

**The Transformation of Domesticity as an Ideology:
Calcutta, 1880-1947.**

by
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Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of London
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

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1997



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Abstract

This study of the ideology of domesticity among the Bengali Hindu middle-class of Calcutta between 1880 and 1947 problematises the relation between anti-colonial nationalism and domesticity by contextualising it in a social history perspective. The thesis argues that the nationalist domestic ideology of the class was not a mere counter-discursive derivative of colonial power/knowledge. Its development was a dialectical process; in it the agency of the lived experience of domesticity, as the primary level of this group's reproduction of its class identity, material anxieties, status, and gender ideology, interacted with nationalist counter-discursive abstractions. This dialectic, the thesis argues, made the domestic ideology of the colonial middle class a transforming entity. Indeed, because of this dynamism, early nationalist essentialisations regarding domesticity disintegrated during the late colonial period (1920-1947).

Anti-colonial nationalism, crystallised by the late 19th century, spiritualised domesticity as a part of an essential 'inner-domain' that was upheld in order to culturally exteriorise the 'materialist' colonial sphere. But this interiorisation and spiritualisation was not a one-way process in which lived domesticity was passively inscribed from above by a preconceived nation. While nationalist abstractions sought to 'recast' the home, the lived domesticity of the class, in its turn, inscribed its agency on nationalism by acting as the fundamental lived unit which was paradigmatically extended to imagine and order the middle-class-led nation.

Given this dialectic, there was the possibility of the nationalist idealisation of the home changing if the lived situation of the class became substantially transformed. Contesting the ahistoricity of recent studies on nationalist domesticity, this thesis argues that such a transformation actually did come about in the period after the First World War. Under its impact, the dominant perception of domesticity changed, creating a discursive transformation that sidelined the ideology formulated in the late 19th-century. The spiritualist rhetoric disintegrated. So did the binary division that had projected the colonial sphere as the only 'outside' as against a harmonious 'inside' in which domesticity, community and the nation existed in an idealised continuum.

Thus, a domestic ideology, that anti-colonial consciousness had deeply integrated with the class's self-justification and claim to 'natural leadership', disintegrated largely under pressure. Consequently, it left behind the deep imprint of some of its expectations in the

middle-class consciousness. The disintegration thus generated a sense of disorientation rather than a liberating feeling for the middle-class majority on the eve of political independence.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis derives ultimately from my participant-observation that was always intrigued by the contradictions and complexities of the Bengali middle-class mentality, particularly in the Calcutta. My association with academia tended to contribute a criticality to this interest. But it was the patience, encouragement and insightful advice of my supervisor, David Arnold, that helped the interest to materialise into a sustained PhD project.

A Commonwealth scholarship at the Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies, London and later, a grant from the Charles Wallace India Trust provided the funding for this thesis. A study leave of three and a half years granted to me by my employers, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, enabled me to avail of the scholarship and complete the work. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the Department of History at Jadavpur for ungrudgingly bearing the extra burden of departmental duties that my long absence imposed on each of them. I should also take this opportunity to thank them for their valuable suggestions regarding source materials for my thesis.

I am grateful to the staff of the British Library, the India Office Library and Records, the University of London Library and the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. I take this opportunity to particularly thank Dipali Ghosh of the India Office Library. I also thank the staff of the West Bengal State Archives, the National Library, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat Library, the Sadharan Brahma Samaj Library, the Central Library, Jadavpur University and the Uttarpada Public Library. Raktim Sur, Baishali Datta and Kakoli Sinha Roy assisted me at different stages of my field-work in copying from source materials, too brittle to withstand xerographic reproduction; without their sincere assistance it would not have been possible for me to collect so much material in the short duration of my field-trip. I am deeply indebted to the numerous individuals, many of them octogenarians, who patiently agreed to be interviewed for hours in connection with this thesis. I thank all those families in Calcutta who gave me access to their cherished collection of personal memorabilia.

Friends in London have helped me cope with the malaise of the isolating experience of thesis-writing. Bajju and Zelpha have always enthusiastically welcomed my invasion of their time and household. I am also particularly indebted to Vibhuti, Joydeep, Erika, Supriya, Jane, Antigoni, Lopa, Anindita, John, Salima, Mustafa, Tanmoy, Ara, Sanjukta, Bhaswati, Charu, Subhadra, Aishwarj, Ajay, Rashmi, Amit, Jayati, Manjari, Suhit and Daud. Tanmoy, Ara, Daud, Subhadra, Charu and Sanjukta have, moreover, given valuable comments on the drafts

of the different chapters of this thesis. The responsibility for errors in the work, however, is entirely mine.

Debdas has borne all the inconvenience of single-handedly managing our home in Calcutta so that I could devote all my time to the thesis. Arka has bravely endured two long stretches of separation from his mother. The two big family-circles - parental and adoptive (by marriage) - that I belong to have been unfailing sources of encouragement. My mother and mother-in-law have been two of the greatest sources of strength and inspiration for me. Finally, this thesis would never have been completed without Bonti shielding Arka from the stark reality of my absence with her soothing presence.

London
1997

Sudeshna Banerjee

Abbreviations

<i>ABP</i>	<i>Amrita Bazar Patrika</i>
BE	Bengali Era
<i>BLAP</i>	<i>Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings</i>
BPTUC	Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress
CMC	The Calcutta Municipal Corporation
<i>CMG</i>	<i>Calcutta Municipal Gazette</i>
<i>EPW</i>	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>
UDHG	Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprasad Ghosh
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives
<i>RCRC-1920</i>	<i>Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into Land Values and Rents in Calcutta, 1920.</i>
<i>IESHR</i>	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>

Glossary

abhijata/abhijata bhadrakok: big zamindars and other Calcutta notables

adharna: antithesis of dharma

andar: segregated women's quarter in the Bengali household

artha: wealth; material resources

ashrama: any one of the stages into which the Vedic texts divided the human life-cycle in this world

badhu: bride

bahir: the outside; the world outside the women's apartment

battala: the world of inexpensive presses in Calcutta

bhadrakok: a social group whose gentility was defined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in terms of upper-caste status, (often) a zamindari or an intermediary tenurial right in land and abstention from manual labour

brahmacharya: abstinence from sensual pleasure; abstinence from sex before and outside marriage

chakri: office work, predominantly understood as clerical

chakure/chakre: one who subsists on chakri

dashakarma: Brahmanical life-cycle rituals

dharma: the totality of duties determined by one's station in the Vedic cosmological understanding of life

garhasthya: domesticity; the stage of marital-reproductive existence of the male

goonda: a blanket description by the police of criminals comprising smugglers, thieves, pick-pockets, cocaine-dealers and toughs

gotra: a clan-like unit which shares the name of an original Brahman priest-preceptor

grhadharma: dharma of the householder

grhalakkhi: housewife idealised as goddess Lakkhi

grhastha: (male) householder; middle class bhadrakok

grhi: (male) householder

grhini: female head of the women's domain in the household

jati: caste; race; nation

jatidharma: the totality of duties towards one's own caste

jnana: metaphysical knowledge

kama: (sexual) desire

kamini: woman as lust incarnate

karta: head of the household

kula: a clan in the sense of all male descendants of a common ancestral male, together with their wives and unmarried daughters

kuladharna: the totality of duties towards one's kula

moksha: Vedic understanding of salvation

naimittik karma: functional means to a spiritual (salvational) end

nishkama dharna: ideal of non-attachment

nishkama karma: action without worldly attachment; performance of duties without worldly attachment

nishkama: free from worldly desires

nityakarma: Brahmanical diurnal rituals

nivrtti: renunciation of worldly desires

panchayajna: five-fold oblation representing the duty of the householder to all from the dead ancestors to every living being.

pandit: a person learned in Sanskrit and the classical Hindu texts

paralok: the life hereafter

parartha: dedication to the good of others

paribar: the household-bound family

patibrata: one whose prime mission in life is subservience to the husband

patibratyaa: unquestioning subservience to the husband as the woman's only means to salvation

patidebata: husband as god

sahadharmini: wife; wife as an aide in the observance of the *dharna* of the householder

samaj: an essential field of moral consensus, more palpably represented in upper-caste, middle class kinship and neighbourhood linkages

samajik: pertaining to the samaj

sannyas: asceticism

sannyasi: ascetic

satitva: female chastity

shakti: the female principle; the divine mother also equated with the motherland.

shatkarma: a branch of Tantric practice aimed at controlling the lived world and environment

swartha: self-interest; consideration of one's own material gratification

vamsa: generally synonymous with kula

varnadharma: same as jatidharma in the given context

varnashrama: the Brahmanical division of society into four *varnas* - Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, and the division of the life-cycle of males of the twice-born *varnas* into four stages - brahmacharya, garhasthya, sanyas and vanaprastha

varnashramadharmā: the totality of duties pertaining to varnashrama

Explanatory Notes

Bengali authors, intellectuals and individuals discussed in this thesis have been referred to either by their full names or first names, following the Bengali convention. In the case of secondary sources, however, citation by the surname has been uniformly followed, in keeping with standard academic practice. The surnames of important personalities of the period, as well as those of authors of primary sources in Bengali, have been given in their pre-colonial form, and not in the Anglo-Indian adaptation. For example, Chattopadhyay, Mukhopadhyay, Ray, and Basu have been used instead of Chatterjee, Mukherjee, Roy and Bose respectively. Thus Rabindranath's surname has been given as Thakur and not Tagore. However, where Bengali authors have been cited exclusively in relation to their English writings, the thesis has retained the form in which they themselves spelt their names in their works. Thus, in referring to the observations of Shoshee Chunder Dutt, whose only work cited here is in English and is authored under the name spelt as above, we have abstained from citing him as Shashichandra Datta, as we would have otherwise done.

In the use of non-English words, a transcription closer to the Sanskrit pronunciation of consonants has been used only in relation to Brahmanical-scriptural concepts. But in the case of Bengali words that do not denote such concepts, an attempt has been made to transcribe as closely to Bengali consonant sounds as possible. The vowel system, however, follows the standard Sanskrit transcription. Thus, while *varnadharma* (and not *barnadharmā*) is the spelling used because of the Brahmanical association of this term, *paribar* (and not *parivar*) has been used because this term has no Brahmanical-Shastric significance, despite its Sanskrit origin. The same applies to the names of Bengali individuals and title of Bengali books. For instance, while in referring to the second *varna* in the Brahmanical hierarchy, the spelling Kshatriya has been used, in citing the name of a Bengali individual, we have preferred to use Khanaprabha (not Kshanaprabha).

Bengali books giving their date of publication only in terms of the Bengali Hindu calendar have been cited as such. The Gregorian equivalent of the Bengali year can be ascertained by adding 593/594 to the Bengali year. Thus, 1327 BE would be 1920-21 AD.

Introduction

Discussion of the relation between nationalism and middle-class domestic ideology in colonial Bengal - a relatively recent concern among historians - has emerged as a result of three main impulses. One is Benedict Anderson's characterisation of the nation as an 'imagined community'. Anderson's emphasis on the cultural self-description involved in the origination of the nation has reoriented studies of nationalism towards an identification of cultural sites and artefacts in terms of which a nation is imagined. In recent historiography on nationalism in India, domesticity has been identified as one such site. The second impulse is the Foucauldian turn in recent studies on colonialism and nationalism in India. The colonial regime of power and knowledge applied a discourse of cultural 'inferiority' and 'primitiveness' of the colonised to justify the latter's subjection and inequality in the sphere of the state. Nationalist counter-discourse, as recent studies have argued, asserted 'sovereignty' in an essentialised 'inner domain' of culture.¹ Domesticity was an aspect of this 'inner domain', where nationalist identity and colonial 'modernity' were fashioned in difference with the West. The third impulse, also often influenced by the Foucauldian concept of power/knowledge, has come from recent feminist writings on colonialism and Indian nationalism. They have shown how the nationalist patriarchal ideology essentialised women in the household as sites of chastity, purity, and unfailing succour, and upheld domesticity as the only 'natural sanctuary' for these 'virtues'.² Cumulatively, these trends have situated

¹ Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty have written extensively on domesticity, either directly or as part of other related issues. E.g., Partha Chatterjee, 'Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 233-53.; *idem*, 'A Religion of Urban Domesticity: Sri Ramakrishna and the Calcutta Middle Class', in Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 40-68; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 51-87; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 116-57. Also see Pradip Kumar Bose, 'Sons of the Nation', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 118-44.

² For feminist critique of the Bengali Hindu nationalist idealisation of womanhood, see Tanika Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalities and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Hyderabad, 1995, pp. 98-115; Jasodhara Bagchi, 'Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal', *EPW*, 25:42-43, 20-27 October 1990, pp. WS-65-WS 71; Indira Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity: The Making of a Hindu Discourse, Bengal 1867-1905', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1993; Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *EPW*, 22:47, 21 November 1987, pp. 2011-15.

domesticity and women therein as sites on the contentious intersection of both the colonial and nationalist axes of power/knowledge.

Most of these studies, strictly speaking, are analyses of nationalist discourse by way of contribution to feminist theory or cultural theory on colonial modernity or nationalism or all of these. But this thesis, in seeking to reproblematised and recontextualise the question of the relation between nationalism and domesticity, engages with the ideology of domesticity between 1880 and 1947 as a part of social history. It concentrates on analysing relevant discourses among the Bengali Hindu middle class of Calcutta during the period as subjective constructions. But it does not confine itself to a deconstruction of texts, symbols and imaginings. Going beyond such analysis, it tries to situate them in a historical perspective and in a complex dialectical interaction with the specificities of time and space.

This study, however, also has a more problematised historiographical perspective. It derives its question from a wider retrospective search for clues to the post-colonial predicament of the Bengali Hindu urban middle class in its colonial experience and the specificity of its nationalist self-definition. However, the particular perspective on the post-colonial situation that underlies this thesis is very different from recent highly theorised, post-modernist discussions of post-coloniality.³ What this thesis keeps at the back of its investigation is a historical and sociological identification of substantive paradoxes in the everyday existence of the class in the immediate post-colonial period. One may briefly outline some of the more significant ones. Compared with their counterparts in many parts of North India, a rigid caste ideology had become much less relevant among the post-colonial Bengali middle class in its 'public' life. In this sense, the class had significantly moved away from the early nationalist rhetoric of caste. Yet, caste was still protected at the level of the family and kin mainly through marriages. Also, the alternative bench-marks, like 'cultured' familial background that had recently come to replace the rhetoric of upper-caste status, in effect served the same statusing function. Higher education of women increasingly became a norm, contradicting the moral stance of the middle-class majority in the early 20th century. Opposition to women's employment outside the home - in 'respectable' professions - was being rapidly overcome. And yet, a discriminate investment of 'chastity' in the female body continued in all segments of male social opinion. Furthermore, however educated or

³ For theoretical perspectives on post-coloniality (general and Indian) see Kumkum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', *Cultural Critique*, 7, Fall, 1987, pp. 157-86; Helen Tiffin and Ian Adams (eds), *Past the Last Post: Theorising Post-colonialism and Post-Modernism*, London, 1991; Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, 1995; Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee (eds), *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, Shimla, 1996.

professionally successful the woman might be, domestication was still forcefully projected as the justification of her womanhood, as the popular Bengali cinema of the 1950s and 60s aptly illustrates. The perception of the male was hyper-sensitive about masculinity, in terms of which all 'public' assertion tended to be imagined. Yet, the bulk of the average-level fiction and films had come to thrive on sentimentality, often crassly tear-jerking. In contradistinction to the pre-colonial or even the late 19th-century morality, a relative 'privatisation' of conjugality and the immediate family had become morally recognised even within the pre-existing norm of the extended family. Despite this, the nuclear family never acquired moral justification. Again, unlike in the late 19th century, some kind of a disjunction between the 'private' and the 'public' was now ideologically upheld. Yet, a dialectical complementarity and complete split between the two remained irrelevant to middle-class attitudes. Above all, amidst the immediate post-independence euphoria of the five-year plan and new political programmes, the everyday life of the class suffered from a pervasive feeling of 'loss' of domestic and 'public' morality. It is significant that the new generation of authors who started writing novels in the 1950s on the urban middle-class situation, were appreciated by critics of the same generation as writing amidst the 'degeneration' of middle-class values.⁴ Indeed, this generation marked the point from which the possibility of 'ever going back' to the idealism of even the young authors of the 1920s, not to speak of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Thakur (Tagore), was sealed.⁵ In actual life, there had emerged a suffocating perception of 'narrowness' in domestic existence and a consequent restless desire to redeem it in social involvement in the space outside the household. At the same time there was the tendency to burrow defensively into domesticity for the protection of class, status and gender.

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Without in any way denying the presence and importance of other factors in contributing to the post-colonial peculiarities of the class, this thesis seeks to highlight the interesting role that the domestic ideology of the class also had in the matter. Within the overall colonial determination of the class's nationalist ideology, domesticity was one of the most important sites that reproduced this group's nationalist and class identity. More importantly, domesticity was a vital aspect of what recent scholarship has rightly identified as the ideological securing of an essentialised 'inner domain', where the colonised male protected his sovereignty as a means to contesting colonial hegemony.⁶ This thesis adds that

⁴ Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima: Bangla Upanyaser Shat Bachhar: 1923-1982*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 129-48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶ See Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 6-11; Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography', pp. 2011-15.

domesticity, indeed, supplied the idiom which made the imagined 'inner domain' palpable as a human unit.

Historians have suggested that an idealised domesticity, defined as an integral part of the nationalist self-description in the latter half of the 19th century, determined the ethos of the Bengali middle class with significant implications for the post-colonial mentality.⁷ This thesis supports the idea that the early nationalist essentialisation of domesticity ^{or femininity!} left a lasting impact on the frame of the Bengali middle-class mind. But, it argues that for an understanding of the implications of the nationalist ideology of domesticity for the post-colonial, the study of early nationalist essentialisations is necessary but not sufficient. An exclusive concentration on the late 19th- and early 20th-century domestic ideology that characterises post-modernist writings on nationalism and domesticity misses an important dialectic. This thesis argues for a consideration of the dialectic of the early nationalist essentialisations on the one hand and their transformation in the period from the First World War on the other; only thus could one arrive at an adequately nuanced understanding of the exact legacy of the anti-colonial nationalist ideology of domesticity for post-colonial dilemmas.

Any tendency to draw conclusions about the nationalist discourse on domesticity exclusively on the basis of late 19th-century ideological stances should reckon with two particularly vital aspects of the transformation in the moral perspective on domesticity. This study agrees that one significant early nationalist impulse was to ascribe an essential 'spirituality' to domesticity (as a part of the 'inner domain'), protecting it against the 'materialism' of the colonial sphere and the West. But, it is argued, this spiritualising rhetoric disintegrated during the inter-war period. The same period saw the disintegration of the early nationalist notion of a harmonious 'inside' that had been idealistically upheld in order to culturally exteriorise the colonial sphere. In the late 19th-century didactic literature, domesticity had been idealised with help of an abstract rhetoric of the *dharma* (the totality of duties determined by one's station in the Vedic understanding of life) of the householder; this rhetoric helped the imagining of an 'inside' where domesticity, upper-caste middle-class society and the nation existed in an unbroken continuum. But it needs emphasising that this empowering rhetoric of continuum came to be swamped by a defensive identification of domesticity with the spatially finite household.

⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty studies colonial Bengali domesticity to explain how even today the project of creating citizen-subjects for India is, according to him, 'continually disrupted by other imaginations of family, personhood and the domestic'. Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral', pp. 51-88.

Thus the legacy for the post-colonial period was not a straight-forward reiteration of the dualist essentialisms of early nationalist domestic morality. The paradox of the late colonial period (c 1920s to 47) was that a domestic ideology, that anti-colonial consciousness had deeply integrated with the class's ontological and social self-justification, disintegrated under pressure. But, it left behind the deep imprint of some of its expectations in the middle-class consciousness. The disintegration, thus, generated a sense of disorientation rather than a liberating feeling for the middle-class majority on the eve of political independence. The class entered the post-colonial phase of its history not with an optimistic ideology centring round domesticity, but with a pervasive sense of 'loss' of domestic morality. This sense of 'loss' and lack of self-justification in domesticity came to affect, as we will see, the social attitudes and political involvement of the class on the very eve of independence. The desperate restlessness to break out of this 'loss' and socially justify themselves had a role, as we will argue, in determining the overlapping participation of the middle-class males in two diametrically opposed mobilisations. In the assertion of the class through Left-led, non-communal strikes and the communal riots, both in 1946, one can discern the idiom of post-colonial paradoxes.

This transformation has been overlooked by existing historiography because of the dominant trend in studying nationalist domesticity as a mere counter-discursive narrative solely derivative of the colonial discourse of power and knowledge. Scholars have not highlighted the transforming relation between nationalist essentialisation of domesticity on the one hand and the domestic lived experience of the class on the other. By contextualising the subject of discussion in social history, this thesis strongly emphasises the need for a dialectical approach to the moral discourse on domesticity. Domestic ideology, from the 1870s, came to reflect the anxiety to 'recast' the Bengali home with abstract 'virtues' inculcating an essentialised difference with the West. On the other hand, it embodied the dynamics of domesticity as a lived experience with its own operative history and material anxieties. In a cultural formation where the family (not the individual) was perceived as the most basic unit of social existence, the household played a primary role in reproducing class, caste, gender and stratification within the class. The derivative essentialisms and blanket statements of cultural difference with the rulers were nuanced, modified and diversified from the beginning by this reproductive role of domesticity. Not only did the middle-class household contribute to shaping its ideal image in nationalist discourse, it also exerted a powerful influence on the specific modality by which the nation itself was imagined and sought to be ordered. In the absence, as yet, of a congealed political nation, the upper-caste,

middle-class family-household was the most fundamental lived unit that could be ideationally extended to imagine an ordered nation.

One significant piece of evidence for the diversifying impact of this dialectic was that in spite of the same experience of colonial subjection there were, in the late 19th century, two distinct discursive formations on domestic morality within the same Bengali Hindu middle class. As we will note subsequently in the discussion, the 'reformed'-Hindu discourse (including the Brahmo voice) was distinct from the one that this thesis terms as neo-Brahmanic.⁸ Basing itself on the neo-Brahmanic morality, as the dominant one among the Bengali Hindu middle class in Calcutta, the present study argues that the decline of this strand of ideology after the First World War, was largely attributable to the dynamics of the lived domestic situation. We find that from after the 1920s this discourse gradually disintegrated, unable to meet the pressure of both new discursive developments and changes in social and domestic lived experience. Domesticity came increasingly to be perceived in terms of such overt physicality and worldliness that it became extremely difficult to invest a rhetoric of spirituality in urban domestic chores and relationships. Also, the early nationalist configurations of the 'inside' and the 'outside' in relation to domesticity were transformed; the dualism was diluted by new 'pressures' that created a nervous perception of a potentially unreliable 'outside' (other than the colonial sphere) surrounding the immediate family-household. And this 'outside' emerged within the hitherto idealised, unbroken sweep of the imagined nation.

This decline of the neo-Brahmanic ideology even during the colonial period enables us to address certain theoretical perspectives on colonialism. It shows that in colonial situations, the contestation between the colonial discourse of power and the nationalist counter-discourse does not exhaust the possible range of contradictions.⁹ The Bengali middle class's growing perception of a second 'outside' was an indication that the facile dualism of early nationalist essentialisms could not sustain themselves, with other contradictions sharpening from the 1920s. These sharpened contradictions fractured the idealised sweep of the nation, surrounding middle-class domesticity with numerous agencies in relation to which it felt vulnerable. This dynamism shows that the rich insights of recent post-modernist writings on

⁸ Though it incorporated fragments of Victorian ideals mainly relating to household management, this ideology was based, in its fundamentals, on Brahmanical metaphysical concepts and a fairly large repertoire of Shastric moral codes.

⁹ See Sumit Sarkar's critique of the recent writings that give the impression that the contestation between colonial and nationalist discourses represented the only noteworthy antagonism in the colonial situation. Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited: Saidian Frameworks in the Writing of Modern Indian History', *Oxford Literary Review*, 16:1-2, 1995, pp. 205-24.

middle-class nationalist discourse are really illuminating only when they are interwoven with the historic specificity of the class and its change over time.

The need to ground post-modernist and feminist critiques in a greater sense of history is particularly acute in the field of scholarship on nationalist discourse on Bengali Hindu domesticity and women. In the West, by the time Foucault's influence came to sweep academia, the family and domesticity were already a densely historicised field,¹⁰ which the Foucauldian perspective further enriched. But, in India, there had been no substantial earlier enquiry into the social history of domesticity and the family when the new Foucault-inspired trend of rethinking colonialism and nationalism was initiated. In historical studies on Bengal, Meredith Borthwick had already worked on the changing role of women in middle-class households in the 19th century. But in focusing on women - that, too, on the microscopic world of Brahma women - her work was not intended to be a social history of domesticity, except tangentially.¹¹ In the recent feminist and post-modernist historiography on Bengali domesticity, therefore, the home has been almost exclusively highlighted as an objectified site, contested by rival discourses of power - colonial and nationalist. In these writings, domesticity appears as some kind of a mirror-image of the nation, with no history of its own predating the colonial impact and no agency in shaping its own transformation. Although otherwise incisive, these studies have not engaged in a comprehensive study of domestic morality in all its ontological complexity and its integral relation to the socio-cultural base of its production. This seems to have created the impression of a homogeneous, middle-class, nationalist discourse on domesticity, evolving, as it were, without any trace of determination by the pre-existing structures and material realities of middle-class existence.

This lack of social contextualising has resulted in generalisations based on a confounding of differing discursive formations. Most conspicuously, these studies have not distinguished between a majority world of neo-Brahmanic didactic tracts and a minority world of a-Brahmanic ones. Importantly, the latter justified domesticity with a rhetoric that did not project the ideological package associated with *nishkama karma* (action and/or ritual performance free from worldly attachment) and *paralok* (the life hereafter); the constant appeal to Shastric injunctions was also absent. What has also been glossed over is that the

¹⁰ Beginning in the 1960s, the history of domesticity and the family in the West became a highly specialised area of research. By the 1970s it covered three broad areas - the demographic, the ideological-attitudinal and the household-economic. For the demographic approach see T. P. R. Laslett and R. Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time*, London, 1972, for the mentality approach, P. Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, New York, 1962; J. L. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, Cambridge, 1979, and for the household-economics approach J. Goody *et al.* (eds), *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, Cambridge, 1976.

¹¹ Meredith Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal: 1849-1905*, Princeton, 1984.

rhetoric of gender and the nature of incorporation of Victorian ideals were different in the two discursive worlds. The minority discourse absorbed Victorian ideals of domesticity in a more straightforward manner whereas in the dominant discourse, Victorian elements were appropriated selectively and that too within the rhetoric of over-all Brahmanical superiority over the West.¹² Within the limited space available, this thesis concentrates on the majority moral discourse alone, but it is necessary at the outset to keep this underlying difference in mind.

Confounding the two discursive worlds has confused some of the otherwise incisive recent analyses of discourses on domesticity and womanhood.¹³ Partha Chatterjee, in his interpretation of how the nationalist middle class (which he presents as undifferentiated) 'recast' women, frequently cites instances from both segments as if they were one. His elision of coercion of women by 19th-century nationalist males and his theory of co-option into the nationalist 'recasting' through gentle persuasion is based on such confusion. In a generalising tone he remarks that in their time Chandramukhi Bose and Kadambini Ganguli were 'celebrated as examples of what Bengali women could achieve in formal learning'. In doing so he overlooks that in the world of the majority discourse, Kadambini and other women with higher education were widely ridiculed. Again, he generalises the contempt of the non-'Westernised' Hindu for such items of clothing as the blouse and petticoat overlooking, in this instance, that the Brahmos expected middle-class women to wear these.¹⁴ Similarly, scholars have generalised the minority world of 'reformed' discourse to imply that strategies of control based on Manu were not so relevant to the late 19th-century discourse on women.¹⁵ Some have also magnified the minority discourse to conclude that by the late 19th century the middle class had accepted that the 'joint family' system was soon going to collapse.¹⁶ In critiquing this homogenisation of middle-class discourses, it is not implied that there were no

¹² This study, in its limited space, avoids going into a detailed analysis of the difference between the two discourses. The difference, however, becomes obvious if the characteristics of neo-Brahmanic didactic literature, analysed in Chapter One are compared with those of the other discursive formation. For an example of the latter, see Shibnath Shastri, *Grhadharma*, Calcutta, 1880. In *Bharat Ashram*, established by Keshabchandra Sen, families lived together and cultivated the lifestyle of the English middle class. (See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 65).

¹³ However, two feminist scholars writing on 19th-century Bengali middle-class attitudes have treated their material in explicit awareness of the existence of and difference between the two worlds of discourse. See Himani Bannerji, 'Attired in Virtue: Discourse on Shame (*lajja*) and Clothing of the *Bhadramahila* in Colonial Bengal', in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 67-106; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester, 1995.

¹⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 122, 128. For an analysis of sartorial 'recasting' of Brahmo women, see Bannerji, 'Attired in Virtue', pp. 67-106.

¹⁵ See Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalities', pp. 98-115.

¹⁶ Bose, 'Sons', pp. 118-44.

overlaps or similarities between these two worlds of discourse.¹⁷ But it is essential to appreciate their distinctness because it brings into sharp focus the importance of stratification and differentiation within the class. The minority discourse was associated with a more 'Westernised' life-style and largely corresponded to the intellectually Victorianised and the more (professionally) 'successful' minority within the class in Calcutta. The neo-Brahmanic discourse, on the other hand, reflected the existence of a vast majority of non-'reformed', middle-class Hindus in the city.

It may be useful to outline here the broader themes that this study of domestic ideology relates to. It should already be evident that the thesis seeks to understand the Bengali Hindu middle-class discourse on domesticity as integrally related to the colonial context which gave that class its peculiar character. As a class aspiring to hegemonise subordinate groups, it was itself subordinated, however, to the economic, administrative and discursive grids of colonial power. In recent years the understanding of the colonial impact has been enriched by theoretical inspiration from Foucault's formulation of power/knowledge and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Foucault's analysis of the underlying assumptions of knowledge as power in post-Enlightenment Western society has inspired a critical review of Western knowledge about the colonised world.¹⁸ Taking his cue from Foucault's theory of the discourse of dominance, Edward Said analyses how imperialist discourses create an imaginary 'knowledge' about the Orient for the exercise of imperial power.¹⁹ So far as the applicability of Said's framework to the present enquiry is concerned, one can say that the formation of the neo-Brahmanic discourse on domesticity was deeply conditioned by imperialist and colonial hegemonic knowledge. This knowledge encompassing family structures, physique, sense of hygiene, diet, womanhood, sexuality and so on, constructed an essential difference between the colonised and the 'superior' race of colonisers. But Said's assumption of total domination foreclosing the possibility of discourses capable of countering it, is not borne out in the present case.²⁰ It will be shown here how the neo-Brahmanic discourse, indeed, resisted significant parts of the imperialist and colonial constructions. Though the ideology internalised Western modes of reasoning, it incorporated Western ideals

¹⁷ For differences and overlaps in intellectual attitudes between Brahmos and 'revivalist' Hindus, see Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism In Bengal, 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, Delhi, 1993.

¹⁸ See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, trans. Richard Howard, London, 1971; *idem*, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon, Brighton, 1980.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Harmondsworth, 1991.

²⁰ For a recent critique of this Saidian assumption, see Aijaz Ahmad, 'Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said', *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London, 1992, pp. 159-219.

only selectively and subsumed them within what was overtly intended as an oppositional identity. Moreover, as already indicated, the colonial discourse, though evidently the most powerful and dominant, was not the only source of power in the colonial situation.²¹ The neo-Brahmanic ideology, in defining an essential difference of Bengali domesticity with the colonial sphere (and the West), indeed upheld some aspects of the pre-existing, pre-colonial structures of power and authority. Prominent among them were the extended-familial structure of patriarchy, the authority of age over youth, and that of kin, caste and the *samaj*²² over the family. Nor did colonial power make class and gender extinct as sources of hegemony; they were only reconstituted and reactivated by colonialism. Tanika Sarkar and Mrinalini Sinha persuasively argue that because of a complex, multivalent relationship between gender and colonialism, the latter at times 'compromised with indigenous patriarchy'.²³ They argue that in the late 19th century it was the 'revivalist'-nationalist patriarchy that colonial power privileged over the reformist-nationalist one. And for us it is significant that the 'revivalist' segment was the base of production of the neo-Brahmanic ideology. It is true that colonialism had created the middle class as one with no material power of coercion. But power manifested itself in the discursive strategies of the class, seeking to assert 'natural leadership' in the colonial situation. This is probably another reason that made domesticity so important for the middle class under colonial domination. Leadership was claimed on the basis of the supposedly innate morality of the class, largely consisting in its 'exemplary' observance of the *dharma* of the householder that was said to be integrating and sustaining the *samaj*.

The engagement of this study with nationalism has already been indicated. We begin in the late 19th century with the crystallisation of a domestic ideology clearly as a correlate of the newly emerged consciousness of belonging to a nation. Almost every didactic piece on domesticity in the late 19th and early 20th century expressed its concern with 'building' and 'strengthening' the nation. The nation, however, is not understood in this thesis as something objectively given. Benedict Anderson's work, in particular, has persuaded social scientists and historians to understand the nation as an 'imagined community'.²⁴ Among the Bengali Hindu middle class, the imagining of a national identity involved, among other things, an

²¹ In critiquing the writings on Indian history that have used a Saidian framework, Sumit Sarkar has drawn attention to their tendency to present colonial knowledge as the originary moment and the only form of power in the colonial situation. Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited', pp. 205-24.

²² This configuration has been explained subsequently.

²³ Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *EPW*, 28:36, 4 September 1993, pp. 1869-78; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn, London, 1991.

essentialisation of Bengali Hindu domesticity. The present study, however, upholds the pertinence of Partha Chatterjee's critique of Anderson's observation that nationalist 'elites' in Asia and Africa have borrowed modular forms of imagining nationhood from the Western experience of nationalism. Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism was posited not on an identity but rather on a difference with the modular forms of the national society propagated by the modern West.²⁵

As the 'virtues' of the ideal domesticity flowed from the characteristics of the imagined nation, one has to see what the boundaries of the imagined nation were. In the colonial context, the nation was necessarily defined in primary contradiction with the colonial presence and its discourse of power. However, besides this basic feature, it acquired other attributes that made its exact content vary in the writings of the Bengali middle class.²⁶ A reading of the normative literature on domesticity clearly indicates that throughout the period the ideal nationalist household was overwhelmingly imagined as a Hindu one.²⁷ Territorially, Bharatbarsha was sometimes invoked in the late 19th century but was consciously used by the more intellectually sophisticated minds. The vast majority of the massive output of tracts on domesticity revealed a fuzziness at the outer extremities of the perceived nation. The palpable core that they usually gave to the nation was Hindu Bengal. And from the domestic ideals, rituals and 'duties' prescribed, it was evidently the upper-caste middle-class domesticity that was generalised as national. The life-styles of the lower classes and castes were hegemonically silenced in the nationalist domesticity, as it was imagined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Linguistically and territorially, the outer periphery might have gradually come to include groups like the Rajputs, the Punjabis and the Marathas.²⁸ But in the tracts on domesticity, the ideal home continued to be overwhelmingly situated in a more palpable core where the nation, whatever its nebulous extremities, was represented as Bengali. And this thesis argues that the lived experience of domesticity had a very important role in the crystallising of this core.

Indeed, the likelihood of domesticity as a lived experience determining the imagining of the nation has not been adequately probed in the existing historiography on the Bengali home and the nation. Almost all the works in question focus on domesticity (and women or children

²⁵ Chatterjee, *The Nation*, p. 7.

²⁶ For a discussion on the boundaries of the nation as it was imagined by the intelligentsia in colonial Bengal, see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 1-39.

²⁷ Also see Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity' for the predominant attempt of the Hindu middle class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to negotiate an oppositional identity informed and shaped by Hindu ideas.

²⁸ Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution', p. 16.

therein) as a site (and subjects) sought to be disciplined and 'recast' by nationalism; they have not concerned themselves directly with the process of conceptualising the nation. Partha Chatterjee's recent work is an exception; it simultaneously addresses both the origination of the nation among the Bengali middle class and the question of domesticity.²⁹ Unfortunately, however, Chatterjee stands the middle-class conceptualisation of the nation on its head. He interpolates, in effect, a pre-conceived nation that selectively and unilaterally overdetermined supposedly passive sites like the household and the family. This thesis argues that in the late 19th century, rather than any pre-conceived nation being used to inform the family field with 'virtues' from above, domesticity, imagined in the paradigmatic form of the extended family, was made to release 'virtues' which could be extended into a conceptualised nation. After all, the family-household, where the middle-class male felt the least impeded in imagining himself as sovereign, was the most fundamental lived unit on the basis of which an ordered nation could be imagined. When this idealised extension of domesticity into the nation was fractured, in the period from the 1920s, by a significant voice separating middle-class domesticity from nationalist mass politics, it was again the lived experience of contemporary domesticity that largely determined this distancing. By the 1920s, despite the imagining of a core where the nation was Bengali, all-India nationalist politics had pushed other linguistic groups into the palpable orbit of the Bengali-imagined nation. It is interesting to note how, in this situation, the Bengali home was the site from which the class felt, and actively reproduced, a distance from such groups as the Marwaris, Biharis and Oriyas.

Another possibility that has remained unexplored in existing studies is that the idealised relation between domesticity and the nation was actually transformed during the colonial period. In feminist studies on Bengal, the preponderance of a synchronic perspective on nationalist myth-making, to the neglect of the changing discursive strategies of control at the practical level of everyday domesticity, has inhibited a diachronic perspective.³⁰ Again, neither Partha Chatterjee's exploration into middle-class domesticity and national identity nor Dipesh Chakrabarty's exploration into the Bengali home and colonial-nationalist modernity has considered the possibility of any substantial transformation between the 1870s and

²⁹ Chatterjee, *The Nation*.

³⁰ Dagmar Engels's study is probably the only one that seriously considers the practical strategies of control and their change over time. But a systematic, critical exploration into the relation between nationalism and domestic control has remained outside the focus of her thesis, precluding any consideration of a transformation in this regard. Dagmar Engels, 'The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, c. 1890-1930, with Special Reference to British and Bengali Discourse on Gender', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1987.

1947.³¹ This thesis seeks to break this impression of an immutable relationship between domesticity and the nation. It tries to show how changes from the inter-war period onwards precluded the extension of domesticity to the imagined nation. This had important consequences for the ideology of domesticity and post-coloniality.

Within the over-all discursive context of nationalism and domesticity in colonial Bengal, this thesis, however, specifically focuses on the ideology of domesticity as a function of order in the middle-class household, colonial society and the imagined nation.³² It studies how the middle class deployed a coherent set of meanings, laden with the class's own consideration of power, to discipline and idealise its domesticity as the moral-cultural legitimisation of its claim to 'natural leadership' in colonial society. The neo-Brahmanic ideology is studied as the dominant attempt by the Bengali Hindu middle class to consciously rationalise and systematise its moral and cultural values as the only legitimate and metaphysically justified norm of practical behaviour.³³ Inside the middle-class household it rationalised the patriarchal hegemonising of youths, women and children through mechanisms of surveillance and welfare. Where colonial society was concerned, the ideology sought to subjectify the lower orders as necessarily requiring middle-class leadership, in order to be initiated into a disciplined and morally exalted way of life.

It should be made clear, in passing, that this is a study of the male's definition of domestic ideology. The direct agency of women in defining domestic morality is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, anyone seeking to grasp the comprehensiveness of the historical perspective, should necessarily situate the subject of this thesis in relation to - indeed, in a dialectical relationship with - women's own definition of domestic ideology. Already an impressive amount of critical literature, albeit mostly relating to India in general or areas other than Bengal, has accumulated on the subject of women's agency in the acceptance of, or resistance to, the nationalist ideology of the family.³⁴ However, in the

³¹ Chatterjee, *The Nation*; Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral'; *idem*, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37, 1992, pp. 1-25; *idem*, 'Open Space/Public Space: Garbage, Modernity and India', *South Asia*, 14:1, 1991, pp. 15-31.

³² For the broad universe within which this understanding of ideology is situated, see Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, Oxford, 1977; Bhikhu Parekh, *Marx's Theory of Ideology*, London, 1982; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds Quentin Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London, 1971; Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*; *idem*, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London, 1977; *idem*, *Power/Knowledge*; Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*, London, 1980.

³³ We have identified the neo-Brahmanic ideology as dominant in the sense that, judging by the sheer preponderance of its production and reproduction, it was the most pervasive among the Bengali middle class up to the 1920s.

³⁴ For the view that women could not inscribe their subjectivity on the nationalist domain as individuals, apart from their families, see Gail Minault, 'The Extended Family as Metaphor and Expansion of Family Realm', in Minault (ed.), *The Extended Family: Women and Political*

limited space of the present work, women's role has been considered only in so far as their everyday behaviour interfered with their smooth 'recasting' by the nationalist patriarchy. It will be indicated how women's non-conformity with many aspects of male-determined norms involved the male nationalist ideology in complex manoeuvres in its bid to hegemonise the women's domain. Again, when the thesis argues that the language of women's domination became transformed during the period of the 1930s and 40s, it recognises that women's agency had an important role in inducing this transformation.

In regard to the question of ordering, this thesis finds a serious problem with the existing post-modernist and feminist writings on nationalist 'recasting' of Bengali domesticity and women. It is surprising that these writings have overlooked the pronounced material underpinnings that the nationalist ordering of the household also had. This thesis tries to show how the neo-Brahmanic ideology reflected, among other things, the middle-class anxiety in the colonial situation, to order domesticity as a materially viable field. After all, in the colonial situation, the economic viability of the household was one of the essential safeguards against state intervention in domesticity. One of the reasons why the early nationalist essentialisations disintegrated was that the idealised 'self-sufficiency' of the household in relation to the colonial sphere and the market in consumer goods became increasingly impracticable after the First World War.

This thesis does not, however, confine the notion of ordering to a concept of disciplining.³⁵ We would argue that in anti-colonial nationalism, the particularly heavy investment of spirituality in domesticity made the moral ordering of the home also a matter of personal, ontological self-justification. Nationalism as an ideology is better understood, as Anderson claims, by aligning it not with self-consciously held ideologies but with the deeply embedded cultural values which help it to come into being.³⁶ We argue that this was even more applicable in the case of colonial nationalism. Because of the middle-class male's

Participation in India and Pakistan, Delhi, 1981, pp. 3-18. For the view that women asserted their agency in both acceptance of and challenge to the nationalist ideology of the family, see Kamala Visweswaran, 'Family Subjects: An Ethnography of the "Women's Question" in Indian Nationalism', PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1990.

³⁵ A mechanical application of Foucault's framework to the colonial middle-class family in Bengal has made Pradip Kumar Bose's study of patriarchal control over the child appear ruthlessly power-laden to the point of being unproblematic and ahistorical. This in effect makes the nationalist discourse of the colonial middle-class appear to be on the same level of hegemonic confidence as capitalism in the West. Bose, 'Sons', pp. 118-44. By contrast, Shibaji Bandyopadhyay's study of nationalist inscription of childhood proves to be remarkably insightful and sensitive, as it interweaves the question of power with the deep sense of vulnerability of the colonised adult male. Shibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dandasamas: Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishusahitya*, Calcutta, 1991.

³⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 12.

feeling of compromise and humility in the colonial sphere, attachment to the 'spiritualist' self-justification in domesticity was fervent to the point of being 'natural'. At one level the male head of the colonial middle-class family was a self-conscious executor of household disciplining, at another, he was himself a fervent believer in the 'spiritual' order of domesticity. Gramsci's relaxation of a strict dichotomy between arbitrary and thoroughly self-conscious ideology on the one hand and belief system on the other probably helps us understand this situation better; it is all the more pertinent because Gramsci suggested this relaxation without abandoning the understanding of ideology as fundamentally a function of control.³⁷ An important cause of the mental crisis of the 1930s and 40s (and beyond) lay in the erosion of this deeply redeeming 'spiritualist' rhetoric. Disorientation was only to be expected among the middle-class majority who did not divest the home of its accustomed 'spirituality' out of choice but because of unavoidable changes in their material existence.

The question of class is extremely important for the central concern of this thesis. Given the specificity of the colonial middle class in Bengal, it was largely through its domestic morality that it sought to create and sustain its class identity and claim 'natural leadership' in colonial society. This thesis does not engage in a detailed discussion of the debates regarding the concept of class; nor does it go into a detailed examination of the different views regarding the applicability of class to the social group under review.³⁸ We start by assuming that this middle class was largely created by the dynamics of colonial administrative, judicial and educational apparatus rather than by full-blooded capitalist development and so could not be called a bourgeoisie in the classic sense of that term. The group that we are looking at may be sociologically defined on the basis of their vocation and life-style. On the one hand, they were distinct from the Calcutta notables - the big zamindars, merchants and other people who had made money through employment with the East India Company or as junior partners of British merchants.³⁹ On the other hand, they were clearly separate from the toilers.⁴⁰ Educated and semi-educated, the middle-class people were either in the liberal professions or in paid employment as bureaucrats (in the lower echelons) and

³⁷ Gramsci, *Selections*, pp. 326, 377.

³⁸ For an interpretation of this class as an 'elite' group defined primarily by caste status, see John H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*, Berkeley, 1968; Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1968. For the view that this was a new social group, produced by a new political economy created by the colonial administrative apparatus, see B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Delhi, 1961. For a different version which looks upon the group under consideration as a new class see Rajat K. Ray, 'Three Interpretations of Indian Nationalism' in B. R. Nanda (ed.), *Essays in Modern Indian History*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 1-39.

³⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 66-69; S. N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38', *Calcutta: Myths and History*, Calcutta, 1977, pp. 20, 26.

⁴⁰ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 66-69.

college teachers, but more overwhelmingly, as school teachers and clerks.⁴¹ Often belonging to 'respectable' families in the countryside, theirs became the more decisive voice in Calcutta society because their numbers swelled with new opportunities of education and employment offered by the city after the Mutiny. The economic indices of the 'middleness' of this group's social standing coexisted, however, with status.⁴² Status usually derived from some form of intermediary tenure in land⁴³ and almost invariably from membership of any one of the upper castes - Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas. As status operated alongside the more material indices as a marker of this class, it made room within the class for people not necessarily pursuing the above vocations. There were Brahmans subsisting on priesthood or as members of the old literati, teaching as *pandits* (persons learned in Sanskrit and the classical Hindu texts) in languishing *tois* (centres for Sanskrit studies) or eking out an income in the city from inexpensive publishing or hack-writing.⁴⁴

What is important to appreciate, however, is that this group seems to have developed a class-consciousness that marked its attitudes and affiliations in the city. In spite of this group's awareness of stratification and differentiation within its own ranks, it had also a self-image as a class. The widest parameters of this self-image were the self-defined distance from the *chhotolok* (meaner sort of people) in Calcutta on the one hand,⁴⁵ and the city's notables, on the other. Thus from the 1870s there was a class consciously designating itself as *grhastha bhadralok* to mark its distinctness from the aristocracy within the *bhadralok*.⁴⁶ In both institutional city politics and the social life of Calcutta this class of *grhastha bhadralok* started distancing itself from the leadership of *abhijata bhadralok* (the big zamindars and city

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Sumit Sarkar, *An Exploration of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Tradition*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993, pp. 26-27.

⁴² In the use of the term 'middle class' in this thesis, no parallel with the English middle class is implied. Indeed, this thesis highlights how the occupational and residential 'slippage' (into employment and residence customarily associated with labourers) of many middle-class members during the period of the 1920s to 40s was sought to be compensated through domestic morality in order to retain middle-class status.

⁴³ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁴ Sumit Sarkar has reminded historical scholarship about the existence and importance of this section of the middle class in late 19th-century Calcutta. Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Sumanta Banerjee has studied in detail how the *bhadralok* in Calcutta in the 19th century defined their culture by marginalising that of the lower orders in the city. Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989.

⁴⁶ This clearly demonstrates how problematic it is historiographically to use the term *bhadralok* to imply a homogeneous cultural identity, not to speak of class identity. As the economist Bhabatosh Datta has aptly pointed out on the basis of an insightful conjunction of academic and participant observations, 'The *bhadralok* were not invariably middle class, but the middle class [in the early 20th century] was invariably *bhadralok*'. Datta, 'Bengali Madhyabitter Tin Kal', *Sat Satero*, Calcutta, 1397 BE, p. 13.

notables).⁴⁷ A spectrum from highly placed lawyers to the poorest clerk and impoverished *pandit* comprised this self-descriptive category of *grhastha bhadrlok*, used interchangeably with another self-description, *madhyabitta shreni* (middle class).⁴⁸

The problem of understanding a group with a declared self-image as a class and yet no direct role in the production process, suggests the value of using the Gramscian understanding of class and hegemony to understand this social category. In the Gramscian sense the social group at the top of the hierarchy in any given social formation constitutes a self-conscious class when it tries to ensure its expansion by ordering a social system conducive to it.⁴⁹ In the present context, as the educated middle class came to represent the more important voice within the *bhadrlok* society in Calcutta from the 1870s, its aspiration for ultimate acquisition of power was reflected in its discursive self-projection as the leaders of colonial Bengal. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, moreover, is particularly relevant to the peculiar 'middleness' of the colonial middle class.⁵⁰ Itself hegemonised by colonial discursive constructions, the class, in its turn, aspired to organise the order in colonial society through its own 'natural leadership'. Not being in the position of actually controlling the subordinate classes in the colonial situation, it staked a claim to leadership on the basis of its education, status and its supposedly 'innate' morality. Therefore, when nationalist essentialisations were evolved for domesticity, it was an ordered upper-caste middle-class Hindu domesticity that was idealised as national. This claim to exclusive possession of the nationalist ideal of the family was also presented as a major justification why the middle class should 'educate' and 'lead' the lower orders.

However, the use of the notion of hegemony to understand this colonial middle class has to be done with caution, as it is not unproblematic. While Gramsci had in mind a class with control over material production, the middle class in colonial Calcutta neither controlled the production process nor ruled over the rest of the indigenous population. Indeed, this difference is important in understanding whose consumption the moral consensus of the didactic literature on domesticity was directed towards. For such a class, hegemonising was confined within its own ranks in an effort to discipline itself into the projected role of 'natural

⁴⁷ Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 8; S. N. Mukherjee, 'Bhadrlok and their Dals: Politics of Social Factions in Calcutta, c. 1820-1856', in Pradip Sinha (ed.), *The Urban Experience: Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1987.

⁴⁸ Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875-1927*, Delhi, 1984, p. 34.

⁴⁹ Gramsci, *Selections*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁰ This expression has been used by Partha Chatterjee to characterise the contradiction in the colonial middle class. This 'middleness', holding the key to the manifold ambivalence of the class, however, has been only partially explored in Chatterjee's analysis because he elides the problematic of class and applies the concept of hegemony simplistically.

leaders'. That is the reason why, as this work will show, the discursive energies of the class were so obsessed with cajoling its own ranks into a consensual ideal of domesticity - an ideal which could then be projected as universal. Thus the set of symbols which it sought to impose on the lower orders was created through the construction of its self-image.

However, though Gramsci's concept of hegemony is useful it is not adequate for a complete understanding of class in the colonial context. A study of domesticity as the primary level of cultural reproduction finds itself particularly confronted by the class's obvious concern with caste, birth, status and neighbourhood linkage. The specifics of the neo-Brahmanic ideology were determined, too, by the pre-existing subjection of the household to the moral authority of the *samaj*. This study has further to reckon with the frantic search for new guarantees of upper-caste status during the inter-war and the Second World War years, when the correlation of class with upper-caste status threatened to be swamped by the lower-caste entrants into the class. In these circumstances, one cannot avoid the historiographical responsibility of asking whether it was a case of a weak class-consciousness, subsumed and diluted by an overriding consciousness of pre-existing cross-class linkages.

Status did not subsume an incipient class-consciousness.⁵¹ Nor did caste status, on the other hand, become irrelevant.⁵² Rather, pre-existing hierarchies of social ranking were both absorbed and reconstituted by the peculiarly colonial consciousness of class that came about as a result of the political economy of a colonial city. Caste distinction within the upper-caste bracket continued to be rigidly observed in marriage and the ritual superiority of the Brahman. Yet, it is essential to realise that in all other matters in late 19th-century Calcutta, a blanket upper-caste status in conjunction with education came to be the hallmark of a group looking upon itself as a class. It was not the Brahmans alone but all of the three upper castes who hegemonically deployed the rhetoric of *adhikar-bheda*⁵³ in relation to the lower castes.

The reconstituting of upper-caste status through a collective consciousness of being an educated middle class becomes clearer if it is placed in historical perspective. It is highly significant that though caste was very important in early 19th-century Calcutta, a social

⁵¹ While not agreeing with S. N. Mukherjee's designation of the whole of the *bhadralok* as a class, we find his study of class and caste in 19th-century Calcutta extremely pertinent and empirically rich otherwise. Many of the following observations are based on his findings. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', pp. 1-59; *idem*, 'Bhadralok and their Dals', pp. 39-58.

⁵² Mukherjee shows that even while wealth came to confer a claim to leadership in early 19th century Calcutta neighbourhoods, caste status did not lose its relevance. Of course, caste status in Bengal had come to signify, since a much earlier period, the social ascendancy of the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas. *Ibid.*

⁵³ This concept had emerged in the 17th-18th centuries as a Brahminical way of upholding harmony alongside conservative maintenance of rules appropriate for each caste, community, sect and doctrine.

fluidity had been created by wealth accumulated by certain families mainly through compradorial connections. Men of very low ritual status were members of *abhijata bhadralok* of Calcutta.⁵⁴ Up to the first half of the 19th century the neighbourhood community was seen as fairly multi-caste with affluent members from castes including Tilis, Kaibartas, Sadgops, weavers, Subarnabaniks, apart from the three high castes.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, significant that the last quarter of the 19th century, during which the *grhastha bhadralok* (also calling themselves *shikkhita madhyabitta* or educated middle class) started dissociating themselves from *abhijata* leadership, was also the time when the rhetoric of upper-caste status came to be more self-consciously applied. For example, the upper castes came to vigorously resist efforts to broaden the education system lest it ceased to be their exclusive preserve.⁵⁶ This intensification of the deployment of upper-caste status to undermine the possibility of lower-caste competition, interestingly, coincided with the decline of Brahman opposition to the Kayasthas' and Baidyas' ritual claim to twice-born status.⁵⁷ This should also be interpreted in relation to the fact that in spite of the availability of a caste rhetoric of differentiation, the need for the additional self-descriptive deployment of class was felt necessary in the late 19th century. It can be said that firmly committed to the ritual supremacy of the Brahman and caste regulations in marriage, the three upper castes nevertheless were co-sharers of a class identity; they sought to perpetuate an oligarchic pre-eminence in education and white collar employment.

One has also to decide whether the notion of the *samaj*, to the authority of which the household was subjected in neo-Brahmanic didactic literature, was independent of class. The *samaj* was imagined as an essentialised field of moral consensus. The more palpable idioms of kin (a huge circle that Bengali kinship connoted) and upper-caste linkage in the neighbourhood facilitated this imagination. It is also true that at both ends the *samaj* was strictly unbounded by class. The deployment of upper-caste linkage in the neighbourhood did not preclude participation by the upper caste *abhijata bhadralok*. Again at the lower end this *samaj* as a hegemonic concept was apparently inclusive. Yet it can be argued that class delineation was implicitly deployed through moral-discursive strategies to make the imagined *samaj* effectively a preserve of the upper-caste middle class. The most decisive indicator of the essence of the *samaj* was the life-style that was idealised as consensual by the dominant (neo-Brahmanic) ideology in the flood of didactic literature from the 1870s onwards. It is

⁵⁴ Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', p. 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁶ Archana Mandal, 'The Ideology and Interests of the Bengali Intelligentsia: Sir George Campbell's Education Policy (1871-74)', *IESHR*, 12:1, 1975, pp. 81-89.

⁵⁷ Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', pp. 34-35, 52.

significant that the ideal domestic mores were distanced from the 'morally lax' life-style of the *abhijata bhadralok*. The lower-class and lower castes were appropriated as the 'led' through a silencing and/or marginalisation of their distinctive lifestyles. The *samajik* (pertaining to the *samaj*) consensus was hegemonically presented as a generalisation of non-'Westernised', educated, upper-caste, middle-class norms.

This thesis, however, seeks to further probe the historical nuances of the question of class. It is necessary to examine the historiographically neglected role of the lower middle class, especially as its numerical weight made the neo-Brahmanic domestic ideology the majority representation. The problematic of lower middle-class determination of the over-all ideology of the class has been overlooked by all recent historical investigators except Sumit Sarkar.⁵⁸ We find that it is indeed difficult to say whether, without the participation of the numerically preponderant lower middle class, the neo-Brahmanic morality would have been the dominant one. The ideology, in its turn, accommodated within the same hegemonising idiom the voice of the lower middle-class majority as well as the 'revivalist' elements among the more affluent middle class. The neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of renunciation sought to counter any radical differentiation in the *samaj*. Thanks to this rhetoric, the lower middle class, despite its indigence, could feel confident as an equal party to the hegemonic aspiration of the class as a whole. This confidence, however, declined with the disintegration of the ideology. Therefore, as we will see, the lower middle-class voice had a very significant role in the frantic search for new sanctifying boundaries around middle-class domesticity. This was only to be expected in the post-First World War period when, as this thesis argues, the margin thinned between lower middle-class, urban living conditions and the material existence in lower-class locations. Also, caste status which had distinguished the indigent lower middle-class home from the lifestyle of the toiler was now perceived as threatened with the class unavoidably opening up at the margins to lower-caste entrants and to skilled labour.

The nationalist essentialisation of domesticity was involved in a project of 'recasting' women as a fundamental guarantee of the 'essential' difference between the Bengali Hindu home and Western social mores. Given the unavoidable contact of the male with the colonial sphere, there was an anxious expectation that women would resist the disruptive impact of the West and the colonial sphere. The 'woman question' is, therefore, important to this study. Before the 1980s, the historiography on colonial debates on the 'woman question' highlighted the unprecedented importance given to the condition of women in the 19th century. But the approach was uncritical, sometimes even assuming an unproblematic 'natural' progression

⁵⁸ Sumit Sarkar, 'Kalijuger Kalpana o Aupanibeshik Samaj', in Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Itihas Anusandhan*, vol. 4, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 1-13; *idem*, *An Exploration*, pp. 26-30.

from reform to emancipation.⁵⁹ Ghulam Murshid's study, however, tries to identify a problematic.⁶⁰ He characterises the period of nationalism as one of retrogression compared with the mid-19th-century attempts in Bengal to 'modernise' the condition of women. But the Eurocentric and modernist assumptions of this view overlook the hegemonising nature of colonial power/knowledge and how it determined the nationalist counter-discourse of power. As Partha Chatterjee and Tanika Sarkar have pointed out in their own ways, nationalism, in reaction to the colonisation of the middle-class male in the sphere 'outside', sought to represent women as the inner-most core of its 'inner domain'.⁶¹ Recent feminist scholarship helps the present attempt to understand the nationalist discourse on women in domesticity by analysing how gender constitutes the other axis of power that underlies nationalist discourse. Feminist writers have scanned the nationalist production of multi-layered myths regarding Hindu womanhood.⁶² This study has drawn upon the incisive feminist identification of gender icons surrounding the Bengali middle-class nationalist essentialisation of the woman in domesticity. It extends the study of nationalist myth-making to include one particular myth that existing feminist writings have glossed over, even though this myth particularly ensured gendered order in the every-day working of domesticity. This was the myth of the functionally knowledgeable but metaphysically ignorant and intellectually feeble female. It is attempted here to show how this myth ensured patriarchal order through a gendered division of knowledge. However, this thesis locates its own problematic regarding the 'woman question' in a trajectory distinct from the existing discourse-analyses of gender. First, it treats the 'woman question' in the context of the thesis's overall concern with the emergence and transformation of the neo-Brahminic ideology as the predominant one among the middle class. Second, with its concern with domestic morality as a function of order, the thesis approaches the 'woman question' accordingly. So, parallel to the existing studies of nationalist essentialisation of women, it creates the much-needed investigative space for the question of how the dominant nationalist morality sought to handle the practical patriarchal problem of controlling the women's domain and sexuality. The extended family structure was particularly important in determining the discourses seeking to discipline women. Though the significance of this specific familial structure of patriarchy has been freely admitted in

⁵⁹ E.g., B. R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity*, New Delhi, 1976.

⁶⁰ Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernisation 1849-1905*, Rajshahi, 1983.

⁶¹ See Chatterjee, 'Nationalist Resolution', pp. 233-53. For a more empirically grounded and gender-sensitive version of broadly the same position, see Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography', pp. 2011-15.

⁶² See Bagchi, 'Representing Nationalism', pp. WS-65-WS 71; Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity'; Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography', pp. 2011-15.

feminist literature, the implications of its discourse of control has hardly been integrated into the feminist perspective on colonial Bengali domesticity.⁶³ In keeping with its social history perspective, the thesis also analyses how the developments of the period from the 1920s to 1947 weakened the neo-Brahmanic voice of patriarchy and induced changes in the language of women's subordination. This emphasis on the transmutation of the rhetoric of patriarchal control over time is an important aspect of domestic ideology which, again, feminist historiography on Bengal has left largely untouched. Dagmar Engels's study of gender ideology in Bengal between 1870 and 1930 deserves special consideration here as it has significant affinities with the concerns of this thesis.⁶⁴ Engels's thesis treats gender ideology at the more functional level of everyday control of women, rather than at the level of myth-making and gender icons. It is probably the only feminist work directly recognising the importance of change over time from the 19th-century position. Like the present study, it identifies the period from the 1920s as one in which the late 19th-century ideological legacy was significantly transformed. However, starting with a critical identification of the fundamentals of the 19th-century ideology of gender control, it fails to consistently retain its focus on ideology. The study of the situation in the 1920s and 30s turns into a descriptive catalogue of changes in domestic practice, leaving unexplained how ideological fundamentals were transformed. This thesis locates that transformation in the decline of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric in particular and a transformation in the language of control in general.

As has been indicated at the beginning of this discussion, this thesis particularly engages with the essential 'spirituality' that the nationalist imagination sought to invest in domesticity. The integral relation between nationalist identity formation in Bengal and the notion of 'spirituality' has been noted by many historians. Of the more recent works, Papia Chakravarty in her study of Hindu nationalism gives a straightforward reading to the theme of spirituality in the writings of historical figures like Swami Vivekananda and Arabinda Ghosh.⁶⁵ Tapan Raychaudhuri refers to spiritualism in relation to the ideas of Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Vivekananda from the perspective of

⁶³ Bharati Ray's study of women's politics within the extended Bengali family, though not related to this study of male-determined domestic ideology, may, nevertheless, be pointed out as a welcome development. However, it requires to be further problematised and calls for greater critical rigour before it can be integrated into a proper feminist perspective. Ray, 'The Three Generations: Female Rivalries and the Joint Family in Bengal 1900-1947', in Rajat K. Ray (ed.), *Mind, Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, 1995, pp. 367-90.

⁶⁴ Engels, 'The Changing Role'.

⁶⁵ Papia Chakravarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 1-114.

intellectual history.⁶⁶ His identification of spiritualism in the thought of these three is not only historicised but critical in its own way. He is particularly aware of the general feeling of humility, 'inadequacy' and racial discrimination in the context of which spiritualism (and criticism of 'Western materialism'), albeit in distinct ways, figured in the thought of Bankimchandra or Vivekananda. However, Partha Chatterjee, to whose arguments this thesis relates more closely, radically reproblematises the nationalist reference to spirituality. The 'spirituality' ascribed by nationalism to its imagined 'inner domain' of culture is deconstructed by Chatterjee, as a discursive strategy that nationalism employed to define an essential difference with the West and the colonial sphere.⁶⁷ The 'outside' was the domain of statecraft, science and technology, where the West had proved its superiority, the East had succumbed. So as against this domain of 'materialism' where the West had to be emulated, the 'inner domain' of nationalist culture (comprising domesticity among other things) was constructed as spiritual, and as the sphere of nationalist victory. Unfortunately, there has been very little subsequent research following up Chatterjee's very insightful suggestion regarding 'spirituality' as a nationalist discursive strategy against colonial power/knowledge.⁶⁸

However, this thesis seeks to highlight a rhetoric of 'spirituality' that was not adequately represented by the exceptional minds on whom the historical discussions of the relation between spirituality and nationalism has generally concentrated.⁶⁹ For this thesis, it is more relevant to examine the pervasive world of moral articulation of the middle class majority. We will, therefore, particularly probe the relatively standardised rhetoric of 'spirituality', represented in the voluminous didactic literature on domesticity published between the 1870s and the 1920s. This rhetoric provides an interesting insight into how 'spirituality' took on functions apart from supplying an idiom of counter-discursive empowerment of the nation in relation to colonial discourse. In the context of lower middle-class material anxieties, this rhetoric of the spiritualisation of domesticity also embodied the functional aspect of disciplining and restraining household against the destabilising forces of the colonial market in consumer goods. With this perspective in view, our study engages in a

much closer
to practice

⁶⁶ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 163-64, 247-53, 268-69.

⁶⁷ Chatterjee, 'Nationalist Resolution', pp. 233-53.

⁶⁸ Chowdhury Sengupta's study deconstructs the spirituality (and masculinity) invested in the nationalist icon of the *sannyasi* as a counter-discursive strategy against colonial discourse. Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 202-48.

⁶⁹ In the existing historical literature, the discussion of the relation between nationalism and spiritualism has focused entirely on the intellectual exposition of the more distinguished minds like Bankimchandra, Vivekananda, Arabinda and some of the activists of the Swadeshi period. See, Amal Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, Calcutta, 1967; Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*; pp. 163-64, 247-53, 268-69, Chakravarty, *Hindu Response*, pp. 1-114; Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 202-48.

dialogue with Chatterjee's interpretation of spiritualisation of the home (as an important aspect of the 'inner domain'). The problem with Chatterjee's thesis arises when, from his more theoretical statement regarding such spiritualisation, he focuses on the specific case of nationalist discourse among the Bengali Hindu middle class in Calcutta. His study of the 'spirituality' of domesticity, instead of discerning the fundamentals of the spiritualising rhetoric, remains only patchy and descriptive.⁷⁰ Because of this vagueness about the content of the 'spirituality' of domesticity, his writings ascribe an immutability to this discursive spiritualisation. This thesis contends that the spiritualisation of the home was only a phase in the ideology of the colonial middle class; it is essentialist and ahistorical to say that, for the whole of the colonial period, this domestic ideology sustained itself through a binary division between the 'materialist' colonial sphere and the 'spiritualist' domestic sphere. Concentrating on the neo-Brahmanic as the dominant ideology of domesticity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this study identifies the fundamentals of this specific rhetoric of 'spirituality'. This identification helps one recognise that later, in the post-First World War period, these fundamentals could no longer be sustained.

The post-modernist and feminist identification of masculinity as a notion to be deconstructed for an understanding of both colonial power/knowledge and nationalist self-description of the middle-class male has proved to be particularly illuminating.⁷¹ The 'effeminacy' and physical weakness ascribed to the Bengali male by colonial discourse have been shown to be at the root of a deep anxiety, shaping significant areas of nationalist identity-formation. Tanika Sarkar has related the male nationalist investment in the home and conjugality to his humiliated 'masculinity' in the colonial sphere.⁷² But in spite of her sustained interest in this assertion of masculinity in domesticity, she does not consider how 'spirituality' was made a necessary correlate of the manliness sited in the home. Indira Chowdhury Sengupta has rightly discerned the intimate relation between spirituality and masculinity in her analysis of the nationalist reformulation of *sannyas* (asceticism) as an

⁷⁰ Chatterjee's discussion of Ramakrishna, that could have led towards the identification of the Brahmanical fundamentals of the spiritualist rhetoric, disappoints by remaining descriptive throughout. Chatterjee, 'A Religion', pp. 40-68. Again, his discussion of the 'woman question' inaccurately asserts that spirituality was invested in women. *Idem*, 'Nationalist Resolution', 233-53. Nationalism valorised female historical figures, glorified motherhood, fetishised female chastity but did not spiritualise women in everyday domesticity, if spirituality is understood in terms of what the Bengali Hindu middle class in the late 19th century imagined it as. This thesis shows that women were represented as functional beings who only made the 'spirituality' of the male ontology possible.

⁷¹ See John Rosselli, 'The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal', *Past and Present*, February, 1980, pp. 121-48; Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi, 1983.

⁷² Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', pp. 1869-78.

institution.⁷³ However, in her identification of glorified images of masculinity, she misses the fact that the image of the *grhi* (householder) was no less invested with spiritual masculinity in the Hindu nationalist discourse of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This thesis tries to show that in the colonial material and discursive situation, particularly with the nation's vital interest in procreation, the male householder, and not the *sannyasi*, was projected as the most important site of a fusion between spirituality and manliness.

In historical discussions on the interrelationship of masculinity and domesticity, too, the possibility of change over time has gone by default.⁷⁴ Existing writings generalise the historical situation of the late 19th century and the first decade of the 20th to give the static impression that middle-class ideology celebrated the home as a haven of masculinity right up to the end of the colonial period. It is argued in this thesis that the changing location of masculinity was one of the major reasons why the appeal of the neo-Brahminic pre-eminence of domesticity declined along with the myth of the 'spirituality' of the home. And this shift in the location of manliness came not so much with the Swadeshi movement as with new currents of opinion and activity that developed from the end of the 1910s onwards. These developments created powerful discursive nuclei contesting the earlier location of 'masculinity' in the Brahminical ideal of the detached performance of household duties.

In concentrating on the city of Calcutta, this study does not seek to generalise about the sensibilities of the Calcutta middle class as adequately representing the whole of Bengal, not to speak of the whole of India. Here, too, our perspective is dialectical. It is strongly emphasised that in order to get an overall picture of the identity and difference between moral sensibilities in the countryside or the rest of India and those in Calcutta, this study has to be supplemented accordingly. Yet the study of middle-class attitudes in Calcutta also illuminates some of the fundamental characteristics of the colonial middle class of Bengal. The city was mainly responsible for producing the ideological pronouncements of the Bengali Hindu middle class as a whole. The district towns and the countryside had their share of middle-class existence, but Calcutta supplied the cultural idiom of urbanity. This was because the colonial period saw the languishing of other urban centres that might have served as alternative models of urban culture. The Calcutta middle class mind also reflected the countryside in its own way. Because the city's middle class predominantly consisted of immigrants, the countryside was very much present in this urban consciousness whether in idealisation, romanticisation, or derision. But there is a more compelling relevance to studying Calcutta. The city came to represent a development which had important implications for domestic

⁷³ Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 287-300.

⁷⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 68-72.

ideology as well as for the post-colonial situation of the Bengali middle class. From the 1930s onwards, Calcutta was a refuge for a middle class that rapidly lost its rural roots. This has made the class and its domesticity different from that of the middle class in other parts of North India. It was thus Calcutta that best reflected the spiritual crisis associated with this loss of the rural base; and this development of course deeply influenced the transformation of its domestic ideology, as we will see in this study.

Although most historical studies on Bengali Hindu middle-class mentality have concentrated mainly or entirely on Calcutta, the impact of the city's specific environment and urbanisation on middle-class sensibilities has hardly been examined. Is there not a sense in which the ideology these studies discuss was largely born out of a situation specific to Calcutta? This thesis engages throughout with the specifics of the city in so far as is relevant. It was the rapid transformation in the urban character of Calcutta from the time of the First World War onwards that had a crucial role in transforming the dominant domestic ideology of the Bengali middle class. Though this thesis concentrates on the Hindu segment of the Bengali middle class in Calcutta, it recognises that to do justice to the complexity of the colonial situation in Bengal, this should be treated in perspective with similar studies of the Muslim counterpart. But then such a study would also have to focus more on districts that had a larger proportion of Bengali Muslims than Calcutta did.

The nearly seventy year period that this thesis covers provides ample scope for studying the colonial situation of the middle class in all the dynamism of the processes of change that the historian seeks to analyse. Long enough to witness even generational change, this time-span enables us to chart a shift in Bengali middle-class ideology from the relative confidence of early nationalism to the crisis of the 1930s and 40s. Stopping in 1905, with the rise of the Swadeshi movement, would have exclusively highlighted the ideological empowering of nationalist domesticity through early nationalist essentialisms. That is inadequate for an understanding of the colonial legacy for the post-colonial era. Indeed, the legacy lay as much in the disorienting disintegration of early nationalist essentialisms as in the deep imprint they left behind. Thus covering the period of the 1920s to 40s as the time crisis of the early nationalist concepts is essential for this study. Again, a concentration on the period from the 1920s to 40s would not have enabled us to understand that the ideological scene was actually one of disintegration, unless one studied this period in relation to the period of early nationalism. The inclusion of the period of the two world wars enables us to see how, even within the framework of colonial dominance, contradictions within indigenous society sharpened and complicated the situation for the post-colonial predicament of the class.

1947 might appear a somewhat artificial watershed for the termination of a study in social history. However, in the case of (West) Bengal, the immediate post-independence period, with its huge refugee influx into Calcutta from East Pakistan, creates new issues and parameters beyond the scope of this study.

This study treats its sources as discursive representations and regards analysis of a discourse produced by a class as vital to the understanding of its self-description and empowerment in relation to 'others'. While drawing largely upon Foucault's configuration of discourse, however, this study partly disagrees with it. For Foucault, discourse signifies a conglomerate of ideas and practice with power as its organising principle.⁷⁵ This study uses discourse to mean an epistemic construction informed by the mechanics of power. Though Foucault himself was careful in his own application of his definitional criteria to the empirical material he analysed, his simultaneous use of ideas and practice within the concept of discourse poses a problem. Practice has its own world that also includes the sense of doing something which is not formalised or structured or epistemically coherent. In particular, Foucault does not outline the boundaries of what he signifies by 'practice'. In so far as practice might have overlaps with the social formation, where then was the dividing line between a discursive formation and the corresponding social formation? There might be aspects of practice that are inscribed by material developments that leave very little room for subjectivity to define its own epistemic construction. This work has, therefore, observed the methodological necessity of distinguishing between discourse and practice, as also between discursive formations on the one hand and the social formations producing them on the other. To bring into sharp focus the origins and transformation of nationalist essentialisations and the ideological aspect of Bengali consciousness, we have focused our attention on the normative and didactic discussion on domesticity. Practice as a distinct sphere has been left out of this account of formal moral pronouncements. Otherwise, it is difficult to avoid confusion with the more personal expressions which may, indeed, have been looked upon as deviant by the dominant ideology.

For formal moral pronouncements, this study has depended mainly on printed normative literature. The existence of the distinct and voluminous genres of didactic tracts (and normative manuals) and periodicals on domesticity provides us with the bulk of our sources. The huge corpus of late 19th-century tracts helps identify the distinctness of the neo-Brahmanic world as well as its overwhelming dominance. This identification prompts the study to understand and put into perspective the neo-Brahmanic milieu as a whole, through an

⁷⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, 1972, pp. 44-55.

examination of other forms of literature (from inexpensive translations of the Smritis and Puranas to compendia of Ayurvedic therapy) that the same milieu produced. This reveals a distinct universe of discourse - prolific, pervasive, and consistently neo-Brahmanic in its fundamental concepts and epistemology. Though not directly concerned with the 'reformed'-Hindu discourses, the study incorporates an awareness and reading of normative texts from the 'reformed' Hindu segment.

However, to understand why the neo-Brahmanic representation clearly dwindled after the 1920s, the thesis chooses not to confine its sources to merely the literature directly upholding that ideology. Focusing on the non-'reformed' section of the Hindus as the social base of production of the neo-Brahmanic discourse, our study follows over time all kinds of normative and pedagogical discussion on domesticity produced by this section. To understand the context of discursive transformation, the thesis uses official records, newspapers, archival sources as well as autobiographical material. As supportive evidence of the pervasiveness (or otherwise) of printed moral stances in the world of practised morality, personal memorabilia and oral evidence have also been used. However, as a study in broad-based social trends, care has been taken in this thesis to ensure that these are representative and not merely individual expressions.

Chapter 1

Ordering Domesticity for the Nation, 1880-1915

Introduction

In the late 19th century, alongside the burgeoning discourse imagining the nation, Bengali Hindu middle-class articulation flooded the world of vernacular print with didactic tracts, manuals and essays on domestic ideology and norms. Indeed, these works were so voluminous that they can be taken as an appropriate entry-point into the moral discourse on the relation between the definition of the nation and the idealisation of domesticity.¹ The didactic literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries clearly represented a conscious drive to redefine domestic morality in an effort to flesh out the idea of the nation at the level of the household and the family. Almost every piece of such didactic writing expressed its concern with 'building' and 'strengthening' the nation. These works also reflected the middle class's discursive resistance² - congealed by the 1870s - to colonial intervention in matters affecting its domesticity. The moral stance was to uphold domesticity and the family as 'a sphere of autonomy' in relation to the colonial sphere, where the colonised male was seen to have lost a significant part of his selfhood.³ But, more importantly for the present study, this right to autonomy, as Partha Chatterjee has contended, was overwhelmingly justified in terms of a 'spirituality' that the Bengali Hindu middle class ascribed to its domesticity (and other 'essential' aspects of its culture) in contrast to the 'materialism' of the West and the colonial sphere.⁴

But a closer analysis of the domestic ideology of the Bengali middle class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries also reveals serious problems with Chatterjee's argument. And it is from this point of disagreement that the present chapter explores domestic ideology.

¹ Tanika Sarkar also notes that this 'massive corpus ... came to occupy a dominant place in the total volume of printed vernacular prose literature of these years [the late 19th century]'. Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *EPW*, 28:36, 4 September 1993, p. 1870.

² Historians have generally discerned a shift by the 1870s from an earlier phase of 'reform' in matters relating to domesticity. While in the earlier phase Indian reformers had looked to the colonial authorities for the reform of 'traditional' institutions, from the 1870s there was increasing resistance to state intervention. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 70-71; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1994, p. 6.

³ Tanika Sarkar. 'Hindu Conjugalities and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal' in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Hyderabad, 1995, p. 98.

⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation*, p. 6.

There are two fundamental points to be made. One is to contend that while the impulse to fashion a 'spiritual' domesticity derived from the emergent feeling of nationalism, the household, in its turn, exerted a powerful influence on the specific modality by which the nation itself was imagined and sought to be ordered. The spiritualist rhetoric evolved, the didactic tracts reveal, out of a dialectic; the nationalist urge to mark the sanctity of the 'inner domain' interacted dialectically with the specific anxieties and material concerns experienced by the class at the level of everyday domesticity. This qualifies the impression, created by Chatterjee's discussion, of domesticity as a passive site for the imagining of the nation. The other contention is that his sweeping statement that the 'inner domain' was 'spiritualised', does not help us to understand the historical specificity of the domestic ideology of the middle class in colonial Bengal. Spiritualism, unless qualified in the light of specific historical contexts, is a broad term and hardly a self-evident category. Basing itself on what was overwhelmingly the majority trend in the didactic literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this chapter contends that the dominant form of the spiritualisation was what can be termed neo-Brahmanic. This was not a straightforward reiteration of Brahmanical texts on domesticity. The emergent consciousness of the nation gave this dominant ideology layers of essentialisation that did not derive from the earlier Brahmanical world-view. But at the same time, the claim for spirituality was based, in its fundamentals, on Brahmanical metaphysical concepts and a selected but fairly large repertoire of Shastric moral codes.

Neo-Brahmanic Ideology: Context and Content

The emergence of the neo-Brahmanic ideology of domesticity from the 1870s onwards was rooted in a conjunction of developments that made the middle class particularly sensitive and jealous about the autonomy of the domestic sphere in relation to the colonial. By the 1870s, the theme of political subjection was of obsessive importance to the middle class. Against this fundamental and all-encompassing loss of self-hood in the colonial sphere, as Tanika Sarkar characterises it, the home became one of the major sites where the autonomy of the male was sought to be protected. Domestic practices and interpersonal relations, consequently, came to be jealously guarded from any colonial attempt at intervention.⁵ The pervasiveness of this anxiety was reflected in the intensity of the Age of Consent agitation of 1891.⁶ In 1891, in official response to the campaign of the Parsi reformer B. Malabari, the minimum age of consent for girls was raised from 10 to 12 by passing the Criminal Law Amendment Act X.

⁵ Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalities', p. 98.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

The 'revivalist' Hindus (the vast majority of the Bengali middle class), resentful since the 1870s of colonial intervention in the laws governing Hindu marriage, now mounted a massive protest. A 'highly organised mass campaign' turned this protest into 'the first middle-class nationalist agitation'.⁷

It has been argued that one of the major factors behind this attachment to the home as an 'inner domain' was the intensification of racial discrimination in the colonial sphere.⁸ It is not an accidental coincidence that during the period from the 1870s, when this new genre of domestic tracts invariably referred to the morality, health, 'true education', and masculinity, of the nation, the racial divisions between the ruler and the ruled had become particularly acute. Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of this intensified discrimination in causing a growing Bengali middle-class disillusionment with the colonial sphere 'as an arena for the test of manhood'.⁹ The political economy of colonialism had no mean role in this. Mrinalini Sinha has pertinently related masculinity in the form of assertion of autonomy in the domestic sphere with the economic situation of the Bengali *bhadralok*. By the 1870s the *bhadralok*, already feeling squeezed out of the dynamic sector of private enterprise, were further hit by the decrease in revenue from landholding and in their power over the countryside. The result was a deepening and inescapable dependence, among the majority of them, on administrative and clerical employment.¹⁰ The ignominy of political subjection, already a matter of obsessive importance, was reinforced by this 'subjection' to the white boss in government offices and European mercantile concerns.

