

## MOTHER INDIA: THE ROLE OF THE MATERNAL FIGURE IN ESTABLISHING LEGAL SUBJECTIVITY<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** Psychoanalytic jurisprudence attempts to understand the images used by law to attract and capture the subject. In keeping with the larger psychoanalytic tradition, such theories tend to overemphasise the paternal principle. The image of law is said to be the image of the paterfamilias – the biological father, the sovereign, or God. In contrast to such theories, I would like to introduce the image of the mother and analyse its impact on the subject's relation to law. For this purpose, I examine the history and use of the figure of Bharat Mata or Mother India and how it influences the Indian subject's relation to law. When the subject is torn between his loyalties to the lawmaker-as-father and the nation-as-mother, who does he side with? Eschewing Greek myths and the Oedipus complex, I focus instead on Hindu mythology and the notion of an oedipal alliance to understand legal subjectivity in India. Lastly, I analyse a defining Indian political trial, the Gandhi Murder Trial, in which all these notions come to play and the accused justifies his decision to murder the father of the nation in the name of the motherland.

**KEYWORDS.** Bharat Mata; Gandhi murder trial; Godse; legal subjectivity; oedipal alliance; psychoanalytic jurisprudence.

Traditional western psychoanalytic legal theory has thus far tended to presuppose that sovereignty is built on the principles of paternity. As a corrective, it seems that

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<sup>1</sup> It would have been impossible to explore the figure of Mother India without taking recourse to her visual representations. I must thank Priya Paul, Urvashi Butalia and Sherna Dastur for the permission to use images from their collections; as well as Sumathi Ramaswamy who has lent me an image, her time and valuable guidance.

an examination of the particular case of India exposes the manner in which images of maternity have been utilised and put to service in establishing sovereignty and legitimacy. At stake are notions of legal subjectivity, nationality, the idea of duty, and most importantly questions of belonging. I argue that unlike cultures that follow the monotheistic Abrahamic religions – tellingly, named after Abraham or ‘the father’ – the impact of the father on the individual’s psyche is far weaker in a country like India, where the cult of the *Devi* or goddess is the strongest Hindu underpinning. While analysing the Indian subject’s relation to law, this essay utilises the Gandhi Murder Trial and the court testimony of the assassin to move the maternal image from the peripheries of psychoanalytic jurisprudence to a far more central position. In doing so I will focus on the image of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India; as we shall see below, since its emergence in the early twentieth century this image starred in Indian calendar art (for instance see Figure 1) and was ubiquitous in the Indian personal as well as public spheres. Its presence permeated homes and shops, as well as temples and political rallies.

While these images may belong to the ‘cultural’ realm, they are a product of law (through regimes of censorship and acceptance) and they in turn inform law. Analysing such images helps us understand the non-positivist ideas of what constitutes law and the subject’s relation to law. More importantly, it reveals how psychoanalytic jurisprudence’s focus on the image of the lawmaker-as-father provides us with an incomplete understanding of the subject’s relation to law, unless we incorporate the role of the mother. Using Sudhir Kakar’s notion of the oedipal alliance I seek to draw upon the image of the mother in order to establish a new idea of legal subjectivity rooted in love rather than guilt. Towards this purpose, I analyse

the idea of the nation-as-mother and the lawmaker-as-father as it emerges in the definitive political trial of independent Indian – the trial of the assassins of Gandhi.

### **The legal image and the father**

Psychoanalytic analysis of the relation between law, images, and legal subjectivity is led by the works of Pierre Legendre and Peter Goodrich. For both scholars the legal image is crucial for instituting legal subjectivity, for it is through its images that law ‘captures’ and subsequently binds its subjects to itself. Goodrich argues that:

The law as a structure of material life, as an institution, is a system of images, and it is through its symbolisation of authority and through its signs of power that the law dwells within the subject. The law in that sense is nothing more than its image, no more and no less than a sign; it is the spectacle of the scaffold, the aura of judgment, the sense of the normal (1990).

Similarly, Legendre asserts that ‘Law seizes its subjects inescapably and subjectively. It gains its effects through founding images...’ (Quoted in Goodrich et al 2006). The main role of the legal image is to hide the fact that all law is based on contingency, and that it lacks an external source of legitimacy. Thus, ‘The [legal] image may be defined for institutional purposes as the emblem or mask that covers the absence of the source of law’ (Goodrich 1995). But these images act as more than just a mask. Analytically, these images provide a portal through which law’s unconscious can be accessed and examined. Institutionally, they help to connect the subject’s unconscious with the unconscious of law. These images cut through the gloss of reason and rationality to forge an emotive bond between the subject and law. They ‘speak directly to the senses and affect the psyche, they address the labile

elements of the self and avoid the calming intervention of *logos*, language and reason' (Douzinas 2000).

However, the legal image takes a particular form in order to capture the subject and to shore up the authority and legitimacy of law. To explain the figure that appears as the mask in front of legal void, Legendre returns to his study of Western Christianity, and he argues that the legal image is nothing but the image of the paterfamilias, of the father – the sovereign and the Other (1997a).

The void that exists behind law is not a space of absolute nothingness, rather it is a space marked by the presence of the murdered father. In Freudian terms, the murder of the primordial father is the myth that lies at the origin of law. For Legendre the legal structure mimics the psychic structure, because they both emerge from the same system of names and orders of classifications i.e. they both belong to the same institutional order of meaning. This is, of course, based on the oedipal complex and Freud's idea that the first law was instituted through the murder – and in the name of – the primal father.

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and later in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud argues that in the beginning of society, that is within the primal horde, the 'violent and jealous father' kept the women to himself and drove away the sons. The word of the father was law and the sons obeyed him out of fear and habit, until the point when they banded together to kill the father. Once they have killed the father, the sons are overcome by guilt, and they revoke this guilt by applying to themselves those actions that their father had prohibited i.e. the killing of the father (the totem) and incest. 'The dead father became stronger than the living one had been' for the laws put in place by the band of brothers are created in the name of the father.

Speaking of the murder of the primal father, Freud notes, ‘this memorable and criminal deed, ...[becomes] the beginning of so many things – of social organisation, of moral restrictions and of religion’ (Freud 1913). This implies that this killing of the father and the instituting of the first laws marks the turn from the pre-social to the social and also marks the beginning of notions of morality, legality and society.

When the sons inaugurate the new law ‘in the name of the father’<sup>2</sup> they also instantaneously institute in the place of the dead father an image – the clan totem. The decree against harming or consuming the totem is nothing but the law against murdering the father. We see then, that in the first instance the image of law arrives in the same moment as law itself, and operates simultaneously with it. Further, the emotions that are felt for the dead father are now transferred to the image and to law. As Goodrich argues: ‘The institutional structure of submission is infantile, the subject loves the law like a child loves its parents’ (1997). Because the nature of submission is infantile, it is not a relation dominated by reason or logic; it is an emotive bond that speaks in terms of desire, guilt and fear and helps us underscore, once again, the irrationality not only of law but also its relation with its subjects.

