male)
Loomba, Promilla	New Delhi, Khatri
Misra, Brij Rani	Kanpur, Brahmin
Misra, Sushila Devi	Itawah, Brahmin
Misra, Mrs	Farrukhabad, Brahmin
Pandey, Dhirendranath	Kanpur, Brahmin (male)
Prasad, Narayan	Kanpur, Katiyar (male)
Rathore, Vijay Devi	Kanpur, Rajput
Rohatgi, Sushila	Allahabad, Bania
Saxena, Satya	Kanpur, Kayastha
Saxena, Uttara	Kanpur, Kayastha
Saxena, Satish	Mainpuri, Kayastha (male)
Saxena, Prasad Narayan	Bareilly, Kayastha (male)
Sehgal, Lakshmi	Kanpur, Khatri
Shukla, Madhavi Lata	Kanpur, Brahmin
Singh, Prof. M.P.	Benares, Thakur (male)
Singh, Govardhan	Kanpur, Kayastha (male)

Singh, Avadrani	Jaunpur, Thakur
Singh, Ram Narain	Jaunpur, Thakur (male)
Sinha, Sharad Kumari	Kanpur, Kayastha
Tewari, Sri Devi	Kanpur, Brahmin
Thapar, Kamala	Kanpur, Khatri
Thapar, Premvati	Punjab, Khatri
Tripathi, Narayani	Jubrajpur/Kanpur, Brahmin
Tripathi, Kala	Kanpur, Brahmin
Verma, Shiv	Shahjahanpur, Kayastha (male)
Yashpal, Prakashvati	Lucknow, Khatri
Yogiji, Hirdaya	Lucknow, Kayastha (male)

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