Thus economically reduced to a second layer of 'subjection', i.e., to *chakri* (office work, predominantly understood as clerical), Bengali middle-class manhood asserted itself particularly vehemently over the question of the autonomy of the domestic sphere. It is not surprising that this assertion, emerging in print from the 1870s, intensified in the 1880s in the wake of the Ilbert Bill Agitation. The display of Anglo-Indian racism, historians have noted, surpassed all previous levels with this agitation.¹¹ The Ilbert Bill of 1882, seeking to assign criminal jurisdiction - albeit limited - to Indian magistrates and judges over European subjects, provoked a 'white mutiny'.¹² The counter-reaction that was produced - 'an

⁷ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

⁸ For this intensification, see, for example, Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 19-20.

⁹ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

¹⁰ The observations on the economic dimensions of 'failed manhood' are a summarisation of Sinha's discussion in *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester, 1995, pp. 6-7. The use of the term *bhadralok* is Sinha's.

¹¹ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1988, p. 32.

¹² Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 33-68.

eagerness to believe that everything Hindu was essentially superior to all that the West had to offer¹³ - came to reinforce the neo-Brahmanic spiritualisation of domesticity that had already been initiated. Coincidentally, the late 19th century was also the time when the Theosophists praised Manu and the caste system and called on Hindus to abjure 'materialism' and revive their great 'spiritualist' tradition.¹⁴ This, coupled with efforts to derive self-esteem from the studies of Max Muller on the 'common origin' of the 'Aryan races', produced a 'spate of Aryanism' among the Bengali Hindu middle class.¹⁵ Neo-Brahmanic tracts repeatedly used the word *Aryarishi* (Aryan seers) in their frequent citations - real or supposed - of Manu and the other authors of the Shastras. The cumulative impact of these attitudes, often summed up somewhat inaccurately as 'Hindu revivalism', provided the broader context for the neo-Brahmanic definition of the 'spirituality' of domesticity. According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, the term 'Hindu revivalism', strictly interpreted, could apply only to the aggressive chauvinism of the 'curious movement' pioneered by Shashadhar Tarkachudamani and Krishnaprasanna Sen; this movement tried to prove that whatever Western science was currently discovering, was embedded in the age-old Hindu Shastras. But most intellectuals and ordinary minds placed under the rubric of 'revivalism' did not seek, Raychaudhuri rightly argues, an unqualified 'revival' of 'lost ways'.¹⁶ However, because of long academic currency, this term (in the absence of any other) readily invokes the dominant frame of mind among the Bengali Hindu middle class in the late 19th century; we will, therefore, use the term, though in quotation marks. 'Revivalism' as a mood comprised a broad spectrum from a suddenly intensified sensitivity about official intervention in the Hindu domestic sphere, to a pervasive belief in the superiority of everything in Hindu tradition, to a chauvinistic contention that claimed Shastric precedents for all the discoveries of modern Western science. There were also considerable intellectual variations within this broad field of revivalism; not everybody was 'revivalist' in the same way or to the same degree. But for the present study, it is the overall tendency to ascribe 'superiority' to Hindu 'tradition' over Western mores that is important; it largely determined why, among the majority, the spirituality invested in domesticity had a Brahmanical core.

On the basis of Sumit Sarkar's reconstruction of the late 19th-century mental milieu of the lower middle class in Calcutta, it seems that this assertion of superiority, particularly vehement in *battala* (the world of inexpensive presses in Calcutta) didactic literature,

¹³ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

emanated especially from among this numerically dominant section within the class. The anxious investment of the lower middle class in the autonomy of the domestic sphere and subordination of women may be inferred from Sarkar's study of the farces and satires that this milieu produced.¹⁷ He shows how this literary output was closely related to the clerical population's alienation from the office and the European employer. They perceived the workplace as dominated by an 'impersonal cash-nexus and authority embodied, above all, in the new rigorous discipline of work regulated by clock-time'. Sarkar further says that eventually this predominantly lower middle-class discourse on *chakri* and alienation from the office - 'a highly visible site of racial discrimination' - merged with broader critiques of colonial domination formulated by more sophisticated intellectual articulation.¹⁸

The denigrating tone of colonial discourse, the intensification of racialism, the colonised male's perception of his emasculation, and the condition of lower middle-class existence, all helped to create a specific conjuncture in the history of Bengali middle-class sensibility. If, in the recent past, the middle-class preoccupation with Brahmanism had been predominantly ritual,¹⁹ then this conjuncture roused the group to reasoned defence - albeit of varying credibility - of Brahmanism. Indeed, the Brahmanical metaphysical repertoire was curiously suited to providing an idealising rhetoric for Hindu domesticity in the face of the colonial deployment of the concepts of 'reason', epistemological comprehensiveness, 'moral integrity', and so on. But, paradoxically, the factors that now induced a self-consciously 'reasoned' defence of Brahmanism, also determined why it would not amount to a straightforward reiteration of Brahmanical metaphysics and Shastric injunctions. Indeed, this was a Brahmanism specially rationalised and selectively highlighted to meet the challenges of colonial and missionary discourses.

A brief look at the main criticisms levelled at the Hindu way of life helps to explain why the neo-Brahmanic morality went in for its selective emphasis on the Brahmanical components. James Mill's *History of British India*, published in 1817 and captivating British public opinion for decades to come, characterised the Hindus as, among other things, primitive, superstitious, undisciplined, oversexed, and with no sense of morality.²⁰ Monier Monier-Williams, for all his admiration for Sanskrit literature, saw in 'Brahmanism ... [in] its present aspect, no apparent unity or design - [it had been] patched, pieced, restored and

¹⁷ Sumit Sarkar, *An Exploration of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Tradition*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993, p. 28; *idem*, 'Kalijuger Kalpana o Aupanibeshik Samaj', in Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Itihas Anusandhan*, vol. 4, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 1-13.

¹⁸ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, pp. 29-31.

¹⁹ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 9.

²⁰ Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's History of British India*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 178-94.

enlarged in all directions'.²¹ A proselytising eagerness, moreover, showed from under his civilising zeal when he suggested preparing 'our Indian school-boys for a voluntary acceptance of Christian truth when their judgements are matured'.²² Threateningly for the Bengali Hindu middle class with their increased sensitivity about domesticity, the institution that Williams and his contemporaries expected to be fundamentally transformed by this 'Christianisation' was the Hindu household.²³ In the manner of contemporary Victorian opinion, Williams criticised child marriage and the 'trodden down' condition of Hindu women and upheld the 'Christian truth' of consensual companionate marriage.²⁴ The other influential intervention was Henry Maine's. On the one hand, his effort to show codified Roman Law as an advance from more primordial society, marked codification as an indicator of an advance from 'barbarism' on his postulated scale of civilisation. On the other hand, however, the epitome of civilisation for him lay in the complete freedom of the individual and of contract, supposedly enshrined in the contemporary English system of law. Hindu family law, as Maine understood it, was based on status and a patriarchal structure inimical to individual liberty and, hence, primitive by English standards.²⁵ Finally, Bengalis had to confront the colonial characterisation of the conquered male as effeminate and childish, in comparison with the supposed masculinity and adulthood of his European counterpart.²⁶ Framed by these critiques, the Bengali sensibility upheld the neo-Brahmanic ideology on the grounds of its supposed scriptural authenticity, rationality, 'civilised' antiquity, 'Aryan' origins, comprehensive cosmology and elaborate epistemology. Care was taken to emphasise its non-involvement with 'promiscuous' popular cults and its inculcation of 'manly self-control' through *brahmacharya* (abstinence from sex before and outside marriage) and sexual continence (within marriage).

In the late 19th century, *bhairabi-chakras* (esoteric circles practising Tantric rituals which involved a great deal of sexuality) still existed in Calcutta and its suburbs.²⁷ It is significant, therefore, that the world of printed neo-Brahmanic morality either attempted to make Tantric traditions more respectable through excision of the supposedly orgiastic

²¹ Monier Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians being a Series of Impressions, Notes and Essays*, 3rd edn, London, 1879, p. 157.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-330.

²⁵ Henry Sumner Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871), 4th edn, London, 1881, pp. 13-201.

²⁶ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi, 1983, pp. 7-8, 11-16, 52-53; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 237.

associations or sought to suppress them altogether.²⁸ What is more important here, however, is that the class generally fell silent about the highly popular Tantric *shatkarma* (an overtly this-worldly branch of Tantric practices like mesmerism, aimed at controlling the lived world and environment). The impact of the neo-Brahmanic morality may be inferred from the admission of the authors of the few books on *shatkarma* published between the 1880s and the 1920s. They stated that the interest in such books had dwindled and Tantric *shatkarma* was becoming a *luptabidya* (extinct knowledge).²⁹ Amiya P. Sen saw traces of the ‘common bhadrakok prudery’ towards the supposed ‘promiscuity’ of popular Vaishnava cults not only in the staunchly Brahmanical writings of Jogendrachandra Basu and Indranath Bandyopadhyay but also in the less rigid intellectual world of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.³⁰ The distancing from popular cults was supplemented by constant claims about the ‘comprehensiveness’ of the Brahmanical world-view and the ‘wisdom’ and ‘reason’ of the Shastras. Indeed, the didactic tracts meant for instructing the male on domestic morality started with the Vedic cosmology and proceeded deductively to situate domesticity within it and finally to lay down the specific duties comprising the *dharma* of the householder.³¹ Interestingly, neo-Brahmanic ideology deployed the concept of reason but not before appropriating it for the Shastras. Furthermore, the teleology often associated with Western discourses on reason was countered with a discourse of ancient wisdom. One author wrote, ‘The old laws which many of us are gradually throwing off will appear to every thoughtful man to be based upon experience and reason’. Inverting the colonial genealogy of rationalism and civilisation, he wrote, ‘If, despite the evident advantages derivable from them, we choose to upset the wise institutions ... maintained intact from time immemorial by our forefathers ... we shall lose our nationality and become a degenerate and demoralised race.’ Anxious to reassure his readers that the differing commentaries on the Shastras did not make Brahmanism a patchy fabric, he explained: ‘Diversity is observable in the Hindu Shastras but profound and pious thinkers ... can find harmony in this superficial diversity ... Brahmins who are the expositors of the Shastras ... have become destitute of the true knowledge ... no wonder that the unity of the Hindu religious texts is not obvious to a foreigner.’³² Again the ‘revivalist’ spectrum, from *battala* tracts to more sophisticated neo-Brahmanic exposition, seemed to have borrowed Maine’s idea that codification of laws was a mark of progress from

²⁸ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 45.

²⁹ E.g., Bholanath Bidyanidhi, *Adbhut Indrajal*, Calcutta, 1317 BE, Introduction; Abhayananda Giri, *Luptabidya*, Calcutta, 1917, Introduction.

³⁰ Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism: 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, Delhi, 1993, p. 263.

³¹ E.g., Umāprasanna Bhattacharya, *Sangsartattva o Grhadharma*, Calcutta, 1290 BE, pp. 1-45; Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru ba Shantikunja*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1900, pp. 3-94.

³² Gyanendrakumar Ray Chaudhuri, *Hindu Customs and Manners*, Calcutta, 1888, pp. 4-5, 80-81.

unqualified primitivism. But beyond that, a genealogy totally different from Maine's was constructed. It was argued that long before the practice of codification developed in the West, the Hindus had been consistently following the code of Manu.³³

This redefinition of the Brahmanical world-view was also heavily inscribed by the Bengali Hindu middle-class perception - internalised from colonial discourses³⁴ - of its 'physical weakness' and 'effeminacy'. This internalisation gave neo-Brahmanism some features which were not derived from Brahmanism. But even this internalisation was only selective. Unlike the 'reformed'-Hindu discourses, the neo-Brahmanic ones derived their prescriptions not so much from the Victorian codes of responsible male behaviour as from the Brahmanical ideal of manliness. Thus a counter-discourse to the colonial contentions about Bengali 'effeminacy' was formulated, centring round the 'spiritual manliness' claimed to reside in the Brahmanical dictums of *brahmacharya*, continence and *nishkama karma* (action and/or ritual performance free from worldly attachment). Significantly, these Brahmanical concepts now acquired an arrogant rhetoric, claiming that this assertion of mental strength was an exclusive characteristic of the Hindus.³⁵ Chandranath Basu, for example, wrote about the superior spiritual strength demanded of the Hindu; the Brahmanical project of salvation, he argued, had no provision for divine grace in a long and difficult journey through several lives. Using this notion of spiritual tenacity, he inverted the Western constructions of Bengali Hindu 'effeminacy', 'cowardice' and 'weakness' and made the West appear 'weak', 'effeminate' and 'childlike' instead: "The Europeans and Americans ... cry helplessly for divine mercy ... unable to endure the hardship [of the quest for salvation]. In the matter of mental strength they are like children; their spiritual weakness makes them wilt as if they were made of butter."³⁶ And significantly, Hindu domesticity was projected as the stiffest test of spirituality and, therefore, by implication, the most important arena where the spiritual superiority of the Hindu over the West was supposed to manifest itself. Chandranath's argument was very representative of a paradox in contemporary Bengali Hindu pronouncements - an aggressive denial of 'weakness' and 'effeminacy', concealing a self-perception of 'weakness' and 'unmanliness' at a more fundamental level of sensibility. However, this self-perception also involved a selective rejection of colonial and Western arguments. The Western critique linked the question of child marriage to the colonial etiology

³³ E.g., Swami Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit o Bartaman* (lectures delivered in 1906), Calcutta, 1928, pp. 274-75.

³⁴ Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalitv', p. 105.

³⁵ E.g., Akkhaychandra Sarkar, 'Shyen Kapat Ebang Shylocker Katha' in *Akkhay Sahitya Sambhar*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 115-16.

³⁶ Chandranath Basu, *Hindutva: Hindur Prakrta Itihas*, Calcutta, 1892, p. 29.

of the Bengali male's 'weakness' and 'effeminacy'. But neo-Brahmanic authors like Chandranath, strongly committed to the Bengali Hindu patriarchal stake in the pre-pubertal marriage of girls, rejected this etiology. Rather, the Western ideal of consensual marriage was declared petty and selfish while non-consensual Hindu marriage was projected as another area particularly invested with the spirituality of the self-less observance of *dharmā*.³⁷

Victorian notions of discipline, punctuality, and domestic hygiene were incorporated,³⁸ giving neo-Brahmanism its complex multi-layered character. It is important, however, that this incorporation did not involve a straightforward derivation from Victoriana, but rather a simultaneous concern to state a difference with the West. Notwithstanding Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's prescription that in matters pertaining to the family and society Brahmanism had nothing to learn from the West, there was more than a hint of the influence of Samuel Smiles in his encouragement to young boys to maintain a record of self-improvement.³⁹ But, more often than not, neo-Brahmanic discourses actually appropriated aspects of Smiles's discourse in such a way as to establish a theory of Hindu superiority over the West. One author quoted Smiles on domestic management, but actually used Smiles's authority to confirm what the ideal Hindu home had supposedly perfected long before Smiles had ever lived.⁴⁰ And the hierarchy of texts is clear when the same author declared that the Dharma Shastras, on which the ideal Hindu home was based, had nothing to learn from any other religion or text. Upendranath Bhattacharya occasionally quoted Smiles, and the Victorian concepts of 'improvement' and 'progress' frequently occurred in his text. But he argued that whereas the Western espousal of 'improvement' was only a recent development, Aryan seers had written about domestic duty and 'improvement' far back in India's ancient past.⁴¹ The selective appropriation of Victorian influence was evident, for example, in the numerous tracts on domesticity written by Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay. His ideal household was cleansed of 'obscene' jokes, particularly amongst prohibited degrees of relationship, and distanced from 'promiscuous' Vaishnava sects.⁴² At the same time, however, he was anxious that Shastric injunctions on sex were not being effectively disseminated;⁴³ he complained that under the impact of Western values, education in sexual mores was being branded as

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-232; Also see (Anon.), 'Garhasthya-prasanga: Narir Kartabya', *Grhastha*, Poush, 1317 BE, p. 53.

³⁸ E.g., Chandranath Basu, *Garhasthya Path*, Calcutta, 1292 BE, pp. 15-16, 28-33, 82-87, 98-99.

³⁹ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 44.

⁴⁰ Ray Chaudhuri, *Hindu Customs*, p. 30.

⁴¹ Upendranath Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, Calcutta, n.d., (c. 1920), p. 38.

⁴² Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Grhinipana*, 4th edn, Calcutta, 1900, p. 11; *idem*, *Sangsartaru*, p. 83.

⁴³ This was a common anxiety in the neo-Brahmanic world. Also see Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, 'Shayan Ebang Nidradi', *Paribarik Prabandha* (1882), 11th edn, Chinsurah, n.d., pp. 237-38.

'obscene, immoral and condemnable' among the *bhadralok*.⁴⁴ The author envisaged a past when the 'guru instructed his disciples ... last of all in *ratishastra* [Shastric codes regulating sex] after which the disciples entered domesticity'.⁴⁵ He and his contemporaries in the neo-Brahmanic world did not imbibe the prudery about the mention of sex so characteristic of Victorian moral pronouncements on domesticity.⁴⁶ Kaliprasanna discussed how a couple, desirous of having a son, should try to arouse each other sexually. The wife in particular was advised to talk and behave in a way conducive to her husband's arousal.⁴⁷

It is not the intention here to imply that the world of neo-Brahmanic discourse was insular and self-contained and had no overlaps on the fringes with 'reformed'-Hindu discourses. Overlaps, induced by common subjection to colonial rule and discourses, were only to be expected amongst otherwise differing nationalist discourses. In this sense, the neo-Brahmanic discourse was situated alongside 'reformed' ones in a common universe (albeit a far from monolithic one), where middle-class efforts at defining an identity oppositional to the West were dominantly 'informed and shaped by Hindu ideas'.⁴⁸ Indeed, in the matter of forging a broad Hindu identity through the Hindu Mela and the National Association, the Adi Brahma Samaj often co-operated with the 'revivalist' Dharma Rakkhini Sabha.⁴⁹ A shared rhetoric of Aryanism facilitated this co-operation, besides the proximity of the Adi Samaj to orthodox Hinduism in matters of caste and women's status. Nor was the apparently great distance between the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and 'revivalist' nationalism invariably unbridgeable, especially in the overall atmosphere of definition of identity based on *Hindutva*. Affiliation to the former did not prevent Bipinchandra Pal from gradually ingratiating himself with the latter. The outer extremities of neo-Brahmanic moral articulation were also blurred by the role of the more exceptional minds like Bankimchandra. Far from being subsumed in the confines of the neo-Brahmanic ideological milieu, he threaded his way in and out of it; the impact of the liberal-universalism of the West on him was significant enough to preclude a whole-hearted identification with 'revivalism'.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, Calcutta, 1900, p. 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ The world of reformed-Hindu and Brahma discourses, more directly derivative of Victorian moral discourse, maintained a clinical distance from direct discussion of sex. E.g., Shibnath Shastri, *Grhadharma*, Calcutta, 1880, pp. 38-40, 45-47; Prasannachandra Dasgupta, *Saubhagya Sopan*, 4th edn, Calcutta, 1314 BE, pp. 191-201.

⁴⁷ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, p. 59.

⁴⁸ Indira Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity: The Making of a Hindu Discourse, Bengal, 1867-1905', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1993, pp. 12, 30-31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

⁵⁰ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, pp. 103-216.



But as a social history project, this thesis is less concerned with overlaps on the fringes and the divided ideological allegiance of exceptional minds (necessarily a minority). It is far more significant that at the heart of the 'revivalist' segment, there was a majority voice that was much more standardised. Articulated in the massive volume of didactic output, it was Shastric in its injunctions and Brahmanical in its ontology - albeit frequently simplified for popular consumption. It is time the history of nationalism in Bengal studied this milieu which gave the chauvinistic neo-Brahmanic periodical *Bangabasi* (from which Bankim distanced himself) 50,000 subscribers - a record number in those days.⁵¹ Moreover, *Bangabasi*, though more chauvinistically 'revivalist' than the rest, emanated from a milieu that also produced a significant number of periodicals like *Arjyadarshan*, *Sadharani*, *Prachar* and *Nabajiban*, to name a few from the late 19th century. Their intellectual worth might have varied, but there could be no mistaking that their pronouncements had a clearly Brahmanical core and were fundamentally at variance with the 'reformed' Hindu discourses. It is not an accidental coincidence that the 1880s was the period when, alongside the massive burgeoning of neo-Brahmanic tracts, anti-Brahmo sentiments also ran high.⁵² Nor should it be overlooked that from the 1880s, the *battala* presses found a growing demand they could exploit - a demand for inexpensive, translated versions of Vedic and Shastric texts.⁵³ This was the time, too, when *battala* manuals on Brahmanical *nityakarma* (diurnal rituals) were printed extensively. It is also significant that whatever the fringe overlaps with 'reformed' Hindu discourse, the majority sensibility in the neo-Brahmanic milieu propelled scurrilous *battala* parodies of the Brahmos and 'Westernised' Bengalis to the height of popularity.⁵⁴

Yet this relatively standardised bulk of neo-Brahmanic moral articulation was also not absolutely monolithic. Amiya P. Sen, in his study of the prominent 'revivalist' spokesmen, shows the differences between, say, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay on the one hand and Chandranath Basu on the other. In his concern for the uplift of the pristine Brahman, his emphasis on ritual observances in daily life and defence of 'traditional' marriage practices in Hindu society, Chandranath, as a 'staunch Brahmanist', was in many ways 'the true successor' to Bhudeb.⁵⁵ But he lacked the 'catholicity which could always be located in the writings of Bhudeb'.⁵⁶ The discussion in subsequent chapters will show in passing that though Bhudeb was the oft-quoted and acknowledged high-priest of the neo-Brahmanic

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵² Sen, *Hindu Revivalism*, pp. 29, 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Sen also highlights the reluctance of the Brahmos to treat the Vedas as a religious source.

⁵⁴ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 8; Sarkar, 'Kalijuger Kalpana', p. 4.

⁵⁵ Sen, *Hindu Revivalism*, p. 210.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

morality, his writing often displayed a flexibility absent in the huge volume of *battala* tracts. On the other hand, Jogendrachandra Basu and Indranath Bandyopadhyay, and, even more aggressively, Shashadhar Tarkachudamani took Aryan chauvinism to an extent unmatched by the relatively more restrained and polemical discourse of Chandranath. Bhudeb, though he initially had links with Shashadhar, took care to distance himself when the latter's pseudo-scientific claims on behalf of Hindu practices took a turn that irked Bhudeb's sensibility. He also distanced himself over time from the 'revivalism' of the periodical (turned newspaper) *Bangabasi*.⁵⁷ There were noticeable variations in detail in the world of the *battala* tracts, too. For example, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, who, at the turn of the century, wrote extensively on domesticity from a staunchly neo-Brahmanic angle, was, nevertheless, opposed to the marriage of girls before 15 years of age.⁵⁸ The neo-Brahmanic world was caught between preference for the pre-pubertal marriage of girls and nationalist anxiety about child health. In Kaliprasanna's case the latter seems to have got the better of the patriarchal commitment to child marriage in a way that was still relatively uncommon in this moral milieu.

But it is important that Amiya Sen's work also makes one aware of the possibility that in spite of great variations in the nuances of their respective ideas and intellectual levels, all intellectuals from Bhudeb to Chandranath, to Jogendrachandra, to Shashadhar inhabited the same broad universe. Tanika Sarkar points out in connection with the Age of Consent agitation that, despite shifts and overlaps, the 'revivalist nationalists' were a distinctive political formation.⁵⁹ There seems to be direct evidence that in the cognisance of the class itself this broad universe was seen as a composite whole, differentiated from the Brahmo and the 'reformed' Hindu discourses. One could cite, for example, an editorial discussion in the 1910s in *Grhastha*, a Swadeshi-inspired periodical, whose editorial preference was clearly for a neo-Brahmanic position on domesticity and society. The discussion reflected the perception that the world of moral discourses was divided into two broad groups - on the one hand, the 'orthodox' Hindus, who did not want changes in the accustomed way of life, beliefs and rituals and, on the other, those who generally welcomed changes. The editorial identified the second group as originally mainly Brahmo in composition but coming, in more recent years, to include a rising section of 'reformed' Hindus. The 'reformed' Hindus, as the editors defined them, 'remain Hindu by faith with changes in customs, behavioural codes and their way of life'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1869.

⁶⁰ 'Alochana', 'Shikkhita Sampradayer Daladali', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, pp. 604-05.

The Specifics of the Dominant Spiritualist Rhetoric

Having delineated the broad parameters of the neo-Brahmanic world, we can now proceed to the problem of the particular form that the spiritualisation of the domestic sphere took within it. Indeed, if one looks at the neo-Brahmanic didactic literature on domesticity, whether of a more sophisticated intellectual articulation or less so,⁶¹ a fundamental and strong consensus is clearly evident as to the moral definition of domesticity and its spiritualisation. All these works used the Brahmanical rhetoric of *varnashrama* (the Brahmanical division of society into four *varnas* - Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, and the division of the life-cycle of Brahman and Kshatriya males into four stages - *brahmacharya*, *garhasthya*, *sannyas* and *vanaprastha*) in socially locating upper-caste domesticity.⁶² They also asserted that *garhasthya* (the stage earmarked for the performance of duties of the married householder) was the highest form of *ashrama* (stage of life). *Garhasthya* was justified not in terms of this-worldly pursuit of pleasure and happiness for their own sake, but only as a vital means to salvation in the male line. The *dharma* of the householder required him to beget the son essential for this salvation and perform the household-based *nityakarma* and *dashakarma* (sacramental life-cycle rituals) supposedly essential for salvation. The neo-Brahmanic tracts emphasised that *grhadharma* (the duties of the householder) spread uninterruptedly from duties to the members of the household to duties to the kin, the caste and the neighbourhood.⁶³ As will be noted in Chapter Three, this made domesticity both the nucleus and a morally inseparable aspect of the order of a community and neighbourhood imagined as upper-caste in effective membership. Neo-Brahmanic tracts projected conjugal union as a means to procreation and salvation. Marriage was indissoluble, non-consensual and, for the bride, pre-pubertal. In this ideology, the significance of conjugality was, therefore, explicitly procreational, particularly with the rhetoric of love deliberately sublimated within it, as noted in Chapter Four.

⁶¹ The observations on this less sophisticated articulation are based on the reading of a huge mass of tracts and periodicals - all on domesticity - covering the period from the 1880s to the 1920s. E.g., Bhattacharya, *Sangsartattva o Grhadharma*; Ray Chaudhuri, *Hindu Customs*; Saradaprasad Hajrachaudhuri, *Sangsardharma o Bishaykarma*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1313 BE; Anandachandra Sen Bidyanidhi, *Grhinir Kartabya*, (1295 BE) Calcutta, 7th edn, 1335 BE; Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*; Chandrashekhar Sen, *Karmaprasanga ba Manabhijanrahasya*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1327 BE.

⁶² Though the scriptural category of the *varna* system was interchangeably used with the *jati* system, many *jatis* and not four *varnas* was crux of the currently prevalent caste structure in Bengal. For the history of the caste system in Bengal, see Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal*, Berkeley, 1976.

⁶³ E.g., Madhabchandra Sanyal, 'Bibaha', *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1322 BE, pp. 548-54; Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit*, p. 102.

Given these fundamentals of the neo-Brahmanic ideology, it is not surprising that spirituality was said to hinge squarely on the centrality of *paralok* (the life hereafter) in the *dharma* of the householder. The spirituality in terms of which neo-Brahmanic nationalism asserted the difference of its domesticity from that of the 'materialist' West was thus selfless performance of this-worldly duties in a spirit of ideal detachment. An article published as late as 1916 pinpointed the exact location of spirituality in the neo-Brahmanic universe. 'For the Hindu, the goal of domesticity is not mere solace and relaxation ... but something much higher than that. Everything from a small domestic detail ... to a major sacrament is an integral part of *dharma*; ... this is the distinctive mark of the Hindu nation.' It is significant that the author explicitly and exclusively associated the Dharma Shastras with this Hindu domestic morality. Furthermore, everything in domesticity was presented as comprehensively covered by *dharma* and the centrality of *paralok*, and rigidly regulated by the Shastras. She wrote, 'The parents of the Hindu are not mere recipients of respect and gratitude. The father is equated with heaven and *dharma*, the mother is regarded as superior to heaven, the wife is the aide in the performance of *dharma* and the son is conceived for the sake of *dharma* and the next life.'⁶⁴ Similarly, another article explained that, instead of making earthly enjoyment the organising principle of this *ashrama*, Aryan seers have made this 'the stage of detached performance of worldly duties and of control of worldly desires'.⁶⁵

Material pursuits, marriage, conjugality and sexuality were all hostages to this definition of spirituality. *Artha* (wealth) and *kama* (sexual desire) were *nimitta* (means to the end) of salvation and hence not autonomous but subsumed and legitimised exclusively by *dharma* and the concern about *paralok*. Bhudeb was exasperated at what he perceived as a tendency among his contemporaries to treat *dharma* as ritual performance; *dharma*, he reminded his readers, was an abstract spirit of duty and selflessness that was supposed to comprehensively inform the entire field of the everyday existence of a householder. He pointed out that it was wrong to look upon worldly pursuits like managing household finances or earning one's bread, as distinct from *dharma*.⁶⁶ In a similar vein, Chandranath Basu wrote, 'None of the duties of *garhasthya* can be performed without the assistance of the wife ... thus it is undeniable that the aim of Hindu marriage is spiritual, not this-worldly.' 'The wife' he continued, 'is needed for the procreation of a son so vital for the life hereafter of the *pitrapurush* [ancestors in the male line of descent]'. The 'inferior objective' of giving pleasure

⁶⁴ Sarojbasini Gupta, 'Grhasangskar', *Grhastha*, Poush, 1323 BE, p. 236.

⁶⁵ (Anon.), 'Grhir Dharma', *Grhastha*, Shrabana, 1319 BE, p. 284.

⁶⁶ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Samajik Prabandha* (1892), in Pramathanath Bishi (ed.), *Bhudeb-Rachanasambhar*, Calcutta, 1364 BE, p. 228.

to each other was justified as a means to 'the superior end'. Chandranath, indeed, vehemently reacted to Rabindranath Thakur's (Tagore's) suggestion that the Brahmanical notion of marriage was nothing other-worldly but only a means to increasing population.⁶⁷ Nagendranath Basu's *Bishwakosh*, the much celebrated 22-volume Bengali encyclopaedia, axiomatically declared that 'a study of the Ayurveda and the Dharma Shastras clearly show that sex is prescribed only for procreation ... Therefore sex on prohibited days, merely for the gratification of desire, is obnoxious and an act of *adharmā* [antithesis of *dharma*].' Pleasure was justified and ways of pleasing the spouse even briefly discussed in the *Bishwakosh*, but only as a means without which healthy procreation was thought to be in jeopardy.⁶⁸ This explains why some of the neo-Brahmanic tracts did not hesitate to talk openly about the necessity of sexual arousal in married couples; the understanding was that this was not a concession of autonomy to pleasure, but a recognition of its significance as a means to procreation. One *battala* tract, for example, explicitly related its discussion to the nationalist anxiety about health and mortality figures. And within that the author situated the other concern, that 'in Hinduism there is no way to salvation without a son'. He regarded 'detailed knowledge of sex [as] essential because the most important duty of begetting a male progeny depended on it'. Effective sexual arousal was important because it ensured that the child would not be 'blind, lame, or cripple'.⁶⁹

As a correlate of this constant reiteration of the justification of life on earth only in terms of the life hereafter, a powerful discourse on selflessness in this world emerged; it left a deep imprint, as this thesis will show, on the sensibility of the class. Chandranath wrote that since domesticity was justified in terms of its relation to *paralok*, the ideal to be constantly cultivated in domestic existence was *parārtha* (the good of others); self-interest only kept people enslaved to the *pravṛtti* (worldly urges) that came in the way of attainment of *moksha* (salvation). Appealing to the coded morality of the Shastras, Chandranath wrote that the Shastras had located the householder's principal duty in serving others and repressing the desire to serve oneself.⁷⁰ It is significant that the statement of difference with the West came to hinge on this 'selflessness' as a characteristic of Hindu existence in domesticity and in the wider community. Individualism was identified as a characteristic of the 'materialist' West and was sought to be kept at bay from Hindu domesticity.⁷¹ The companionate ideal of

⁶⁷ Basu, *Hindutva*, pp. 360, 365, 367.

⁶⁸ Nagendranath Basu (ed.), *Bishwakosh*, vol. 15, Calcutta, 1311 BE, p. 407.

⁶⁹ Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, pp. 53, 55, 94.

⁷⁰ Basu, *Hindutva*, pp. 38-39. Also see Gupta, 'Grhasangkar', p. 238; Sen, *Karmaprasanga*, vol. 1, pp. 51, 226-27.

⁷¹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Garhasthya', *Grhasthali*, 1:1, 1884, p. 2.

conjugalities was criticised, as will be seen in Chapter Four, as a site of selfish obsession of the couple with each other at the cost of the well-being of the extended family. The Hindu ideal of conjugalities was projected as the self-less performance of the couple's procreational, ritual and material duties under the sombre rubric of *nishkama karma*. The situating of spiritualism in selflessness had a gendered dimension to it, however. Women were a particularly essentialised site of this selflessness. Not only was the 'selflessness' of the widow valorised, so was the housewife's. One author wrote about the housewife, 'Doing all the domestic chores single-handedly and eating only after everybody else had...is her privilege as the *grhalakshi* (the housewife idealised as Lakshmi, the essentially demure goddess of prosperity), ... her virtuous deed, ... her honour'.⁷² Not surprisingly, the apparent tone of praise was actually one of prescription; the ideal of selflessness was a moral-prescriptive obligation vital for the control of women - the instrument of procreation and the site of purity that the colonised male body was perceived to have largely lost.⁷³ It is equally important that women were not subjective parties to the spirituality connecting selfless domestic duty with *paralok*. This spirituality focused on men who alone could claim to be truly detached from this world and, therefore, the real architects of this spirituality. Women were, in effect, functional beings who made this spiritualisation of male existence possible, but had no means to help themselves to their own salvation. Every didactic tract emphasised that the wife had no *dharma* of her own apart from that of her husband on whom alone her salvation depended.⁷⁴

The position of the neo-Brahmanic discourse as the most dominantly projected domestic morality, from its origination to at least the 1920s, seems to be borne out by qualitative evidence. Importantly for the present project as an exploration into social, rather than intellectual, history, the less sophisticated and more standardised form of this ideology was represented in a flood of didactic tracts and inexpensive periodicals. The preponderance of inexpensive print in this voluminous genre seems to indicate the role of the more numerous lower middle class in making the ideology evidently more pervasive than any other among the middle class. Sumit Sarkar has analysed the composition of the milieu that produced *battala* literature as one of predominantly upper-caste, 'unsuccessful bhadralok - *pandits* losing patronage in the new era, obscure hack-writers, humble school teachers, clerks, educated unemployed youth'.⁷⁵ It is not an accidental coincidence, therefore, that the same milieu

⁷² Nagendranath Ghosh, 'Bartamaner Strishikkha o Amader Kartabya', *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1322 BE, pp. 648-49.

⁷³ For the investment of the colonised male in the purity of the supposedly uncolonised body of the female, see Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *EPW*, 22: 47, 21 November 1987, p. 2011.

⁷⁴ E.g., Sen Bidyabhusan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, p. 38.

⁷⁵ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 26.

produced farces and satires deriding the 'England-returned *babu*' and generally the 'reformed'-Hindu (including the Brahmo) way of life. The farces and the didactic tracts gave their affiliation away by their tone of wounded ego when they glorified the 'poor Brahman' who had little English education and material success but who was learned in the scriptures.⁷⁶ Educated women of Brahmo and 'reformed'-Hindu circles were particularly exposed to diatribe from these *battala* publications. This was the numerically dominant milieu that sustained the greater popularity of Jogendrachandra Basu's *Model Bhagini* compared with Bankimchandra's novels even as late as 1910.⁷⁷ Nor is it coincidental that in the same *battala* world of publication, as Sumit Sarkar has shown, the theme of *kaliyuga* came to predominate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The *kaliyuga* literature, as Sarkar calls it, was represented by a massive volume of tracts, farces and satires which constructed the contemporary colonial milieu in the image of the Puranic concept of *kaliyuga* - a cataclysmic period of the world turned upside down. Sarkar shows how the Puranic concept came to be overlaid with the anxieties of the predominantly upper-caste, lower middle class in the colonial milieu.⁷⁸ It is important that in this literature the *adharmā* of the colonial sphere was shown as 'polluting' lower middle-class domesticity with the market-ethos, *swartha* (self-interest), and surrender of weak males to the wiles of their domineering and extravagant wives.⁷⁹ It might not be wrong to suggest that these farces and satires on the one hand, and the didactic tracts on the other, were two faces of the same apprehension of domestic and social 'disorder' that the colonial situation was feared to be unleashing. While the farces condemned the 'causes' of 'disorder' - cash nexus, adoption of Western mores and so on - the didactic tracts supplemented them by an anxious statement of rigid Shastric safeguards for order.

The participation of the lower middle class in its production gave the neo-Brahmanic ideology the support of numbers in its emergence as the preponderant moral discourse. But what made it powerful was that it was not confined to the lower middle class or to less sophisticated formulation. With figures like Bhudeb - extensively quoted in his turn in tracts

⁷⁶ E.g., 'Bidyashunya Bhattacharya' (pseud.), *Ekei Ki Bale Bangali Saheb*, Calcutta, 1880, pp. 17-47. The pseudonym Bidyashunya (devoid of education) is itself a gibe at those who looked upon English education as the only one worth the name. The use of the surname Bhattacharya indicates that the author sought to speak as a Brahman.

⁷⁷ Sen, *Hindu Revivalism*, p. 208. In *Model Bhagini* the educated daughter of a professionally successful middle-class Brahmo father had to be necessarily promiscuous. Her righteous husband, the repository of Brahmanical virtues and erudition in the Shastras, was predictably a 'poor Brahman'. Jogendrachandra Basu, *Model Bhagini* (1293-95 BE), in Jogendrachandra Basu *Granthabali*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1976, pp. 157-422.

⁷⁸ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, pp. 8, 27-29; *idem*; 'Kalijuger Kalpana', pp. 1-13.

⁷⁹ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 28.

on domesticity - Rangalal Mukhopadhyay, Nagendranath Basu, Chandranath Basu, Akkhaychandra Sarkar, Saradacharan Mitra, to name a few, this ideology was well represented in the world of more sophisticated articulation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even in the 1910s and 20s, intellectuals like Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay,⁸⁰ Binaykumar Sarkar,⁸¹ Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi explicitly upheld the neo-Brahmanic world-view. The ideology thus straddled both worlds. It was a sphere where the moral attitude of the lower middle class and that of a section of the more 'successful' or more self-consciously intellectual middle class were united in a consensus. It is significant that the epistemological principle of the celebrated *Bishwakosh*, was itself Brahmanic and the *Bishwakosh*, in its turn, was widely quoted in neo-Brahmanic tracts on domesticity.⁸² In the discussion of human behaviour, categories and instincts universal to all human societies, the *Bishwakosh* axiomatically and exclusively used the Brahmanical epistemology. For example, the discussion on sex in this encyclopaedia is exclusively a compendium of Shastric prescriptions and injunctions regarding sex and a sprinkling of quotations from Ayurvedic sources like the *Sushruta Samhita*. Similarly the discussion on 'women' was a cluster of citations mainly from the Dharma Shastras and some of the Puranas.⁸³ Thus, in matters concerning the domestic sphere, the Brahmanical world-view was presented as the universal one.

It would be wrong to assume that the neo-Brahmanic ideology was restricted to the extremely aggressive strand of Aryanism represented by the leaders of the *Bangabasi* group - figures like Jogendrachandra Basu and Indranath Bandyopadhyay or Shashadhar Tarkachudamani - though this strand must have given the ideology a fillip.⁸⁴ The ideology did not owe its inception to the *Bangabasi* writers; it had already crystallised by the time *Bangabasi* attained popularity. It should be borne in mind that *Bangabasi*, though by far the most chauvinistic, was not the only periodical upholding the neo-Brahmanic view; there was, indeed, an impressive number of them.

Though the exposition of this world-view reached a fever-pitch during the Age of Consent agitation, it would be wrong to imagine an ideology, as comprehensively and systematically expounded as this, to be coterminous with the short span of an agitation. Nor did the ideology lose its dominance with the waning of the prominence of sensational

⁸⁰ Radhakamal's views seemed to have gone through a transition in the 1920s. This is discussed in Chapter Two.

⁸¹ As discussed in Chapter Two, Binaykumar abandoned his commitment to the ideology c. 1915.

⁸² E.g., Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, p. 41.

⁸³ Basu (ed.), *Bishwakosh*, vol. 22, Calcutta, 1318 BE, pp. 234-42.

⁸⁴ For discussions about this particularly aggressive strand of 'revivalism', see Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, pp. 9-12, 33-34; Sen, *Hindu Revivalism*, pp. 205-84.

spokesmen like Shashadhar and Indranath at the turn of the century. Indeed, the Swadeshi movement inspired the emergence of a spate of neo-Brahmanic periodicals. During the 1910s and early 1920s, the ideology was upheld by periodicals like *Grhastha*, *Upasana*, *Arghya* and *Nayak* closely linked to each other and to such 'orthodox' periodicals as *Brahman Samaj* and *Kayastha Patrika*. Their link, moreover, with district-level periodicals like *Bardhaman Sanjibani*, *Chabbish Pargana Bartabaha*, *Hinduranjika* and *Rangpur Dikprakash* indicates the integration and the importance of the neo-Brahmanic universe. The didactic authors contributing to these periodicals (often the same author regularly contributing to three or four of these) quite obviously looked upon them as representing a discursive grid distinct from others.

Significantly, in the 1930s when communal-minded intellectuals undertook a vigorous drive to redefine Hindu identity, they explicitly identified the neo-Brahmanic spiritualisation of every-day existence as the dominant moral rhetoric to be confronted and marginalised, as noted in Chapter Two. For example, in the early 1930s Debaprasad Ghosh of the Hindu Mahasabha was exasperated that the spiritualist rhetoric justifying this-worldly existence exclusively in terms of the next had been so incessantly preached over the years that it had come to have a deep impact on the vast majority of the Bengali Hindus: 'The hypnotic impact of this unceasing reiteration [of the *paralok* as the central significance of this life] is still strong; the inertia it has generated and the spell it has cast are yet to be properly dispelled.'⁸⁵ It is significant that in the 1920s and 30s, non-communal intellectuals of varying persuasions - for example, Binaykumar Sarkar, Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay and Annadashankar Ray - similarly identified the rhetoric of Brahmanical spirituality as the dominant morality to be challenged, as will be seen in Chapter Two. Again, evidence of the dominance of this morality was also to be found in the language of advertisements in the world of cheap print. If advertisers may be regarded as particularly careful not to shock the dominant morality, then it is significant that advertisements up to the 1920s were worded, the next chapter will show, in close conformity with the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of domestic morality.

An argument about the predominance of the neo-Brahmanic ideology with its manly spirituality and its Vedic-Shastric rationality has, however, to come to grips with Sumit Sarkar's study of the appeal of Ramakrishna's childlike *bhakti* (simple devotion) and unreason among the lower middle class. Ramakrishna's popularity indicated that there was a strong attraction away from the ritualism and formalism of Brahmanical otherworldliness towards the simplicity of a childlike self-abandonment in *bhakti* and its promise of this-

⁸⁵ Debaprasad Ghosh, 'Punarukti', *Hindu Kon Pathe, Kayekti Samajik Prabandha*, Calcutta, 1341 BE, p. 139.

worldly communion. Relegated to dull and lowly clerical jobs, the lower middle-class devotees perhaps expressed a muffled defiance through a preference for feminisation, child-like behaviour, and irresponsible unreason of the *pagal* (unreasonable person) that marked their sessions with the master.⁸⁶ But it is equally important that the same lower middle-class milieu produced a huge volume of neo-Brahmanic tracts, too vast to be ignored. The plausible explanation is that this was an ambivalence characteristic of the liminality of the colonial middle class. At the level of practised morality, release in the form of feminisation and qualified unreason was accommodated. But the printed voice of order could not afford to depend on *paglami* (unreason) for the organisation of domesticity, particularly when it was anxious to avert from Hindu domesticity the colonial gaze that professedly projected 'reason' as the principle of its critical and 'reforming' ardour. Because the internal order of domesticity was so vital for biological and cultural reproduction, youths needed to be ordered through more rigidly codified norms. The neo-Brahmanic language suited the requirements of disciplining which could not be left to the informal persuasion of simple piety. Similarly, for patriarchal reasons, the adult male as the keeper of order and discipline had to be knowledgeable (acquainted with the Brahmanical metaphysics) and manly. It is to be noted that the chapter entitled 'Pagaler Philosophy' (Philosophy of the Unreasonable) in one of the didactic tracts on domesticity is entirely a discussion of Brahmanical metaphysics.⁸⁷ The author sarcastically called himself 'unreasonable' because he did not follow the 'easy path' of 'materialist' reason that 'Westernised' brethren did; his was the morally exacting 'rationality' of *nishkama karma*.

The Ordering Function

Besides spiritualising domesticity relative to the colonial sphere, the neo-Brahmanic ideology also reflected middle-class anxiety, in the colonial situation, to order domesticity, i.e., to use patriarchal authority to structure domesticity as a disciplined, orderly, stable and materially viable field. The colonial discourse of power constructed the Bengali Hindu household as disorderly, superstitious, unhygienic and promiscuous, and thus sought to justify intervention in Bengali domesticity. The neo-Brahmanic projection of a flawless domestic arrangement sought to counter (or forestall) such intervention. If domesticity were to be one of the major sites where the shrunken autonomy of the colonised male was to be preserved, then it had to

⁸⁶ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 23. Ramakrishna and his devotees freely expressed their emotions, danced ecstatically and wept in public.

⁸⁷ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsataru*, pp. 171-93.

have adequate internal policing, organisation and knowledge to be able to keep official interference and Western cultural inroads at bay. This is probably one of the major reasons why the massive corpus of domestic manuals aimed at - as Tanika Sarkar characterises it - a 'thorough pedagogisation of even minute and mundane details of domestic life'.⁸⁸ However, this nationalist counter-discourse was inevitably a discourse of power in its own right. Domesticity was the site which nationalism drafted in order to shape youths, women and children as obedient subjects. The ordered household was the fundamental unit where sexuality could be regulated, procreation legitimised and sustained, the virility of the young male controlled and put to use, women subordinated, and the child provided the supposedly formative early socialisation - all for the ideal future of the nation. Also, the dissemination of the nationalist repertoire of formal knowledge - as opposed to the 'denationalising' education in the colonial sphere - could be most manageably organised, structured and controlled if the household was mobilised as its base.⁸⁹

A study of this ordering function of the ideology also reveals that this was not a mere one-way ordering of domesticity by an imagination of national virtues evolved autonomously of the domestic situation of the class. Rather, lived domestic experience also unleashed material determinants that shaped the parameters of the class's imagining of national 'characteristics' themselves. The imagining of the nation and its ideal domesticity, after all, was also a matter of ordering, with an eye to the interests of the upper-caste, status-bound class with its own specific material anxieties and its specific pre-existing structures of authority. An appreciation of this dialectic is needed to counter the impression of material context-lessness and disembodiedness, generated by much of the recent discussions on the nationalist 'recasting' of domesticity.⁹⁰

The disciplining function expected of the male head of the household by nationalism's discourse of power was evident in the frequent characterisation of the *paribar* (the household-bound family) as a state to be governed, an enterprise to be administered, or even as an army to be led.⁹¹ Echoing Bhudeb,⁹² many neo-Brahmanic essays on domesticity claimed that each *paribar* was a kingdom and 'preserving the internal order' was entirely the 'duty' of the head

⁸⁸ Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalities', p. 99.

⁸⁹ Also see Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

⁹⁰ E.g., Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 9-13, 35-37, 116-157. Chatterjee's discussion on the 'middleness' of the Calcutta middle class is totally regardless of the material specificity that determined the discursive contours of the class's articulation. Also see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 50-88.

⁹¹ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

⁹² Mukhopadhyay, 'Grhe Dharmadhikaran', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 179.

of the family.⁹³ Predictably, this need for order was justified on the basis of a constructed notion or threat of emergent 'disorder'. This construction pervaded the neo-Brahmanic tracts and periodicals. Youths were seen as becoming selfish, extravagant and self-willed under the impact of Western mores,⁹⁴ male children as disobedient and given to masturbation, women as lazy, extravagant and domineering.⁹⁵ The concern for order was also closely related to the anxiety to keep official interference at bay and indeed avert the colonial gaze altogether from middle-class domesticity. This is indicated by the forceful reiteration that Hindu domesticity - 'civilised', 'time-tested' and 'codified' - needed no disciplining intervention from the colonial sphere. When, in the 1880s, the missionary W. Hastie criticised Hindu ritual practices in the *Statesman*, his article was followed by numerous resentful letters to the editor. This epistolary counter-offensive questioned his right to attack ceremonies held in Hindu homes. What is more, they anxiously claimed for Hindu domestic practices a foundation in nothing short of the authenticity of the rigidly codified Shastras.⁹⁶ Again, in the immediate wake of Malabari's proposal regarding the Age of Consent, one author wrote, 'Thoughtful men must ... pause before they adopt any foreign innovation ... the system of marriage prevalent in the previous three ages of *satya*, *treta* and *dapar* cannot be condemned ... there is no reason to resort to foreign [sic] legislation for its suppression.'⁹⁷ Ordered domesticity was also a source of moral capital for the middle class in staking a claim to 'natural leadership' over the lower orders.⁹⁸ *Kayastha Patrika*, for example, wrote in 1915, about the 'duty' of 'the educated middle class' to 'instruct the lower orders in the morality and discipline of *nishkama dharma*' in order to 'improve the condition of the nation'.⁹⁹ And it has already been noted that it was domesticity - of course middle-class and upper-caste - that was regarded by this ideology as the greatest domain of *dharma* in this world.

However, this important site of nationalist ordering, in its turn, supplied, at least to begin with, the principal modality for the imagining of the nation. The *paribar* (the household-bound family) was the dominant idiom for imagining the nation as a human unit. It is important to realise that when, during the late 19th century, Bengali Hindu middle-class nationalism was fashioning the ideal *paribar* as an orderly and disciplined site, it was actually

⁹³ E.g., (Anon.), 'Garhasthya', p. 1.

⁹⁴ E.g., (Anon.), 'Bartaman Shikkha', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1322 BE, pp. 797-80.

⁹⁵ E.g., Sen, *Karmaprasanga*, vol. 1, pp. 187-88.

⁹⁶ E.g., the letters of 'A Brahman' (27 September 1882), of 'Ramchandra' (16 October 1882), and of Ockhoy Chunder Karmokar (23 September 1882) reproduced in W. Hastie, *Hindu Idolatry and English Enlightenment*, Calcutta, 1883, pp. 103, 108-09, 131.

⁹⁷ Ray Chaudhuri, *Hindu Customs*, p. 33.

⁹⁸ E.g., Gupta, 'Grhasangkar', p. 238.

⁹⁹ (Anon.), 'Swarthahinatar Shikkha', *Kayastha Patrika*, reproduced in *Grhastha*, Poush, 1322 BE, pp. 206-07.

also imagining an ordered nation after the model of the upper-caste, middle-class family-household. In the absence as yet of any clearly congealed political nation as a human unit, the most fundamental lived unit on the basis of which an ordered nation could be imagined was the household; after all it had a pre-existing disciplinary mechanism and a structure of authority. Therefore, in the late 19th century rather than any preconceived nation being used to inform the family field with 'virtues' from above, domesticity, imagined in the form of a 'joint family',¹⁰⁰ was projected as the hallowed field for the performance of *dharma* and, therefore, the paradigm for imagining the nation. Swami Abhedananda, in one of his lectures in 1906, was merely reiterating a very common rhetorical claim of the period when he said that every community among the Hindus was a family. He stated what he perceived as the duty of every resourceful person first to the family, then the kin, and finally the caste. He went on to say that in recent years this familial sense was being extended to include the whole of the '*Bharatiya Aryajati*' (the Aryan race in India), instead of being restricted to respective caste-communities.¹⁰¹ Thus, domesticity and the family were made to provide the 'virtues' that were extended to construct the nation. Before the 1920s even a social scientist like Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, in trying to identify the characteristics of the nation as a human unit, highlighted nothing but the 'joint family' and the caste system as 'cherished national institutions'.¹⁰² This reveals the source from which the nation was being imagined by the Bengali Hindu middle class.

One can now analyse some important aspects of this ordering of domesticity to qualify further the discussions which have treated domesticity only as a passive site for what appears, from their analyses, to be a preconceived idea of the nation. The notion of selfless duty towards domesticity and the community was one of the characteristics that the neo-Brahmanic ideology, as has already been noted, claimed as the essence of the spirituality of the nation. Simultaneously, however, neo-Brahmanic authors were anxious to ensure that this confident

¹⁰⁰ Academic discussions on the Hindu 'joint family' remain tangled in definitional problems, with the Indological notion (based on Hindu legal texts) and the sociological conception not corresponding to each other. (See for example, A. M. Shah, *The Household Dimension of the Family in India*, Berkeley, 1974; G. Sontheimer, *The Hindu Joint Family System: Its Evolution as a Legal Institution*, Delhi, 1977). Again, (as observed in Chapter Five), while it was a widely cherished ideal throughout the period, the structural meanings read into the term 'joint family' varied significantly in the class's own cognisance. It is preferable to use the term - necessarily in quotation marks - only when it refers directly to the subjective use of the term by the Bengali middle class itself during the period concerned. But in so far as this thesis sociologically characterises the structure that predominantly obtained among the Bengali middle class, the term extended family has been preferred.

¹⁰¹ Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit* pp. 104, 118. Also see Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1320 BE, p. 575.

¹⁰² Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', p. 575.

assertion was supplemented by elaborate prescriptions on how to cultivate this selflessness. This revealed that for Bengali Hindu domesticity in the colonial environment, selflessness was also the moral language for enforcing discipline. Chandranath Basu said that if the Bengali Hindus were to be true to their nationhood, they would have to renounce the selfish pursuit of personal luxury that English education instilled into them, destroying the self-renouncing tradition of *brahmacharya*.¹⁰³ Authors like Chandranath used the concept of self-renunciation as a stabilising safeguard for indigent domesticity against what was perceived as an unavoidable capitulation to paid jobs and relatedly the market in consumer goods.¹⁰⁴ Under colonial rule, he wrote, it had become necessary for the sake of survival to adopt a means of livelihood which was 'basically a path of temptation ... One should be careful not to tread it more than was necessary for subsistence'.¹⁰⁵ Another author similarly presented the household as a site where the destabilising impact of 'relentless pursuit of *swartha*', ensuing from the colonial sphere, was corrected by the redeeming touch of *parartha*. He went on to enjoin that Western ideas and luxury should be prevented from disordering this sphere.¹⁰⁶

The selflessness that the nation was expected to cultivate in its ideal domesticity, also, however, had a sub-text of anxiety about the viability of the middle-class family, given its limited resources. This draws our attention to the material underpinning of the nationalist imagining of domestic 'virtues' - an aspect conspicuously elided in post-modernist historiography on Indian nationalism. It is significant that Chandranath's abstract metaphysics about self-renunciation was punctuated with very realistic passages on the scant resources of the middle class.¹⁰⁷ Selflessness and abstinence from luxury were, thus, the rhetoric of safeguard lest ordinary middle-class domesticity went overboard; as he said, 'if we could renounce extravagance and imbibe *brahmacharya* we could save money ... extravagance is the reason why we run into debt'.¹⁰⁸ The material context of this anxiety to discipline desires through a rhetoric of selflessness was clearly revealed by the evident anxiety in didactic tracts to reassure youths that middle-class domesticity was not a site of unmitigated sorrow.¹⁰⁹ Also, the unfailing emphasis on *garhasthya* as the greatest of the *ashramas*, was often followed by the injunction that world-renunciation by youths was

¹⁰³ Basu, *Hindutva*, pp. 37-39, 402.

¹⁰⁴ For the perceived relation between paid jobs and the market, see Sarkar, *An Exploration*, pp. 8, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Basu, *Hindutva*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Sen, *Karmaprasanga*, vol. 1, pp. 43-44, 186-93

¹⁰⁷ Basu, *Hindutva*, pp. 400-03.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

¹⁰⁹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Garhasthya', p. 3.

unjustified.¹¹⁰ The reason for the apprehension of world-weariness may be gauged from a late 19th-century farce which presented an archetypal clerk as saying, 'As it is, the burden of debt on the one hand and domestic worries on the other are driving me crazy. With her [his wife's] nagging on top of that, I do not feel like staying at home any longer.'¹¹¹

The section of the middle class round which the apprehension of world-weariness particularly centred, is not far to seek. It should not be overlooked that in most of the functional information that the domestic manuals and periodicals supplied, the concern was to save the 'humble *grhastha*' from spending beyond his capacity. An article in *Grhasthali* said, 'Particularly, the humble *grhastha* [as it is] has difficulty sustaining the large number of children and dependants ... the way the children quickly soil their clothes ... a knowledge of inexpensive washing procedures could help every person wear clean clothes everyday ... if one combines it with borax one can do with half as much soap'.¹¹² On the other hand, Bengali Hindu middle-class nationalism needed domesticity for biological and cultural reproduction - so vital for the nation in its opposition to the colonial presence. From that perspective, too, *sannyas* in youth was an anathema. Even the farce quoted above did not actually mean to encourage world-renunciation. Rather the entire tenor of the majority of such farces was to project the need for an ideal of domesticity. Indeed, the ideal it projected for the male was 'discussion with *pandits* learned in the scriptural codes', 'metaphysical speculation on *dharma*', 'performance of the Brahmanical *nityakarma*' and 'spending the night at home'.¹¹³

Another characteristic of the neo-Brahmanic didactic literature underlines the role of the material reality of middle-class domesticity in determining the nationalist essentialisation of the home. These tracts, manuals and periodicals sought to equip domesticity with an extensive field of functional knowledge. They gave instruction on domestic budgets, hygiene, elementary astrology, basic medication, the management of interpersonal relations, midwifery, upbringing of children and so on. Most of these chores were explicitly shunted on to women; not only were they to rear the children and cook and clean, and but were now expected to know the answer to every mundane domestic situation. Quite clearly, as Tanika Sarkar has noted, the household was nationalism's site of formal knowledge.¹¹⁴ Nationalist anxieties about the 'degenerating' health of the Bengali Hindu middle class were reflected in the elaborate medical and therapeutic information that was furnished in the manuals. It is also

¹¹⁰ E.g., Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sangsar Kosh*, Calcutta, 1900, p. 65. Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, pp. 60-61.

¹¹¹ Bholanath Mukhopadhyay, *Apnar Mukh Apni Dekho*, Calcutta, 1314 BE, p.131.

¹¹² (Anon.), 'Bastra Dhauta Karibar Pranali', *Grhasthali*, 1:1, 1884, p. 21.

¹¹³ Mukhopadhyay, *Apnar Mukh*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugality', p. 99.

significant that neo-Brahmanic domestic manuals up to the late 1910s provided a compendium of Ayurveda and Mushtiyoga (a popular therapy partly derived from Ayurveda) so that domesticity did not have to fall back on Western medicine.¹¹⁵ This tied up with the projection of the allopath as the avaricious agent of an alien therapy,¹¹⁶ and his denigration, whether in Jogendrachandra's *Model Bhagini* or in *battala* farces, as promiscuous and immoral.¹¹⁷

This knowledge also aimed at giving domesticity, as far as possible, an insulation relative to the market in consumer goods - the other 'destabilising' sphere that was sought to be distanced from domesticity. Here again the lived reality of average middle-class existence overdetermined the nationalist inscription of domestic order. The bank of knowledge with which nationalism invested its domestic order, clearly bore the mark of the limited, even scarce, resources of ordinary to lower middle-class households, dependent on a fixed income from *chakri*. The manuals suggested elaborate functional safeguards against apprehended vagaries of the market. For example, an article giving information about some chemical preparations said, 'the producers do not divulge the formulae for the preparation of these. So the *grhastha* has no option but to look towards the market.'¹¹⁸ Ambikacharan Gupta was equally concerned to control domestic spending for 'people ... [who are so] incessantly hassled by domestic indigence that ... demoralisation claims them.' This made him lengthen the list of functional knowledge women should possess in order to cushion domesticity against the market. To solve the paradox of providing young men with recreation but saving them expenditure on it, he instructed young brides in conjuring and card tricks.¹¹⁹

It should not be overlooked, however, that this quest for order through insulation from the market also related to a specific concern of the Bengali middle class. The class was anxious to ensure a sense of simple contentment lest the market in consumer goods radically diversified the lifestyle within the extended family, impairing the cushion-effect expected of it. The urban market and consumerism were regarded as the most potent agents of such diversification of lifestyle. There is ample evidence of fear of consumerism in the late 19th-century farces and tracts. It is significant that in the farces the insubordinate wife, intent on driving away the relatives dependent on her husband's income, was also portrayed as market-

¹¹⁵ E.g., Ambikacharan Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban: Amulya Gyan Bhandar*, (1887) Calcutta, 3rd edn, 1887, pp. 34-99; 'Rogir Paricharjya', *Grhasthali*, 1:1, 1884, pp. 10-14.

¹¹⁶ E.g., Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay, *Grhasthadarpan*, Calcutta, 1932, p. 1 of the Introduction.

¹¹⁷ Basu, *Model Bhagini*, pp. 179-83; 'Janaika Daktar' (pseud.), *Daktarbabu Natak*, Calcutta, 1875, *passim*.

¹¹⁸ (Anon.), 'Taila Prastut Pranali', *Grhasthali*, 1:7, p. 152.

¹¹⁹ Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban*, p. 240.

oriented and extravagant.¹²⁰ Market-led differentiation in life-style was also perceived as inimical to the ideal consensus in the *samaj* - a consensus that the class regarded as vital for its order and stability.¹²¹ Bhudeb, for example, explicitly stated that the 'power of money' was weakening the authority of consensus in the community.¹²² The compendia of mundane, functional information and knowledge were, therefore, as crucial for the ideology as the metaphysics of *nishkama karma* and *parartha*; indeed one supplemented the other.

More interestingly, a close study of the neo-Brahmanic tracts and periodicals also reveals that at certain points these writings might indeed subtly contradict the nationalist essentialisation of domesticity. While the nationalist voice in them invariably condemned luxury, the sections on functional knowledge sometimes sought to equip domesticity with methods of preparing certain items of 'luxury' at home. However, the strength and intensity of the rhetoric of spirituality concealed this tactful appropriation of some of the less 'harmful' 'luxuries' that had started lurking on the horizon of lower middle-class wishes. While periodicals like *Grhasthali* and *Kajer Lok* moralised about domesticity as the sphere of detached performance of duties, control of worldly desires and abstention from luxury, they also supplied information on how to prepare articles like scented hair oil and perfume at home.¹²³ But it is important to realise how this appropriation ultimately aimed at maintaining order. By providing this know-how, the periodicals explicitly aimed at preventing the diversion of the scant family income to the market and reserving it for the performance of 'duties' instead.

The nationalist determination of domesticity was also mediated by the continuing popularity of certain pre-existing forms of popular domestic knowledge from which cultural nationalism sought to distance itself. Ambikacharan Gupta, in his *Grhastha Jiban*, which ran into several editions, sought to equip the young bride with, among other things, an elaborate knowledge about Tantric *shatkarma* and popular spells that supposedly helped to recover lost or stolen items, catch thieves, and so on.¹²⁴ It has been noted how the neo-Brahmanic ideology, in response to colonial critiques, tried to project domesticity as distanced from popular spells and this-worldly Tantric remedies. But Ambikacharan's complicated manoeuvres to accommodate these in his book betrayed the household's inability to conform

¹²⁰ For a summarised account of plots of a sizeable number of 19th-century satires and farces, see Jayanta Goswami, *Samajchitre Unabingsha Shatabdir Bangla Prahasan*, Calcutta, 1974.

¹²¹ E.g., Rajanikanta Gupta, 'Amader Jatiya Bhab', *Sahitya*, Baishakh, 1298 BE, p. 21.

¹²² Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 240-41.

¹²³ (Anon). 'Grhabyabaharjya Drabyadi Prastutpranali', *Grhasthali*, 1:7, p. 152. Identification of scented oil and particularly perfume as 'luxury' pervaded the didactic texts, e.g., Ganapati Ray, 'Grhinir Kartabya', *Grhastha*, Bahdra, 1321 BE, p. 1065.

¹²⁴ Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban*, pp. 211-73.

to the expected marginalisation of these practices. It seems that not only were they popular in the women's domain; many a male, like Ambikacharan himself, could not relinquish overnight their belief in the efficacy of these methods. But the problem was that this belief was now embarrassing to articulate and so required subterfuge. He, therefore, shunted the responsibility for this knowledge onto the women's domain and at the same time ensured that at least there it was respectfully preserved. This is clear from his advice to the young bride that, unlike contemporary males, she should not learn to look askance at these spells, indicating that among educated males the current trend was to do so.¹²⁵ But, at the same time, Ambikacharan was anxious to keep up the impression of the ideal rationality and detachment of the male. He did it by dissociating the knowledge of Tantric *shatkarma* from the male (father's) voice in which the whole book was presented; to present the section on *shatkarma* a female voice was introduced into the text as that of the elder sister of the young bride. Thus this 'useful' knowledge was preserved in domesticity and yet the Brahmanical detachment and other-worldly ontology of the male was not compromised; significantly, true to the hierarchy of the neo-Brahmanic ideology, Ambikacharan's protagonist was a Brahman and a Sanskrit scholar learned in the Shastras.¹²⁶ Similarly, the section on spells for the recovery of lost articles and remedy for poisoning was presented as learnt by the author from an *ojha* (exorcist), out of personal curiosity. The author, thus, seemed to take care that no impression was created of any 'natural' (hereditary or caste) association of the upper-caste, middle-class male with this knowledge. Also, the author's acquisition of such overtly this-worldly knowledge was made to appear as too casual to affect his fundamental spirit of worldly detachment.

The other important aspect of order, where lived domesticity and the process of imagining the nation interacted, was the question of household authority. The neo-Brahmanic morality ordered interpersonal relations in the family through a rhetoric of rigid authority and hierarchy. All members were subordinated to the *karta* (male head of the household), women to patriarchy, children and youths to the elderly, servants to masters. The nature of authority of the male over the female is discussed in Chapter Four. The disciplining of childhood and its harnessing to the orderly nation have been analysed in two recent studies. Shibaji Bandyopadhyay has shown how the dominant colonial middle-class morality 'demanded blind allegiance and unquestioning subordination' from the child.¹²⁷ Pradip Kumar Bose has

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Shibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandasamas: Upanibeshbad o Bangla Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 134-46, 192-98.

specifically shown how children were one of the major sites on which 'the needs of the nation and the model of national cultural improvement' were projected and tried out.¹²⁸ This thesis will, accordingly, concentrate on the ordering of youths. Indeed the middle class's imagining of the nation, and the class's claim to natural leadership in colonial society depended on biological and cultural reproduction. In both of these youth mattered most. This investment in youth was also an anxious one because young men were perceived as potentially very corruptible by 'Western' ideas. Ideas of individual liberty that permeated English education, made middle-class patriarchy apprehensive of an assertion of autonomy by young males. The way the normative tracts characterised this stage in life indicated the vital concern for the 'power' of youth and a fear about its 'corruptibility'. As one such tract stated, 'in youth one's physical organs as well as mental capacities ... are at the height of their effectiveness. On the other hand, vices like desire and anger, equally developed, try to rule over the youth's mind'.¹²⁹ Therefore, while the nationalist agenda made youth one of its main sites for the modelling of the nation, it was also necessary to discipline young men with a very strong reiteration of the authority of old age over youth. Simultaneously, as patriarchy nervously imagined young men calling their fathers 'old fools',¹³⁰ the ideal young man was projected as continent, strong, and morally upright; this moral uprightness necessarily included subordination to elders.¹³¹ Bhudeb wrote, 'Honouring age and seniority in relationships is one of the great virtues of our nation. It should be religiously maintained in the family.'¹³² The morality betrayed an interesting paradox, however. On the one hand, the ideology expected youths to assert autonomy in relation to a colonial education that was turning them into 'spineless creatures ... passively flowing downstream' towards an unimaginative and unanimating world of paid employment or legal practice. But, on the other hand, at home they were to subordinate their individuality and sexuality to the rubric of patriarchal and Shastric authority; the plea was that under the impact of Western individualism, young men was prone to *swartha* that was inimical to the sense of duty determined by *dharma*.¹³³

The role of the pre-existing structure of patriarchy in reinforcing the nationalist rhetoric of familial authority and deciding its specific contours, should not be overlooked. In a culture where the middle-class family was, more often than not, an extended one with the

¹²⁸ Pradip Kumar Bose, 'Sons of the Nation', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 120-22.

¹²⁹ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, p. 42.

¹³⁰ E.g., Jadunath Chakrabarti, *Garhasathyashram: Grhir Kartabya*, Calcutta, 1295 BE, p. 35; Chattopadhyay, *Grhinipana*, p. 16.

¹³¹ E.g., Gupta, 'Grhasangskar', p. 236.

¹³² Mukhopadhyay, 'Grhe Dharmadhikaran', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p.183.

¹³³ 'Alochana', 'Bartaman Shikkha' in, *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1322 BE, p. 798-99.

young married son morally obliged to reside with his parents and other elderly male members of the family, recognition of the full-fledged adulthood of the youth was impossible. This is clear, for example, in Chandranath Basu's discussion of marriage and his criticism of 'reformed' Hindu opinion about the matter. Chandranath gave the 'spirituality of marriage' as the reason why young people should not choose their respective spouses. But, in the same breath, he said that, if order and peace in the family and the *samaj* were to be preserved, the choice of spouse should be left to the parents; 'marriage should be arranged early under parental authority and not at one's own discretion'.¹³⁴ Objectification of youth as the reproductive base of the nation conflated with its objectification in the pre-existing ontology as the procreators of the sons needed for salvation in the male line.

Thus in an ideology in which youth was repeatedly validated as a 'power', the sexuality of young men was also sought to be regimented. Indeed, the spiritual ideals of selflessness and manly detachment served as a disciplining rhetoric holding the 'disordering' potential of youthful passion and pleasure in check. At a more functional level the autonomy of a young man's sexuality was heavily circumscribed by the deployment of real and supposed Shastric injunctions. Didactic tracts and Ayurvedic manuals emphasised that youths should not resort to masturbation and excessive sexual indulgence.¹³⁵ This was contexted in an internalisation of the colonial characterisation of the Bengali Hindu male and his alleged weakness and effeminacy. The British portrayed the Bengali Hindu male as lacking 'manly self-control' and resorting to excessive sexual indulgence thanks to the overtly sexual atmosphere of the Bengali home encouraging such practices as masturbation.¹³⁶ However, once this characterisation was internalised, the disciplining language that was devised by the neo-Brahmanic ideology was not just a simple derivation of Western ideas about 'sins' like masturbation. It was also derived, it seems, from the Shastras and Ayurvedic texts which premised masculine health and vigour on the conservation of semen and prescribed elaborate rules of abstinence (for the unmarried youth) and continence (for the married).¹³⁷ The *Bishwakosh*, which represented an epistemological vindication of the neo-Brahmanic world-view, extensively and frequently quoted Sushruta to emphasise that sexual indulgence, over and above what was prescribed in the Shastras, led to 'excessive loss of semen' and impairment of manly strength.¹³⁸ Thus for the ideology, *brahmacharya* and Shastric

¹³⁴ Basu, *Hindutva*, Calcutta, 1892, p. 384.

¹³⁵ E.g., Rampran Sharma, *Brihat Rashigyan Dipika o Brihat Chikitsatattvabaridhi*, Howrah, 6th edn, 1326 BE, pp. 81, 100-102.

¹³⁶ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 18-19.

¹³⁷ E.g., Basu (ed.), *Bishwakosh*, vol. 22, pp. 241-42.

¹³⁸ Basu (ed.), *Bishwakosh*, vol. 15, pp. 406-08.

continence (after marriage) became the rhetoric for ordering the procreative faculty of youth. One author of several *battala* didactic tracts wrote, 'Those who indulge in excessive sexual intercourse right from puberty, never have strong and healthy children; many of these children even turn out to be impotent.'¹³⁹ Elsewhere he identified masturbation as another reason for the supposed decline of potency.¹⁴⁰ Didactic literature on domesticity and on the ideal Hindu way of life said that since in the present system of education there was no scope for the moral education of children and youths, the home was where *brahmacharya* should be enforced by parents.¹⁴¹ In the context of a derivative perception of Bengalis as a non-martial and undisciplined people, several texts called upon the father to impose a Spartan regime. Bhudeb, for instance, invested the *karta* of the family with a duty of imposing a strict moral regime on the sons and instructing them in Shastric rules of continence.¹⁴² This moral drive of the late 19th century to regiment adolescence, youth and marital sex seems to have been largely determined by a sensitivity to official statistics. That this generation of didactic authors was actually disturbed by these figures is indicated by Bhudeb's concern over the 1881 and 1891 census statistics; these figures showed a much lower rate of demographic growth in Bengal and India than in Britain.¹⁴³ This sensitivity of the authors, particularly to what they perceived as a high child mortality rate, ties up with their obsessive concern (discussed in Chapter Four) with ensuring a 'hygienic' condition in the domestic labour room and during child-birth.

The ambivalence of the colonial middle class, however, affected the ordering discourse on youth. Obsession with 'effeminacy' and 'cowardice' tended to generate attitudes that might at points run contrary to the discourse of rigid subjection of youth to strict discipline. One strand of discourse, for example, might be cited in which the need to assert 'courage, freedom of mind, firmness and self-reliance' diluted the enthusiasm about *brahmacharya*. Bankimchandra Sen wrote that the excess of discipline was stifling the 'natural' liveliness of childhood and the teenage years making the principles of *brahmacharya* unanimating. Interestingly, it was the author's concern that childhood and youth among Bengali Hindus should rise above 'effeminacy', 'weakness', and 'inertia' that prompted his emphasis on the need for cultivating the 'natural liveliness' of the teens. It is not surprising, therefore, that this discourse was no less essentialising than the usual ones on *brahmacharya*. Indeed the same

¹³⁹ Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, p. 39.

¹⁴¹ E.g., Jibankali Ray Baidyaratna, 'Bibaha-bidhi', *Grhastha*, Phalgun, 1321 BE, p. 449.

¹⁴² Mukhopadhyay, 'Santaner Shikkha', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 140; *idem*, 'Shayan Ebang Nidradi', p. 238.

¹⁴³ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Samajik Prabandha* (1892), in *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*, Calcutta, 1364 BE, p. 208.

assumption of innate corruptibility of teenagers and youths underlay this discussion. The idealist path envisaged by the author for youths was also one of 'renunciation and self-sacrifice' and not self-realisation. Finally, it did not really question the notion of *brahmacharya*. Sen wrote, 'There could be no justification of boyhood, after all, without *brahmacharya*'.¹⁴⁴ Rather, he wanted to make *brahmacharya* more palatable to teenagers by concessions to adventurism so that both discipline and the nationalist requirements of a healthy nation were served. This illustrates the peculiar liminality of the colonial middle class as well as contradictory expectations of nationalism from youth during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. So it was rare, but not unexpected, that an occasional voice would emerge apparently against the strict disciplinarian expectation and yet fail to jettison a disciplining stake in *brahmacharya*.

One has, however, to confront the question whether the greater activism conceded to young men from the time of the Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) fundamentally changed the attitude of the ideology to youth. This political activism of youths, after the turn of the century, was inspired by Vivekananda's understanding of *karma* which was different from the accustomed meaning. In the place of mere caste-based domestic ritual performance, Vivekananda suggested the ideal of non-traditional social service as the principal form of *karma*.¹⁴⁵ As an essay in social history, this study is not concerned with Vivekananda's ideas as such. But it is important to see whether as a result of meanings read into his teachings by the Bengali Hindu middle class during the Swadeshi movement, the dominant morality came to radically transform its position on youth. It seems that the invocation of political initiative of youths actually went hand-in-hand with denial of freedom to their sexuality and personal self-definition. It does not seem to have affected the dominant moral perception of the role of youths in the family, in relation to the familial hierarchy and the authority of the elderly. And in any case, this did not seek to alter the control of the sexuality of youth that the neo-Brahmanic morality imposed through its enunciation of continence, legitimisation of sexuality in terms of procreation, and so forth. The activism read into *karma* did not affect the belief in control of sexual urges. Nor did Vivekananda probably mean it to because his ideal of manliness lay in conquering such desire. Swami Abhedananda, one of Vivekananda's lieutenants, for example, disapproved of what he perceived as the decline of the authority of the *samaj* in enforcing the compulsory reverence of the younger for the elder in the family.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Bankimchandra Sen, 'Bange Balyajiban', *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1322 BE, pp. 528-29.

¹⁴⁵ Sarkar, *An Exploration*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁶ Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit*, p. 120.

In *Grhastha*, a periodical inspired by the Swadeshi movement, the editors frequently professed their affiliation to the ideals preached by Vivekananda. It is, therefore, significant that by editorial choice they printed the whole of the presidential address delivered at the Brahman Sammilan in 1914; the address was permeated with the idea that the nation was becoming weak because youths were not observing *brahmacharya* before marriage and the rigours of Shastric continence after it.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, political activism among youths in Bengal during the 1910s went hand in hand with the rhetoric of *brahmacharya*. Another article in *Grhastha* in 1914 praised youths for their 'brave' participation in the rescue operations during the Damodar floods of 1913.¹⁴⁸ It was jubilant to note that the 'activism' that had supposedly disappeared after the Swadeshi movement from among Bengali Hindu middle-class youths, was returning. But, interestingly, one of the developments that the editors identified as indicative of this 'new energy' was that 'the leaders of our Hindu society have got together to arouse the power of the *samaj* to re-establish traditional Brahmanism'.¹⁴⁹ An article in another periodical pledged its allegiance to the 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal' and apparently seemed to go against hierarchy of age. It said that under the impact of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal, Hinduism would rise again and then 'the orthodoxy and parochialism of the aged would be uprooted and the youth would realise the true message of the liberal ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'. But this rhetoric did not actually mean giving the individuality and sexuality of youth a freedom from nationalist-Brahmanical essentialisation. Its envisaged termination of 'orthodoxy' boiled down to the statement that the 'recalcitrant children' of 'traditional Mother Dharma' would 'in the manner of the noble Brahman' devote their energies to the ideal of self-renunciation and *moksha*.¹⁵⁰

Nor did the young men who participated in the Swadeshi movement, predominantly interpret Vivekananda as detracting from the neo-Brahmanic world-view that *garhasthya* was the highest form of *ashrama*. The implication of this for the question of masculinity should also be noted in passing. Where 'service to the motherland' was concerned, Vivekananda had privileged the *sannyasis* over householders by investing the former with a heightened spiritual masculinity. Vivekananda, in his turn, was a major source of inspiration among young Swadeshi activists.¹⁵¹ Yet, it is important, that even the participants in the first wave of revolutionary terrorism (1907-17) were, more often than not, ideologically committed to the

¹⁴⁷ Kumudchandra Singha, 'Sabhapatir Abhibhashan', *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1321 BE, pp. 619-20.

¹⁴⁸ 'Alochana', 'Bigata Barsher Dan', *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1321 BE, p. 599.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 598.

¹⁵⁰ (Anon.), 'Hindur Adhikar', *Chabbish Pargana Bartabaha* reprinted in *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1321 BE, pp. 585-87.

¹⁵¹ Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 239, 244-45.

neo-Brahmanic dictum of the primacy of *grhadharma*. It is significant that Binaykumar Sarkar, himself a participant in the Swadeshi movement, named his periodical *Grhastha* (householder) when he launched it in the immediate wake of the movement. While *Grhastha's* editorial preference for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition was explicit, so was its projection of the spiritual masculinity of the *nishkama* householder. Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, the prime accused in the 'Delhi Bomb' case, published two books in 1920; both upheld the primacy of *garhasthya* as the main arena of *nishkama karma*.¹⁵² Again, Matilal Ray, who was in active terrorist politics in 1912-15 and then shifted from political militancy to constructive Swadeshi, invoked the members of his Prabartak Sangha to compulsorily perform the duties of the householder and perform them in the ideal spirit of Brahmanical detachment.¹⁵³ It may be argued that for many Swadeshi activists, in spite of their personal choice of celibacy, the ideological stake in healthy and prolific reproduction of the nation was too high for an advocacy of *sannyas* for the majority. So even after the Swadeshi movement the idealisation of the *grhi* (householder) remained pervasive as the optimum combination of conservation of semen through continence on the one hand and reproduction on the other.

Neo-Brahmanic structuring of authority in relation to the home was not a matter of relation exclusively between the family on the one hand and the nation on the other. The specifics of the neo-Brahmanic ideology were determined, too, by the prior location of the household and the family in the *samaj*. Imagined mainly as an upper-caste, middle-class field of moral consensus, the *samaj* was more palpably represented in kinship networks and upper-caste, middle-class neighbourhood linkages. *Grhadharma* (duty pertaining to domesticity) was situated in the neo-Brahmanic ideology under the rubrics of *kuladharmā* (duty pertaining to the patrilineal clan), and *jatidharma* (duty pertaining to the caste).¹⁵⁴ The accustomed notions of *kula* (a clan in the sense of all male descendants of a common ancestral male, together with their wives and unmarried daughters) *vamsa* (generally synonymous with *kula*) and *gotra* (a clan-like unit which shares the name of an original Brahman priest-preceptor) into which blood relation and patrilineal kinship were organised in the existing marriage and inheritance practice among the Bengali Hindus were carefully reiterated. Thus, though the household was the primary unit around which the imagining of the nation could start, it is also important that the household order was ideologically situated (as noted in Chapter Three)

¹⁵² Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, pp. 8-10, 60-64.