Legendre notes another dimension of the role of the father for law: ‘there is a paternity of institutions because law needs a legitimate author’ (1997b). On the level of consciousness, the subject needs to know that law has a defined author – someone who guarantees its legitimacy; this can be a divine authority or the sovereign, or increasingly the state. On the level of the unconscious, the subject will only follow law if the institution has successfully captured him. The conscious and the

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<sup>2</sup> A term introduced by Jacques Lacan to denote the legislative and prohibitive function of the symbolic father. See Lacan 1977; and Lacan 2013.

unconscious levels of the subject are appeased simultaneously by the parental authority that stands behind the law – the father that acts as the legitimate author, and the one who inspires an Oedipus complex.

In all these theories of traditional psychoanalytic jurisprudence, the mother is conspicuous by her absence. Female figures are rare in legal imagery, and even the popular ones such as Iustitia or Lady Justice are non-maternal personages which are relegated to the field of justice rather than law (See Goodrich 1993).<sup>3</sup>

#### THE GANDHI MURDER TRIAL: LOCATING THE MURDER OF THE INDIAN FATHER

In modern India there is only one man who can claim the title of father. Known to the world as Mahatma Gandhi, or Gandhi the great soul, a sobriquet bestowed upon him by Rabindranath Tagore; within the country Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is simply referred to as *bapu* (father) or *bapuji* (father with the honorific *ji*) or more officially as ‘father of the nation’. Such is the force of the term that it is used for him by his followers and detractors alike. As Vinay Lal notes, even those who passionately disagree with Gandhi or claim to hate him, unanimously declare him to be the father of the nation, albeit an undesirable and corrupt nation. ‘In the most extreme form of the allegation, he is said to have merely fathered a tribe of dull, corrupt, vulgar, and singularly unattractive politicians’ (Lal 1995).

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<sup>3</sup> Even for Goodrich the female images are linked predominantly to notions of justice rather than law. When Goodrich does attempt to trace a female law, it is in the context of common law and distinguished from the patriarchal civil law.

On 30 January 1948, as Gandhi walked towards his daily public prayer meeting in New Delhi a man suddenly blocked his path: facing Gandhi, Nathuram Vinayak Godse bowed with folded hands, said '*Namaste, Bapu* [Greetings, Father]', and then fired three shots at point blank range.

The plot to assassinate Gandhi had been fermenting for a while; after a few botched attempts, Godse decided to carry out the assassination on his own, and after the fatal shooting surrendered to the police (See Gauba 1969; Tushar Gandhi 2007; Malgaonkar 2008). The original charge-sheet in the case listed twelve accused, however, three were never caught. Out of the nine who were brought to trial, one turned King's Evidence. Amidst protests, the Bombay Public Security Measures Act of 1947, originally enacted to allow for speedy trials of those accused of communal riots in the aftermath of the Partition, was swiftly extended to Delhi to try Gandhi's assassins. A Special Court was set up at the Red Fort, the erstwhile Mughal Palace; under the aegis of a single judge, Justice Atma Charan.

Held in newly independent, but not yet post-colonial India, this trial focused on the murder of the 'father of the nation'. In 1948, India had the status of a Dominion of the British Empire; it was an independent nation which lacked its own laws. Before the murder, the symbolic father of the nation and the legal father of the nation differed; while Gandhi was viewed as the largely undisputed – though not entirely politically relevant – father of the nation, the laws of the country had clearly been promulgated in the name of the foreign father, the Rex, King George VI. In

fact, the name of the case, *R v Nathuram V. Godse and the other accused*,<sup>4</sup> clearly signifies the presence of the foreign father, while the case itself became an attempt by the Indian State to recognise Gandhi as the official Indian father.

While the State undoubtedly viewed Gandhi as the ‘father of the nation’, even his assassin was willing to grant him that sobriquet. During his trial, Godse repeatedly referred to Gandhi as the father of the nation (Godse 1949). Through his testimony he attempted to frame Gandhi as the primal father, the lawmaker who rules his domain singlehandedly. As Godse noted: ‘On coming back to India he [Gandhi] developed a subjective mentality under which he alone was to be the final judge of what was right or wrong.’ And further added: ‘He alone was the judge of everyone and everything, he was the master brain guiding the civil disobedience movement; nobody else knew the technique of that movement; he alone knew when to begin it and when to withdraw it’ (Godse 1949).

For Godse, then, Gandhi had been acting as the sole lawmaker – the legislator and the judge, the symbolic father who ruled the land according to his own will. Since this will often ran contrary to Godse’s idea of the Indian freedom struggle, he chafed against this rule. So far, Godse’s views are in keeping with the claims of traditional psychoanalytic jurisprudence, wherein the struggle for power between the son-as-subject and the father-as-lawmaker results in the murder of the latter.

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<sup>4</sup> *R v Nathuram V. Godse and the Other Accused* (1948-49); Court of the Special Judge, Red Fort, Delhi, 1948. This was not a court of record; Godse’s testimony cited here is from the National Archives of India.



However, we find that Godse's decision to assassinate Gandhi, as well as the manner in which he subsequently frames his defence, are underpinned with a strong presence of the maternal figure. For Godse, this maternal presence takes the form of the nation-as-mother or the Motherland,<sup>5</sup> popularly known as Mother India or *Bharat Mata*. For all his hatred for Gandhi, Godse's primary concern was not the father, he was tied far more strongly to the mother.

Godse described his life's aim to devote himself to an ideology that would preserve the independence of his Motherland. At the same time, there was no doubt about the role occupied by the Hindu nationalists within the familial setting; they were for Godse, the 'beloved sons of this Holy Land'. He argued during his trial, 'Hindustan [here pre-partition India] is...both the motherland and the holy land for the Hindus from times immemorial.' And further asserted that India is not simply the Mother, she is also the Mother Goddess: '[I] do maintain that even this servant of the country [Gandhi] had no right to vivisect the country – the image of our worship – by deceiving the people.' Here it is important to note that it was not just independent India that was deemed to be the motherland, but pre-partition India that included Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh. This imagination of the nation as a mother, as a living, breathing, corporeal body led Godse to accuse Gandhi of not just acquiescing to the division, but to the 'vivisection' of the mother at the time of Partition in 1947. Lastly, he claimed that he had killed Gandhi not only because the

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<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to certain other Hindu nationalists, including his mentor and co-accused in the Gandhi Murder Trial, V.D. Savarkar, who in an attempt to portray India in as masculine a way as possible, attempted to portray the nation as a fatherland to hide its more common association with the mother/mother goddess. For instance see Savarkar 1949.

latter had failed to protect the mother, but also because he had participated in her symbolic death that was the result of the Partition.

Here we find that Godse is articulating a different father-son relation, one which goes against the theories of the oedipal complex that we have seen so far. For, rather than wish to compete with the father, Godse expresses a desire to work with him in order to protect the mother. I believe that this latter position is close to Sudhir Kakar's notion of the oedipal alliance and is a far more suitable lens than the oedipal complex to analyse Indian legal subjectivity. The idea of the oedipal alliance is also fitting because it takes into account the strong maternal presence within the Indian family, mythology and the psyche.

Before we return to the Gandhi Murder Trial and the invocation of Mother India within it, it is important to trace the anthropological development of the maternal figure from the earth-as-mother to the nation-as-mother in the form of Mother India.