¹⁵³ See Papiya Chakravarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 64-114.

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Madhabchandra Sanyal, 'Bibaha', *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1322 BE, pp. 548-54; Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit*, p. 102.

within the *samaj* and under the authority of its moral consensus. As Bhudeb wrote, 'nationalism is eroded if the authority of the *samaj* declines'.¹⁵⁵

Presumably under the impact of the increasing prominence in the 1910s of associations of intermediate and lower castes,¹⁵⁶ the neo-Brahmanic world appeared to reinforce the deployment of a rhetoric which it ascribed to the inspiration of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement.¹⁵⁷ However, this did not significantly transform the authority of caste in the neo-Brahmanic discursive world. Though the authors often spoke of the possibility of attainment of ideal Brahmanhood irrespective of birth, they expected life-cycle rituals to be performed according to *jatidharma*.¹⁵⁸ Abhedananda's pronouncement indicates the attitude of the first generation of Vivekananda-inspired missionaries to the relation between the family and caste at a time when the Swadeshi movement was raging and drawing inspiration from Vivekananda's ideals. According to him, in domestic decisions regarding marriage, death rites, Shastric rituals and choice of occupation every caste was bound to adhere to its own *dharma*. This authority of the family over the individual, of the *kula* over the family, and of caste over *kula* was the manifestation, he said, of the self-renunciation that Hindu life stood for. And Abhedananda unhesitatingly denied the individual any freedom to deviate from the consensus of the community, even when he felt that caste regulations had become rigid, lifeless and divisive.¹⁵⁹ Thus the 'undivided Hindu *jati*' that his nationalist imagination proposed was a status-bound and hierarchical one and the family was an integral part of that hierarchy.

The 'Spirituality' of the 'Joint Family'

From Bhudeb to the *battala* tracts, the neo-Brahmanic morality presented the 'joint family' as an ideal field in which the Hindu precept of self-less duty was inculcated. The huge bulk of neo-Brahmanic didactic tracts of the period from the 1880s to the 1920s looked upon the 'joint family' as a national institution.¹⁶⁰ As a pre-existing institution the extended family was probably the most palpable entity on which the neo-Brahmanic ideology could base Bengali

¹⁵⁵ Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', p. 239.

¹⁵⁶ Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1984, p. 158.

¹⁵⁷ E.g., 'Hindur Adhikar', *Chabbish Pargana Bartabaha* reprinted in *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1321 BE, p. 586.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Abhedananda, *Bharat Atit*, pp. 100-01, 105.

¹⁶⁰ E.g., Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', p. 575; (Anon.), 'Bange Ekannabarti Paribar', *Grhasthali*, 1:4, 1884, pp. 94-99; 'Alochana', 'Ekannabarti Paribar', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1322 BE, p. 806.

domesticity's claim to a spirituality that was seen as essentially residing in the ideal of selflessness. The great passion with which the 'joint family' was projected as a national institution, had all the force of a counter-discourse in the face of the universalist teleology of the colonial argument that this system would gradually wither away. There was a strong nationalist essentialisation of the British Indian law courts as the hated site where the destruction of this cherished system was being eagerly executed by the colonial rulers in order to weaken the nation.¹⁶¹ However, it should also be highlighted that the neo-Brahmanic discourse on the 'joint family' was an important area where the nationalist eagerness to invest domesticity with spirituality was considerably determined, in its turn, by the material stake of the ordinary middle class in the continuance of the accustomed system of the extended family.

The writings of Henry Maine - especially *Ancient Law* (1861) and *Village Communities in the East and the West* (1871) - had a crucial role in determining the contours of the neo-Brahmanic discourse on the 'joint family'. Maine believed that the patriarchal family, where the eldest male parent held absolute power over other members, was the form of primitive family organisation that had once been typical throughout Indo-European society. The earliest societies, Maine surmised, were not composed of individuals as understood in the Victorian age but of aggregations of families. But, while in 'modern progressive European societies' the individual was steadily substituted for the family, in India the patriarchal family persisted, making society remain primitive relative to the West. The corollary of Maine's thesis was that the continued growth of contractual freedom in 'progressive' societies was attributable to an 'enhanced moral consciousness'.¹⁶² But he also expected that the logic of 'progress' would transform the family in India into a nuclear one in future.

The way in which almost every neo-Brahmanic discussion of the 'joint family' brought up the issue of 'civilisation' makes it clear that these discourses were in implicit dialogue with Maine's contention regarding the teleology of family systems in the story of 'progress'.¹⁶³ Neo-Brahmanic writings were also in dialogue with 'reformed' Hindu voices which either criticised the 'joint family' or found it impracticable as a harmonious unit.¹⁶⁴ Bulloram Mullick, for example, in his study of the Hindu family in Bengal wrote that the 'joint family' system, supposedly inconsistent with 'new ideas and new sentiments relating to the

¹⁶¹ E.g., Goloknath Sen, *Grhaniti*, Calcutta, 1289 BE, pp. 15-16.

¹⁶² George Feaver, *From Status to Contract: A Biography of Sir Henry Maine 1822-1888*, London, 1969, pp. 49-50, 54.

¹⁶³ E.g., Bhattacharya, *Kartavya-nishtha*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ E.g., Shastri, *Grhadharma*, p. 69. This dialogue with the colonial and the 'reformed'-Hindu discourses was clear, for instance, in an article in a neo-Brahmanic journal. It introduced its defence of the 'joint family' on the ground that 'some have started disapproving of it nowadays'. See (Anon.), 'Bange Ekannabarti Paribar', *Grhasthali*, 1:4, 1884, pp. 95-97.

individual', was 'clearly unsuited to the spirit of the present times'. Bulloram admitted that he was deeply influenced by Maine's writings.¹⁶⁵ In dialogue with the colonial and the 'reformed'-Hindu discourses, the neo-Brahmanic one used the concept of 'civilisation' and took Maine's genealogy about the 'antiquity' of the patriarchal family and claimed, 'From time immemorial this wonderful phenomenon [the joint Hindu family] was the national property of the Hindus'.¹⁶⁶ But they discarded Maine's teleology. In a representative passage, Upendranath Bhattacharya wrote that it was the Hindus, with their ancient civilisation, who had preserved the 'joint family' as the Aryan ideal of duty towards larger numbers than merely one's own immediate family. The nuclear family, presented in Maine's thesis as the highest stage of civilised development, was projected by the author as a mode of living common among lower animals.¹⁶⁷

However, sometimes beneath the firm assertion of the 'virtues' of the 'joint family' system, there were contrary notes which indicated that some of the colonial criticism weighed with the proponents of the neo-Brahmanic morality. The reason for this was that the same class which benefited if the 'joint family' cushioned the shock of unemployment or indigence, was also the one whose capacity to sustain non-earning members was limited. The class was too accustomed to living in extended family units not to perceive nucleation as a deviation from the norm. Yet, at another level of consciousness, Western notions were probably initiating doubts about issues like bringing up children in an extended family environment.¹⁶⁸ The author of an article in a neo-Brahmanic periodical strongly asserted that the merits of the system were overwhelming, but not before he had 'conceded' that it had 'a few defects'. He went on to say that in some cases nucleation might ease an otherwise tense situation but as a matter of principle such a split was based on 'unqualified selfishness' and total preoccupation of individuals with their physical being. He said that the institution was facing criticism not because of anything intrinsically wrong with the ideology of the 'joint family' but because people were failing it.¹⁶⁹ Bhudeb, in his turn, wrote that it would be ideal for each brother to live, strive and earn independently, contributing to the good and the 'improvement' of the nation. But he qualified this by adding that this was desirable where every son in a family was a bread-earner. His attachment to the 'joint family' ideal got the better of the Victorian influence as he almost immediately went on to assert that, 'Especially, when our country is poor and its people in favour of the "joint family", it is advisable to preserve this institution

¹⁶⁵ Bulloram Mullick, *The Hindu Family in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1882, pp. 2, 174.

¹⁶⁶ 'Alochana', 'Ekannabarti Paribar', p. 806.

¹⁶⁷ Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁸ Bose, 'Sons', p. 121-22.

¹⁶⁹ (Anon.), 'Bange Ekannabarti' pp. 95- 97.

as it enshrines the national sense of *dharma*'. And in unison with all other voices in the neo-Brahmanic world, Bhudeb perceived the 'national sense of *dharma*' to lie in *parartha* (dedication to the good of others), supposedly best inculcated in the 'joint family'.¹⁷⁰

It is obvious, then, that the 'joint family' was particularly presented as the repository of the 'spirituality' of Bengali Hindu domesticity against the inroads of the West. The selflessness that concern with life hereafter was to generate, invested its ideal field of operation in the idea of the 'joint family'. With this selflessness and commitment to duty supposedly best inculcated in it, the 'joint family', according to several authors, was the moral paradigm for the nation.¹⁷¹ As one author wrote, 'If here [in the "joint family"] people could abandon their selfishness and perform their duties sincerely, then the nation will be able to achieve true improvement'.¹⁷² The effectiveness of the 'joint family' as a model for the nation lay in its extendibility and indefinite boundary. In their lived experience, too, many households had kin and relatives from outside the circle of parents and married siblings. This became combined with the open-ended nature of Bengali Hindu kinship that itself generated a feeling of large human units into which the household dimension of the family could be made to merge.¹⁷³ Several neo-Brahmanic authors used the ideal of *parartha* in the 'joint family' as an ordering trope for the 'good and happiness of the many', the 'many' representing the nation.¹⁷⁴

যদিও 'সংসার' is a new concept

Finally, the nationalist inscription of 'spirituality' on the 'joint family' was also determined by the material requirements of average middle-class domesticity with its limited resources. It is not surprising, therefore, that in almost every essay the metaphysical rhetoric on the 'joint family' as the field of *nishkama karma* was punctuated by more mundane references to this system as a safeguard against material insecurity. Bhudeb's effusion about the 'joint family' was followed by a very interesting comment. Referring to the spiritual vindication of this institution - a vindication to which he himself was a party - he said, 'Beneath this laudatory note there might be a stronger persuasion. Our country does not need life insurance because the families are joint. Or to put it differently, in the absence of life insurance that is available in Europe, there would have been endless misery in our country

¹⁷⁰ Mukhopadhyay, 'Ekannabartita', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 200-01.

¹⁷¹ E.g., Bhattacharya, *Sangsartatva o Grhadharma*, pp. 45-46; Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', p. 575.

¹⁷² Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, p. 27.

¹⁷³ For the peculiar capacity of the Bengali Hindu ideology of kinship to evoke an open-ended designation of 'one's own', see Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, Chicago, 1977, pp. 3-34.

¹⁷⁴ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Ekannabarti Paribar', p. 806;

had it not been for the joint family.¹⁷⁵ When in the midst of its spiritual rhetoric an article on domesticity referred to the joint sibling group as 'life-supporting', it was probably not exclusively implying emotional support.¹⁷⁶ An article in *Grhastha* revealed the same stake, 'But this safeguard which has protected us so long is now on the verge of disappearance ... Many orphans and helpless persons found a place worth the name in this world thanks to ... this [institution]'.¹⁷⁷

There were even tenuous manoeuvres in the discourse on the 'joint family' revealing the high material stakes in it. The voice of order had to be simultaneously aware that the moral appeal of spiritualisation of the 'joint family' did not lessen the burden on those bread-earners who had to sustain dependants beyond their means. Almost all authors, therefore, had to punctuate their high-flown rhetoric on the selfless duty of the householder to his dependants and ensure in the interest of order that his patience did not go overboard. Most of them had to emphasise that every able-bodied male should try to earn.¹⁷⁸ The same voices which condemned people turning their backs to needy relatives, had to qualify this statement in the next instant and say that sustaining very distant relatives was best avoided.¹⁷⁹ Again Bhudeb who was disturbed by what he considered a poor rate of demographic growth, had grudgingly to say that a male living in a 'joint family' should not have any children until he had a job.¹⁸⁰

Before concluding this chapter, one should pause to note one particularly important implication of the discourse on the 'joint family'. Before the 1870s the extended family had been for probably a little over one hundred years the dominant structure for upper-caste Bengali families.¹⁸¹ But the habitual attachment to this particular form acquired, thanks to the passionate neo-Brahmanic defence, a moral significance that was much more loaded than whatever moral appeal it might have had before. Maine's views came at a time when the Bengali Hindu attitude to colonial intervention in the domestic sphere was hardening and the search for benchmarks of cultural difference with the West was under way. By bringing the theme of the specific structure of the Hindu family into discursive limelight, Maine unwittingly provided an important marker of difference. The habitual-emotional affiliation to the system now came to be consciously invested with the new moral sanctity of national

¹⁷⁵ Mukhopadhyay, 'Ekannabartita', p. 201.

¹⁷⁶ (Anon.), 'Garhasthya', p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ 'Alochana', 'Ekannabarti Paribar', p. 806.

¹⁷⁸ E.g., Mukhopadhyay, 'Ekannabartita', p. 203; 'Alochana', 'Ekannabartitar Doshgun o Amader Kartabya', *Grhastha*, Phalgun, 1323 BE, p. 399.

¹⁷⁹ E.g., Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Mukhopadhyay, 'Ekannabartita', p. 203.

¹⁸¹ Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Norms of Family Life and Personal Morality among the Bengali Hindu Elite, 1600-1850' in Rachel Van M. Baumer (ed.), *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Hawaii, 1975, pp. 14-15.

identity. This is indicated by the fact that the new rhetoric on the 'spirituality' of this 'national institution' was supplemented contemporaneously by another development - the issue of split in extended families was no longer confined to the moral-emotional level of individual families and kin-groups but became a national discursive concern.¹⁸² Furthermore, the heavy deployment of the rhetoric of selflessness and spirituality made it one of the main sites of redemption for the moral conscience of a class which felt itself compromised and compromising in the colonial sphere. Chapter Five will suggest that this moral-redemptive investment in the vastness of familial affect created a crisis of conscience in the period of the 1930s and 40s. The moral susceptibilities of the class would then rankle that, for material reasons, it was 'selfishly' narrowing down its sphere of affect in the family. This malaise would underlie efforts to redeem the situation by trying to find release into 'vastness' of other imagined forms of solidarity - sometimes contradictory to each other - outside the home.

Conclusion

To say that the neo-Brahmanic domestic morality was dominant among the Bengali Hindu middle class during the late 19th and early 20th centuries does not imply that there was no deviance from it in practice among the non-Brahmo, non-'reformed' Hindus among whom it held sway. It should be emphasised, however, that the concern here is with domestic ideology and not domestic practice. What is important for the present concern is that in this social base that produced the ideology there was no self-conscious and self-righteous questioning of it up to the period of the First World War. Therefore, whatever divergence there was in practice, could be marginalised by the ideology as deviance in an air of confident self-righteousness. The next chapter, however, will argue that after the First World War the situation changed. The ideology gradually disintegrated while questioning voices staked their legitimacy on grounds of principle. Thus nationalism's spiritualisation of the 'inner domain' of culture in relation to the West and the colonial sphere disintegrated even during the colonial period and particularly between the 1920s and 1947.

¹⁸² E.g., (Anon.), 'Bange Ekannabarti', pp. 98-99; Hajrachaudhuri, *Sangsardharma*, p. 14.

Chapter 2

From the Spiritual to the Secular: Domesticity, 1917-1947

Introduction

The previous chapter has analysed how the dominant ideology among the Bengali Hindu middle class in the late 19th century invested domesticity with spirituality in contrast to the West and the colonial sphere which it constructed as materialist; among the non-Brahmo, non-'reformed' Hindus who formed the vast majority this spiritualisation had a neo-Brahmanic content. This chapter contends that in the period after the First World War this spiritualisation, along with the neo-Brahmanic ideology as a whole, started disintegrating. Reasoned questioning of the morality by new discursive trends had a role in the weakening of the ideological defence of neo-Brahmanism. Spilling beyond the pale of the literati, it influenced the ordinary middle class at a time when university education was spreading fast among its members during the 1920s-1930s.¹ Yet it is more accurate to say that, unlike among the self-consciously intellectual, among the vast majority of the class this disintegration was not so much a matter of conscious interrogation of the neo-Brahmanic morality. It seems that for them the perception of the lived experience of domesticity changed from the 1920s in a way that became increasingly incompatible with the ideology. The emergent perception of domesticity as overwhelmingly material and physical became so compulsive that the moral persuasion of a spiritualist ontology oriented towards the next-life became increasingly out of tune with the tenor of existence; domesticity became incorporated into an ontology that was secular by the yardstick of neo-Brahmanic spirituality.² This does not in any way imply that spiritualism disappeared from the middle-class world-view. But it is important to realise that unlike under the sway of the neo-Brahmanic world-view, it was no longer domesticity where spirituality could be effectively and predominantly invested. The neo-Brahmanic ideology, it should be borne in mind, had justified the mundane details of domesticity as means to the end of *moksha* and thus subsumed them under an overarching spirituality, directed towards the next world. From the 1920s these details of domesticity appeared in such overt worldliness in the perception of the class that the scope for investing

¹ Aparna Basu, 'Growth of Education and Muslim Separatism, 1919-1939', in B. R. Nanda (ed.), *Essays in Modern Indian History*, Delhi, 1980, p. 228.

² This thesis uses the term secular to mean worldly or mundane.

spirituality in concepts like conjugal relation, procreation and so on dwindled. Middle-class ideologies, therefore, had now to concentrate entirely on alternative essentialised sites of spirituality outside urban domesticity.

This transformation in the perception of domesticity was the result of a complex interaction of the discursive world with changes in the material existence of the class. The changes in the lived experience of the class from the time of the First World War provide the material context for this perceptual transformation. The transformation in the urban situation in Calcutta added a specific dimension to the transformation of this lived experience and the consequent change in perception. The cumulative change in the existence of the class created the perception of domesticity as a thoroughly secularised field, splintered into 'problems' and made disturbingly physical by the pressure of 'wants'. On the other hand, Indian and international political developments, in a complex interaction with the world of youth, determined the weakening of the appeal of the ideology along generational lines.

Immigration, Congestion and the Primacy of This-World

The neo-Brahmanic morality created a spiritual image for domesticity by making the related concepts of *paralok* and *nishkama karma* central to the justification of the mundane details of domesticity. Upholding the ideal of meticulous but detached performance of mundane duties, the ideology proscribed a desperate or passionate staking of everything in survival in this world. It is argued here that because of the developments from the time of the First World War, domestic attention was so compulsively and totally claimed for desperate strategies of this-worldly survival that the rhetoric of *paralok* and Brahmanic detachment were of necessity marginalised. Shortage and inflation between 1918 and 1922 and during the Second World War, the perception of 'massive' educated unemployment and a drastic drop in income from rural money-lending from 1929 underlay the perception of 'pressures' that drove the class to a desperate quest for survival. But there was also a crucial sense in which the specific urban experience of Calcutta determined this perceptual transformation. The sudden increase in the influx of Bengali middle-class immigrants into Calcutta from the time of the First World War and their experience in the city profoundly transformed the attitudinal orientation of middle-class Calcutta. Nor did the already-settled population remain unaffected by this orientation. The class as a whole became unprecedentedly geared to a desperate wish to survive and live here and now; domesticity, consequently, was pressured into making this-worldly survival its sole concern. Particularly the disappearance from 1929 of the prospect of

the rural base ever rejuvenating made Calcutta the only site of survival for the immigrant middle class.

Middle class immigration into Calcutta had been steadily increasing from the last quarter of the 19th century.³ Educational opportunities and a perceived prospect of better medical facilities as pull factors, and malaria in the countryside and the declining income from tenure-holding as push factors, had determined this steady increase. But the wave of immigration that induced the perceptual transformation in question was the one from the First World War onwards. Neither the censuses nor historical studies of migration provide separate statistical information about the immigration of the gentry from the districts into Calcutta.⁴ However, various other kinds of evidence indicate that the period from 1915 saw a sudden intensification of immigration of middle-class families into the city. The 'artificial development' of industries during the First World War created a large additional number of clerical jobs in and around Calcutta.⁵ This new and powerful pull-factor came against the backdrop of potential push-factors, which in their turn had recently emerged or accentuated.

Malaria in the Bengal countryside had had a role in inducing emigration since the late 19th century. But it is important here that on the eve of the First World War it intensified. In the mid-1910s the anxiety about malaria registered a rise, as indicated by periodical literature. There was a sudden concentration of numerous articles lamenting that 'Malaria is ravaging the villages of golden Bengal'.⁶ However, our hypothesis seems to be more conclusively substantiated by the surveys conducted in the late 1920s by malariologists like M. O. T. Aiyengar. They found that certain parts of Western Bengal 'have suddenly, during the past few years, become intensely malarious'.⁷ The obvious pull of Calcutta in such circumstances may be gauged from the following perception: 'In fact it is the prevalence of malaria and other epidemics in rural Bengal that has comparatively speaking made Calcutta a sanatorium ... which offers the best facilities for treatment.'⁸ It is important that while the death rate in Bengal as a whole steadily increased between 1910 and 1915, in Calcutta it rose

³ S. N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38', *Calcutta: Myths and History*, Calcutta, 1977, pp. 16, 23. Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 8.

⁴ Haraprasad Chattopadhyay's detailed study of migration relating to Bengal does not, however, provide a connected and chronological account of middle class immigration into Calcutta. Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, *Internal Migration in India: A Case Study of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 55-197, 404-46.

⁵ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V (Bengal and Sikkim), pt. I, p. 288.

⁶ (Anon.), 'Bangalir Jatiya Jiban' *Chabbish Pargana Bartabaha*, reprinted in *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1323 BE, p. 663.

⁷ Sujata Mukherjee, 'Problems of Land Transfer, Agrarian Changes and Standard of Living of Small Farmers in Bengal: 1928-1947', PhD dissertation, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 107-09.

⁸ *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* (hereafter *CMG*), 22 November 1924, p. 49.

much less.⁹ Indeed, as the Census of 1921 noted, 'there has been of recent years a very great improvement in the health of the city.'¹⁰ It is equally important that in the 1910s discussion of an 'acute shortage of drinking water' in the countryside became particularly frequent.¹¹ Ecological push-factors seem to have intensified during the same period in certain parts of East Bengal, too. Particularly in Bikrampur and Noakhali considerable stretches of middle-class habitation were lost to the rivers Padma and Meghna.¹² And this development came to a head during the middle of the 1910s, when Calcutta, coincidentally, beckoned with war-time employment.

The situation in Calcutta immediately after the war seems to indicate that the potential push and pull factors in question did indeed lead to an intensification of middle-class immigration into the city. The Rent Committee of 1920 reported not only an 'abnormal rise' in rent in the immediate aftermath of the war, but also an abnormal increase in population 'during the last few years and especially since the armistice'.¹³ This 'sudden' increase is very unlikely to have been a natural increase among old settled families. Other sources seem to confirm the hypothesis of a sudden escalation of immigration. In 1921 Basantakumar Chattopadhyay noted with exasperation, 'It is as if [middle-class] people from all over Bengal have decided to live in Calcutta.'¹⁴ He further wrote, 'Living beings out of their volition succumb to *maya* [illusion] ... From now on, the residents of Calcutta may be cited as an example of this.' He believed that in leaving the village for Calcutta, they had bargained for an illusion. But what is important here is the use of the phrase 'from now on'. If immigration from the districts into Calcutta had always been a fact - which it was - then the use of this phrase means that the author was referring to a recent and intensified wave of middle-class immigration. Finally, it is important for the present discussion that this immigration was predominantly of families. This is evident from frequent discussion that the fear of malaria and water-borne disease was inducing whole families to migrate, leaving their ancestral home to languish.¹⁵ The rising trend of immigration with families was also reflected in the

⁹ *Census of India, 1921*, Vol. VI (Calcutta), pt. 1, p. 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹ E.g., 'Maphaswaler Bani', 'Deshbyapi Jalakashta', *Grhastha*, Jyaishta, 1323 BE, 767-68.

¹² See for example, 'Maphaswaler Bani', 'Noakhali Sagargarbhe', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, pp. 741-42. For autobiographical reference to this push factor, see Gopal Halder, *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 39-40.

¹³ *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into Land Values and Rents in Calcutta*, (henceforth *RCRC-1920*), Calcutta, 1920, pp. 2-3. Middle-class housing was separately mentioned as severely affected by this sudden rise. Also see, for example, Kshitish Chandra Biswas, 'Housing Problem in Calcutta: Can It Be Solved? - I' *CMG*, 13 June 1925, pp. 175-77. Biswas also notes an 'abnormal increase in population since the war'.

¹⁴ Basantakumar Chattopadhyay, 'Charka', *Bharatbarsha*, Baishakh, 1328 BE, p. 516.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

remarkable increase during the late 1910s in the proportion of women between 15 and 40 years of age in the neighbourhoods of North Calcutta, dominated by the Bengali middle class.¹⁶ This influx of families was likely to have again intensified with the Depression, when the position of numerous intermediary tenure-holders in the rural economy dwindled drastically.¹⁷

The circumstances of the immigration from the period of the First World War onwards, shaped the immigrants' perspective on domesticity in the city. It is very important that for this new batch of immigrants, Calcutta was a much more desperately sought escape - an escape from death and decadence. It is undeniable from the sheer volume of contemporary essays that the analogy widely used in connection with the countryside, from the 1910s onwards, was that of the *shmashan* (cremation ground; site of devastation).¹⁸ This perception was so pervasive in print that even when the nationalists appealed to the immigrants to return to the village and initiate its rejuvenation, they also ironically reiterated this image of death and devastation.¹⁹ The sensibility of the immigrants in Calcutta, therefore, was one of an unwillingness to die in a city where they had come to 'live'. There was a frenzied quest for life and survival, which in a time of multiplicity of perceived pressures, created a compulsive this-worldly preoccupation. Basantakumar Chattopadhyay might idealistically expect that his reprimand would persuade the immigrants to go back to the districts. But paradoxically, his close observation of their attitudes reveals why, rather than going back, they would stake their quest for survival in Calcutta: 'We have been so mesmerised by filtered water and electric fans that we are ready to live in dark, ill-ventilated rooms, give our children water that goes by the name of milk ... yet we would not leave Calcutta. Many of us would reply that the village is the breeding ground of malaria'.²⁰ His article gives an idea as to how the immigrant's reactions to Calcutta were seen to be sequenced. Coming away from the 'death', threatened by water-borne disease and malaria, to the 'life' promised by electric fans and filtered water, the immigrant families, once in the city, became party to the apprehensions of disease and adversity peculiar to Calcutta. Yet, they would rather stay on in the city, with its medical facilities, than go back to the world which they pervasively imagined as the unmitigated site of death. Hence the frantic wish, one could argue, to live here and now. This desperation became even more acute with the Depression, because then the prospect of

¹⁶ *Census of India, 1921*, vol. VI, p. 45.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of how the Depression affected tenure-holders see Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Order and Politics, 1919-1947*, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 101-14.

¹⁸ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Banger Swasthya o Malaria', *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1323 BE, p. 671; (Anon.), 'Bangalir Jatiya Jiban', p. 663.

¹⁹ E.g., Ramratan Chattopadhyay, 'Jibaner Khata', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, p. 627.

²⁰ Chattopadhyay, 'Charka', p. 516.

depending on the rural base for survival disappeared for many. It is significant that in the perceptible wake of the rural credit crunch in 1929, Calcutta (and not the countryside) became the world where 'both the poet and the hero of the novel situated his quest for true identity'.²¹ One critic observes about the literature of the 1930s and 40s, 'The modern generation ... [was] no longer in a position to beat a romantic retreat from the city's realities. Rabindranath's clerk Haripada has given way to another breed - uprooted, alienated...'.²²

Entry into the frame of mind peculiar to contemporary Calcutta further deprived the immigrants' mental world of a relatively resigned attitude to death; it became difficult to find space in urban domesticity for the detached *paralok*-orientation that was central to the neo-Brahmanic spiritualisation of the home. Within the city, the immigrant's wish to live came to be structured into much more well-defined, secular discourses and programmes geared to survival - discourses which used elaborate statistics to reinforce the sense of urgency. There was, for example, a heightened concern about health and mortality figures in the city from the 1920s,²³ because of an interesting conjunction of developments. Chittaranjan Das's ambitious mayoral effort to improve health in the city, the voice of nationalist doctors,²⁴ and the initial enthusiasm of the voluntary Ward Health Associations²⁵ sensitised middle-class householders to death and disease in their respective municipal wards as well as in the city in general. This escalation of anxiety about health interacted, and probably overlapped, with the construction of the Bengali Hindus as a 'dying race'. Already important as an ideological pronouncement by the late 1910s, this construction, in its turn, was heavily underpinned by the steady communalisation of the Bengali Hindu middle-class mind, as noted subsequently in this chapter.

This perception of the city and its middle-class domesticity as the site of overtly physical survival, though induced by the attitude of immigrants, could not have remained confined to them; it seems to have gripped the city's middle class as a whole. The crucial development of a suddenly intensified feeling of congestion created new secular concerns and anxieties among the settled and the immigrant alike. The 1920s thus marked a sudden

²¹ Saroj Bandyopadhyay, 'Amaratver Thikana Railo Sahitye', *Anandabajar Patrika*, 7 March 1990, p. x of Supplement.

²² Subho Ranjan Dasgupta, 'Calcutta in Twentieth-Century Literature', in Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1990, p. 253.

²³ E.g., *Swasthya Samachar* quoted in *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, p. 349; Amulyacharan Ukil, 'Bangalir Swasthya Kise Bhalo Haite Pare', *Arthik Unnati*, Bhadra, 1333 BE, p. 380.

²⁴ Chittaranjan Das, on capturing the Calcutta Municipal Corporation executive, drafted prominent nationalist doctors to assist in dealing with the health situation.

²⁵ These associations were formed in 1924 at the behest of the newly elected, Swarajya Party-led executive of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. See Sundarimohan Das, 'Extension of Medical Relief in Calcutta', *CMG*, 13 December 1924, pp. 203-05.

eruption of themes in print which were quite obviously the consequence of immigration and congestion - fear of higher incidence of infectious disease,²⁶ of importation of diseases from outside the city,²⁷ of further increase in rents,²⁸ and of a further decrease in per capita living space.²⁹

Significantly, as the already congested areas of North Calcutta burst at the seams to accommodate the intensified immigration,³⁰ a grave concern about lower middle-class housing and congestion in middle-class lived space emerged in lay discussions in print. In 1921 one author, for example, expressed his exasperation at the way house-owners were allegedly renting out every nook and corner of their premises to numerous parties.³¹ Before the 1920s, discussion of 'congested' and 'ill-ventilated' Bengali middle-class houses had occurred in medical journals and the 'reformed' Hindu discourse on domesticity; they derived, in a more or less straightforward manner, the essentialist colonial opinion about the 'ill-ventilated' *andar* (the segregated women's quarter within the house) and the high-walled inner courtyard of Bengali houses.³² But in the neo-Brahmanic segment of print, the themes of perceived congestion and ill-ventilation were conspicuous by their absence up to the end of the 1910s. The absence was also reflected in the confidence with which the colonial suggestions about the reorganisation of built space in the Bengali household were refuted. As late as 1914, the nationalist periodical *Grhastha* claimed how airy and hygienic Bengali houses were thanks to the courtyard in the middle.³³ Making the colonial disapproval of the inner courtyard stand on its head, it constructed the English type of house as 'deprived' of such an 'outlet to the sky'.³⁴ Among the non-'reformed' Hindus, the idea of a 'congested', 'ill-ventilated household' made its appearance in lay discussions from the beginning of the 1920s. In 1926 *Arthik Unnati* (edited by the same person who had once edited *Grhastha*) stated in an editorial, 'Ordinarily, nobody would agree to rent these damp and unhygienic premises. But in Bengal there is no dearth of people to rent them. Many low-income middle-class families never object to rent them if they get some concession. The tenants succumb to disease in no time ... the only

²⁶ E.g., Kshitish Chandra Biswas, 'Housing Problem in Calcutta: Can It Be Solved? - II', *CMG*, 11 July 1925, p. 335.

²⁷ E.g., *CMG*, 22 November 1924, p. 49.

²⁸ Manimanjari Mitra, *Calcutta: An Urban Disaster*, Calcutta, 1990, p. 178.

²⁹ E.g., Prafullachandra Basu, *The Middle Class People in Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1925, pp. 8-9.

³⁰ For the population density in the Bengali middle-class neighbourhoods (wards 1-5 and 9), see *Census of India 1921*, vol. VI, pp. 4-5. For a reflection of the emergent sensitivity about congestion in North Calcutta in the 1920s, see (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar o Badibhada', *Arthik Unnati*, Kartik, 1333 BE, p. 522.

³¹ Ashutosh Bidyabinod, 'Daybhag Sangskar', *Bharatbarsha*, Baishakh, 1328 BE, p.554.

³² (Anon.), 'Problem of Dietary', *Calcutta Medical Journal*, August, 1909, p. 52.

³³ 'Alochana', 'Prachya o Pashchatya Paribar', *Grhastha*, Kartik, 1321 BE, p. 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

reason why women of urban middle-class families lose their health so early lies in these houses, deprived of light and air'.³⁵ The root of this transformation in perception seems to lie in the war-time developments. During the war the 'abnormal increase' in population 'was not accompanied by any corresponding increase in building operations'.³⁶ The supply of accommodation 'never greatly in excess of demand ... [was] now far short of the demand - a fact only too apparent to everybody'.³⁷ The consequent compulsion for lower middle-class tenants to accept accommodation of a quality far short of their idea of habitability, directly linked the sense of congestion with the perception of 'ill-ventilated' accommodation. With lower middle-class housing consequently viewed as a den of tuberculosis, gasping for 'life-giving' air,³⁸ an anxious search for solutions - medical and infrastructural - manifested itself in print.

The urgent preoccupation of domesticity with a worldly perspective was reinforced by the growing physicality in which genteel poverty came to be perceived, as high prices, educated unemployment and the rural credit crunch brought many lower middle families progressively towards the brink of starvation. This dimension of poverty will be discussed subsequently. Here it is important that the relatively resigned perspective on life (and death), needed to sustain the neo-Brahmanic centrality of *paralok* in domestic morality, receded. Urban domesticity came to be predominantly perceived as the site where survival, rather than an essential spirituality, had to be fiercely ensured. It is probably not surprising, therefore, that from the 1930s, didactic literature spiritualising domesticity drastically declined. On the other hand, the creative literature of the 1930s and 40s, in so far as it did at all, situated spirituality not in urban domesticity but in a mystical tryst with nature, in rural mystic traditions, or in the essential 'spirituality' of rural Bengal.³⁹ It is also significant that from the 1930s, the power of persuasion of the neo-Brahmanic censure of this-worldly Tantric solutions declined. A look at *panjikas* (Bengali Hindu almanacs) up to the 1920s yield extremely few advertisements of Tantric amulets claiming to solve material problems. It is, therefore, significant that by the middle of the 1930s, *panjikas* were flooded with them.⁴⁰ It is significant that in the background of the acutely perceived problem of educated unemployment, most of these advertisements promised that the amulet concerned would

³⁵ (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar', p. 523. Also see, for example, Biswas, 'Housing Problem - I', p. 177

³⁶ RCRC-1920, p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar', p. 523.

³⁹ For a critical discussion of these literary trends, see Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima: Bangla Upanyaser Shat Bachhar: 1923-1982*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 10-57.

⁴⁰ E.g., the advertisements for Kundeshwari Kabach and Pandit Bipinbihari Jyotishshastri's Nabagraha Kabach in the advertisement section of *Bishuddha Siddhanta Panjika*, Calcutta, 1343 BE.

ensure employment. By the early 1940s, amidst war-time privation on the one hand and the prospect of clandestine profit on the other, these advertisements came to have even bolder fonts, and the term 'Tantric' was specially highlighted.⁴¹

Secular Perception of Death

It can be suggested that the increasing incidence of physicality in the discussions of everyday existence was supplemented by a weakening of the neo-Brahmanic discourse of death. Death was not a total termination but a bridge to the next life and, therefore, the concept through which the ideology derived spiritual justification for this life. Even up to the 1910s, there seems to have been enough ontological space for the neo-Brahmanic spirituality of death to sustain itself, though official mortality figures caused a secular concern about the future of the nation right from the 1880s. During the period of the 1920s to 40s, however, the middle class of Calcutta had interesting social encounters with dying, both real and ideational, that seemed to reorient the discursive situation on death. Probably never before were images of death - literal and figurative - so pervasive in 'public' discussions. But more importantly, these images were material, gradually constricting the discursive space for the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of spirituality relating to death. Death came to be increasingly perceived predominantly as a total termination. The hitherto frequently deployed notion of *paralok*, therefore, was inevitably sidelined from moral reckoning.

One particular discursive deployment of death, that became pervasive from the middle of the 1910s and persistently used material indices of dying, came to deeply determine the moral perception of domesticity. This was the construction of the Bengali Hindus as a 'dying race'. The image was first conjured up by Upendranath Mukhopadhyay in his tract *A Dying Race* (1909), 50,000 copies of which were distributed free.⁴² Against a projection of Bengali Muslims as steadily growing in numbers, 'strength', 'wealth' and 'solidarity',⁴³ Upendranath juxtaposed the Bengali Hindus as a 'race' heading towards demographic extinction.⁴⁴ The 'dying race' thesis proved increasingly emotive from the publication of the 1911 Census onwards. As the Hindu middle class increasingly imagined its bid to hegemony in Bengal threatened by Muslims, the world of print was flooded with essays which started with the

⁴¹ See the advertisement section of *Gupta Press Directory o Panjika*, Calcutta, 1348 BE.

⁴² Papiya Chakravarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 31-42.

⁴³ Upendranath Mukhopadhyay, *A Dying Race* quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

explicit assumption that the Bengali Hindus were a 'dying race'.⁴⁵ Expressions like this became very common from the middle of 1910s: 'We, degraded Bengalis [Hindus implied], devoid of life-force, boast in vain of our nationality ... the Bengali race is, for all practical purposes, dead.'⁴⁶ The rapid communalisation of the Bengali middle class from the middle of the 1920s, made this image of dying an ideological trope of 'immense potency' that explicitly and implicitly underlay the vast majority of moral discussions on the Hindu way of life.⁴⁷

As the class perceived itself, increasingly from the time of the First World War, as losing out to multiple pressures, this imagination of demographic 'death' conflated with other images of decline and decadence in which domesticity came to be mapped. There was widespread discussion, for example, of ecological decline and malaria in Western and Central Bengal, perceived as depriving the middle-class Bengali household of its rural subsistence base.⁴⁸ A linguistic-provincial dimension also came to reinforce the secular indices of dying. As the lead of the educated Bengali began to be wiped out in the neighbouring provinces by the emergence of educated middle classes indigenous to those areas,⁴⁹ and Calcutta increasingly attracted immigrants from other provinces, the Bengali middle class imagined itself as 'cornered'.⁵⁰ Their families were perceived as 'robbed of subsistence' by this influx, as we will note in the next chapter.⁵¹ And, most importantly, Calcutta became the spatial symbol of this particular 'dying'.⁵²

Importantly, this pervasive construction of 'dying', thanks to its engagement with subsistence, vitality and fecundity, constantly referred back to domestic norms and choices like marriage customs, diet, health and procreation. This had, and this is most relevant here, implications for the spirituality invested on domesticity. Thus unlike death in the neo-Brahmanic ideology, this perception imagined death in terms of this-worldly indices and induced a search for solutions equally secular.⁵³ Indeed, it created a discursive universe of its own in which domesticity was mapped, not in spirituality and metaphysical speculation about the next life, but in secular concerns about ecology, demography, child-health, age of

⁴⁵ E.g., Amiyabala Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye: Kanyar Prati Matar Upadesh*, Howrah, 1344 BE, p. 5.

⁴⁶ (Anon.), 'Bangalir Jatiya Jiban', p. 662.

⁴⁷ Pradip Kumar Datta, "'Dying Hindus": Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal', *EPW*, 28:25, 19 June 1993, p. 1316.

⁴⁸ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Banger Swasthya', pp. 671-72; Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, *Bangala o Bangali*, Calcutta, 1347 BE, Introduction and pp. 39-40.

⁴⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1984, p. 164.

⁵⁰ Prabodhchandra Basu, 'Bangalir Arthik Swadhinata Labher Upay', *Arthik Unnati*, Baishakh, 1333 BE, p. 52.

⁵¹ (Anon.), 'Baithak', *Baithak*, Ashadh, 1329 BE, p. 13.

⁵² E.g., 'Samayiki', 'Nija Basabhume Parabasi Hale', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashwin, 1340 BE, pp. 645-47; Basu, 'Bangalir Arthik', p. 52.

⁵³ E.g., Debaprasad Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', *Hindu Kon Pathe: Kayekti Samajik Prabandha*, Calcutta, 1341 BE, pp. 4-5, 20-21; 'Samayiki', 'Nija Basabhume', p. 647.

marriage, and the incidence of venereal disease. In an atmosphere dominated by the thought of the 'dying race', the engagement with the question of child mortality, in particular, turned from an anxious concern into a neurosis from the 1920s. In an article published in 1920, Bamandas Mukhopadhyay, one of the leading obstetricians of his time, situated his concern about child mortality within the construction of the 'impending death of the nation'; he projected the alarmist picture of a 'near future' when the Bengali Hindu would 'suffer the fate of the dodo'.⁵⁴ Relatedly, there were alarmist representations in nationalist writings about the incidence of venereal diseases.⁵⁵ Quite obviously influenced by the communal concern with demography, Hindu nationalist opinion constructed the messes and hostels in Calcutta as haunts of venereal disease. The nationalist doctor Sundarimohan Das, who explicitly associated youths in the messes in Calcutta with licentious lifestyle and venereal disease, alleged that 75 per cent of the students had ruined their health through sexual irregularity.⁵⁶ What is more, this-worldly anxieties about the fate of the 'dying race' indeed tended to pull in the direction of solutions that went directly against neo-Brahmanic injunctions. The communal voice, strong in the press and periodical literature, called for abolition of caste disabilities, acceptance of widow-marriage and sometimes even the initiation of inter-caste marriage.⁵⁷ The first two aimed at the integration of lower castes into the Hindu mainstream. The enthusiastic espousal of widow-marriage was quite obviously impelled by the neurotic concern with demographic growth in relation to the Muslims. The apprehension of 'dying' in relation to other linguistic groups in the city and to Muslims in terms of employment generated widespread discussion about how parents should reorient the upbringing of their children. Keeping self-employment in mind, numerous authors suggested the inculcation of the profit-motive by parents among young boys.⁵⁸

By the 1930s the middle class was confronted with real death on a social scale. The third and most intense phase of revolutionary 'terrorism' (1930-35) gave a new dimension to death, with the 'sacrifice' of young lives weighing on the Bengali mind. On the other hand, in the wake of the conjunction of the credit crisis and massive unemployment, the class reported and registered 'frequent suicide' among 'workless [sic] youths' and members of

⁵⁴ Bamandas Mukhopadhyay, 'Shishurakkha o Bangalar Dhai', *Bharatbarsha*, Chaitra, 1327 BE, pp. 506-07.

⁵⁵ Charuchandra Mitra, 'Bibaha o Samaj Prasanga', *Bharatbarsha*, Magh, 1332 BE, p. 202.

⁵⁶ Sundarimohan Das, *Brddha Dhatrir Rojnamcha*, Calcutta, 1330 BE, pp. 9-11, 32; Praphullakumar Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu* (1940), Calcutta, 1963, p. 90.

⁵⁷ E.g., Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu*, pp. 20-29, 93-96.

⁵⁸ E.g., 'Parashuram' (pseud.), 'Banglar Bhadrakalok', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1332 BE, pp. 34-35.

'impoverished' middle-class families.⁵⁹ The class, probably, could not afford to be resigned in its perspective on death, with such violent termination of young lives in its midst. Simultaneously, the same reason - the perception of material pressure - that caused the untimely death of unemployed youths also, however, helped overcome the idea that insuring life amounted to taking liberties with the profundity of death. By the 1930s people no longer refused to be persuaded by the secular rhetoric of the periodicals popularising life insurance. An article in one such periodical remarked, for example, 'Medical science has not developed anything which can bring back life or secure immortality for an individual. Nor can the philosopher very emphatically assure us about the continuity of our life after death ... Death ... means complete extinction and from the point of view of the individual it is not very painful. On the other hand, the very thought of possible suffering and helplessness of his dependants is unbearable.'⁶⁰ Such material discussions, which multiplied during the inter-war period and after, had the impact of sidelining the question of *paralok* and prioritising the material concern of survival of the dependants left behind by the deceased. It is important to note here, in passing, that even in the 1910s neo-Brahmanic didactic literature on domesticity had started with the confident assumption that the Vedic concept of the next life was self-evident. The tracts of the 1920s, however, were anxious to 'prove' the 'truth' of the *paralok*,⁶¹ indicating a decline in the earlier confidence that the readers would take the 'truth' for granted. By the early 1940s, even the attempts to 'prove' the existence of *paralok*, had conspicuously declined in print.

In the early 1940s the apprehension of Japanese bombing reinforced the perspective on death with a sense of imminence and a fear of annihilation that precluded any thought about the next life. The sensibility of the class, as almost unanimously presented in genres from novels to contemporary newspaper reports, registered its own grim suspense on moonlit nights, when bombing was usually apprehended.⁶² But the simultaneous will to 'live' was equally keenly registered by observers in the way the days following actual bombings would find the Calcutta streets crowded as usual with people pursuing strategies of survival in a

⁵⁹ CMG, 8 January 1938, quoted in Ray, *Urban Roots*, p. 190. Reversing the previous trend from the middle of the 1920s, the male rate of suicide in Calcutta outstripped the female one during the 1920s. *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. VI (Calcutta), pts. 1 & 2, p. 37.

⁶⁰ Hiranmay Banerji, 'Some Aspects of Insurance', *Insurance World*, January, 1933, p. 41.

⁶¹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Paraparar Barta', *Basanti*, Baishakh, 1328 BE, pp. 90-92; Chandrashekhar Sen, *Karmaprasanga ba Manabjibanrahasya*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1327 BE, Introduction.

⁶² '...dropping of bombs...sound of anti-aircraft fire...wintry night...shadows of a bright moon tend to give a sensation...a shaking to which most of us were not accustomed'. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (hereafter *ABP*), 26 December 1942, p. 4; Also, e.g., Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar* (1943) in Gajendrakumar Mitra et al. (eds), *Tarashankar Rachanabali*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1380 BE, pp. 281, 284-87; Bengal, Home Political, 39/43 of 1943, WBSA.

scarcity-hit situation.⁶³ Finally, the death of thousands of emaciated famine victims on the streets of Calcutta in 1943-44 gave a jolt to the neo-Brahmanic serenity of death. The actual deaths, along with numerous photo features⁶⁴ and artistic representation of that dying,⁶⁵ created a strong visual impression of death as a horrifying termination. Again, on the other hand, the sheer weight of numbers - thousands dying at a time - admittedly created an indifference to the death of unrelated people. Many reminiscences have registered how the class became 'used to stepping over corpses on the streets'.⁶⁶ It may be suggested for further research that, in spite of a continued performance of Brahmanical last rites, this experience tended to displace the significance of death from spirituality and institutionality to, predominantly, the sphere of affect.

Decline of the Support-base and 'Self-sufficiency'

It has been observed in the previous chapter that the neo-Brahmanic morality had high stakes in the ideals of sharing and simple contentment in the family and kin. Indeed, these values were expected to sustain the sense of spirituality by giving domesticity a 'self-sufficiency' in relation to the market in consumer goods - a dreaded hub of 'materialism'. The decline of the confidence of the ideology was closely related with the increasing perception, from the 1920s, of the unfeasibility of this ideal and the impossibility of a voluntary insulation of domesticity from the market.

In the late 19th century Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay was happy that the reason why the Bengali Hindus did not need life insurance was the 'joint family'. Even as late as 1913, an article in *Grhastha* reiterated the same position.⁶⁷ It is significant, therefore, that by 1926 the Calcutta-based non-European insurance companies were making noticeable headway; their policy-holders were overwhelmingly the 'poorer' of the 'salaried middle class', who feared that 'in their absence their wife and children would be totally helpless'.⁶⁸ By the 1930s, insurance and investment in postal savings was a part of the middle-class package.⁶⁹ Indeed, the confidence in the 'joint family' spirit must have declined remarkably during the 1920s and

⁶³ E.g., *ABP*, 28. December 1942, p. 1.

⁶⁴ E.g., the photo features in *ABP* during September 1943.

⁶⁵ Artists like Chittaprasad Bhattacharya, Somnath Hore, Debabrata Mukhopadhyay, Zainul Abedin and Gopal Ghosh recreated this death and dying in numerous sketches and paintings.

⁶⁶ E.g., Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Romanthan Athaba Bhimratipraptar Paracharitcharcha*, Calcutta, 1994, p. 92.

⁶⁷ 'Alochana', 'Prachya o Pashchatya', p. 18.

⁶⁸ 'Molakat', 'Jibanbimar Byabsa', *Arthik Unnati*, Ashadh, 1333 BE, p. 181.

⁶⁹ E.g., Bhabatosh Datta, *Sat Satero*, Calcutta, 1397 BE, p. 15; Nrupendrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi, *Nari Bipathe Jay Keno*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1351 BE, p. 79.

1930s; otherwise, it is difficult to perceive how the class by the 1930s had been forced out of the belief widespread in its ranks that life-insurance hastened the policyholder's death.⁷⁰ This connection between the emerging dependence on life insurance and postal savings on the one hand and diminished confidence in 'joint family' support on the other is confirmed by the census report of 1931. Based on answers received from the members of the middle class to an official questionnaire, the 1931 Census discerned the tendency among 'the young men nowadays' to defer marriage 'until they ... are in a position to support a wife'.⁷¹ Things had moved a long way from the confident expectation of Chandranath Basu that the 'joint family' would support the wife and children of a youth yet to complete his education and seek a job.⁷² The period from the First World War with its pressures as well as stratification within the class and the family, narrowed the zone of effective caring within the extended family and kin, as will be seen in Chapters Three and Five.

It is important to note in this connection a particular moral deflection within the milieu that had produced the neo-Brahmanic discourse. By the 1920s a voice had emerged, which not only refrained from essentialising this constriction of caring as induced by 'selfishness', but went on to plead 'inability' to perform the conventional 'duties' to the 'joint family'. Many discussions admitted this narrowing, but stated that economic difficulties were forcing this development on the class. This was even while many authors condemned what they saw as selfish attention to respective wives and children.⁷³ One Khanaprabha Debi wrote, in 1921, 'In the joint family of those days the brother's widow or the widowed sister or their orphaned children would not appear as so heavy a burden. Now [they do], because people are failing to fulfil the needs even of their wives and children.'⁷⁴

In order to sustain detached performance of domestic duty on which the ideology based domesticity's claim to spirituality, late 19th-century neo-Brahmanic literature had attempted to keep the market at bay. The huge compendia of knowledge that the domestic manuals supplied up to the period of the First World War, reflect an anxiety to save the ordinary middle-class household from the cash-nexus and dependence on specialised services and goods. The confidence of the neo-Brahmanic morality regarding such ideal insulation from

⁷⁰ About the wide prevalence of this belief 'even a few years back', see Satyendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Jiban Bimar Uddeshya' and Atasikusum Sarkar, 'Jiban Bima o Narir Kusangskar' in *Jiban Bima*, 1:2, 1336 BE, pp. 44-45, 66. Both the authors noted that this apprehension had declined 'at present'.

⁷¹ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, pp. 399, 417.

⁷² Chandranath Basu, *Hindutva: Hindur Prakrta Itihas*, Calcutta, 1892 BE, pp. 399-400.

⁷³ Bijaykrshna Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay Bangali Kon Pathe', *Bharatbarsha*, Agrahayan, 1345 BE, p. 960; Mitra, 'Bibaha o Samaj', p. 205.

⁷⁴ Khanaprabha Debi, 'Durdine Nari', *Bharatbarsha*, Shraban, 1328 BE, p.184.

the market, however, nose-dived from the 1920s - a development clearly reflected in the change in the nature of information that manuals and essays now supplied to domesticity. From the 1920s the effort to equip households with the know-how for preparing items like shoe polish, tooth-paste and perfumes noticeably declined. It was clear that specialisation and commercialisation of goods and services had so obviously manifested itself, and the household had so clearly had to accept it, that the supply of such know-how was becoming increasingly redundant. Up to the pre-First World War period, there had been not only numerous manuals but even periodicals, which expected to give domesticity 'working knowledge of more or less everything'.⁷⁵ They had supplied the formulae for preparing at home the consumer items that threatened to permeate the lower middle-class household.⁷⁶ Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay's manual published in the 1930s illustrates how the situation had been transformed since the 1910s. It might appear that Purnachandra expected to isolate the home from the market in consumer goods just as the neo-Brahmanic periodicals up to the 1910s had done; he sought to inculcate 'self-sufficiency' in the middle-class Bengali family and reiterate 'the wealth of information that had always ensured its well-being'.⁷⁷ But the difference becomes clear when one discerns that Purnachandra actually did not provide any know-how beyond a compendium of basic therapies and information about balanced diets and medicinal herbs.

After the First World War domesticity was waking up in helpless consternation to the powerlessness of its idealised 'self-sufficiency' in relation to the advancing strides of specialisation and commercialisation. This consternation found convoluted expression, for example, in a sudden demonisation of the *goala* (milkman) in print from 1918-19; it reached a fever-pitch by the middle of the 1920s. The essentialisation that the *goalas* diluted milk, had been common in late 19th-century Calcutta.⁷⁸ But before the 1920s *goalas* had not been characterised as enemies of the household.⁷⁹ By the 1920s, however, the *goala* in middle-class perception was a personification of slovenliness - wearing a 'dirty loin-cloth', carrying a 'dirty *gamchha* [piece of coarse cloth serving as a towel]', and 'spitting all around'.⁸⁰ The characterisation seemed to have the subtle sub-text that the characterised person was a non-

⁷⁵ Advertisement for *Kajer Lok*, in *Kajer Lok*, April, 1910, p. 61.

⁷⁶ E.g., 'Waterproof Barnish Prastut Pranali', *Kajer Lok*, January, 1910, p. 8; 'Kalap Prastut Pranali', *ibid.*, November, 1910, p. 185.

⁷⁷ Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay, *Grhasthadarpan*, Calcutta, 1932, Introduction.

⁷⁸ E.g., Rameshchandra Datta, *Sangsar* (1886), in *Ramesh Rachanabali: Samagra Upanyas*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 365; Jogendrachandra Basu, *Bangali Charit* (1907) in *Jogendrachandra Basu Rachanabali*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1976, p. 142.

⁷⁹ Doctors had written even before 1910 on the harmful effects of dilution of milk. But there was no demonisation of the *goala* in lay opinion in print before the latter half of the 1910s.

⁸⁰ T. K. Ghosh, 'Sanitary Milk Supply', *CMG*, 13 December 1924, p. 211.

Bengali (more specifically, of up-country origin). He, moreover, was shown as not only alienated from the Bengali middle-class household, but often as an organised trade interest ranged against domesticity.⁸¹ Unlike the image of the *goala* of the late 19th century,⁸² the *goala* in the 1920s was constructed as dangerous enough to cause the death of infants; 'Nowadays the milk that the *goala* supplies, diluted with water, is causing cholera', wrote an article on rising child mortality.⁸³ Though the obsession with child mortality during the 1920s-40s seems to have had its share in the formation of this new stereotype, it was not the only factor. The deployment of the concept of 'business' in relation to the *goala* reflected the 'helplessness' of the household; Bengali middle-class domesticity perceived itself at the receiving end of the commercialisation of one vital service in a locale where urbanisation had taken a sudden and alienating spurt from the period of the First World War. This, in its turn, has to be contextualised further. In 1880 Shoshee Chunder Dutt had observed that even a poor middle-class household had at least one cow.⁸⁴ Khitindranath Thakur wrote that unlike in the late 1920s (when he was writing his book), 'in the early 20th century almost every middle-class household' in the city had its own cow-shed.⁸⁵ By 1918 only a third of the whole milk supply was 'based in private residences'.⁸⁶ The massive immigration of up-country and Oriya *goalas* between 1911 and 1921⁸⁷ indicates the pull factor constituted by the rising ratio of households without cows to the total milk supply. Starting before the First World War, this influx of non-Bengali *goalas* was likely to have further accentuated with the overall abrupt rise in immigration between 1915 and 1920. This sudden accentuation must have made the Bengali middle class realise with a shock the implications of a commercialisation which had already, albeit slowly, initiated before the War.

The limits of the rhetoric of 'self-sufficiency' in relation to the market became stark in the 1930s. The emergent confident air of advertising openly indicated how the middle class, contrary to its own moralising, had started patronising the market of consumer goods. Through the advertisements, the market now addressed households in a voice of

⁸¹ S. S. Bose, Letter to the Editor, *CMG*, 3 January 1925, p. 309.

⁸² Significantly, in late 19th-century literature it was the *goalini* (milkmaid), rather than the *goala*, who appeared more frequently. Her representation as invariably Bengali is significant. Her access to the middle class *andars* in the neighbourhood and her familiarity and informality with women there clearly indicates that the relation was not very different from that in the village community. See Basu, *Bangali Charit*, p. 142; Datta, *Sangsar*, p. 365.

⁸³ Rameshchandra Ray, 'Shishumangal Pradarshanite Ki Shikhlam', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1335 BE, p. 636. Also, Bose, Letter to the Editor, *CMG*, p. 309.

⁸⁴ Shoshee Chunder Dutt, *India, Past and Present: With Minor Essays on Cognate Subjects*, London, 1880, p. 226.

⁸⁵ Khitindranath Thakur, *Kalikatar Chalaphera: Sekale ar Ekale*, Calcutta, 1337 BE, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Chunilal Bose, *Milk Supply of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1918, p. 2.

⁸⁷ See the statistics quoted in Chattopadhyay, *Internal Migration*, pp. 424-25.

unprecedented authority; this openly demonstrated that the market now took a middle-class clientele for granted. The dominant format of advertisement that had continued more or less strongly up to the 1920s, was testimonial-based. What is important here is its conformity to the vocabulary of status, so characteristic of educated upper-caste *samaj* and domesticity.⁸⁸ As this format declined, the dominant trend from the 1930s onwards used the 'democratic' and impersonal voice of market rationality, accompanied by an increasingly sophisticated visual appeal.⁸⁹ The Second World War finally shattered the last remaining claim of domesticity to an idealised insulation from the 'materialist' spirit of the market. For quick money and/or survival, the middle class participated at different levels in the war-time black-market, a development further analysed in Chapter Three. What is important here is that with this widespread involvement with the market, the disregard of *paralok* among the class was too glaringly demonstrated for the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric to have much ontological relevance left.

Adversity: Splintered and Secularised

An interesting terminological development reflected the crux of how the material and perceptual developments outlined above transformed the domestic world-view. Up to the 1910s the terms predominantly used to characterise the situation in the indigent middle-class household were *durdasha* and *durabastha*, both meaning a state of adversity. This abstract and holistic characterisation of adversity was not compartmentalised into a perception of a number of distinct 'problems'.⁹⁰ It was, therefore, congenial for the continuance of the neo-Brahmanic ideology, in which *dharma* as a holistic and abstract totality, subsumed the autonomy of specific mundane chores, by muting the significance of their physicality. This was reinforced by the relegation of functional details of domesticity to a lower level of significance in relation to the overarching metaphysical knowledge of the (male) householder.

The transformative impact of various developments from the time of the First World War was reflected in the perceptual shift from domesticity as an *abastha* (state) to domesticity as a physical aggregation of multiple and distinct *samasya* or problems. Though the use of the term *durabastha* continued, the sense of an abstract and total condition originally associated with the term, was diluted by the splintered perspective linked with the

⁸⁸ E.g., the advertisements for Chandrakishor Sen's Jabakusum Taila and H. Basu's Pushpasar in *Arjyabhumi*, Bhadra and Ashwin respectively, 1314 BE, pp. 125, 126.

⁸⁹ E.g., advertisement for Calcutta Chemical, *Prabasi*, Ashwin, 1349 BE, p. 633; advertisements of Horlicks, Banakusm Hair Oil and Ovaltine in *Masik Basumati*, Phalgun 1341 BE, pp. 16, 18, 21.

⁹⁰ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Hindur Grhe Durabastha', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1323 BE, pp. 783-84.

perception of numerous materially defined *samasya*. Thus, though a conscious questioning of the spiritualisation of domesticity was in effect voiced mainly by the more intellectually-oriented minority, the neo-Brahmanic ideology declined among the vast majority of the middle class mainly because of this splintering and overt physicalisation of the perception of the domestic field.

From a little after the turn of the century, the term *annakashta*, or dearth of subsistence, became common but did not rupture the totality of the neo-Brahmanic perspective because this was usually the only dearth that was specified. Moreover, the term was used, more often than not, to represent an overall resourcelessness, rather than a specific want. *Kajer Lok*, a pre-First World War periodical on domesticity, frequently reiterated that the Bengali middle class was in the 'throes of *durdasha* [adversity]'.⁹¹ However, apart from the 'dearth of subsistence', it did not specify any other.⁹² Often the term 'want' was also used but what was signified, again, was an overall privation rather than specific wants. An article in the periodical *Arghya* stated, 'The middle-class home is a scene of total hardship ... Our condition is becoming wretched, ... day by day a picture of destitution is looming'. And the solution suggested was significantly simple and idealistic - thrift, renunciation of luxury, a domestic supply of milk and an ideal wife who ensured peace and prosperity.⁹³ *Kajer Lok* meticulously devoted itself to the effort of equipping domesticity with knowledge insulating it from the market and specialised services. The other solution it suggested was moral - the creed of simple contentment. And the periodical comfortably continued with the reiteration of the neo-Brahmanic ideal of domesticity constantly referring back to the Dharma Shastras.⁹⁴ As late as 1913 even Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, an economist, perceived the *durabastha* of the Bengali Hindu household without identifying distinct 'problems'. He was hopeful that an even keel could still be maintained, if the middle class renounced 'expenditure on luxuries'.⁹⁵ His perception of adversity and suggested solution thus were not essentially different from Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's, articulated in the 1880s. Bhudeb had proscribed 'luxury' in *grhastha* households and emphasised *nivrtti* (renunciation of worldly desires) as a means of keeping the market, and therefore penury, at bay.⁹⁶

⁹¹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Shilpay Dhanagamer Upay', *Kajer Lok*, March, 1910, pp. 38-41.

⁹² E.g., (Anon.), 'Beder Banar', *Kajer Lok*, April, 1910, pp. 65-69.

⁹³ Kalachand Ghosh, 'Jarū Garu Dhan', *Arghya*, Ashwin-Bhadra, 1317 BE, pp. 212-15.

⁹⁴ E.g., Jogendranath Basu, 'Bishay o Dharma' and Satyacharan Mitra, 'Adhyatmaniti', in *Arghya*, Ashwin-Bhadra, 1317 BE, pp. 187-90, 236-41.

⁹⁵ Radhakamal Mukhopadhyaya, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1320 BE, pp. 569-84.

⁹⁶ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya, 'Artha Sanchay', *Paribarik Prabandha* (1882), 11th edn, Chinsurah, n.d., p. 206.

By the 1920s, however, all discussions directly or incidentally concerning domesticity perceived the horizon dotted with numerous 'problems'. By the end of the 1930s, the same Radhakamal, for example, observed that 'In Bengal in no other epoch had so many problems loomed on the horizon, all at the same time'.⁹⁷ But he was not the first to say this. Already in the 1920s, in a considerable section of the press and print, the perception of adversity, even in moralist writings, had disaggregated into 'problems'. It was observed, for example, that 'The life of the Bengali household [was] grinding to a halt' under the pressure of 'numerous problems',⁹⁸ and that the subsistence crisis, the scarcity of cloth, the problem of high prices, and the health problem had come to stay.⁹⁹ Other authors added to these the 'unemployment problem'¹⁰⁰ and the 'housing problem'.¹⁰¹ While many discussions concentrated on specific problems, there were numerous other general discussions, conveying the impression of a perception overwhelmed by the clustered way in which these problems were seen suddenly to have besieged middle-class existence.

In the absence of any other development to explain this perceptual transformation, it might not be too reductionist or positivistic to say that it was largely a consequence of unprecedented pressures from 1917 onwards. The Census of 1921 noted that the sudden rise in the prices of essentials like cloth, salt and kerosene from 1918 had most severely affected the middle classes who depended on small fixed incomes; as they had 'no compensation' they 'suffered a very great hardship'.¹⁰² The 1931 Census, in its turn, observed that during whole of the decade 1921-28 high prices of necessaries had continued.¹⁰³ But the middle class cannot be claimed to have derived the imagination of unprecedented pressures from the census's characterisation of the situation. Even before the 1921 Census Report had been published, the vernacular press and print initiated a pervasive discussion of the jolting impact of so many 'problems' emerging at the same time. In 1920 a *Bharatbarsha* editorial enumerated the 'various' problems like shortage of food, shortage of cloth, shortage of all essential commodities and the outbreak of various epidemics.¹⁰⁴ Of course, added to it were the 'housing problem',¹⁰⁵ the 'rent problem',¹⁰⁶ and the 'shortage of milk in Calcutta',¹⁰⁷ all

⁹⁷ Mukhopadhyay, *Bangala o Bangali*, Introduction.

⁹⁸ Anathnath Mukhopadhyay, 'Utsab', *Basanti*, Bhadra, 1328 BE, pp. 406-09.

⁹⁹ 'Alochana', 'Ghor Durdin', *Bharatbarsha*, Magh, 1327 BE, p. 221.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., 'Shikkhita Bangalir Bekar Samasya', *Anandabajar Patrika* quoted in *Arthik Unnati*, Poush, 1333 BE, p. 656. In 1922 a committee appointed after discussions in the legislative council, described unemployment among the educated middle class Bengalis as overwhelming.

¹⁰¹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar', pp. 521-24.

¹⁰² *Census of India, 1921*, vol. V (Bengal), pt. 1. p. 30.

¹⁰³ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ 'Alochana', 'Ghor Durdin', p. 221.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., Biswas, 'Housing Problem - I' and 'Housing Problem - II', pp. 175-77, 335-39; (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar', pp. 522-24.

specific to the transformation of Calcutta's urban condition from the period of war. It may not be wrong to suggest that this splintering of the perception of domestic adversity was induced, to begin with, by an itemised sense of dearth deriving from the war-time shortage and high prices. Once this itemised perspective emerged and disintegrated the holistic one, all other areas of perceived discomfiture automatically appeared as so many other 'problems'. Finally the secular nature, the urgency and the concentration of these 'problems' determined why, far from reiterating the facile 'spiritual' solution of simple contentment, each problem generated its own universe of concrete and detailed solutions. And there was no possibility, nor inclination, to bring these universes into an overarching spiritual rationale.

One might pause here to note the interesting development that by the 1930s, a 'sexual problem' had been added to the list - not pervasively but definitely and noticeably. By the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, there was a body of literature that perceived it as one of the 'unavoidable problems of this age'.¹⁰⁸ Nrupendrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi's statement (in 1944) based on more than a decade's practice of psychoanalysis, was significant; in recent years, wherever they had gone, 'educated men and women' were eager to discuss the problems of their individual sex-lives with Nrupendrakumar and Aradhana.¹⁰⁹ Advaita Mallabharman, in a foreword to a study of human sexual behaviour in India over the ages, described the scene of serious literature on sex in the late 1930s: 'Even a few years back, recognition of the existence of a sexual problem was taboo...now it [specialist discussion on sex for popular consumption] is steadily proliferating'. He noted that recently a group of specialists had started writing sex-manuals with an eye to solving the problem of sexual maladjustment and maximising the pleasure of couples.¹¹⁰ It is important to understand that this new crop of literature that Mallabharman referred to, was different from the pre-existing genre of neo-Brahmanic 'guide books on marriage'. The latter had never represented marital relations as a zone of likely maladjustment. Concerned with the quality of the progeny and the health and virility of the male, these books had concentrated on Shastric rules of continence.¹¹¹ The identification in the 1930s and 40s of the 'sexual problem' implicitly contradicted the neo-Brahmanic notion of marriage. The latter had, per force, denied the possibility of marital, sexual maladjustment. Hindu marriage as an indissoluble, non-

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Bose, Letter to the Editor, *CMG*, p. 309.

¹⁰⁸ Advaita Mallabharman, 'Foreword', in Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, *Jaunakhudha o Narir Satitva*, Calcutta, 1346 BE, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹¹ See Dagmar Engels, 'The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, c. 1890-1930 with Special Reference to British and Bengali Discourse on Gender', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1987, pp. 98-102.

consensual marriage of souls and an eternal bond stretching over several lives, was projected as predetermined to be compatible. Therefore, extra-marital sex or refusal to sexually cooperate with the spouse in the duty of procreation, was treated not as a secular problem but as contravention of *grhadharma*.¹¹² Of course, this rhetoric was gendered. Though the neo-Brahmanic tracts modified Shastric norms and insisted on male monogamy and condemned sexual deprivation of the wife, male chastity remained normative rather than obligatory.¹¹³ On the other hand, the literature of the 1930s and 40s on the 'sexual problem' was often oriented towards controlling female sexuality by ensuring sexual 'fulfilment' within marriage. But what is important in this context is that the open recognition of sexual incompatibility as a secular - physical and psychological - problem, undermined the neo-Brahmanic claim that Hindu marriage was a spiritual issue, above the secular indices of compatibility. The 'sexual problem', moreover, fashioned its own universe, deriving from and generating specific secular discourses like artificial birth-control, psychoanalysis and sexology; together these discourses gradually sidelined the Brahmanical one, in which marital sex was recognised but rigidly controlled as an integral part of *naimittik karma* (mundane means to the end of salvation).

The emergence of the perception of concrete adversity, dotted with endless 'problems', also brought in its wake a powerful construction of genteel poverty as demeaning. This came up against the neo-Brahmanic tendency to spiritualise poverty. As has been analysed in the previous chapter, poverty had been combined with the image of the Shastra-observing Brahman to create an icon of serene self-possessed righteousness as juxtaposed to the 'materialist' lifestyle of the 'westernised' householder.¹¹⁴ But in the 1920s while literary imagination produced a romantic outburst against the stultification of the soul by concretely imagined lower middle class poverty,¹¹⁵ essays on the domestic predicament frequently described the household as a 'site of perpetual gloom and dissension'; this dissension was projected as 'the natural ally of poverty' and a problem-battered existence.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, poverty, rather than being invariably mapped and ordered in a spiritual terrain, now asserted itself as a discursive nucleus in its own right, unleashing poverty-justified discourses that often went against neo-Brahmanic norms. For example, the widely published life insurance propaganda that there was no life after death, was an appeal, after all, to the secular

¹¹² For a detailed exposition of the neo-Brahmanic rationale of Hindu marriage, see Nagendranath Basu, *Bishwakosh*, vol. 22, Calcutta, 1318 BE, pp. 234-42.

¹¹³ See Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric Against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *EPW*, 28:36, 4 Sept. 1993, p. 1872.

¹¹⁴ E.g., Jogendrachandra Basu, *Model Bhagini* (1293 BE) in *Jogendrachandra Basu Rachanabali*, vol. 1, pp. 157-422.

¹¹⁵ For a critical discussion, see Gopikanath Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher Madhyakalin Bangla Katha Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1986, pp. 269-335.

¹¹⁶ Narayan Bharati, 'Arthik Unnati', *Arthik Unnati*, Jyaishta, 1333 BE, p. 130.

strategies of fighting genteel poverty.¹¹⁷ Again, secular understanding of adversity was the main reason why a significant voice on artificial birth control could emerge from the 1920s;¹¹⁸ and this voice, as will be noted in Chapter Three, was indeed radically different from that of the neo-Brahmanic rules of continence.

Allegiance Divided

The neo-Brahmanic ideology had given domesticity an all-absorbing significance by making it the idiom in terms of which the middle class viewed and ordered the identity of the upper-caste, middle class society and the imagined nation. The home therefore was expected to enjoy the unrivalled allegiance of youths, the most crucial agent of cultural and biological reproduction. It is argued here that from the 1920s this moral projection of an all-absorbing perception of domesticity weakened especially among youths for two reasons. The moral aesthetic of the neat tranquil home was swamped by a change in the perception of lower middle-class urban housing and households. Simultaneously, youths in the 1920s-40s period tended to project the sphere outside the home as more redeeming and 'manly' than domesticity.

An enquiry committee of 1919 noted that during the war years the middle-class pressure on available accommodation had so intensified that there were cases of tenant families of 14 or 15 members living in two rooms, sharing basic amenities like taps and toilets with other families on the same floor.¹¹⁹ A 1945 survey by the Indian Statistical Institute found that out of 428 middle-class families (the average middle-class family in Calcutta was found to comprise seven members) randomly surveyed, 190 occupied one room each, 147 had two rooms. Out of 712 random samples, only 266 families had their own 'private baths'; the rest shared bathrooms in common with other tenants.¹²⁰ Given this context, it is to be noted that the middle-class house, described in all its dilapidation and suffocation, was constantly used in the literature of the late 1920s onwards as a metaphor for the condition of the lower middle class in the city.¹²¹

Again what strikes one about the fictional literature of the period between 1920s and 1947, is that sophisticated to less gifted articulation invested poverty of the lower middle-

¹¹⁷ Banerji, 'Some Aspects of Insurance', p. 41.

¹¹⁸ E.g., Hrishikesh Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, Chandannagar, 1334 BE, pp. 144-48.

¹¹⁹ Mitra, *Calcutta: An Urban Disaster*, p. 179.

¹²⁰ *CMG*, 6 July 1946, p. 158.

¹²¹ E.g., Achintyakumar Sengupta, 'Gumot' (1924), in *Achintyakumar Rachanabali*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1975, pp. 537-41; Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, pp. 120-21.

class household with unprecedented physicality.¹²² And the interference of this physical condition with the spiritual and the emotional was explicitly probed. Achintyakumar Sengupta in his short story, *Gumot*, chose a 'dilapidated' built space as the suitable site for the erosion of the mutual affection of a lower middle-class couple.¹²³ Even Premendra Mitra, much less idealistic as an author than many of his contemporaries, could not avoid introducing the theme of the stultification of the soul by the physical tyranny of lower middle-class housing. He wrote in a short story, 'houses mushroom all right but do not flower ... they are nothing more than a roof overhead'. And he situated these houses in the 'octopus' of a city which sucked dry not only 'life and blood but also the soul'.¹²⁴

The image of lower middle-class urban housing thus became so obviously wretched that associating spirituality with this space became very difficult. This is reflected in the language of nationalist authors trying to persuade the migrated population to return to the village. In a situation where the immigrant families were overwhelmingly disinclined to return, the nationalist persuasion was likely to specially emphasise that aspect of middle-class existence in Calcutta that was seen as the most unbearable. It is significant that against an essentialised 'spirituality' and 'completeness' of rural domestic existence, the nationalist writings particularly contrasted the 'wretched' housing condition of the lower middle class in the city.¹²⁵

Significantly, in the 1920s and 30s, young authors wrote a number of novels, short stories and poems using the imagery of the road and of the youth as a traveller or even a gypsy,¹²⁶ while the house was simultaneously presented as a metaphor of decay. This romanticisation of the road was largely an outcome of the inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution and the beginning of mass movements in India. But it was also a matter of the obsession with courage-manliness-strength that had become an integral part of Bengali middle-class consciousness, thanks to a complex interaction of colonial and nationalist discourses. It is important to emphasise here, for the reckoning of studies on colonial masculinity, that the period from the late 1910s marked a change in the dominant orientation of the middle-class discourse of masculinity. By the 1920s the ideal of activism had created, among youths, a moral voice that competed with the neo-Brahmanic ideal of the spiritual manliness, squarely sited in the detached performance of domestic duties. In Chapter One it

¹²² For a critical discussion, see Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 269-335.

¹²³ Sengupta, 'Gumot', pp. 537-41.

¹²⁴ Premendra Mitra, 'Agamikal' (1927), quoted in Debkumar Basu, *Kallogoshthir Kathasahitya*, Calcutta, 1980, p. 118.

¹²⁵ Chattopadhyay, 'Charka', p. 516.

¹²⁶ For a critical discussion, see Bandyopadhyay, 'Amaratver Thikana', p. x.

was noted that the Vivekananda-inspired Swadeshi ideologues, activists and 'terrorists' of the period 1905-17 had not intended to detract from the ideal of the spiritual manliness of the householder; they had indeed often reiterated the dictum that *garhasthya* was the highest form of *ashrama*. By contrast, from 1917 onwards, the home and the 'passivism' of the *grhastha* came to be imagined as sites of effeminacy and weakness in significant areas of articulation. For example, Hemendrakumar Ray, best known for his adventure stories, made one of his young heroes say, 'Born in the home-bound environment of Bengali families, we [nevertheless] ... long to jump into the whirlpool of events, experience excitement after excitement ... We want an active life with a feeling of ceaseless movement and numerous risks'.¹²⁷ The ontological mapping of domesticity was thus transformed in changing times and among a new generation of youths. The first impulse that generated an infatuation with the idea of the 'wide world' among this generation, seemed to have derived from the euphoria in Bengali press and print over the participation of Bengalis in the First World War.¹²⁸ It is significant that the poet Najrul Islam, who had an important role in inspiring this romantic longing among Bengali youths for the 'wide world', had himself performed military service during the First World War. Then came the inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution and a vague feeling of being at one with the destinies of the 'wide world'.¹²⁹ Bengali youths romantically identified themselves with the 'dominated' 'waking up from slumber and bondage' in a global wave of emancipation.¹³⁰ The home, by implication, became a site of inertia and spatial smallness in relation to that wide dynamic world.¹³¹

The conflation of the appeal of this imagined wide world outside the domestic sphere with that of Gandhi-led mass movement in 1919-22, is reflected in the reminiscences of those who were in their youth in the 1920s. It is significant that Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay recalls his enthusiasm for the Non-Cooperation Movement in terms of the following lines from a poem by Najrul Islam, hailed in the 1920s as youth and rebellion personified: 'A crazy wayfarer burst into the courtyard of Mother Bengal/ Thirty crores of people sang as they

¹²⁷ Hemendrakumar Ray, *Sonar Pahader Jatri*, quoted in Shibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandasamas: Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishusahitya*, Calcutta, 1991, p. 282.

¹²⁸ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Nabya Bangalir Sainik Brtti', *Grhastha*, Agrahayan, 1323 BE, pp. 92-94.

¹²⁹ The nature and implications of the Russian Revolution were not clear to most young Indians at the beginning of the 1920s. But there was a general enthusiasm about and interest in what the Bengali youth imagined as an ideal of universal advancement. See, Gopal Haldar, *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1978, p. 316.

¹³⁰ 'Junior Ukil' (pseud.), 'Ukiler Katha', Letter to the editor of *Sabuj-patra*, reprinted in *Bharatbarsha*, Chaitra, 1327 BE, p. 476.

¹³¹ See the poem by Najrul Islam which expressed the resolve to break out of the 'closed confines' of the home and experience the 'world', the 'whirlpool of changing times'. Islam, 'Sangkalpa' in Bishwanath De et al. (eds), *Sunirbachita Kabita: Kaji Najrul Islam*, Calcutta, 1970, p. 246.

followed him, heedless of everything'.¹³² The association of the road and unreason in this imaging of Gandhi is significant. The followers were expected to forget reason in order to take to the road. Was it, then, both colonial and patriarchal reason? Maybe, it was also a romantic and momentary rejection of the reason of class. Most reminiscences recount how a vague sentiment had developed among youths about a freedom attained alongside all sections of the oppressed.¹³³ For the convert to Marxism in the late 1930s, this taking to the road might not merely signify the abandoning of one's exclusive preoccupation with the domestic, but also an effort at repudiating his or her class-base. Gopal Haldar felt that he had really reached the 'highway' only with his conversion to Marxism.¹³⁴

Another manifestation of the eagerness to prove one's courage and endurance outside the home, was the emergent trend of cycling and other youth expeditions from the 1920s.¹³⁵ One group of young men who found it 'against their grain to waste long vacations at home on idle gossip', decided to form an association called Calcutta Wheelers to 'brave danger' and have a taste of 'adventure'.¹³⁶ Predictably, the dominant patriarchal reaction was one of distrust in which the bicycle and these expeditions became symbols of 'luxury' and 'waste of time' in a period of educated unemployment.¹³⁷ But there was another voice among the elderly. Jaladhar Sen, the editor of the popular periodical *Bharatbarsha*, though then in his sixties, lauded such expeditions. In his introduction to an account of one such tour, he hailed the participants' resolve not to replicate domestic habits on the expedition. He wrote, 'We board the train at Howrah station, make our beds, go to sleep ... These cyclists ... have braved dangers ... If it is anybody who has the right to write a travel-account it is them'.¹³⁸ Did the split in the voice of the elderly have anything to do with the eagerness to see the 'dying race' 'rejuvenated' in strength and spirit of adventure in relation to the Muslims, who were being constructed in communal literature as highly adventurous?¹³⁹ It should be noted that in its editorials Jaladhar's *Bharatbarsha* frequently characterised the Bengali Hindus as a 'dying race'.

¹³² Hirendranath Mukhopadhyaya, *Tari Theke Tir: Paribesh, Pratyakkha o Pratyayer Brttanta*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 78.

¹³³ Haldar, *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 2, p. 316.

¹³⁴ The chapter which describes the eve of his conversion is titled 'The Highway - the Peoples' Way', *ibid.*, pp. 316-55.

¹³⁵ (Anon.), 'Gharchhadar Dal', *Bharatbarsha*, Chaitra, 1328 BE, pp. 575-77; (Anon.), 'Dwichakre Bhupradakkin, Bichitra, Bhadra, 1334 BE, 704-10.

¹³⁶ Manindranath Mustofi, *Bhramaner Neshha*, Calcutta, 1337 BE, pp. 2-4.

¹³⁷ Chattopadhyay, 'Charka', p. 514.

¹³⁸ Jaladhar Sen's foreword to Mustofi, *Bhramaner Neshha*, no page number.

¹³⁹ For such construction, see, for example, Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', p. 21.

In the 1930s this division of allegiance took a very palpable form among a section of middle-class youths. There was a noticeable appearance in fiction of youths leaving their homes as a result of disagreement with the elders often over political opinions.¹⁴⁰ This was a reflection of what was actually often happening in the case of revolutionary 'terrorists' and communists in the 1930s and 40s. By the early 1940s even young women activists leaving their parents was not unheard of.¹⁴¹ Even where Marxist activists did not leave their homes, the liminality of their colonial middle-class being often attracted them strongly to the slum. Spending hours on party activity in slums, was also often a revolt against the class-patriarchy, that had tried to inscribe middle-class youths' minds with abhorrence for the slums as sites of menial labour. This 'spirit of revolt' was one of the reasons why, for example, Chandra Ray, a communist activist, preferred to stay in working-class slums 'day in and day out' on becoming a Communist trade union activist.¹⁴²

'The Rise of Youth'

By the latter half of the 1920s, both favourable and critical opinion registered a 'rise' or 'revolt' of youth. Not only did middle-class students and youths dominate such urban demonstrations as the anti-Simon Commission hartal of 3 February 1928, the assertion of youth as a distinct agency in the political life of the city was evident in student and youth conferences and associations that proliferated in 1928-29. These associations raised demands for complete independence and radical social and economic changes.¹⁴³ Sumit Sarkar has pertinently suggested that educated unemployment may have had something to do with this youth unrest.¹⁴⁴ However, this study, without denying the significance of this material conditioning, will examine this wave of 'youth unrest' in relation to the dominant domestic ideology, especially the precept of *brahmacharya*.

Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay noted in 1928 what he called the 'rise of youth'.¹⁴⁵ He associated this 'rise' particularly with the questioning of the established social patriarchal regime among a section of young Bengali authors who were being accused of the overt

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, pp. 160, 183, 232-33; Nirendranath Ray, 'Dabi', *Parichay*, Ashadh, 1345, pp. 136-140.

¹⁴¹ Manikuntala Sen, *Sediner Katha*, Calcutta, 1982, pp. 75-76, 95.

¹⁴² Reminiscences of Chandra Ray, quoted in Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish: Asamapta Biplab*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 22.

¹⁴³ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 266.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Samajdharma o Sahitya' (1928), *Chintayasi*, in *Dhurjatiprasad Rachanabali*, vol. 2, 1987, Calcutta, p. 60.

deployment of sex in their writings. Even though Dhurjatiprasad was critical of the frothy romanticism involved in the writings of these authors (of *Kallol*, *Kalikalam* and like-minded literary circles), the sociologist in him saw these 'excesses' as a reaction to 'oppression' by a 'Shastra-chanting' regime. This rise of youth was not a mere question of one generation's unavoidable gap with the other. It was an assertion - whether in literature or in social action - of youth as a principle and a distinct agency. Indeed, the assertion against the neo-Brahmanic moral order was not confined to *Kallol* and such other circles. In his first publication, *Tarunya* (Youth), a collection of essays, Annadashankar Ray who was not a member of the above groups also claimed autonomy for youth. He asserted his conviction: 'If we have unwavering confidence in our own youth, it will show us the way. And that should be the way'.¹⁴⁶ The 'way' as he saw it, entailed protesting against the spirituality invested by neo-Brahmanic ideology in marriage and conjugality; this spiritualist regime, he believed, robbed youth of the freedom of choice and self-definition. His conception of the 'spirit of youth' was incompatible with the concepts of female chastity and continence,¹⁴⁷ representation of women as *kamini* (lust incarnate), and denial of agency to the body.¹⁴⁸

However, what crystallised into a questioning in print in the latter half of the 1920s had already developed into an attitude in the early years of the decade, waiting for systematic articulation. Indeed, a unique atmosphere was created by the conjunction of the tidings of the Bolshevik Revolution and the beginning of a mass movement in India, creating an intense expectation of political freedom.¹⁴⁹ This expectation of political freedom and the 'rise' of hitherto marginalised masses underlined to youths their own double subordination - to the colonial state and patriarchy. The connection was clear to sympathetic contemporaries. Dhurjatiprasad observed, 'Workers, servants peasants, petty clerks, and at home the wife, the son and the daughter are all raising their heads against oppression'.¹⁵⁰ It would be interesting to understand the impact of this conjuncture through a reading of the view of Sachindranath Sengupta (born in a non-'reformed' Hindu family) who had joined the Swadeshi movement as a boy of thirteen in 1905. By 1919, even while *brahmacharya* was being strongly upheld by

¹⁴⁶ Annadashankar Ray, 'Srishtir Disha', *Tarunya* (1928), in *Annadashankar Rachanabali*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1987, p. 401.

¹⁴⁷ Ray, 'Jati o Sati', *Tarunya*, pp. 417-25.

¹⁴⁸ Ray, 'Prachhanna Jadabad', *Tarunya*, pp. 407-13.

¹⁴⁹ Following the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917, rumours spread among wide sections of the people in India about a total change with the hitherto oppressed coming into their own. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 178.

¹⁵⁰ Mukhopadhyay, 'Samajdharma', p. 67.

most Swadeshi activists and first wave 'terrorists' (of the period of 1905 to 1917),¹⁵¹ Sachindranath revolted against the appropriation of the agency of youth by nationalist patriarchy.

Twenty-seven years of age in 1919, Sachindranath repudiated allegiance to the neo-Brahmanic ideal and voiced protest against the 'repression' of childhood and youth by patriarchy. He criticised the ideal of a compulsorily detached and authoritarian father imposing on his children an unquestioning adherence to *sanatan dharma*. But, most importantly, he voiced his consternation that in the name of *brahmacharya*, adolescents were constructed as 'almost animals'. Thus, the greatest pain as he saw it, was the denial of human dignity to and the marginalisation of adolescents. The inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution behind this questioning is clearly indicated by Sachindranath's elation that a new era had dawned and 'everyone one - big or small - in this world is craving for freedom'. And significantly, in this imagined era of liberation, he desired youth to gain freedom from both the colonial government and 'oligarchy of the elders'.¹⁵²

It is important here to understand the significance of a connection made by a number of authors, in recounting their post-adolescent enthusiasm in the period 1917-22, about the vaguely-felt 'promise' of freedom in the air. They all contextualised this exhilaration against the mortifying guilt complex, imposed on the adolescents of their day by the constantly-preached norms of *brahmacharya*. Therefore, the promise of an overall freedom that these men, barely out of their teens, associated with Gandhi, also involved the fashioning of a Gandhi of their own. The real-life Gandhi, after all, far from providing solace in the matter, cast youth in more or less the same repressive moral stereotype where material desires and sexuality were concerned.

Annadashankar Ray, who called Gandhi one of his 'gurus',¹⁵³ however, condemned the concept of *brahmacharya* in particular and Shastric injunctions in general. Gopal Haldar, who participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement as a college student in Calcutta, had been sermonised right 'from 9-10 years of age', even through vernacular school texts, that youth was a 'highly treacherous phase when the senses become overpowering'. It is significant, therefore, that Gopal and many of his contemporaries were inhibited in their allegiance to Gandhi the whole person: 'Gandhi inspired us with the principle of *atmashakti* ... [But] his project was firmly bound by thousands of restrictions based on tradition.

¹⁵¹ E.g., Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, pp. 62-64. Prabartak Bidyapith, founded by Matilal Ray (a participant in the first wave) in February 1921, was based on an inculcation of *brahmacharya*. (Chakravarty, *Hindu Response*, p. 84).

¹⁵² Sachindranath Sengupta, 'Sabujbhiti', *Prabasi*, Kartik, 1326 BE, pp. 25-29.

¹⁵³ Annadashankar Ray, quoted in Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, p. 405.

Gandhi's "truth" was an arid lifeless concept of purity, devoid of palatability and fragrance ... We jumped at the idea of *swaraj* but could never accept *chittashuddhi* [cleansing the mind of worldly desires]'. Gopal Haldar had been inspired by Vivekananda, thanks to his connection in his early teens with revolutionary 'terrorists'. By the end of the 1920s, he was again - albeit briefly - on the fringes of revolutionary terrorism before his conversion to Marxism. But his Vivekananda was not the disciple of Ramakrishna, with his 'aversion to *kamini-kanchan* [women and money as the twin trope of worldly temptation]'; he was exclusively the symbol of the energy of youth, 'the explorer on the trek of life'. Gopal remarked, 'I have heard that some of the Swadeshis believed that the more youths would repress their desire, the further they would proceed towards overthrowing British rule. I, for one, did not subscribe to this'.¹⁵⁴ The call of Non-Cooperation helped Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay forget his feeling of guilt over the 'bad habits of youth', which was 'a very serious moral issue when [his generation] was in [its] teens'. He remembered how the advertisements in the *panjikas* had frightened his adolescent mind with terrifying illustrations of the threatened clinical outcome of these habits. When, in 1919, he felt attracted to the Gandhian movement, he chose to ignore Gandhi's rhetoric of *brahmacharya* and continence.¹⁵⁵

It is important that the frequency with which *brahmacharya* occurred even in the 1920s in moralistic, nationalist writings declined by the middle of the 1930s. Indeed, the world of revolutionary 'terrorism', the greatest stronghold of this precept, had itself become transformed. The veteran *dadas* (leaders), living on their past, had started losing their credibility in the eyes of young recruits in the this most intense phase (1930-35) of revolutionary terrorism. This was also when women were working side by side with men in 'terrorist' circles, marking a new level of participation of women in the revolutionary movement.¹⁵⁶ With affairs and marriages between 'terrorists' occurring to the extent of being reflected in fictional literature, the scope for the imposition of *brahmacharya* considerably narrowed.¹⁵⁷ Gopal Haldar remembered the comment of a fellow-accused in jail in 1932. Young Suraj Raychaudhuri had no respect for *brahmacharya* and mildly complained that he had not had the chance of an affair because of the regime imposed by the *dadas*.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Haldar, *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 2, pp. 109-12.

¹⁵⁵ Mukhopadhyay, *Tari Theke*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁶ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 251-52, 314.

¹⁵⁷ For autobiographical evidence of such marriage, see, Phulrenu Guha, 'Ja Peyechhi' in Nilima Chakrabarti (ed.), *Aj Ami*, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 11-12.

¹⁵⁸ Haldar, *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 2, p. 354. Haldar was arrested in 1932 in connection with the third wave of revolutionary terrorism.

As might already be evident from this discussion, the emotional investment of youths in Non-Cooperation and their simultaneous alienation from the *brahmacharya* rhetoric was an indication of their protest - sometimes explicit but more often implicit - against patriarchy as such. In some cases the challenging of patriarchy was direct. Annadashankar saw *dasatya* (servitude) among the middle class not merely in relation to the colonial state; 'slavish' subservience to patriarchy, he argued, was carefully instilled at home.¹⁵⁹ And he railed against the neo-Brahmanic morality and norms that took all decisions on behalf of youth. The assumption that protest against patriarchy was pervasive, if frequently implicit, can also be based, for example, on the world of adventure stories, a genre that rapidly developed among young male authors during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶⁰ One such author, Hemendrakumar Ray, gave his lead characters Jayanta and Manik unlimited freedom to undertake their adventures. Significantly, they were presented as young men who had lost their parents.¹⁶¹ But not every author resorted to such facile non-confrontational means of removing the patriarchal impediment to the assertion of youth. There were novels with a clear tone of 'revolt'. In Shibram Chakrabarti's *Badi Theke Paliye*, Kanchan, a young boy, ran away from home because to him it represented a site dominated by the disciplinarian father. Shibaji Bandyopadhyay analyses how Shibram's attack on patriarchy and on didactic authors like Satishchandra Chakrabarti,¹⁶² is reflected in the way Kanchan differentiated between his parents: 'In the desert named father, mother is the only oasis'.¹⁶³

The 'revolt' of youth should not be taken in any absolute sense, however. There will be occasion to show in greater detail in Chapters Four and Five that it was gendered and socially limited. Here we should briefly point out that the investment in the 'road', rather than the home, was largely romantic and highly ambivalent. Again, the feeling of being at one with the marginalised, obscured a continuing stake in class and status and domesticity as the ultimate sanctuary for both. It should also be kept in mind that open and principled questioning of patriarchy was common among the more intellectual sections of the youth. Finally, the discursive assertion of youth, in spite of sincere efforts to imagine young women as partisans, often narrowed down to a celebration of youthful masculinity.¹⁶⁴ But what can be claimed

¹⁵⁹ Annadashankar Ray, 'Dharmasya Glani', *Tarunya*, p. 398.

¹⁶⁰ The following interpretation of adventure stories is indebted to Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal*, pp. 280-86.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁶² Satishchandra Chakrabarti in his *Santaner Charitragathan*, hailed profusely in the early 20th century, had enjoined the father to be a ruthless disciplinarian and the mother an obedient aide of the father. See *ibid.*, pp. 227-32.

¹⁶³ Shibram Chakrabarti, *Badi Theke Paliye*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁶⁴ E.g., Ray, 'Dharmasya Glani', p. 400.

here is that this 'revolt' did weaken the foundations of the neo-Brahmanic morality among the youth. This is reflected in the lack of interest among youths to revive the trend of neo-Brahmanic didactic literature when it dwindled from the late 1920s and virtually dried up in the 1930s.

The decline of the power of persuasion of the neo-Brahmanic discourse on youth among the less self-consciously intellectual majority can be inferred from the advertisements in the *panjika*. As the *panjikas* enjoyed huge sales, the advertisements in them obviously tried to appeal to the sensibility of largest numbers possible. Any change in the nature of these advertisements, therefore, may be taken as reflecting a change in the moral attitude of the majority. Significantly, up to the 1920s, the reference to youth in the advertisements of aphrodisiacs, elixirs and related products was clearly in deference to the neo-Brahmanic morality. They, indeed, echoed the rhetoric of neo-Brahmanic tracts in their moral condemnation of youths' inability to 'control the senses'. A typical advertisement read, 'in youth ... most men, becoming a slave of their senses, ...ultimately ruin their body, mind and spirit....'¹⁶⁵ Another advertisement fleetingly appealed to the male fantasy of retaining youth in old age, 'Only Mahashakti Rasayan can make an old man as potent as a youth'.¹⁶⁶ But it took care to immediately revert back to the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric about youth and its alleged corruptibility. By the late 1930s and early 40s, the situation had clearly changed. In some of the advertisements of the 1930s, nervous debility was still being related to masturbation, wet dreams and 'overdose of sex'.¹⁶⁷ But the appeal now was to the considerations of male health (as before) and male pleasure, and rarely any longer to the neo-Brahmanic, moralist rhetoric of *brahmacharya*.

Reasoned and Ideological Questioning

The romantic protest of youth or the discursive pressure of a 'problem'-centred perception of domesticity, with all their dissolving impact on the ideology, did not necessarily involve a direct and reasoned questioning of spirituality imposed on domesticity. However, the period from after the First World War also produced such questioning. The periodical *Sabuj-patra*, launched in 1914, was the first to initiate a reasoned criticism of neo-Brahmanic spiritualisation of worldly existence. It is important to keep in mind, however, that neo-

¹⁶⁵ Advertisement for Gonohrin, in the advertisement section, *Nababibhakar Panjika o Directory*, 1327 BE.

¹⁶⁶ Advertisement for Mahashakti Rasayan in *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ E.g., the advertisement for Gonela, manufactured by *Kabiraj G. D. Kabibhushan and Company* in the advertisement section, *Gupta Press Directory o Panjika*, Calcutta, 1342 BE.

Brahmanic periodicals dismissed *Sabuj-patra's* questioning as representing a 'Brahmo standpoint' and, therefore, a minority opinion.¹⁶⁸ This study, therefore, would start with the first significant questioning of neo-Brahmanic spirituality from within the non-'reformed' Hindu milieu that had produced the given ideology. In this milieu, questioning voices emerged prominently enough from the latter half of 1920s. It started with the launching of *Kallol*, a periodical which questioned, among other things, the established moral 'orthodoxy' in general and its invocation of Brahmanical concepts for the rigid control of sexuality of youths in particular. Also, with them the presentation of urban genteel poverty acquired a body of its own.¹⁶⁹ It is important, however, that *Kallol* itself did not directly assert that domestic existence was 'material' and should be upheld as such. Rather, they themselves represented a romantic-iconoclastic outburst of middle-class youth with some degree of idealistic sentimentality.¹⁷⁰ But in so far as their writings reflected a psychoanalytical influence, the idea of the autonomy of the body and a physical representation of want, they came to be branded by custodians of the established morality as 'materialist'. This initiated a literary debate in popular periodicals of the 1920s and 30s over the supposed spirituality of Hindu existence. And domesticity came up as the main site where this spirituality was reaffirmed or denied. This debate in the late 1920s and 30s brought into the arena of non-academic periodicals and genres, the standpoints of intellectuals like Binaykumar Sarkar, whose views on the matter was till then confined to more scholarly articulation.

Critical defence of *Kallol*¹⁷¹ caused Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay to bring forth his attack on the spiritualisation of everyday existence into the world of popular Bengali periodicals. At one level he demystified the Brahmanical rhetoric, pointing out that the concept of the *muktapurush* (the ideally detached male above worldly desires) was only a ploy for rigid social regimentation.¹⁷² At another level, he pointed out the anachronism involved in persisting with that spiritualisation. Elaborating what he regarded as the changed condition of the urban middle class in the post-First World War period, he asked, 'How could a hungry individual or the urban people of today deny that a materialist outlook is only natural?'¹⁷³ He argued that at the behest of a 'Shastra-chanting' nationalist patriarchy, people

¹⁶⁸ E.g., 'Alochana', 'Shikkhita Sampradayer Daladali', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, pp. 604-08.

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of *Kallol's* questioning of the established morality, see Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 175-335; Basu, *Kallogoshthir Kathasahitya*, *passim*.

¹⁷⁰ See Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 175-335.

¹⁷¹ *Kalikalām* and *Pragati* (Dhaka) had stances broadly similar to *Kallol's*.

¹⁷² Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Nabya Samajdarshaner Bhumika: Dui' (1355 BE), *Baktabya*, in *Dhurjatiprasad Rachanabali*, vol. 2, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷³ Mukhopadhyay, 'Samajdharma', p. 67.

persisting with the spiritualist rhetoric were ignoring the fast pace at which attitudes and customs had started openly changing in the recent years. He characterised it as a bloated, self-complacent patriotism that was constantly reiterating that the Bengali Hindu lifestyle was spiritual. Dhurjatiprasad's insistence on a materialist outlook was contextualised in the wider world of his sociological theory about the development of middle-class personality in the Indian context.¹⁷⁴ Using the Marxian analysis of history, he regarded spiritualisation of everyday existence not as a value in itself but as an ideological construct, created by the class in a given historical conjuncture and bound to give way in a changing socio-economic conjuncture. His characterisation of the contemporary proponents of spirituality fitted into his theory about the hypocritical adherence of the colonial middle class to spiritual values characteristic of a 'cleft culture' and 'split personality'.¹⁷⁵

The influence of Marxism on the one hand and psychoanalysis on the other, had created their own critical trajectories among educated Bengalis by the 1930s. Marxism being unequivocally situated in the materialist universe of discourse, a conscious espousal of it would predictably come up against the spiritualist construction of domesticity. The influence of Marxism started spreading among the younger generation, particularly students, from the middle of the 1930s.¹⁷⁶ Psychoanalysis, in its turn, also challenged the spiritualist representation of domesticity through the assignment of autonomy to psycho-sexual urges. It seems that by the late 1930s, psychoanalysis was a familiar theme to the world of vernacular readership. Scholars in psychoanalysis like Sarasil Sarkar and Ranginichandra Halder¹⁷⁷ initiated popular writing on Freudian psychoanalysis; Ranginichandra, for example, wrote a series of popular articles on psychoanalysis in the widely-read periodical *Bharatbarsha*. Moreover, psychoanalysis deeply conditioned the fictional writings of a group of young authors in the period from the late 1920s.¹⁷⁸ Though their writings faced virulent criticism from a section of the literary world in Calcutta, the readership they enjoyed was substantial.¹⁷⁹ This readership could not have remained totally impervious to the dissolving impact of psychoanalysis on the neo-Brahmanic ideology.

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion of Dhurjatiprasad's sociological thought, see Abhijit Mitra, 'Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji: From the Problem of Personality to the Plane of Sociology', in Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *The Bengali Intellectual Tradition*, Calcutta, 1979, pp. 235-63.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 342. For evidence of reminiscences, see Ashok Sen, *Tin Kudi Dash*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1990, pp. 75-77.

¹⁷⁷ Subodhchandra Sengupta and Anjali Basu (eds), *Sangsad Bangali Charitabhidhan*, revised 3rd edn, Calcutta, 1994, pp. 449-50, 564.

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion of the influence of psychoanalysis on the creative literature of the period, see Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 270-74, 320-30.

¹⁷⁹ For evidence of large readership, see Datta, *Sat Satero*, p. 117.

Popular essays on psychoanalysis, in particular, familiarised the average middle-class readership with the psychoanalytical challenge to the spiritualist understanding of conjugal relations. It also exposed the neo-Brahmanic regimentation of sex imposed in the name of that spirituality. Nrpndrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi's book on popular psychoanalysis argued that the myth of spirituality had so long obscured the fact that humans were primarily driven by their psycho-sexual urges; the current 'revolution in psychology' was dispelling this myth. It further claimed that life had always been materialistic and the senses, intelligence, emotions and ego had always asserted their agency in contravention to moral dictums.¹⁸⁰ Published in 1939, Kalidas Mukhopadhyay's *Jaunakhudha o Narir Satitva* was a psychoanalytical study of sexuality in ancient India, written for general readership. It unveiled the myth of the spirituality of 'Aryan' conjugality and the notion of conquering desire - so central to the neo-Brahmanic ideology. Kalidas went on to project the id as the driving force of existence and creativity.¹⁸¹ This book, moreover, had a foreword written by Ranajit Sengupta from a Marxist standpoint. Ranajit characterised the spiritualisation of conjugality and the family as an eyewash that concealed the exploitative nature of the bourgeois family that treated the wife and children as private property. Spiritualisation of a material urge like sexual desire out of existence was a manifestation, he argued, of sexual exploitation that was co-extensive with political and economic exploitation in an unequal society. It is interesting to note, in passing, how in this Marxist writing the binary division of materialism/spiritualism collapsed into the one of manliness/effeminacy. Ranajit expressly used the term 'unmanly' to characterise the alleged suppression of 'the materiality of the sexual urge' with a spiritualist verbiage.¹⁸² Reflecting the deep conditioning of the colonial middle-class mind by the complex interaction of colonial and nationalist discourses on effeminacy, it indicated the specific way in which in a colonial discursive milieu even Marxist perspectives could become implicitly gendered.

It is probably more important to see how the neo-Brahmanic ideology was weakened by conversion of ideologues from within its own ranks. One very prominent case was that of Binaykumar Sarkar. A participant in the Swadeshi movement, he edited *Grhastha* (1910-1917), a periodical for and largely on middle-class Bengali domesticity. Overtly neo-Brahmanic and didactic, *Grhastha* constantly harped on the spirituality of Hindu domesticity based on detached performance of *grhadharma* and on *indriyanigraha* (repression of sensual

¹⁸⁰ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸¹ Mukhopadhyay, *Jaunakhudha*, pp. 17-29.

¹⁸² Ranajit Sengupta, 'Foreword', in *ibid.*, pp. 11-16.

appetite). In 1914-15 Binaykumar Sarkar's ideas underwent a fundamental transformation.¹⁸³ On the basis of extensive reading on Indian history and culture he decided that it was erroneous to read an essential spiritualism into Hindu thought and way of life in the past. So far as *Grhastha* was concerned, however, Binaykumar's transformation did not affect the nature of the periodical, except to introduce an occasional and subtle discordant note during the last couple of years. But this may be explained in terms of its neo-Brahmanic image, the specific type of readership it had acquired, and the editorial assistance that Binaykumar had to rely on when he was away in Europe from 1914 onwards. Indeed, it seems that Binaykumar's inability to agree with the expectations of the periodical was the reason why it wound up in 1918. In the middle of the 1920s, Binaykumar could start his editorial effort with a clean slate, without any feeling of obligation to the preferences of any pre-existing readership. The new periodical, *Arthik Unnati* (Material Advancement), was based on the overt assumption of the material nature of every-day existence. The intention was to suggest solutions to material problems and ways for capital formation among the Bengali middle class. Most of the articles related to domesticity directly or incidentally. Problems of health, disease, food-adulteration, milk supply in the city, housing and house rent in Calcutta, and the economic condition of women were among the themes frequently addressed elaborately. If there was any overarching morality it was a secular one of 'material advancement'.

His declared break with the notion of an essential 'spirituality', specific to the Hindu way of life, involved Binaykumar in a comprehensive rethinking of domesticity - generation-relations, sex, sexuality and so on. The editorial preference of *Grhastha*, at least up to 1915, was clearly for the themes of *brahmacharya* among unmarried youth, continence among married males and strict subservience of youth to the authority of age. It is, therefore, striking that by the 1920s, Binaykumar had come to criticise the moral discourse of authority of age over youth; repressive regimentation of youth, he now argued, was a convoluted expression of the geriatric fantasy of regaining youth. He further claimed that domination by the aged was an impediment to social development; 'the keys to material advancement jingle in the hands of young men and women'. The projection of sex in the didactic articles in *Grhastha* contrasted with Binaykumar's later pronouncements on sex in Bengali literature. He came to criticise those who attempted to 'impose' a 'dehydrating' spiritualist construction on this 'mundane and natural impulse of flesh-blood'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ For a discussion of the intellectual development of Binaykumar Sarkar, see Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay, 'Benoy Kumar Sarkar: The Theoretical Foundation of Indian Capitalism', in Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *The Bengali Intellectual Tradition*, pp. 212-33.

¹⁸⁴ Haridas Mukhopadhyay et al. (eds), *Binay Sarkarer Baithake*, vol. 1, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1944, pp. 127-30, 698.

It is true that Binaykumar's challenge to the essential 'spirituality' of Hindu domesticity was a consequence of his extensive rereading of ancient Indian history and philosophy. But the question is whether it was just a coincidence that from the middle 1910s another staunch proponent of the neo-Brahmanic ideology, Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, found it difficult to reconcile his social reactions with his ideological commitment to this essential spirituality. Indeed, in this sense, his garbled, hesitant but unavoidable ideological shift away from neo-Brahmanic spirituality was more symptomatic of the pressured nature of the transformation of minds during this period. Through his periodical *Upasana* and his writings in *Grhastha* and *Brahman Samaj*, Radhakamal had upheld the innate spirituality of Bengali Hindu domesticity, supposedly enshrined in the restraint of desire and the centrality of *paralok* and structured under the rubric of *varnadharma*; predictably, the authority frequently cited by him was Manu. The first discordant note appeared in his writings in 1916, when he stated in his *Daridrer Krandan* that the present was an 'age of materialism'. Poverty in every ordinary middle-class and lower-class household, he wrote, was becoming too oppressive to keep the strain of materialism contained by spirituality. So long given to quoting Manu, Radhakamal now quoted Vatsayana and claimed that '*artha* [wealth] was the basis of the other three elements of *garhasthya* viz., *dharma*, *kama* and *moksha*'. However, this call for a 'materialist' outlook in domesticity was hesitant and ambivalent. Though he implied that questions of spirituality could wait now, he was anxious that it would have to be rehabilitated once domesticity was on an even keel. He was anxious to emphasise to his readers that physical comfort, though the prime necessity in this hour of unprecedented poverty, was neither the ultimate goal nor the ultimate bliss. He reminded his readers that Western materialism was not the ideal, as it had divested worldly existence of all traces of spirituality.¹⁸⁵

It is significant that by the 1920s, Radhakamal's writings had lost the clarity and cogency characterising his didactic articles written before 1915 on *varnashramadharma*, *brahmacharya*, the 'self-less' ideal of the 'joint family' and so on. His uncertainty came to be reflected in the verbosity and vagueness of his articulation. It is clear that he, like his contemporaries, was unable to ignore the enthusiasm among the youth from the end of the 1910s. But, at the same time, he probably apprehended a total repudiation of existing domestic and social norms. So, alongside the pronouncement that a 'materialist' outlook was necessary in domesticity, he wrote such garbled prose in an *Upasana* editorial as: 'We will not be soft and yielding like the silt of the Ganges, we will welcome and absorb this monsoon

¹⁸⁵ Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, *Daridrer Krandan*, Baharampur, 1322 BE, Introduction and pp. 5-10.

flood with our intellect ... The lively *Shyam* [invoking the double-meaning of Krishna and the colour of youth] is “eternally new”; now in this “eternally new” the ever-youthful heart of Bengal would welcome the eternal [in our culture].¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, he defended the *Kallol* group of authors who were being criticised for their alleged ‘materialism’ and attack on the ‘spirituality’ of domesticity and conjugality.¹⁸⁷ A person who had upheld notions like *varnashrama*, *brahmacharya* and *nishkama karma* even up to the middle of the 1910s, came editorially to accept, by the beginning of the 1920s, articles and extracts which opposed or criticised these.¹⁸⁸ In the editorial quoted above, he even wrote that the injunctions on a ‘normal’ conjugal sex-life were causing dissatisfaction and a decline in health.¹⁸⁹ Did Radhakamal’s open divergence from the spiritualist rhetoric, particularly on sex and on the compulsory *brahmacharya* of the widow, also have something to do with an apprehension of the ‘race’ ‘dying’ demographically?

This divergence from the spiritualist rhetoric, however, was not confined to self-consciously ideological writings. The world of more functional writings on domestic problems incidentally produced a line of expediency that weakened the spiritualist aura around domesticity. In the 1920s, with the perception of the problem of educated unemployment aggravating genteel poverty, periodicals were inundated with exhortation to youths to resort to self-employment. Many authors expressly held the spiritualist rhetoric of self-renunciation and the related suspicion of *artha* (regarded as ‘the root of all evil’) as aborting the profit-motive in Bengali households.¹⁹⁰ Manuals on self-employment upheld the pursuit of money as a value in itself. Narendranath Chattopadhyay remembered his head-teacher in school as having advised the students that ‘at the onset of youth, every person should prepare himself as far as possible for the duties and circumstances of domestic life’.¹⁹¹ Narendranath significantly did not interpret this preparation as one for *nivrtti* and a detached performance of *grhadharma*. It is important that the book in which he quoted this advice, was a manual on self-employment. In it he further advised potential self-employers that ‘the modern civilised world’ was silently telling the Bengali household ‘if you touch pot, you must touch penny’; and the author wrote the book with the express purpose of indicating where the penny was. The only continuity - superficial - with neo-Brahmanic morality was the author’s indictment of ‘luxury’ in the Bengali middle-class family. But for the rest it represented a single-minded

¹⁸⁶ ‘Alochani’, ‘Bangalir Byartha Asha’, *Upasana*, Shraban, 1327 BE, p. 5.

¹⁸⁷ Sajjanikanta Das, *Atmasmrti*, Calcutta, 1384 BE, pp. 175, 188, 255.

¹⁸⁸ E.g., Atulchandra Datta, ‘Bhabbar Katha’, *Upasana*, Shraban, 1327 BE, pp. 20-24.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Alochani’, ‘Bangalir Byartha Asha’, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ E.g., Bharati, ‘Arthik Unnati’, 129-31.

¹⁹¹ Narendranath Chattopadhyay, *Bangali Kon Pathe*, Calcutta, 1343 BE, Introduction.

attention to 'material advancement'.¹⁹² And even the condemnation of luxury was for the saving of every penny that could be gainfully invested.

Finally, in the 1930s the spirituality of Bengali Hindu domesticity was strongly challenged from even within the milieu of its production by a new ideology of Hindutva. The communal voice, waxing strong from the 1920s, had already questioned significant elements of the neo-Brahmanic morality as has been noted. In the perceptible wake of the Communal Award of 1932, however, this questioning was transformed into an alternative ideology of Hindutva - a Hindutva repudiating Brahmanical fundamentals and upholding unabashed worldliness. Constructing worldliness and fecundity as the key to the 'development' of the Muslim community, which was presented as strangling the Bengali Hindu,¹⁹³ the communal voice called for a manliness that was 'this-worldly' and demographically effective.¹⁹⁴ Condemning the 'ceaseless reiteration' of the 'myth' that Hindu domestic existence was spiritual,¹⁹⁵ the communal authors invoked the cult of worldly enjoyment.¹⁹⁶ Dismissing the Shastric regime,¹⁹⁷ the transformed definition of Hindutva called for a way of life free, from the determinism of the Vedas.¹⁹⁸ The *paralok*-oriented Vedic ontology was replaced by a coexistence of faith in a personal god with a this-worldly enjoyment of life and full-blooded physicality of existence.¹⁹⁹ These authors propagated non-observance of caste, albeit with varying degrees of discomfiture.²⁰⁰ The communal spokesmen sought rigidly to control youth tastes, activities and sexuality, but it is important that the ideological rationale was not one of sexual continence but an explicitly this-worldly pursuit of demographic growth and a witch-hunt against effeminacy.²⁰¹ But, most importantly, they constructed an 'innate materialism' of Bengali Hindu existence and authenticated it with a genealogy. In contradistinction to the 'Aryan' genealogy, upheld by the neo-Brahmanic morality, they variously claimed that the

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, passim.

¹⁹³ E.g., Matilal Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, Calcutta, 1933, p. 21.

¹⁹⁴ For a ruthless and single-minded quest for *birjyamay jiban* (in the literal sense of virile existence) and for communal assertion, - violent if need be, see Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', and 'Punarukti' in *Hindu Kon Pathe*, pp. 26-27, 134-35; Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, pp. 48, 96.

¹⁹⁵ E.g., Ghosh, 'Punarukti', pp. 132-36. Praphullakumar Sarkar condemned *nishkama karma*, the main plank of neo-Brahmanic spirituality of domesticity, as idle 'next-life fixation'. Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁶ E.g., Mohitlal Majumdar, *Banglar Nabajug*, Calcutta, 1352 BE, pp. 68, 44-49. Also, Matilal Ray reassured that 'If the barred door of worldly enjoyment is to break down, the descent of god on this life would legitimise it with an immortal touch'. Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁷ Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ E.g., *ibid.*, pp. 62, 95-96; Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu*, p. 22.

¹⁹⁹ Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, Calcutta, 1340 BE, p. 2; Majumdar, *Banglar Nabajug*, pp. 44-47.

²⁰⁰ E.g., Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, p. 6; Ghosh, 'Arthasamasya o Shikkhasangskar', *Hindu Kon Pathe*, pp. 182-83.

²⁰¹ E.g., Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu*, p. 112. Note his attitude to new literary trends, 'modern dance', movie-going and birth control.

vast majority of Bengalis were not Aryans by racial stock. Brahmanism, therefore, was artificially grafted onto the everyday existence of the Bengali Hindu,²⁰² whose 'natural' propensity was better manifested in the worldliness of the Tantras.²⁰³

How this communalisation weakened the sway of the neo-Brahmanic discourse within the milieu of its origin, is reflected in the transformation of Matilal Ray, who became an important spokesman of this communal Hindutva. A believer in constructive Swadeshi ever since he renounced revolutionary 'terrorism' in the middle of the 1910s, he had founded the Prabartak Sangha which upheld a combination of the renunciative spirit of the monk with the duties of the householder based on the principles of *Vedanta*.²⁰⁴ But when he wrote *Hindutver Punarutthan* in the wake of the Communal Award, his transformation to a Vedanta-renouncing this-worldly Hindutva was explicit. Exactly how far the vast majority of the class themselves produced or were consciously converted to this ideology as such, may be a matter of debate, which, however, is beyond the scope of this study. What can be argued here is that the communal voice was so widely and aggressively represented in the Bengali Hindu press and print particularly from the 1930s, that it could not have failed to grip minds and exert a dissolving impact on the neo-Brahmanic ideology.²⁰⁵

Joya Chatterji has argued that the communalisation of the Hindu voice particularly from the late 1920s harnessed the definition of Hindutva to the Brahmanical notion of 'spiritual' domesticity and the detached performance of household duties.²⁰⁶ In substantiating this argument she has, however, almost exclusively depended on Sharatchandra's ideological transformation from *Pather Dabi*²⁰⁷ to *Bipradas*²⁰⁸. The present study does not regard Sharatchandra's shift to a Brahmanical domesticity as in any way representing the only or even the majority trend in the widely broadcast communal ideology especially from 1932. The majority voice in print, among communal intellectuals and spokesmen both outside and inside the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal, consciously and strategically upheld a sharp departure from

²⁰² E.g., Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', pp. 5-11; Majumdar, *Banglar Nabajug*, pp. 44-45.

²⁰³ E.g., Majumdar, *Banglar Nabajug*, pp. 46-47; Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', pp. 10-11.

²⁰⁴ Chakravarty, *Hindu Response*, p. 88.

²⁰⁵ For a discussion of how the discursive power of Hindu communalism produced a formation of immense potency, see Datta, 'Dying Hindus', pp. 1305-19; for the powerful role of propaganda in spreading communal ideologies in Bengal, see Suranjan Das, 'Propaganda and Legitimation of Communal Ideology: Patterns and Trends in Bengal, 1905-1947' in Das and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds), *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia*, Calcutta, 1993, pp. 191-209.

²⁰⁶ Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 151-90.

²⁰⁷ In *Pather Dabi* 'Sharatchandra's hero concerns himself little with matters of the spirit...does not observe caste...makes a plea for the destruction of all that is *sanatan*...'. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁰⁸ In *Bipradas* the hero is given to 'spiritual quest' and 'is the ideal *grhastha*' who 'rigidly observes caste rules...is not attached...to worldly goods'. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-70.

neo-Brahmanic spirituality. After all, neo-Brahmanism was not suited to the communal agenda of the re-marriage of widows, inter-caste marriage, secular exploitation of procreation, and a deflection from *varnadharma*. Sharatchandra's trajectory, however, may be explained differently. It is, indeed, important to remember that even after he had written his communal piece, *Hindu-Musalman Samasya*,²⁰⁹ he wrote the novel *Shesh Prashna* (1927), which questioned significant elements of the neo-Brahmanic ideology like *brahmacharya*, *satitva* and Hindu marriage.²¹⁰ So, his veering towards the neo-Brahmanic domestic ideal in 1930-31, when he wrote *Bipradas*, is interesting. From the essentialisation of radical political activists as 'Westernised' and atheist in *Bipradas*, it seems that by 1930, Sharatchandra's communal expression was nuanced by his disquiet about the third phase of revolutionary 'terrorism' and the fear of Communist influence among young men and women. Sharatchandra, as Tanika Sarkar has shown, wrote *Bipradas* in the context of his discomfiture about widespread working-class militant action and mass mobilisation; and Sarkar regards this as the specific historical setting for the transition from *Pather Dabi* to *Bipradas*.²¹¹ Moreover, for an author too attached to 'simple, unaffected domesticity' and the essentialisation of women as the 'natural' providers of succour,²¹² the retreat into the rigidly coded world of neo-Brahmanic domesticity was his specific answer to another problem. Sharatchandra's converting of the leading woman in *Bipradas* from an initially 'emancipated' stance to Brahmanical mores, was a reaction to the growing involvement of women in the arena of radical politics.²¹³ The latent unease that he had had about politically active women even in his *Pather Dabi*, now came to the surface, and his individual preference tilted him to the neo-Brahmanic moral environment for an effective control of women.

It is important to address the problem whether the questioning of the spirituality of domesticity changed the domestic ideology of the vast majority of the class, who did not express themselves in print. One interesting entry point is Dhurjatiprasad's *Amra o Tnahara*, presented as dialogues between the intellectual, on the one hand, and ordinary middle-class elements like clerks, on the other. The conscious effort to be simultaneously critical and self-critical makes this work a contemporary source worth considering. Dhurjatiprasad presented the world of clerks in the 1920s as different from that of the intellectuals but did not preclude

²⁰⁹ Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Bartaman Hindu-Musalman Samasya', in Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Sharatsahityasamagra: Akhanda Sangskaran*, Calcutta, 1392 BE, pp. 2134-36.

²¹⁰ Chattopadhyay, *Shesh Prashna* (1927), in *ibid.*, pp. 1266-1388.

²¹¹ Tanika Sarkar, 'Bengali Middle-Class Nationalism and Literature: A Study of Sharatchandra's "Pather Dabi" and Rabindranath's "Char Adhyay"', in D. N. Panigrahi (ed.), *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India*, Delhi, 1985, pp. 452-55, 458.

²¹² Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 154-59.

²¹³ Sarkar, 'Bengali Middle-Class', p. 458.

perceptual overlaps. Most importantly, his representation did not show the articulation of the lower middle class as reflecting a confident anchoring in the neo-Brahmanic ideology. Their moral pronouncements, as presented by the author, reflected a complex, if fuzzy, world, standing at the reception point of a plurality of ideas, albeit often with their intellectual sophistication flattened out. But what is important here is that the hold of neo-Brahmanic morality had disintegrated and the conviction in the spirituality of domestic existence had clearly ebbed. Significantly, Buddhadeb Basu in his review of *Amra o Tnahara* agreed with Dhurjatiprasad. He wrote that though it was not 'venturing' to totally forsake the 'reassuring shelter of convention', the non-intellectual section of the ordinary middle class, nevertheless, was crumbling in its Brahmanical 'conservatism' under the 'pressures of modern living'. It may be concluded, therefore, that the rarity of widow marriage and inter-caste marriage during the period of the 1920s to 40s²¹⁴ need not indicate that the neo-Brahmanic ideology actually strongly survived. The decline of neo-Brahmanism as a comprehensive world view is unquestionably proved by the absolute decline in neo-Brahmanic didactic-metaphysical literature. Elements of Brahmanical practice thus lingered, not any longer as an integrated ideology, but as conventions.

The advertisements in the *panjikas* may be taken as providing another entry point. It is interesting how up to the 1920s the advertisers for elixirs (for men) and aphrodisiacs felt it necessary to sublimate the hint of autonomy of pleasure²¹⁵ and clothe it in a Brahmanical rhetoric of sex as a means to a procreative and salvational end. The expression 'marital bliss' was used and then immediately hedged in by the notion of procreation of a son as the legitimisation of that bliss; this was in conformity with the functionality of *kama* in the neo-Brahmanic ideology.²¹⁶ Visually 'marital bliss' was represented in illustrations of a couple surrounded by children.²¹⁷ It is significant, therefore, that from the 1930s a more direct appeal to hedonism emerged. The importance of procreation persisted, but a closer look at the advertisements reveals that it now hardly represented the advertiser's concession to Brahmanical legitimisation of marital sex; the emphasis was exclusively on having healthy children.²¹⁸ Very representative of the changed language was the advertisement for

²¹⁴ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, pp. 397, 402.

²¹⁵ In *Nababibhakar Panjika o Directory* (1327 BE), for instance, among numerous such advertisements, the sole exception was the advertisement for *Momsek Batika*. Significantly, it was not produced by any Ayurvedic company but by Hakim Masihar Rahaman's Unani Medical Hall.

²¹⁶ E.g., advertisement for Swasthya Sahay Batika in *ibid.*

²¹⁷ Advertisement for Mahashakti Rasayan in *ibid.*

²¹⁸ See the numerous advertisements for virility elixirs in the advertisement section of the *Gupta Press Directory Panjika*, Calcutta, 1342 BE.

Gonobalm.²¹⁹ In this full-page advertisement there no reference even to procreation. The height of the product's effectiveness was made to lie in its ability to prolong foreplay.

Conclusion

By the beginning of the 1940s, the neo-Brahmanic ideology had disintegrated. The tracts giving the comprehensive rationale of neo-Brahmanic domesticity and the reiteration of the Shastras on every domestic issue had absolutely declined.²²⁰ Most importantly, as the investment of neo-Brahmanic spirituality in domesticity declined and the centrality of *paralok* receded from mainstream print, there emerged no noticeable trend among the youth to thread the mundane details of urban domesticity into any alternative overarching spirituality. It is true that even while didactic literature for the male on domestic duties absolutely declined from the late 1920s and 30s, literature sermonising women on ideal behaviour in their marital life still continued for quite some time more.²²¹ But this continuity is explicable in terms of patriarchy's unceasing stake in gender. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, the content of the didactic literature for women was never specifically neo-Brahmanic. So the continuance of the genre of moralistic literature for women does not detract from the contention that the neo-Brahmanic ideology declined. Indeed, Chapter Four will show how the neo-Brahmanic language of women's subordination also came to be steadily replaced by other languages of patriarchal control, reinforcing the over-all disintegration of the ideology.

The neo-Brahmanic ideology, particularly its rhetoric spiritualising domesticity, had too deeply influenced the middle class mind to disappear without a trace. In Chapter Five it will be observed how the difficulty of investing spirituality any longer in urban domesticity, left the class disturbed and disoriented. Moreover, while the ideology thus disintegrated, the ordering concerns of what it had tackled remained - the concerns about effectively disciplining youths, women and children as obedient subjects for both the nation and patriarchy. They posed the problem of morally ordering domesticity afresh - a problem that subsequent chapters will analyse.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Works like Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay's *Samaj o Sahadharmita*, reiterating the comprehensive sweep of the Shashtra-regulated neo-Brahmanic world-view, were rare by the 1940s. Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Samaj o Sahadharmita*, Chandannagar, 1942.

²²¹ E.g., Surendranath Ray, *Narir Karmajog*, Calcutta, 1342 BE.

Chapter 3

The 'Outside' Transformed

Introduction

It is important to understand exactly how the ideology of the colonised Bengali male situated domesticity in relation to the nation. Recent historiography on nationalism has convincingly argued that the Bengali Hindu middle class defined its domain of sovereignty in relation to the colonial state by turning its independent self-hood inwards, into an essentialised world of national culture in which domesticity featured most prominently.¹ But the question is whether in the matter of the everyday domestic existence of the class, it was the household that was morally defined as the 'inside' and separated from the 'world' as the 'outside', as some scholars have argued. If not, what was the fundamental split in the nationalist project of interiorising the autonomy of the middle-class male? It is also important to examine whether the nature of the 'inside'/'outside' distinction in relation to domesticity remained unaltered throughout the period from the late 19th century to the 1940s.

Discussion of the 'inside'/'outside' distinction in relation to nationalism and Bengali domesticity has been initiated by Partha Chatterjee. It has already been noted that in his critique of Benedict Anderson's thesis, Chatterjee argues (in contradistinction to Anderson's 'universalist' Western model) that anti-colonial nationalism asserted its 'sovereignty' in an imagined 'spiritual' domain as against the 'materialism' of the colonial sphere. The 'material'/'spiritual' distinction was condensed, Chatterjee argues, into 'a far more powerful dichotomy', that between the 'outer' and the 'inner' by making the 'spiritual' analogous with the 'essential' marks of the cultural identity that 'lie within one's inner self'. Finally, Chatterjee contends that the application of the 'inside'/'outside' distinction to concrete day-to-day living, 'separated social space into the home and the world'.² What makes the final turn of Chatterjee's argument problematic is that his subsequent discussion clearly equates 'the home' with the spatially finite entity of the family-household; this implies that everything outside the household was seen as part of the externalised 'world'.³

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 6-11; Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *EPW*, 22: 47, November 21, 1987, pp. 2011-15.

² Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 4-6, 9, 119-21.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 133-34.

The suggestion about the cultural externalisation of the colonial sphere, relative to an idealised internality of domesticity and other 'essential' aspects of 'national' culture, has much to commend it. But the contention that in every-day existence nationalist discourse defined the household as the 'inside' or the 'only sphere of autonomy' in relation to the colonial sphere, is not borne out by closer historical scrutiny, as will be seen in the course of this chapter. The uncontexted and ahistorical nature of Chatterjee's reading of the divide seems to be rooted in his definition of the nation. Instead of deconstructing the nation as was actually imagined by the Bengali Hindu middle class in the late 19th century, Chatterjee interpolates a nation which appears as a self-imagining entity. Instead of being imagined in the idiom of the primordial linkages like kin, caste and neighbourhood, in which upper-caste society was organised, the nation is presented by the author as virtually a pre-conceived entity, unilaterally overdetermining sites like domesticity. It does not occur to Chatterjee that in the late 19th century the imagined sphere of autonomy - the 'inside' - instead of being spatially-demographically restricted to 'the home', was more likely to be idealistically ensconced in those linkages out of the need for a vast and 'harmonious' counter-domain of power. It is unfortunate that Tanika Sarkar, whose analysis of the nationalist discourse on women is remarkably insightful, also argues that male nationalist discourse in the late 19th century safeguarded 'the household of the *bhadralok* ... as the solitary sphere of autonomy'.⁴

This thesis argues that the 'inside'/'outside' divide did have a place in the ideological cognisance of the colonial middle class in Bengal. However, the vast body of late 19th and early 20th century didactic literature indicates that the 'inside' into which the sovereignty of the nation was withdrawn, was indeed one in which the middle class home was idealised as in continuum with the *samaj*. Indeed the home, instead of being emphasised in its spatial and demographic distinctness, was invested with a spatially indefinite moral rhetoric to reinforce its idealised integration with the pre-existing loyalties comprising the notion of the *samaj* (community), in effect upper caste in its membership. The special significance of domesticity was that it supplied the idiom which was extended to imagine and order this *samaj* that then translated into the nation. True to this continuum, the 'outside' could not start from the immediate outside of the home either spatially or institutionally. What was being ideologically externalised in the matter of 'day-to-day living' was not 'the world', but specifically the colonial sphere and the tangible influences flowing from it. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, for example, in his idealisation of the 'essential culture' of the Bengali Hindu *samaj*, saw it in opposition to what he explicitly identified as a composite world of discriminatory and inimical

⁴ Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *EPW*, 4 September 1993, p. 1870.

institutions. That world significantly comprised British Indian laws, law courts, tariff regulations and government institutions.⁵

This chapter, however, also argues that the idealistic configurations of the 'inside' and 'outside' from the perspective of domesticity became transformed in the period from after the First World War; the idealised, unbroken continuum, in which domesticity, the community and the nation had been located, could not be sustained. The existing binary division of the 'inside'/'outside' came to be complicated by the emergence of the perception of another 'outside' within what cultural nationalism had idealised as a homogenous 'inside'. Also, the idealistic extension of middle-class domesticity to imagine the nation was undercut by the entry of the masses into politics. This entry made the domain of political nationalism disturbingly different from the nation imagined by the Bengali middle class; it was time, therefore, to draw a line between upper-caste, middle-class domesticity, on the one hand, and nationalism as a political movement, on the other.

Many scholars writing on the nationalist 'recasting' of domesticity and of women have applied to Bengali middle-class attitudes the Western conception of a 'radical separation' between the private and the public spheres.⁶ The terms 'private' and 'public' entered the English usage of the Bengali middle class in the second half of the 19th century. But the question is how far the Western notion of a radical separation applied to the moral perception of the middle class in Calcutta during the given period. The Western notion has been best explicated so far by Jurgen Habermas.⁷ Habermas has, however, been criticised for not sufficiently questioning the bourgeois assumptions underlying his model.⁸ But in so far as his thesis still elicits an academic consensus, the private and the public in Western liberal thinking are seen in complementarity, as necessarily united in a contradiction. The public sphere is contradictory to and dependent on an intimate realm, which is necessarily seen as the bourgeois nuclear family where the endlessly interiorising subjectivity of the individual is formed.⁹ This thesis, examining in detail the late 19th- and early 20th-century discussion of domesticity in relation to notions of kinship, community and neighbourhood, shows that in the

⁵ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Samajik Prabandha* (1892), in Pramathanath Bishi (ed.), *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*, Calcutta, 1364 BE, pp. 144-45.

⁶ E.g., Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in The Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester, 1995, p. 141; Tanika Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugality and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Calcutta, 1995, pp. 99-115; Pradip Kumar Bose, 'Sons of the Nation', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, 1996, p. 118.

⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass, 1989.

⁸ Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass, 1992.

⁹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 27.

dominant Bengali Hindu middle-class ideology the relation between these entities and domesticity did not admit of a Western-type split; the application of the idea of a 'radical separation' obscures rather than illuminates.¹⁰ The defensive withdrawal of domesticity into its household dimension from the 1920s, however, did bring in its train a particular sense of 'privatisation' - the 'privatisation' not of the individual but of the household in the face of pressures from the 'outside'. This privatisation was further reinforced by developments that tended to draw a line between nationalist mass politics and the household. Yet, this 'privatisation' was both partial and different from the Western one.

The Late 19th-Century Imagination

The middle class's moral construction of the 'inside' and 'outside' in the late 19th century was far from unproblematic. In ordering the 'inside' the dominant ideology had carefully to negotiate and accommodate the pre-existing social hierarchy, status and linkages and yet sublimate their respective discourses of closure lest the 'unity' of the nation (in contradistinction to the colonial sphere) was fractured. That is why the finite dimensions - spatial and demographic - of the household had to be blurred. The spatially indefinite Brahmanical rhetoric of the *dharma* of the householder, binding the pre-existing linkages and hierarchy in a united whole, was an ideal answer to the situation. In the pre-First World War period there was a relative sense of security still derivable from kinship, from the linkage of the upper-caste neighbourhoods and from the relative power of persuasion of an upper-caste, middle-class moral consensus. All this gave the moral rhetoric of this ideal unruptured continuum of domesticity, the community and the nation the semblance of viability required for its predominance.

Relatedly, this section will examine the relevance of the notions of the 'private' and the 'public' in this discourse. Where the derived usage of these notions were concerned, contact with Western literary trends and political-philosophical discourses definitely brought the terminology associated with civil society into the world of the educated Bengali middle class. Diaries, autobiographies, and novels - genres associated with the emergence of the concept of

¹⁰ Also see Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 10-12. Chatterjee makes the same observation, albeit with hardly any substantiation. Dipesh Chakrabarty fleetingly suggests that a private/public split was made irrelevant by the pre-existing moral discourse of *dharma*, the joint family and organisation of the built space. But he does not develop these suggestions into an empirically substantiated or even theoretically comprehensive argument. See Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 51-87; *idem*, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37, Winter, 1992, pp. 1-25.

the private individual in the West - also emerged in colonial Bengal.¹¹ British-Indian legal usage initiated concepts like 'private dwelling' and 'private individual' in the everyday English usage of the educated middle class. Bankimchandra (under the pseudonym Ramchandra) wrote, for example, in his criticism of W. Hastie, a missionary, 'Hastie attacks without provocation the proceedings [a funerary ceremony] ... held in the private dwelling house [of the Shobhabajar Raj family]'¹² However, it is important to note the exact significance that came to be attached to these concepts in the colonial milieu of late 19th- and early 20th-century Calcutta.

It has been pointed out in Chapter One that though middle-class domesticity was the fundamental social-structural paradigm which was extended to imagine the nation, every family-household was subjected to the authority of the *samaj*.¹³ If the home rather than being imagined as discrete and self-contained, was thus situated within a strong perception of a stasured community, it has to be analysed how exactly the 'inside'/'outside' was delineated. The identification of the market as an 'outside' phenomenon by the ideology has been indicated in Chapter One. We will consider here the cultural externalisation more specific to the colonial situation. We can use Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's writings for the purpose, particularly because the huge body of neo-Brahmanic tracts, especially the *battala* products, extensively reiterated, often directly quoted, his fundamental cotentions.

Bhudeb clearly framed the colonial sphere as the real 'outside' by using women, the innermost part of the 'inner domain', as the litmus. Sukumari, an imagined archetypal woman from the *andar*, lost her *lajja* (modesty) when her husband took her into the company of Englishmen.¹⁴ What immediately strikes one is the tactical suppression, in this specific context, of the otherwise oft-repeated dictum in the neo-Brahmanic morality. The dictum was that the married woman was not supposed to mix with the males (other than the husband) even within the in-laws' family unless the latter were much younger than her. Thus, relative to Englishmen the 'otherness' of the *parpurush* (males other than the husband) within the upper-caste, middle-class society was clearly sublimated in Bhudeb's essay. This sublimation of perception of 'otherness' within the *samaj* tackled the dilemma of an ideology that was otherwise committed to institutions based on various pre-existing perceptions of 'otherness' within the *samaj*. It should not be overlooked that *daladali* (factionalism) was not the only

¹¹ Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Deferral', pp. 52-53.

¹² 'Ram Chandra' (pseud.), Letter to the Editor, Statesman, 16 October 1882, in W. Hastie, *Hindu Idolatry and English Enlightenment: Six Letters Addressed to Educated Hindus Containing a Practical Discussion of Hinduism*, Calcutta, 1883, p. 131.

¹³ E.g., Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', *Paribarik Prabandha*, Chinsurah, 11th edn, n.d., p. 237.

¹⁴ Mukhopadhyay, 'Lajjashilata', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 38.

source of discord in the *samaj* that Bhudeb had to reckon with in his quest for order in the family and the community. His articles on domesticity had to come to grips, too, with a kinship structure organised in degrees,¹⁵ an upper-caste society retaining distinctions between and even within the three upper castes, other kinds of hierarchies of status and difference in wealth.¹⁶ His writings also indicate his awareness that at every layer - whether of the family, of kin, or of caste - there was a perception of *par* (not one's own) for the ego. Bhudeb had to recognise, for instance, that the hierarchical degrees of relational closeness in Bengali Hindu kinship created distinct spheres even within the *samaj*; he said, therefore, 'These have been codified by the authors of the Shastras. I have nothing to say about them'.¹⁷ Similarly, numerous authors not only hailed caste distinctions, but enjoined the strict observance of *gotra* and the status of the *vamsa* in marriage among the Bengali upper castes.¹⁸ *Vamsa*, indeed, was a particularly important criterion on which status was seen as resting. Chandranath Basu gave detailed functional advice as to how the sense of solidarity of the *vamsa* could be 'strengthened' so that 'its honour in the *samaj* increases'.¹⁹ Bhudeb upheld the distinctness of the *paribar* (the household dimension of the family) when he wrote, 'Every *paribar* is a small kingdom'. But it is important that he was anxious to immediately emphasise that these *paribars* were integral parts of the 'wider kingdom' of the *samaj*.²⁰

The tension was at its discursive height when Bhudeb found himself confronted with the problem of 'how the *paribar* could be saved from the infection of the moral turmoil in the *samaj*'; the turmoil was characteristically seen as arising from the consumption of food forbidden by the Shastras and disrespect for Brahmans and the elders, under the impact of English education.²¹ This almost had the imprint of a perception of the *samaj* as 'outside' the *paribar*. But it is interesting that this imprint was muted by an explicit discouragement of an attempt to solve the problem by insulating the *paribar* from the *samaj*. After all, the anxiety of middle-class nationalism was to claim not merely the family but also the *samaj* as its sphere of 'sovereignty'. Indeed, this discussion about turmoil in the *samaj* was laid out in Bhudeb's concern that 'in this subjugated country of ours ... the rule is that of an alien race with a religion different from ours ... [and] often an antagonism to the norms of our *samaj*'. He resented the fact that if the *samaj* imposed a boycott on a 'transgressor' in its midst, then

¹⁵ Mukhopadhyay, 'Gnatitva', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 53.

¹⁶ Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 241, 245.

¹⁷ Mukhopadhyay, 'Ktrim Swajanata', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 59.

¹⁸ E.g., Madhabchandra Sanyal, 'Bibaha', Chaitra, *Grhastha*, 1322 BE, pp. 548-54.

¹⁹ Chandranath Basu, *Garhasthya Path*, Calcutta, 1292 BE, p. 61.

²⁰ Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', p. 239.

²¹ Mukhopadhyay, 'Dharmacharjya', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 167-68.

the latter was now in a position to mobilise the British Indian legal institutions and escape the verdict of the former.²²

The nationalist projection of the domesticity-community-nation continuum thus needed an ideal merging into one another of the distinct layers within upper-caste, middle-class society, so that the perception of 'outside' at every layer could be muted; thus the colonial sphere could be starkly represented as the only 'outside'. The abstract, metaphysical and spatially indefinite ideal of the householder's *dharma*, elaborated by numerous neo-Brahmanic texts, was an effective answer to the nationalist need to bind the whole field from domesticity to the nation. Indeed, the concept of the *dharma* of the *grhi* (householder) gave domesticity an abstract sweep that extended beyond the concrete spatial and demographic dimension of the household. Upendranath Bhattacharya's book on domesticity, for example, represented the neo-Brahmanic elaboration of the householder's duty. Characterising the nation as 'nothing but a huge extended family', he urged his readers to extend the ideal of duty from domesticity to successive, wider affiliations almost indefinitely.²³ 'The ancient Hindus had realised that they had come to this world to perform duties ... One's home is the primary level at which one learns to perform these duties ... the duties [of the householder] extend from [duties] to the wife and children to parents to dependants within the family; then it progressively covers the kin, the neighbours, the people of the human settlement concerned, and ultimately the whole of the living world.' This is why, he argued, sincere *seva* (service) towards guests and charity to beggars have been considered as the highest *dharma* of the Hindu.²⁴

But, problematically, the class needed to provide in its domestic ideology two functions not easy to reconcile; there was the need simultaneously to ensure both 'unity' and hierarchy in domesticity and the *samaj*. On the one hand there was the anxiety to keep the lower orders bound in consent to this *samaj* led by the upper-caste, middle class as 'natural leaders'. This was reflected in the constant invocation of the householder's 'duty' towards the poor. This was sometimes done by invoking the concept of love for all.²⁵ But, more frequently, the Brahmanical rhetoric of *panchayatna* was invoked to remind the householder of his 'duty to

²² Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', pp. 240-41.

²³ Upendranath Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, Calcutta, n.d., (1920s), p. 27. The date is inferred from the authors statement that not even fifty years have passed since 1880.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51. Also see Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', *Grhastha*, 1320 BE, p. 573.

²⁵ (Anon.), 'Shrishri Annapurna Puja', *Basanti*, Baishakh, 1328 BE, pp. 3-4.

all' - from his dead ancestors to all created beings.²⁶ At the same time, care had to be taken to uphold the hierarchical and stasused character of *samaj*. For example, the rhetoric of caste was constantly reiterated. Brahman authors of *battala* didactic tracts often staked their 'natural leadership' of the nation on the grounds of the supposedly superior wisdom of the caste.²⁷ Upendranath Bhattacharya, in his cogent presentation of the morality of the domesticity-community-nation continuum, also emphasised the leadership of the Brahman in the community.²⁸ But even while upholding social hierarchy and status differentiation, their divisive edge was sought to be muted, true to the ideal of an integrative communitarian rhetoric. The note of paternalist 'duty' was strong in the frequent invocation, particularly during periods of natural calamity, that the more affluent should forgo 'extravagance' in their own domestic existence and help their poorer 'brethren' in distress.²⁹ Again, in the case of the domestic servant, the class-ridden refrain of distrust was muted by a moral language that conferred family-membership on him or her, albeit at the bottom of the family hierarchy.³⁰ The rhetoric of duty to the neighbourhood also tried to apparently maintain a note of inclusiveness. However, it falls into perspective when one observes that in discussions on domestic duty to neighbours, the lower-class or lower-caste neighbour never sprang to life. The neighbourhood community was implicitly imagined as a network of upper-caste middle-class households.³¹ The didactic authors, indeed, generalised upper-caste, middle-class domesticity and silenced the heterogeneity of domestic experiences within the Hindu fold. For example, all books on domestic morality upheld the Brahmanical metaphysics and rituals and marginalised, by their silence, the domestic ideology of cults popular among the lower orders. Bhudeb devoted the bulk of *Achar Prabandha*, his book on Hindu rites, to the diurnal and life-cycle rituals meant for the 'twice-born'; the rituals of Shudras along with those of women were briefly presented in an appendix.³²

Urban anonymity often threatened to split the idealised image of an unruptured bond of the household with the *samaj*. Authors of neo-Brahmanic texts, however, were anxious not to allow this anonymity to detract from the projection of the rupture with the colonial sphere as the fundamental split. Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay's didactic tract, at the turn of the century,

²⁶ E.g., Anandachandra Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya* (1295 BE), Calcutta, 1335, p. 21; Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, pp. 50-51; Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, pp. 63-64.

²⁷ E.g., Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Bangalir Mundu*, Calcutta, 1900, Introduction.

²⁸ Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, p. 32.

²⁹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Bangalir Jatiya Jiban', *Chhabish Pargana Bartabaha*, reprinted in *Grhastha*, Baishakh, 1323 BE, p. 663.

³⁰ E.g., Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, p. 140.

³¹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Hindur Bhabishyat Sangsar', *Grhastha*, Shrabon, 1323 BE, pp. 877-80.

³² Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Achar Prabandha* (1894), Calcutta, 1334 BE, pp. 299-301.

reflected the middle class's stake in property and fear of anonymity in the colonial city. He wrote, 'Many able-bodied men, ... pretending to be helpless beggars, are actually cheats on the look-out for a favourable opportunity to burgle or steal from *grhastha* households.' But muting any cynicism about the neo-Brahmanic 'duty' to the poor, he hastened to say that it was a matter of national pride that the Hindus sustained so many beggars for the sake of *dharma*. But, more importantly, in highlighting the fundamental difference with the colonial sphere in this matter, he wrote that, 'The *sahab* (the European) hands the beggar over to the police ... the police extracts ten rupees as fine from the beggar.' The author ridiculed the coloniser's 'sense of justice' and condemned those Bengali Hindus who, 'aping their *sahab* employers, had stopped giving even *mushtibhiksha* [a handful of grain to the needy]'.³³

However, there were also elements in the pre-existing kinship culture and existing patterns of urban habitation that could give the ideal amplification of domesticity the moral viability to sustain its authority at least up to the end of the 1910s. Bengali Hindu kinship in the male line was open-ended, flowing into successive larger circles of *sapinda* (all those who share the body of the same seventh ascending ancestral male of ego's *kula*), *sakulya* (all those who share the body of the tenth ascending ancestor), and so on within the vast configuration of *gotra*. This, along with the even wider configuration of *atmiya-kutumba* flowing from *gotra* exogamy, created a general feeling of vastness, with the effect that the imagination of kin and blood could be emotively amplified almost indefinitely. The way the middle-class residential pattern had congealed in the city by the 1870s sustained the ideal amplification of the familial paradigm in the neighbourhood. Reminiscences, sociological studies and the House Assessment Books of the Calcutta Corporation reveal that many neighbourhoods in North Calcutta and old Bhawanipur (the two areas where the Bengali Hindu middle class were concentrated up to the end of the 1920s), bore the marks of settlement along lines of common ancestral village,³⁴ kin or caste.³⁵ It is also significant that when, from the 1870s, the middle class asserted its distinct identity in the city and *abhijata*-led *dals* lost control over

³³ Chattopadhyay, *Bangalir Mundu*, p. 42

³⁴ See Sukumar Sen, *Diner Pare Din Je Gelo*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1982, p. 99. He relates how the old residents of Goabagan Road of North Calcutta were not only Kayasthas but had migrated to Calcutta from the same native village.

³⁵ At the turn of the century the vast majority of the house-owners in Bosepada Lane, for example, were *kulin* Kayasthas - Ghosh, Basu and Mitra. See the House Assessment Book, ward no. 1, 1900-1901 to 1906-7, CMC; Also see, Harisadhan Mukhopadhyay, *Kalikata: Sekaler o Ekaler* (1915), 4th edn, Calcutta, 1985. For caste-based settlement in old Bhawanipur, see Anjana Roy Choudhury, 'Caste and Occupation in Bhowanipur [sic], Calcutta', *Man in India*, 44:3, September 1964, p. 219.

them, kinship and neighbourhood ties came to play a significant role in the formation of new factions.³⁶

Contemporary English ideas influenced even neo-Brahmanic discourses to address the question of cleanliness and discipline in the household; and these, by implication, gave the household space a distinctness relative to the space outside it. Didactic tracts on domesticity conveyed the sense of the house as a distinct and concrete spatial unit when they discussed the need to keep the house clean.³⁷ While census operations and taxation from the colonial sphere inscribed a distinctiveness on the household, so did the indigenous architectural prescriptions. Based on *Vastushastra*, these prescriptions regarding the auspicious lay-out and orientation of the house, effectively emphasised it as a distinct spatial unit.³⁸ But, contrary to these perceptions of the spatial distinctness, the rhetoric of the householder's *dharma* ideologically blurred, as already noted, the physical boundaries between the household and its spatial-demographic outside within the *samaj*.

One can pause here to examine the applicability of the 'private'/'public' divide in the spatial organisation of the middle-class household in relation to the neighbourhood. It seems clear that the pre-existing spatial organisation of domesticity blurred sharp disjunctures and gave notions of private and public a very different meaning from the Western understanding. We can see this in Shoshee Chunder Dutt's perception of middle-class built space in late 19th-century Calcutta. He wrote that 'each family [was] private' but it was not all members of the family or the whole of the house that was being marked off as an undifferentiated zone of privacy. He said that each extended family 'lived in a separate house ... Leasing an entire house is common but leasing a part of it or a set of apartments is exceedingly rare'. The reason he gave for this mode of 'private' occupation however holds the key to the specific perception of the 'privacy' of built space. The author explained: 'It [the practice of more than one family leasing/renting different parts respectively of the same house] is an arrangement not convenient to either lessee, particularly as the women of one family may not associate with or be seen by the men of another.'³⁹ Thus, rather than any derived western notion of the privacy of the whole house as such, the requirement of the invisibility of the *andar* to males outside the kin was the reason for this mode of habitation. The 'privacy' of the house thus

³⁶ S. N. Mukherjee, 'Daladali in Calcutta in the 19th Century', *Calcutta: Myths and History*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 85.

³⁷ E.g., Mukhopadhyay, 'Parichhannata', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 71-74.

³⁸ E.g., (Anon.), 'Grhanirman', *Grhasthali*, 1:5, 1884, pp. 89-92.

³⁹ Shoshee Chunder Dutt, *India, Past and Present: With Minor Essays on Cognate Subjects*, London, 1880, pp. 216-17.

started not from the outer walls of the house inwards, but from the outer walls of the *andar* inwards.

The *baithakkhana* or the living room in the men's quarter was situated in a grey area where the (male) neighbourhood and the men's quarter of the house flowed into each other. The contemporary Western norm, that made admission into the household parlour contingent on prior appointments, was not followed in the *baithakkhana* in the majority world of non-'Westernised' Bengali families. Shoshee Chunder himself confirms this: 'The rich and the poor Bengali are very fond of clubbing together and chatting away their hours. By the doorway ... you would always see a long bench or a number of wooden stools to invite in passing acquaintances. To pull at the hookah is the greatest delight of the Hindu without reference to rank or age and of course there is a large room for their reception upstairs'.⁴⁰ Sukumar Sen noted in his autobiography that the *rowak* (the concrete plinth outside the *baithakkhana* and open to the road) of a typical North Calcutta house was the 'annexe' of the *baithakkhana* and had a very important role in the life of the neighbourhood.⁴¹ It thus marked an overlap of the household space with the space outside without any stark disjuncture.

This spatial statement of domestic morality also brings into sharp focus the problem of interpreting the use of the terms *ghar* and *bahir* in middle-class discourse in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as 'the home' and 'the world', as Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty have done.⁴² As Shoshee Chunder's account indicates and Rabindranath Thakur's naming of his novel *Ghare Baire* confirms, *ghar* and *bahir* in the gender-segregated spatial culture of the Bengali Hindu household, was more often than not used as coterminous with *andar* (the women's apartment) and *bahir* (the world outside the women's apartment) respectively.⁴³ *Bahir* in the sense of the 'outside' of the *andar* began from the men's quarters and very much from within the home itself.⁴⁴

Ideally, the world of 'public associations' even up to the 1910s was imagined to be within the sweep of the domesticity-community-nation continuum. At least up to the second decade of the 20th century the neo-Brahmanic moral rhetoric would go on attempting to subsume the less intimate sphere of 'public' associations and meetings. Such associations

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴¹ Sen, *Diner Pare*, p. 98.

⁴² Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 120-21; Chakrabarty, 'Open Space/Public Space: Garbage, Modernity and India', *South Asia*, vol. 14:1, 1991, pp. 15-31.

⁴³ *Ghare Baire*, deploying the dichotomy of the *ghar* and the *bahir* in the title, portrayed the heroine's emergence of the from the *andar* to the men's quarter and not to the space outside the house. Rabindranath Thakur, *Ghare Baire* (1916) in *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, vol. 8, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 141-334.

⁴⁴ E.g., Mukhopadhyay, 'Lajjashilata', p. 38 for the use of the term *bahir* in relation to the men's quarter within the house.

were sought to be represented as a part of the comprehensive world of domesticity projected as the microcosmic representation of the nation. One can cite from the 1890s an editorial note in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a newspaper known to have represented the voice of the non-'Westernised' petty gentry and lower middle-class readership. In criticising the Director of Public Instruction, Bombay, for 'interdicting' a didactic tract titled *Srtidharma Prakash*, the colonial authority was clearly projected as the 'outside' invading the 'inside'. The book was hallowed as 'dedicated by a bereaved Hindu father' to his 'chaste and beloved daughter in Heaven' and as preaching 'the Hindu virtue of ... submission to the husband'. Using the idioms of both emotion and the ideal of Hindu marriage the editorial thus invoked the supposed sanctity of the intimate sphere of the Hindu home. But what is more significant here is the sudden reference to the Congress. Abruptly, the editorial asked, 'Is it the same DPI who circulated anti-Congress literature last year?' It also claimed in passing that there was not a single person in the country who was against the Congress. Thus the nation was imagined in the idiom of the intimate sphere of Hindu domesticity and then identified with a public association sublimating the latter's universalist rhetoric and political formalism. By making the colonial sphere the enemy of the Congress and of the intimate sphere in the same breath and the same sense, the nationalist public association was included in a simple unruptured world of extended domesticity.⁴⁵ Thus Chatterjee's facile situating of nationalist politics and 'public' associations in the 'outside' is not borne out by the ideological situation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Public libraries and associations established by the middle class were closely integrated with the spirit of the *samaj* in the Calcutta neighbourhoods.⁴⁶ Chatterjee's use of the term 'a new public sphere' might unnecessarily create a confusion and imply an ideological separation between the sphere of Indian 'public associations' on the one hand and domesticity-community on the other. It is important that the dominant morality was anxious to mute any autonomy or any feeling of separateness on the part of these institutions in relation to the domesticity-community-nation sphere; the imagination of an unruptured sweep of the latter was vital for the class and its dominance in the colonial situation.

This does not mean, however, that political associations derived from the Western culture of the 'public' sphere were smoothly accommodated into the world of pre-existing sensibilities. An editorial in *Grhastha* said, 'Those illiterate people, in their gathering under a modest thatched roof, can more quickly take decisions to reform their community than could

⁴⁵ *ABP*, 2 January 1890, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶ In Bhawanipur, for example, the relatively affluent middle class elements established the Bhawanipur Sahajya Samiti in 1891 to help indigent lower middle-class families. See Roy Choudhury, 'Caste and Occupation', p. 210.

the educated in their mammoth meetings, marked by detailed proposals, fitted with electric lights and loudspeakers, and aided by prolific attempts in the press to mobilise opinion.⁴⁷ The longing for the simplicity, the consensus and the supposed solidarity of the village community indicates an unease about the formalism of the urban associations. Maybe, this was the spirit that was reflected in the Swadeshi movement's shift towards more familial and communitarian modes of mobilisation like *arandhan* and *rakhi-bandhan*.⁴⁸ The unease about public associations and meetings seems also to have involved a sense of the alienation of the class from its educated self. The editorial in question argued, 'The lower classes, despite their illiteracy, are found to achieve much greater well-being [of their community] than people of the upper classes who, with all their access to education, are failing to ensure the good of their own community.' The sphere of formal meetings and journalism was also regarded in this article as infected with an individualism which the author considered inimical to the consensus required for the good of the community. In their decisions about their own community the 'educated people of today' were perceived as guided more by their individuality than the interests of the community. 'That is why among the educated the ties of the *samaj* are loosening day by day to the point of disappearing altogether; ensuring the well-being of the *samaj* has become almost impossible nowadays.' These criticisms were clearly voiced to prescribe the mechanism of communitarian consensus based on an expectation of an other-regarding attitude. Rather than demarcating this world of meetings and associations as an 'outside' of the domestic sphere, the article indicated an anxiety to subsume it into the latter.⁴⁹ Indeed, this was a call to the middle class to realise the need for consensus which the associations must serve rather than jeopardise. The very reason why the editors of *Grhastha*, themselves part of the world of the 'public' forms of articulation, wrote this editorial was because they ideally wanted this world to conform to the simplicity and 'unity' of the ideal consensus in the home. There was, in the criticism of the educated, a wish that the formalism of the received modes of contestation like debate should not get the better of the ideal spirit of moral consensus in the *samaj*.

⁴⁷ 'Alochana', 'Janasadharaner Manushyatva', *Grhastha*, Ashwin, 1320 BE, p. 900.

⁴⁸ Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 287. Based on the popular ritual of *arandhan*, the movement gave a call to women not to light the home fire on Partition Day. *Rakhi-bandhan*, a popular rite invoking the familial paradigm of sister-brother relation, was transformed into a symbol of unity among the people of Bengal.

⁴⁹ 'Alochana', 'Janasadharaner Manushyatva', pp. 900-01.

The Emergence of a New 'Outside': 1920s-1940s

After the First World War, this idealisation of an unfractured 'inside', blurring the physical boundaries of the household, became increasingly difficult to sustain. Even as state repression from the late 1910s reinforced the existing resentment against the colonial sphere as a powerful 'outside', a new 'outside' came to be perceived within the idealised sweep of the domesticity-community-nation continuum, i.e., what was hitherto idealised as the 'inside'. There was a very conspicuous voice of order apprehensively, indeed neurotically, identifying, numerous concrete spaces and real human agencies, even within the community and neighbourhood, as inimical to the domestic order. Simultaneously as this new 'outside' became filled with concrete spaces and agencies, the voice of order and patriarchy unavoidably expressed a desperate wish to insulate 'the home' by drawing a sanitary cordon around the household. The voice of abstract 'virtues' and the householder's *dharma* amplifying domesticity into the nation came to be contested by the voice of the concrete, finite household.

It is important to note that the neurotic perception of an array of spatial and human anti-domestic agencies (independent of the colonial sphere) had hardly congealed before the end of the First World War. In the neo-Brahmanic didactic writings of the period up to the 1910s, the prostitute, the allopath, the lawyer and the tout at the law-court had been perceived as the human agents hostile to domesticity.⁵⁰ However, the prostitute was an age-old icon while the allopath, the lawyer, and the tout were perceived as appendages of the colonial sphere. In essays on domesticity there was hardly an impression of an overpowering, concretely perceived 'outside' within the continuum of domesticity, community and the nation - an 'outside' inimical to the order and existence of the middle-class household. Up to the 1910s, the corrupting 'outside' was the colonial sphere with its English education and subversive ideas that turned young men into 'non-Hindu minds inside a Hindu exterior'.⁵¹ The theatre was probably the only 'corrupting' space that appeared frequently in moralistic literature. Occasionally the 'English hotel' was mentioned. Significantly it was not the lower middle-class clerk but the 'Westernised' upper middle class and the Calcutta notables who were shown in farces as frequenting 'English hotels'. Another hostile zone was located, but that was within the minds of individuals who were prone to vices of 'crude selfishness' and

⁵⁰ E.g., 'Janaika Doktor' (pseud.), *Daktarbabu Natak*, Calcutta, 1875, *passim*; Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru ba Shantikunja*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1900, pp. 289, 297-98, 317, 322.

⁵¹ E.g., Sanyal, 'Bibaha', pp. 549.

'shameful aping of Western mores'.⁵² These vices within 'weak' individuals were 'the enemies of domesticity which is the heart of the *samaj*'.⁵³ A *battala* allegorical tract, for example, enumerated influences hostile to domesticity. Characteristically the lawyer, the allopath, the tout at the law court and the prostitute were identified. Interestingly, a spatial dimension was deployed when a palace was portrayed as luring the vulnerable *grhashta* which its splendour. But this space was allegorical. It was inhabited by human forms all right, but named as 'lust', 'anger', 'self-interest' and so on; these were only metaphors of vices within the individual mind.⁵⁴ Had the author perceived numerous concrete hostile spaces and human agencies within the nation, could his spaces and human forms have been exclusively metaphors of 'vices' within the householder?

The perception of a hostile 'outside' within the community and neighbourhood congealed, to begin with, as a sense of vulnerability in relation to the sphere outside the family-household - a sense of withdrawing into the actual, bounded space of the household for assurance under the pressure of numerous material spaces and agencies. Also, this vulnerability was reinforced by the loosening of the household from the ancestral support system and *samajik* consensus, both of which had helped blur the spatial and demographic boundedness of the family-household. In Chapter Two it has been noted that from the end of the 1910s, the domestic horizon came to be dotted with numerous perceived 'problems' of subsistence and survival in the city. In the given historical circumstances, these problems became associated with the perception of real human agencies and spaces as responsible for them. Not unexpectedly, therefore, the ideal of the continuum of domesticity and the *samaj* came to be contradicted by voices that tended to defensively narrow the 'inside' down to the household in contrast to the community. This identification of hostile agencies and spaces seen as threatening the viability of the household was very different from the way the domestic adversity had been identified and explained before. In the whole body of didactic literature on domesticity before the First World War adversity had been blamed on the abstract notion of *adhinata* (colonial subjection) and 'vices' like extravagance and self-interest, as noted in Chapter One. On the other hand, the confidence with which the moralising rhetoric had extended domesticity into the community proves that, apprehensions notwithstanding, no major concrete, hostile agency had been perceived within the *samaj*.