#### IN SEARCH OF THE MATERNAL PRESENCE

The absence of the female figure in Western jurisprudence is in stark contrast to the importance of the maternal presence within Hinduism. An examination of Indian mythology and culture reveals that ancient Indian society was marked by the dominance of the female deity, and it was only with the start of the Aryan civilisation and the rise of the Brahminic tradition that the traditional dominance of women in India begins to be restricted. Despite this, nature and primal energy remain entirely feminine within Indian culture. Everything that cannot be controlled by humankind is attributed to a feminine deity – famine, cholera, smallpox, childbirth

are all believed to be within the domains of various different goddesses (Nandy 2005). While the most important form of the Mother Goddess was Mother Earth, she also appeared in many other forms, as the protectress of children; as the favoured goddess of various cities – such as Cape Comorin, Kalka, and Chandigarh, as tribal divinities; and as goddesses of diseases and war (Bhattacharya 1999). This tradition of the various goddesses acting as the protectress and symbol of cities and towns around India is of particular importance to us, because in the late nineteenth century this tradition of the Mother Earth and city goddess gives rise to a new deity – Mother India.

While Mother India arose from this organic cultural tradition, it cannot be denied that she arose in response to, and was deeply influenced by, the politics of the time. The role played by women as the symbolic configuration of the state or the civic virtues it embodied was not new or uncommon in the West.

Examples of women as personification of a country or nation abound all over the world. We have *Mayr Hayastan* (Mother Armenia), Mother Eire (Mother Ireland), *Moder Svea* (Sweden) and *Matushka Rossija* (Mother Russia) amongst others. In other countries, the nation may not be symbolised by a mother figure, but instead by a younger woman, often cast in the role of the beloved. These include *Suomi-neito* (the maid of Finland), Cathleen ní Houlihan in Ireland, Britannia in England and Marianne in France. In yet other countries, nations can be brought together through other female figures mostly borrowed from religion. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm cites examples of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico and the Virgin of Montserrat in Catalonia as holy icons that gave ‘palpable reality to otherwise imaginary community’ and consequently give the nations a sense of unity (2006).

We find then that, while in the traditional psychoanalytic view, the law or the state may be in the name of the father, in many different parts of the world the nation is signified as a female, and usually as a maternal figure. Since motherhood is linked to gynaetopical relations, to questions of genealogy, birth, breeding, production and reproduction, I seek to demonstrate that the nation's claim on the son precedes the claim of the lawmaker. The son belongs to, and is attached to, the nation as mother with emotive bonds that are far stronger than his attachment to the lawmaker-as-father.

MOTHER INDIA



Figure 1 D. Banerjee, *Bharat Mata in Shackles*, 1941. Publication information unknown.

Image courtesy of the Priya Paul Collection.

In Indian languages and within the Hindu culture, land or the earth is often referred to in a female form and is evoked as mother, for instance as *Dharti Mata*

(Earth Mother) in Hindi. The same earth is also revered as the goddess *Bhu Devi* (Land Goddess). The origins of the cult of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India can be traced back to this idea. However, scholars argue that the shift from Mother Earth to Mother India is not entirely an organic one, and resulted from a strong political context – an incipient independence movement and a desire to claim the nation.

This gendering of the nation was not restricted to India. As Linda Edmondson shows, all over the world the gendering of nationhood is most likely to occur at times of emergencies and budding nationalism. Such figures have emerged and become popular around the world from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1920s (Edmondson 2003).

While in India there had been a long tradition of worshipping the mother goddess for centuries, at the end of the nineteenth century we witness the first attempts at ‘re-inventing the earth mother as the Motherland’ (Sen 2002). The credit for this reinvention usually goes to the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterji who, in his novel *Anandamath* (1882), for the first time introduces the figure of the goddess who is also the Motherland. As Julius Lipner suggests, the Mother Goddess paradoxically both ‘symbolises and births the nation in her various forms’ (Lipner 2005).

The novel is set in the 1770s during the Bengal Famine. The famine forces one couple, Mahendra and Kalayani, to leave their village along with their infant daughter in search of food. The couple are separated, but coincidentally taken in by the same group of monks. The monks are of a sect known as *Sanatans* or the Children and are based at Anandamath or the Abbey of Bliss. The *Sanatans* are fighting against foreign enemies to protect the Mother, and the Mother is none other

than Mother India. Her figure is revealed to Mahendra within a cave: He finds there three versions of the Mother: the first, 'imposing' and 'resplendent' representing Mother India before her conquest as Jagadhatri; the second a mother in 'rags and tatters' reduced to gloom and humiliation by her new rulers as Kali; and the last, the mother as she is destined to be, independent and 'bright, beautiful, full of glory and dignity' (Chatterji 1882). Those familiar with Hindu mythology will note that the goddesses of the past, present and the future are all *avatars* of Durga.

The main disjuncture with history for which the novel is blamed, is the 'other' or the foreign enemy that it posits. It refuses to recognise the culpability of the East India Company in the Bengal famines of the late eighteenth century; instead it places the blame for these squarely on the puppet Muslim Nawab who was in charge of Bengal. In keeping with this idea of history, the novel urges the Hindus to rise up against the Muslims who are threatening Mother India. Supporters of Bankim, on the other hand, have argued that the anti-Muslim message of the novel was tactical; that fearing State censorship, Bankim had created the Muslim as the 'other', even though the book was directed against the British.

It remains unclear what Bankim's intentions were and against whom his book was targeted. This is not helped by the fact that this book was hugely popular, often altered and republished. As Tanika Sarkar highlights, there were multiple editions of the book, with 259 alterations across the five versions published during Bankim's lifetime alone (Sarkar 2006). If not during Bankim's lifetime, especially after his death, the book became increasingly anti-British. In fact, a popular version translated by Basanta Koomar Roy in 1941 has been sanitised of any anti-Muslim reference.

Regardless of these controversies, scholars agree that Bankim was the first author to popularise the figure of *Bharat Mata*.

#### THE GRAPHIC IMAGE OF MOTHER INDIA

Before we proceed any further, it is important to note that while Bankim was the first author to explicitly imagine the nation-as-mother, the figure itself was already familiar to the Indian psyche. It is believed to have been based on a regional notion of Mother Bengal, and even Mother India had made an appearance before in front of packed audiences in a play called *Bharatmata* by Kiranchandra Ray in 1873 (Sarkar 2006).

The credit for the first well known graphic image of *Bharat Mata* is given to Abanindranath Tagore for his 1905 portrait of the same name. In keeping with this Bengal connection we find that Abanindranath Tagore's portrait known as *Bharat Mata* (Figure 2) was originally called *Banga Mata* (Mother Bengal) (Ramaswamy 2010). This image of a pale and ethereal mother had little of the fury and passion associated with Bankim's Mother India. Abanindranath Tagore's painting of *Bharatmata* was a wan figure with more in common with Ray's Mother India, utterly beaten by the British coloniser, than with Bankim's fierce goddess.





Figure 2 Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905. By kind permission of the Victoria Memorial Hall and Rabindra Bharati Society, Kolkata, India.

Few scholars are willing to recognise the goddess-like qualities of Abanindranath Tagore's *Mother India*; instead, they argue that this first graphic image was that of the Mother alone, a deliberate anti-goddess who did not want to revolutionise her sons. For instance, Geeti Sen notes:

Let us concede this point, *Bharat Mata* lacks that anger and revolutionary zeal required of an icon to inspire a nation to revolt – as could be found in popular images of Kali from contemporary Battala prints in Calcutta; or in the imaging of *La France* by Delacroix' (2002).

However, she argues that this was a deliberate ploy. The partition of Bengal in 1905 had led to the growth of a violent nationalism in India that sought to defend the motherland. In the face of this aggression, Abanindranath wanted to provide a graphic image of a 'demure' mother figure.

He offers us, then, an alternative imaging of the Motherland – one that is opposed to the aggression of rising nationalism. By small subtle changes he transforms her iconography from a goddess into that of the mother of the country – thus transforming her from a religious into a secular icon (Sen 2002).

Sen's understanding of this image can be challenged at two levels: firstly, on the issue of its supposed 'secular' nature, and secondly, its inability or its desire not to inspire revolutionary zeal. Let us not forget that in this picture *Bharat Mata* had been painted in a particularly Hindu style: her four arms and haloed head belie the claim of being non-Goddess like. The issue of the religious overtones of the *Bharat Mata* imagery will be briefly discussed below; but for now, it is sufficient to note that the image borrows from a heavy semiotic history that cannot be described as secular.

On the issue that the *Bharat Mata* figure was ‘opposed to the aggression of rising nationalism’, no matter what Abanindranath Tagore’s intention was, his image fits very well in the larger universal tradition of imagining the nation as a defenceless woman, and exhorting her sons to take up arms in her defence. For instance, writing in the context of Iranian nationalism, Afsaneh Najmabadi asserts: ‘While the father was included in the familial setting that evoked one’s instinctive qualities of respect and dutifulness towards parents, it is only the mother who was cast as the possible victim of enemies, facing the danger of foreign transgression and calling for help’ (1997). No matter what country she is representing, nor how she herself is represented, the chief task of nation-as-mother is to rally her sons against the foreign threat. Two important points must be noted here: firstly, the nation-as-mother is always in need of protection and never the protectress, no matter whether she is portrayed as defenceless or armed. The armed mother is at best a rallying cry, a figure meant to shame her sons into action. Secondly, this mother is more often than not only exhorting her sons into battle, while remaining ambivalent towards her daughters. Tagore’s vision of Mother India fulfilled both these ideas of the nation-as-mother.

While rooted in the Indian tradition, due to the fact that Mother India emerged within a nationalistic context, her graphic image often expresses the hybridity of the colonial psyche. In her seminal work on Mother India, *The Goddess and the Nation*, Sumathi Ramaswamy notes: ‘[L]ike so much else in British India that mimed the master’s culture, some of the earliest images of India as an anthropomorphized female appear in and from contexts that we can recognise as European and colonial’ (2010). The shift from Mother Earth to Mother India can be

viewed as an instance of the hybridity of the colonised psyche; such a psyche seeks to access concepts that have been familiar to it over the ages and use them to counteract the new colonial ideas. In keeping with this hybridity, the terms that were applied to the earth in general are now used to refer to a particular geo-body.

Evidence of this colonial hybridity is easy to find: An examination of the early pictorial depictions of *Bharat Mata* reveals that her image borrows heavily from the existing pictorial tradition of Britannia. In fact, some early images show Mother India in the presence of Britannia, and in a few of them the former is handing over a male child (the Indian subject) to the latter. In images such as Figure 3, India is portrayed as old and haggard, whereas Britannia is youthful and regal.



Figure 3 *Bharat Bhiksha (India Begging)*, circa 1878. The Calcutta Art Studio. By kind permission of the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, India.

In this image, the Indian child is shown in a particularly European form, perhaps, in an attempt to indicate his new loyalties. However, ‘the directionality’ of the gift is quite clear, the eye contact between the ‘son’ and Britannia, and the

latter's close-handed grip of the former reveals that Britannia is pulling the Indian subject towards her and away from India. The slightly revealed breast of Britannia signifies the nourishment that she can provide the child, a task that old India is physically incapable of performing. Crucially, this picture predates the birth of Bankim's Mother India, when the Indian nation is established as a young mother to whom the subject owes his love and loyalty.

#### THE MOTHER AND THE MAP

Within the realm of graphic images, pictorial depictions of Mother India follow a particular trope: they show the mother superimposed on a map of India (for instance see Figure 1 above). In fact, in most depictions the map and the mother become one, 'her body is conspicuously carto-graphed to approximate the scientifically mapped shape of India' (Ramaswamy 2010). As Manu Goswami notes, '*Bharat Mata* marks the historically significant reconstitution of colonial spatiality into national property' (2004). We must also note here, that this trope of superimposing a woman on a map is not a new idea; in fact, its roots can be found in the images of *Europa Regina*, the woman who embodies the map of Europe.

This picturisation of the country as the map/Mother was a direct challenge to the colonial imagination of India. Part of the colonial enterprise was to gain minute information about India, to rule the country by rigorously classifying everything within it. Crucial to this project of gaining knowledge of India was the fledgling science of cartography. Cartographic knowledge was deemed real and rational – part of a modern discourse. According to Christopher Bayly, the colonial exercise of mapping the nation was scientific and empirical, and this approach was 'deliberately

dry and un-theoretical, an anti-dote to romance and imagination’ (1996). This approach sought to divorce the idea of India from the cultural myths and tales of the natives, and ground it entirely within a Western-rational discourse. By doing so, the Raj could lay down the conditions on which a nation could be claimed, and sideline any claim that was not ensconced in the new cartographic language.

In response to this, there emerged in India a trend of what Ramaswamy labels ‘barefoot cartography’. She uses this term to describe the move through which Indians sought to wrest the map and the idea of India from the foreign lawmaker, and instead facilitate ‘a more earthbound and sensory, even corporeal, relation to soil, land, and territory than is arguably possible when following the protocols of a lofty and rarefied science such as cartography’ (2008).

In a time when few Indians went to school – especially Western schools, and even fewer remained in school till an age where they learned geography, most Indians were introduced to the map of India in its calendar form: Mother India acquainted her subjects with the idea of India.

[I]t was through the mass media that the mapped image of the nation was rendered familiar to the average citizen as it travelled – albeit in a highly condensed and even caricatured form – across the subcontinent and was incorporated into newspaper mastheads and cartoons, merchandise labels and advertisements, god posters and calendars, and the like (Ramaswamy 2010).

In addition to this, the fluidity of the image allows *Bharat Mata* to appropriate areas of the Indian sub-continent that remain extraneous to the Indian state. Before independence, the image included all of Pakistan and Bangladesh. After independence, the image of Mother India allows India to escape beyond its geographic territory: her flowing tresses can claim Nepal, the crown and halo can

include all of Kashmir and even parts of Pakistan, and an erring foot can capture all of Sri Lanka.

We also find that as the cartographic idea of Mother India grew stronger, it changed Bankim's own vision of the mother. Later editions of *Anandamath* not only focus on Mother India, but explicitly mention the map/Mother figure; with the Basanta Koomar Roy translation first published in 1941 describing the image of the mother as 'a map of India in rags and tatters' (Chatterji 2006).