One of the fundamental developments which came to define the vulnerability of the Bengali middle-class household in relation to this new 'outside' was embedded in an

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 549, 552.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

⁵⁴ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, pp. 286-309.

interaction of the transforming material condition of the class and the changing social environment and composition of the city from the period of the First World War. In Chapter Two the middle-class perception of unprecedented adversity from the last years of the war onwards has been contextualised in the material condition of the class and its perceived 'problem' of educated unemployment. The peculiar stake that immigrant middle-class families developed in an imagined prospect of survival and 'life' in the city has also been noted. With this frame of mind, the Calcutta they confronted was a city where the influx of people from other provinces had registered a manifold increase from the time of the First World War. Suddenly, therefore, the middle-class household imagined itself as situated in a city that had passed 'into the possession of non-Bengalis'.⁵⁵ 'At present Bengalis have become so cornered that it seems as if Golden Bengal does not belong to Bengalis any more ... Had the post-war [First World War] tide not been impeded somewhat by the present depression, the whole of Calcutta would have passed under the control of non-Bengalis'.⁵⁶ Moreover, significantly for the understanding of the 'inside'/'outside' divide, the discussion of this self-perception as 'cornered' was particularly viewed in relation to two basic concerns of domesticity - subsistence and housing. While discussing the competition faced by Bengali middle-class youths in Calcutta, one author referred to the influx of Tamil clerks into the city as 'robbing the Bengali family of its subsistence'.⁵⁷ The family-household was, thus, the existential base from which the vulnerability relative to this material 'outside' was felt. It is not surprising that though they seldom competed directly with the Bengali for educated employment, the Biharis and Oriyas were also externalised using the yardstick of ordered domesticity as will be observed later in this chapter. These people constructed as choking Bengali middle-class urban existence with congestion, shortages and disease, were, moreover, symbols of the Bihari and Oriya middle-class resistance to Bengali middle-class employment (and therefore, subsistence) in Bihar and Orissa from 1911 onwards.⁵⁸ It will be noted later in this chapter that from the 1920s the class's attitude to the servants as such became explicitly suspicious and derisive, contradicting the paternalistic rhetoric. But, as we shall see, within

⁵⁵ E.g., 'Samayiki', 'Nija Basabhume Parabasi Hale'. *Bharatbarsha*, Ashwin, 1340 BE, p. 645.

⁵⁶ Prabodhchandra Basu, 'Bangalir Arthik Swadhinata Labher Upay', *Arthik Unnati*, Baishakh, 1333 BE, p. 52.

⁵⁷ (Anon.), 'Baithak', *Baithak*, Ashadh, 1329 BE, p. 13.

⁵⁸ E.g., 'Samayiki', 'Nija Basabhume', pp. 645-47. The author resented the absence of concerted Bengali resistance to the influx of non-Bengalis into Calcutta at a time when people of the 'adjacent' provinces 'disliked the Bengalis' and 'opposed the appointment of Bengalis' there. For the historian's comment on resistance to the appointment of Bengalis in the neighbouring provinces, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Delhi, 1984, p. 164.

that overall attitude, the non-Bengali servant, rather than his Bengali counterpart, was particularly singled out for derision.

It is important to analyse in this connection the transformation of the Bengali middle-class construction of the non-Bengali businessman, particularly the Marwari, in relation to the Bengali household. Significantly, before the First World War the construction of the Marwari as an enemy of domesticity had not appeared. In 1912 an article in a nationalist periodical professedly for middle-class householders lauded the Marwaris for their 'sense of commitment', eagerness for self-employment and 'honesty in business'.⁵⁹ It is true that even after the war, there was a significant strand of nationalist discourse valorising the Marwari spirit of enterprise as the antithesis of the 'servility' of the Bengali to colonial employment.⁶⁰ But at the same time there was now a conspicuous voice within the class characterising Marwaris as exploiters.⁶¹ The ambiguity was often found in same individual. 'Parashuram' (Rajshekhara Basu) wrote that if the middle-class Bengalis were losing out to the non-Bengali businessmen, 'they only had themselves to blame'.⁶² But simultaneously he could not help characterising the latter as 'those who have deprived the Bengalis of their mouthful'.⁶³ His essay illustrates how the non-Bengali businessman was perceived as directly exploiting the Bengali household: 'At every turn of the crooked way to the consumer's home, they are extracting profit.'⁶⁴ Significantly, 'Parashuram's 1920s fictional creation of Ganderiram, a Marwari, marketed a cooking medium of dubious safety.⁶⁵ This portrayed association of the Marwari with an imagined item supposedly dangerous for domestic health is significant. During the same period, in an interview published in a periodical, the Bengali interviewee said, 'If they so wish, Marwari wholesalers in food can starve the city to death'.⁶⁶ The interviewee then went on to elaborate the plight of the Bengali householder and the marginalisation of the Bengali wholesaler, as a consequence of the 'complete control of Marwaris' over the distributive trade in food since the First World War.⁶⁷ Moreover, heavy Marwari investment in land and built property in the city from the last years of the First World War, made the Marwari appear all the more as a direct exploiter of the lower middle-

⁵⁹ 'Alochana', 'Marwarir Nikat Bangalir Shikkha', *Grhastha*, Chaitra, 1319 BE, p. 211.

⁶⁰ E.g., Bijaykrshna Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay Bangali Kon Pathe', *Bharatbarsha*, Agrahayan, 1345 BE, p. 959.

⁶¹ E.g., 'Molakat', 'Adhyapakar Mudikhana', *Arthik Unnati*, Bhadra, 1333 BE, pp. 432-33.

⁶² 'Parashuram' (pseud.), 'Banglar Bhadrakalok', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1332 BE, p. 34.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ 'Parashuram' (pseud.), 'Siddheshwari Limited' (1922), in *Parashuram Granthabali*, vol. 1, 5th edn, Calcutta, 1394 BE, pp. 3-17.

⁶⁶ 'Molakat', 'Adhyapakar Mudikhana', p. 433.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 432-33. See, Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interest in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, Calcutta, 1979, p. 134.

class Bengali household, at a time when the existing Bengali neighbourhoods registered a 'remarkable' rise in land values and rents in 1918-19.⁶⁸ In the context of an 'acute housing problem', aggrieved voices registered the Marwari 'manoeuvres' that 'shattered the hopes of Bengali lower middle-class families of getting affordable rented accommodation' in the apartment complexes lining the newly-constructed Central Avenue'.⁶⁹

However, agencies like the up-country *goala* (studied in Chapter Two) or the Marwari businessman, though contributing to the 'hostility' of the new 'outside', were not strictly speaking covered by the Bengali middle class's subjective definition of the *samaj* into which domesticity had so long been morally blended. The fracturing of the idealised bond of domesticity with the Bengali upper-caste, middle-class *samaj* by the new 'outside' is effectively illustrated by the perceived hostility of the *badiwala* (owner of a tenanted house). From after the First World War the *badiwala* emerged as a symbol of hostility to the middle-class - particularly lower middle-class - domesticity. This stereotype of the *badiwala* emerged largely with the 'abnormal rise' in rents in and around Calcutta during the 'latter half of the year 1919'.⁷⁰ The Calcutta Rent Committee Report of 1920 found many instances in which the post First World War dearth of urban accommodation was being 'used as a means of "squeezing" tenants unduly'.⁷¹ The voice of middle-class domesticity was reflected in Sundarimohan Das's writing in the 1920s; he characterised lower middle class domesticity in the city as 'hounded everyday by the *badiwala*'.⁷² Serious essays from the 1920s onwards reflected the middle-class demand for legal safeguards against 'exploitation' by the *badiwala*.⁷³ Simultaneously, among the less celebrated but more numerous authors of fictional literature, 'oppression' by and 'heartlessness' of the *badiwala* became a frequent sentimental motif.⁷⁴ Significantly, this motif was virtually absent in the literature of the pre-First World War period. The pervasiveness of vulnerability among the lower middle class in relation to the *badiwala* may be gauged from contemporary statistics; by the early 1940s, out of a total of 74,361 *pukka* (brick-built) houses in Calcutta, 52,000 were inhabited exclusively by tenants,⁷⁵ while out of the remaining houses there must have been many in which the

⁶⁸ RCRC-1920, p. 2.

⁶⁹ E.g., (Anon.), 'Kalikata Sahar o Badibhada', *Arthik Unnati*, Kartik, 1333 BE, pp. 552-53. For the evidence that these tenements were actually acquired by the Marwaris, see *Census of India, 1931*, vol. VI (Calcutta), pts. 1 & 2, p. 6.

⁷⁰ RCRC-1920, pp. 1-2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷² Sundarimohan Das, *Brddha Dhattrir Rojnamcha*, Calcutta, 1330 BE, p. 68.

⁷³ E.g., 'Janaika Nagarik' (pseud.), 'Kalikata Badibhada Ain', *Arthik Unnati*, Ashwin, 1333 BE, p. 455.

⁷⁴ E.g., Priyakumar Goswami, 'Bhagnanid', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1335, pp. 33-35.

⁷⁵ *Jugantar*, 15 April 1944, p. 5.

landlord shared the premises with tenants. The last years of the Second World War further worsened the 'housing crisis' and deepened the contradiction between the *badiwala* and the tenant. The plight of the tenant was widely reported in the press with many newspapers calling for 'vigorous action'.⁷⁶ Another figure rupturing the moral blending of domesticity and the *samaj* was that of the *bhadralok* turned-*goonda*. The *goonda* (described by the police as a spectrum including smugglers, thieves, pick-pockets and toughs) came to be reckoned as one of the major agencies constituting the hostile 'outside'. In the early 1920s the middle class registered the *goonda* menace as 'suddenly increasing'.⁷⁷ A periodical, in 1922, reflected the middle-class household's fear: 'Be it morning, noon, or evening every major thoroughfare of Calcutta witnesses the tyranny of the *goondas* ... After a few days they might enter the house and snatch money and valuables'.⁷⁸ Indeed, this 'sudden increase' of the menace induced the promulgation of the Goonda Act of 1926. But what was problematic for the household's ideal relation with the community was that now the *goonda* was also increasingly coming from a Bengali Hindu middle-class and upper-caste background, as will be further seen in Chapter Five.

The patriarchal problem of ordering young men and women played no less decisive a role in the configuration of the new 'outside'. In the early years of the 20th century in spite of patriarchy's perennial anxiety about youths, a frantic identification of numerous 'dangerous' spaces corrupting young men had not emerged. Friends of youths had always been regarded with suspicion. Authors distinguished between spending money on ceremonies involving the kin and relatives from 'wasting' it on entertaining friends.⁷⁹ Students were also essentialised as picking up lavish habits - like visiting the theatre - at college hostels. Beyond this the identification of agencies and spaces was hardly involved in a witch-hunt. Drinking in the student messes was discussed among the Bengali middle class.⁸⁰ But, it is equally true that in 1905, the then Bengali members of the Calcutta University senate, known for their moralist stance, 'warmly defended' the existing system of private messes. They did not agree with the Principal of Presidency College that messes suffered from 'moral evils of a more serious nature'.⁸¹ By contrast, the question of disciplining youth in the 1920s conjured up numerous

⁷⁶ Bengal, Home Political, 39/43 of 1943, WBSA; Bengal, Home Political 163/45 of 1945, WBSA.

⁷⁷ E.g., (Anon.), 'Kalkata Sahare Gundar Atyachar', *Baithak*, Ashadh, 1329 BE, p. 71.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ E.g., Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, 'Madhyabitta Shrenir Durabastha', *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1320 BE, p. 571.

⁸⁰ John Berwick, 'Chatra Samaj: The Significance of the Student Community in Bengal, c. 1870-1922', in Rajat Ray (ed.), *Mind Body and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, 1995, p. 237.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250, 256.

concrete spaces and agencies outside the home as hostile to the project. The frenzied identification of 'corrupting' spaces, which came to include even the emerging phenomenon of road-side tea-stalls, is not surprising in the light of the discussion in Chapter Two. It may be recalled that this was the time when patriarchy registered a 'revolt of the youth'; youths were seen as creating a parallel universe outside the home.

Nrpendrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi, ultimately concerned in their psychoanalytical book with the control of female sexuality in the changing atmosphere of this period, were unavoidably concerned with the disciplining of youth as such. Their project neurotically constructed the outside of the home as infested with innumerable spaces supposedly encouraging promiscuity - hotels, restaurants, messes, jails, revolutionary terrorist and communist circles, cinema houses, parks, and all conceivable forms of public conveyance including rickshaws.⁸² By implication, the imagining of the family circle as a haven of safety was overt. To show that Nrpendrakumar's was not an isolated case of hyper-anxiety about this perceived 'outside', one might cite *Byabhichari Rameshdar Atmakatha*. This book, aiming at exposing a few influential figures in Calcutta's municipal politics and social life, may be taken as an index of the moral sentiments of the majority whom the author obviously sought to influence in the largest possible numbers. It is significant that this book identified as hostile almost the same spaces and agencies as Nrpendrakumar and Aradhana did.⁸³

One might observe, in passing, the transformation of the middle-class perception of the mess. By the 1920 and 30s, in the frantic voice of patriarchal order the students' hostels and messes had become sources of venereal disease, as noted in Chapter Two. This stereotyping of the mess became so pervasive that life insurance periodicals in their propaganda drive used a narrative which saw young men live in Calcutta messes, come under 'bad influence' and waste on prostitutes the money painstakingly saved by their parents for their education.⁸⁴ Of course, this essentialisation of the mess was the consequence of a complex tangle of nationalist medical voice, hyper-anxiety about the 'dying race', and the communal obsession with numbers and child mortality. But it should not be overlooked that from the perspective of the individual family, too, the reproduction, survival and health of the male child were of prime importance. Furthermore, it may be suggested that particularly from the 1930s, the voice of apprehension about the mess probably acquired an added dimension. The 1930s

⁸² Nrpendrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi, *Nari Bipathe Jay Keno*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1351 BE, pp. 182-83, 211-25.

⁸³ Rameshchandra Mukhopadhyay, *Byabhichari Rameshdar Atmakatha*, Calcutta, n.d. (c. 1933), pp. 55-70.

⁸⁴ E.g., Amalendukumar Sen, 'Life Insurance Policy', *Jibanbima*, Ashadh, 1337 BE, pp. 364-66.

marked the most intense phase of revolutionary terrorism and the rising popularity of communism among a section of the burgeoning world of politically-involved students and youths. If the world of fictional literature pervasively registered and reflected the association between Calcutta messes and radical politics,⁸⁵ patriarchy with its characteristic anxiety about youth must have registered it all the more. For Nrpndrakumar 'terrorism' and Communism in particular, and active nationalist politics in general, created a significant sphere of 'disorder' outside the home and encouraged free mixing.⁸⁶ Again, Hemendraprasad Ghosh, the editor of *Basumati*, in characterising revolutionary 'terrorism' as a 'disease' spread by the revolutionary leaders, perceived the germ of 'terrorism' as coming from the 'outside'. He accused the government of ignoring the problem of unemployment and identified the 'problem' of household subsistence as the reason why unemployed youths turned to 'terrorism'. But what is important here is that he, thus, suggested a solution at the level of the household to prevent the influence of the 'terrorist' leader 'outside' from 'instilling [young] minds with perversion and violence'.⁸⁷

In a culture committed to the spatial seclusion of women, the emergence of the female body from the accustomed confines also contributed to the configuration of the new 'outside' fracturing the ideal community.⁸⁸ It is noted in Chapter Four how Nrpndrakumar Basu, because he considered the emergence of women from seclusion as unavoidable, developed a hypersensitivity about the 'outside'; he found almost everything outside the home a potential threat to the control of female sexuality. This was the period when Rabindranath Thakur came in for criticism from several quarters for directing dance-dramas on the 'public' stage in Calcutta with a cast that included *bhadramahilas* (women of *bhadralok* families). Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi, for instance, wrote, 'the other day I read in *Sanjibani* that some *bhadramahilas* of Calcutta participated in a dance-drama in an open gathering ... Many people [including Jogeshchandra himself] are angry at learning this news'.⁸⁹ This alienation from the 'outside' over the question of the visibility of the *bhadramahila* in the 'open' was all the more intense because of an equally widespread feeling that this was an eventuality that could not be resisted. Jogeshchandra, with all his opposition to women appearing on the 'public' stage, also wrote, 'Observing the pace of change, I realise that however angry we feel

⁸⁵ During the 1930s-40s many stories in periodicals focused on youth participation in radical politics and relatedly portrayed the Calcutta messes as the base of mobilisation. See for example, Manindra Ray, 'Dhnadha', *Parichay*, Jyaishta, 1349 BE, pp. 356-69.

⁸⁶ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, p. 183.

⁸⁷ Hemendraprasad Ghosh, 'Bangalar Annasamasya', *Bharatbarsha*, Jyaishta, 1340 BE, p. 949.

⁸⁸ This emergence is studied in Chapter Four.

⁸⁹ Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi, 'Naranarir Karmabhed', *Bharatbarsha*, Shrabana, 1335 BE, p. 344.

or blind we try to be, a social revolution has begun and nobody is able to stop it'⁹⁰. There was a representative ring in the author's voice that however much individual households might try to resist, the 'outside' with a dynamism of its own was in many ways dictating terms to domesticity.

In the voice of order the streets and public transport in particular emerged in clear outlines as spaces alienated from the home with this gradual visibility of hitherto secluded women. In 1925 a writer imagined all males on railway platforms as potentially lecherous, 'Where does the lecherous and inquisitive gaze of every man on the railway platform turn when a woman, particularly a beautiful one, appears there!'⁹¹ During the Second World War, unaccompanied Bengali Hindu women as office employees became visible on public transport, thanks to women's employment in the Civil Supplies Department.⁹² The crowd in trams and buses immediately came to be represented as potentially undependable with 'pawing beasts' hiding in its midst.⁹³ For the same fundamental reason, Nrpandrakumar and Aradhana condemned the new system of seating both the sexes together in some of the cinema houses of Calcutta in the early 1940s.⁹⁴

However, though the perception of numerous unprecedented pressures was a major reason why the perception of the new 'outside' developed at all, the withdrawal into the individual household was not entirely a matter of objective determination. It is not as if the historian's hindsight is interpolating the concept of a new 'outside'. Maybe, some of the reactions cited above have already indicated a subjective definition of the 'outside' by the class and its domesticity. But it is essential to highlight how the middle class of the period, using the household as a fundamental base of identity-formation, inscribed its own discretion, subjectivity and agency on the process of defining this 'outside'. This imprint is evident in the imagined degrees of externality in relation to extra-familial agencies coming into the household and also in the choice of strategy for shutting out this 'outside'.

It is important to note how the moral discourse on the treatment of servants was transformed. In neo-Brahmanic didactic literature the note of distrust about the servant had been subdued by the deployment of a rhetoric of paternalism and the servant's incorporation

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁹¹ 'Shri Daradi' (pseud.), 'Bangalar Meyeder Sambandhe', *Bharatbarsha*, Shrabana, 1332 BE, p. 260.

⁹² The connection between the considerable employment of women by this department and this first significant visibility of unaccompanied women in noticeable numbers on public transport was obvious to contemporaries. See, for example, Binay Ghosh, 'Madhyabitta', *Nababaucharit* (1944), Calcutta, 1979, p. 25.

⁹³ *CMG*, 6 July 1946, p. 160.

⁹⁴ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, pp. 211-13.

into the employing family.⁹⁵ Though this discourse continued during the period from the 1920s to 40s, it now faced a powerful, competing one of conscious externalisation of the servant. Amiyabala Guhajaya Sarkar, for example, in her book of advice to young mothers published in 1936, perceived the servant as an agent of the 'outside'. She ascribed to him (as will be shown in the following discussion) 'dangerous' propensities that he had not been accused of having prior to the inter-war period.

However, it is equally important that domestic discretion applied varying degrees of externalisation with regard to servants. The part-time servant, in particular, was externalised from the world of adoptive sentiment of the middle class, because he or she was considered as tainted by the spirit of the market and having no pre-existing linkage with the household. This is evident from the circulation of derisively used expressions like *bhadate* or *bajare* (mercenary, market-polluted) in relation to Brahman cooks and servants from the middle 1910s. Amiyabala wrote, 'Do you have any idea as to the scale of untoward incidents occurring in this city thanks to part-time cooks and maid-servants! ... It may well be that they suffer from venereal diseases'.⁹⁶ 'The immoral non-Bengali servant' constructed by Bengali domesticity from the time of the massive immigration during the First World War,⁹⁷ was particularly virulent if he served part-time because he stood, at the intersection of two axes of domestic definition of externality - the market and linguistic otherness. It is probably not surprising that in the wake of the huge increase in Oriya immigration into Calcutta during the decade of 1911 to 1921,⁹⁸ the part-time Oriya cook became particularly suspect and was harshly condemned or caricatured.⁹⁹ Nrpndrakumar and Aradhana constructed male servants in general as agents of sexual 'pollution' of young, middle-class girls. But when it came to citing instances from Aradhana's case-files, Oriya cooks or servants were somehow overwhelmingly cited as offenders.¹⁰⁰

Significantly, where linguistic identity formation externalised the Oriya or the Bihari, the domestic order had a distinctive agency in branding him an 'outsider'. Thus, while at the level of the mess, or generally the space outside the home, the Oriya was identified as a bad cook, a fake Brahman and/or a characteristically sly person, at the level of the middle-class

⁹⁵ E.g., Bhattacharya, *Kartabya-nishtha*, p. 49.

⁹⁶ Amiyabala Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye: Kanyar Prati Matar Upadesh*, Howrah, 1344 BE, p. 152.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, *Internal Migration in India: A Case Study of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 288, 290, 292-3, 296-7.

⁹⁹ E.g., Umeshchandra Dasgupta, 'Bange Daridya Brddhi Haitechhe Kise', *Grhastha*, Magh, 1323 BE, p. 372; Das, *Brddha Dhatri*, p. 68, Nrpndrakumar Basu, *Janmashasan* (1334 BE), 4th edn, Calcutta, 1350 BE, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, pp. 185-6, 189-202.

household he was a person sexually corrupting middle-class girls and even acting in collusion with the enemies of the employer. Amiyabala might sound ludicrous to posterity but she wrote in all solemnity about the non-Bengali, part-time cook: 'Have you ever realised that enemies might bribe him to poison your husband and son!'¹⁰¹ Thus the alienation effected by linguistic identity-consciousness, was reinforced by domesticity with its own externalising parameters.

But more fundamentally, domesticity inscribed its subjective judgement on the congealing 'outside' within the nation by steadily abandoning the neo-Brahmanic discourse of spatial indefiniteness of the householder's *dharma*. Indeed, in contradistinction to the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric, domesticity now made a statement on the 'outside' by initiating discourses explicitly upholding spatial and demographic boundaries, securing domesticity in the physical dimension of the material household. In 1922, the prostitutes of Calcutta participated in a door-to-door fund-raising campaign in the *bhadralok* neighbourhoods of Calcutta for the flood-afflicted people of North Bengal.¹⁰² The coming of the age-old symbol of the anti-domestic to the door-step of middle-class houses was resented as a spatial transgression. But it is important here that the voice of domestic order immediately expressed an unprecedented sensitivity about the externality of the street where such an unaccustomed and unritualised transgression was taking place. Many periodicals voiced their displeasure with the nationalist leadership in Bengal for alleged consent to this appearance of the prostitute on the middle-class door-step.¹⁰³ The periodical *Baithak* particularly registered that they came to 'every door'. It claimed, moreover, that the middle-class households had made generous contributions more out of an anxiety to quickly get rid of these volunteers, allegedly capable of vociferous insult, and preserve the sanctity of the *bhadralok* home.¹⁰⁴

The Second World War and the Famine of 1943 saw a more intensified drive to emphasise the boundaries of the concrete household with its immediate spatial 'outside' - the street and the pavement. A close look at the whole spectrum of printed articulation from newspaper editorials to fiction, from 'high' print to *battala* reveals an unmistakable and pervasive association. The street and the pavement came to be associated with the painful war-time compromise and 'loss' of values sacrosanct to middle-class domesticity.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰¹ Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye*, p. 151.

¹⁰² E.g., (Anon.), 'Spashta Katha', *Baithak*, Kartik, 1329 BE, p. 119.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 118-19. Also see Sandip Bandyopadhyay, 'The "Fallen" and Non-Cooperation', *Manushi*, 53, July-August, 1989, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ (Anon.), 'Spashta Katha', p. 119.

¹⁰⁵ For fictional representation of such obvious association, see Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar* (1943), in Gajendrakumar Mitra *et al.* (eds), *Tarashankar Rachanabali*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1380 BE.

street was the invariable backdrop against which the Bengali middle-class male was seen as compelled to wait, for the first time, in long queues at control shops, in close contact with the bodies of lower-class people; the former was to be served not on the basis of social hierarchy but his position in the queue. While a social observer with professed Marxist leanings relished the predicament of the *babu* at this levelling,¹⁰⁶ the author of a *battala* tract on the Second World War found the wait in queues demoralising and felt anguished at having to carry the shopping like a *mute* (person hired for carrying a heavy burden).¹⁰⁷ Even an anguished newspaper report betrayed a language of both class and gender, when it stated that the *babu* was thus often having to perform the role so long entrusted to maid-servants.¹⁰⁸ Also, the streets of Calcutta were widely perceived as the sphere where human life was valueless in the eyes of 'reckless' drivers of military lorries, which appeared as a lethal agent in printed discussions and fictional literature from 'high' print to *battala*.¹⁰⁹ The street was also where the chastity of the female body was openly 'sold' for a morsel of food.¹¹⁰ The numerous representations of death and life on the pavement, therefore, had a sub-text written in a language of class and emotion. In genres ranging from photo-features to articles, fiction to reminiscences, the pavement was represented as a site where domesticity lost its sanctity and death its serenity. A photo-feature in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* highlighted the sense of sanctity of the home and the female body relative to the pavement when it gave to the photograph of an ill-clad famine-stricken mother and her child the caption, 'Once they had a home. Now hunger and destitution have driven them to the pavement.'¹¹¹ The reminiscences of Manikuntala Sen, who had been Marxist activist in the 1940s, recalled the destitute's war-time domesticity on the pavements of Calcutta as 'veritable hell'.¹¹² For many, like Hemendraprasad Ghosh, a reflection on the 'sight of Calcutta' in 1943 invariably conjured up 'dead bodies lying on the pavements'.¹¹³ On 17 August and 7 October 1943, he recorded in his diary, the death of emaciated famine-stricken children on the pavement outside his house with the expression 'What a sight!', indicating his jarred sensibilities.¹¹⁴ When on 31 October of the same year his 'beloved' son-in-law died he was anguished, but in a serene expression of

¹⁰⁶ Ghosh, 'Kramabikash o Kiu', *Nabababucharit*, pp. 75-80.

¹⁰⁷ Nagendranath Das, *Mahajuddher Sakkhigopal o Shrikanter Shribrdhi*, Calcutta, n.d. (c. 1944), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Jugantar*, 19 April 1944, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, p. 138; Das, *Mahajuddher Sakkhigopal*, pp. 7-8. For a non-fictional version of this pervasive war-time perception, see *CMG*, 1 June 1946, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Manikuntala Sen, *Sediner Katha*, Calcutta, 1982, p. 94; Unpublished Diary of Hemendraprasad Ghosh (hereafter UDHG), 23 and 26 August 1943.

¹¹¹ *ABP*, 20 September 1943, p. 1.

¹¹² Sen, *Sediner Katha*, p. 94.

¹¹³ UDHG, 26 October 1943.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 August and 7 October 1943.

controlled grief he wrote a philosophical poem on separation.¹¹⁵ The neo-Brahmanic discourse by projecting the neighbourhood as effectively a relational network of middle-class, upper-caste households had virtually silenced or appropriated the presence of the street. That projection came to be fractured by the perception of the street acquiring an irrepressible concreteness; the middle-class definition of household correspondingly secured class, gender and emotions in a spatially concrete 'inside' in opposition to this immediate spatial 'outside'.

However, the statement of the spatial distinctness of the household was only a manifestation of a more comprehensive conceptual statement. Using the concept of the concrete household, domesticity was sought to be separated not from a mere aggregate of 'hostile' spaces and agencies, but from a more comprehensive social zone perceived to be in a flux. In this comprehensive perception, the 'outside' was where the moral consensus of the *samaj* was seen to be declining. Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay's writings on domesticity, read in conjunction with other contemporary and near contemporary works, provide an interesting insight. One could, indeed, discern how the voice of domestic order from the 1920s inscribed itself on the 'inside'/'outside' divide by reading a new meaning into the word *samaj*. Basantakumar's *Byakti o Samaj* and *Ghar o Par*, published in 1920, reiterated most of the fundamentals of the neo-Brahmanic domestic morality, including the concept of *panchayajna*.¹¹⁶ It is significant, therefore, that contradicting himself and the neo-Brahmanic sublimation of spatial distinctness of the household, he broke into a finite separation of the concrete household from a *samaj* that was not consistently neo-Brahmanic in conception.

Writing (or rather modifying the contents of his letters written between 1916-18) in the midst of the mass upsurge of 1920, Basantakumar disapproved of any 'sudden revolution'.¹¹⁷ He apprehensively registered 'Europe turning towards extreme socialism' and the workers, peasants and untouchables rising in India.¹¹⁸ It is significant that in this frame of mind - not uncommon in the early 1920s - he effected an epistemological break; during the course of his discussion of the Brahmanical duties of the householder in the *samaj*, he suddenly broke into a sociological definition of *samaj* as society.¹¹⁹ In an appropriative sweep, Basantakumar's sociological *samaj* significantly included lower castes, labourers, peasants and primary producers who had staked their claim to define the nation.¹²⁰ He also reminded his readers that one should always keep the good of peasants and producers in mind as one was so

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 October 1943.

¹¹⁶ Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, pp. 8-10, 63-64.

¹¹⁷ In the books concerned, the author edited and modified (in 1920) the advice contained in his letters written from prison to his wife between 1916 and 1918.

¹¹⁸ Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti*, pp. 19, 57-58.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17, 61-64.

¹²⁰ Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Ghar o Par*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, p. 10.

dependent on them.¹²¹ However, for people like Basantakumar, the time for explicitly recognising the presence of, and dependence on, the lower castes and orders was also the time for demarcating a boundary between the concretely perceived middle-class household on the one hand and the *samaj* on the other.¹²² His sociological *samaj* was, therefore, projected as a *par* (not one's own; the other) of the *ghar* (the home).¹²³ In the neo-Brahmanic ideology the lower orders had neither been explicitly included in the *samaj* nor openly pronounced as *par*; their inclusion in the 'inside' was conveniently kept nebulous by the social fluidity of the Brahmanical rhetoric the householder's *dharma*. Basantakumar, by contrast, time and again emphasised their externality to the finite space of the middle-class home. He did write that though they are *par*, they are not entirely so as the householder was socially so dependent on them. But that statement only underlined that they were *par* after all. It is significant that the sphere where they were to be appropriated through the rhetoric of mutual 'social dependence' was not an extended domesticity, but the sociological *samaj* separated from the household.

In a wider sense, Basantakumar's sociological-sounding *samaj* was a space imagined to accommodate within itself, the contemporary flux in the boundaries of caste, occupation, and status - a flux that the class did not want to spread into the home. It was also where the power of consensus of the non-Westernised, educated upper-caste community was wilting under irrevocable pressures. While he clearly preferred the maintenance of caste distinctions,¹²⁴ his *samaj* was where 'no craft is lowly or trade demeaning'.¹²⁵ A mind anxious for solution of the problem of unemployment,¹²⁶ had to provide a space where change in caste occupation could be accommodated and yet distanced from the home. The censuses indicate that from the late 1910s upper-caste, middle-class youths had started taking up some of the occupations they had hitherto looked down upon.¹²⁷

The majority of upper-caste households remained committed to caste distinctions during the 1920s and 30s. The 1931 Census recorded the opinion that 'those who rigidly and rationally practise strict control in the matter [of dining] are scientifically in a better position and are entitled to respect and not to ridicule'.¹²⁸ It also found that most people 'accepted some modification' to injunctions on interdining 'in modern circumstances' but personally

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 19.

¹²² Bandyopadhyay, *Ghar*, p. 8.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹²⁵ Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti*, p. 54.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V (Bengal and Sikkim), pt. 1, p. 289.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.419.

believed such injunctions to be based on 'fundamentally sound principles'.¹²⁹ For this majority, nurturing their intimate convictions in the household, the 'outside' was where the impact of the 'progressive' and the communal voices in favour of the relaxation of caste restrictions was to be kept insulated.¹³⁰ The 'outside' was where, according to the Census of 1931, Bengali Hindu upper-caste males of 'every degree of orthodoxy showed a much greater liberality of outlook as regards pollution by contact, eating of prohibited foods, and inter-dining with other castes'.¹³¹

Again Basantakumar's spatially finite *ghar* was where, as he states in *Ghar o Par*, many individual families might prefer to adhere to 12 as the female age of marriage; but one could not any longer depend on *samaj* for a strong condemnation of the way in which 'the age of marriage had already gone up in practice to 15 or 16'.¹³² Rameshchandra Ray, writing contemporaneously on the training of women in domesticity, viewed the situation as the disappearance of the pre-existing configuration of *samaj* among the Bengali middle class migrated to the city. For Rameshchandra Ray the 'outside' was a sphere where there was 'disorder all round'. He also, like numerous authors throughout the 1920s and 30s, keenly felt the 'decline of the community consensus' about the female age of marriage.¹³³ Bijaykrshna Basu saw the disorder as originating from outside and impregnating the home mainly through youths who participated recklessly in the former.¹³⁴

Basantakumar's writings also reflected the ambiguities characteristic of the middle class in the given context. The shift towards a sociological understanding of *samaj* notwithstanding, the wish to be able to order relations outside the household by ideally amplifying domestic affect and the paradigm of blood lingered. Basantakumar was nostalgic about an imagined period, when the whole *samaj* had been like an extended family. In 1921 another author lamented that a decline in enthusiasm for Bengali Hindu festivals had made people forget how to make the *par* one's *apan*, and unite one's relatives and the poor with bonds of affection.¹³⁵ It is true that by the 1930s and particularly the early 1940s, the *samaj* in the sociological sense was being frequently and unambiguously used in even non-academic

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* This was the response of an educated Bengali Brahman to a question on inter-dining placed before him by the Census personnel. The open criticism, in the awareness of which this response is couched, is reflected in the response of another Brahman to the same questionnaire. The latter welcomed the growing trend of Bengali Brahmans dining together with other castes. See *ibid.*, p. 415.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹³² Bandyopadhyay, *Ghar*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, p. 6.

¹³³ Rameshchandra Ray, 'Strishikkha', *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, p. 375.

¹³⁴ Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay' p. 961.

¹³⁵ (Anon.), 'Shrishri Annapurna' p. 3.

discourse.¹³⁶ However, Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, describing contemporary usage (in the 1930s), wrote that the term *samajik* (pertaining to the *samaj*) occasion still meant one in which the kin and the caste and the neighbours were the main components; even an exclusive gathering of friends could not be called *samajik* by that yardstick.¹³⁷

Similarly, the creation of a sanitary cordon around domesticity in the face of the new 'outside' was not entirely unambiguous or uniform within the class and that made the situation problematic for the voice of order. As noted in Chapters Two and Five, the liminality of the colonial middle class and its derived notion of its own 'unmanliness', unavoidably tended to project assertion in the sphere outside the home as redeeming. The problem for patriarchy was that when the period from the 1920s saw a suddenly intensified youth participation in the 'outside', patriarchy could not always unambiguously or unanimously condemn it. Samar Sen remembered his grandfather Dineshchandra Sen's mixed feelings about revolutionary 'terrorism'. Though the latter disapproved of 'terrorism', he also respected 'terrorists' like Bina Das in his own way.¹³⁸ Indeed, in the voice of order the closing in on the concrete domestic in the face of the 'outside', however, also had the sub-text of the wish that the class was in a position to control the 'outside' and neutralise its destabilising potential. The defensive withdrawal into the concrete household, rather than being a matter of choice, was often a reflection of the class's lack of access to power needed to control the 'outside'. Yet the wish to control remained. After a few middle-class women had participated in the 'outside' during the Non-Cooperation Movement, a discernible voice valorised this spatial transgression of women. But there was, simultaneously, an anxiety in the same voice to make the 'outside' as much a site of chastity as the home was imagined to be. An article, for example, hailed the participation of women like Basanti Debi in political demonstrations outside the home. But referring to the fund-raising efforts of the prostitutes it said, 'If, following their [of women like Basanti Debi] example, prostitutes frequently appear on the streets then in the near future people would no longer enthusiastically respond to the women's call for mobilisation'.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Binay Ghosh, 'Jirna Puratan Jak Bhese Jak', *Nabababucharit*, p. 127.

¹³⁷ Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya', in *Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya*, 1345 BE, p. 125.

¹³⁸ Samar Sen, 'Babu Brttanta', *Babu Brttanta*, Calcutta, 1981, p. 11.

¹³⁹ (Anon.), 'Spashta Katha', p. 119.

Domesticity and the Nation, the Household and the Community: 1920-47

The sublimation of contradictions within the idealised 'inside' of the imagined continuum of domesticity and the nation was fractured also by developments in nationalist politics. The continuum, resting on the complacent imagining of a middle-class, upper-caste nation, was ruptured when the entry of the masses into politics in 1919-20 connoted a very different nation. Up to the late 1910s the middle class had frequently and confidently asserted that, with their 'superior' morality cultivated in the 'ideal' atmosphere of their homes, the Bengali middle class were the 'natural leaders' of the lower orders.¹⁴⁰ The emergence of the masses in mainstream politics displaced this confident expectation to lead. Almost coinciding with this development, the continuum of the household and the *samaj*, which had been further extended to imagine the nation, also became fractured.

The years 1919-22, with their impressive number of strikes in Calcutta's industrial belt and the crucial role of labour in the massive *hartals* and demonstrations paralysing the city, dramatically thrust the masses onto urban middle-class sensibility.¹⁴¹ The class stood confronted with the disturbing realisation that those they had expected to lead, had started imagining a nation on their own - a nation very different from the extension of Bengali upper-caste middle-class way of life.¹⁴² A song in a book of parodies ridiculing middle-class sensibilities said,

We, the cream of the educated bhadralok,
Have created the National Congress.
Will it now be hijacked by the coolies and the workers?¹⁴³

The situation became particularly disturbing when, in 1921, the peasants showed signs of withholding rent from zamindars.¹⁴⁴ The Bengali Hindu middle class, after all, had a high proportion of intermediary tenure-holders. The extent of shock in the 1920s can be gauged if one keeps in mind that, during the Swadeshi period, the class had displayed both its jealous stake in land and its confident assertion of 'natural leadership'.¹⁴⁵

Specifically, the expectation to hegemonise colonial society largely through an extension of the moral idiom of middle-class domesticity, was jolted by the considerable autonomy of the emerging form of nationalist politics in relation to the class's domestic

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Sarojbasini Gupta, 'Grhasangskār', *Grhastha*, Poush, 1323, p. 239.

¹⁴¹ Ray, *Urban Roots*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁴² Also see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 167.

¹⁴³ 'Kalapahad' (pseud.), *Unmilan Sangit*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1340 BE, p. 50.

¹⁴⁴ Rajat K. Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875-1927*, Delhi, 1984, p. 297.

¹⁴⁵ Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 110-11.

morality. The most glaring instance was the open participation of prostitutes, the very symbol of the anti-domestic in middle class morality, in the Non-Cooperation Movement and in the flood-relief campaign in 1922. The participation was tensely noted in most contemporary periodicals. It is not clear whether the Congress leadership in Bengal itself took the initiative in involving the prostitutes as volunteers during Non-Cooperation.¹⁴⁶ Even if the prostitutes had themselves taken the initiative to join, the alienating implication of this for middle-class domestic morality is the same; a space was created in the sphere of nationalist politics where the prostitutes could fashion their participation alongside middle-class youths. However, there is also evidence to suggest that Chittaranjan Das and Praphullachandra Ray, quite contrary to Gandhi's attitude,¹⁴⁷ were not eager to debar prostitutes from direct participation.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, patriarchal resentment was voiced in several periodicals condemning 'those who had allowed' the prostitutes to join Non-Cooperation, and welcomed 'bidi-smoking prostitutes' to attend Congress meetings.¹⁴⁹ When in spite of this protest in 1921, the Congress leadership in Bengal did not prevent the fund-raising processions of prostitutes in 1922,¹⁵⁰ the growing autonomy of institutional politics relative to a declining consensus in the *samaj* became clear. So, even while cultural nationalism continued to be invoked in writings on domesticity,¹⁵¹ the need was also felt to separate the domestic from the nation as mass politics was tending to define it - a nation that was going beyond the control of the moral idiom of middle-class domesticity.

The impulse to thus draw a line distinguishing nationalist politics from the household, was no less induced by an anxiety to counter the disturbing development that youths within the class were enthused by the social transgressions in the political sphere; this enthusiasm alerted the ordering instincts of patriarchy. About the participation of prostitutes, for instance, so particularly disturbing for patriarchy, the voice of youth could be disconcerting. Many youths were deeply moved by the prostitutes' participation in Non-Cooperation.¹⁵² Indeed, as noted previously, many youths were inspired by the entry of the lower orders as such into the national mainstream. Chapter Two has shown how during the 1920s and 30s a section of young authors produced a romantic critique of the hegemonic tone of the upper-

¹⁴⁶ Bandyopadhyay, 'The "Fallen"', pp. 18-21.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* For Gandhi's attitude, see Madhu Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women', *EPW*, 20:40, 5 October 1985, p. 1693.

¹⁴⁸ Bandyopadhyay, 'The "Fallen"', pp. 18-21.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ E.g., Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, 'Amader Samajik "Pragati"', *Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1345 BE, pp. 123-32; Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye*, pp. 6-7, 15-16, 124-25.

¹⁵² E.g., Sen, *Sediner Katha*, p. 27; Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay, *Tari Theke Tir: Paribesh, Pratyakkha o Pratyayer Britannia*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 84.

caste, middle-class domestic morality regarding the life of the lower orders and marginal people. This dramatic entry of lower-class life and domesticity into mainstream literature shocked class susceptibilities for an exclusive moral definition of domesticity. It is true that a handful of intellectuals like Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay criticised the young authors' sentimentalisation of poverty or romanticisation of lower-class sex-life in the interest of more mature literary articulation. But, when Sajanikanta Das, in his *Shanibarar Chithi*, ridiculed the effort of the 'rebel poets of today' to 'represent' the 'anguish of the masses', he represented a pervasive voice of resentment at the first significant appearance of lower-class domestic and sex-life in serious middle-class fiction.¹⁵³

This brings us to the more immediate and palpable problem that patriarchy faced in relation to the emergence of mass politics; the latter directly threatened the authority and hierarchy in the middle-class household itself. For middle-class patriarchy, this assertion of the lower orders came tangled with the assertion of 'revolt' of young men and women within the class, as has been noted in Chapter Two. Many nationalists of the older generation, who were uncomfortable about the assertion of political agency by peasants and workers, also saw it as somehow encouraging young middle-class men and women to question the authority within middle-class families.¹⁵⁴ The more detached and intellectual observation of Dhurjatiprasad also saw a relation between the two developments when he wrote in the late 1920s, 'workers, servants, wives, sons, daughters, peasants are rising against oppression, mobilising, organising strikes...'¹⁵⁵ And in the 'revolting' voice of youth itself, as noted in Chapter Two, there was a strong strain of romanticism, deriving inspiration for its own struggle against patriarchy from the political assertion of the masses. It is not surprising, therefore, that disciplinarian voices like Nrupendrakumar's constructed the sphere of active politics as a domain of promiscuity and disorder.

While domestic order thus tended to demarcate its own domain in distinction to nationalist politics, the extension of the domestic idiom to order the *samaj* also became problematic. The confidence in an idealised and uninterrupted blending of the household with the *samaj* does not seem to have been rudely shaken in the period before the First World War. A relatively undifferentiated lifestyle seems to have fairly sustained the credibility of the

¹⁵³ Editorial, *Shanibarar Chithi*, quoted in Sajanikanta Das, *Atmasmrti*, Calcutta, 1384 BE, p. 120. Though the trend manifested itself incipiently in Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's writings, the direct entry of the lower classes and marginal people into mainstream literature really began with Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Premendra Mitra and Manish Ghatak of the *Kallol-Kalikalam* circles.

¹⁵⁴ Charuchandra Mitra, *Nari: Pashchatya Samaje o Hindu Samaje*, Calcutta, 1344 BE, Introduction.

¹⁵⁵ Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Samajdharma o Sahitya' (1928), *Chintayasi*, in Dhurjatiprasad Rachanabali, vol. 2, p. 67.

ideal. During the period after the First World War the assuring feeling of a moral consensus seemed to recede. Two developments seemed to weaken this consensus, separating the discretion of the individual household from the consensus of the *samaj*. One was an emerging plurality of views about appropriate life-styles. The other was the emergence of opinions that prioritised the specific needs of the individual household - views that came into conflict with the moral discourses upholding the earlier consensus.

It might seem that the ideal of moral consensus in the *samaj* was regarded from the time of the crystallisation of the neo-Brahmanic ideology as unrealisable even by the early proponents of the ideology. In 1882, in one of his didactic essays on the family, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay stated that material greed and jealousy were weakening the harmony of the *samaj* and factionalism was increasing. In the city, he stated, even the 'truncated unity' that factionalism could enforce was absent, as the ambience there was not conducive to the very existence of *samaj*. But the anxious tone of these observations was modified by a more optimistic one, when Bhudeb simultaneously suggested how harmony might be maintained; he was hopeful that if these suggestions were followed harmony could indeed be ensured in many cases.¹⁵⁶ To understand the shift of the moral discourse on the relation between the household and the *samaj* from the early nationalist idealisation, one can consider the changing expectations of the residents of Calcutta from their middle-class neighbourhoods.

Bikash Bhattacharya, born in 1940 and brought up in North Calcutta, writes that, 'The whole of North Calcutta was like an extended family'.¹⁵⁷ This perception, however, might not exactly represent the residents' perception of neighbourhood community ties in the 1930s and 40s. Bhattacharya's representation of North Calcutta is probably partly a retrospective romanticisation constructed in contrast to his characterisation of South Calcutta - which he admittedly abhorred - as 'individualistic'. The obvious exaggerations of his account of the latter alerts us to the element of construction regarding the former. The contemporary perception of the neighbourhood community in North Calcutta during the 1930s and 40s was probably actually of a twilight zone, where alongside strong residues of the 'traditional' linkages the confidence of households in a harmonious community was, nevertheless, declining.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Mukhopadhyay, 'Daladali', pp. 241, 244.

¹⁵⁷ Bikash Bhattacharya, 'Sahar Kalkatar "Uttar" Puran', *Anandabajar Patrika*, 4 September 1994, p. 9 of Special Supplement.

¹⁵⁸ This discussion of the transformation of relation between the household and the neighbourhood concentrates on North Calcutta and Bhawanipur, as the Bengali neighbourhoods of South Calcutta only started developing from the late 1920s.

An article in 1922 expressed frustration that the residents were not taking the lead in quelling the 'sudden escalation' of the 'goonda menace' in North Calcutta neighbourhoods. What is important here is that the author had actually hoped to find such initiative.¹⁵⁹ But in 1942, amidst acute, war-time food scarcity, a letter to the editor of a newspaper called upon students and other voluntary organisations working in the city to assist in the work of food distribution in the Calcutta neighbourhoods.¹⁶⁰ It is significant that its author did not even express any expectation that the people of the neighbourhood would volunteer. This may be considered in relation to a contemporary official report about war-time, voluntary Wards Civil Supplies Committees, composed of local residents, to help the distribution of civil supplies to households in need. This report covered a number of neighbourhoods from North Calcutta, Bhawanipur and Ballygunj and based itself on interviews with 925 people including teachers, contractors, clerks, unemployed and hawkers. The majority replied that they were totally dissatisfied with the working of these Committees and had hardly seen their members.¹⁶¹ In 1941-42 the apprehension of Japanese bombing had prompted a considerable number of middle-class families of Calcutta to quit the city leaving their houses locked and empty. Voluntary House Protection Fire Parties, composed of residents of the respective neighbourhoods and formed in early 1942 at the behest of the government, could not be persuaded to assume responsibility for the vacant houses.¹⁶²

Increasingly from after the First World War, the moral consensus about domestic life-style projected by the huge body of neo-Brahmanic literature was swamped by a plurality of views justifying life-styles that were openly divergent. Up to the 1910s, it was the life-style of the 'Westernised' that had been identified as diverging from the ideal life-style of the Hindu; the ideology had confidently branded it as deviant. One of the signs of the decline of the neo-Brahmanic ideology from the 1920s was its failing ability to marginalise the emerging plurality of life-styles. As noted in Chapter Five, the composition of the class itself was undergoing change with the entry of lower castes and skilled labour, with their different life-styles, into its fold. While contemporaries recalled that thanks to war-time business a section of the class 'had become rich overnight',¹⁶³ another section of the class was seen as sinking into menial jobs under the pressure of the economic crisis created by the war.¹⁶⁴ This growing stratification and diversification within the class constricted the material base that could

¹⁵⁹ (Anon), 'Kalkata Sahare Gundar Atyachar', p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ Taracharan Banerjee, Letter to the Editor, *ABP*, 27 December 1942, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Bengal, Home Political, 163/45 of 1945, WBSA.

¹⁶² Bengal, Home Political, W-23/42 of 1942, WBSA. These parties were formed to combat fire in the event of bombing.

¹⁶³ Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Natun o Puratan', *Parichay*, Poush, 1345 BE, p. 502.

¹⁶⁴ Ghosh, 'Nababaucharit', *Nabababucharit*, p. 21.

sustain the relatively undifferentiated lifestyle among the non-'Westernised' Hindu middle class. Again, as Dhurjatiprasad's penetrating social observation in *Amra o Tnahara* shows, intellectuals started looking upon themselves as distinctive from the rest of the middle class and were looked upon as a class within the class.¹⁶⁵ The contemporary critical acknowledgement that his book realistically identified an alienation between intellectuals and the rest of the ordinary middle class, indicates the representativeness of what Dhurjatiprasad perceived.¹⁶⁶ The autobiographies of intellectuals who were young in the inter-war period, indicate that their respective affiliation with intellectual circles diluted their attachment to the more primordial linkages of the kin and neighbourhood and the moral consensus that went with such linkages. In contrast to the recollections about their childhood and adolescence, those about their life from college and university onwards were characterised by an ontological identification with intellectual and/or academic circles, and not so much with the neighbourhood and relatives.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, some inhabitants of this intellectual universe looked down upon the community gatherings in *baithakkhanas* as preoccupied with demeaning gossip; they hailed the *adda* (informal gathering where participants discuss an indefinite range of topics) of intellectuals and the literati as a world where 'there was no pettiness but pure joy and creative inspiration generated by the august company of the learned and the talented'.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the emerging plurality of openly professed lifestyles during the 1920s was registered even by the Census authorities. It prompted them to conduct in 1931 an elaborate questionnaire among the Bengali Hindu middle class on issues of domestic and community morality, on which there had been a strong Brahmanical consensus up to the 1910s. The answers received reflected not only a 'very great change' in 'public opinion' on these subjects but various shades of 'latitudinarian' opinion. While some respondents returned themselves as orthodox and some others as unorthodox by Brahmanical social morality, many more returned themselves as neither and openly justified various shades of intermediate moral postures.¹⁶⁹ The census also noted the general impression that middle-class immigrants who had recently moved to the city, were less committed to the 'orthodox' morality than families who had been settled in Calcutta for generations.¹⁷⁰ The 'orthodox' morality was observed to

¹⁶⁵ Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, *Amra o Tnahara* (1931), in *Dhurjatiprasad Rachanabali*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 3-160.

¹⁶⁶ For some 1930s reviews of *Amra o Tnahara*, see *Dhurjatiprasad Rachanabali*, vol. 2, pp. 399-405.

¹⁶⁷ E.g., Sen, *Babu Brttanta*; Sukumar Sen, *Diner Pare Din Je Gelo*, 2 vols., Calcutta, 1982 and 1393 BE respectively; Pratulchandra Gupta, *Dinguli Mor*, Calcutta, 1985.

¹⁶⁸ Sudhirschandra Sarkar, *Amar Kal Amar Desh*, Calcutta, 1375 BE, p. 103.

¹⁶⁹ *Census of India*, vol. V, pp. 396-402, 414-20.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

have lost the confident authority with which it had so long marginalised the 'Europe-returned' and branded their life-style as deviant.¹⁷¹

The Second World War further constricted the room for the ideal of an unbroken extension of domesticity to define the *samaj*. Contemporary minds clearly observed the differential impact of the Second World War on different sections of the middle class. The new dimension it added to the fracture of the ideally imagined community was the perception of upper-caste, middle-class elements themselves exploiting their 'brethren' - a perception pervasive in print and in the press during the war. A newspaper article in 1943 criticised the hypocritical effort to give the impression that the middle class was a community of co-sufferers in the war.¹⁷² It said that at the cost of college teachers and petty clerks, who had failed to take advantage of the black-market, the others - from traders to clerks in the Civil Supplies Department - thrived. In newspaper articles to war-time fictional literature, the shocked sensibility of the class itself noted that while a section of the middle class was being crushed under adversity, another was 'gloating' in the war-time boom of entertainment and prostitution; while inflation was seen as forcing lower middle-class girls into prostitution, the middle-class participants in the black market were seen as taking advantage of this predicament.¹⁷³ An editorial in *Jugantar* described 'the deep crisis' the urban middle-class household faced with inflation and scarcity; simultaneously it recognised how many a household, in its self-centred quest for survival, 'colluded with the black-market or captured other people's stocks by hook or by crook'.¹⁷⁴

As the space for *samajik* harmony shrank from the inter-war period onwards, there also emerged a perception of the individuality of the household as mediating the sway of the consensual discourse on domesticity. Before the 1920s the individual household's right to discrete choice and priorities had rarely asserted itself in an open conflict with consensual moral rhetoric. But from the latter half of the 1920s, even while the notion of a moral consensus in the *samaj* was being reiterated, a conspicuous voice of the individual household, unable to meet the expectations of that consensus, emerged. An interesting area of conflict between the consensual voice and that of the individual household was birth-control. In the 1920s and 30s the neo-Brahmanic voice discouraging any birth control, beyond the Shastric

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹⁷² Binay Ghosh, 'Madhyabitta', (first published in *Jugantar* c. 1943-44), *Nabababucharit*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* For fictional representation, see Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, pp. 160-61, 189-91, 217.

¹⁷⁴ *Jugantar*, 19 April 1944., p. 2.

prescription of periodic continence, was still strong.¹⁷⁵ But the perceived pressures of middle-class poverty were breaking the moral consensus along lines of household priorities.¹⁷⁶ Concern for the health of the nation also created rival opinions from the 1920s. While one set of opinions came to propagate the necessity of birth control in the view of a perceived problem of over-population confronting the future nation-state,¹⁷⁷ the other insisted on 'healthy procreation' without control over numbers. The second proved to be the more powerful because of the frenzied communal propaganda concerning a demographic race with the Muslims.¹⁷⁸ But, distinct from all these voices, the voice of discrete domestic choice openly raised its own moral justification on the ground of material incapacity of individual families.¹⁷⁹ Though there were attempts to dismiss it as a 'fashionable' pretext for shirking 'duty',¹⁸⁰ this voice could not be marginalised as deviant particularly from the 1930s. By then the importance of household priorities in the matter was accepted. Many authors recognised, albeit grudgingly, that on this matter it was possible for 'perfectly honest and sincere men' to hold contradictory opinions.¹⁸¹

The Rhetoric of the Welfare State

The emergence of an overpowering 'outside' within the idealised nation, and the weakening of confidence in the traditional bases of support, transformed middle-class domesticity's moral chemistry with the colonial state. It left the class no way but to involve the state in domestic matters, from which the pre-existing ideology had tried to avert the official gaze rather than attract it. As noted in Chapter One, the absence of social security had caused an apprehension even when the neo-Brahmanic ideology was formulated in the 1870s-80s. But the anxiety to avert official interference from the 'inner domain' had made the ideology frantically invoke the 'joint family' spirit, a minimum dependence on the market and moral safeguards against consumerism. However, as observed in Chapters Two and Five, the idealised shock-absorbers like the rural-ancestral support base and the 'joint family' were increasingly perceived as failing to rise to the occasion from the end of the First World War. Not unrelatedly, therefore,

¹⁷⁵ E.g., Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye*, p. 25; Letter of Charuchandra Mukhopadhyay to Khitindranath Thakur, reproduced at the back of Khitindranath Thakur, *Kalikatar Chalaphera: Sekale ar Ekale*, Calcutta, 1337 BE.

¹⁷⁶ E.g., Hrishikesh Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, Chandannagar, 1334 BE, pp. 136-45.

¹⁷⁷ E.g., Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, *Bangala o Bangali*, Calcutta, 1347 BE, Introduction, pp. iv-v.

¹⁷⁸ E.g., Praphullakumar Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu* (1940), Calcutta, 1963, p. 89.

¹⁷⁹ E.g., Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, pp. 144-5; Basu, *Janmashasan*, pp. 22-23,

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Sarkar, *Khaishnu Hindu*, p. 89.

¹⁸¹ E.g., *CMG*, 14 December 1935, p. 154.

from the late 1920s, but more significantly from the 1930s, segments of middle-class domesticity were slowly but surely opened up to official involvement. Anxious lest this unavoidable involving of the colonial state in every-day domesticity compromised the latter's autonomy in relation to the former, the class needed a countervailing rhetoric. It needed to be strong enough to curb the arbitrary exercise of state power, particularly in the contemporary atmosphere of massive state repression under the Defence of India Act. From the 1930s, therefore, the rhetoric of the welfare state was deployed to invert this position of helplessness into one of moral power in relation to the state. Unavoidable admission of vulnerability was sought to be inverted into a language of moral empowerment by claiming redress as a matter of right.

Up to the beginning of the 1920s, the attempt to invoke an idealised self-sufficiency of the 'inner domain' in relation to the colonial state continued, deploying the 'duty' of the *samaj* to cushion the indigent middle-class household. Of course, the other moral safeguard for this self-sufficiency - the condemnation of 'luxury' also continued.¹⁸² There were frequent appeals to the more affluent in the *samaj* to help the poorer 'brethren'.¹⁸³ Again in an article in 1920 in a popular Bengali periodical, the author enjoined domestic self-reliance in the education of women and the general welfare of the domestic field so that any government involvement would be automatically redundant. It emphasised an extension of the 'joint family' ideal of sustaining dependants and relatives into the community as the means to solving the problems facing the nation. The duty of the household to order the *samaj* in the neighbourhood was clear in the invocation to women to share equally 'the joys and the sorrows of neighbours and not express feigned sympathy'.¹⁸⁴ By the second half of the 1920s, however, the first significant voices calling for government attention to the internals of domesticity were to be heard. In the light of the discussion in Chapter Two and the second section of this chapter, it is not surprising that lower middle-class housing was one of the areas offered for government involvement. Of course, the voice was one of demand and not of supplication. Not only was it projected as a duty of the government to build houses for the lower middle class, writers sensitised readers to the discrepancy between the responsibility the government assumed in Britain and that it did in India: 'In Britain governments have been known to resign because of their failure to solve the problem of lower income housing.'¹⁸⁵ But more importantly, the relegation of responsibility to the government to plan and build houses

¹⁸² E.g., 'Alochana', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, pp. 585-86; *idem*, 'Palli Prasanga' *Grhastha*, Ashadh, 1323 BE, p. 767.

¹⁸³ E.g., Ramratan Chattopadhyay, 'Jibaner Khata', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, p. 627.

¹⁸⁴ Ray, 'Strishikkha', pp. 376-77.

¹⁸⁵ 'Alochana', 'Kalikata Sahar o Badibhada', p. 524.

for the middle class contradicted the dominant attitude of the non-‘Westernised’ middle class so far. It has been noted in Chapter Two how the ‘English style’ of ordering built space (which had no provision for an inner court-yard) had so long been looked upon with disfavour.¹⁸⁶

When, in the 1930s, authors like Hemendraprasad Ghosh strongly deployed the notion of the welfare state and blamed the government for the condition of the Bengali middle class, one of the most vulnerable areas of middle-class domesticity was unavoidably submitted to official reckoning - its problem of subsistence. Also, the ‘joint family’, which the neo-Brahmanic ideology had always projected as an ideal institution in the face of ‘civilising’ colonial discourse, now came up in ‘public’ discussions not in its moral confidence but in its practical vulnerability. What is very important to understand is that this unprecedentedly detailed disclosure of vulnerability of the domestic sphere came at a time of massive state repression. Therefore, when Hemendraprasad expressly used the rhetoric of the welfare state he chose to speak from a position of strength. Instead of looking inwards on the supposed vices of ‘selfishness’, ‘luxury’ and ‘indolence’ in the Bengali middle-class family, his critical focus was entirely on the state. Though his discussion of the subsistence crisis in the middle-class household started with premise that the joint family was no longer an effective support-base for the unemployed youth, he meant it as a practical statement; he did not go into a moral discourse condemning its ‘break-up’. This enabled him to shift the responsibility for the crisis to the government. He condemned the official strategy of not allotting funds for instruction in different industrial skills and allotting only 1 per cent of the budget to the department of industry as against 27 per cent to the police. Above all, he accused the state of taking advantage of the subjugated condition of Indian society and not initiating the necessary welfare functions. ‘In Europe and America the government maintain records of the unemployed but in our country it does not. The main reason is that those are independent nations and, therefore, the state there cannot allow the unemployed to die of starvation ... the government is bound to provide for their subsistence’.¹⁸⁷

Between 1941 and 1945, thanks to scarcity and galloping inflation, the vulnerability of the middle-class domesticity came through in print and in the press even more strongly; but, significantly, so did the demand for state responsibility.¹⁸⁸ But the war additionally exposed middle-class domesticity in terms different even from the discussions of 1930s. In the 1930s in essays concerning the welfare state the themes of domestic indigence and decline of ‘joint

¹⁸⁶ E.g., ‘Alochana’, ‘Prachya o Pashchatya Paribar’, *Grhastha*, Kartik, 1321 BE, p. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Ghosh, ‘Bangalar Annasamasya’, pp. 948-52.

¹⁸⁸ E.g., Jaminikanta Gupta, Letter to the Editor, *ABP*, 4 September 1943, p. 2.

family' cohesion were presented with some veneer of disembodiedness. But in the 1940s domestic distress came to be discussed in terms of actual households. The large-scale detention and externments (from Calcutta) under the Defence of India Rules were the special reason why time and again the discussion focused on the internal working of the Bengali middle-class household. In the Bengal Legislative Assembly the question of the maintenance of the families of detainees and security prisoners came up repeatedly with details about the number of members in the respective families and their material condition, attendant on the detention of the bread-winner.¹⁸⁹ In 1943 in a question regarding Priyaranjan Dasgupta, a security prisoner, the scrutiny of the family situation even brought up the details of the working of the joint family, of which the prisoner's immediate family was a part.¹⁹⁰ As in many other cases, the bargaining between the government and the opposition about family allowances laid the internal working of the family even more bare for the state to see. The government justified its refusal to pay family allowance in the given case on the ground that Priyaranjan's was a 'joint family'. An opposition member retaliated by raising the possibility that the prisoner's wife and children might actually be neglected by the family during Priyaranjan's absence.¹⁹¹ Inverting this naked exposure of substantive domestic situations into a premise of moral power, the opposition criticised the government for relying on the mechanism of the extended family and not making 'enquiries as to how the members [of the prisoner's family] are maintaining themselves'.¹⁹²

Such inversion of vulnerability into moral power was more forceful in a speech by Hemaprabha Majumdar in the Assembly. It directly used the voice of the housewife. With great emotion, Hemaprabha invoked the depleted pantry and the scarcity-hit kitchen of the lower middle-class household to demand that the state guarantee subsistence. 'Thousands of mothers of Bengal, with empty pots on the kitchen-fire and anxiously watching the faces of their hungry children, are waiting', she demanded in asking the ministers to solve the war-time subsistence crisis. She warned that if the state failed, no power would be able to resist 'the massive upsurge that the rise of *matrshakti* [the power of motherhood] would trigger'.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *BLAP*, vol. LVI, no. 1, 1940, p.351-52.

¹⁹⁰ *BLAP*, vol. LXIV, no. 2, 1943, p. 111.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *BLAP*, vol., LVI, no. 1, 1940, p. 352.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has tried to highlight that the period of the 1920s to 40s produced a split between the vulnerable discrete household and the new 'outside'. This fostered, from the perspective of the household, a moral perception of three spheres in place of the projected binary division between the colonial sphere and that of domesticity extended into the nation. Domesticity was still constantly sought to be inscribed with the abstract evocation of the nation. Yet, the growing tendency of the ordinary middle-class household to morally close in on the household dimension of the family was also undeniable. This relative 'privatisation' of the family-household - not the nuclear family, though - was also related to a transformation from the 1930s in the architectural and habitational organisation of household space in relation to the neighbourhood. Unlike the older organisation, the dividing line of the new type of houses with the 'outside' was not a fuzzy zone where the neighbourhood flowed into the men's quarters. Indeed, with gender segregation noticeably declining in the household organisation of space, the front door now more clearly signified a closure to any spilling in of the 'outside' into the house. This new signification of the front door was adopted as a free choice in the case of the small number of affluent and Westernised upper middle class. But in the case of the vast majority of the ordinary middle class it seems to have been imposed by the smallness of plots and/or the anonymity of the new neighbourhoods.¹⁹⁴ The consequence, however, was the same; the built space was now organised on the basis of the 'privatising' role of the front door in relation to the neighbourhood.

All this, seemingly, brought the usage of the 'private' and the 'public' somewhat closer to the Western notion of divided spheres. However a close look reveals the difference with the West. Because the split in the given context was more pressured than anything else, the line of separation often got smudged; but, more importantly, the terms of separation themselves were drawn largely from the lingering components of the neo-Brahmanic ideology itself. The pressured nature of the split is proved by the 'absence of autobiographies in the confessional mode', even during the 1930s-40s.¹⁹⁵ The endless interiorisation that marked the Western divide between the private and the public, did not characterise the Bengali milieu. It is significant that Rabindranath's use of interior monologue in *Chaturanga* was not followed by novelists writing during the 1920s-1940s period, with the exception of Dhurjatiprasad

¹⁹⁴ From the late 1920s, with the established neighbourhoods of North Calcutta and old Bhawanipur over-built, new neighbourhoods mainly housing recent immigrants (previously strangers to one another), sprang up in the Ballygunj area of South Calcutta.

¹⁹⁵ Chakrabarty, 'Who Speaks', p. 10.

Mukhopadhyay and partly Gopal Halder.¹⁹⁶ Also, as the discussion in Chapter Five will try to show, the bourgeois nuclear family, on which the Western notion of the public depended for its conceptualisation, never came to supplant the 'joint family' as an ideal in Bengal.

The appeal of domesticity and the community (whatever it might be configured as) imagined in continuum lingered, reflecting even in the early organisation of the Communist Party where the ideal of the extended family and the related ideal of sublimation of *swartha* was heavily deployed. Reminiscing about the party organisation of the early 1940s, Amiya Mukhopadhyay sounded nostalgic (with an implied sub-text that the present-day party organisation had become impersonal): 'That mode [of organisation] was never to be experienced again. It was as if the whole party was an extended family'.¹⁹⁷ Another party worker reminisced how this familial atmosphere was sustained by designating senior members as uncles, aunts, even mothers. He recalls with nostalgia, 'In 1943 the "mother" of the party was honoured at the Party Congress. That was a different spirit; the very memory overwhelms us even today.'¹⁹⁸

Using two articles published in 1935 and 1942 respectively as entry-points, one can highlight the complexity of the resultant relation between the 'private' and the 'public'. The author of the first represents a voice that upheld a clear distinction between the *andar-mahali* (befitting the inner quarters of the house) behaviour on the one hand and the behaviour suitable for meetings and public transport on the other. 'The crux of the life in society is to recognise that there is a fundamental distinction between the "me" in the meeting and "me" outside it ... When we board trams buses and trains ... we always behave in the same manner as the "me" of the *andar-mahal*.' He was critical that in Bengal in the Congress, the Corporation and the University the 'familial' mode of imposing consensus continued. This article of course has the sub-text that many people still did not make the distinction that the author enjoined. But more important here is that the moral world of the author had become sensitive to the necessity of a split between these two worlds. This is a transformation from the dominant mentality of the late 19th and early 20th centuries of subsuming the world of associations within the bond of the domestic morality. This gives us an indication as to how the perception of those who consciously broke with the use of the domestic idiom in the domain of meetings and public associations, recognised the autonomy of that domain relative to the domestic. But the difference with the Western perception becomes clear in the author's

¹⁹⁶ Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima: Bangla Upanyaser Shat Bachhar, 1923-1982*, Calcutta, 1991, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Reminiscences of Amiya Mukherjee, quoted in Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish: Asamapta Biplob*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 20.

¹⁹⁸ Gobinda Kanrar, *Communistder Sekal o Ekal*, quoted in Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, p. 21.

moral prescription as to how the ideal split might be effected. He advised for the public sphere a sublimation of individuality with the help of a *samajik* spirit of co-operation. As the model of this 'samajik interdependence', he upheld the village community and a caste-based division of labour. He significantly regarded the urban milieu as devoid of *samaj*. He wrote, 'If the Bengalis have to re-establish the sense of the *samajik* in their lives they would have to revert to a 'mutual dependence for subsistence'. And he had already used this concept of mutual dependence with regard to the 'caste-based system of mutual subsistence' which he claimed had disintegrated because of colonial rule.¹⁹⁹

Binay Ghosh's article revealed another dimension of the genesis of the split. It had a subtle language of class as well as a sense of a colonial middle-class predicament. The article presented an imagined character as fairly representative of the Second World War period. He was a clerk who was making 'ready cash' out of a war-time assignment and was putting on the air of an officer in public transport. The author described his discomfiture and exasperation when he met, in a tram, an uncle from the ancestral village, who started discussing domestic details. By presenting the uncle as a rustic, the author indicated that 'privatising' the household, in conversation in the 'outside', had become common among the urban middle class. He made the uncle garrulous and the contents of his speech unabashedly intimate to indicate that the urban sensitivity of the author and the reader had some reason to sympathise with the nephew. Therefore, in so far as the reader was to sit in judgement on this nephew, they were not expected by the author to critique the accustomed degree of 'privatisation'. Rather, they were to identify the nephew's over-sensitivity in the matter and link it to his new-found wartime opulence. At another level, the projection of the uncle carried the suggestion that he was not a prisoner of affectation.²⁰⁰ The author's tone indicated a sense of loss on behalf of an urban middle class who were also perceived as prisoners of the split (between the domestic sphere and the new 'outside'), which prevented them from appreciating the uncle's simplicity.

¹⁹⁹ Nirmalkumar Basu, 'Bangalir Charitra', *Prabasi*, Ashadh, 1342 BE, pp. 418-20.

²⁰⁰ Ghosh, 'Pratidin', *Nababaucharit*, pp. 54-57.

Chapter 4

Ordering the Woman's Domain

Introduction

One of the major concerns of the neo-Brahmanic ideology was to reorder gender relations in domesticity on the basis of principles consistent with the self-image of the Bengali Hindu middle-class nation. Recent scholarship on the nation and on gender has studied the late 19th-century nationalist representation of womanhood as the core of a discursive interiorisation of the 'essential' aspects of his existence by the colonised male.¹ This idea of interiorisation can be accepted as the wider context for a specific study of the neo-Brahmanic disciplining of the women's domain. Tanika Sarkar seems to offer a nuanced and gender-sensitive reading of this interiorisation. Perceiving a fundamental and all-encompassing loss of his self-hood in the colonial sphere, the middle-class male regarded the women's domain as a sphere unpolluted by foreign rule.² The obsessive preoccupation in nationalist literature with *satitva* (female chastity) was a consequence of this male essentialisation of the woman's body as the ultimate, unviolated inner space.³ But this compensatory project also involved a surrender of the wife to the Hindu male - a surrender glorified as willing. Highlighting the rhetoric of the Age of Consent agitation (referred to in Chapter One), Sarkar has brought out the latent force concealed in the myth of the willing surrender of the wife. This has been an effective interrogation of Partha Chatterjee's elision of patriarchal coercion and exploitation in the nationalist project of 'recasting' women.⁴

But he deny that?

Feminist deconstruction of the valorisation of womanhood and glorification of the mother has also shed light on the ideal woman in domesticity. The icons of the heroic woman and of the *shakti* (the female principle; the divine mother also equated with the motherland) were repeatedly invoked to compensate for the middle-class male's sense of inadequacy and feeling of powerlessness in relation to the colonial masters.⁵ But this layer of nationalist myth

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 116-57; Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *EPW*, 22:47, 21 November 1987, pp. 2011-15.

² Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography', p. 2014.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric Against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child-Wife', *EPW*, 28:36, 4 September 1993, pp. 1869-78; Chatterjee, *The Nation*, pp. 116-57.

⁵ Jasodhara Bagchi, 'Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal', *EPW*, 25:42-43, 20-27 October 1990, pp. WS 66-WS 69; Indira Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and

of heroic womanhood and powerful motherhood coexisted with the other layer where the power was sought to be toned down with the deployment of domesticating notions of tenderness and of self-denying service to the husband and the extended family.⁶ Valorisation of the *sahadharmini* (wife as an aide in the observance of the *dharma* of the householder) of the ancient past as an active resister to foreign rule was adapted at another level to suit nationalism's idealisation of the wife. So, the *sahadharmini* idealised for the present was the *patibrata* (one whose existence and duties are geared to the prime mission of serving the husband), the *sati-saddhvi* (an idealised womanhood that conflated chastity with an uncompromised devotion to the husband), 'energising the husband for the goal of regenerating the motherland', procreating heroic sons and nurturing the ideal family for the nation.⁷ As Jasodhara Bagchi has pointed out, this apparent empowering of women in nationalist ideology ultimately reinforced a social philosophy of deprivation of women who were expected to sacrifice everything for their menfolk and believe that the only justification for their existence lay in producing heroic sons.⁸

While engaging with male-determined domestic morality as a function of order, it is necessary, however, to further develop the existing feminist analysis of the nationalist inscription of the 'woman question'. Therefore, in dialectical complementarity to existing studies of the nationalist essentialisation of womanhood, the present discussion will highlight the agency of middle-class domesticity in the control and disciplining of the woman's domain. Bengali Hindu middle-class domesticity itself was a relation of power with its specific patriarchal structure and household-level anxieties about controlling women's agency and sexuality. Therefore, the practical problem of sustaining that power at the level of the lived experience of domesticity had as important a formative role in nationalist discourse as the abstract processes of myth-making and identity-formation. It has to be understood historically that the neo-Brahmanic discourse had to formulate its language of patriarchy in a way compatible with the pre-existing patriarchal structure of Bengali Hindu domesticity. The neo-Brahmanic definition of the ideal housewife, for all its 'newness', only reconstituted the existing language of control without disturbing the requirements of the extended family structure.

Cultural Identity: the Making of a Hindu Discourse, Bengal 1867-1905', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1993, pp. 141-52, 170-77.

⁶ Bagchi, 'Representing', pp. WS 70-WS 71.

⁷ Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, New Jersey, 1990, pp. 52-53; Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 152-64.

⁸ Bagchi, 'Representing', pp. WS 65, WS 70.

The importance of the household-kin dimension of patriarchy in determining the national voice may be illustrated by the powerful neo-Brahmanic rhetoric against the Age of Consent Bill (1891), which proposed to raise the female age of consent from 10 to 12. Recent feminist scholarship has pertinently pointed out that the agitation was a political assertion of masculinity by the agitating Bengali Hindu middle-class males. Essentialised as effeminate by colonial constructions, the middle-class male asserted his masculinity in a nationalist statement of autonomy centring around the site of Hindu marriage.⁹ Also, while the males, in general, keenly felt a loss of autonomy in the work-place, nationalists were disillusioned with 'the public sphere as an arena for the test of manhood'.¹⁰ Conjugality, therefore, was chosen as a major sphere of assertion of manly autonomy in relation to the colonial state.¹¹ What is overlooked, however, is that the neo-Brahmanic discourse on the Age of Consent controversy also had another obvious dimension, albeit at the more immediate level of substantive patriarchal stakes in the organisation of the family. Given the dominant structure of patriarchy as an extended family, the 'necessity' of early domestication of the bride was elaborately and pervasively voiced by the agitators against the Bill; the non-affinal woman of recent domicile was portrayed as potentially capable of instigating her husband to break out of the extended family.¹² The flood of didactic literature in the period sought to subordinate the bride not only to the husband but also to her parents-in-law and her other senior in-laws with equal rigidity; she should selflessly serve all of them.¹³ Chandranath Basu, a prominent ideologue of the agitation and spokesman of the neo-Brahmanic ideology as such, revealed the stake of neo-Brahmanic disciplining in pre-pubertal marriage of women. Rationalising the 'selfless duty' of the bride to the groom's patrilocal family, consisting of 'her husband's father, mother, uncles, brothers, sisters, maternal aunt, paternal aunt, and so on', he wrote:

one who becomes related to so many [people], ... one who also has to live up to other relationships [than the conjugal] ... must painstakingly learn many duties for the sake of the everyday life process of the family. This learning process is impossible for a woman to master unless she enters the husband's household at a very early age. For a girl who enters the husband's family at a mature age, lack of such a training gives free rein to her sexuality; she is so strongly attracted towards the husband that she fails to perform her familial duties towards the others.¹⁴

⁹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester, 1995, pp. 138-80.

¹⁰ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', pp. 1870-77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² E.g., Saradaprasad Hajrachaudhuri, *Sangsardharma o Bishaykarma*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1313 BE, p. 12.

¹³ E.g., *ibid.*; Anandachandra Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya* (1295 BE), Calcutta, 7th edn, 1335 BE, pp. 119-38.

¹⁴ Chandranath Basu, *Hindutva: Hindur Prakrta Itihas*, Calcutta, 1892, pp. 209-10.

The anxiety to preserve this structure of patriarchy was also reflected in the hierarchy of domination that was envisaged for the bride. Primarily, she was to be subordinated to the husband; 'to merge the wife's being with his, the husband should mould the wife', controlling her 'body, mind and spirit'.¹⁵ But at the same time, authors like Chandranath were anxious lest conjugal attachment individualised the conjugal unit. Neo-Brahmanic patriarchal morality was, therefore, particularly anxious not to concede the groom a right to choose his wife; he was expected to rely entirely on the choice of parents or elders.¹⁶ The Age of Consent agitation involved, as has been pointed out by Tanika Sarkar, the question of female chastity. Sarkar situates this involvement with chastity at the abstract and ideational core of a nationalist project of interiorising the autonomy of the colonised male. But for the anti-Consent ideologues chastity was also a moral mechanism for disciplining female sexuality at the substantive level of domesticity; pre-pubertal marriage of females was deemed by neo-Brahmanic patriarchy to be an essential pre-condition for such disciplinarian containment. Numerous didactic tracts and essays insisted that it was vital to have women married before they reached the stage of sexual arousal.¹⁷

Another respect in which the specific structure of patriarchy determined the nationalist structuring of the woman's domain was the continuation of the pre-existing patriarchal practice of preserving order in the *andar* through a partial empowerment of elderly women. At the abstract level of nationalist myth-making, it was relatively easy to deploy the icons of willingly submissive womanhood. But where the nation was confronted with the practical problem of controlling woman's agency in the lived world of the household, the dominant ideology found the situation much more problematic. Indeed, didactic literature was marked by a multi-layered discursive manoeuvring which sought to accommodate the mature mother and the 'new woman' in the same nationalist project of an ideal domesticity.

A look at the nationalist 'recasting' of women from the vantage point of the agency of domesticity also saves one from confounding the dominant discourse - the neo-Brahmanic - with the 'reformed'-Hindu discourse (quite clearly in the minority). Scanning didactic tracts exclusively for nationalist essentialisation of domesticity, manhood and womanhood, Tanika Sarkar casually generalises, on the basis of Brahmo tracts, and claims that the 19th-century didactic literature on domesticity, in contrast to *Manusmriti*, related 'not so much to strategies of control as to unprecedented possibilities in the conditions of the woman's

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 384, 386.

¹⁷ E.g., Hajrachaudhuri, *Sangsardharma*, p. 12.

existence'.¹⁸ The dominant discourse - neo-Brahmanic - with its overwhelming presence in late 19th- and early 20th-century tracts, does not bear out this conclusion. Sarkar's observation is appropriate enough where the 'reformed' Hindu writings are concerned. But the neo-Brahmanic was a moral world heavily deriving its language of control from Manu. In questioning this flattening out of differences between the two discursive worlds, it is not, however, implied that there were no overlaps or similarities between the two.¹⁹ Most strikingly, perhaps, there were common gender icons like the *sati-saddhvi* or the *patibrata*. This similarity highlights how similar gender concerns could underlie otherwise differing discourses. Yet, gender icons and essentialisations are not the only means by which patriarchal formations perpetuate themselves. Even conceding the presence of gender in all non-feminist discourses, one still needs to address the equally relevant question of the extent of patriarchal control when comparing the full intention of different discourses.²⁰ For the accuracy of relative evaluation, it has to be realised that the 'reformed' discourses - Brahmo or otherwise - were not as narrowly focused on procreation and child-rearing in their justification of womanhood. Though procreation and motherhood were no less central to the 'reformed' discourses on women, a space, however limited, was, nevertheless, opened up for other justifications to develop along trajectories of higher education and companionate marriage.²¹ The relative range of possibilities in the two strands of discourse becomes clear from difference in the representation of the *sahadharmini* in the two.²² Unlike in the reformed, particularly the Brahmo discourse (mainly of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj variety), the neo-Brahmanic moral representation of the *sahadharmini* did not involve the companionate ideal; in the latter the *sahadharmini* was the scripturally ordained aide in the performance of the ritual and functional duties of the householder. This neo-Brahmanic version of the *sahadharmini* was also sought to be 'recast', but the emphasis was more on the enhancement of her functional role with the addition of such Victorian notions as hygiene and punctuality. Equipping her for an ideal intellectual compatibility with the husband was clearly not the intention in the neo-Brahmanic tracts in which womanhood was sought to be rigidly restricted

¹⁸ See Tanika Sarkar, 'Hindu Conjugalities and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.), *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Hyderabad, 1995, pp. 98-115.