Apart from the cartographic, another important advantage of *Bharat Mata* is signified through her accoutrements which provide us with a 'subterfuge of antiquity' where a 'very modern entity, the nation...[is in a] quest to pass itself off as timeless and eternal' (Ramaswamy 2001). Close attention needs to be paid to the way that *Bharat Mata* is dressed in these images. Her regalia is strongly reminiscent of the Hindu goddesses popular in calendar art. Always shown with a crown, and draped in a saree, often with multiple arms, *Bharat Mata* is deliberately made to look as if she belongs to a previous era (for instance, see the various portrayals in Figure 4). Though portrayed as a young woman she is laden with antique jewellery: her antiqueness is, then, taken as a direct signifier of the antiqueness of India itself and, therefore, becomes another way to negate the British claim of creating India and being its rightful rulers.

This superimposition of the Mother Goddess upon the body of the modern cartographically-defined national territory allows the Indians to claim the modern discourse, and at the same time portray a prior claim on the land by appropriating the 'antiquity' that the figure displays. But, crucially for us, it also helps in asserting the



power of the unconscious by taking recourse to myths and fancy, and asserting their dominance over the rational and the positivistically legal.

To unpack this further, by placing the image of a goddess garbed in ‘antique’ clothing and jewellery upon the map of India, the Indians seek to deny the coloniser’s claim that the Indian state was a new entity created by the latter. By displaying that the modern Indian nation was not indeed ‘modern’, the Indian population sought to participate in a discourse that had so far been denied to the ‘backward’ native. More importantly for us, the recourse to mythical figures and tales allows the Indians to delve into the realm of the unconscious and lay a claim to the Indian geographic territory that was prior to, and more deeply binding than, the rights given to them by positive law of the British Raj. This idea of the nation-as-mother allows the Indian people to claim a natural tie to the land that could not be undone by mere positive law. It allows them to access a prior ‘law’ – a law based on nature and gynaetopical relations – that triumphed over ‘man-made’ laws of the foreign coloniser. Once again, we find that the ties that bind the son to the mother prevail over his ties with the father.

A third advantage of the image of Bharat Mata emerged from Hindu semiotics upon which her depiction was based. The lineage of Bharat Mata as a Hindu goddess allowed Hindus not only to counteract the colonial claim to the nation, but also to exclude the Muslim population. Illustrations of Mother India, which focused on the Mother as a female body and not simply a map, were more obviously Hindu and also clearly anti-Muslim. For instance, an article in the *Rohilkhand Gazette* in 1925, while discussing offensive publications against Muslims, especially mentions ‘a cartoon portraying Bharat Devi, which here was

clearly a Hindu woman, armed with sword and spear, fighting against the Muslims. She had killed some Muslims and was standing sword in hand over the prostrate corpse of one of them' (Quoted in Gupta 1998).

Amongst others, Gandhi believed in and defended the secular credentials of Mother India. In his plea for Hindu/Muslim unity he urged both religious groups, 'to serve India, for they are even as blood-brothers, born of the same mother—*Bharata Mata*' (1921). And ten years later he noted:

Let all of us Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians, live amicably as Indians, pledged to live and die for our motherland. Let it be our ambition to live as the children of the same mother, retaining our individual faiths and yet being one, like the countless leaves of one tree (Gandhi 1931).

However, I argue that despite protestations to the contrary, *Bharat Mata* remains a Hindu goddess. She is not claimed by the state; she is claimed by a particular religion alone. Before and after independence, the flag in the Mother Goddess' hand acts as a clear signifier of who she belongs to. In Hindu nationalist images the mother is often portrayed with the Hindu saffron flag rather than the flag of India (Figure 4). As Sherna Dastur's image shows, Mother India is being increasingly depicted holding the saffron flag. Such visuals signify not only the difference between the Hindu population and the Indian population, but also attempt to mark Mother India as belonging to the former.



Figure 4 Sherna Dastur, *Find the Missing Object*, 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.

We find that as late as 2005, when the famous Indian artist M.F. Husain, a Muslim, ‘dared’ to depict *Bharat Mata* as a naked figure in order to depict the lack of development of the country and highlight human rights abuses, several cases were brought against him in several Indian courts. He was accused of ‘hurting the religious sentiments, displaying obscenity at public place, defaming *Bharat Mata* and conspiring to cause communal unrest and disunity in the country’ (*The Hindustan Times* 2006). The fact that depicting the image of the nation as a female nude led to claims of ‘conspiring to cause communal unrest’, shows how closely this image was aligned with the Hindu community in India. This was not an image of the

state, instead it stood for the nation: a nation that could not be accessed equally by all the citizens of the Indian State; a Hindu nation whose icon could only be claimed by the members of a chosen religion. Here we find that the transformation from mother to goddess is complete.

#### THE 'OEDIPAL ALLIANCE' AND THE LEGAL SUBJECT

Through our discussion of the maternal figure, we find that the myths of the Mother Goddess or Devi form the 'hegemonic narrative' of Indian culture (Kakar 2012a). It is precisely because of this hegemonic narrative and its influence over Indian mythology that psychoanalysts have been unable to find evidence of the oedipal conflict in the Indian psyche. As we have seen above, within traditional Western psychoanalysis the oedipal conflict is the precursor to the subject's ability to make laws for itself, albeit in the name of the father. The lack of the oedipal conflict in India has been used by psychoanalysts working on the country such as Owen Berkeley-Hill (1921 and 1925) and Claud Dangar Daly (1910) to argue that the Indian man was incapable of overthrowing the father and thus unsuited to making laws for himself.

The hegemonic narrative of the goddess in mythology is replicated in early Indian childhood, where the children are usually kept away from adult males and are deeply immersed in the maternal sphere. Within this maternal immersion we find evidence of Melanie Klein's good and bad mother. For the child, the 'good' mother is the one who offers the breast and nourishes him; and the 'bad' or the 'genital' mother is the one who combines in herself the denial of the breast and the potential to destroy the child, coupled with a sexually demanding body that overwhelms the

son (Klein 1992). As Ashis Nandy notes: ‘The Indian’s fantasy life is to a great extent organized around this image [of the ‘bad’ mother] of an angry, incorporative, fickle mother, against whom his anger is directed and from whom through a process of projection, counter-aggression is feared’ (2005). This idea of the ‘good’/‘bad’ mother is embodied in India in the idea of the Mother Goddess, who is known by the name of *Shakti* (energy) and has the power to be the gentle protectress or a destructive force (Kakar 2012b).

Using this Kleinian distinction as the basis for the mother-son relation, Sudhir Kakar posits his theory of maternal enthrallment. He defines maternal enthrallment as: ‘the wish to get away from the mother together with the dread of separation, hate for the mother one longs for so much, incestuous desire coexisting with the terror inspired by assertive female sexuality’ (2012a).

Kakar argues that one of the main reasons why the Oedipus conflict does not underpin the Indian psyche, is because of the nature of the father-son interaction in the early life of a child. In traditional Indian households the father enters the life of the child only in later childhood and, therefore, has a smaller role to play in the development of his psyche. The child’s second birth<sup>6</sup> is marked by his entry into the world of the father and other men, having been confined until this point to the spaces dominated by women, and having little more than perfunctory contact with the men in the family. Entirely enveloped in the sphere of the mother, the son begins to fear

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<sup>6</sup> This ‘second birth’ is a play on words since, while it refers to the son’s move into a world dominated by male members of the family and marks the beginning of his subjectivity, it also invokes the idea of higher caste boys being ‘twice born’. Within Hinduism, the second birth is a spiritual birth after which the boy would traditionally learn the trade of his caste and thus become part of the male world, albeit at an older age than the psychoanalytic ‘second birth’.

the ‘bad’ mother who is seductive and ‘sexually ravenous’ and threatens to ‘engulf his budding individuality, [and] destroy his masculinity’. In order to avert this calamity, the boy wishes to forge strong bonds with the father and be taken under his wing; Kakar call this the ‘oedipal alliance’ (1980).

‘Oedipal alliance’ refers to the deeply buried and unfulfilled need of many male patients for the firm support, guidance, and emotional availability of the father who is needed by the little boy at the Oedipal stage of his life, so that the boy can separate and free himself from an overwhelming, omnipresent, and especially the sexually threatening pre-Oedipal mother (Kakar 2012a).

We find that the son’s relation to the father is not one of antagonism; rather it is a relation in which the son enthusiastically seeks the presence of the father and the father’s influence over him. For the Indian son/subject the necessity of the oedipal alliance as a means to escape the maternal presence often outweighs the rivalry that acts as marker of the Oedipus conflict. (Kakar 2012b).

At the level of law, this father-son relation indicates that far from rebelling against the law of the father, the son/subject actively seeks out the law and wants to submit to it. This submission is not the same as the Western submission to the lawmaker-as-father, because it is not borne out of the guilt that accompanies the desire to murder the father or due to the fear of castration; instead this submission is a positive relation between the subject and law. We find evidence of this oedipal alliance in the records of the Gandhi Murder Trial.

THE FATHER OF THE NATION

Once we have identified the country as the mother of the subject, the question arises, what is her relation to the lawmaker-as-father? To answer this question, we must return to the roots of *Bharat Mata* in the notion of Bhu Devi or the Earth Goddess. In ancient India, kings were referred to as *mahi-pati* or *bhumi-pati*. This compound Sanskrit term is usually translated as ruler of the earth. For instance, in his essay ‘Translation of a Sanscrit [sic] Inscription, relative to the last Hindu King of Delhi, with Comments thereon’, James Tod discusses an inscription from King Prithviraj’s<sup>7</sup> palace and translates the term *mahi-pati* as ‘sovereign of the earth’ (1824). However, as Minoru Hara points out, to do so is to miss the literal meaning of *pati*, i.e. husband. If we translate the term correctly, two meanings emerge – the king as *bhumi-pati* is not just the ruler of the earth, he is also the husband of the earth (1973). Hara further argues that this relation is conjugal, since the king is also referred to as *mahi-bhuj* or enjoyer of the earth. Herein lies the crucial difference between the imagination of the nation-as-mother within the Western and Hindu psyches. For the West, the idea of nation-as-female and even nation-as-mother is fairly common. However, this figure always plays second fiddle to the lawmaker-as-father. The paternal principle is the central principle along which the son’s relation to the family and the subject’s relation to law are understood. In India, we find that the lawmaker or father-figure is only able to assume his position due to his relation with the mother and never independently of her. We realise that if the country is mother, then the ruler is her husband who acts as a father to the subjects. What is significant here is that the subject is tied to the land/nation first and, importantly, before he

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<sup>7</sup> A twelfth century Hindu Rajput King who ruled parts of Northern India.

forms ties to the king and, therefore, he owes prior – and often greater – loyalty to the nation than the ruler.

There are two further implications of this idea: Firstly, the subjects do not belong to the king alone, they are the joint subjects of the land/nation and the ruler. The people are subjects of the nation first, and it is only through his relation to the land that the king or the lawmaker can lay claim to the subjects. Secondly, the primary duty of the subject is to protect the land as mother. As James Lipner notes: ‘[I]f she [the land] is protected in accordance with *dharma*, then, by implication, together with her husband the king she is a protective and bountiful mother to their *prajas* or subjects’ (2005). As we will see in the section below, the subject’s duty to protect the land, includes the duty to protect it even against its consort, the king/father. At the same time, since the king obtains his ability to rule by virtue of his relation with the land, the king shares with the subject/son the duty to protect the land or the nation.

Evidence of this tale can be found in one of the most pervasive mythological tales of India – the *Ramayana*.<sup>8</sup> In this Hindu epic, the female protagonist Sita (literally translated as furrow) is named so because her father found her while ploughing his field. In the epic, Sita marries Ram, the prince who would become king one day. In an example of how all the mothers/mother goddesses are one, Sita is described as an *avatar* of Goddess Laxmi, and is also seen as a version of the Goddess Sita portrayed in the *Rig Veda*.<sup>9</sup> The popularity of the *Ramayana* in

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<sup>8</sup> Attributed to Valmiki, the Sanskrit version dates back to the fifth – fourth centuries BC.

<sup>9</sup> The *Rig Veda* is one of the oldest Hindu texts and is believed to predate the *Ramayana* by a millennium.



twentieth and twenty-first century India has meant that in contemporary times Sita from the *Ramayana* is worshipped as a goddess in her own right.

More important for us is the link that Sita has with the land, it is this link that gives her consort the power to rule their subjects as a king. As Cornelia Dimmitt notes:

She can be seen to display the qualities of a goddess in two different modes: as mistress of the plants and animals she is intimately related to the fertility of the earth, and as *sakti* [power], the energy that inspires the hero Rama to action, *she is the source of his power as king* (1982).

Therefore, we find that while the Indian king is the lawmaker, he receives this ability by being the consort of Mother Earth. Inherent within this is the understanding that while the land or the mother is timeless, the role of the father is time bound and the figure keeps changing.

[T]he earth is ever-lasting and remains always young. After her husband king dies, she starts again the same life cycle with another victorious hero, and thus she is enjoyed one after another by thousands of kings during the course of a long history (Hara 1973).

The father is not the repressive foreigner who bends the subject to his will, rather, the father is the man who is linked to the nation and with whom the son/subject seeks to form an alliance in order to jointly protect the ‘good’ mother and escape the overwhelming influence of the ‘bad’ mother. The lawmaker-as-father is primarily identified by his relation to the mother, it is by virtue of his relation to the earth/nation that he is expected to, and allowed to, act as the lawmaker.

GANDHI AS THE FATHER OF THE NATION

After examining the development of the figure of Mother India, the role of the father in Indian childhood and the idea of the oedipal alliance, we revisit Gandhi as the father of the nation. We start by examining the ways in which Gandhi is depicted alongside Mother India in popular images.

In calendar art renderings of Mother India her figure is usually accompanied by the men of the nation, including the fairly prevalent figure of Gandhi. However, I argue that within this tradition, Gandhi occupies a special place. Only Gandhi is depicted as having any direct physical contact with the mother. When other men are shown, they are always shown in the presence of the mother, but not physically touching her.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> With the exception of a picture in which S.C. Bose is shown in *Bharat Mata's* lap instead of Gandhi. However, in order to remove any ambiguity, that picture is titled *Bharat Santan (India's Child)*. *Bharat Santan* (mid 1940s?) by Sudhir Chowdhury. Chromolithograph published by SNS, Calcutta, India.



Figure 5 Prabhu Dayal, *Bharat Mata ki Godh Mein Mahatma Gandhi*, circa 1930. Image courtesy of Urvashi Butalia.