¹⁹ This point has been discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter One.

²⁰ The word possibilities is not used here in any positivist or teleological sense. It signifies relatively less structured or less hegemonised areas - either inadvertently or grudgingly or sometimes patronisingly created - within particular discursive formations of power/knowledge.

²¹ For the enthusiasm among the members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj about women's formal, higher education (without any gender discrimination in the basic curriculum) and the overwhelming opposition to it among the vast majority of the Bengali Hindus, see Kathinka R. Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves and the Girls: Girlhood in Calcutta under the Raj*, Amsterdam, 1995, pp. 117-19, 128.

²² For the companionate version of the *sahadharmini*, see Chowdhury Sengupta, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity', pp. 154-62.

to the procreative rationale of Shastric womanhood. Again, in distinction to the 'reformed' discourse, the neo-Brahmanic discourse overtly characterised women as *kamini*.

However, the neo-Brahmanic interpretation of womanhood started declining with other components of the ideology from the late 1920s. During the 1920s and early 30s, the neo-Brahmanic language of patriarchal domination was still being reiterated in one section of print. But within the social base of its production, more accommodating moral postures simultaneously emerged, if only to keep women's subordination alive by supplying it with alternative ideological justification in the face of increasing interrogation of the established rhetoric. It is interesting that the specific structure of patriarchy had an important role in inducing the decline of the neo-Brahmanic language of women's subordination. The subjection of youth to patriarchy determined why the young males of the period of the 1920s to 40s in their 'questioning' of neo-Brahmanic morality, also often spoke on behalf of women, visualising the latter as co-sufferers. Of course, the young males of this period, in their turn, essentialised women and envisaged the control of female sexuality in their own ways. But, it is equally true that because of this generational mediation, the Shastric and narrowly procreational rationale of womanhood was considerably diluted in the male-determined projects of control of the woman's domain.

'Natural' Faculties and Division of Knowledge

It is important that the neo-Brahmanic legitimisation of male domination did not, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, require a rationale of a division of labour-space between men and women. The non-'reformed' Bengali Hindu middle-class household, it should be borne in mind, had a pre-existing practice of gendered spatial segregation within the home. This, along with the pre-pubertal marriage of women, precluded the possibility of women staking their claim to the sphere outside the home. It will be argued here that the 'superiority' of and domination by the male in the household was justified with the help of a division not so much of spheres as of knowledge - a hierarchical and gendered notion of knowledge within domesticity. This division of knowledge thrived on the myth of the functionally knowledgeable but metaphysically ignorant and intellectually weak female; the constructed handicap of female intellectual incapacity was paradoxically glorified as 'natural'.

This division of knowledge, consistent with 'natural' faculties and 'tradition', was largely constructed in response to a dilemma. On the one hand, there was the perceived imperative to recast women for the ideal domesticity that the nation needed. On the other,

there were competing views on women's education. The non-Brahmo, non-'Westernised' Hindu middle class wanted women's education to consist of a wide repertoire of functional knowledge 'useful' for domesticity. The need for a minimum of reading-writing skills was increasingly conceded, but the woman was to acquire these at home 'from the father, the brother or the husband'²³ or through pre-pubertal schooling at strictly 'orthodox' schools like Mahakali Pathshala.²⁴ Right up to the 1920s, neo-Brahmanic didactic writing argued in favour of 'protecting' women, the cherished site of cultural 'purity', from the established system of higher education that was allegedly denationalising the Bengali male.²⁵ But disturbingly for neo-Brahmanic patriarchy, there were other views (mainly coming from the members of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj) which insisted on formal, higher education for women.²⁶ In this situation, therefore, the twin concerns of preserving the existing patriarchy and creating the more 'equipped' housewife were met by the neo-Brahmanic ideological stance that the 'faculties' of the male entitled him to a world of knowledge different from the female. The male was said to possess the capacity for speculative metaphysical overview. This metaphysical knowledge, in its turn, was constructed as the ultimate knowledge in this world. The man, therefore, was the thinking person who had the right to authority within the family. The woman, 'devoid' of this metaphysical self-knowledge and world-view, was necessarily suited only for the functional roles of housewife and mother. *global / local knowledge*

The neo-Brahmanic ideology not only served the purpose of gendering knowledge and 'natural' faculties into an effective mechanism of control, but with its Vedic cosmology, also gave this specific hierarchy of gendered knowledge and faculty an air of profundity and predestination. Nagendranath Basu's encyclopaedia, *Bishwakosh*, extensively quoted by neo-Brahmanic tracts, may be cited as representing the neo-Brahmanic world-view. Nagendranath presents Hindu cosmology as one in which the perspective on the mortal world centred round salvation in the male line. The role of the woman was functional; she was to produce the son indispensable for the salvation of her husband and his ancestors and ensure the earthly well-being of the family. She did not have much significance apart from that.²⁷ In the matter of salvation, to which the empowering project of Brahmanical knowledge was related, the woman had no ability to help herself. In order to lay her sexuality and power of procreation at

²³ E.g., Kalipada Bandyopadhyay, 'Samaj Prasanga', *Grhastha*, Baishakh-Ashadh, 1324 BE, pp. 634-35.

²⁴ For the curricular details of Mahakali Pathshala and a discussion of the non-'reformed' Hindu attitude to women's education see Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, pp. 85-91; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 50-51.

²⁵ E.g., Bandyopadhyay, 'Samaj Prasanga', p. 637.

²⁶ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, pp. 117-19, 157.

²⁷ Nagendranath Basu, *Bishwakosh*, vol. 22, Calcutta, 1318 BE, pp. 234-42.

the disposal of the male, Brahmanical discourse had made her existence and even her salvation entirely dependent on that of her husband; her only *dharma*, therefore, was *patibratya* (devotion to the husband as the only means to salvation). The husband, of course, was her *param-guru* (supreme mentor).²⁸ The Brahmanical ideology thus sanctified and institutionalised the self-acquired instructing role of the male in a way that justified his complete control over the sexuality, existence and salvation of the wife. The myth of a binary division between the faculties of the head and the heart reinforced this division. A very representative statement in this period in the didactic literature on domesticity was that men, with their intellectual capacity, were superior to women, who were represented as rich in matters of the heart.²⁹ This severity of the intellectual faculty was then used to justify why the male should rule.³⁰

The authority of the male was situated in a subtle balance between his supervisory role on the one hand and his detachment from any 'demeaning' involvement in mundane domestic chores on the other. He could thus maintain the 'spirituality' of detachment that the Brahmanical ideology expected of the male. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, for example, stated in one of his essays on domesticity, that the husband was supposed to elevate domesticity with *jnana* (metaphysical knowledge), 'instruct the wife in household duties and fix the standard' for her.³¹ Clearly indicating his agreement with the construction of a gendered hierarchy of knowledge, Bhudeb pointed out that this supervision did not mean, however, that the male with his 'higher level of intelligence and lofty goals' should 'drag himself down to the petty trivialities [of domestic chores]'.³² Though he was anxious that the exalted perspective of the male should not impair his watchful supervision, his fear of any inversion of the hierarchy made him hastily add that rather than stoop to 'petty mundaneness', the male might risk some degree of inattention to domesticity.³³ This moral construction of the 'profound detachment' of the male from banal domestic details and the essentially mundane significance of women became deeply imprinted on Bengali mentality and came to determine the attitude to working women's role in the household. Shanu Lahiri was one of the first Bengali women to take up painting as a career in the late 1940s. She faced no patriarchal objection to her professional career in her married life; but the problem lay elsewhere. She felt that when she tried to find a

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-36.

²⁹ E.g., Manindramohan Bhattacharya, 'Narir Parichay', *Matrmandir*, Ashadh, 1330 BE, pp. 20-21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Surendranath Ray, *Narir Karmajog*, Calcutta, 1342 BE, p. 61.

³¹ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, 'Grhinipana', *Paribarik Prabandha* (1882), 11th edn, Chinsurah, n.d., p. 39; Chandranath Basu also advised the male to 'always keep an eye on the domestic role of women'. Chandranath Basu, *Garhasthya Path*, Calcutta, 1292 BE, p. 4.

³² Mukhopadhyay, 'Grhinipana', pp. 39-40.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

creative time and space for herself at home, in between hours of household chores, the people around her failed to realise the importance of that. She contrasted this attitude with what she perceived as the work pattern of her male fellow-artists. 'Nobody can dream of disturbing them at that time [when they are painting] ... even children quickly learn that the father is at work; one should now walk and talk softly. But what if the mother [is doing extra-domestic, creative work]? ... the servants of the household feel free to come into the room where she paints to ask her about oil, salt or chillies'.³⁴ However, the supervisory role assigned to the male in the late 19th-century discourses was equally crucial because nationalist redefinition of domesticity inscribed the women's world with Western notions of hygiene, cleanliness and discipline that the women in the *andar* were not accustomed to. Chandranath Basu complained that women's work in the *andar* was often undisciplined. He suggested, 'If one applies a little intelligence, domestic chores may be effectively performed. But that is not done. So men have the duty to advise and teach women to apply their mind to domestic work'.³⁵

Interestingly, many didactic tracts betray a sub-text that women often resisted their 'recasting' by the male-determined nationalist project. Indeed, this resistance seems to have had a role in determining the considerable height at which the construction of the superiority of male knowledge was pitched. The nationalist male project of the late 19th century was after all an attempt to hegemonise the women's field of knowledge, which had hitherto had a considerable autonomy due to *purdah*. Consequently, female protest at this inscription of their accustomed sphere of knowledge was not unexpected. Chandranath's *Garhasthya Path* has such a sub-text. The author wrote, in connection with his advice to keep cooked food covered, 'They [women] often reply, "What harm would just a few dust particles cause? ... We have always kept food uncovered. But who has ever fallen ill for that?"'³⁶ Women's attempt to preserve their relative autonomy, based on their accustomed fund of knowledge, also surfaces in a very different kind of text. In his far from didactic essay on the Hindu family in Bengal, Bulloram Mullick observed how the *grhini* would not depend on formal therapies but on her own knowledge of popular charms and talismans; she was quite insistent on her autonomy in this matter.³⁷ It is interesting to relate this account with a poem written in the 1930s when allopathy had clearly gained ascendancy among middle-class males in Calcutta. The poet Radharani Debi had embarked, under the pseudonym 'Aparajita', on a conscious project of

³⁴ Shanu Lahiri, 'Amar Anubhabe' in Nilima Chakrabarti (ed.), *Aj Ami*, Calcutta, 1987, pp. 137-38.

³⁵ Basu, *Garhasthya Path*, pp. 86-88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

³⁷ Bulloram Mullick, *The Hindu Family in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1882, p. 58.

trying to present various female voices directly.³⁸ Her poem tried to represent, among other things, elderly women as scoffing allopathy and recommending popular remedies. Whether the poet, with her own 'modern' educated sensibilities, was sub-consciously essentialising is not the question. What is important here is the authority and firmness of conviction that the poet ascribes to the voice of elderly females regarding their own knowledge:

Tie in a red *shalu*
Black sesame and fresh corn-cobs
Tie it round the arm
In an amulet.
The doctors know nothing.
Is it so easy to diagnose disease!³⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that there was so much anxiety, in many didactic texts of the late 19th century, to base the male's 'right' to advise on domestic chores on the kind of *jnana* (profound knowledge) that was out of bounds for women. Chandranath Basu wrote in his book on domesticity, 'The men in this country have acquired more education than women. Therefore men would realise better the significance of whatever I have written [here] about domestic norms. For the reform of our domestic practices our men should explain these to our women.'⁴⁰ Ambikacharan Gupta's way of authoring his didactic manual for women makes interesting reading. The author presented his compendium of advice in the voice of an imaginary father instructing his daughter who was on the threshold of marital existence. Significantly, this father was presented by the author to his female readership as a *pandit*, 'learned' in the Shastras. More interestingly, this *pandit* was shown as giving advice to his newly-married daughter on the request of his wife. It should not be overlooked, that even with her direct experience of domesticity, the wife was shown as regarding her husband as more 'knowledgeable' than she was about domestic norms.⁴¹

There was the corresponding concern in almost all didactic tracts produced from the neo-Brahmanic ideological sphere for female readership not to equip the female reader with the epistemology of the neo-Brahmanic world-view.⁴² Indeed, the very thematic organisation of male-authored domestic tracts for women was different from those meant for men. The

³⁸ 'Aparajita Debi' (pseud.), *Aparajita Rachanabali*, Calcutta, 1984, pp. vi-xii (Editor's Introduction).

³⁹ 'Aparajita Debi', 'Sebika' in *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴⁰ Basu, *Garhasthya Path*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Ambikacharan Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban: Amulya Gyan Bhandar*, 3rd edn, Calcutta. 1293 BE, pp. 1-2.

⁴² Anandachandra Sen Bidyabhushan's book on domestic duty of women is the only exception that has come to notice in the present investigation. Along with practical advice on the woman's 'duty', the author also elaborated at some length on the Vedic world-view. Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, pp. 1, 4-5.

latter, more often than not, started with the question of creation and salvation and the importance of domesticity to that Brahmanical project.⁴³ But for women there was almost invariably a compendium of functional directives and codes of conduct with no metaphysical elaboration on the place of *stridharma* (women's *dharma*) in the Vedic cosmology. Surendranath Ray, though he summarily invoked the *Gita* to emphasise the performance of duties in a spirit free from desire, decided to elaborate it no further for his female readers. Instead he said, 'A specific form of *sadhana* (the dedicated pursuit of a spiritual objective) has been named *karmayoga*. But the subject is a little too complicated and at present is irrelevant for you [the female readership].'⁴⁴ A didactic article for women published in *Grhashta* in 1910 clearly separated epistemologies along the line of gender when it earmarked metaphysical discussion of the scriptures for males; women were 'not required to spend time listening to complicated metaphysics' and needed to be advised on functional duties instead.⁴⁵ It is interesting that Ambikacharan Gupta gave his female readers fragments of functional information even on *Jyotish* (Hindu astrology) and Ayurveda without giving them any idea about the overarching Brahmanical epistemology.⁴⁶ In the chapter on rituals he emphasised, as did every other neo-Brahmanic manual, that since she had no independent right in Brahmanical worship, the woman should concentrate on the this-worldly *bratas* (rituals for women).⁴⁷ Thus the women's sphere of knowledge was made to appear essentially worldly with no capacity for a detached overview that was the supposed characteristic of the male's knowledge.

The anxiety that women should not cultivate speculative faculties largely determined the pervasive opposition to higher education for women that characterised the period up to the 1920s. At the level of every-day utterances within the middle class, there was a common expression that has been recalled by the women (who were in their early teens in the 1920s) interviewed for this thesis: 'If girls receive higher education, they would want a say in everything.'⁴⁸ Jaminimohan Ghosh in 1915 had no doubts as to the necessity of education for women of middle-class families; he, however, suggested a maximum formal education up to the upper primary level.⁴⁹ Education higher than this was admissible only if it was wedded to

⁴³ E.g., Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru ba Shantikunja*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1900, pp. 3-15; Chandrashekhar Sen, *Karmaprasanga ba Manabjibanrahasya*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1327 BE, *passim*.

⁴⁴ Ray, *Narir Karmajog*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ (Anon.), 'Garhasthya-prasanga: Narir Kartabya', *Grhashta*, Poush, 1317 BE, pp. 51, 53.

⁴⁶ Gupta, *Grhashta Jiban*, pp. 34-99, 100-210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 343-50.

⁴⁸ Interviews with Jyotirmayi Sarkar, Kamala Ghosh and Pratima Sen, 14 March 1995, 19 April 1995 and 25 June 1995 respectively.

⁴⁹ Jaminimohan Ghosh, *Sangsar Samasya*, Calcutta, 1322 BE, p. 105.

the ideal of Sita and Savitri - 'a wonderful coexistence of *shakti* and subordination'.⁵⁰ Women were conveniently constructed in such discourses as naturally cut out for child-bearing and, therefore, not to be burdened with speculative and theoretical exercise. Some authors argued that intellectual exercises impaired their procreative faculty. In the late 1920s Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi advised that women should not be 'burdened' with mastering theoretical knowledge about the world, because they were already burdened by the 'natural' responsibility of procreation.⁵¹ As late as the 1930s, even Sundarimohan Das, an allopath (who, moreover, was a Brahmo), advised that during puberty girls should be temporarily taken off serious academic exercises.⁵²

To reinforce the moral persuasion of this rhetoric of control, the image of the ideal woman fashioned in accordance with the male-determined division of knowledge and faculties was juxtaposed against the negative image of the woman with 'inhibitive' knowledge and 'destructive' faculties. It has been noted that the male-determined priorities of the nation came up against women's pre-existing knowledge. A hegemonising tone of rationality was, therefore, deployed against the 'wrong' knowledge of the women's world to beat off women's resistance. The myth of different mental faculties on which the construction of the division of knowledge was based, deployed a similar set of juxtaposed symbols. The essentialisation of women as 'naturally' possessing humility, steadfastness and submissiveness and an instinctive recoiling from extravagance, was supplemented by the icon of the undesirable woman; the latter was imaged as extravagant, querulous, domineering, and using spells to 'enthral' her husband. A typical neo-Brahmanic tract at the turn of the century represented the selfless Bengali woman as 'praying "May my son live long, may my husband be prosperous..." In these prayers there is little that relates to her own exclusive well-being ... [or] prosperity or ... her own uplift either in this world or the next'.⁵³ Apparently, this essentialisation had the ring of universality. However, it was fractured in the same text by the projection of the domineering wife who incited the hen-pecked husband to 'abandon his dependant brothers'.⁵⁴

However, the nationalist construction of undesirable knowledge and destructive faculties was not as uncomplicated as might be imagined. It was mediated by an unavoidable anxiety on the part of the voice of the neo-Brahmanic, patriarchal order to defuse the situation

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵¹ Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi, 'Naranarir Karmabhed', *Bharatbarsha*, Shrabana, 1335 BE, p. 340.

⁵² Sundarimohan Das, *Saral Dhatrihikha o Kumartantra*, 8th revised edn, Calcutta, 1938, p. 5.

⁵³ Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Grhinipana*, Calcutta, 4th edn, 1900, p. 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

by accommodating what was quite obviously woman's assertion against male efforts to 'recast' her. This is reflected in the subtle fractures within the same text or in differences between texts within the same neo-Brahmanic world of discourse. A book, written to uphold *patibratya* in 'the light of the Shastras', stated, 'When your husband comes to know that you use spells and potions, he is disgusted and looks upon you as a snake.'⁵⁵ But Ambikacharan Gupta, no less neo-Brahmanic in his affiliation, added to his didactic manual for women a chapter on Tantric spells supposedly effective in keeping the husband under control, as has been noted in Chapter One. The anxiety of the author to save the neo-Brahmanic image of the male as distanced from popular Tantric practice and, at the same time, to include this chapter in the manual through a complex manoeuvring seems to represent a tactful accommodation. Authors like Ambikacharan obviously realised that the neo-Brahmanic censure of these spells was proving ineffective in the women's domain. Again, alongside the didactic literature that condemned the querulous wife, there were texts trying to give a space to marital altercation as a means of defusing domestic situations. Concern for order, hierarchy and authority in the domestic sphere was explicit in Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's essays on domesticity. It is, therefore, significant that he looked upon conjugal altercation as a necessary shock absorber: 'It is a thunder-squall that releases the storm and rain only to restore the energy equilibrium'.⁵⁶

Still there was a point beyond which such accommodation was impossible because the investment of nationalist patriarchy in the 'new' woman was so great. For example, the future of the nation was seen as intimately related to child-birth and neo-natal care. The nationalist obsession with the 'weakness' of the nation generated the image of the domestic labour room as a 'veritable hell'.⁵⁷ Domestic manuals were inundated with articles on the ideal labour room and details about 'hygienic' child-birth to overdetermine with male wisdom and 'knowledge', a process hitherto entirely in charge of women in middle-class households.⁵⁸ The criticism of women's 'ignorance' and alleged unwillingness to learn, however, considerably intensified from the early 1920s, coinciding with allopathy's rise to ascendancy in Calcutta.⁵⁹ In Chapter Two it has been observed that this was also the period when concern about child-health and child-mortality in the city turned into a veritable neurosis due to a complex and

⁵⁵ Bagalacharan Raychaudhuri, *Satidharma*, Calcutta, 1302 BE, pp. 1, 3.

⁵⁶ Mukhopadhyay, 'Dampati-kalaha', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ E.g., Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, Calcutta, 1900, p. 21.

⁵⁸ E.g., 'Sutika Grha', *Grhasthali*, 1:1, 1884, pp. 10-14.

⁵⁹ E.g., Rameshchandra Ray, 'Stri-Shikkha', *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, pp. 373, 380. The author, an allopath, deplored the 'ignorance' of women and condemned their 'blind' faith in untrained midwives.

tangled interaction between the ascendant voice of nationalist allopaths and that of Hindu communalism.

More pervasive, of course, was the construction of the woman with 'obnoxious' faculties, the 'type' held responsible for much adversity in colonial middle-class domesticity. This construction was largely produced by a complex mixture of men's awareness of their own failing in the colonial situation and an anxious male expectation that women should somehow absorb the shock of changes, which the class saw as affecting its existence and material condition. It is important that the same charges that the class tended to bring against itself were doubly reinforced when many authors transferred them to women. The more the class criticised itself for luxury in the face of genteel poverty, the greater was the deployment of two icons - the idealised *grhalakhi* who (among other things) was thrifty as opposed to the undesirable housewife who wasted the modest resources of her *chakure* (dependent on *chakri*) husband.⁶⁰ The lower middle-class *chakure*, who looked upon themselves as slaves not only of the European employer but also of poverty, probably needed the reassurance of the woman in domesticity as a shock-absorbing buffer between themselves and adversity in the colonial situation. Tanika Sarkar has pertinently interpreted the wish for a willingly submissive wife as a compensation for the forced surrender of the male in the colonial sphere.⁶¹ It is not surprising that most of the rigidly Shastric books on women's morality in the late 19th century were published from the inexpensive *battala* presses which predominantly reflected the lower middle-class mentality. Similarly it was in *battala* literature that the iconisation of the querulous and extravagant wife was the strongest and most pervasive.⁶² Going beyond Tanika Sarkar's analysis, however, this thesis highlights that the ideal wife was required to be more than merely submissive; she was expected to somehow neutralise in domesticity the material consequences of the clerk's powerlessness to negotiate for better pay in the colonial sphere. For example, Jaminimohan Ghosh's characterisation of women as extravagant was situated squarely within the context of a wider projection of the male not only as '*paradhin*' (subjugated) but also as ill-paid. One cannot fail to notice, in the author's voice, the lack of self-confidence of the indigent male and the consequent anxious stake in the loyalty of the wife. In calling for unflinching loyalty to the 'indigent' husband, the author drew a significant analogy: 'Does the mother throw away an uncouth and deformed child?' The appeal for a reassuring promise of motherly protection from the wife is

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⁶⁰ E.g., 'Janaika Brddha' (pseud.), 'Stri', *Kajer Lok*, November, 1910, pp. 283-84; Ganapati Ray, 'Grhinir Kartabya', *Grhastha*, Bhadra, 1321 BE, pp. 1060-67.

⁶¹ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

⁶² Sumit Sarkar, 'Kalijuger Kalpana o Aupanibeshik Samaj' in Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Itihas Anusandhan*, vol. 4, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 1-13.

significant. Jaminimohan idealised the good wife who 'knew' how to keep the indigent domesticity of the *chakure* on an even keel.⁶³

The *Grhini* and the *Badhu*, the Son and the Patriarchy

Recent feminist scholarship has adequately highlighted that by coalescing the mother goddess with one's own mother, the nationalists helped to domesticate *Shakti* within the nationalist image of the ideal 'joint family' and sought to restrict women's effective agency to procreation and the nurturing of children.⁶⁴ Taking domestic morality as a function of order allows us, however, to approach motherhood and the procreative power of the young bride from a related but different angle. By focusing on the neo-Brahmanic as the dominant ideology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we can see how at the more practical level of domestic order (rather than at the more abstract level of myth making), cultural nationalism was involved in a tense and complex manoeuvring to accommodate two vital agencies within its project. These were the agencies of the mature mother as *grhini*, on the one hand, and the bride or *badhu* as a young mother or mother-to-be, on the other. A crucial concern of neo-Brahmanic morality as a nationalist project was to effectively subordinate the procreative power and 'nurturing role' of women to the national requirement for healthy and well-nurtured sons. At the same time, given the concern of patriarchy to preserve the extended family structure in which it was organised, the mature mother had to be relatively empowered to control the young bride on behalf of patriarchy. Paradoxically, therefore, neo-Brahmanism's espousal of the rigidly disempowering rhetoric of women's subordination derived from Manu, coexisted with a moral recognition of the partial empowerment of the mature mother within the household. Problematically for its hegemonic project of 'recasting' women, the neo-Brahmanic morality had to tackle the predicament that the mature mother could not be 'recast' in a way detrimental to her authority in the *andar*. Thus the hegemonic investment of cultural nationalism was all the greater in the young bride. But the ideology could not wholeheartedly privilege her over older women. This dilemma complicated the discussions of motherhood by fracturing it into the mature mother and the young procreative bride and involved the morality in complex manoeuvres in trying to accommodate the two simultaneously. It is argued here that the generational dimension in this patriarchal scheme of relative empowerment ultimately militated against its ordering potential.

⁶³ Ghosh, *Sangsar Samasya*, pp. 53-56.

⁶⁴ Bagchi, 'Representing', pp. WS 69-WS 70.

At first sight, neo-Brahmanic literature appeared to project a blanket morality equally disempowering to all women with its rhetoric of unquestionable subordination to the husband and to patriarchy. The only agency allowed to the woman was to assist her husband in the performance of Brahmanical rituals, in procreation and in nurturing sons for the sake of salvation in the male line. Irrespective of his age and position in the hierarchy of authority within the family, the husband appeared to be the supreme controlling authority of the mind and body of the woman. But a closer look at the didactic literature on women's morality reveals that the rigidly disempowering rhetoric, overtly geared to procreation, was mostly addressed to the young bride; she was entering domesticity and was, therefore, most crucial for both patriarchy and the nation to 'recast' and control. It is also important that the young husband, unless he happened to be the head of the household, was not completely autonomous in relation to the extended family which was the ultimate dominating agency.

A close look at the didactic literature, as well as other types of sources, clearly indicates that in a situation where the *andar* was spatially segregated from the constant gaze of the disciplining male, patriarchy needed to co-opt the *grhini* (the female head of the *andar*), albeit at a lower rung of authority. Therefore, the ideology, in fashioning its practical application, accepted a relative empowerment of elderly housewives, if only to domesticate the young housewife, considered as a potential threat to the sibling solidarity of her in-law's family. In a book that went into several editions, Anandachandra Sen Bidyabhusan advised the young bride that in the in-law's house she must go by the advice and orders of her mother-in-law or whoever was the *grhini*. The author defined the *grhini* as the mother-in-law or whoever is the senior-most female; the status of the *grhini* was that of the queen of the household.⁶⁵ The young bride was advised that even if she had any difference of opinion with the *grhini* she should unquestioningly obey her.⁶⁶ Another writer, in a more descriptive account of family life in Bengal, related that young females were 'continually kept under the *grhini*'s surveillance. They are not allowed to speak aloud or lift their veil ... they are sharply reproached for being immodest in the presence of males. The *grhini* does make the young females work hard!⁶⁷ Anandachandra wrote that those young women who had received some formal education, might 'believe that they had greater intelligence and power of deliberation than the elderly women. But if they reflect a bit deeply, they would realise that the practical training and the experience that the older women have gained, is time-consuming for young

⁶⁵ Sen Bidyabhusan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, pp. 30, 126, 128, 147.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁷ Mullick, *The Hindu Family*, p. 44.

brides ... to master'.⁶⁸ But it is also important that cultural nationalism in the latter half of the 19th century could not leave young brides entirely to the instructive regime of the *grhini* and other elderly women in the *andar*. In the 1880s Chandranath Basu urged, as has been already noted, that it was the duty of men to always 'keep an eye' on the domestic role of women. Indeed, the appearance from the late 1870s of a flood of predominantly male-authored literature on the conduct and duties of the woman was itself a testimony to nationalism's self-conscious male gaze on behaviour and order in the *andar*.

The image of the mature, asexual mother was upheld by patriarchy and privileged over the young wife in the discourses of the late 19th century. Sumit Sarkar has shown how the middle-class *chakure*, labouring under a sense of servility in the colonial sphere, was hypersensitive about an imagined servility to the wife at home.⁶⁹ In this mental climate, the assuring image of the 'self-less' mother was likely to prevail over that of the 'selfish' wife. From Sarkar's study of 'cheap vernacular tracts, plays and farces' it seems that the image of the mother, 'ill-treated' by her 'extravagant and domineering daughter-in-law', conflated with the image of the enslaved mother-land and prevailed over that of the wife.⁷⁰ In a metaphysical piece, written much later but very much from within a neo-Brahmanic ontology, the praise of the mature mother was explicitly related to a simultaneous rationale for depressing the status of the wife. The affection of the mother was elevated on the ground that it was devoid of self-interest and the love of the wife was represented as physical and not above self-interest. Thus the motherhood of the bride, actual or potential, was devalued. Regarding the mature mother, the author wrote, 'That the mother is even superior to heaven itself, has been recognised in all *yugas* [ages] ... But, at present, because of the degeneration of dharma, ... people are abandoning their reverence for the mother ... Lured by worldly pleasure they are ... demoting the mother to a position inferior to the *shakti* of the temptress in the form of the wife.' Thus it is clear that the fear of the power of fertility and the anxiety to control female sexuality was also an important factor in creating such a hierarchy. The concern for a necessary hierarchy and order in the *andar* comes through most clearly in the statement that if the wife is truly a sharer of the husband's *dharma* of domesticity then she would, of her own accord, keep herself subordinated to her mother-in-law.⁷¹

However, the interaction of the nationalist agenda of 'recasting' women with the patriarchal concern for disciplining the young bride complicated the rationale for partially

⁶⁸ Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, pp. 126-27. Also, Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban*, pp. 8-11.

⁶⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *An Exploration of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Tradition*, Shimla, 1993, p. 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Bankimchandra Ghoshal, *Sangsartattvadarshan o Premanjali*, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 50, 96-97, 99-100.

empowering the *grhini*. This tension seems also to have been reinforced by the unease of nationalist patriarchy about the constant possibility of the *grhini*'s assertion of a regime in the *andar* not in conformity with the nationalist ideal of domesticity. The apprehension was latent in the didactic literature itself. In his advice to the young bride, Anandachandra repeatedly felt compelled simultaneously to instruct the female head of the *andar*. He could not help saying that since the *grhini* was the queen of the woman's domain, 'one cannot expect peace and happiness in domesticity if [the *grhini*] is not an ideal character'. So he advised both the bride and the *grhini* to be above intolerance, suspiciousness, jealousy, selfishness, pettiness, partiality and indifference.⁷² Another author, in writing the biography of a housewife of 'exemplary character', carefully emphasised that, as a mother-in-law, she treated her daughters-in-law with affection and rectified their shortcomings with 'gentle persuasion'.⁷³ Some texts, albeit fleetingly, characterised the *andar* as a scene of altercation between the *grhini* and the *badhu*, forgetting for the moment the necessity of privileging the *grhini*. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, in his book on domesticity, concerned throughout with order, inadvertently contradicted one of his key dictums for the male. Though he generally advised men to keep away from the 'demeaning' details of domesticity, he advised tactful male intervention in the tensions between the mother- and daughter-in-law.⁷⁴

The recognition of the experience of the *andar*, where quarrels must have featured prominently, helps us understand that it was actually the interaction of the cultural requirements of the nation with the more practical concerns of patriarchy that brought about this paradox. The colonised male, anxious to project the Bengali Hindu domesticity as impeccably 'civilised', sought to cleanse the household of any kind of quarrelling. The empowered position of the mature mother in relation to the daughter-in-law could, sometimes, be embarrassing for the 'civilised' national identity. However, in spite of occasional notes of caution, the privileging of the *grhini* over the *badhu* was religiously maintained in the essays and didactic literature on domesticity. It is true that of the two, the young bride was more crucial for the nationalist project of domesticity. But given the specific structure of patriarchy, the fear of promiscuity in large families, and the male stake in his self-image of 'lofty' detachment from 'petty' domestic details, the privileging of the *grhini* was indispensable. Moreover, the *grhini* also had her point to score; she was usually past the socially-reckoned age of possessing alluring sexuality, while the young bride, though institutionally powerless, possessed that powerful 'lure'. To the mind of the colonised male,

⁷² Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, p. 147.

⁷³ Chandrakanta Sen, *Bamasundari ba Adarsha Nari* (1295 BE), Calcutta, 1316 BE, p. 44.

⁷⁴ Mukhopadhyay, 'Grhe Dharmadhikaran', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 183-86.

sensitive about *adhinata* (subordination), the 'enthraling' sexuality of the young procreative female created a double bind. The intolerable anxieties created by the confrontation with colonialism and Western culture generated in the mind of the colonised male 'a desire to return to a post, to one's mother, a reversion to the womb'.⁷⁵ For the adult male this image of security could only be that of the mature mother.

However a change seemed to have come by the 1920s. In Chapter Two it has been observed that from that decade the idealisation of domesticity as a holistic field of abstract virtues was steadily swamped by a compulsive perception of a physical field fractured into numerous problem-zones, each surrounded by secular discussions of solutions specific to it. These specialised discussions on poverty, health, income, investment and so on often addressed the *grhini* and/or the *badhu* as agents in a material project. Dictated more immediately by the urgency of their own functional priorities than by a strict commitment to the nationalist essentialisations of womanhood, these discussions created a fuzziness. Unlike the previous writings that consistently privileged the *grhini* in terms of knowledge and dependability, these new ones had differential priorities about co-opting either the *grhini* or the *badhu*. Praphullachandra Ray, in his campaign against the 'denationalising' habit of drinking tea and eating foreign-manufactured biscuits, privileged the *grhini* over the *badhu*. The latter, unlike the elderly woman, was seen as prone to serving tea and biscuits to the neglect of indigenous snacks.⁷⁶ Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay, who wrote a domestic manual in the 1930s, lauded elderly women whose knowledge about the therapeutic value of indigenous natural ingredients was supposedly so sound that they 'did not have to call the doctor [allopath] at every turn'.⁷⁷ On the other hand, nationalist allopaths, as has been already noted, criticised the 'inhibitive' nature of much of women's accustomed knowledge of hygiene and child-birth. And it was the elderly woman, rather than the young bride, who was castigated as the custodian of this 'wrong' knowledge. Moreover, the *grhini's* treatment of pregnant daughters-in-law was characterised as unsympathetic.⁷⁸ Sex manuals, written by doctors, privileged 'scientific', 'rational' information on the subject as against the 'distorted' notions that the young wives gleaned from elderly women in the family.⁷⁹ Similarly, in the 1930s, Indian insurance companies, priding themselves as nationalist institutions, specially earmarked the elderly women in the family as superstitious and unjustifiably opposed to the life insurance. Educated young women were called upon to take the initiative and dispel the

⁷⁵ Bagchi, 'Representing', p. WS-69.

⁷⁶ Praphullachandra Ray, 'Chnida Mudi Khai o Biskut', *Bharatbarsha*, Baishakh, 1345 BE, p. 673.

⁷⁷ Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay, *Grhasthadarpan*, Calcutta, 1932, Introduction.

⁷⁸ Das, *Saral Dhatrihikkha*, pp. 2, 5.

⁷⁹ Rudrendrakumar Pal, *Sachitra Jauna Bidya*, Calcutta, 1354 BE, p. 2.

wrong beliefs about insurance.⁸⁰ Finally, popular psychoanalytical writings, though often advocating greater psycho-sexual space to women only out of a conservative concern to contain female sexuality within marriage, nevertheless introduced a note discordant with the rhetoric privileging mature motherhood. Thus, even while in one segment of print the nationalist glorification of mature motherhood continued, some psychoanalytical voices tended to undercut that glory; they criticised the culturally enforced termination of youth in women and the 'pre-mature exile' into mature motherhood.⁸¹

This emergent ambivalence about the *grhini* in the world of nationalist discourses was reinforced by another development that tended to embarrass the nationalist male from the beginning of the 1920s. Though the theme of oppression of the daughter-in-law by the mother-in-law was not new to the world of Bengali middle-class consciousness, didactic literature had so long generally elided it, lest it undercut the disciplining language of complete obedience to the mother-in-law. The question of the *grhini* and her daughters oppressing the *badhu* had occasionally surfaced even in neo-Brahmanic tracts on domesticity but the male authors had immediately tried to project it as a deviation from the ideal. For example, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay had fleetingly admitted that many young brides had to put up with a constant tirade from their mothers- and sisters-in law. But this admission did not prevent the author from taking the responsibility of recommending the authority of the *grhini* in the *andar*.⁸² But in the period of the 1920s to 40s there was a noticeable tendency in a section of the male nationalist voice to completely dissociate the male self-image from any responsibility for the actions of the *grhini*, who was constructed as oppressive towards her daughter-in-law. Significantly, this distancing developed from the beginning of the 1920s in the perceptible context of the emergence of discussion in the press and print of court cases concerning the alleged torture of brides.⁸³ Nationalists were clearly perturbed and embarrassed. The sense of disturbance was indicated, for example, in Sundarimohan Das's frequent references to such 'torture' even where it was not relevant to his immediate subject of discussion.⁸⁴ It is significant that Sundarimohan was anxious to attach the blame entirely to the mother-in-law and elderly females in the house. This anxiety, it might not be wrong to claim, was tied up with the embarrassing development that in the court-cases in question, males (the respective husbands) were often identified as the oppressive agency. While a

⁸⁰ E.g., Atasikusum Sarkar, 'Jibanbima o Narir Kusangskar', *Jibanbima*, 1:2, 1336 BE, p. 66.

⁸¹ Nrpndrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi, *Nari Bipathe Jay Keno*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1351 BE, p. 41.

⁸² Chattopadhyay, *Grhinipana*, pp. 15-16.

⁸³ E.g., (Anon.), 'Amader Samaj', *Baithak*, Bhadra, 1329 BE, p. 50.

⁸⁴ E.g., Das, *Saral Dhatrishikha*, p. 5.

section of the contemporary nationalist opinion felt that the plight of young married women in the country was deplorable, it is significant that they were, more often than not, silent about any likely role of the husband in such 'torture'. Instead the mother- and the sister-in-law were overtly branded as the responsible parties in the same way as in Sundarimohan's writings.⁸⁵ The image of the 'torturing' elderly female, insulated by seclusion from the 'restraining' influence of males in the family, surfaced in Hemendraprasad Ghosh's diary (in the 1940s) where he noted such 'scandalous' cases to be on the increase. In relation to one particular case of torture, leading to the suicide of the bride concerned, Hemendraprasad related the 'news' that the mother- and the sister-in-law were responsible.⁸⁶ From the absence of any corresponding apportioning of blame to the acquiescing or unresisting husband of this and other victims, it seems that the male mind was anxious to deny male complicity in these 'scandalous' incidents; hence the construction of the 'news' representing the sole agency of the 'exploitative' female.

While the male voice of order became ambivalent about the *grhini*, the generational dimension associated with the patriarchal scheme of relative empowerment of older women created a trajectory of change in the period from the 1920s. In Chapter Two it was noted that from the latter half of the 1920s, the class observed a 'rise of youth' among its male population. The self-image of these young males as oppressed by patriarchy brought in its train a perception of an affinity between their subordination to patriarchy and the *badhu*'s to the *grhini*. It is true that this co-suffering fellowship, romantically and patronisingly granted by the husband to the young wife - where it was granted at all, of course - was very much sited within domestication and marriage. But it weakened the neo-Brahmanic language which had given the bride very little morally recognised space other than the procreative. The nature and limits of the new space created will be examined later in this chapter in connection with the theme of conjugality.

How the generational element in the scheme of partial empowerment of the mature mother itself ultimately came to dilute the moral rhetoric of her unqualified authority over the *andar* can be gauged from the reminiscences of two women from non-'Westernised' Hindu families. The artist Shanu Lahiri, for example, sat her art course in the Indian Art College in the mid-1940s. It is extremely significant that she looked upon her agency in shaping her life as necessarily mapped in a generational sequence. Her mother's grandmother's oppressive role as the *grhini* starts for Shanu the genealogy of her own self. The former 'thwarted' Shanu's mother's craving for higher education, an anguish which Shanu's mother supposedly

⁸⁵ E.g., Shyamlal Goswami, 'Hindunari o Hindusamaj', *Matrmandir*, Ashwin 1330 BE, p. 119.

⁸⁶ UDHG, 19 March 1945.

assuaged by supporting her daughters' wish to choose independent careers for themselves. 'Right from her childhood my mother passionately wanted to study... "But you are a girl... Where does the question of studies arise?" The objection was not so much by the parents as by the grandmother who was ruthless and firm in her convictions'. In imagining her mother's plight as a young bride, Shanu again highlighted the role of an oppressive *grhini* - this time Shanu's own grandmother, her father's mother. 'For quite a few years from her marriage at the age of ten, my mother suffered ... under the repressive regime of the mother- and the sisters-in-law ... Though my father wished [to have her formally educated] ... he could not overcome his diffidence and disregard the authority of his parents'. However, later when Shanu's mother became the *grhini* of the household, 'she assuaged her own unfulfilled desire for education by providing me and my sister with opportunities for education on a par with my brothers'. It is crucial to note how Shanu described her father's support for her mother's plans regarding Shanu's education. 'Probably a helpless feeling of frustration had built up in my father's mind on seeing the most cherished wish of his wife go to pieces bit by bit. That is why later in his life he never opposed any wish or action of my mother ... particularly in the matter of the freedom and higher education of the daughters'.⁸⁷ Thus, like many women in her class and in her generation, Shanu did not identify this 'diffidence' of her father as an extended ramification of patriarchy; the generational dimension seemed to have mediated both her mother's reckoning and hers. To them her father somehow appeared to be at the receiving end of the same authoritarian structure as her mother was.

As a college student in the 1930s, Phulrenu Guha became associated with the Jugantar Party and also briefly with the Communist Party. She, too, could not contextualise her self-assertion without relating it to her mother's struggle against her grandmother (father's mother) in the matter of Phulrenu's higher education. She, too, imagined her father at the receiving end of patriarchy and condoned his failure to protest against his wife's predicament: 'He firmly believed that ... higher education for women was absolutely necessary. But he had not been able to stand against the authority of the family and enable my mother to study.' Regarding her mother's assertion in later life, she wrote, 'The perpetually scared person always anxious to please everybody in the family, [she] secretly nurtured many a dream ... In her later life, with those frustrated dreams on her mind, she stood firm and encouraged me in all my efforts, disregarding all opposition.' But Phulrenu also went on to say, 'But would she have been able to succeed in that unequal battle [with her mother-in-law] had my father not now come forward with his unbending personality?'⁸⁸ This reveals how, for the younger

⁸⁷ Lahiri, 'Amar Anubhabe', pp. 131-33.

⁸⁸ Phulrenu Guha, 'Ja Peyechhi' in Chakrabarti (ed.), *Aj Ami*, pp. 8-10.

generation of the 1930s who started questioning the established morality regarding the relation between the sexes, the generational factor was an important conditioning. Their protest, therefore, was against the established language and existing institutional organisation of patriarchal oppression, rather than directly against patriarchy as such. The generational mediation concealed the gender susceptibilities of the younger generation of males who were often only patronising in their co-option of women into male-determined projects. That is why, as a women's activist, Phulrenu Guha said that, since the system based on Manu was a creation of men, women needed male 'support' to break it.⁸⁹ For political activists like Phulrenu, moreover, the goal of national freedom, commonly shared with her husband and her other male colleagues, foregrounded the sense of the generational solidarity diluting the awareness of gender where male colleagues were concerned.

Moral attitudes to women were transforming even among young men who were not directly involved in politics and who by the late 1930s had not openly revolted in their households against the lingering enforcement of purdah by their elders. It would be interesting to look at the minds of such men through the observation of the contemporary brides in their household. Even during the 1930s women usually entered their married life with a mind conditioned to expect a regime of unmitigated terror at the in-laws'.⁹⁰ Both Jyotirmayi Sarkar and Jyotsna Mitra, interviewed in connection with the present project, said that they had come to their in-laws at the age of 12 (in 1930) and 16 (in 1940) respectively, prepared for such a regime. Conditioned in this way, their minds registered 'unexpected support' from their husbands. Though they could not 'fight for' the further school or college education of their wives, both husbands started taking fringe liberties with the norms of patriarchy. Jyotirmayi's husband in the early 1930s 'dared' to talk with his wife in front of elders, much to their chagrin.⁹¹ Jyotsna Mitra recalls that, transgressing the existing norm of her in-laws, her husband and brothers-in-law took her out to movies, though 'the elders in the family were not particularly happy about it'. Though the attitude of the husbands was only protective and patronising and did not involve challenging patriarchy, both women were overwhelmed with a pleasant sense of surprise. Jyotsna recalls having resorted to artificial contraception but told the interviewer, 'Of course, such decisions are not possible to be taken unilaterally. One had to have the permission of the husband'. It did not generally appear iniquitous to Jyotsna and

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Regarding such conditioning, also see, Lahiri, 'Amar Anubhabe', p. 131.

⁹¹ Dagmar Engels identifies the late 1920s and early 30s as the period when the domestic injunction against couples talking with each other in the day-time, in the presence of elders, came to be increasingly disregarded. Dagmar Engels, 'The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, c. 1890-1930, with Special Reference to British and Bengali Discourse on Gender', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1987, p. 95.

her female contemporaries that the 'supportive' males of their generation assumed that female contraception would have to depend on the husband's consent. For Jyotirmayi, even after the death of her husband when she was 18 years old, the generational factor went on blinding her to the limits of the emancipating zeal of the males of her generation in the in-laws' family. She was grateful to receive the support of her brother-in-law in her resolve to sit the matriculation examinations as a private candidate. He even 'fought' with the elders and succeeded in getting permission for Jyotirmayi to appear in front of his friends and talk with them, as 'she had started appreciating intellectual discussions'. Jyotirmayi, at that time, was not able to realise that these gestures were merely patronising and accommodative. With hindsight Jyotirmayi guesses that one of the reasons why the brother-in-law was 'so liberal' was that, typically of a section of the youth in the late 1930s, he was vaguely inspired by the developments in Soviet Russia. His attitude to Jyotirmayi was his 'effort to live up to the expectations of his "progressiveness"'. Indeed, it should be borne in mind that the concept of *pragati* (progress), with broadly left-radical associations, was being constantly deployed in the 1930s and 40s in the writings of young intellectuals. Jyotirmayi' came to realise the limits of her brother-in-law's 'progressiveness' when she fell in love with one of his friends and decided to marry him in the early 1940s. The patriarchal susceptibility of the brother-in-law asserted itself openly for Jyotirmayi to see, when he sided with the whole of the family to condemn her decision.⁹²

Conjugality

This section tries to show how the neo-Brahmanic concern for order in the extended family fought shy of the concept of companionate conjugality lest it gave the bride a justification (other than the procreative) that she might use to empower herself in relation to patriarchy. However, from the late 1920s, to the disadvantage of the ideology, the moral attitude to conjugality started diversifying. The discourse of conjugal love gained moral recognition even within the social base that had produced the neo-Brahmanic morality. The contention that the neo-Brahmanic intention was to sublimate conjugal love might sound paradoxical because there was, after all, a great emphasis on the conjugal unit in the ideology. Every late 19th-century neo-Brahmanic didactic writing emphasised the woman's role as the husband's *sahadharmini* as one of the most important components of *grhadharma*.⁹³ It was emphasised

⁹² Jyotirmayi Sarkar and Jyotsna Mitra interviewed on 14 March 1995 and 22 June 1995 respectively.

⁹³ E.g., Sen Bidyabhushan, *Grhinir Kartabya*, pp. 40-45.

that without the wife as helper the householder could not expect to fulfil his *dharma*.⁹⁴ Transmigration of souls being the metaphysical core of the dominant ideology, conjugality was overtly emphasised not merely as the procreative base of the nation but of salvation in the male line. This is what made conjugality so central to *garhasthya* as an *ashrama*. But the problem was that given the integral link between this ideology and the extended-family structure of patriarchy, strong emotional attachment between the spouses was looked upon as a threat to sibling cohesion and filial piety.

In this context one has to examine the arguments of Tanika Sarkar. Not only has she claimed that in the 'revivalist'-nationalist ideology 'all other relations even the mother-child one...remained subordinated to it [conjugality] up to the end of the 19th century', but she has also discerned the deployment of love in the rhetoric centring on conjugality.⁹⁵ She saw a 'discomfort' among the 'revivalist'-nationalists about this deployment because 'once it [the question of love] was raised, sooner or later, the question of mutuality was bound to come; male monogamy was one idea that authors felt obligated to introduce, impelled by this demand of reciprocity implicit in love'.⁹⁶ Yet, she believes, love had to be unavoidably deployed to reinscribe and justify the non-consensual marriage of pre-pubertal women.⁹⁷ This view, however, is open to question.⁹⁸ Conjugality was highlighted in 'revivalist'-nationalist tracts not as an emotional attachment but as a sacramental union and the nucleus of the Brahmanical duties of the householder. It should be realised that conjugality was consistently represented in all neo-Brahmanic didactic literature as a matter of detached performance of duty with an eye to the next life and the future of the nation. More importantly, given the firm commitment of the ideology to the structural integrity of the 'joint family', the conjugal relation, however glorified as a function of duty, was not foregrounded in the network of domestic relations as the most evocative attachment. Indeed, if any attachment were morally privileged in neo-Brahmanic tracts, it was that of every member to the 'joint family'. Contestation of the colonial critique of Hindu non-consensual marriage made the deployment of the concept of a strong bond unavoidable, but emotional-sexual attachment was in the same breath immediately sought to be sublimated with use of words like affection rather than love. The obligation to uphold male monogamy was imposed on 'revivalist'-nationalist pronouncements not along a supposed trajectory of love but to counterbalance the

⁹⁴ E.g., Panchanan Chakrabarti, *Grhadharma o Karmapaddhati*, Calcutta, 1294 BE, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁵ Sarkar, 'Rhetoric', p. 1870.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1872.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1870.

⁹⁸ Sarkar incidentally bases her conclusions in this essay on the same kind of source - neo-Brahmanic tracts on domesticity - which this thesis predominantly cites. This makes the debate with Sarkar all the more meaningful.

embarrassing imposition of compulsory *patibratya* on brides who, married as children, had no right of dissent. Also male monogamy was being conceded in the face of the Age of Consent Act and the embarrassing situation created by the case of Phulmani, a child-bride, allegedly raped to death by her husband.⁹⁹

By the late 19th century, disturbingly for the non-‘reformed’ Hindu patriarchy, the Western ideal of companionate marriage was being adopted by the ‘reformed’ Hindus, particularly the Brahmos.¹⁰⁰ For a system compulsorily imposing a non-consensual union on pre-pubertal women, the mutuality implicit in the concept of companionate compatibility was problematic. Strong emotional and/or sexual attachment to the spouse, it was further apprehended, would break up the ‘joint family’. Chandranath Basu in his *Sabitritattva* felt alarmed that ‘Many Bengali brides are now in favour of staying separately with their respective husbands ... They are disrespectful towards their parents-in-law and ruthless to the brothers-in-law ... the joint family is going to pieces’.¹⁰¹ Another author, who similarly condemned the imbibing of the companionate ideal by the ‘Westernised’ section of the middle class, lauded the time when ‘the glare of Western enlightenment had not entered this country, and people had still regarded marriage as a sacrament and not as conjugal love’.¹⁰² And this author was writing in the context of his praise of a woman who was supposed to have dedicated her existence not exclusively to ‘pleasing’ her husband but ensuring the well-being of the entire extended family of her in-laws. It should be noted that in the rigidly hierarchical neo-Brahmanic morality, the wife was first subordinated to the husband, and then the couple was subordinated to patriarchal authority in the extended family. Had subordination to the husband been the only intention, then neo-Brahmanic ideology in the late 19th century would not have been so opposed to the groom giving his opinion in the choice of his wife, even though he was supposed to be ‘mature, learned and educated’ in relation to the wife.¹⁰³ The hierarchy of subordination envisaged by the morality of the extended-family-centric patriarchy is thus clear.

In their simultaneous contestation with the Western criticism of Hindu conjugality on the one hand, and the derivation of the Victorian companionate ideal by ‘reformed’ Hindu discourse, on the other, the neo-Brahmanic authors sometimes found the deployment of the term ‘love’ unavoidable. Chandranath Basu, for example, felt obliged to address the binary

⁹⁹ For the details of the Phulmani Case, see Sarkar, ‘Rhetoric’, pp. 1873-75.

¹⁰⁰ For the adoption, see Meredith Borthwick, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Princeton, 1984, p. 109; Engels, ‘The Changing Role’, p. 95.

¹⁰¹ Chandranath Basu, *Sabitritattva* (1900), Calcutta, 1315 BE, p. 80.

¹⁰² Sen, *Bamasundari*, p. 22.

¹⁰³ Basu, *Hindutva*, p. 218.

logic of 'independence'/'subjugation' deployed by the Western condemnation of 'exploitation' of women under the Bengali Hindu system of marriage. He argued that consensual marriage, exclusively geared to the happiness of the conjugal unit and the individual autonomy of each spouse, created an equation that was potentially selfish and therefore unstable. It is interesting to see how he derived the concept of love and then muted its potentially equalising promise. He argued that if love was what the Western criticism of 'our conjugality' was all about, the Hindu marriage stood for a selfless merger, the most ideal form of love. 'In our country learned men regard the husband and the wife as one person.'¹⁰⁴ Observed closely, this deployment of complete merger effectively exorcised romantic love by constructing an automatic union from the very beginning of acquaintance. What was effectively flattened out was the very crux of romantic love - the exciting and endless quest for the unknown within the known. Interestingly, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's voice, though staunchly Brahmanical, was subtly different from the overwhelming trend in the neo-Brahmanic didactic literature. It is true that Bhudeb accommodated romantic love in marriage out of a conservative concern to see both male and female sexuality more effectively vented within domesticity. Yet it is important to register the distinctiveness of his voice. He wrote, "Love is a sentiment we are not able to master", "it suddenly attracts and robs your heart", "love encourages a spirit of independence" ... the harm such contentions have caused is limitless. Such advice has destroyed many a happy home, tarnished many a pure soul and distorted many a fine brain'.¹⁰⁵ From the sub-text in this statement it is also clear that in spite of - and maybe also because of - the celebration of romantic love by a handful of creative authors, the voice of morality constructed this sentiment as unsuited to Bengali Hindu domesticity and its ideal of selflessness. So even though Bhudeb was otherwise profusely quoted in didactic tracts and articles, his attitude to romantic love in marriage was not echoed in the neo-Brahmanic world.

Even as late as the 1920s, Surendranath Ray indirectly reiterated the same fundamental neo-Brahmanic position that the male should not be lured away by any language of conjugal attachment from the ideal detachment expected of him. In his book on epistolary training of young brides, Surendranath aimed at ensuring that the young wife's correspondence did not violate 'the limits of restraint, morality and civilised behaviour'. She should not write, among other things, sentimental letters to the husband; 'unwanted emotionalism' in this relationship was particularly induced by the influence of the novel which the young bride should keep at bay. It is to be noted that all the model letters the author composed to exemplify ideal conjugal correspondence, tried to sublimate emotionalism through a regime of euphemising

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁵ Mukhopadhyay, 'Dampatya-jiban', *Paribarik Prabandha*, pp. 9-10.

expressions. Also, the possibility of a strong emotional-sexual bond was sidelined with a strong reiteration of the rhetoric of the sacramental significance of marriage. A potentially equalising emotional field was fractured by elevating the male to the 'masculine' virtue of detachment and depressing the wife's status to a perpetual *shishyatva* (discipleship) 'at the feet' of the husband.¹⁰⁶

In the period from the 1920s the language of order surrounding conjugality seemed to enter a twilight zone. There was an anxious attempt - in retrospect, a last-ditch one - to confine conjugality within neo-Brahmanic parameters. Surendranath's *Narilipi* was, significantly, written in the 1920s. In one exemplary letter, for example, the newly-wed is writing to her husband, 'Yesterday I received your letter full of blessings ... I am too young and do not have a sound knowledge of proprieties ... Relieve me of all anxieties by sheltering me at your feet.'¹⁰⁷ Through this letter the author was also trying to instruct the newly-married husband to be restrained to the point of conveying only 'blessings' to his wife. In another letter, where a wife was shown as expressing her anxiety on not receiving any reply from the husband, the author's effort to euphemistically circumvent the expression 'love' is clear: 'Either you are ill or you no longer have the same sentiment for me.'¹⁰⁸ The two-tiered hierarchy of women's subordination to patriarchy was upheld in another letter. In it the wife's role as conscience-keeper significantly took the form of reminding the husband that, as he was so keen on taking her away to his far-away work-place, she should be able to take her parents-in-law along; otherwise she should be allowed to stay with them because her primary duty was to serve these infirm in-laws.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, the 1920s were also the time when, as observed in Chapter Two, the power of persuasion of the neo-Brahmanic morality as a whole started declining. As a part of this wider disintegration, the overtly inegalitarian language ordering gender relations within conjugality weakened and created a search for an alternative language of control over the bride. The young males of the 1920s and 30s were the generation among whom this particular rhetoric dwindled in its power of persuasion. For example, Hirendranath Basu (born 1900), a law student (and later lawyer) from an ordinary middle-class, non-'Westernised' Hindu family in Calcutta, regularly wrote long and emotionally surcharged letters to his wife between 1925 to 1929, during which period he often had to be away from her. It is significant

¹⁰⁶ Surendranath Ray, *Narilipi*, 3rd edn, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 100-08. The constant use of the terms *priti* and *sneha*, generically denoting affection, instead of *prem* or *pranay*, words more appropriate for conjugal and romantic love, is to be noted.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-01.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-06.

that under his father's headship the large extended family enforced *purdah* in the 1920s.¹¹⁰ Hirendranath's letters, just like those written in 1936-38 by Pramathanath Datta from a similar cultural background,¹¹¹ did not try to pontificate on the duties expected of his wife as *pativrata* or even as a member of an extended family. What is more, hierarchy did not self-consciously surface at least in the letters of these two men. Indeed, Hirendranath strongly objected to his wife Kalyani presenting herself in one of her letters as 'a beggar at your door'. He wrote 'Who is begging for my love? The one from whom there is nothing that I should withhold! ... I beg you not to use this expression'.¹¹² He also wrote that though conventionally he was supposed to accept the *pranam* (Hindu convention of touching the feet of the elder) that Kalyani had conveyed him, that was not what he wanted from her. He complained, 'Does it hurt you to simply love me?'.¹¹³ In another letter he even went to the extent of saying, 'You would discover many a shortcoming in me. Do not take them too seriously ... Please, do not forget this request.'¹¹⁴ These letters seem to contrast with letters generally written by young men of the early 20th century. In 1903, for example, a youth wrote to his father-in-law regarding his (the former's) ten year old wife, 'I am glad to learn that the mistress is regularly teaching my wife ... knitting and sewing ... as directed... I send six useful books (meant for our Hindu females) for my wife's instruction. I request my sister-in-law...to explain the contents of these books thoroughly to her.'¹¹⁵ Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay's letters (written to his wife during 1916-19) were a conscious effort to instruct the wife in Brahmanical mores; in them the superiority of the husband's knowledge and faculty was explicitly asserted and elaborated. The wife, he pointed out, had no self or worship independent of her husband, and 'inspiring *shakti* in the husband is her only form of worshipping god'.¹¹⁶ The 'terrorist' Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay, had written an undated letter to his wife from hiding around 1915.¹¹⁷ The letter betrayed not the voice of the estranged lover but that of the teacher. Instead of any intimate and endearing mode of address, the formal address *kalyaniyashu* ('source of well-being') was used. He wrote, 'Take my affectionate blessings ... I have tried to explain to you in many ways the essence of human existence ... I expect from you the kind

¹¹⁰ Details about the family were furnished by Kalyani Basu.

¹¹¹ Letters of Pramathanath Datta to his wife between 19 March 1936 and 30 May 1938. Courtesy Pranab Datta. Details about the family were furnished by Pranab Datta, son of Pramathanath.

¹¹² Letter from Hirendranath Basu to Kalyani Basu, 6 January 1925. Courtesy Kalyani Basu, Calcutta.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Letter from Hirendranath to Kalyani, 12 February 1925.

¹¹⁵ Letter of Indrachandra Sarbadhikari, 10 February 1903, preserved in the Hemendraprasad Ghosh Collection, Central Library, Jadavpur University, Calcutta).

¹¹⁶ Basantakumar Bandyopadhyay, *Byakti o Samaj*, Chandannagar, 1327 BE, pp. 1-7.

¹¹⁷ For a biography of Jatindranath, see Prithvindrath Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhak Biplabi Jatindranath*, Calcutta, 1990.

of strength, patience and sense of duty that is found in one in a thousand ... Moments of weakness might come but at such times look up to my elder sister....¹¹⁸ Indeed, he wrote much longer and less formal letters to his elder sister Binodbala, who had brought him up and whom he regarded as a mother.¹¹⁹

Significantly, from the second half of the 1920s persons like Matilal Ray, affiliated to the neo-Brahmanic ideology, shifted towards an appropriation of the concept of emotional love in their moral projection of conjugality. The impulse behind this appropriation seems to be clear from his book (written in 1925), which presented his moral suggestions for women. The author apprehended the emergence in the near future of 'rebel women' initiating 'a civil war between the sexes'. His nationalism steeped in conservative patriarchal morality, he did not like the idea that 'this gender antagonism would add to the various other forms of parochialism plaguing the colonised race'.¹²⁰ It is significant that in the context of this apprehension, he emphasised the need for respect, compassion and emotional love in marriage.¹²¹ Though it is not indicated in Matilal Ray's text, the world of neo-Brahmanic morality as a whole probably had other reasons to grudgingly invest the conjugal unit with emotional love. In the light of the suddenly increased fear of venereal disease from the 1920s, noted in Chapter Two, it may be suggested that the deep conditioning by the construction of the 'dying race' might have been a factor in this shift. It was noted that in the context of the 'revolt' of youth on the one hand, and communal frenzy about virility on the other, there was a suddenly intensified anxiety over prostitution in Calcutta.¹²² It is very likely that this anxiety also had something to do with the emergent willingness to indulge the conjugal unit with some amount of emotional exclusiveness. Even Surendranath Ray went against the grain of his project in a model letter that is worth highlighting. In it he conspicuously allowed the wife to use the word 'love' and relaxed the injunction on use of sentimental language. 'I always look up to you. Should you be indulging in cheap enjoyment by hurting me in the process? You pledged so much, professed so much love for me - was it all unreal? ... I am waiting for your reply like the *chatak* bird for the rain.'¹²³ It is highly significant that this letter was imagined

¹¹⁸ Letter of Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay, 3 Jyaishta, year not stated (c. 1915), courtesy Birendranath Mukhopadhyay. Also see *ibid.*, Introduction.

¹¹⁹ Letter of Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay to Binodbala, 3 Jyaishta, year not stated (c. 1915), courtesy Birendranath Mukhopadhyay.

¹²⁰ Matilal Ray, *Narimangal*, Calcutta, 1332 BE, p. 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²² E.g., Charuchandra Mitra, 'Bibaha o Samaj', *Bharatbarsha*, Magh, 1332 BE, p. 205.

¹²³ Ray, *Narilipi*, p. 104.

as being written to a husband who was 'causing his own ruin' by indulging in 'enjoyments' that threatened to 'tarnish his respectability'; the hint seems to be overt.¹²⁴

The anxious deployment of emotional love to stabilise the jolts of the transformation of the period of the late 1920s to 40s, is more reliably mirrored by a discourse on conjugality at a less formal and more intimate level of moral articulation than published books and articles. These were *biyer padya* (poems commemorating a wedding) that the extended family, relatives and close friends of the groom and/or the bride wrote, printed and distributed among invited guests on the occasion of the wedding. Though emerging from the more intimate level of the household, these short poems, direct in their message, made moral statements (when written by elders) and observed the norms of hierarchy and authority within the family and kin. Samples of *biyer padya* were collected in connection with this research from more than thirty middle-class families; they cover the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. From a study of these it seems that the formalised and glaringly inegalitarian rhetoric of *patibratya* noticeably decreased in these poems from the late 1930s onwards. Simultaneously, the theme of emotional love came to be explicitly stated. What is equally important, however, is that a new language of patriarchal control over the bride was sought to be deployed in these poems. The ideal of the 'joint family' structure of patriarchy and the subservience of the bride to it was now safeguarded by couching the discourse of 'duty' of the bride more in the language of emotion than in that of sacramental institutionalism.

The typical rhetoric of the 1920s, particularly when it was a message of blessing from the elders, had been,

With your soul totally dedicated to the husband,
Achieve incomparable glory in the world
By being at his feet.¹²⁵

This subordination to the husband was further located in an over-all subordination to the elders in the in-laws' extended family. There also the language used was not one of emotion but of institutional formalism. Up to the 1920s, in the case of families with average to fairly high education, the bride had been advised in the poems to 'worship the feet of the parents in law/ Always in the proper spirit of *bhakti*.'¹²⁶ It is, therefore, significant that in 1934, for example, in a fairly educated Bengali Hindu family, the message of the mother of the groom read, 'may this outward union make the union of hearts deeper'.¹²⁷ Instead of expressions like

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.

¹²⁵ *Shrimati Umashashir Shubha-parinay Upalakkhye Snehashirbad*, 11 Baishakh 1334 BE, Courtesy Chandranath Basu.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Shriman Subodhkumar o Shrimati Kamalaranir Shubha-bibaha Utsabe*, 20 Shraban 1341 BE, courtesy Subodhkumar Basu.

patibratya and *patidebata* (husband as god) so common in this genre up to the 1920s,¹²⁸ patriarchal considerations sensitised the bride to her duty by the use of a different rhetoric, 'May your journey on the road of truth, justice and duty be unobstructed'.¹²⁹ And when a non-'Westernised' family which, however, had highly educated sons, celebrated a wedding in 1948, elderly women, far from using the formalised rhetoric of *patibratya*, wrote,

Confide in us, Prashanta, how happy you are
In this moment of happy union of hearts.¹³⁰

In another such poem a woman in another family advised her newly married younger brother-in-law and his wife on conjugal 'duty'.¹³¹ Maintaining a serious vein throughout, this message written in 1938, explicitly upheld the concept of romantic love and avoided the mention of *patibratya* or any such harsh rhetoric of total subordination. Although in the late 1930s there was still the occasional use of the word *patibratya* in a number of poems, it was clearly a more casual reference now. People hardly any longer elaborated on the rigidly subordinating rhetoric invoking the husband as god. Significantly, the questionnaire conducted by the 1931 Census revealed the waning of the notion of *patidebata* among the middle class.¹³² Out of the thirteen messages of felicitation/blessing printed on the occasion of a particular wedding in 1943, only one explicitly used the concept of *patibratya*. The others, though often equally moralising in their intent, used the concept of emotional love and confined their advice to a prescription of 'making the in-laws happy' and standing 'committed' to the 'union of hearts'.¹³³ In 1910, when a didactic article, after an initial and brief glorification of the *sahadharmini*, had shifted to a blatant projection of women as functionally necessary but dangerous creatures, it did something very common in the early 20th-century neo-Brahmanic world of moral discourse. It went on to say, 'The wife is pleasurable if you can tactfully subordinate her. [Otherwise] ... she is worse than a poisonous snake'.¹³⁴ However, by the early 1940s, such a rhetoric of control, as the transformation in the world of *biyer padya* indicates, had become embarrassing to articulate as a moral statement in print. Among the sections more aware of the new discursive trends, therefore, the need was felt for a more 'humane' rhetoric of control. It should be noted here that in contemporary writings

¹²⁸ E.g., 'Always know that the husband is a woman's god/... Worshipping his feet is your mission in life.' in *Shrimati Jyotirmayir Shubha-parinay Upalakkhye*, 16 Phalgun 1327 BE, courtesy Gayatri Basu.

¹²⁹ *Shriman Subodhkumar*.

¹³⁰ *Prashanta o Shephalike*, 15 Baishakh 1355 BE, courtesy Shephali Nag.

¹³¹ *Shriman Amarendranather Shubha-bibahe*, 3 Magh 1345 BE, courtesy Sudha Mitra.

¹³² *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V (Bengal and Sikkim), pt. I, p. 417.

¹³³ *Shrimati Maya o Shriman Nrpندرkrshner Milanotsabe Shubhashirbad*, 20 Shraban 1350 BE, courtesy Dilipkumar Basu.

¹³⁴ 'Janaika Brddha', 'Stri', p. 284.

questioning the neo-Brahmanic morality, there was a constant reminder that women were humans. As one author wrote, 'Men have so long fashioned women at their will. That is why women's identity, stripped of humanity, has become restricted to that of the wife merely. Women are not merely that; they are humans as well'.¹³⁵

However, it was not merely male, intellectual criticism that weakened the persuasive power of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of *patibratya*. There is evidence that men registered a growing scepticism about this rhetoric among women - the very people who were sought to be subordinated through this persuasion. This was probably more decisive in inducing a transformation in the disciplining language of patriarchy. Nrupendrakumar Basu, whose concern was clearly disciplinarian, urged in the 1940s that women should be conceded, among other things, sufficient emotional space within marriage if they were not to 'go astray'.¹³⁶ Significantly, Nrupendrakumar, writing on the basis of his psychoanalytical observation, also stated that 'women cannot be blamed' for refusing to be persuaded, any longer, by the rhetoric of *patibratya* that had 'so long forced women to compulsorily worship the feet of their husbands' even where the latter 'suffered from venereal disease'.¹³⁷ In this transforming atmosphere of the 1930s and 40s, emotional appeal appeared to have a greater persuasive potential than the Shastric rhetoric of women's subordination. However, to ensure that the accommodation of romantic love in the moral rhetoric did not individualise the conjugal unit in relation to the extended family, one message in 1948, for example, read,

Making everybody your own,
Bind yourself to them by a bond of affection.
Let everybody's love for you keep you ever-smiling.¹³⁸

In the message of blessing to Prashanta and Shephali cited previously, the elderly women reminded the couple that it was important for them to make others in the family as happy as themselves. In this matter, too, the replacement of the older rhetoric 'sheltering' the bride 'at the feet of the elders' tended to be replaced by an emotional buttress to women's subordination to patriarchy. In the late 1930s and 40s the bride was to 'love everybody and make everybody happy'.¹³⁹

In this connection one might recall from the discussion in Chapter Two that, from the late 1920s, serious discussions of sex and psychoanalysis identified conjugal disharmony and sexual maladjustment in marriage as 'problems' plaguing middle-class domesticity. These

¹³⁵ 'Banganari' (pseud.), 'Naranari', *Agamani*, Calcutta, 1926, p. 11.

¹³⁶ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, pp. 40-41, 89. This book represents Nrupendrakumar's views as the co-author contributed only the specific case-studies.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹³⁸ *Shriman Arun o Anjaliranir Milane*, 24 Shraban 1355 BE, courtesy Krishna Ray.

¹³⁹ *Shrimati Maya*.

discussions challenged the myth that, in contradistinction to the 'ephemeral' and 'materialist' bond of Western marriage, the Hindu union was sacred, eternal and obviously harmonious. The 'spirituality' of marriage was now questioned by a number of authors.¹⁴⁰ 'Banganari' inverted the myth of the innate harmony of Hindu marriage and argued that divorce was rare only because it was difficult to obtain under Hindu law; but maladjustment, she (or he) claimed, festered nonetheless under the cover of a compulsory duty of conjugal coexistence.¹⁴¹ This makes one aware that, when in 1937-38 the Hindu Woman's Right to Divorce Act was passed, the voice of patriarchal order registered its alarm. However limited divorce might be even after the passing of this Act, several writers nervously saw the incidence of divorce suits as an indicator of growing 'disorder' in the Bengali home.¹⁴² It should not be overlooked, moreover, that these discussions of conjugal disharmony emerged during a period when, disturbingly but unavoidably for patriarchy, the female age of marriage was going up. The problem for patriarchy was the decline of its own certainty about the question of divorce. The general disapproval of divorce, for example, did not develop into organised and widespread patriarchal opposition. Indeed, in a period of growing discursive plurality among the middle class, issues like divorce could cause a feeling of helplessness rather than opposition. In 1944, when his granddaughter Bani decided to seek divorce from her husband, the journalist Hemendraprasad Ghosh did not know how to react: 'Bani ... has declined ... to go to her husband's place where she has been so unhappy. What course she will adopt next, I do not know. But it is a great disaster.'¹⁴³ A few days later he wrote, 'The marriage, it now transpires, has been an unhappy one, and perhaps there is something wrong with the husband. But, then, it goes against the tradition of the Hindus to seek such a separation'.¹⁴⁴ 'Abha's daughter's [Bani's] action has been an unexpected blow. She now seeks a divorce. What a calamity for the girl and her mother.'¹⁴⁵ The answer to such a situation among one section of the voice of order might have been a forceful reiteration of subordination to the husband and patriarchy. But among those who were more sensitive to new discursive and social developments, the tendency may well have been - as it seems from the *biyer padya* - to give the domestication of and control over women a new justification; it was done by morally

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Samajdharma o Sahitya' (1335 BE), *Chintayasi* in *Dhurjatiprasad Granthabali*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1987, p. 58.

¹⁴¹ 'Banganari', 'Baibahiki', *Agamani*, pp. 1-7.

¹⁴² E.g., Bijaykrshna Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay Bangali Kon Pathe', *Bharatbarsha*, Agrahayan, 1345 BE, p. 961.

¹⁴³ UDHG, 10 March 1944.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 April 1944.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1944.

providing conjugality with a more intimate space and the young bride a more 'humanised' status within it.

The Language of Control from the 1920s to 40s

As is probably already evident, the period from the late 1920s saw a transformation in the language of subordination of women in domesticity from the neo-Brahmanic in particular and the 19th-century moral indices in general. It is true that throughout the 1920s and even into the 1930s, the neo-Brahmanic moral rationale of womanhood was reiterated. But more importantly, there emerged during this period a plurality of moral stances with various degrees of accommodation of the idea of self-determination on the part of women. This section relates both these tendencies to changes in the lived experience that thrust themselves on patriarchy during these decades. Finally, this was the period when, with the decline of women's seclusion, the justification for women's subordination had necessarily to transform itself from the division of knowledge and faculties to that of the division of work-space.

The most fundamental anxiety behind the shift in patriarchal pronouncements in the 1920s seems to be indicated by the particular meaning that began to be read into the term *stri-swadhinata* (women's liberty). The opinions of the 1920s onwards signified the term in the context of what they explicitly perceived as women's autonomous initiative in fashioning this *swadhinata* (liberty). It is also clear that this initiative was looked upon as a recent development. The various shades of moral pronouncement trying to reiterate or alter the language of control were thus responses by the middle class to this jolting perception of women's own agency. The role of women's assertion in determining these male reactions become all the more evident when we compare the discussion of women's liberty in the 1920s with those in the neo-Brahmanic didactic literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the latter, whenever the question of *stri-swadhinata* had come up, the young husband, 'denationalised' by his English education, was ascribed the agency for making the wife *swadhin* (independent) and destroying her 'natural modesty' in the process. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay did not condemn Sukumari (an imaginary character) for transgressing spatial segregation; her husband was ascribed the primary agency for having initiated the process and was, accordingly, condemned.¹⁴⁶ In the early 20th century numerous essays blamed Western-educated young men for experimenting with Western ideas of women's liberty on their wives and warned that 'another European society would be created'.¹⁴⁷ In the 1920s,

¹⁴⁶ Mukhopadhyay, 'Lajjashilata', *Paribarik Prabandha*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁷ E.g., Purnachandra Basu, *Samajtattva*, Calcutta, 1308 BE, pp. 213-27.

however, authors like Matilal Ray directly ascribed agency to women threatening to come out of purdah and staking a 'separatist' claim to involvement in the sphere outside the home: 'Women are demanding the independence to participate in all walks of life equally with men ... in teaching, in the legal profession, in political meetings and even in flood-relief operations as recently evidenced during the North Bengal floods ... Women have expressed the childish whim of contesting the municipal elections ... just like men they want to come out of home'.¹⁴⁸ The note of apprehension in Matilal's voice seems to indicate that though such assertion in professions and active politics was still extremely limited in the 1920s, it had created an impact out of proportion to its actual incidence. The period after the First World War saw the formation of national women's organisations. Historical opinion is divided on whether the 'first wave feminists' questioned patriarchy.¹⁴⁹ But what is important here is that the patriarchal susceptibilities of nationalist males were tensed, especially as simultaneously (from 1917) the demand for female franchise and political representation was raised among women. The apprehension in Matilal's voice about the fracture of the nationalist field ties up with the suspicion among prominent nationalists regarding the women's demand for franchise. In a characteristic patriarchal gesture Gandhi withheld his support to pro-franchise women nationalists by expressing the need for 'helping their men against the common foe'.¹⁵⁰ Opponents of the franchise in Bengal argued that the vote might play havoc with women's 'natural' roles as wives and mothers.¹⁵¹ Matilal, thus, was only voicing a pervasive nationalist male apprehension of the generation past its youth, when he constructed the 'he-woman', subversive in her appropriation of the masculine role and her abandonment of her 'natural' one.¹⁵²

However, this changed perception of women's agency actually diversified the nationalist-patriarchal approach to the woman question. Matilal's position was only one response - one that retained the neo-Brahmanic position more or less intact. Before looking at the mosaic that the nationalist male discursive scenario came to represent in the 1920s, one should briefly discuss the more feminist voice, in dialogue with which the other nationalist

¹⁴⁸ Ray, *Narimangal*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁹ For differing views, see Geraldine Forbes, 'The Indian Women's Movement: A Struggle for Women's Rights or National Liberation?', in Gail Minault (ed.), *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Delhi, 1981, pp. 49-82; Kamala Visweswaran, 'Family Subjects: An Ethnography of the "Women's Question" in Indian Nationalism', PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1990, pp. 26-63, 149-215. Visweswaran concentrates on the Madras Presidency.

¹⁵⁰ Forbes, *Women*, p. 101.

¹⁵¹ Barbara Southard, 'Colonial Politics and Women's Rights: Woman Suffrage Campaigns in Bengal, British India in the 1920s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27:2, 1993, pp. 397-439.

¹⁵² Ray, *Narimangal*, p. 3.

voices set their parameters of opposition, accommodation or both. The specificity of the period of the 1920s and 30s was that in some sections of the print it came to raise much more fundamental questions than a mere right to emerge from seclusion and have higher education. For example, the articles written by an author under the pseudonym 'Banganari' and first published during the years 1921-23, may be regarded as representing the liberal-feminist criticism of the pre-existing gender morality. Going beyond paternalistic concessions of the relaxation of purdah and the grant of higher educational opportunities, it voiced a woman's right to her own self, an equitable sexual morality, equal rights of representation in society and the polity and equal right to employment outside the home.¹⁵³ It is important to realise that though authors like 'Banganari' represented only a minority, their writings, by unnerving patriarchy, determined the dialogical contours of the contending discourses on women's morality in the 1920s. For example, the assertion of the pro-franchise women, however limited in numbers, coupled with the deployment of the term 'women's revolution' by authors like 'Banganari', was immediately reflected in all shades of patriarchal discourse in their anxiety to appropriate the term. The intention of authors like Matilal Ray was to strip the term of its transformative promise and inscribe a destructive significance on it. Constructing the contemporary demands of political and vocational equality by women as 'extrovert self-advertisement', he warned that 'a civil war [between the sexes] is threatening to break out'. These women were in effect seen as the enemies of the nation, adding an 'unnatural antagonism' to the 'the numerous separatist tendencies already plaguing the *jati*'. But interestingly, the notion of revolt was also then appropriated by him in his own ambitions for women: 'Women would definitely have to revolt', but that 'revolt' should consist of a woman's sublimation of her sexuality and 'elevation' of her self to a 'divinity' that would inspire men to conserve their energy for the service of the nation. And the glorified conscience-keeper's *shakti* was actually to consist in her moral resistance to men unworthy of the nation.¹⁵⁴

The perception of 'women's revolution' also inscribed itself on the nationalist discourses which intended to defuse the 'revolutionary' potential through accommodation. Some authors constructed the revolt as natural and historically justified but simultaneously neutralised it by taking its ultimate agency away from women. Sureshchandra Gupta, for example, wrote in a nationalist periodical, 'the strain of revolt in the female voice today ... is only to be expected. The day the woman was deprived of her independence, the seed of revolt was sown ... today it has ... asserted itself openly. If this is a revolt, then men are responsible

¹⁵³ 'Banganari', *Agamani*, *passim*.

¹⁵⁴ Ray, *Narimangal*, pp. 3, 7, 5, 10-18.

for it, not women ... maybe this revolt is transgressing limits but ... the reaction is always equal and opposite to the action'. Thus by representing the 'revolt' not so much as a positive development of women's subjectivity but as an undesirable end-product of allegedly irresponsible male behaviour, the author actually advised a male initiative in defusing the situation by a timely accommodation of some of the women's demands. The patronising spirit of the accommodation underlay the declaration, 'We want to end the absence of women's role in social life'. And the author wanted this 'we' to fashion in women the ability to assert their *shakti* against all inequalities. Gupta also accommodated women's assertion of their right to contest elections and saw no reason why women should have no role in national decision-making which in any case affected them as well.¹⁵⁵

Gandhi's symbolising of female sexuality was in line with an essentialised national identity, strategically gendered through his evocation of the mythological figures like Savitri and duties like obedience and nurturing.¹⁵⁶ But these continuities of the Gandhian message with neo-Brahmanic moral ordering conceal a paradox. By invoking what he considered a wife's duty to defy her husband for national service and involving vast numbers of women in the *satyagraha* movement, Gandhi 'had embarked on a ... dangerous enterprise of bringing women in the public'.¹⁵⁷ Also problematic for nationalist patriarchy was the romantic enthusiasm of the post-adolescent males, whose joining of the Non-Cooperation Movement did not necessarily reconcile them with Gandhian notions of sexuality. It has been noted in Chapters Two and Three that, in their romantic animation of the moment, young men imagined women as one of the hitherto marginalised groups, and tended to adopt moral stances incompatible with the neo-Brahmanic patriarchal morality. Nationalist discourse was caught between its commitment to the unprecedented national mobilisation achieved among women during Non-Cooperation and its anxiety to keep women rooted in predominantly traditional roles. With various authors trying, in their own way, to reformulate patriarchal morality in the transformed situation, there was now much less homogeneity and certainty than before in choosing the exact language of control.

A look at nationalist periodicals like *Matrmandir* and *Basanti* gives an idea of this. In the same Gandhi-inspired periodical (*Basanti*) in which there were occasionally articles looking askance at women with college and university education,¹⁵⁸ there was also detailed

¹⁵⁵ Sureshchandra Gupta, 'Jagaran', *Matrmandir*, Ashadh, 1330 BE, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵⁶ Ketu H. Kartak, 'Indian Nationalism, Gandhian Satyagraha and Representations of Female Sexuality', in Andrew Parker *et al.* (eds), *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, New York, 1992, p. 397.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 397, 401; Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *EPW*, 21 November, 1987, p. 2014.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., 'Meyemahal', 'Shishupalan', *Basanti*, Ashadh, 1328 BS, pp. 251-253.

reporting on how well women were faring in the matriculation. *Basanti* also lauded women going abroad for higher education.¹⁵⁹ In *Matrmandir*, which had articles essentialising women as habitually extravagant and seeking to confine women's role exclusively to domesticity,¹⁶⁰ there were also more accommodative-patronising discourses supporting women's emergence outside the home. Sureshchandra Gupta, for example, wrote, 'We must try our level best to ensure that women may apply their independent energy to familial, social and political life'.¹⁶¹ But there was apprehension that women's definition of their own independent strength might indeed be asymmetrical to the male-determined parameters of the nation. So this kind of nationalist discourse was eager to define for women the national ideal. Sureshchandra, after accommodating the view that women as human beings were entitled to all human rights, hastened to remind his readers about the 'natural' division of faculties. Unable to recognise women's ultimate control over their own bodies, Gupta wrote, 'Of course, men and women have separate spheres of existence'; and this difference and the 'the laws of nature' would determine the difference in rights and duties.¹⁶² Shyamlal Goswami criticised purdah and the early termination of the formal education of women. But his apparently radical suggestions regarding women's higher education could not conceal his conservative commitment to the control of female sexuality. It surfaced in his assurance to families reluctant to send their daughters to high schools or colleges: 'All problems could be solved by sending girls not to the type of schools and colleges that encourage a preoccupation with novels but to ones that are suited to our society'.¹⁶³

The different shades of partial accommodation, in the 1920s, of women's autonomous agency in fashioning their selves were, however, still predominantly within the parameters of inter-gender division of knowledge based on 'natural faculties'. It was really the 1930s and 1940s which seemed to mark a qualitative transformation in the patriarchal language of women's subordination. With purdah declining, the accustomed language of division of knowledge - functional (female) and intellectual-metaphysical (male) - had to be reinscribed with an argument of a 'natural' division of work and spaces. Thanks to purdah, differential engagement with spaces - the home and its outside - had not required elaboration. However, by the late 1930s, even in discussions that went on constructing a difference in 'natural' faculties, this construction now conflated with the emergent construction of division of work in relation to spaces - domestic and extra-domestic. It seems that the 1920s had been more

¹⁵⁹ 'Meyemahal', *Basanti*, 1328 BE, p. 253.

¹⁶⁰ E.g., Bhattacharya, 'Narir Parichay', pp. 19-21.

¹⁶¹ Gupta, 'Jagaran', pp. 8-10.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Goswami, 'Hindunari', p. 120.

disturbed over the possibilities conjured up before an apprehensive patriarchy by the accommodative discursive strategies that argued for some space for women outside the home. But from the 1930s the voices of non-‘reformed’ Hindu patriarchy seemed to be reacting not so much to mere discourses or even possibilities, but to a more concrete situation where seclusion was seen to be actually breaking down.

Two texts, representative of the contemporary voices of patriarchy in the 1930s, may be used to understand the attempts to construct the new language of women’s subordination and domestication. The more uncomplicated of the two was Surendranath Ray’s *Narir Karmajog* (1935). Surendranath explicitly entered into ‘contention’ with the ‘younger generation of today’, whom he perceived as favourable to women’s engagement - vocational and political - outside the home. He presented the younger generation’s argument as he saw it: ‘our women should have the independent right to work; ... the woman going out to work ... and earning as she chooses would help every family and even the country fight poverty.’ Contradicting this view, the author asserted that the sphere outside the home was potentially polluting and justified woman’s domestication on the ground of her ‘chastity’ and the male’s ‘duty to protect it’. Conflating the ‘outside’ with the unrelated employer and thus conflating the divisions of labour and space, the author, moreover, argued that if the woman was subordinated to her own people at home, she would be subordinated to an ‘outsider’ in the workplace. The way the author often used direct speech to present women’s voices staking a claim to the ‘outside’, suggests that these voices were not imagined but actually encountered by patriarchy at that juncture. But it is even more significant that the female voice, as Surendranath represented it, was that of the lower middle-class woman in purdah. She was represented as saying that she had the right to go out and work as the male members were ‘failing to earn enough to sustain the family’.¹⁶⁴

Surendranath was aware of the force of this plea in the situation of the 1930s, ‘In the past the family did not have to depend on the income of women, but today the situation has certainly changed. Today men are indeed expecting support from women in both domains [in the household and in the field of monetary support]. The income of the male is now failing to run the household singly ... So the woman can now make the demand for an entry into the outside world with quite a degree of insistence and pride’. But the author, in an anxiety to take away from this argument, appealed to middle-class families to cut down on ‘conspicuous consumption’ as if it were the way out of the material crisis. And in a pre-emptive manner he immediately named luxury items all of which barring one were for women’s use. Thus by

¹⁶⁴ Ray, *Narir Karmajog*, pp. 26, 31, 33, 39.

implication he made women forfeit the right to demand work outside the home. Surendranath reckoned another kind of pull of the 'outside' on women - that of nationalist politics. One imaginary female voice was presented as saying that 'her [domestic] duties were not enough for her; she can shoulder much more responsibility ... Why should she not, over and above all this, devote herself to the cause of the uplift of herself and the country?'¹⁶⁵ Indeed, in the 1930s women were much more exposed to such persuasion than during Non-Cooperation. Even during Non-Cooperation women Congress volunteers had established contacts with the *andar* and persuaded a number of women to come out of purdah and attend the women's gathering addressed by Gandhi in the wake of the Congress Session at Calcutta in 1920.¹⁶⁶ But in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31 'women participated in thousands'.¹⁶⁷ The author's counterpoise to both the grounds - political and vocational - for women's engagement with the outside was, 'In the world of domestic responsibilities men should protect the family from external adversities and provide for its subsistence. Women should do all the domestic chores, nurture the children, and ensure the comfort of the members....'¹⁶⁸ Transgression of this 'division of workload' 'ordained by the ancient Hindu lawgivers', would only bring greater disorder in the household already plagued by numerous problems.¹⁶⁹

Unlike Surendranath's neo-Brahmanic reaction to women's involvement outside the home, Nrpندرakumar Basu's *Nari Bipathe Jay Keno* (1944) was a popular psychoanalytical study of Bengali female sexuality. The question of the increasing tendency among women 'to employ their bodies outside the home according to their own discretion' came up in this discussion because of its relevance to the question of female sexuality. Nrpندرakumar's predicament was illustrative of that section of patriarchy, which under various pressures, material and discursive, was abandoning the earlier defence of women's seclusion and was, therefore, left sounding distraught and ambivalent. Nrpندرakumar's affiliation to psychoanalysis committed him to the recognition of women's wish, as much as men's, to have autonomy over their own bodies and the right to work outside the home. He even identified the opposition to women's equal right to life outside the home as a reactionary effort to preserve the structure of patriarchy. But in effect Nrpندرakumar's own attempts at suggesting an alternative organisation of work and spaces was confused and ambivalent. Unable to use any arbitrary rhetoric to keep women's involvement with the outside to the minimum, Nrpندرakumar used the language of scientific empiricism. By 'observing' how the

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39.

¹⁶⁶ See Renuka Ray, *My Reminiscences*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 28.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁸ Ray, *Narir Karmajog*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

'outside' tended to 'pollute' women he implicitly expressed his preference for the division of work-spaces. He claimed that it was 'observed' that the tendency to 'go astray' was particularly high among women affiliated with the Congress, the 'terrorist' groups and the Communist party. Working women, female students in colleges and the university were in effect looked upon with distrust by him, in spite of all his professed commitment to higher education of women. Not only were the 'ringleaders of women's movements', whether in the West or in India, 'found' frequently to have homosexual tendencies, educated, working spinsters were 'observed' to be lesbian, narcissistic or frigid. He also took care to highlight the possibility that in the expectation of independent careers women might have to sexually oblige people in authority.¹⁷⁰

Narir Karmajog, with its unequivocal moral verdict against women's involvement in the 'outside', and *Nari Bipathe Jai Keno*, with its greater ambivalence, may now be situated against the lived experience of the patriarchy during the 1930s and early 1940s. The 1930s, indeed, marked a deep moral predicament. The majority sensibility of the class favouring total domestication of women was deflected within the same group by the pressure of changing circumstances specific to this period. A sense of the patriarchal attitude of the middle-class majority at the turn of the decade to the question of women's relation to the 'outside' was reflected in *Shikhhita Patitar Atmacharit*. Quite obviously written to expose a few famous personalities in the municipal politics and 'high society' of Calcutta of the late 1920s, this book may be taken to have appealed to (and, therefore, reflected), the sensibilities of the middle-class majority. It is interesting, therefore, that it projected the participation of married middle-class women in Non-Cooperation as leading to marital infidelity. Many women, it was claimed, had abandoned their husbands and taken up jobs, while some others had started illicit affairs with fellow nationalist cadres.¹⁷¹ If this was the majority attitude to women active outside the home at the beginning of the 1930s - the results of the Census questionnaire of 1931 confirms that it was¹⁷² - then the 1930s and 40s marked a serious predicament for the majority. Whether the majority within the middle-class patriarchy liked it or not, from the latter half of the 1930s 'what changed significantly was the presence of women in all major events of the times'.¹⁷³ Indeed, the 1930s were a decade of great paradox in this regard. While the majority within patriarchy maligned women coming into political activism and into employment, unprecedented possibilities were also created during this decade for women's

¹⁷⁰ Basu and Debi, *Nari Bipathe*, pp. 35-36, 40-41, 80, 86, 183.

¹⁷¹ Manada Debi, *Shikhhita Patitar Atmacharit* (1929), Calcutta, 3rd edn, 1929, p. 124.

¹⁷² *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, pp. 400-01.

¹⁷³ Forbes, *Women*, p. 191.

emergence in the 'outside'. Patriarchy was not in a position to control certain developments that came in a clustered way during the 1930s. Moreover, patriarchy wilted under material pressures that were militating against women's seclusion.

A recent study of girlhood among the middle classes in Calcutta in the colonial period has identified the 1930s as the period of noticeable decline of purdah.¹⁷⁴ Phulrenu Guha, who, as a student, stayed for some time in a girls' hostel in Calcutta in the late 1930s, noted that by that time 'a noticeable number of girls had broken purdah despite a strict regime of prohibition'.¹⁷⁵ In the early 1930s Khitindranath Thakur noted that now the 'free movement of women [of middle-class families] was steadily increasing'.¹⁷⁶ It is true that the decline of purdah by itself did not involve women with paid jobs or active politics and that women going out to work were very limited in number in the 1930s. But for patriarchy it was a situation with dangerous possibilities. A near future, when patriarchy would have to give in to women's involvement in both worlds, threatened to materialise, unless some rhetoric was deployed to prevent this spatial levelling from affecting the 'natural' division of work.¹⁷⁷ Hence the shift to the rhetoric of the spatial dimension of the division of labour.

However, the decline of purdah was not the only development that the class had to address in its search for an alternative rhetoric of control. More problematically, this decline was accompanied by a significant rise in the female age of marriage and a remarkable increase in the incidence of secondary, and in some cases college, education among women after the Child Marriage Restraint Act took effect from 1930.¹⁷⁸ But the crisis for patriarchy was that instead of being able to unequivocally oppose these developments, it often actually had to be a party to the way these developments interacted and reinforced each other. Indeed Nrpndrakumar's ambivalence and sense of disturbance accurately reflects this paradoxical situation. The process seems to have started with the Child Marriage Restraint Act. The statutory raising of the age of marriage to 14 created the problem of keeping pubescent girls 'out of mischief'.¹⁷⁹ In these changed circumstances the secondary school came to be looked upon as a 'protector of the morality of pubescent girls'.¹⁸⁰ This created an atmosphere where woman's secondary education, on becoming a norm, tended to spill over beyond matriculation. This spilling over made patriarchy apprehensive of gender roles collapsing,

¹⁷⁴ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁵ Guha, 'Ja Peyechhi', p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ Khitindranath Thakur, *Kalikatar Chalaphera*, Calcutta, 1337 BE, pp. 108-09.

¹⁷⁷ The apprehended involvement materialised in 1941-42 with the war-time clerical employment of women, discussed in Chapters Three and Five.

¹⁷⁸ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, pp. 96, 119.

¹⁷⁹ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 400.

¹⁸⁰ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, pp. 96, 119.

subverting the domestic order and women's subordination within it. Bhupatimohan Sen, who advised women to concentrate on child-rearing instead of increasing the jurisdiction of their rights, also looked upon women's college education and professional training with suspicion.¹⁸¹ But the same class had started having the uncomfortable but unavoidable feeling that the lower middle-class male might need some pecuniary support from his wife and unmarried daughters to supplement his meagre income. Even an author who feared that the higher education of women would encourage cross-caste consensual marriage, could not help feeling that it would have been better if women could work to supplement the income of the family.¹⁸² Despite their apprehension about higher education, an increasing number of lower middle-class families sent their girls to high schools. The concern was to get them married off cheaply.¹⁸³ From the late 1920s and more so in the 1930s grooms' families were increasingly insisting on educated brides.¹⁸⁴ The lower middle class, plagued by the problem of dowry, responded to the suggestion that girls should be given a proper formal education in order to avoid payment of dowry.¹⁸⁵ Finally, the same class which had forcefully denounced women's involvement with work outside the home, was forced in its lower echelons to consider the possibility of daughters earning a living as school-teachers.¹⁸⁶

Even after criticising denial of self-hood to women, Nrupendrakumar, it has been noted, characterised women in active politics as prone to promiscuity. This, too, was particularly shaped by the developments of the 1930s. Women's political role could not be restricted any longer to the Gandhian ideal of domesticity-based, secondary service in a male-centric nationalist enterprise. In the sphere of 'terrorist' activity the decline of the older leadership in the late 1920s also marked the beginning of direct involvement of women in revolutionary acts.¹⁸⁷ The voice of domestic order was alarmed.¹⁸⁸ In the transformed language of control, therefore, the spatial dimension of gender roles and division of work became heavily underlined.¹⁸⁹ Ironically, but not unexpectedly, in this matter middle-class patriarchy and colonial officials agreed in emphasising that the 'true vocation' of 'the members of the gentler sex should be in their homes'. The police in Calcutta on the basis of their observation

¹⁸¹ Bhupatimohan Sen, 'Deshi Banam Bideshi, pt. 5', *Jibanbima*, Chaitra 1336 BE, p. 269.

¹⁸² Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay', p. 961.

¹⁸³ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, p. 311.

¹⁸⁴ E.g., Nrupendrakumar Basu, *Janmashasan* (1334 BE), Calcutta, 1350 BE, p. 57.

¹⁸⁵ E.g., Goswami, 'Hindunari', p. 120.

¹⁸⁶ Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, p. 311.

¹⁸⁷ Forbes, *Women*, pp. 138-41.

¹⁸⁸ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 401; Kerkhoff, *Save Ourselves*, pp. 220-21.

¹⁸⁹ Amiyabala in her advice to women to exclusively mind the home, condemned both university-educated women and the revolutionary 'terrorists'. Amiyabala Guhajaya, *Mao o Meve: Kanyar Prati Matar Upadesh*, Howrah, 1334 BE, pp. 11-12, 109.

believed that 'middle class families would really welcome action which would keep these uncontrolled, unmarried young ladies from participating in such public matters'.¹⁹⁰ With men training women in driving, shooting and physical exercises, the world of revolutionary 'terrorism' of the 1930s must have given patriarchal susceptibilities the uncomfortable feeling of a relatively unstructured world. Female 'terrorists' and communists had to face virulent slander campaigns.¹⁹¹ Regarding communist women, who faced the fiercest vituperation, what clearly conflated in the class's voice of order, was the nervousness about the right of the worker to his labour and that of the woman to her sexuality. Charuchandra Mitra, the vice-chairman of the National Council of Education in 1937, wrote that under the 'influence of socialist and communist propaganda many were persuaded that workers and women could not be emancipated from exploitation, short of adoption of the Soviet model'. However, the Soviet Union, the author argued, had failed to establish equality and, where women were concerned, the only gain had been widespread sexual licence.¹⁹² Debaprasad Ghosh, in his representation of the Soviet Union as a site of promiscuity, wrote: 'Do you know what this equality-preaching orgiastic era of Communism has decided about the sexual regime? ... Not the *sati* but the sexually lascivious female is the most superior woman of this era.'¹⁹³ This characterisation was extended by implication to women associated with the Communist Party of India.

Female Sexuality and Procreation

The neo-Brahmanic ideology sought to control female sexuality through the ideal of *stridharma* in which the legitimisation of female sexuality lay in procreation. Didactic literature constantly reiterated the Shastric dictum, 'The significance of having a wife is to beget a son'.¹⁹⁴ This Brahmanical objectification was nuanced, however, by the way in which the site of the female body was inscribed by the colonised male's specific notion of masculinity. The nationalist essentialisation of the female body also interacted with the practical considerations of patriarchy to create the neo-Brahmanic discourse on female

¹⁹⁰ Kerkhoff, p. 221.

¹⁹¹ Renu Chakravarty, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement: 1940-1950*, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 20, 82.

¹⁹² Charuchandra Mitra, *Nari: Pashchatya Samaje o Hindu Samaje*, Calcutta, 1344 BE, Introduction.

¹⁹³ Debaprasad Ghosh, quoted in Binay Ghosh, 'Prem = Biology + Culture', *Nabababucharit* (1944), Calcutta, 1979, p. 82.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., Goloknath Sen, *Grhaniti*, Calcutta, 1289 BE, p. 6; Jibankali Ray Baidyaratna, 'Bibahabidhi', *Grhastha*, Phalgun, 1321 BE, p. 444.

sexuality in all its complexity and ambiguity. However, the gender imbalance in the neo-Brahmanic sexual morality, like all aspects of the dominant ideology, came to be increasingly interrogated from the 1920s even among non-Brahmo, non-‘reformed’ Hindu males. But not surprisingly, female sexuality was the area where questioning authors across the board stumbled, more or less, caught by their inability to overcome the deep-seated male commitment to denying women full control over their own bodies.

The tense nationalist effort to fashion the ‘new woman’ by simultaneously imposing femininity and sublimation of sexuality on an agency constructed as dangerously alluring, was interesting. Manu’s contention that women were innately promiscuous and oversexed and, therefore, justified in their sexuality solely by motherhood,¹⁹⁵ was the key to the neo-Brahmanic signification of the female body, so crucial for the biological reproduction of the nation. The anxiety to keep this sexuality under the rubric of patriarchy was reflected, for example, in the distrust of the novel.¹⁹⁶ Of course, it was not neo-Brahmanic literature alone that regarded novels as exciting female sexuality. A Brahmo nationalist doctor wrote that reading novels induced premature puberty in women.¹⁹⁷ Also, questions of virility and of the health of the son (the future of the nation) determined the contours of the objectification of female sexuality. In order to observe continence, believed to make the semen more potent, women were optimally to sublimate their sexuality and help the conservation of masculine energy. Authors, therefore, appealed to women that, instead of whetting the male sexual appetite, they should suppress their sex appeal and act as conscience-keepers and preservers of the ‘vitality’ of the nation.¹⁹⁸

However, there was another trajectory in the nationalist male discourse that prevented this sublimation from veering to complete asexuality. Nationalists constructed the body of the middle-class male as maimed and marked by subjection in the colonial sphere.¹⁹⁹ It is probably a compensatory aesthetic that imagined the ideal woman as invariably tender, full-bodied and beautiful. With this aesthetic stake in the ‘femininity’ of the ‘new woman’, the hint of anything - particularly the ‘denaturing’ and ‘denationalising’ agency of higher education - that was imagined as distorting this femininity, was warned against. Right up to the 1930s women asserting themselves outside the home were criticised by the majority morality as ‘he-women’,²⁰⁰ who were ready to abandon even the ‘natural’ virtue of

¹⁹⁵ I. J. Leslie, ‘Strisvabhava: The Inherent Nature of Women’, in N. J. Allen *et al.*, (eds), *Oxford University Papers on India*, vol. 1, part 1, Delhi, 1986, p. 40.

¹⁹⁶ E.g., Sen, *Grhaniti*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁷ Das, *Saral Dhatrihikkha*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Ray, *Narimangal*, pp. 51-59.

¹⁹⁹ Sarkar, ‘Rhetoric’, p. 1871.

²⁰⁰ Ray, *Narimangal*, p. 3.

motherhood.²⁰¹ The 'recast' young wife was thus to be a combination of femininity and sublimated sexuality.

But it is also crucial to understand that nationalism did not leave male sexuality untouched. Indeed, the Shastric fundamental was heavily overdetermined in the neo-Brahmanic ideology by a nationalist anxiety to monitor male sexuality as well. The imagining of the nation, though gendered, involved a recasting not merely of women but also men who were more visible to the colonialists; the sexual morality of men outside domesticity, therefore, was a matter of the self-esteem of the nation and the class, imagined in relation to the colonial presence. After all, the Bengali Hindu male had already been characterised in colonial discourse as given to excessive sexual indulgence, encouraged by 'the overtly sexual atmosphere of the Bengali home that led to masturbation and other such practices'.²⁰² It was not surprising, therefore, that the neo-Brahmanic ideology sought to rigidly bind males to the Shastric precepts of *brahmacharya* before marriage and continence within it. From a recent study which has cited an impressive number of late 19th-century farces and novels, it seems that patriarchy, with its obsessive investment in the control of female sexuality, was, however, also troubled by a perceived proneness of males to amorous adventures outside marriage.²⁰³ In a novel, published in a non-Brahmo Hindu periodical, the 'infidelity' on the part of the young wife was presented as a consequence of her neglect by the husband, who was preoccupied with extra-marital affairs. It reveals how a one-way essentialisation of women as potentially promiscuous was complicated by a nationalist compulsion to critique male sexuality: 'The girl failed [to repress her sexuality] ... but is she to be blamed?'²⁰⁴ Similarly, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, writing in 1900, condemned the sexual 'immorality' of 'the husbands in Bengal' as the reason why the wives sometimes 'went astray'.²⁰⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that in this context he indulgently presented the sexual urge of the young wife as something natural at her age. He castigated the husbands, who, because of their impotence caused by a reckless sex-life outside marriage, could not meet the legitimate sexual demand of their wives.²⁰⁶ Thus, at one level, the given morality used the myth of the oversexed female to order her. But at another level, it actually looked upon male sexuality as a more real threat to the domestic order. The way in which advertisements up to the 1920s projected the male, seems to indicate this. While the advertisement for remedies for female

²⁰¹ Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye*, pp. 7,11.

²⁰² Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 18-19.

²⁰³ Sambuddha Chakrabarti, *Andare Antare*, Calcutta, 1995, pp. 94-97.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁰⁵ Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, Calcutta, 1307 BE, p. 30.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

disorders did not refer to any 'bad habit' or 'excessive sexual indulgence', the advertisements for elixirs for males constantly did. Indeed, the popularity of Ramakrishna's rhetoric about the woman as temptress was probably a convoluted expression of the male's predicaments - moral and physiological - with his own sexuality in a nationalist project that made exacting demands on his morality.

It was this tension that created within the ideology an occasional voice that even went against the nationalist call for continence and sublimation of female sexuality. Ambikacharan Gupta's *Grhastha Jiban* was written to equip the young bride with all the 'necessary' domestic knowledge. After duly equipping her with the asexual details as to how she should 'worship' and 'serve' the husband, Ambikacharan included two chapters, authored in the voice of a woman, to instruct the bride as to how she could 'please' the husband, so that he did not feel attracted to entertainment outside. The young bride was even advised to learn singing so that she might entertain her husband.²⁰⁷ Again in 1880 an article in *Sadharani* asked, 'Why do men go to prostitutes even when they have wives? Probably because they do not get from their wives the pleasure they derive from the prostitutes.' The author, therefore, advised young wives to try and be as enticing as the prostitute and gave specific advice as to how they could do it.²⁰⁸

However, the problem was even deeper. On the one hand, the woman was charged with the responsibility of keeping the husband away from the prostitute. On the other hand, the patriarchal rhetoric of the 'joint family' presented her, as has been already noted, as the sexually alluring agent weaning the husband away from filial-sibling loyalty. Sumit Sarkar's identification of the middle class perception (already discussed) of a 'double bind' of *chakri* in the colonial sphere and the 'domineering' wife at home, may be further fleshed out by highlighting the significance of the wife's sexuality in that perception. A song, recorded before 1925, presented a married male who was constrained by *chakri* to live in his faraway workplace and was, therefore, implicitly trapped in his pent-up sexual attraction for his wife. The wife was represented as intent on 'converting the son of another [family] into her property'. She wrote a letter to the husband making false allegations of ill-treatment by the mother-in-law. When the husband arrived the wife draped in a 'sari highlighting her buttocks, pulled up a long face, / sat close to the husband /breathing heavily/ started her *mantra* [against the mother-in-law]'. The husband, thus 'persuaded by his mentor', asked for his share of the

²⁰⁷ Gupta, *Grhastha Jiban*, pp. 329-42.

²⁰⁸ (Anon), 'Swami Bashikaran Mantra', *Sadharani*, 14 Bhadra 1287 BE, p. 232.

ancestral property and wrecked the 'golden household'. The song ended with the moral, 'do not be hen-pecked, dominate instead.'²⁰⁹

The nationalist objectification of female sexuality as procreative was supplemented by an anxiety not to allow women control over their own fertility. This objectification thus did not relate procreation with the capability - physical or otherwise - of the mother to bear and rear children. This ties up with the way in which right up to the end of our period interest in women's health was, more often than not, less for its own sake than for procreation. At the turn of the century, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay was critical of the way girl children were neglected in Bengal. But the advice and remedies he suggested in the matter, were concerned only with the nurturing of her reproductive faculty.²¹⁰ He wrote that the neglect of her physical health made her weak for the purpose and inadequate attention to the company she kept bred 'bad habits' which made her 'immature organs infertile'.²¹¹ Even a nationalist allopath was concerned about the health of the pubescent girl because any serious ailment during this period would hinder procreation. His insistence that girlhood as a stage should be recognised and 'premature' female puberty prevented, was geared not so much to any ideal of mental-intellectual parity with the male-child as to a concern for the effective maturing of the female reproductive faculty.²¹² A nationalist periodical in the 1920s, for example, expressed its concern about the declining health of women. But instead of going into a sympathetic analysis of women's health for their own sake, the entire issue was treated negatively as a hindrance to effective procreation of healthy children.²¹³ Indeed the author condemned women for developing ailments through alleged laziness and then trying to escape the responsibility of further procreation once a couple of children had been born. Interestingly, this is very similar to the exasperation of a didactic article published in 1910 on women: 'Always keep them engaged in work to keep their mind and body healthy. There is no greater impediment to domesticity than sickly women'.²¹⁴ Thus even in the midst of Gandhian politics, with its concession of a significant measure of moral initiative to women, male nationalist discourse had not changed much from the earlier position in the matter of signification of women's health.

Before the First World War, when patriarchy had not felt much economic compulsion for artificial birth control, the health of the mother had been subordinated to the neo-

²⁰⁹ M. L. Saha, *Record Sangit*, Calcutta, 1925, p. 338.

²¹⁰ Chattopadhyay, *Sukher Sangsar*, pp. 39, 41.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Das, *Saral Dhatrihikkha*, pp. 1-6.

²¹³ 'Meyemahal', 'Shishupalan', p. 251.

²¹⁴ 'Janaika Brddha', 'Stri', p. 284.

Brahmanic moral injunction against artificial contraception. In his neo-Brahmanic texts on domesticity, Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay advised that birth-control should not be resorted to, whatever the compulsion, because the birth of sons should not be hindered.²¹⁵ Even in the 1920s patriarchal preference ruled that a couple of children was not the size of the 'normal family'. In an article in a Gandhi-inspired nationalist periodical the author was sarcastic that though his grandmother's generation had not read Mill and Bentham, they managed to retain their health even after bearing 11 or 12 children; the present generation of novel-reading women gave up after producing a couple of children.²¹⁶ From the late 1920s patriarchal susceptibility against artificial contraception registered strong disapproval that contraceptive methods had started being discussed in some of the periodicals for women.²¹⁷ Many a conservative voice complained that the 'women of today do not want children'. A letter from an educated male to Kshitindranath Thakur read, 'Like Western women many educated women of today do not desire to have children. They are eager to use the contraceptive methods that are prevalent in the West. In the women-subscribed periodicals contraceptives and detailed instructions related to them are published and one shudders to think how these must be encouraging the immoral desires of wayward women, married and unmarried.'²¹⁸ This fear that, by giving women control over their own fertility, contraceptives would deprive patriarchy of the means of preventing any 'illicit' sex on their part is implicit in Amiyabala Guhajaya's book of advice to young brides. She was not against birth-control in principle, probably in view of the pervasive perception of the worsening material circumstances of the average middle class family. But significantly, she urged adherence exclusively to Shastric rules of continence as a means of birth-control and vehemently discouraged - indeed condemned - artificial contraception without showing any medical reasons for this disapproval.²¹⁹

A noticeable body of moral opinion favourable to artificial contraceptives and birth-control did emerge from the 1920s, as noted in Chapter Three.²²⁰ However, in most of these discourses contraception and birth-control was upheld not primarily for the sake of the woman but for some male agenda. Nrupendrakumar Basu, in a 1927 publication advocating family planning, was clearly prompted by two considerations - the health of the future of the

²¹⁵ Chattopadhyay, *Sangsartaru*, p. 98.

²¹⁶ 'Meyemahal', 'Shishupalan', p. 251.

²¹⁷ Letter (27 March 1929) of Charuchandra Mukhopadhyay to Kshitindranath Thakur, printed at the back of Thakur, *Kalikatar Chalaphera*, p. [1].

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. [5].

²¹⁹ Guhajaya, *Ma o Meye*, p. 25.

²²⁰ This discussion excludes learned medical discourse as less relevant to this thesis.

nation and the poverty of the lower middle-class male.²²¹ The mother's health was mentioned once but not for its own sake; her ailments (caused by multiple pregnancy) and domestic chores left the children - the implied future of the nation - unattended.²²²

Hrishikesh Sen, another author of the period, gave the health of the mother greater attention, seemingly as a value in itself. 'The wife ... [after consecutive childbirths] is worn down by child-rearing, ... weakened by disease, exhausted by ceaseless household chores and the sexual demands of her husband'.²²³ But the question was brought up not as a subject in its own right but incidentally in the context of the primary issue of discussion - the crisis of male unemployment that the author highlighted as the major problem confronting the middle class. 'The number of children is steadily growing among the middle class. They are increasing the congestion in the job-market and inflating the ranks of the unemployed.'²²⁴ Indeed, the plight of the wife was contexted exclusively within the problem - more urgent for the author - of the husband whose 'income was limited and debts mounting'.²²⁵ An editorial of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* in 1935 argued: 'Some amount of control on parenthood would save both mother and the child a good deal of palpable misery ... in ignorant and poor families and not among the upper classes which, in spite of their capacity to rear a normal family, affect contraception most - not always perhaps for eugenic or altruistic reasons.'²²⁶ The editorial was undoubtedly sarcastic about contraception among the 'upper classes', but the question is which sex was at the receiving end of the sarcasm. It should be kept in mind that one of the many scores on which the educated women of the period of the 1920s to 40s were scorned, was their unwillingness to have too many children.²²⁷ The *Gazette* editorial, moreover, did not consider the health of women among the upper classes as worth indulging; the only criterion the author regarded as worth considering was that of capacity - understood as monetary and not maternal - to rear.

It is significant that when in the late 1930s the Marxist intellectuals in India took their initial stand on family planning, the women's perspective was not primary even to them. When they disapproved of birth-control on the ground that it was a structural adjustment smacking of bourgeois reformism, they failed to consider that there was a women's dimension to the problem. In the late 1930s the Marxist intellectual Hirankumar Sanyal, in reviewing Praphullakumar Sarkar's *Khairshnu Hindu* for *Parichay*, criticised the communal logic of

²²¹ Basu, *Janmashasan*, pp. 3, 50.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²²³ Hrishikesh Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, Chandannagar, 1334 BE, p.145.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²²⁶ *CMG*, 14 December 1935, p. 154.

²²⁷ E.g., 'Meyemahal', 'Shishupalan', p. 251.

Sarkar's argument about population. But this criticism remained strictly within the confines of the economic and the institutional-political; the gender dimension of the communal demographic project was not discussed.²²⁸ This omission is significant at a time when communal-minded authors and politicians, in their propaganda for a demographic race, took the objectification of female sexuality to the level of a blatant functionality.

The extent of transformation in middle-class attitudes to female sexuality during the period of the 1920s to 40s can be gauged in terms of the growing contestation of the notion of *sattiva*. As has been already noted, the 'virtues' of *sattiva* and *patibratya* came to be questioned by a new generation of authors. For example, 'Banganari' pointed out that it was an unequal morality that squarely located chastity in the female body and not correspondingly in the male.²²⁹ But even in this emergent discourse of the 1920s-40s the stake in the control of the female body lingered. In the 1920s authors like those of the Kallol group sent shock-waves through the world of established morality by 'challenging' the concept of female chastity among other things. The young editors of Kallol were, indeed, reported to have refused to publish stories which, they felt, idealised *sattiva*.²³⁰ However, such challenges came as the adjunct of a 'revolt' against the repression of the adolescent and post-adolescent young male by the dominant patriarchal morality. As Binay Ghosh correctly observed, the open eruption of sex in fictional literature of the 1920s and early 1930s was more a revolt of repressed middle-class male sexuality, rather than an upholding of females' right to their own bodies.²³¹ Shailajananda was one of the members of the Kallol group whose stories on life among coal-miners was supposed to be a counterpoise to the hypocritical and unequal sexual morality of the middle class. But his phase of romanticisation of 'uninhibited' lower-class sexuality over by the 1940s, Shailajananda's deeper commitment to a gendered notion of chastity asserted itself. In 1943, in a message of felicitation to a newly married woman, he moralised: 'Today your life as a woman would be blessed with its ultimate justification, ... *patibratyadharmā*, into which you are initiated today keeping the sacred fire as the witness, should be your only *dharma* ... For ages Indian women have found ultimate fulfilment in this surrender.'²³² Shailajananda, of course, had no countervailing prescription for the groom. Thus, unavoidably, many of the authors critical of the neo-Brahmanic ideology could not fully overcome their own anxiety to preserve gendered control over the body as a guarantee of order in domesticity and society. After his call to women to challenge the unequal notion of

²²⁸ Hirankumar Sanyal, 'Pustak-parichay', *Parichay*, Baishakh, 1349 BE, pp. 345-48.

²²⁹ 'Banganari', 'Baibahiki', pp. 2-7.

²³⁰ Hemendrakumar Ray, 'Kalloler Dal', *Ekhan Jnader Dekhchhi*, Calcutta, 1993, p. 244.

²³¹ Ghosh, 'Prem = Biology', p. 86.

²³² Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay's message, in *Shrimati Maya*.

satitva, one author took the self-ascribed responsibility of saying, on behalf of women, that the female protest would not stoop to the level of indulging in promiscuity in retaliation.²³³ Again, in popular psychoanalytical essays, a concern with female chastity often lingered beneath a 'scientific' exterior. Nrpndrakumar's book, already mentioned, criticised the fetishisation of female chastity and the Shastric regime enforcing it. And yet his own anxiety about female chastity was evident from his distrust of anything outside the family and the home that might, in the fast-changing social circumstances, sexually 'corrupt' women. Indeed, the subject of his book *Why Women Go Astray*, (a query that did not raise the corresponding question why men did) aimed at providing patriarchy with a basic psychoanalytical knowledge of female sexuality, so that 'scientifically' and 'compassionately' women could be held back from influences that led to their 'sexual pollution'.²³⁴

Marxist and Marxist-inspired discourse on sexuality would be interesting to study, as they were supposed to be committed to recognising male domination as a form of exploitation. In his preface to a book, Ranajit Sengupta, a Marxist, justified women's equal right to sexual gratification and criticised the majority morality for repressing it with the help of the 'the cheap, hypocritical' rhetoric of *satitva*.²³⁵ It is interesting, however, that this recognition of women's right to gratification appeared in his discussion in the context of an anxiety about disorder: 'People do not understand that this denial of the sexual urge is ... the root of much of the domestic and individual disorder in our society today.' Again, in claiming that the bourgeoisie had established the unequal sexual morality, he collapsed gender inequality entirely into the paradigm of economic inequality. And the traditional rhetoric of disciplining female sexuality and fertility was replaced by a more 'scientific'-sounding essentialisation of women as mothers.²³⁶ Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, in his study of female sexuality, similarly criticised the use of the 'myth of *satitva*' in the perpetuation of male control of the female body. However, he stated that 'nature never allows women to forget the fact of procreation'. The prescriptive tone of the discussion that followed cannot to be missed, nor its appeal to biology.²³⁷ Also, in the given context, the Bengali Marxist and Marxist-inspired intellectuals were having to prove that Marxism as a creed did not propagate sexual licence. Binay Ghosh, for example, was anxious to show that familial order, based on a biological morality, distinguished apes as 'perennial lovers' from 'lower species'. The author

²³³ 'Shri Daradi' (pseud.), 'Banglar Meyeder Sambandhe', *Bharatbarsha*, Shraban, 1332 BE, p. 261.

²³⁴ Basu, *Nari Bipathe*, *passim*.

²³⁵ Ranajit Sengupta, foreword to Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, *Jaunakhudha o Narir Satitva*, Calcutta, 1940, pp. 11, 15.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²³⁷ Mukhopadhyay, *Jaunakhudha*, p. 25.

also tried to reassure his readers that Lenin had said that 'marriage and love were the lovely flowers of civilisation'.²³⁸ And within this latent concern for order, lay Ghosh's apprehension about the women's absolute control over their own bodies. He requested women to be cautious in the exercise of their sexual liberty and remember 'their historical role'.²³⁹ What he meant by the 'historical role' became clear when he advised women's activists against 'licence and adultery'. He further advised them that the 'the history of civilisation' demonstrated that the family was here to stay.²⁴⁰ It is significant that he did not bind the male to the same necessity of domestication and the 'historical' role of stabilising the family.

Conclusion

The language of women's subordination was thus transformed during the period of the 1920s to 40s, partly under the pressure of material and discursive changes and partly because of the agency of women themselves. Moral concepts like *patibratya* and the divinity of the husband declined, yielding place to other gendered concepts. But it is important to note the tenacity of the concept of female chastity, which survived in all its 'glory', in spite of serious questioning from within the class itself. Maybe, the specific meaning that the nationalist self-definition of the colonised male gave to it, made it survive strongly along with its correlate - the specific signification of the 'masculinity' of the colonised male. So while the communal voice blatantly brandished this unequal concept as a virtue even in the 1940s, the Marxists, for all their conscious denunciation of the concept, could not banish it entirely from the recesses of their moral sensibility. Throughout the period from 1923 to the riots of 1946, the communal politicians and intellectuals used chastity as a ploy to arouse communal sentiments. Newspapers 'reported' the 'abduction' of Hindu women by Muslims and communal writers invoked the Hindus to avenge it.²⁴¹ So far as the Marxists were concerned, female chastity, sincerely questioned in a comprehensive condemnation of inequality as such, asserted its lingering persuasion during the Bengal Famine of 1943. Manikuntala Sen in her reminiscences of the Second World War and the famine lamented the 'loss of honour' of peasant women.²⁴² In the songs of the Indian People's Theatre Association (a Marxist-inspired cultural organisation founded in 1943) there was often a conflation of 'loss' of

²³⁸ 'Prem = Biology', p. 88.

²³⁹ Ghosh, 'Myamaler o Manusher Prem', *Nabababucharit*, p. 91.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Pradip Kumar Datta, ' "Dying Hindus": Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal', *EPW*, 28:25, 19 June 1993, pp. 1314-16.

²⁴² Manikuntala Sen, *Sediner Katha*, Calcutta, 1982, p. 68.

female chastity with the image of famine-ravaged Bengal: 'we have given fifty lakhs of life/ we have given the honour of our mothers and sisters.'²⁴³ The dominant feeling was not so much one of condemnation of violence against, and unequal treatment of, women; it was one of the loss of something precious. Thus the Marxist attitude to chastity was not very different from other 'progressive', non-communal voices. A non-Marxist author, Bhabani Bhattacharya, in his novel written in the context of the famine, questioned the notion of the 'body's sanctity' which he felt was the construction of 'the convention-bound moron'. Yet he was irked by the 'sale of shame' on the streets of Calcutta by famine victims and was anxious to have it redeemed. He projected a woman earning from 'white soldiers' by exposing her body before them; but her 'glorified' aim was presented as sustaining all her co-villagers with the money.²⁴⁴ This lingering obsession of the middle class with female chastity seems to be a consequence of what Tanika Sarkar identified as the colonised male's idealisation of the female body as an inviolate space unaffected by colonial subjection.

²⁴³ Sudhir Chakrabarti (ed.), *Adhunik Bangla Gan*, Calcutta, 1394, p. 151.

²⁴⁴ Bhabani Bhattacharya, *So Many Hungers!*, London, 1947, pp. 163-64.

Chapter 5

The Search for Order and Justification, 1920-47

Introduction

In Chapter Three we noted how, during the period of the 1920s to 40s, the sweep of the social space interiorised in relation to the colonial sphere was transformed. The emergence of the perception of a new 'outside', within the hitherto idealised 'inner domain' of domesticity, the *samaj* and the nation, bred a sense of vulnerability. The imagined 'inside' tended to defensively narrow down to the material confines of the discrete, individual family-household. This shrinkage of the 'inside' was not merely a matter of material survival. As the discussion in Chapter Three has indicated, this defensive impulse was also a quest for safeguards of order no longer guaranteed by the moral consensus of the *samaj* - a consensus that was seen as declining. It was also noted that in the new 'outside' the distinctive markers that the class had upheld as the justification of its 'natural leadership' were swamped by social mobility, change in the accustomed occupational structure, and new forms of political mobilisation during the period of the 1920s to 40s. This chapter examines in detail how, in this context, the individual family-household became the jealously guarded domain where the status associated with high caste and education were sought to be secured. The decline of the neo-Brahmanic ideology from the 1920s onwards (discussed in Chapter Two) further meant that the Shastric rhetoric of 'virtues', hegemonically applied to upper-caste, middle-class domesticity, was also declining. There was accordingly a frantic search for new 'virtues' or bench-marks to order and sanctify the middle-class home.

However, simultaneously as the class searched for alternative safeguards for order, a feeling of deep disturbance developed over the question of the soul. The concerns of survival/success, status, security and order made the class concentrate its energies on a disciplining function now increasingly shrinking down to the confines of the individual household. For a people accustomed to a rhetoric which joined domesticity to community in a wider continuum, this shrinkage unavoidably created a suffocating feeling of 'narrowness'. This claustrophobia also derived from the disintegration of the rhetoric of sacred spirituality justifying even the most mundane domestic details. The middle class mind became involved in a frantic search for justification of a functional field that was now perceived as blatantly secular and physical.

Reordering Domesticity

The neo-Brahmanic domestic morality had ensured the self-image of the upper-caste middle class as the natural leaders of the nation by homogenising the image of Bengali middle-class existence on the basis of a generalisation of upper-caste domestic norms and the projection of a Vedic-Shastric ontology. The disintegration of the power of persuasion of this ordering discourse called for new parameters to order domesticity, so that the 'natural leaders' could still sustain their claim to leadership on the basis of a distinctive, principled life-style. This was particularly urgent because not only was occupational status in flux (as noted in Chapter Three) in the 'outside', lower castes and skilled labour were also 'entering' the middle class. The educated upper castes, therefore, were anxious to distance themselves from the new entrants.¹ The desire to hegemonise the lower castes and the uneducated was, therefore, present in most discursive attempts at reordering domesticity during the period of the 1920s to 40s. Pramatha Chaudhuri, who was eager to redefine domestic values to give the individual the opportunity for 'self-realisation', was simultaneously anxious that the educated Bengali middle class should retain national leadership.² Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, on the other hand, wanted individualism to be sublimated in the redefinition of domestic and social values but represented the same hegemonic concern.³ Even at the level of less celebrated articulation, this concern was equally present. In a letter to the editor of *Sabuj-patra*, quite obviously by a youth, the writer represented middle-class youth's enthusiasm about 'the rise of the Shudras all over the world'. But this 'rise' was accommodated within the projection of the educated middle class as the 'natural leaders'. And relatedly, the writer considered the 'educated' environment of the middle-class household as conducive to producing the natural leaders of the nation.⁴ It was thus in this context of the class's anxiety about self-justification as 'natural leaders' that new criteria were sought for drawing boundaries around educated, upper-caste domesticity even within the class.

¹ This 'entry' is not being sociologically read into the situation with the historian's hindsight. A wide spectrum of contemporary authors used the word in a sense that implied the educated upper castes' helplessness before a situation in which the boundaries of the middle class had become negotiable to lower castes and skilled labour mainly because of the forces of the market. For such use of the term 'entry' see 'Parashuram' (pseud.), 'Banglar Bhadrakalok', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1332 BE, p. 31.

² Pramatha Chaudhuri, 'Bangalir Patriotism', *Sabuj-patra*, reprinted in *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, pp. 348-50.

³ Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya', *Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1345 BE, p. 52.

⁴ 'Junior Ukil' (pseud.), 'Ukiler Katha', *Sabuj-patra*, reprinted in *Bharatbarsha*, Chaitra, 1327 BE, p. 476.

It should be emphasised, in passing, that our discussion in Chapter Two about the romantic longing for the 'outside' among youths should not be taken to imply that the young generation of the inter-war period completely abandoned the disciplining and hegemonic intentions of middle-class domestic morality. It should be pointed out that the contemporary youths' engagement with the 'outside', romantic identification with the 'rise' of the lower orders and commitment to gender equality were all limited. For example, it did not take the writers of the *Kallol* group long to abandon their engagement with the lower orders.⁵ With all their promise of revolt against the established domestic morality, they were nevertheless hesitant about any radical redrawing of the boundaries of middle-class domesticity. The Bohemianism of the leading males appearing in some of their fictional creations, was a short-lived, romantic, outburst against patriarchal repression. Their celebration of the sex-life of the lower orders was similarly a creation of a sentimental fantasy around the notion of free sexuality. Even Marxists often had problems in trying to break away from their roots in the middle-class domestic order. This is not surprising when the Communist Party as a whole, going by its own admission in 1946, spent more time trying to attract the middle class than consolidating its base among the peasants and workers.⁶ Manik Bandyopadhyay, who converted to Marxism in the early 1940s, admitted his personal experience of middle-class liminality. He wrote that his occasional 'escape' for a few days from the 'narrow, petty' everyday life of the class into the company of the *chhotolok* gave him temporary relief. But his class susceptibilities used to soon tire of the 'ruthless, naked realism' of lower-class existence, and he heaved a sigh of relief on his return to the familiar order of middle-class domesticity.⁷ In Chapter Four it has been observed how the youths of the 1920s to 1940s period, in spite of the sincere intention among a section of them to ensure equality of women, remained within an engendered discursive frame. On the whole, it may be said, that the young men of the period, for all their feeling of suffocation in domesticity, were only ambivalent; one part of their self remained affiliated to the middle-class domestic order as the site of reproduction of class, status and gender.

In the neo-Brahmanic morality the rhetoric of *varnadharma* had largely supplied the ordering matrix for the middle class imagining of the *samaj* with domesticity at the heart of it. The decline of the persuasive power of that order created a major problem for the status-

⁵ Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima: Bangla Upanyaser Shat Bachhar: 1923-1982*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 60-61, 66; Gopikanath Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher Madhyakalin Bangla Kathasahitya* (1380 BE), Calcutta, 1986, pp. 216-25.

⁶ Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish: Asamapta Biplab*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 161

⁷ Manik Bandyopadhyay, 'Sahitya Karar Age', in *Manik Granthabali*, vol. 12, Calcutta, 1975, p. 556.

bound ordering concern of the class. Caste was being questioned in the press and print from communal quarters as well as from among those who started identifying themselves, and, were being identified, as 'progressive'. In its study of 'public opinion' among the middle class, the 1931 Census noted that the voice in favour of the relaxation of caste was the 'ablest as well as most vocal'.⁸ Thus a situation was created in which open defence of caste in the arena of formal discussion was becoming socially embarrassing. Yet it was difficult for the susceptibilities of the upper castes to be complacent about their own pre-eminence in a period in which some members of the lower castes had already pushed their way into the middle class and many an author betrayed his/her inner discomfiture at this. Some of the literature still retained an overt upper-caste rhetoric; the authors called for a higher birth rate and greater attention to health among upper-caste families in order that the upper-caste leadership did not ultimately get swamped by what they perceived as a demographic upsurge among the Namashudras, Bagdis and Chamars.⁹ But there was now a more pervasive, if subtle, variety of reaction in print, in which the attempt to draw boundaries was not immediately apparent. However, a close reading reveals that it was situating these new 'entrants' on a lower level of respectability even in the writings of authors who in the 1930s and early 40s aimed at wooing the lower castes into a blanket Hindu identity in contradistinction to the Muslims. Debaprasad Ghosh betrayed his susceptibilities when, in spite of his best attempts to sound comfortable about the 'entry' of lower castes into the fold of the *bhadralok*, his caution gave way. In one place he used the expression 'so-called *bhadralok*' about these entrants.¹⁰ Again, the new development of inter-caste marriage among the non-Brahmo Hindus caused an anxiety disproportionate to its microscopic incidence. Bijaykrshna Basu, for example, writing in the late 1930s, questioned the justification for co-education in Calcutta University. It was perceived as generating 'inter-caste and other heterodox love affairs ... leading to even suicide in many of the cases which do not terminate in marriage'.¹¹

Indeed the hesitancy of the upper castes regarding a total disavowal of caste becomes clearer from the public stance of the communalists themselves. From the 1920s there was a communal incentive to reclaim low castes in order to create a unified Hindu community.¹² But Joya Chatterji points out that despite a strategic commitment to an inversion of the 19th-

⁸ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V (Bengal and Sikkim), pt. 1, p. 397.

⁹ *Swasthya Samachar*, quoted in *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, p. 348.

¹⁰ Debaprasad Ghosh, 'Arthasamasya o Shikkhasangskar', *Hindu Kon Pathe: Kayekti Samayik Prabandha*, Calcutta, 1341 BE, p. 182.

¹¹ Bijaykrshna Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay Bangali Kon Pathe', *Bharatbarsha*, Agrahayan, 1345 BE, p. 961.

¹² Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 192.

century Hindu nationalist defence of strict obedience to caste rules, a radical critique of the caste system formed no part of the programme and ideology of the Hindu Sabhas; low castes were encouraged to take modest steps upwards in the caste hierarchy.¹³ Yet, in spite of this underlying hesitation in public pronouncements, the voice against caste disabilities, as already noted, was overwhelming among the educated middle class. Therefore, it can be argued that the class tended to protect upper-caste status at the more intimate level of the household in its rituals and marital relations, even while at the level of social pronouncement, caste was increasingly questioned. It is significant that even in the midst of this questioning, inter-caste marriage among non-Brahmo Hindus, though beginning to occur, was, nevertheless, rare during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴

However, this was not the only way status based on upper-caste origin was sought to be protected in the individual household in the face of the state of flux in the 'outside'. The problem for the upper-caste middle class was also one of defining 'virtues' that would set their own domesticity apart from that of lower-caste entrants into the middle class. What made the discursive deployment of an alternative benchmark of status all the more necessary as a countervailing factor, was the simultaneous invocation, particularly in a nationalist vein, that the upper castes should emulate the more enterprising trading castes. Numerous authors criticised the domestic upbringing of male children in upper-caste Bengali families.¹⁵ The lower castes like the Vaishyas were praised for inculcating a spirit of free enterprise and not an obsession with university degrees.¹⁶ In this situation the upper-caste middle-class claims regarding the supposed superiority of their domestic norms, had to avoid a blatant and explicit appeal to upper-caste status. The consequent anxiety was to draw boundaries around upper-caste domesticity with some other benchmark which would perform the same statusing function, without an explicit deployment of the rhetoric of caste.

Higher education and intellectual pursuits, still heavily monopolised by the upper castes were, therefore, forcefully deployed. Indeed, authors who called for an inculcation of the enterprising spirit of the trading castes were themselves often equally anxious that higher education should not be abandoned. For example, Narayan Bharati wanted every middle-class youth to have college education even if he became a grocer. While enjoining middle-class families to follow the example of trading communities and motivate their children towards private enterprise, 'Parashuram' told his readers that this vocational change by itself would

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁴ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 397.

¹⁵ E.g., Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay', p. 959.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 960.

not affect the intellectual qualities of the Bengali middle class. This assurance had an unmistakable, prescriptive ring about it.¹⁷ Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi, an intellectual and retired college teacher, argued that it was unjustified to expect youths, still attached to caste status, willingly to accept employment alongside the lower castes. He argued that trade as a vocation, after all, had no respectability attached to it; the greatest respectability attached to education.¹⁸ Indeed, intellectualism as an ideal also compensated for the economic levelling that low incomes were seen to be bringing about. The educated were agitated that while an 'uneducated *darwan* [gate-keeper] refuses to work below a salary of 24 rupees ... hundreds of Bengali matriculates [receive] 20 to 25 rupees a month'.¹⁹ The legitimising power of money facilitated the entry of skilled labour into the middle-class fold. The educated upper castes were also sensitive about what they perceived as the emergence of a small but conspicuous pocket of recent affluence created by the First World War.²⁰ All this also threatened to weaken the status of education as a necessary determinant of colonial middle-class identity. Among the educated upper-caste middle class, predominantly dependent on intellectual service and the professions, this only increased the anxiety to reinforce the language of status surrounding education and intellectualism. Bhabatosh Datta, an academic, relates in a tone of humour mixed with consternation the blatantly functional worth of the educated young private tutor in the eyes of the uneducated but rich father of the student.²¹ No wonder he was pained during the Second World War to perceive that 'the half-educated contractor rose to pre-eminence, outstripped the educated middle class and climbed higher'.²² Even more interestingly, in a conversation in 1945 with the bureaucrat Ashok Mitra, the Communist leader Muzaffar Ahmed expressed his pride and gratification that most of the 'bright' cadre of the Communist Party were Oxbridge alumni.²³

It is important in this connection to explain an apparent paradox. In its voice of nationalist and social concern throughout the inter-war period, the class strongly criticised its own investment in university degrees. The argument was that in view of increasing educated unemployment, male children of Bengali middle class families should be equipped for self-employment. But the same class, in its more intimate voice of household-patriarchal concern with family status, stuck to the primacy of education as the benchmark of class identity. What

¹⁷ See, for example, 'Parashuram', 'Banglar Bhadrak', p. 31.

¹⁸ Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi, 'Annachinta', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1332 BE, p. 102.

¹⁹ Prabodhchandra Basu, 'Bangalir Arthik Swadhinata Labher Upay', *Arthik Unnati*, Baishakh, 1333 BE, p. 53.

²⁰ E.g., Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, 'Natun o Puratan', *Parichay*, Poush, 1345 BE, p. 502.

²¹ Bhabatosh Datta, 'Lekhapadar Kalobajar', *Sat Satero*, Calcutta, 1397 BE, pp. 42-43.

²² Datta, 'Bangali Madhyabitter Tin Kal', *Sat Satero*, p. 17.

²³ Ashok Mitra, *Tin Kudi Dash*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1400 BE, p. 253.

could prove it better than moralistic novels for children? Shibaji Bandyopadhyay has analysed the highly popular and the much-emulated novels of Dinesh Mukhopadhyay (published in the early 1940s) to illustrate the strong emphasis among the middle class on status based on high caste, family prestige and higher education.²⁴ The typical story-line saw the young son of a 'highly respectable' but impoverished upper-caste family, relentlessly pursuing higher education on the way to judicial or similarly 'distinguished' employment. Equally, somewhere down the story-line the author made the boy consciously abandon the idea of embarking on private commercial enterprise.

It is interesting in this connection that from the 1920s, the educated upper castes deployed a new expression to signify their world; they now projected their families and household environment as 'cultured'. Prafullachandra Basu in his book *The Middle Class in Calcutta* published in 1925 wished to believe that it was 'culture' that 'distinguished the middle class from other classes'.²⁵ Again, in the early 1940s the apprehension among the upper castes about inter-caste marriage was often rationalised in terms of this notion of 'culture'. In some writings the educated middle class was presented as not against inter-caste marriage as such; their 'circumspection' was justified as an apprehension about any 'culturally' diluting impact that such marriages might come to have. After stating - in apparent neutrality - that caste and lineage were of late being overlooked by some educated men and women in choosing their spouses, one author indulgently said: 'However, they would quite understandably insist on cultured demeanour'.²⁶ In the given context, where cultural refinement as the author understood it, was still overwhelmingly a preserve of the educated upper castes, 'cultured demeanour' had a strong upper-caste, middle-class resonance. It is significant, therefore, how this notion, along with intellectualism, was deployed to ensure that upper caste, educated pre-eminence did not get swamped by the 'unrefined' lifestyle of new 'entrants' like lower-caste businessmen and skilled labour into the middle class. Changing patterns of occupation also called for boundaries, while lower middle-class liminality posed a problem for patriarchy, with young communist activists preferring to live 'day in and day out' in working-class slums, as noted in Chapter Two. This liminality was not merely a matter of romanticising people who did manual labour and/or were free from the moral regime of middle-class domesticity. In a colonial context the inflation of the late 1910s and early 1920s created a sentiment of common suffering with labour in the same consciousness

²⁴ Shibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dandasamas: Upanibeshbad o Bangla Shishusahitya*, 1991, pp. 157-63.

²⁵ Prafullachandra Basu, *The Middle Class People in Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1925, p. 2.

²⁶ Narendrakumar Basu and Aradhana Debi, *Nari Bipathe Jay Keno*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1351 BE, p. 84.

that also betrayed a feeling of distance. As Chandra Ray, the Marxist trade union leader, already cited in Chapter Two, said, 'I have grown up in a lower middle-class environment. Where else would my place be than beside the worker!'²⁷ In 1936 a book review in *Prabasi* read, 'A ruthless regime of poverty is alike oppressing the *bhadra* [the genteel] and the *abhadra* [non-genteel] households in Bengal'.²⁸ Again Hrishikesh Sen in his study of unemployment and indigence in the lower middle-class household declared that middle-class existence could not be saved unless the condition of every class in society was improved.²⁹

The hegemonic and conservative attempts to draw boundaries afresh, thus coexisted with a feeling of common suffering and romantic longing for the unbound. This liminality made the drawing of boundaries tortuous and ambivalent but all the more urgent for the voice of order. This was after all the time when, as has been noted in Chapter Two, the residential distinction with the lower orders threatened to disappear at the lower end of the middle class. The definition of moral benchmarks now had to 'save' the middle-class household in slums and slum-like apartments with the redeeming touch of an 'educated and cultured' ambience. Simultaneously, the domesticity of the uneducated, lower-caste skilled labour was to be distanced from that of the educated, but impoverished, lower middle class by the same token of a familial vintage of 'culture' and 'enlightenment'. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, one of the most critically acclaimed novelists of the period from the 1930s, blatantly betrayed his feeling. He represented the entry of the skilled worker into the middle class as polluting the domestic sphere with 'vulgar' taste and 'degenerate' lifestyles. In his novel *Manvantar* (1943) written against the backdrop of the Second World War, Tarashankar projected the household of such labour-turned-middle-class. It was characterised by drunkenness, 'vulgar' consumerism, loud exhibitionism in the enjoyment of any form of entertainment, and unruly children chanting film songs that the author obviously considered lewd. Indeed for him 'vulgar' films, the other phenomenon that was contemporaneously perceived as dissolving middle-class domestic morality, was a metaphor for the domestic situation in the houses of upwardly mobile skilled labour. Portraying what he perceived as an average morning in such households, Tarashankar wrote: 'Life has already started in their houses, and started in the rhythm and flamboyance of vulgar films.' It is important to note how the concept of glamour and the market, lurking behind the notion of commercial entertainment, were conjured up in the use of this metaphor. The life of the non-labouring and impoverished lower middle class, on the other hand, was perceived by the author as fatally ill, drained of life, weak. But the

²⁷ Chandra Ray's reminiscences in Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, p. 22.

²⁸ Shanta Debi, 'Pustak Parichay', *Prabasi*, Shraban, 1343 BE, p. 530.

²⁹ Hrishikesh Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, Chandannagar, 1334 BE, pp. 150-56.

author was careful to point out that even in these slum-like tenements their domesticity was marked by an effort to sustain gentility - an effort consisting of their preservation of a sense of 'modesty' and avoidance of brazenness and loud domestic altercation.³⁰

Domesticity redefined in the light of 'culture' also sought to compensate for the loss of occupational 'respectability' for those whose middle-class identity was compromised in the work-place. By the late 1920s it is clear that a section of even upper-caste youths were reluctantly but surely entering taxi-driving, becoming fitters, mechanics and apprentices for skilled labour.³¹ But what is important here is that this entry into a world of less 'respectable' jobs left the youths agonised. The pain of capitulation to employment incompatible with caste and family upbringing resonated in various genres from serious writing to 'comic songs'. One such song sarcastically related how the sons of *kulin* Brahmans were opening shoe stores. In order to highlight the plight of the situation, the song associated the Brahman with a trade related to the skinning of dead cows - a notion repugnant to a Brahman.³² Even the socialistically inclined language of authors like Hrishikesh Sen betrayed a sense of anguish. He wrote that the situation had come to such a pass that 'youths with higher education' were having to 'salivate' at the prospect of technical jobs on the factory floor.³³ Why this feeling of repugnance translated into an investment in 'culture' preserved in the home is reflected in Panchanan Ghoshal's work on criminology.³⁴ On the basis of his encounters, as a police officer, with the peculiarities of Bengali middle-class mentality, the author observed that their upbringing induced middle-class youths to look for status, respectability and 'good association' in their world of employment. He elaborated that even when they worked as skilled labour 'they would not associate with "uncultured people" even in the work place'.³⁵ The specific way in which the author used the term 'uncultured' (by putting it in quotes) indicates that he was quoting directly from contemporary middle-class usage itself. This shows how in a quest for boundaries a relatively recent usage - the term 'culture' - was being packaged into the notion of *bhadrata* (gentility). What is, however, more significant is that looking at this obsession with 'culture' initially from an academic distance, the author himself

³⁰ Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar* (1943), in Gajendrakumar Mitra *et al.* (eds.), *Tarashankar Rachanabali*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1380 BE, pp. 120-21.

³¹ E.g., Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, p. 147. The Census of 1931 noted that an interest in technical qualification had slowly but definitely developed among middle-class youth. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 289. For evidence of the emergence of upper caste motor mechanics and taxi-drivers, see for example, Bengal, Home Political, 407/31 of 1931, WBSA.

³² M.L. Saha, *Record Sangit*, Calcutta, 1925, p. 145.

³³ Sen, *Bekar Samasya*, p. 147.

³⁴ Panchanan Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, Calcutta, 1954. *Aparadh-bigyan* was first published serially in *Bharatbarsha* between 1940 and 1943, and then published, with additions, in a book form (in eight volumes) in 1954.

³⁵ Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 2, p. 101.

gradually slipped into the subjective. He hailed the Bengali's 'insatiable thirst for education and knowledge'. Sharing the pervasive class anxiety to draw boundaries around the educated Bengali middle class in the context of the contemporary occupational changes, he declared: 'I admit that we [the Bengali Hindu middle class] have nothing but this mental aristocracy ... we are not prepared to lose [it].'³⁶

On the other hand 'culture' was used as a moral indictment of the alleged consumerism of the 'upstarts'. The deployment of words like 'fashion', 'exhibitionism' and 'glamour', all carefully associated with the determinism of the market, helped highlight what the average middle-class domesticity (in contradistinction to an essential life-style of the market-smitten *nouveaux riches*) should be like. The true middle-class identity was to lie in the 'culture' of gentility that enlightenment was supposed to confer. In the writings of Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, for example, the educated middle-class voice of order came through when he identified the lifestyle of the *nouveaux riches* as destabilising. He even went to the extent of enumerating a few domestic practices that, in his perception, had recently become associated with 'exhibitionism' within the class.³⁷ Sunitikumar's identification of the First World War as a watershed in social values and his allegation about the recent emergence of the cash-nexus among a group within the *bhadralok*, must have made it clear to his contemporaries which life-style he was condemning.³⁸ Binay Ghosh, a Marxist-inspired author, in his own way situated his sensibility at a cultural distance from skilled labourers who, during the Second World War, had turned into small entrepreneurs and entered the middle class with the passport of affluence. In a subtly sarcastic tone, he associated their life-style with consumer durables, commercial entertainment and a smattering of English: 'They now relax at home, listen to Radio Saigon and "drive"[in English] to Metro Cinema in their second-hand cars'.³⁹ The problem, however, was that the moral worth of 'culture' as a way of life was not above criticism and scrutiny within the educated middle class itself; the possibility of 'refinement' actually concealing double standards was occasionally voiced. For example, in a short story Ashalata Singha voiced the class's latent craving for simplicity: 'everything in this refined ambience [is] surrounded by a glossy film of artificiality'.⁴⁰ And yet Ashalata, like many of her contemporary authors, could not abandon the 'culture'-marked, hegemonic self-image of educated, upper-caste, middle-class domesticity. So, in the short story concerned, she redeemed the 'artificiality' by making the indifferent members (of the joint family portrayed)

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁷ Chattopadhyay, 'Amader Samajik "Pragati"', *Jati, Sangskrti o Sahitya*, pp. 123-32.

³⁸ Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti' and 'Amader Samajik "Pragati"', pp. 45, 123-32.

³⁹ Binay Ghosh, 'Madhyachitta', *Nabababucharit* (1944), Calcutta, 1979, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Ashalata Singha, 'Mrtyur Alo', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1345 BE, p. 58.

abandon their 'feigned civility' in favour of simple affection. Thus redeemed, 'cultured' domestic ambience received a revalidation as a way of life superior to its imagined, 'uncultured' counterpart.

This gradual shift from the 1920s towards a definition of a-Brahmanic moral 'virtues' (like 'culture') for domesticity could not dispense, however, with the indictment of *swartha* (self-interest). But it is equally significant that the discourse against *swartha* now steadily abandoned the Brahmanical rhetoric in favour of a mundane one. The deployment of the concepts of *nishkama karma* and *parartha* (other-regarding attitude) as manifestations of *paramartha* (the ultimate spiritual truth) declined in the moralist invocations of the late 1920s onwards. *Swartha* was now more often indicted using a secular rhetoric of duty to the extended family, kin and society. Rameshchandra Ray, for example, criticised the 'geriatric' rhetoric of '*sanatandharma*' which 'glorified everything traditional'.⁴¹ But that did not make him any more charitable to the idea of full-blooded pursuit of the interests and urges of the individual. This continued condemnation of *swartha* was probably inevitable in a colonial mental climate, plagued by the absence of social security; the stake in support from within the extended family and kin was, predictably, high. Answers by middle-class people to the Census questionnaire in 1931 explicitly located the investment in 'joint family' support within a context where 'there is no dole system by the State, no insurance against unemployment, no old-age pension'.⁴² Indeed, it is interesting how even in intellectual circles, barring small pockets, the mention of individualism was equated with *swartha*. Deployment of the notion of uninhibited self-realisation in one section of print created apprehension in the majority segment that an encouragement to individualistic self-realisation would create further disorder in an already disoriented domestic situation.⁴³ Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, in his collection of articles on Bengali Hindu life and domesticity written in the 1930s, advised that individualism was undesirable in the present situation. He noted with concern that under the impact of contemporary poetic and literary trends, young Bengalis were becoming 'centrifugal' in their attitudes. He declared that Bengali Hindu existence was now faced with such multiple adversity at home and outside that this was not the time for unrestrained individual freedom.⁴⁴ In his communally surcharged writings of the early 1940s, the poet

⁴¹ Rameshchandra Ray, 'Strishikkha', *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, pp. 375-76.

⁴² *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 420.

⁴³ Pramatha Chaudhuri intended his periodical *Sabuj-patra* as a forum for propagating unhindered self-realisation of the individual. See Pramatha Chaudhuri, 'Bangalir Patriotism' *Sabuj-patra*, reprinted in *Bharatbarsha*, Phalgun, 1327 BE, pp. 348-50. For a discussion of the individualist strain in the writings of the *Kallol-Kalikalam* circles, see Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, pp. 175-268.

⁴⁴ Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti', p. 51.

Mohitlal Majumdar advised that 'this quest for individual freedom is not conducive to the patience, far-sightedness and love needed for this ancient but dying society'.⁴⁵

Another significant late 19th-century moral self-ascription that the middle class continued to invest in its domesticity during the period, was that of a non-criminal identity. It sought to distinguish the class from the *chhotolok* who were seen as 'naturally' prone to criminality.⁴⁶ During the period from after the First World War, the projected image of the ideal upbringing of children in middle-class families faced a crisis in relation to this question of criminality. The increasing visibility of *bhadralok*-turned-*goondas* (noted in Chapter Three) disadvantaged the ideologically constructed 'natural' boundaries with the *chhotolok*.⁴⁷ When, in the 1920s, newspapers and periodicals registered a 'suddenly intensified' activity of *goondas* in Calcutta, there was relative silence about the emergence of upper-caste, middle-class elements in their ranks - a development that is confirmed, however, by police records.⁴⁸ But underneath this silence in the more sophisticated world of print, the problem agitated the middle-class mind. Concern for the redemption of the *bhadralok*-turned-*goonda* appeared in *battala* literature. It is significant that in both police files and *battala* literature, the *goonda* came through as a person living away from his parental home and, indeed, away from *bhadralok* habitation altogether. This indicated a middle-class patriarchal tendency to eject him from domestic space, in order to keep the projected 'innate' morality of middle-class domesticity intact. Again, in fiction, the *goonda* was often stereotyped as Muslim and the *goonda pada* (*goonda* neighbourhood) situated away from Hindu middle-class habitation.⁴⁹ Panchanan Ghoshal relates, on the basis of his professional experience, how before the Calcutta Riots of 1946 the 'bhadralok household had not allowed the *goonda* to come anywhere near its vicinity'.⁵⁰ *Ganesh Gundami*, a *battala* tract on the rectification of a *bhadralok*-turned-*goonda*, revealed the disturbance of the middle-class mind. On the one hand, the author tried to save the innately moral image of the upper-caste, middle-class

⁴⁵ Mohitlal Majumdar, *Banglar Nabajug* (1352 BE), Calcutta, 1965, p 172.

⁴⁶ For a study of the Bengali middle-class construction of a non-criminal identity for itself from the mid-19th century, see Anindita Mukhopadhyay, 'Legal and Penal Institutions within a Middle Class Perspective in Colonial Bengal: 1854-1910', PhD dissertation, SOAS, London, 1996.

⁴⁷ The *goonda* as a 'criminal' officially classified by the colonial government was a category more described than defined and to be controlled by state power rather than to be understood. The official reports created an image of a man brought up outside normal society. See, Suranjan Das, 'The "Goondas": Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld through Police Records', *EPW*, 29:44, 29 October 1994, pp. 2877-83. Without going into the cause-effect relationship between the colonial and the Bengali middle-class discourses on the *goonda*, it can be pointed out that the Bengali middle-class discourse on domesticity contributed to this marginalisation by dissociating the *goonda* from the actual and idealised domestic space.

⁴⁸ E.g., Bengal, Home Police, 407/31 and 211/31 (1-4) of 1931, WBSA.

⁴⁹ Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal*, p. 292.

⁵⁰ Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 5, p. 153.

household by ostracising the *goonda*. Significantly, he was anxious to emphasise that it was not because of domestic training but the 'polluting influence' of a *chhotolok* friend - presented as a low-caste youth - that turned Ganesh (a '*bhadralok* youth') into a *goonda*. On the other hand, the tract reflected the anguish that these youths were lost to the home. Indeed, the helplessness of the middle-class mind regarding the matter is reflected in the way Ganesh's redemption was attributed in the story to divine revelation.⁵¹ Thus, despite the anguish, middle class morality was not ready to take the *bhadralok*-turned *goonda* back into middle-class domesticity, unless he was somehow miraculously 'reformed'.

The Problem of Self-Justification

The Bengali middle-class mind, feeling spiritually dwarfed in its predominantly *chakure* capacity in a colonial environment, had effected an ontological disjunction. The household-community sphere, ideologically separated from the colonial sphere, had been invested with the protection of, and monopoly over, the soul. The neo-Brahmanic ideology, using domesticity as the site, had conditioned the Bengali Hindu middle-class mind to feel justified in living up to the ideal of selfless performance of the *dharma* of the householder. Spirituality, derived from the concepts of next life and salvation, justified every functional detail of domestic existence from pecuniary concerns for familial sustenance to gastronomy to conjugal relations and marital sex. But the steady physicalisation of the perception of domesticity and the disintegration of the neo-Brahmanic ideology from the 1920s onwards, increasingly removed the urban household from the idealised sphere of spirituality. Used so long to the exalted neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of justification, there was an intense feeling of disturbance and a frantic search for an alternative rationale.

A suffocating feeling of loss of justification for middle-class domestic existence was reflected in the frequent association of middle-class domesticity from the 1920s with a sense of claustrophobia. In creative literature and contemporary social observations the perception of claustrophobia was also associated with material indices, like housing and the over-all economic condition of the lower middle class. It has been noted in Chapter Two how, from the 1920s, the essays on living conditions in lower middle-class households began to characterise the situation as environmentally claustrophobic.⁵² But this was not the only sense of claustrophobia deployed. There were numerous discussions in various genres of literature that deployed it in the sense of a crisis of the soul. Unlike the previous trend of didactic

⁵¹ Gangeshkumar Chattopadhyay, *Ganesh Gundami*, Calcutta, 1333 BE, pp. 3-5, 13-18, 20.

⁵² E.g., Basu, *The Middle Class*, pp. 5, 8-10.

writing, moralist essays of the period came frequently to use the expression 'narrow domesticity'.⁵³ And this imagining came clustered with notions like 'smallness', 'pettiness' and so on. Moreover, the concept of soullessness, so long associated with office-work in the colonial sphere, seemed to have spilled over into the perception of domestic life in the inter-war period. For example, an editorial in *Upasana* in 1920 observed, 'The narrowness of the clerk's existence in Calcutta is infecting the thought of Bengal ... The Bengalis are failing to sustain themselves economically, while the squabbles and pettiness of a claustrophobic domestic life are crippling them in every way ... the innate happiness that animates the household in cities like Madras, is nowhere to be found in our midst.'⁵⁴ Terms like 'monotony', 'soullessness', 'drudgery', and 'lack of creative inspiration' came to be so frequently used in relation to domesticity by such a wide spectrum of authors that they cannot be dismissed as either coincidental or casual. Prafullachandra Basu's essay (published in 1925) on the Bengali middle class in Calcutta, represented the average middle-class family in Calcutta as 'usually joint and, therefore, large'. Notwithstanding this numerical expanse, he saw home life as narrow and 'unenlivening' particularly for youths. Significantly the sense of suffocation in his characterisation had two dimensions. In the material and physical senses the home as well as middle-class existence as a whole was the site of 'bitterness' and 'nervous strain' bred by an economic situation in which prices had more than doubled without a proportionate increase in salaries. In the residential sense, the author invoked the claustrophobia of the 'ill-ventilated', 'cramped' and 'overcrowded' interior. But more poignant was the spiritual claustrophobia of a 'narrow', 'dull' 'monotonous' and 'uninviting' home-life. He particularly emphasised the 'narrowness' of vision that patriarchy imposed on youths, aborting the spirit of initiative among the latter. The other dimension was the 'narrowness' of mind arising out of a 'selfish' identification with the family-household.⁵⁵

In its portrayal of urban domesticity, creative literature profusely evoked a sense of mental and emotional bankruptcy, and a poverty of imagination and creative inspiration surrounding it. Achintyakumar Sengupta's short story *Gumot* (the title, significantly, conveys the sense of stuffiness) may be taken as a case in point, particularly as it did not go into the material details of the indigence of the particular clerk's family and yet breathed claustrophobia into the fictional situation.⁵⁶ Indeed, the main situation that the author tried to

⁵³ E.g., Hemendrakumar Ray, 'Amader Sahitya', *Basanti*, Jyaishta, 1328 BE, p. 133.

⁵⁴ 'Alochani', 'Bangalir Byartha Asha', *Upasana*, Shrabana, 1327 BE, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Basu, *Middle Class*, pp. 45, 51, 77, 80, 86, 88.

⁵⁶ Achintyakumar Sengupta, 'Gumot' (1924), in *Achintyakumar Rachanabali*, vol. 2, Calcutta, 1975. For a discussion see, Debkumar Basu, *Kallolgoshtir Kathasahitya*, Calcutta, 1387 BE, pp. 67-68.

address was that the clerk's everyday existence had become so impregnated with a mental bankruptcy that it could create moments of claustrophobic suspension of normal affection, and even communication, between an otherwise loving couple. Stories about suicide by poor clerks and unemployed youths often went beyond the documentation of material poverty to highlight suicide as an undignified exit from a spiritually demeaning lower middle-class existence.⁵⁷ The narrow lane where the authors frequently located the clerk's or the teacher's household, was consciously deployed not merely as a realistic setting,⁵⁸ but as a metaphor of mental suffocation.⁵⁹ This imagination of claustrophobia and pettiness, however, was not confined to moods and moments of fictional or poetic creation. In an essay, Manik Bandyopadhyay characterised the 'narrowness, artificiality, ... [and] selfishness' of the middle-class domestic and social environment as 'poisoning' and implied a sense of release when he referred to his periodic escapes from it. 'It is as if I heave a sigh of relief when I escape sometimes from this life into the company of *chhotoloks* - peasants and the like.'⁶⁰

The ontological factors adding up to this feeling of claustrophobia and generating a wish for a redemptive release, are challengingly subtle for historical analysis but no less important for that. We could use as an entry-point Matilal Ray's *Hindutver Punarutthan* which was written in 1933 with the expectation of spreading a communal ideology among the readers. It is significant that Matilal, in evolving his strategy of persuasion, assumed that he was addressing a sensitive mental climate already disturbed over the question of the justification for everyday existence.⁶¹ Particularly illuminating here is Matilal's discomfiture in having to uphold 'worldly enjoyment', i.e., in having to blatantly gear sexuality to the overtly functional agenda of beating the Muslims in a demographic race. And it is important here that the reason for his discomfiture arose from his keen awareness of the contemporary state of the Hindu middle-class mind. The author wrote that 'Bengali Hindus had come to feel that a flat appeal to the Shastric injunctions', instead of ordering existence, would only make it 'immobile'. Matilal was thus conscious that the neo-Brahmanic justification of everyday existence was disintegrating among his targeted middle-class readership. But he was also aware that this readership 'believed that the meaning of existence does not lie in eating,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 69-70.

⁵⁸ For the reality underlying this imagination, see Sajanikanta Das's description of poet and school teacher Mohitlal Majumdar's rented residence 'in a dilapidated house in a damp, blind alley'. Sajanikanta Das, *Atmasmrti*, Calcutta, 1384 BE, p. 134.

⁵⁹ E.g., Jyotirindra Maitra, 'Madhubangshir Gali', in *Madhubangshir Gali* (1944), Calcutta, 2nd edn, 1955, pp. 5-17.

⁶⁰ Bandyopadhyay, 'Sahitya Karar Age', p. 556.