Very often Gandhi appears to be seated on the lap of Mother India but he is not depicted as a young boy, rather, he is always portrayed as an adult, and often even an aged man (Figure 5).<sup>11</sup> Here we find evidence that Gandhi is not depicted as

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<sup>11</sup> Modern versions of similar images can be found online. *Bharat Mata*, late 1940s, available on <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/product/paintings/mother-india-wearing-sari-and-mahatma-gandhi-in-her-lap-WF14/> (accessed 30 Dec 2016); and *Bapuji on [sic] Eternal Sleep*, circa 1948, available on

the son of Mother India, instead, he is portrayed as her consort. These images also point towards the mother/beloved slippage of the nation with relation to the male citizens of the country, as delineated by Najmabadi amongst others.

In other pictures Gandhi is depicted above *Bharat Mata*, as a figure smiling down at the nation from the skies. Painted after his death, many such images portray Gandhi as a god; in fact, in one such picture he is flanked on either side in the sky by Jesus and Buddha (Figure 6). Together the three ‘gods’ smile down upon Mother India, who is surrounded by her important sons such as Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and Jawaharlal Nehru. This is not simply a matter of chronology of death, for it is well known – and well utilised by the calendar art industry – that Bose and Singh died before Indian independence was achieved and Gandhi was assassinated. By placing Gandhi above all others, these images seek to highlight the special role of Gandhi as the father of the nation.



Figure 6 T.B. Vathy. *Message of Love*, circa 1940. Ravi Verma Press, Trivandrum. Image courtesy of Sumathi Ramaswamy.

As we noted above, within India Gandhi is simply known as *bapu*. The term *bapu* is revealing, for it throws light on the affection and attraction that the Indian

subject feels for Gandhi. For while the word ‘father’ is literally translated as ‘*baap*’, *bapu* is an affectionate diminutive that signifies not just the biological relation but also the affection that the child feels towards the father. Vinay Lal argues that the term ‘*bapu*’ is closer to Gandhi’s own worldview, whereas the state-created, formal term of ‘father of the nation’ stands for power and dominance, ‘it points to the signal triumph of the masculine in the political domain’ (1995). To designate Gandhi unquestioningly as the father of the nation is to turn him into a ‘resolutely masculine figure, [which is] a very questionable and dubious exercise’ (Lal 1995), especially if we were to keep in mind Gandhi’s own politics. Perhaps the most successful rebuttal against the colonial notions of masculinity was provided by Gandhi. Gandhi focused on two ideas of the relation between masculinity and femininity. The first of these is similar to the Indian traditional role of the masculine and feminine: Gandhi borrowed from the Hindu *vamachara* (a heterodox form of Hinduism) tradition, when he argued that while both manliness and womanliness were equal, androgyny or the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy was superior to both (Nandy 2009). Gandhi was advocating the superiority of *klibatva* or androgyny, a part of the culture that the modern Hindu ‘masculine’ man was trying very hard to erase from his consciousness in a bid to compete with the more masculine Muslim and Christian ‘other’.

Gandhi’s second take on the relation between masculinity and femininity also borrowed from the Indian Hindu tradition but, as Nandy points out, was especially developed by him as a ‘methodological justification for the anti-imperialist movement, first in South Africa and then in India’ (2009). In this ordering,

womanliness was superior to manliness, which in turn was superior to cowardice or failure of masculinity.

Gandhi sought to feminise politics by bringing women into the public realm, and also tried to make the independence movement more accessible to women, the young and the elderly, by shunning violence. Gandhi also participated in many activities that had traditionally been deemed feminine: for instance, one of his often used political techniques of public fasting had been inspired by the ritualistic private fasting of Hindu women; within his *Ashram* he took upon himself the nursing of ill inmates, another task usually thought to be feminine. Gandhi wanted to erase the boundaries between the feminine and the masculine: ‘A man should remain man and yet should become woman, similarly a woman should remain woman and yet become man’ (Quoted in Lal 1995). In fact, such was Gandhi’s desire to highlight the feminine within the masculine, that his grandniece titled his biography as *Bapu-My Mother* (Manuben Gandhi 1945).

One plank of Gandhi’s ideology was singled out by his detractors as being the most feminine: In an atmosphere where aggression and violence became the markers of masculinity, Gandhi’s call for non-violence flew directly in the face of the new trend of militarising Hindu men. Given this context, it is not entirely surprising that certain groups within the Hindu community urged Indians not to follow Gandhi’s advice: for instance, an Indian newspaper editorial noted ‘The sermon of *ahimsa* [non-violence] has emasculated the Hindu nation...We do not need Gandhi’s advice. They [the Hindu men] have to follow the teachings of Lord Krishna’ (*Sudharak* 1924).

These ideas of masculinity, the role of non-violence and the duty of the father of the nation were central to Nathuram V. Godse's understanding of Gandhian politics, and his decision to assassinate Gandhi. They also formed a large part of his statement to the court in the Gandhi Murder Trial.

In his psychoanalytic reading of Godse's actions and Gandhi's assassination, Nandy posits two main reasons why Godse was against Gandhi's politics. The first reason was Gandhi's view of the feminine. An important plank in Gandhi's philosophy was 'his rediscovery of womanhood as a civilising force in human society', and this was not always accepted well in a culture which had 'deep-seated conflicts and ambivalence about femininity' (1990). In India the traditional ambivalence towards femininity did not emerge because the feminine was seen as weak, rather, it was because the woman, as we have seen above, was a traditional symbol of the uncertainty of nature, power and aggression. As a result of which, in Indian society femininity was either abnegated or glorified out of all proportion as the goddess.

This view of women was particularly prevalent in the Brahminic/Sanskritic culture and was less common in the 'little cultures of India'. The latter were far more comfortable with the idea of the goddess and her control over the land and nature. This traditional mistrust came to be mixed with, and fed upon, the colonial/Western distrust of the feminine. As the elite in Indian society, the Brahmins were far closer to the colonial masters than the lower castes. This resulted in the Brahmins adopting colonial outlooks much earlier than the rest of the country. This closeness also added to the Brahminic distrust towards the feminine, as they sought to adopt the Western notions of power and masculinity, which viewed power and domination as a male



preserve, while subjection was seen as a feminine trait fit for the colonial subjects. (Nandy 1990).

In the face of this distrust, the Gandhian return to femininity<sup>12</sup> was particularly galling to his assassin Godse. The assassin, born Ramachandra Godse, was the fourth son born to a Maharashtrian Brahmin family where the previous three sons had died in infancy. Fearing a curse on the sons of the house, the parents sought to change Ramachandra's fate by bringing him up as a girl. His nose was pierced and he wore a *nath* or a nose-ring which gave birth to his new name Nathuram. Nandy argues that Nathuram Godse's upbringing as a girl forced him to adopt a hyper-masculine stance in order to underscore his maleness and 'to regain the lost clarity of his sexual role by becoming a model of masculinity' (1990). Hence, he fought particularly hard against Gandhi's inclusion of 'the feminine' within politics.