⁶¹ Matilal Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, Calcutta, 1340 BE, p. 67.

sleeping and making love'.⁶² A crisis of justification for everyday existence among the middle class can thus be inferred from the sub-text in Matilal's writing. Significantly, this seemed to tie up with the ontological orientation among youth in the late 1920s and 30s. Premendra Mitra, a young 'rebel' author and poet, wrote in the late 1920s to a fellow-member of the *Kallol* group, 'the reality is ... I find no joy in the affection of friends or in appreciating the beauty of a women; the universe is teeming with life but has no joy for me ... I cannot even grasp what I want to do ... it is so painful ... I cannot understand the meaning of this existence'.⁶³ Rebellng against the neo-Brahmanic ideology with its comprehensive cosmological justification of every-day existence, youths like Premendra were frantically searching for an alternative but comprehensive justification for 'eating, sleeping and making love'. Premendra consequently wrote in a poem,

Human existence asks for a meaning -
The whole human,
with flesh, blood, bones and brain, fat and tissues,
Hunger, thirst, greed, jealousy and desire.⁶⁴

A generation was trying to come to grips with the stark physicality of everyday existence from which the veneer of spirituality was receding. With the erosion of sacred spirituality, conjugality and sex within marriage were in need of an alternative 'exalted' significance. A culture so long used to a spiritual justification was now left confronting marriage in an ideological vacuum. Given a system where marriages were arranged and the justifying rhetoric of pre-marital love with the spouse could not be deployed, the disintegration of neo-Brahmanical spirituality left the class disturbed about the redemption of the physicality of this relationship. Simultaneously, the agency of the body was being upheld in some quarters. Annadashankar Ray was one of those young authors who, in his collection of essays on youth, demanded that this agency should be retrieved from spiritualist verbiage.⁶⁵ It is significant, however, that he, too, was not reconciled to the idea of a physical relationship devoid of some 'higher' significance.⁶⁶ He, therefore, heavily invested, by way of justification, in emotional love and independent (as against parental) choice by marrying couples.⁶⁷ But the less original minds of the vast majority must have felt even more morally upset. Still rooted in arranged marriages, they were simultaneously exposed to a prominent voice saying that

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 81.

⁶³ Premendra Mitra's letter, quoted in Raychaudhuri, *Dui Bishwajuddher*, p. 292.

⁶⁴ Mitra, 'Mane', quoted in *ibid.*, p. 293.

⁶⁵ Annadashankar Ray, 'Prachhanna Jadabad', *Tarunya* (1928), in *Annadashankar Rachanabali*, vol. 1, 1987, pp. 407-13,

⁶⁶ Ray, 'Jati o Sati', *Tarunya*, p. 418.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 418-19.

his poem is
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'domesticity, not based on ... the free choice of the couple, was disgusting and bestiality itself'.⁶⁸ This could be particularly disturbing at a time when, as noted in Chapters Two and Four, conjugal disharmony as a theme in its own right could not be moralised out of significance, especially in the context of a rising female age of marriage. It may be suggested that moral disquiet in this vital and intimate area of domestic existence must have increased the feeling of claustrophobia in domesticity.

However, the most important single ideal in relation to which the conscience of the class perceived itself as sinking into 'smallness', was the 'joint family'. It is, however, facile and even inaccurate to understand this feeling of narrowness in terms of the so-called 'break-up of the joint family'. The 1931 Census reported, on the basis of the questionnaire already referred to, that 'Opinions received were unanimous that certainly in the higher castes it [the 'joint family'] has now begun to break up'.⁶⁹ But it is important to understand that contemporary understanding of the 'joint family' among the participants in the system itself, reveal that there were no rigid norms commonly shared. There was, for example, no fixed rule shared by all extended families as to the pooling and allocation of financial resources. Nor was there a fixed norm about the horizontal (collateral) and vertical (generational) depth of this idealised institution. What would be a 'joint family' to some might appear to be a fragmented family to others. In his book (published in the 1930s), suggesting means of material viability for middle-class domesticity, Nrpéndranath Chattopadhyay talked about the different lived manifestations of the ideal: 'Usually married siblings stay as a joint family. In some cases uncles and [married] nephews stay jointly. Usually the joint household is not sustained beyond this extent.'⁷⁰ Debaprasad Ghosh, in talking about the 'breakdown of the joint family', actually referred to very big families in which 'many smaller units, many relatives and dependants' were supported by a thoroughly centralised reserve of resources under the irrevocable authority of the *karta*.⁷¹ Interviews with men and women who were in their youth during the 1920s, 30s and 40s period, conducted for this thesis, have shown that the meaning read into the term was very diverse; the interpretation varied with the interviewee's own experience of the specific structure and organisation of the extended family that he or she grew up in.⁷² Thus, the pointless discussion on the structural 'break-up' of the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁶⁹ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 401.

⁷⁰ Nrpéndranath Chattopadhyay, *Bangali Kon Pathe*, Calcutta, 1343 BE, pp. 103.

⁷¹ Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', *Hindu Kon Pathe*, p. 25.

⁷² To cite just a few of the extensive interviews conducted, interviews with Bindumadhab Datta, Gouri Sen, Sushilkumar Sen and Pratima Sen, Amitabha Mukhopadhyay, Bhabanath Ghosh, Pratima Pal, Arunkumar Ghosh on 20 June 1995, 21 June 1995, 25 June 1995, 3 April 1995, 16 May 1995, 1 June 1995, 21 June 1995 respectively.

'joint family' obscures what is important for the crisis of justification in domesticity. Indeed, the real significance lies in the moral-emotional problem centring around this ideal in the period concerned. It is important to understand why even in an extended family of married siblings, members experienced a feeling of 'narrowness'. It is also important to realise why three-generational parent-filial families often did not regard themselves as 'joint families', and why the extended families in the city felt that they had left the ideal of the 'joint family' back in the ancestral home. Finally, it is important to realise the sense of disturbance and pangs of conscience that characterised a situation where material forces tended to create greater identification with the immediate family, while the ideal of the 'joint family' remained strong.

Once the confounding construction of the 'break-up' of the joint family is tackled, it becomes apparent that the feeling of 'narrowness' stemmed largely from the perception of a contraction of the zone of effective affect within the 'joint family'. On closer observation, one realises that while family structures were often 'joint' in one sense or another, loyalty to the whole family was not seen as unqualified. What numerous essays on domesticity written during the period really lamented was that 'the feeling of unity within the joint family is sadly declining'.⁷³ This was also indicated in the 1931 Census itself. It reported a pervasive feeling that 'the joint family, when it was bound together by unquestioned loyalty to its head, was an admirable substitute for universal insurance'.⁷⁴ This reflects the predominant familial situation, as the class saw it. The contemporary middle-class sensibility believed that while families still often remained 'joint', the 'unquestioned loyalty to the head' and the affective bond between and amongst the constitutive primary units were weakening.

This sense of 'narrowness' within the 'joint family' was created particularly because while, on the one hand, the zone of caring was seen as shrinking, the sway of the discourse condemning *swartha* and upholding 'duty' continued. Indeed, the discourse against *swartha*, instead of disintegrating like other elements of the 19th-century morality, had acquired a new lease of life by secularising itself, as has already been noted. Not surprisingly, therefore, the narrowing of effective caring was hardly ever sought to be justified as a matter of right; the frequent argument, defence or apology was that economic pressures induced this constriction.⁷⁵ This indicates how this contraction tended to prey on the conscience of the majority of a class used to the dictum that support to members of the extended family and the closer kin was a matter of duty. One of the developments that hurt the conscience and yet proved irrepressible, was the increasing prominence of the conjugal unit. It has been noted in

⁷³ Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay', p. 961.

⁷⁴ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 401.

⁷⁵ E.g., Khanaprabha Debi, 'Durdine Nari', *Bharatbarsha*, Shrabana, 1328 BE, p.184.

Chapter Four how and why the concession of relative 'privacy' to the conjugal sphere was proving to be unavoidable from the 1930s. Again, another kind of rhetoric that had the same significance was that of insurance and nominated savings. A representative sample of this rhetoric read: 'Death does not matter much to a man himself but to those who are left behind it is nothing short of a catastrophe. It not only means the loss of all prospects of education for his children but also means starvation for them ... The growth of feelings of love and affection thus may be seen to foster insurance.'⁷⁶ Thus contemporary discursive changes tended to concede the immediate family a relatively privatised emotional space even within the extended family.

Contemporaries perceived that while many people were not able to fulfil their duties to the joint family under pressure there were others who deliberately did not do so 'under the impact of Western individualism'.⁷⁷ On the basis of answers to the questionnaire, the Census of 1931 particularly referred to those whose employment far away from the ancestral home made them live as satellite families near their work-place. It gleaned from the answers the general moral attitude to such families: 'They find it difficult to pool their earnings and the spread of Western individualism makes it irksome for them to remit all that they can save from their own expenses as a contribution to the joint family.'⁷⁸ It is important, however, that even observers critical of the self-centredness of those who could afford to have dependants, did not always paint these people as free from the pangs of conscience. Interestingly, they might actually present this dilemma through the metaphor of claustrophobia. In one of his essays on the period of the Second World War, Binay Ghosh imagined a conversation on board a tram between a clerk (thriving on contacts with the black-market) and his uncle. When the uncle referred to the plight of the helpless widowed sister whom the clerk was obviously not supporting, the latter felt suffocated, 'as if the tram [was] ... full of "choking gas"'.⁷⁹ Thus, the critical but sensitive social observers saw the conditioning of conscience by the discourse against *swartha* as so strong that even people abandoning their 'duties' out of choice could not avoid a feeling of guilt.

The dilemma, and the resultant claustrophobia, was probably stronger in the case of those having to restrict the zone of caring under pressure. This was because the idealistic condemnation of *swartha* continued in their own morality; yet that lofty rhetoric was now becoming painfully fractured in their own voice by a discourse of 'burdens'. For example, an

⁷⁶ Hiranmay Banerji, 'Some Aspects of Insurance', *Insurance World*, January 1933, p. 40.

⁷⁷ E.g., Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', p. 25.

⁷⁸ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, pt. I, p. 401.

⁷⁹ Ghosh, 'Pratidin', Nabababucharit, p. 57.

author writing in the late 1930s, condemned the Western-educated for allegedly going back on their duty to 'parents, siblings, maternal and paternal aunts'.⁸⁰ But the same article also summed up the predicament of the 'one [who] earns with ten or so people looking to him for sustenance'.⁸¹ A susceptibility that did not approve of women going to work was left saying, however, that in England men did not have to bother about the subsistence of women. The author could not entirely suppress a muffled note of complaint that, by contrast, 'widows in Bengali families spend their lives depending on either their father's household or on somebody in the husband's family'.⁸²

Gopal Haldar's perception helps us to understand how deep the impact of the discourse against *swartha* was, and why the perception of failing ones 'duties' could generate such intense feeling of narrowness and incompleteness. Gopal Haldar, as has been observed in Chapter Two, represented the search for self-justification through identification with mass politics, with the 'highway, the people's way'. In his *Tridiba* trilogy, invested with autobiographical underpinnings, he signified the protagonist's world as one of intellectual Bohemianism. Yet Gopal's 'ideal human being', as he stated in his autobiography, was his father Sitakanta.⁸³ Sitakanta's presence could be discerned in the father in several of Haldar's novels like *Bhangan*, *Sroter Dip*, *Ujan Ganga* and *Ekada*.⁸⁴ It is interesting to try to contextualise Gopal Haldar's imaging of his father and his moral-emotional investment on that image. He situated the essence of his father's (or Gyanshankar's in *Bhangan*, *Sroter Dip* and *Ujan Ganga*) existence not merely in the latter's intellectualism. Rather he linked it more firmly to the ontological justification and fulfilment deriving from Sitakanta's 'unfailing performance' of duty towards the extended, lineal family.⁸⁵ Even as a youth of the 1920-30s and as a Marxist, the author looked nostalgically back to a 'completeness' of ontology arising out of fulfilment of duty to the 'many' that the lineal family consisted of. The likes of Sitakanta, as Gopal saw them, 'sustain and bring up many, willingly shoulder the responsibility of many ... [and] exit gracefully after fulfilling the duties of life'⁸⁶ In *Ujan Ganga* this image of completeness is made to invest Gyanshankar's death with the tragic splendour of that of a hero.⁸⁷ By contrast, the next generation (Haldar's own) in the family

⁸⁰ Basu, 'Bartaman Shikkhay', p. 961.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Gopal Haldar, *Rupnarayan Kule*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁴ Amiya Dhar, 'Aupanyasik Gopal Haldar', *Baromas*, April, 1994, p. 77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Gopal Haldar, *Ujan Ganga* (1950), Dhaka, 1974, pp. 190-91.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

was portrayed as lax in its attachment to the lineal family and in its performance of 'duties'.⁸⁸ But what is more important here is that the author clearly presented his own generation as sadly fragmented and disturbed in its search for self-justification.

Finally, the emergent perception of the 'narrowness' of the urban household seems to have derived inversely from the perception of an open-ended 'vastness' associated with the lineal family in the village. Numerous essays, while talking about the decline of the 'joint family spirit', related it to the migration of smaller familial units to the city and their gradual loosening from the rural-ancestral base.⁸⁹ The answers to the Census questionnaire of 1931 indicate that there was a dominant sense in which the 'break-up of the joint family' was being largely imagined in terms of this decline of live contact with the lineal family in the native village.⁹⁰ The family associated with the ancestral home was thus often imagined as the real 'joint family' giving a feeling of smallness to the urban satellite family, even if the latter lived as a three-generational unit or as a comensal one of married siblings.

However, there seems to have been another important association with migration that came to reinforce the feeling of the inconsequentiality of the middle-class household in the city. It was with the village home that the myths of the ancestral family's status and achievements were associated. Those middle-class families which had moved into the city too recently to have any status there, were also cut off from the base of their genealogies of power, status, manliness and achievement, left behind in the village. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's autobiography provides an entry-point into this feeling. Referring to the family's status respectively in their native place and in the town where his father was professionally established, he wrote, 'As soon as we arrived at Banagram we became aware of blood, aware not only of its power to make us feel superior to other men but also of its immeasurable capacity to bring men together ... At Kishoregunj our genealogy like every other boy's stopped at the father. The story ended with the assertion that Nirad Chaudhuri is the son of Upendra Narayan Chaudhuri.'⁹¹ If this was the feeling in relation to a small town it must have been even more acute in the case of immigrants in Calcutta. It might not be wrong to surmise that it was difficult for them to quickly gain a status commensurate with the one left behind in the village. This feeling of statuslessness was likely to have been particularly acute if the

⁸⁸ Also see Haldar's reminiscences for the author's remorseful admission that he and his brothers had 'failed' their 'duties' to the mother and the extended family. *Rupnaraner Kule*, vol. 1, pp. 36-38.

⁸⁹ E.g., Ray, 'Strishikkha', p. 375.

⁹⁰ *Census of India, 1931*, vol. V, p. 401. For didactic literature equating the 'joint family' with the ancestral family in the village home, see Sarojbasini Gupta, 'Grhasangskar', *Grhastha*, Poush, 1323 BE, pp. 236-37.

⁹¹ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, New York, 1951, p. 51.

immigrants happened to be lower middle class, looking upon themselves as less 'successful'. Chaudhuri's use of the term 'assertion' is very significant for the present study. The participation of the middle class in the strike wave and the communal riots of 1946 might have had something to do, after all, with the lower middle-class immigrants' feeling of inconsequentiality and powerlessness in an urban milieu where they were cut off from the empowering bases of blood and lineage. Whether these two forms of participation could not have been their wish to assert through some empowering and ingratiating identity will be analysed in a subsequent section.

Alternative 'Virtues'

There were, of course, discursive efforts to ease the sense of spiritual suffocation through the invention of alternative 'virtues' in Bengali Hindu existence and domesticity. The inter-war period was not starved of discourses of spiritual quest in various forms. But the decline of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of spirituality was not adequately compensated by any alternative investment of sacred spirituality in the functional field of urban domesticity, now pervasively seen as physical and secular. It is, indeed, significant that authors trying alternatively to justify domesticity with the touch of simple piety also claimed that the Bengali Hindu middle class could find it only in the countryside; middle-class domesticity in Calcutta was written off as a site for even this simple sacred-spirituality.⁹² It is significant that Gopal Halder made one of the major characters in the second of his *Bhadrasan* trilogies voice the same opinion; 'This is the essence of Bharatbarsha ... standing in vigil over it, is not today's city but the home in the soothing village; the home there ... [is] protected by the ancestral deity and the *grhalakkhis*'.⁹³ Gopal Halder meant this to be representative of a discursive trend and not an isolated voice. One needs to offer an appreciation of the nature of the trilogy to explain why. Though this trilogy had a strong autobiographical element, he also intended it to be a historical-sociological study of the transformation of middle-class domestic morality during the 1920s and 30s.⁹⁴ He, therefore, took care to modify real characters encountered in his life to voice wider discursive trends and ideological stances within the class. The above observation, therefore, reflects a shared perception of the physicality and secularity of domestic preoccupation in the city, frustrating the investment of spirituality in domestic concerns and space.

⁹² E.g., Basantakumar Chattopadhyay, 'Charka', *Bharatbarsha*, Baishakh, 1328 BE, p. 516.

⁹³ Gopal Halder, *Sroter Dip*, Calcutta, 1950, pp. 232-33.

⁹⁴ See the author's introduction to Gopal Halder, *Bhangan: Shatabdir Srot*, Calcutta, 1354 BE.

On the other hand, there emerged a conspicuous attempt - represented in a wide spectrum of literature - at morally redeeming 'pettiness' and 'narrow-mindedness' in domesticity in terms of 'mental richness'. This developed increasingly from the middle of the 1920s. Indeed, from the 1920s onwards, excessive emotionalism became a dominant characteristic of the less sophisticated, but more voluminous, fictional output in Bengal.⁹⁵ The articulation of the less celebrated contributors to the periodical *Kallol*, for example, may be taken as nearer the view-point of the average middle-class youth. On the basis of his exhaustive study of the output of the periodical, Debkumar Basu observes that in numerous stories the various small incidents and details of domestic existence were treated mainly in the light of romantic emotionalism.⁹⁶ Taking the world of average fictional expression as a whole, a few examples can be cited. Ashalata Singha, in the short story already cited, probed the extended family situation with married siblings with varying incomes. The author deployed the notion of 'pettiness' in her portrayal and made the atmosphere even more stifling by attributing a veneer of 'refinement' under which the 'pettiness' festered.⁹⁷ But by afflicting a girl child in the family with a fatal disease the author introduced compassion and affection in her aunt, the most 'self-centred' woman in the family and redeemed her. This sentimental suggestion of moral redemption was echoed in a very similar story on the 'joint family' situation published in *Bichitra*.⁹⁸ The discourse of emotion was also used as the yardstick of condemnation. In a story a clerk failed to pay rent for three consecutive months, received notice from the landlord and failed to pay even after that. When the landlord finally ejected him, the clerk had to go with his family to a slum where his ailing son died.⁹⁹ The author placed the onus squarely on the supposed 'heartlessness' of the landlord. Significantly, in both these cases the language of sentimentality was being deployed not merely as an alternative search for justification. The heavy deployment of the discourse of the heart was also meant to bring order and to bind people in the family and the community together in a situation where 'selfishness' and the cash-nexus were seen as dissolving the older morality. For example, in his novel *Kalo Ghoda*, Sarojkumar Raychaudhuri encountered the experience of the Second World War with a moral sensibility that he had developed in his early youth during the 1920s and 30s. This novel is particularly relevant because its moral concern is pronounced. Furthermore, the yardstick of the author was clearly a critique of *swartha* based not on the neo-Brahmanic dictum of *nivritti* but the 'qualities of the heart'. The author's open

⁹⁵ Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima*, p. 177.

⁹⁶ Basu, *Kallolgoshtir Kathasahitya*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Singha, 'Mrtyur Alo', pp. 58-60.

⁹⁸ Samirendra Mukhopadhyay, 'Ekannabarti Paribar', *Bichitra*, Agradhayan, 1334 BE, pp. 865-67.

⁹⁹ Priyakumar Goswami, 'Bhagnanid', *Bharatbarsha*, Ashadh, 1335 BE, pp. 33-35.

indictment of Shrimanta, the leading male character, was that 'he is galloping like a dark horse down the track of life towards his own success. On this track there is no place for the heart.'¹⁰⁰ The dehumanising implications of the market were deployed when the author wrote, 'His [Shrimanta's] is a transactional world view of "cash and carry".'¹⁰¹ The author's preference for Sumitra, Shrimanta's wife, was clear. She, significantly, was a clerk, had been promiscuous before her marriage, and did not subscribe to traditional mores. But the author's statement is clear in investing her simultaneously with an emotional honesty and the ability to adjust to changing times.

Even more significantly, the attempt to bolster emotional and mental richness as moral justification for middle-class existence was also reflected in serious essays enjoining the cultivation of the innate 'richness' of the Bengali that was supposed to be *manasik*. There is a problem regarding the interpretation of the term *manasik* (pertaining to the *man*) as in Bengali *man* could mean both the mind and the heart. However, most writers used in connection with *manasik* qualities, a cluster of terms like emotionalism, idealism, intellect and intelligence. Hence, the imagery generally involved a combination of the qualities of the head and the heart. For example, what 'Parashuram' meant by *manasik* richness is clear in his following assurance, 'Many Bengalis cultivate literature, history, and philosophy even while working for European merchants. Even if [a Bengali] takes up the measuring scale in his hand his source of emotion will not dry up.'¹⁰² By the *manasik sangskrti* of the Bengalis Sunitikumar meant both their supposed emotionalism and cultivation of knowledge.¹⁰³ Rameshchandra Ray saw self-interest as a 'constriction of emotional faculties' and also, significantly, as unmanliness.¹⁰⁴ Even learned articles published during the 1920s and 30s on society and culture in Bengal took care to emphasise that Bengali Hindu life was distinguished by a deep emotionalism and lyricism.¹⁰⁵ One cannot avoid feeling that this suddenly heightened tendency, particularly from the late 1920s, to invent emotionalism as the 'innate' quality of the Bengali Hindu might have been partly induced by a communal anxiety to move away from the caste-based moral ordering of neo-Brahmanism. Most of the communal ideologues while constructing the genealogy of the 'superficial' influence of Brahmanism among Bengali Hindus emphasised emotionalism and worldly piety as the

¹⁰⁰ Sarojkumar Raychaudhuri, *Kalo Ghoda* (1945), Calcutta, 1361 BE, p 67.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² 'Parashuram', 'Banglar Bhadrak', p. 35.

¹⁰³ Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti', pp. 50-55.

¹⁰⁴ Ray, 'Strishikkha', pp. 375-76.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., Bimanbihari Majumdar, 'Vaishnav Sahitye Samajik Itihaser Upakaran', *Sahitya-Parishat-Patrika*, no. 3, 1331 BE, p. 106.

central impulse of Bengali Hindu domesticity and religion in the pre-colonial period.¹⁰⁶ However, what is important here is that whatever the reasons behind it, emotionalism was being morally deployed in the 1920s and 30s with unprecedented self-consciousness. Furthermore, as the earlier discussion of the situation in the extended family indicates, there was enough anxiety generated in that sphere to determine why there should be a search for some alternative, integrative and reassuring morality in the place of the declining rhetoric of neo-Brahmanism.

The problem for the disturbed middle-class mind, however, was that the assurance of emotional integrity as a moral yardstick was qualified. The communal voice which usually upheld emotionalism in an effort to suggest a domestic and social morality more ingratiating than the neo-Brahmanic one, was, nevertheless, hesitant to give emotionalism a free rein. After all, emotionalism had often been associated in nationalist sensitivity with effeminacy. Committed to the communal agenda of ruthless deployment of masculinity, Debaprasad Ghosh wanted the 'emotionalism of the Bengali Hindu' to be supplemented by a cultivation of strength and masculinity.¹⁰⁷ Other voices also were worried about what they considered as an excessive deployment of emotionalism and intellectualism in contemporary moral stances. Authors like Sunitikumar or 'Parashuram' were perturbed about the material condition of the average Bengali Hindu family and anxious that they take to private enterprise. They considered problematic, the growing Bengali identification with an 'emotional' self-image and the belief in Bengali families that a spirit of business enterprise would destroy the qualities of the heart in their children. The authors were, therefore, worried about what they considered an excessive deployment of emotionalism and intellectualism in contemporary moral stances. They argued that discourse on Bengali's 'natural' emotionalism should be tempered as it hindered the adoption of vocations geared to a profit motive.¹⁰⁸

However, this invocation to Bengali parents to modify the upbringing of their children did not go unchallenged. It was argued that emulation of Marwaris and the trading castes would swamp the atmosphere of the educated Bengali home with unrefined demeanour and the spirit of self-interest. Jogeshchandra Ray Bidyanidhi curtly pointed out that those who were preaching the emulation of trading castes in the upbringing of children were themselves in paid jobs and not in business.¹⁰⁹ He went on to claim that if such an upbringing were provided to a Bengali child, nothing could save him or her from being mean-minded and

¹⁰⁶ E.g., Ray, *Hindutver Punarutthan*, pp. 5, 27-30.

¹⁰⁷ Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti', pp. 50-55.

¹⁰⁹ Ray Bidyanidhi, 'Annachinta', pp. 101-02.

spiritually bankrupt. It is interesting to note the moral unease of a Marxist author about the spirit of business enterprise entering the middle-class family. In the trilogy already cited, Gopal Haldar deviated from details of his own extended family to create, in the household in his trilogy, the character of a son (Sureshwar) who successfully took to business. The author explicitly dissociated this involvement in private enterprise from any idealism reminiscent of the business ventures of the Swadeshi period. In this historical-sociological novel the origin of Sureshwar's business was located by the author in the boom of the First World War; the sub-text was immediately clear. But, more importantly, the author presented Sureshwar as the first in his generation to repudiate his 'duties' to the ancestral home and the lineal family. The other sons were also drifting away from such 'duty' but doing so unintentionally. Moreover, they were presented as somehow redeemed by intellectual pursuits or the inspiration of mass politics. Sureshwar was projected as pleading inability on blatantly economic grounds and excusing himself, when he was the one with the greatest pecuniary means to help his uncle sustain the ancestral base. This idealistic reaction of an intellectual (and that, too, a Marxist), indicates the more general cultural climate in which the moral safeguard of emotional integrity and 'mental richness' must have been adopted.

Even authors like 'Parashuram' and Sunitikumar, themselves renowned intellectuals, were actually not in any way marginalising 'mental-emotional richness' and 'enlightenment'.¹¹⁰ So strong was the distrust of the very mention of *swartha* that in invoking the profit motive, the term they used, like many of their contemporaries, was 'self-preservation', presumably to preclude any impression of self-interest. And, of course, such authors took the utmost care to emphasise that emotional richness and intellectual refinement were only to be controlled, not abandoned. For example, Sunitikumar greatly valued the self-ascription of the Bengali as emotional; he merely emphasised that this should not be the 'only identity'. Given the depressed material condition of the average Bengali middle-class household, it should coexist with a practical sense and spirit of enterprise.¹¹¹

The optimism of the effort to generate moral assurance on the basis of parameters like intellectualism, 'mental richness' and sincerity of emotion was, however, thrown into disarray by the experience of the Second World War. The war brought home to the class and exposed to society as a whole, the extent of the middle-class household's 'corruptibility' in relation to the market. Even newspaper editorials, while highlighting the war-time plight of lower middle-class households, also admitted how this struggle 'compelled' them to 'scandalously'

¹¹⁰ See Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti' and 'Amader Samajik "Pragati"', pp. 47-55, 129.

¹¹¹ E.g., Chattopadhyay, 'Jati, Sangskrti', pp. 48-49.

abandon established morals on a large scale.¹¹² Thus the crisis of the 'soul' loomed large. The class was in more desperate need than ever before of justifying its everyday existence and its claim to 'natural leadership', because the extent of its compromise with the market had subverted its self-projected image of 'innate' morality.

If the alternative moral parameters like emotional richness and intellectual refinement had generated any hope of moral release from the claustrophobia in domesticity, the Second World War came to create a powerful discourse of 'decadence' of the class and its morality. Those who in the late 1920s and 1930s had attempted alternative definitions of domestic and social morality based on values like education, refinement and emotional richness, seemed to be overtaken by a sense of loss. The war frustrated the attempt of the moral redefinition of the 1920s-1930s to simultaneously accommodate 'self-preservation' and protection of the soul in a single domestic strategy of living. What predominantly emerged was a pervasive imagination of a 'moral black-out'.¹¹³ Bhabatosh Datta, an economist who as a youth in the 1920s-30s had shared the enthusiasm about the new literary trends of those decades, records his shocked sensibility in his statement that the war marked the beginning of the middle class's 'loss of character'.¹¹⁴ Santoshkumar Ghosh experienced the war as a youth in his twenties and went on to initiate in the post-war period, along with other authors, a literary trend based on the assumption of the moral decadence of the class and its domesticity. He reminisced about the war years as a period when 'the soul was being sold in order that one might live; ... personal purity, respectful behaviour and mutual affection in the family was decaying'. He believed that though fall from moral standards had started earlier but 'it had neither been so stark nor so pervasive'; the war turned it into a total 'moral degeneration'.¹¹⁵ Journalist Hemendraprasad Ghosh wrote in his diary in 1943, 'A new order is coming ... in which men are becoming worse than beasts'.¹¹⁶ In 1945 he reflected, 'the war has brought such changes in society that one feels that one cannot fit himself in'.¹¹⁷ Binay Ghosh also perceived the Second World War years as marking 'the beginning of a pervasive decadence'.¹¹⁸

In this morally disturbing perception of degeneration, moreover, domesticity was imagined as the main site where the male was unredeemed as never before. Indeed, it can be

¹¹² *Jugantar*, 19 April 1944, p. 2.

¹¹³ This expression was used by Bishnu De, a contemporary young poet, when he referred to the impact of the Second World War and the famine. Quoted in Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima*, p. 136.

¹¹⁴ Datta, 'Bangali Madhyabitter Tin Kal', p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Santoshkumar Ghosh, 'Ei Bangla', quoted in Mukhopadhyay, *Kaler Pratima*, pp. 130-31.

¹¹⁶ UDHG, 12 August 1943.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 January 1945.

¹¹⁸ Ghosh, *Nabababucharit*, Introduction.

argued that the experience of the war made the lower middle-class household the greatest site of the failure of the male. Genteel poverty was not new, but now an unprecedented number of lower middle-class families were facing starvation.¹¹⁹ The failure of the lower middle-class bread-earner to feed the family was inscribed in the appearance of cheap canteens, opened 'to provide relief for the middle class in the city'.¹²⁰ War-time inflationary pressure on the lower middle-class family was seen as making middle-class women turn to prostitution in order that the families might survive. A contemporary social observer saw this as the 'destruction' of the 'the foundation of helpless, indigent middle class families in "private call houses"'.¹²¹ Families otherwise opposed to it, 'had to'¹²² allow daughters to take up jobs (including clerical ones) hitherto not regarded by the middle class as respectable for women.¹²³ In the fictional literature of the period there was the reflection of the unhappy consciousness of patriarchy about having to make this compromise. The father in Tarashankar's *Manvantar* voiced the sense of failure among the male guardians of these working girls, 'I am having to take your income for the maintenance of my family; the shame and anguish of this inadequacy on my part is unbearable for me'.¹²⁴ But even heavier on the conscience of elderly males, was the way their commitment to the pre-existing patriarchal morality about women's work had come to be diluted by an unavoidable feeling of material relief at women supplementing the dwindled income of the family.¹²⁵ Again, the male was faced with a very real threat. In the cases where unmarried daughters took up employment and economically rehabilitated their parental families from the brink of destitution, this development threatened to negotiate a voice for them in the decision-making of the family.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ E.g., Jaminikanta Gupta, Letter to the Editor, *ABP*, 4 September 1943, p. 2. Pleading the urgency of relief in the context of the steep rise in begging, the author wrote, 'middle class *bhadralogs* [sic] are also experiencing starvation but their sense of self-respect has still kept them indoors'.

¹²⁰ *ABP*, 29 August 1943, p. 6.

¹²¹ Ghosh, 'Madhyachitta', *Nabababucharit*, p. 28. For fictional representation of middle-class daughters 'forced' into prostitution with patriarchal connivance, see Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, p. 161.

¹²² Contemporary literature extensively recaptured this expression 'having to send to work' to represent the attitude of an anguished patriarchy to women's participation in clerical jobs in particular.

¹²³ The 1931 Census reported that even among the 'progressive' Bengali Hindus, the vast majority approved of women's employment only in teaching, medicine and women-related social work. *Census of India*, 1931, vol. V, p. 401. During the war women from lower middle-class families started working as clerks in the Civil Supplies Department and as stenographers and telephone-operators. See Bharati Ray, 'Women of Bengal: Transformation in Ideas and Ideals, 1900-1947', *Social Scientist*, 19:5-6, May-June, 1991, p. 11.

¹²⁴ E.g., Bandyopadhyay, *Manvantar*, 145-46.

¹²⁵ For fictional representation, see Manik Bandyopadhyay, 'Chakranta', *Khatian*, p. 573.

¹²⁶ On the basis of interviews with some of these working women of the 1940s, Bharati Ray concludes that working unmarried daughters did, in many cases, assert this voice. See Ray, 'Women of Bengal', p. 11.

But domesticity was all the less redeeming, because it was household-based survival that was perceived and projected by the sensibility of the middle-class male as the very nucleus of the self-centred quest for survival during the war. An editorial on the war-time condition of middle-class domesticity makes interesting reading. On the one hand, the household was presented as the helpless victim of scarcity and inflation. On the other, it was constructed as the ultimate agency that determined why people were trying 'to intercept other people's rightful share by hook or by crook in a desperate struggle to procure necessities'. The agency for the moral compromise of the male was then subtly distributed over the whole household: 'Such immoral incidents are now common in middle-class households'.¹²⁷ This shifting of agency from the males to domesticity ties up well with the author's exasperation with the *thali* (the shopping bag).¹²⁸ The editorial lamented that the *thali* had become 'an invariable part of the urban *'babu's* appendage'. It is interesting that the average middle-class *babu* going to the market with a *thali* in hand had not been uncommon before the Second World War.¹²⁹ However, the clue to this derision of the *thali* was betrayed by the article itself, when it recounted the general behaviour before the rationing system, with its 'hassling paraphernalia of ration-cards, coupons and tickets', had emerged: 'Previously in the middle-class households of the city, the women managed the purchases; they used to send the servants or the children to do the shopping'. Thus the war had clearly thrust on the middle-class adult male the trivia that he had so long kept detached from his self-image by using the hierarchies of gender, class and age. It was one thing for the male voluntarily to do some shopping and quite another to be a slave of the market and of the mundane needs of the household. This, in turn, relates to the projection of the wife in a *battala* piece on the petty clerk's plight during the war. Betraying strong class and gender susceptibility, the author expressed his anguish that during the war the clerk had become a slave of the market which made him stand in various endless queues and drag the supplies home like a *mute* (person hired to carry a heavy load).¹³⁰ But for these 'indignities' generated by the market, the author held the allegedly inconsiderate, nagging wife as ultimately responsible; she was the one who constantly reminded him of the exhausted household stock of necessities and made him repeatedly stand in queues.¹³¹ It is probably not merely coincidental that the household, the *thali* and the wife - all domestic icons - were thus essentialised as scapegoats at a time when

¹²⁷ *Jugantar*, 19 April 1944, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ See Pratulchandra Gupta, *Dinguli Mor*, Calcutta, 1392 BE, p. 46.

¹³⁰ Nagendranath Das, *Mahajuddher Sakkhigopal o Shrikanter Shribrddhi*, Calcutta, n.d. (1944), p. 6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

the male mind was conscience-stricken and sensitive about the extent of its own compromise with the black-market. In these accounts the shifting of the agency to domesticity and women, had the sub-text that, had it not been for the family, the males would not have taken 'immoral' routes to survival. In effect, therefore, domesticity was left appearing even less redeeming than in the 1920s and 30s. Moreover, the pressures of the war had nakedly exposed the myth of its 'innate' morality, both to the class itself and to those it aspired to hegemonise. If, in such a situation, the class was to justify its claim to hegemony, it needed to erase its current image through an assertion that would redeem it in the eyes of society. And it would have to be in the 'outside' because the immediate household had become identified as the nucleus of the self-centred survival of the class. Where the middle class's search for justification was concerned, the discourse of 'decadence' that became pervasive in the post-war period, left no space where any fresh set of 'virtues' could be immediately invented to reassure the class about its 'innate' morality. The next section analyses two cases of socio-political mobilisation in the light of the class's need for assertion through some supra-household solidarity, as 'elevation' out of a claustrophobia that had finally become unbearable because of war-time self-perceptions.

Assertion to Redeem

This section argues for situating middle-class participation in the strike wave of July 1946 and the Calcutta Riots of August in the same year against the back-drop of the spiritual claustrophobia of the Bengali Hindu male in the household. There seems to be a sense in which these two acts, though very different from each other, were, among other things, also forms of redemptive assertion for a release from domestic 'narrowness'. This is not to underplay the importance of the factors that manifestly caused these developments. Each of these two forms of participation was conditioned by the economic and political developments of the period. What is suggested here is the possibility of reading an element of the spiritual crisis in domesticity into these two 'public' forms of assertion. Domesticity might have been an underlying cause of some of the manifest reactions that determined these two cases of middle-class mobilisation. What seems to support this suggestion is that the terms in which authors perceived and imagined each of these cases of participation, involved an explicit juxtaposition of the redemptive 'vastness' of an imagined social solidarity against the 'narrowness' of the household.

The call for the strike on 29 July 1946, given by the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress, crested the strike wave triggered off by that of the Post and Telegraph employees starting on 11 July 1946.¹³² Initially involving the postmen and lower grade staff, the Post and Telegraph strike came to involve, by 21 July, the clerical force and managed to disconnect Calcutta's postal and telegraphic communications from the rest of the world. What is important is that this was the first trade union-led strike in which white collar government employees decided to join ranks with the non-white-collar work force. Finally, the BPTUC call resulted in an unprecedentedly massive general strike expressing solidarity with the Post and Telegraph employees. Again, what is important here is that in this general strike the clerical world in Calcutta as a class joined for the first time a trade-union-led strike alongside industrial workers. This participation was essentially different from the middle-class participation in the industrial strikes associated with the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements. White collar labour had not joined the movements as a class or participated as a class in industrial strikes. And the participation of middle-class elements in industrial action during the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements in an individual capacity could not have been comparable with the massive participation on 29 July 1946, which brought Calcutta's offices to a standstill. All major dailies in Calcutta used the term 'unprecedented' in describing how the whole area of Dalhousie Square, with its numerous offices, had become 'silent and dead'.¹³³ It is clear from reports from all sections of the press, that what the middle-class clerical population did, was perceived as totally unprecedented in the class's history. It is highly significant that the middle-class mobilisation in the communal riot in August 1946, too, appears improbable given the long-term sensibilities of the class. During the riot the Bengali Hindu middle class entered an 'improbable alliance between students, professional men, businessmen and ex-soldiers, Congressmen, Mahasabhaites, shopkeepers and neighbourhood bully boys'.¹³⁴

These two assertions were conditioned by important socio-economic developments affecting the middle class in Calcutta. For example, the white-collar participation in the industrial strike wave of 1946 cannot be dissociated from the intense expectation of freedom and the massive anti-imperialist mass upsurge which gripped Calcutta from the last quarter of 1945.¹³⁵ Simultaneously as the lower middle class in late 1945 perceived the economic situation as desperate, the communally tilted sensibility of journalist Hemendraprasad Ghosh,

¹³² Pranab Kumar Chatterjee, *Struggle and Strife in Urban Bengal, 1937-47: A Study of Calcutta-based Urban Politics in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 173-74.

¹³³ E.g., *Jugantar*, 31 July 1946. quoted in Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, p. 168.

¹³⁴ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 239.

¹³⁵ Chatterjee, *Struggle*, pp. 153-75.

for example, registered a grave cause of anxiety. He tensely observed that due to the pressure of the war on lower middle-class families, 'young men and women have become imbued with undigested ideas about Communism'.¹³⁶ This observation, interestingly, was echoed by official sources which noted 'the sentiment in favour of communism greatly growing in middle class families'.¹³⁷ Official sources also highlighted the desperate situation of the urban middle class in the midst of unabated inflation, scarcity, 'housing famine', post-war retrenchment, and the 'fear of a job famine'.¹³⁸

In the case of the Riots, the participation of middle-class youths and the acquiescence of middle-class families in communal violence has to be placed in the context of the world-view of an 'embattled elite', as Joya Chatterji characterises 'the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok*'. It has been already observed that the Bengali Hindu middle class had, from the early 1910s, begun to see the Hindus as 'dying' in relation to the Muslims - a feeling that intensified after the riots of 1926. With the Communal Award and the Poona Pact the Hindu middle class apprehended the prospect of totally losing its claim to political power. Furthermore, the agrarian depression having damaged their economic position, they were all the more aggrieved about job reservations for Muslims in the shrunken employment situation of the 1930s. As the measures adopted by successive Muslim governments 'demolished step by step the structures that had long sustained *bhadralok* dominance', Hindu communal mobilisation emerged as 'the most powerful of competing political strategies that were evolved in response to this series of challenges'.¹³⁹ Given the growing communal susceptibility of the class, the overtly communal volunteer organisations, often encouraging pseudo-military training, were successful in mobilising the middle-class Bengali Hindus of Calcutta behind the increasingly virulent communalism that characterised middle-class politics in the 1940s.

What is intriguing is that that the same class produced, within a month, two forms of assertion for two very different, if not diametrically opposite, causes. The strike wave in July 1946 had created an atmosphere of mobilisation across communal divides.¹⁴⁰ But in mid-August, the Hindu middle-class male was an active agent in Hindu communal violence, either directly participating in it or more generally acquiescing in and supporting it. And, more significantly, there was considerable overlap, it seems, between the section of the class which participated in the strike and that which joined in the riots. The Congress and the non-communist 'terrorist' groups played an active part in the mobilisation for the massive strike

¹³⁶ UDHG, 16 and 17 January 1945.

¹³⁷ Bengal, Home Political, 163/45 of 1945, WBSA.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 267.

¹⁴⁰ Chatterjee, *Struggle*, p. 174.

of 29 July 1946. But Congressmen were also very much involved in rioting groups of Hindu youths.¹⁴¹ The terrorists (not converted to communism) often had very obvious links with communal programmes of training Hindu youths for 'self-defence' throughout the 1930s and early 40s.¹⁴² Even members of the Communist Party were appalled that communal sentiments were privately nurtured by some of their comrades in an individual capacity.¹⁴³ Indeed, the communal sentiment was widespread, out of proportion to the actual membership of the Hindu Mahasabha or even openly declared commitment to communalism.¹⁴⁴ The role of this latent communalism of the majority explains the overlap in participation in the two episodes.

But there is a sense in which the underlying causes of this overlap, this assertion through two opposing ideas of solidarity, lay largely in the moral crisis centring around middle-class domesticity. The class's perception of a new, inimical 'outside' and self-perception as 'cornered', had (as analysed in Chapter Three) increasingly prompted a withdrawal of its ordering concerns into the discrete household. Domesticity thus was one of the bases from which the vulnerability of the class was imagined and reproduced. In the previous sections we have noted how in that household the male faced a claustrophobic lack of self-justification; the Second World War made the search for a release out of this suffocation finally desperate. It is, therefore, highly significant that in describing its own participation in both these forms of assertion, the class actually deployed the juxtaposed ideas of 'narrowness' of the small family-household and the vastness of a supra-household solidarity. Another meaning that was read simultaneously into such assertion was, not surprisingly, the redemption of 'lack of masculinity'. Thus both the Marxist imagining of the socially redemptive function of the strike and the communal invocation of Hindu solidarity deployed the notion of masculinity. There was a difference, however. In the communal discourses the meaning read into masculinity was literal. The word virility, rather than merely masculinity, was frequently used to remind Bengali Hindus about their supposed duty of demographic multiplication. Also, masculine strength was used in a sense of a blatantly physical one with the sub-text of the need to be violent in an eventual show-down with the Muslims. By contrast, the Marxist use of the concepts of effeminacy and weakness, though gendered, was more figurative. It stood for a generic perception of all kinds of male failing that prevented a social redemption surmounting class, coloniality and the confines of the immediate household.

¹⁴¹ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 238-40.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁴³ Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, p. 208.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194; Chatterjee, *Struggle*, pp. 178, 194.

Accounts of the strike written by Marxist intellectuals and activists provide an effective point of entry. The possibility of this Marxist voice not representing the ordinary striking office-employee's mentality, probably, does not arise, because the accounts used are themselves emotional and reflect susceptibilities that the class as a whole shared during the preceding decades. Moreover, if the general strike was a moment of experiencing the liberating dimension of liminality, the middle-class Marxists' sentimentalising of the participation would give very much an insider's account of the class's attempt at redeeming its domestic 'narrowness'. Subhash Mukhopadhyay, Marxist intellectual and poet, wrote in *Swadhinata* (the Bengali organ of the Communist Party of India), an account of the clerical staff's entry into the Post and Telegraph strike.¹⁴⁵ Far from trying to give an 'objective' account, he sentimentalised the participation as a moment of social redemption of *swartha*. The redeeming 'energising touch of mass participation'¹⁴⁶ during the strike was contrasted with the 'narrowness' of the domestic survival instinct of the middle class during the Second World War: 'Even while realising the gravity of the countrywide crisis [the war] nobody [in the clerical world] had had any ideal higher than moderate material affluence for himself and his household consisting of parents, wife and children'.¹⁴⁷ This 'narrowness' of the family (significantly, characterised as narrow despite the three-generation depth) was juxtaposed to the supposedly liberating significance of what the author presented as a feeling of oneness with all the employees of the office. It may be noted, in passing, that during this period Manik Bandyopadhyay wrote a short story which was somewhat uncharacteristically idealistic for the author. In it the blatant narrowing of affect in a family of married siblings, left one of the brothers, a petty clerk, anguished. His existence came to be animated with a new justification, thanks to his office colleagues' solidarity; very unrealistically, the author made the clerk's immediate family merge with an extended one comprising the immediate families of a few other colleagues.¹⁴⁸ In his account of the strike, Subhash perceived a feeling of fulfilment and pride in spending 'sleepless nights' away from the family-household, organising collective action. 'Many have not eaten or slept the whole day [the previous night included]. Such an experience is totally new for them ... In front of the telephone exchange ... [one] was heard saying proudly to his colleague "...Since eight yesterday I have not had the time to go home."' The friend was not to be put to shade, 'And me! I have been outside since day before yesterday.'" Both the liminality and the wish to stake leadership with a morally redeemed

¹⁴⁵ Subhash Mukhopadhyay, 'Dak Tar Telephoner Galpa', *Swadhinata*, 24 July 1946, quoted in Amalendu Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, pp. 164-65.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

image seem to come across in the tone of appropriation: ‘“Strike”! The word is not new. But what is new was the middle-class *bhadralok*’s snatching of the word from the *chhotolok* worker’.¹⁴⁹

It was inevitable that in redeeming itself the colonial middle class would also want to redeem its ‘unmanliness’ and ‘cowardice’. In Subhash’s account of the strike this ‘cowardice’, moreover, was sought to be redeemed through a wider solidarity than the household-bound family. ‘There is a great thrill in keeping sleepless nights on an empty stomach and courting risks and pain not for the ones own sake but for everybody in the office. There is valour in it’.¹⁵⁰ It is also evident that the identification with a wider world outside the home was being used to give a spatial as well as a numerical dimension to this assertion. This spatial ‘ennobling’ comes across in other contemporary references to the strike. Concepts of openness and vastness were heavily deployed in relation to middle-class participation in the strike and the related processions and meetings; expressions like ‘the open *Maidan*’, ‘on the wide roads of Calcutta’, and ‘rubbing shoulders with the masses’ were pervasively used in a sense of elevation from closed domestic spaces. Sabitri Ray, whose novel *Swaralipi* opens with the mammoth meeting of 29 July in the Calcutta *Maidan* wrote, ‘In the open *Maidan* they were seated closely, shoulder to shoulder - workers, peasants, students, authors, teachers. Their eyes lit up at every syllable of what the speaker said’¹⁵¹ In 1943-44, in the famine-ravaged atmosphere, the Marxist intellectuals within or close to the Communist Party, had invoked the theme of ‘new life’ in their intellectual articulation and in the cultural performances of the Indian People’s Theatre Association. But for the middle class, they implied, this ‘new life’ called for an assertion outside the ‘decadence’ of everyday middle-class existence. Jyotirindra Maitra, whose collection of lyrics entitled *Nabajibaner Gan* (Songs of New Life)¹⁵² was one of the most noted products of this trend, contemporaneously wrote a poem on the clerk’s existence during the Second World War. In it he invoked the archetypal clerk’s assertion of ‘new life’ not in middle-class domestic existence, decaying from ‘social tuberculosis’, but in the mass upsurge outside it. Indeed, he presented the hitherto idealised refuge in a ‘private and intimate tryst’ with ‘the pure, unaffected, unquestioning sanctuary’ of the home as decadent, anachronistic and unanimating.

¹⁴⁸ Manik Bandyopadhyay, ‘Ekannabarti’, *Khatian* (1947) in *Manik Granthabali*, vol. 8, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 645-54.

¹⁴⁹ Mukhopadhyay, ‘Dak Tar’, p. 164.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁵¹ Sabitri Ray, *Swaralipi* (1952), 2nd edn, Calcutta, n.d., p. 1. This meeting, expressing solidarity with the employees of Post and Telegraph, was attended by a few lakhs of people. See Chatterjee, *Struggle*, pp. 173-74.

¹⁵² Jyotirindra Maitra, *Nabajibaner Gan*, Calcutta, 1945.

Significantly, Jyotirindra also imagined the projected assertion of the clerk outside the home, alongside the masses, as a forceful discarding of the 'disguise of effeminacy'.¹⁵³

To go still further and appreciate how the middle class saw its participation in the Calcutta riots as another mode and moment of redeeming 'narrowness', one might analyse the writing of Panchanan Ghoshal. In his *Aparadh-bigyan*, already cited, he dedicated a chapter to communal riots, using the 1946 riots as his most prominent case-study. Starting with the academic-sounding statement that communalism was a mental disease, the author soon betrayed his prejudices when he described the involvement of the Hindu middle class as prompted purely by self-defence. More significantly, his essentialisation of Hindu middle-class involvement deployed the same parameters in a redemptive sense - a supra-household solidarity and assertion of manliness and strength. He believed that this involvement had rendered a 'service' to 'the Bengali Hindus'. Forcefully deploying the redemptive sense of the Hindu neighbourhood as a 'big family' he was elated that during the riots 'the divisive criteria of wealth and education' were forgotten. 'In the hour of danger women of one [Hindu] household were not afraid of taking shelter in another'. There was also a refrain of household division of labour, albeit on a redemptive communitarian plane: 'Women repelled the adversaries by pelting brickbats from the roof, while men did not hesitate to risk their lives in protecting communal lives and property and female chastity'.¹⁵⁴ This feeling of gratification in an imagined familial identification with a much larger unit than the household was probably also shaped by the overtly communal voice in the press and print. The forceful rhetoric of the Hindu Mahasabha and communal-minded Hindu leaders and authors had been trying throughout the 1930s and 40s to appeal to a sense of vulnerability over such matters as 'effeminacy' and 'narrow' domestic existence. In 1934 Debaprasad Ghosh had, for example, characterised the Bengali Hindu as 'going deeper into a well'. Relatedly he had brought up the question of the redemption of the supposedly constricted soul. Also, in the manner characteristic of the contemporary communal rhetoric, he heavily played upon the sensibility of Bengali Hindus about their supposed lack of courage, strength and masculinity.¹⁵⁵ He deployed the imagery of the 'well' not merely in relation to the political 'marginalisation' of the Bengali Hindu male but his entire 'life-style'. And this life-style, according to the author, was characterised by ill-health, impotency, inertia, poverty and a narrow concern with the immediate household at the cost of the wider interests of 'the Hindu nation'.

¹⁵³ Maitra, 'Madhubangshir Gali', pp. 5-17.

¹⁵⁴ Panchanan Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1954, pp. 161-63.

¹⁵⁵ Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', pp. 25-27.

Not surprisingly Panchanan saw this participation also in the light of redemption of 'effeminacy' and 'cowardice'. The 'big family' of the community-neighbourhood was imagined as a special site for martial activity involving men and women alike. 'It [the riot] converted the Bengali Hindus, irrespective of sex, into a war-loving martial race'. It should be borne in mind that since the riots of 1926, violence had started being inculcated, though ostensibly on grounds of self-defence. For example, Sajanikanta Das in an article written in the wake of the Calcutta riots of 1926, blamed the 'effeminacy' that exposed the Hindu to such 'oppression'. 'If he knew how to wield the cudgel in retaliation, the unreasonable demands of the Muslims would not have reached the extreme limit they have done today'.¹⁵⁶ Since the Communal Award of 1932, moreover, Calcutta, as has been already noted, had seen the establishment of a plethora of Hindu volunteer groups effectively mobilising large sections of Hindu middle-class youths in Calcutta.¹⁵⁷ Authors like Debaprasad had exhorted the 'sinking race' to 'fight back ... to acquire masculinity, inculcate virility, and invoke vigour' because 'the weak never achieve redemption.'¹⁵⁸ Additionally, the communal-minded leaders, authors and organisations had brought up the 'cause' of protecting the honour and chastity of women which, they constructed, was endangered by the Muslims. Newspapers and periodicals frequently 'reported' the 'abduction' of Hindu women by Muslims, and communal spokesmen blamed it on the 'unmanliness' of the Bengali Hindu male.¹⁵⁹ The possessive voice of gender figured equally in Ghoshal's appreciation of the offensive 'self-defence' of the 'big family' during the riot. The men of the community-neighbourhood were projected as protecting the chastity of their women as much as communal property.¹⁶⁰ It is interesting to note, in passing, that the unmanliness-cowardice complex was so deeply inscribed on Bengali middle-class consciousness that the voice of self-criticism - the minority voice - during and after the riots used the same yardstick to condemn the communal violence. The overall 'failure' of the Bengali Hindu middle class, as much as that of its counterpart, to prevent the genocide was condemned as 'unmanliness'. Santoshkumar Ghosh, for instance, reflected on the riots: 'in the veins and arteries of social existence germs of cowardice were bred - for the first time on such a large scale'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Sajanikanta Das quoted in Papia Chakravarty, *Hindu Response to Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*, Calcutta, 1992, p. 193.

¹⁵⁷ Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁸ Ghosh, 'Bangalar Hindu', p. 26.

¹⁵⁹ Pradip Kumar Datta, ' "Dying Hindus": Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal', *EPW*, 28:25, 19 June 1993, pp. 1305-19.

¹⁶⁰ Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 5, p. 163.

¹⁶¹ Ghosh, 'Ei Bangla', pp. 157-58

Throughout the riots these two elements - the supra-household family and masculinity - seemed to be the major evocative paradigms of solidarity. The acceptance of the *bhadralok*-turned-*goonda* during the riot inside the orbit of middle-class domesticity was interestingly invested with both. As a police officer, Panchanan observed that *goondas*, so long ostracised from the vicinity of middle-class households, were 'warmly greeted indoors ... [and] women of *bhadralok* households now talked with them and affectionately served them food'.¹⁶² The sudden effusion about the *goonda* as the 'saviour' 'attracted many non-*goonda* middle-class elements from the upper castes to *goondaism*'.¹⁶³ Gopal Mukhopadhyay, Dinabandhu Datta, Bhanu Basu were the more famous of such converts to *goondaism*.¹⁶⁴ In this context it might be pertinent to raise, in passing, the question whether there was any feature in the practised morality of the household that prompted youths to seek justification through an overnight conversion. One might consider the case of Gopal Mukhopadhyay (Gopal Pantha). Grandson of the revolutionary-terrorist Anukul Mukhopadhyay, Gopal, before becoming a *goonda* during the 1946 riots, had been running a meat-shop.¹⁶⁵ What is immediately striking is his vocation. During the two preceding decades, the more public and the nationalist voice of the class had enjoined Bengali youths to take up any form of self-employment including opening cigarette-and-*pan* (betel leaf) shops.¹⁶⁶ But the question is whether at the level of the family-household, where the statusing function of the class ultimately rested, such vocations were at all well-digested. Indeed, ambivalence marked the 'public' voice itself. Narayan Bharati who was insistent on the dignity of all forms of self-employment, was, nevertheless, anxious that every middle-class youth should have a college education even if he became a grocer.¹⁶⁷ 'Parashuram' had in the recent past closely observed the vocations that the middle class was grudgingly appropriating into its understanding of respectability; he did not mention ownership of a meat-shop. Indeed, by his observation, even grocery was still beneath the 'dignity' of an upper-caste, middle-class upbringing.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the fictional literature of the late 1930s and 1940s seems to indicate that the not-so-'respectably' employed tended to be marginalised by the self-image of the educated household.¹⁶⁹ It is significant that in order

¹⁶² Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 5, p. 153.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁶⁴ Das, 'The "Goondas"', p. 2879.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2881; Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Romanthan Athaba Bhimratiprapta Paracharitcharcha*, Calcutta, 1994, p. 97.

¹⁶⁶ E.g., Basu, 'Bangalir Arthik Swadhinata', p. 53.

¹⁶⁷ Narayan Bharati, 'Arthik Unnati', *Arthik Unnati*, Jyaishtha, 1333 BE, p. 130.

¹⁶⁸ 'Parashuram', 'Banglar Bhadrlok', p. 31.

¹⁶⁹ Manik Bandyopadhyay in a story written in the 1940s, highlighted the feeling of embarrassment in an educated family about the 'half-educated' son taken to bus-driving. The latter consequently was marginalised in the household. Bandyopadhyay, 'Chalak', *Khatian* (1947) in *Manik Granthabali*, vol. 8, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 617-24.

to make his *Bhadrasan* trilogy historical-sociological, Gopal Haldar modified the details of his own family to create the socially representative character of a marginalised and aggrieved son; the latter was in the eyes of his father an educational 'failure', in 'bad company' and outside the pale of 'respectable' vocation.¹⁷⁰ These marginalised persons within domesticity were likely to have thirsted for a supra-household identity that would ingratiate them better in the middle-class world of status.

The question more difficult to address, however, is how morally reassuring this assertion actually proved to be. Did the feeling of the 'big family', into which even the ostracised *bhadralok goonda* had been rehabilitated, outlive the riots and constitute a new domestic ideology? It is significant that once the specific anxieties of the moment abated with the cessation of communal violence, the ordering stake in the family-household reasserted itself, highlighting the ambivalence which middle-class domesticity had not been able to surmount after all. Panchanan Ghoshal, who had been elated by the sense of the small family dissolving its narrowness in the 'big family', was also pained that the initiative of youth in 'defending' the household and the neighbourhood during the riots legitimised the insubordination of youths to elders within the family. He lamented that 'since the end of the riots fathers and uncles have not been able to recover their voice of authority in relation to their sons and nephews'.¹⁷¹

Again, it is telling that after the riots the middle-class households again reverted back to the moral discourse against the *goonda*.¹⁷² The temporary admiration for the *bhadralok-tuned-goonda* during the riots obscured the deeper anxieties of a class whose stake in property, security and order could never allow it to trust the *goonda* in the long run. Moreover, the class still aspired to hegemonise, and in spite of a self-ascription of decadence, it needed the veneer of moral authority surrounding its domesticity. Even during the riots, whatever the approbation for the *goonda's* activities in informal pronouncements, the formal articulation of the class in newspaper reports essentialised the *goonda* as the only palpable agency in looting and arson on the Hindu side of the communal divide. What was elided was the role of the Bengali Hindu household in encouraging him. The encouraging of the *goonda* during the riots has come down to posterity only through the self-critical - minority - voice of the class. The then Secretary of the Calcutta District Committee of the Communist Party reminisced: '[When] Bhanu and Jaga [two *goondas* who had shot to prominence during the

¹⁷⁰ Haldar, *Bhangan: Shatabdir Srot*, Calcutta, 1354 BE, *passim*; *idem*, *Sroter Dip*, *passim*; *idem*, *Ujan Ganga*, *passim*.

¹⁷¹ Panchanan Ghoshal, *Aparadh-bigyan*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1954, p. 162.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 154-57.

riots] displayed the severed head of a Muslim ... a septuagenarian Brahman said, "Bless you. You have performed the feat of killing a *jaban* [non-Hindu and foreigner]."¹⁷³ Tapan Raychaudhuri highlights the active role of the male heads of households in the neighbourhood in elevating the *goonda* to prominence and temporary respectability.¹⁷⁴ The majority of the class displayed an amnesia about this encouragement. Even those reminiscences that did imply an acquiescence on the part of the middle-class households, resorted to an indirectness in the matter of ascription of agency. Bhabatosh Datta looked upon the riot as a milestone in the disintegration of the morality of the Bengali middle-class household. But it is interesting that where the *goonda*'s role was concerned, the agency for his rise into prominence was practically ascribed to the *goonda* himself; the author wrote, 'in every neighbourhood the *goonda* assumed the mantle of the saviour'.¹⁷⁵ So the moral responsibility laid at the door of the middle class household was that of passive acquiescence, not of an active role in elevating the *goonda* to temporary glory. The conscious foregrounding of the agency of the *goonda* in middle-class retrospective narrative served the class's domestic self-image in another way. It helped obscure the reality that for all their 'cultured' and educated upbringing, a supposedly distinctive mark of the middle-class family, middle-class educated youths, in many cases, participated in communal violence out of offence and not, as authors like Panchanan Ghoshal claimed, invariably out of self-defence.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, printed reminiscences, except in a minority voice (often Marxist),¹⁷⁷ have displayed an amnesia about this offensive role of Hindu middle-class youths.

Conclusion

The 19th-century definition situating self-justification of the colonised male squarely in domesticity and its 'spirituality' had given the assurance of an unfractured ontology. Its decline and the consequent search for an alternative justification by the Hindu middle-class male in relation to domesticity over the period from the 1920s to the end of the 1940s could not resolve whether the justification could be reinvented in the home or outside it. The

¹⁷³ Kumud Biswas, quoted in Sengupta, *Uttal Challish*, p. 191.

¹⁷⁴ Raychaudhuri, *Romanthan*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁵ Datta, 'Bangali Madhyabitter Tin Kal', p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Analysis of mobilisation during the riots reveals that educated Bengali Hindu youths including professionals were often on the offensive during the 1946 riots. Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 239.

¹⁷⁷ Manikuntala Sen, a Marxist activist of the 1940s, has highlighted the active participation of middle-class youths in arson in the neighbourhood. Sen, *Sediner Katha*, Calcutta, 1982, pp. 173-75. Tapan Raychaudhuri sarcastically reveals the offensive initiative often involved in Hindu youth's practice of 'self-defence'. See Raychaudhuri, *Romanthan*, p. 94.

transformed perception of everything from the domestic field to nationalist politics tended to displace efforts at social justification from the home to the sphere outside it. But considerations of status, class and gender continued to pull the energies of the class back into the security and the ordered environment of the home. Till the end of the period the crisis remained unresolved.

Conclusion

This thesis, in addressing the wider problem of Bengali Hindu middle-class identity in the colonial situation, has shown how domesticity was vital to the class's self-image and ideology. Under colonial domination, the class had neither a control over the production process, nor any direct participation in state power. Perceiving the spheres of the state and dynamic private enterprise as sites of its failed hegemony, the class had to look for alternative social spaces on which to base its quest for nationalist identity formation. The late 19th-century nationalist ideology largely sited the identity of the class in the home, but extended it into the community or *samaj*. This sweep, in which the home and the *samaj* existed in a continuum, constituted the nucleus of the imagined nation. This social space was idealised as being characterised by the 'innate' morality and enlightenment of the class and the 'spirituality' of its 'inner domain' of existence. In the absence of any other effective modality of hegemonising the lower orders, the construction of this 'enlightened' and 'innately' moral self-image supported the class's claim to 'natural leadership' in colonial society. This was why domestic ideology was so important to the class and its identity. Though the *samaj* was the guardian of its 'morality', the home was the primary location where the moral and spiritual self-image of the class was sought to be ordered and perfected.

Within this wider question of the interrelationship between nationalism, class-identity and domesticity, this thesis has shown that nationalist domesticity was not a mere counter-discursive narrative, solely derivative of the colonial discourse of power/knowledge. It has been shown that even while domestic ideology came to bear the strong imprint of nationalist counter-discursive essentialisms, there was more to the ideology than just that. By emphasising the distinctiveness of the neo-Brahmanic discursive formation from the 'reformed'-Hindu one, this study has indicated the importance of other factors that were potent enough to produce two discursive worlds within the same class and in response to the same colonial power/knowledge. The dualist essentialisms in nationalist rhetoric that derived counter-discursively from colonial knowledge, interacted dialectically with the household-level reproduction of class, status and gender to create a transforming world of nationalist ideology of domesticity. This dynamism underlay the transforming process of the emergence, development and disintegration of the neo-Brahmanic ideology within the colonial period.

Our study of the neo-Brahmanic ideology as a nationalist one has shown that its project of 'recasting' domesticity was not independent of the everyday requirements of the

middle-class home. With its own operative history, lived domesticity had a distinct agency in determining the nationalist ordering of the home; this has been emphasised in analysing how neo-Brahmanic morality took care to retain some of the pre-existing structures of social and familial authority. It has been shown, moreover, that everyday middle-class existence in the late 19th century had an important role in determining the way the nation itself was imagined. It was the home, situated within linkages like kin and the upper-caste neighbourhood and placed under the moral authority of the *samaj*, that was extended ideologically to imagine the nation. Also, the limited material resources of the middle-class majority determined the exact rhetoric that was used to spiritualise the home. The deployment of the concepts of the detached performance of domestic duties, the inculcation of *parartha* and self-renunciation, were ideally suited to keep the 'destabilising' force of consumerism and individualism at bay. Under colonialism, social security was absent, and, in any case, would have invited the dreaded force of colonial interference into the domestic sphere. It has been shown how in this situation, material stakes were high in constructing the 'joint family' as the principal site for performing *nishkama karma*. Finally the requirements of the lived reality of domesticity have been shown to be reflected in the nationalist 'recasting' of women. At the level of myth-making, nationalist essentialisations often inscribed womanhood exclusively in their own parameters. But, at the level of ordering everyday domesticity, nationalist ideology had to reckon with the disciplinarian concerns of the pre-existing patriarchal order. The neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of control was predominant because it effectively served the purpose of sustaining the pre-existing mechanisms of gender-control - pre-pubertal marriage of women and the extended familial structure of patriarchy. The dialectic was also evident in the way nationalist essentialisation and the everyday needs of patriarchy asserted their respective requirements and involved the nationalist strategy of 'recasting' women in a series of complex manoeuvres.

To highlight the intervention of change over time in the dialectic in question, the thesis has demonstrated how the neo-Brahmanic ideology, with its share of early nationalist essentialisms, disintegrated in the period after the First World War. This discourse came to be sidelined in nationalist articulation by newly emerging discourses. The neo-Brahmanic ideology, even while addressing domestic adversity, had taken care to subsume the autonomy of specific mundane chores and mute their physicality under the abstract and holistic rhetoric of *dharma*. The new discourses were based on parameters that were secular by the Brahmanical yardstick. Moreover, they specified norms that were based on the perception of

domesticity as a physical zone, splintered into specific, mundane 'problems' and their specific solutions.

However, more fundamentally, this decline of the neo-Brahmanic morality, along with the dualist essentialisms of the 'inside'/'outside' and the 'material'/'spiritual', was the consequence of a change in the overall perception of domesticity. This perceptual change, this study has shown, was largely a consequence of significant material changes in the lived experience of domesticity from the period of the First World War onwards. The changing material circumstances subverted the perception that had considered the neo-Brahmanic ideology to be viable. The neo-Brahmanic spiritualist rhetoric of *nishkama karma*, and the projection of *paralok* as the justification of worldly existence, had been sustained by a relatively confident expectation of support from the kin and a lingering dependence on the family's rural base. Also, up to the period of the First World War, the life-style was relatively undifferentiated among the non-'Westernised' majority within the middle class, and this gave the ideal of a *samajik* consensus the semblance of viability. Neo-Brahmanic literature always anxiously perceived a consumerist ethos as threatening to the ideal of renunciation. But from the incessant preaching against 'luxury' through a flood of didactic texts it is evident that there was, nevertheless, an expectation that unceasing persuasion, through moralising and pedagogy, could be successful in resisting it. The tone of this expectation reflected a situation where the market in consumer goods was yet to conspicuously diversify the life-style of the non-'Westernised' majority of the class.

But material developments from the First World War onwards, this thesis has shown, ushered in certain significant changes that transformed the class's perception of domesticity, and this perception increasingly demonstrated its incompatibility with the ideological requirements of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric. One very important development that induced this perceptual transformation was the dwindling of the rural base among a considerable section of the middle class in Calcutta. From the time of the First World War, and particularly with the crisis of the rural gentry in 1929-30, Calcutta witnessed a sudden increase in permanent immigration. The growing commercialisation of even essential commodities and the emergent control of Marwaris over the distributive network of food bred new contradictions; and this had implications for the growing sense of the vulnerability of the household. The influx of other linguistic groups into Calcutta, at a time of growing educated unemployment and shortages of essential commodities and accommodation, created a feeling among Bengalis that they were being cornered. Finally, the composition of the class itself was transformed by the influx of skilled labour and 'successful' lower-caste elements into the

middle class. This had implications, we have shown, for the domestic morality of the upper castes, who had, for so long, virtually monopolised the middle class's identity and its definition of domesticity. In discussing the changing material circumstances affecting domestic ideology, we have particularly stressed the impact of the Second World War. We have specifically shown how the pervasive collusion with the black-market by the middle class dealt the final blow to the neo-Brahmanic ideology with its emphasis on *paralok*. The war also sharply accentuated the perception that upper-caste, middle-class elements could themselves exploit their 'brethren'. It has further been shown that the transformation in the middle-class discourse on domesticity was also affected by changes in nationalist politics. It has been noted how the entry of the masses into politics had a significant transformative impact on the domestic ideology of the class, which had so long complacently believed that the ideal home for the nation was a generalisation of middle-class domestic norms.

In highlighting the importance of material conditions in the moral-discursive world of domesticity, this thesis has sought to historicise the problem by emphasising the significance of Calcutta as the locale. It has situated the inter-war transformation of middle-class sensibility about urban domesticity in the perceived problems of congestion, housing, disease and death, specific to this city. The sense of being 'edged out' of subsistence, living space and employment by other linguistic groups contributed to the transformation of the Bengali middle class's perception of its own domesticity. And, in contemporary print, it was Calcutta that was represented as the essential site of this 'edging out'. The same applied to the post-First World War Bengali representation of the Marwari as exploitative and the up-country *goala* as harmful. It has also been demonstrated how domestic morality was deeply affected by the city's experience of the Second World War. The impact of starvation on the one hand and rampant participation in the black-market by the members of the same class on the other has been particularly noted. The death of countless famine victims in the space immediately outside the middle-class home has been noted for its impact on middle-class domestic morality. We have also noted the shock to gender sensibilities with the first significant entry of middle-class women into clerical jobs and sometimes into prostitution. Domestic morality was also affected by the levelling of class and status in the war-time queues at ration shops.

This engagement with material developments has proved illuminating, because among the middle-class majority, the neo-Brahmanic ideology declined not so much because of a reasoned and self-conscious questioning, as out of a transformed perception of domesticity. And it was mainly the changes in the lived experience of domesticity that transformed the perception in a way incompatible with neo-Brahmanic ideology. However, to put this

predominant trend in perspective, we have also shown how a more self-consciously intellectual voice, though a minority one, directly challenged the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric during the inter-war period.

Keeping our focus on the relationship between nationalist discourse and middle-class domesticity in view, we have concentrated on investigating the disintegration of two neo-Brahmanic constructions that embodied two important early nationalist essentialisations. One was that the home was a part of the nationalist 'inner domain' as against the colonial 'outer domain'. The other construction was that this 'inner domain' was characterised by an essential 'spirituality' in contradistinction to the 'materialism' of the colonial sphere. We have also studied the disintegration of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of women's subordination because the control of the woman's domain was a vital area where nationalist myths and symbols interacted with the everyday functioning of middle-class patriarchy.

In the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric, spirituality was gendered and sited in the male householder, whose spirituality was conflated with his masculinity and consisted in the performance of his *dharma* in a spirit of renunciation and sexual continence. This thesis has shown that during the inter-war period, significant intellectual challenges to the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric emerged - challenges that reached the ordinary middle class through popular periodical literature. Still, it is more accurate to say that among the less self-consciously intellectual majority, the ideology started disintegrating from the 1920s onwards under the pressure of a growing perception of domesticity as overwhelmingly material and physical. The thesis has shown that this perception became so compulsive as to weaken the moral persuasion of a spiritualist ontology oriented towards the next-life. From the 1920s, mundane details of urban domesticity appeared in the light of such overt worldliness that the scope for investing spirituality in concepts like conjugal relations and procreation dwindled.

It has been shown that the transformation in the urban situation in Calcutta, from the time of the First World War, added a new dimension to this perceptual shift. The sudden increase in Bengali middle-class immigration into Calcutta from the First World War and the immigrants' experience in the city transformed the attitudinal orientation of middle-class Calcutta. In recent years the vision of the countryside as a site of death and decadence had become so intense that, for this new batch of immigrants, Calcutta was a much more desperately sought refuge than for previous waves. Their dominant attitude in the city was a determination not to die in a place where they had come in order to live. The consequent preoccupation with survival created a compulsive this-worldly preoccupation and did not leave the established population of Calcutta unaffected. A perceived 'congestion' and fear of

respiratory disease came to obsess middle-class Calcutta at a time when various forms of discussion of death - communal and medical - were in the air. This study has shown that the domestic existence of the class as a whole became unprecedentedly geared to a desperate wish to live here and now. The urgent preoccupation of domesticity with a worldly perspective was reinforced by the growing physicality in which genteel poverty came to the fore. This was largely because high prices, educated unemployment, the rural credit squeeze and, finally, the Second World War brought many lower middle-class families increasingly closer to starvation and a residential slippage into slums. Domestic attention was now so compulsively and totally claimed for desperate strategies of this-worldly survival that the rhetoric of *paralok* and Brahmanic detachment were necessarily marginalised.

The neo-Brahmanic spiritualisation of the home had involved an all-absorbing representation of domesticity as 'the greatest stage in life'. This thesis has demonstrated how the rhetoric weakened. The moral aesthetic of the neat, tranquil, home was swamped by a change in the perception of lower middle-class urban housing and households. Simultaneously, youths in the 1920s-40s tended to project the sphere outside the home as more redeeming and 'manly' than domesticity. This, in its turn, ruptured the connection between masculinity and the supposed spirituality of the male householder. By the 1920s, the ideal of activism had created, among youths, a moral voice that competed with the neo-Brahmanic investment of spiritual manliness in the detached performance of domestic duties. The inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution, a vague identification with the 'wide world', and, finally, the appeal of Gandhi-led mass movements between 1919 and 1922, made the home, by implication, a site of inertia and narrowness. From the 1920s, and particularly from 1932 onwards, Hindu communal propaganda aggressively challenged, in its own way, the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric and set out its own equation of masculinity, spirituality and the duty of the male householder. It invested the householder with masculinity of a blatantly virile kind, reclaimed him for an overtly this-worldly existence, and divested his 'duty' of spiritual content. He was sought to be equipped instead for the 'duty' of beating Muslims in a demographic race.

The new pressures on the household that the class registered in the period after the First World War, diluted the essentialist dualism between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Neo-Brahmanic morality had not restricted the 'inside' to the spatial-demographic confines of the home. In the late 19th century the self-strengthening impulse of nationalism had juxtaposed the 'externality' of the colonial sphere to an 'inside', where the home was idealised as existing in a continuum with the *samaj* and extended to imagine the nation. In the period after the First

World War this idealised, unbroken continuum could no longer be sustained. The thesis has shown that the binary division of the 'inside'/'outside' came to be complicated by the emergence of the perception of another 'outside', within what cultural nationalism had idealised as a homogenous 'inside'. Anxiously identifying numerous concrete spaces and classified human agencies as constituting this new inimical 'outside', middle-class patriarchy tended to draw a sanitary cordon round the material household. The rhetoric of the abstract notion of *dharma*, that had merged domesticity with the *samaj*, came to be contested by the voice of the real household, finite in numbers and space. This 'outside' prominently comprised the Marwari and the burgeoning tide of people from neighbouring provinces; the middle-class household imagined itself as situated in a city that had passed 'into the possession of non-Bengalis'. But the fracturing of the idealised bond of the home with the *samaj* was really reflected in hostile 'others' identified within the fold of Bengali upper-caste, middle-class society itself. The 'outside' was also where patriarchy perceived youths as creating a parallel universe outside the home. The emergence of the female body from purdah increasingly from the 1930s also contributed to the configuration of the new 'outside', fracturing the ideal community. However, the perceived spatial distinctness of the household was only one manifestation of a more comprehensive conceptual statement. Using the concept of the material household, domesticity was sought to be separated not from a mere aggregate of 'hostile' spaces and agencies, but from a more comprehensive social zone perceived to be threateningly in a flux. In this zone the moral consensus of the *samaj* was seen to be declining. It was also a space where the impact of the contemporary dilution of the boundaries of caste, occupation, and status was sought to be kept confined, away from the upper-caste, middle class home. In pursuit of one of its main objectives, this study has shown how, in the imagining of this 'outside', domesticity clearly asserted its own discretion and agency and acted as the fundamental base of middle-class identity-formation. Middle-class, upper-caste domesticity also came to draw a line between itself and nationalist mass politics, when the latter emerged. This entry made the domain of political nationalism disturbingly different from the nation imagined by the Bengali middle class. Thus, the idealistic rhetoric extending middle-class domesticity to imagine the nation dwindled.

The neo-Brahmanic morality also seriously disintegrated in its rhetoric of control over women. The thesis has shown that the neo-Brahmanic mechanism of control had consisted in an overtly procreative justification of womanhood. Rigid hierarchy and the extended family norm of patriarchy carefully diluted the discourse of conjugal love with the help of the supposed 'spirituality' of marriage, at one level, and its functionality (for procreation), at

another. With the reiteration of a gender division of work-space made superfluous by the existence of rigid *purdah*, neo-Brahminic patriarchy found it more efficacious to construct a gendered division of knowledge and 'natural faculties'. The knowledge of the male was represented as intellectual and metaphysical and the 'severity' of his supposed 'intellectual faculty' was presented as the justification for his domination. A woman's knowledge was represented as functional and her dominant faculty emotional, so justifying her subordination. This thesis has shown how the rigidly Shastric rhetoric of control failed to cope with the changing situation from the 1930s. The division in male opinion along generational lines, the rise in the age of female marriage, the rapid spread of women's secondary education from the 1930s, and a nervous perception of women 'revolting', prompted patriarchy to defuse the situation by adopting a more 'humane' rhetoric of control.

The disintegration of the neo-Brahmanic ideology generated a frantic search for new criteria to order domesticity. With the idealised continuum of the household and the *samaj* ruptured and the faith in the effectiveness of a *samajik* consensus irrevocably shaken, the class's hegemonic function of ordering its moralist self-image now needed to concentrate entirely on the household. But the home that the middle-class male now burrowed into in order to protect status, gender, class and caste was not the spiritualised home that late 19th-century nationalism had idealised to inspire counter-discursive confidence against colonial discourse. The imagined 'inside' was now steadily narrowing down to the material confines of the discrete, individual family-household. So long accustomed to the rhetoric of 'spirituality' and the expansiveness of domesticity, the home was now perceived as too overtly physical and 'narrow' to be the site of self-justification for the middle-class male. Furthermore, amidst the feeling of insecurity that characterised the late colonial (1920-47) impulse to insulate the home from the 'outside', it was now difficult to discursively deploy the home as an unquestioned institutional nucleus of the power of the class.

During the 1930s there was a noticeable effort to redeem this spiritual 'claustrophobia' and morally justify the class's leadership with new 'virtues' like 'culture' and 'mental richness'. But as the thesis has demonstrated, these efforts to regenerate moral self-justification were thrown into disarray by the experience of the Second World War. The war-time black-market exposed the extent of the middle-class household's 'corruptibility'. Thus the class had a more desperate need than ever before to justify its everyday existence. If the alternative moral parameters, like emotional richness and intellectual refinement, had generated any hope of moral release from the 'claustrophobia' of domesticity, the Second World War came to create a powerful discourse of 'decadence' and 'degeneration' of the

class and its morality. The thesis has shown that this disturbing perception of moral degeneration had a pronounced gender dimension. Two major indices of this 'degeneration' were the 'failure' of the male and the 'loss' of the 'sanctity' of the female body. The war-time inability of the male to sustain the family above starvation level or to 'save' the female body from 'pollution' made domesticity the main site where the male imagined himself to be unredeemed as never before. The participation of the same middle class in the diametrically opposed mobilisations of the 1946 strike-wave and Calcutta riots reflected a desperate quest for social redemption, a redemption that necessarily had to take place outside the 'narrow' confines of the home.

However, once the excitement of the strike and riot was over and Independence dawned, a sense of crisis emerged as the dominant frame of mind, with which the class entered the post-colonial period. The search for an alternative justification for everyday middle-class existence remained unresolved, with the class indecisive as to where it should be invented - whether in the home or outside it. The perception of domesticity as 'claustrophobic' and geared to material survival tended to privilege the space outside the home as the ideal site for the social justification of the middle-class male. But considerations of status, class and gender continued to pull the energies of the class back into the security and ordered environment of the home. Again, though the neo-Brahmanic morality and the 'spiritualisation' of the home had disintegrated, its traces lingered in the anxiety - partly hegemonic, partly personal-ontological - to invest middle-class domestic existence with a 'higher' significance than the material. The perceived inability to do so was reflected in the pervasiveness in the 1950s and 1960s of the discourse of middle-class 'degeneration' and 'loss' of its supposed 'morality'.

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