While his first reason for being against Gandhian politics arose out of his gender identity, his second conflict with Gandhi was based on his caste identity as an upper caste Hindu. Godse was a member of the Brahmin community, whose superiority Gandhi was seeking to challenge. Traditionally in Hindu society the Brahmins are the intellectuals and the Kshatriyas are the warriors; though the latter demonstrated the unpredictable and violent feminine energy within the Hindu way of thinking, they were seen as being the closest to the Western masculine ideal. This classification of Kshatriyas as 'masculine' allowed the British to distinguish this caste from the rest of the Hindus and designate them as a part of the 'martial races'

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<sup>12</sup> Kakar argues that it is the lack of oedipal complex in India and the ability of the child to identify with both the male and the female parent that in 1943 allowed Gandhi to publically proclaim that he had mentally become a woman (Kakar 2012).

in British India. The fact that this Western classification of masculine and feminine prevailed over the traditional Indian classification speaks volumes of the extent of the hybridity of the colonial Indian psyche.

We find that in Maharashtra, from where Godse and most of the assassins hailed, there was a weak presence of the Kshatriyas and as a result a particular group of Brahmins i.e. the Chitpavan Brahmins viewed themselves as both warriors and intellectuals. Thus, we see that as a Chitpavan Brahmin, Godse not just exhibited the influence of a Sanskritic/Brahminic culture, but also a culture that treasured masculinity and valour in men. Godse himself had started the Hindu Rashtra Dal (Hindu National Organisation) to fight the British and viewed non-violence as an emasculating force. In his trial Godse stated:

I firmly believed that the teachings of absolute *Ahimsa* [non-violence] as advocated by Gandhiji would ultimately result in the emasculation of the Hindu Community and thus make the community incapable of resisting the aggression or inroads of other communities especially the Muslims (1949).

Gandhi's attempt to return to the traditional Hindu idea of *purusatva* (masculinity), through his attempts at renouncing large parts of the material world, coupled with his attempts to incorporate the 'feminine' traits of nurturing and non-violence within the freedom movement were seen as attacks against Indian masculinity. This struggle between *purusatva* and Western notions of masculinity underpinned not only the Gandhi Murder Trial, it is also forms the basis of the modern Indian subject's relation to the nation and the lawmaker.

GANDHI AS FATHER, INDIA AS MOTHER

If we return to the Gandhi Murder Trial with our knowledge of the oedipal alliance, we find that this case epitomises the idea of the father within the hybridised colonial psyche of India. On the one hand, as we have seen in our discussion at the start of the essay, in the trial Godse displays shades of the classic oedipal complex because he portrays Gandhi as the primal father whose word is law. And we find within Godse, the son/subject, the corresponding desire to murder the lawmaker. On the other hand, the subject is unable to escape the Indian idea of the father as *guru* and consort of the land/nation. This in turn leads the subject to try and form an alliance with the father and hold him responsible for protecting the Mother/Mother Goddess. Godse's defence speech in the trial veers from one idea of the father to the other but, in its final instance, rests on the traditional Indian desire for the oedipal alliance.

There is an overwhelming presence of the nation-as-mother in Godse's life. As we have discussed above, this strong maternal presence forces the Indian son to seek out an oedipal alliance with the father. The idea of Gandhi as the protector of Mother India is captured beautifully in Figure 7. In this image by Prabhu Dayal, Mother India is begging god, in the form of a Shivling or statue of God Shiva, to protect her from the tyranny of British rule – represented in the form of a British Officer on horseback. Here Gandhi takes on the personage of the many armed god who attempts to protect the nation-as-mother. However, the father is also the consort of the mother and, therefore, in the eyes of the son has a duty to protect her.

Godse's speech leaves no doubt as to his belief that Gandhi had failed to adequately protect the motherland. Godse sought the father's alliance to carry out their shared duty of protecting the mother; however, when he felt that the father was not fulfilling this duty, he decided to murder him. The reason for this murder,

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crucially, is not oedipal rage, but the rage of a failed alliance. ‘Gandhiji is being referred to as the Father of the Nation – an epithet of high reverence. But if so, he has failed in his paternal duty in as much as he has acted very treacherously to the nation by his consenting to the partitioning of it’ (Godse 1949).



Figure 7 Prabhu Dayal, *Bharatuddhar (Protector of India)*, circa 1930. Shyam Sunder Lal, Cawnpore. Image courtesy of the Priya Paul Collection.

We see in the Gandhi Murder Trial that the father was murdered for two reasons: in the first instance the murder is marked by a hint of the oedipal conflict, where the father was no longer viewed as a tenable lawmaker, and a few sons of the nation banded together to murder the father in an attempt to institute a new source of law. In the second instance the same murder displays tones of an oedipal love, a belief that the father would act as protector. It is only when the father failed to protect the mother in the eyes of the Hindu nationalists and, thus, failed to protect the Hindus themselves, that they murdered him. This murder encapsulates the tumultuous relation of the Indian son with his father; a relation marked not only by the oedipal conflict but also a desire for an oedipal alliance, a hope and belief in the strength of the father.

This complicated relation with the father was repeatedly invoked by Godse during the trial:

I stoutly maintain that Gandhiji in doing so [allowing the partition of the country] had failed in his duty which was incumbent upon him to carry out, as the Father of the Nation. He has proved to be the Father of Pakistan. It was for this reason alone that I as a dutiful son of Mother India thought it my duty to put an end to the life of the so-called Father of the Nation, who had played a very prominent part in bringing about the vivisection of the country - Our Motherland.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argue that in the Indian imagination the figure of the mother is the most important familial figure, and the mother-son relation has a deep impact on the

son's relation with the father. Towards this end, to the familial setting of lawmaker-as-father and subject-as-son, I add the presence of the nation-as-mother. I use the Gandhi Murder Trial as a starting point to examine different Indian conceptions of the father and the subject's relation to the lawmaker-as-father.

I then examine the idea and graphic image of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India as it emerged within the Indian freedom movement in the late nineteenth century. While tracing the history of the figure, we find that it was used in various different ways by the Indian subject to establish a link to the land that surpassed his bond to positivistic colonial law. India is imagined as a Mother and Mother Goddess, one who is superimposed upon the map of the nation and acts as a rallying figure to urge her sons to drive away the foreign rulers. We also find that this role of the Mother and the Mother Goddess are closer to the Hindu imagination of the Goddess and at times antithetical to Islam, and this allows Hindu nationalists to posit not just the British, but also Muslims as the foreigner that threatens the Mother.

The idea of Mother India is deeply rooted within the notion of Mother Earth. If we examine traditional Hindu ideas of the role of the ruler, we find that the lawmaker is nothing more than the consort of the earth. Thus, the lawmaker-as-father is the consort/husband of the nation-as-mother, and while the former may change with time, the subject's relation to the latter is constant and supreme. The lawmaker is able to claim the subject only through his relation with the mother, and the father/lawmaker and the 'dutiful' son/subject share the responsibility of protecting the mother.

All these ideas come together within the Gandhi Murder Trial: in the Hindu nationalist subject's relation to the father of the nation or Gandhi we find evidence of

oedipal conflict, but this is overshadowed by the need for an oedipal alliance with the father, and a desire for his protection. As the father of the nation Gandhi is expected to ally with the son/subject to protect the mother; his perceived failure to perform these duties leads Godse to assassinate him. When the lawmaker-as-father fails to protect the nation, the subject chooses to sever all ties with the former and reassert his allegiance to the mother. The mother introduces the subject to the lawmaker and, if the lawmaker fails to fulfil his duties, the subject returns to the mother; for the maternal presence is eternal but the lawmakers change with time.



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