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Sour Milk: Women and the Hindu Nationalist Movement in India

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Sour Milk: Women and the Hindu Nationalist Movement in India

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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1.

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In February of 2015, Sadhvi Prachi, a member of the Hindu nationalist organization the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as well as the current ruling political party of India, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), implored Hindu women to each produce four children. She claimed that every child would contribute to the protection and preservation of Indian borders, society and culture. Speaking at a public event in Delhi she explained the value of this directive:

If there is one child, where all will you send him? To protect the border... or make him a scientist or he will take care of business.... So, we need four children. One can go to protect the borders, one can serve the society, give one to the saints and one to VHP to serve the nation and protect the culture. This is very important.

Sadhvi Prachi's comments draw an association between women's reproductive capacities and national security which include the preservation of territorial boundaries ("the borders"), Hindu spirituality ("saints") and culture ("protect the culture"). The inclusion of the VHP in her narrative makes clear that the conception of national service and culture she is alluding to is Hindu nationalist in character.

Moreover, she echoes the themes of *seva* (service), *suraksha* (protection), *dharma* (religious duty) and *samksara* (pious disposition) which are central tenets of the Hindu nationalist movement. In a later statement, she says that she does not want women to simply procreate, producing multiple children like "puppies", but that they should raise Hindu nationalist subjects who will contribute to the preservation and protection of the nation.

Sadhvi Prachi is a prominent ascetic of the Hindu nationalist movement who contested the Assembly elections from the Purkazi constituency in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2012. Her comments were disregarded as a minority sentiment by the BJP, which explicitly distanced itself from her opinion. BJP's chief in UP, Laxmikant

Bajpai, declared: “under such circumstances, there is no significance of such remarks (“Asked people to have 4 kids, not 40 puppies: BJP's Sadhvi Prachi stokes new controversy”). While it is unclear which “circumstances” he is referring to, it may be assumed that he was alluding to the Delhi state elections, which took place two weeks after Prachi’s comment. BJP’s loss to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had already been predicted by this point, making it an imperative to maintain a distance from what are perceived as the more radical, militant Hindu nationalist organizations.

In response to criticism for her comments from popular media and activists, Prachi argued that her directive was urgent because of the prevalence of forced conversions. She has also been a vocal advocate of the *Ghar Wapsi* (literally: returning home) campaign, a program which emphasizes the idea that non-Hindus were all once Hindus who have forcefully been converted to other religions, especially Islam and Christianity. Prachi has also claimed that *reconversion* of non-Hindus to Hinduism should continue until 15 crore (150 million) people have been converted (ibid.).

The campaign to “reconvert” non-Hindus has been accompanied with Hindu nationalist advocacy on the issue of “forced conversions”, which according to Hindu nationalists are rampant at the moment. These have included fears of “Love Jihad” a supposed conspiracy by Muslim groups that involves seduction, marriage and forceful conversion of Hindu women by Muslim men who have disguised themselves as Hindu men. Invoking the concept of Love Jihad, Sadhvi Prachi claimed:

‘They (author’s note: Muslims) are trapping our daughters through 'love jihad'. These people who give birth to 35-40.... are spreading love jihad... They are trying to make Hindustan into Darul Islam’

(ibid.)

This statement makes evident the urgency of Sadhvi Prachi's directive which is based on fears of Muslims gaining demographic supremacy over Hindus.

Significantly, women are central to Sadhvi Prachi's above statements. Not only is Sadhvi Prachi herself female, she directs her comments at women, urging them to reproduce more children. Moreover, she makes evident that these children are vital specifically so that they may become Hindu nationalist subjects in service of the nation's territorial security and cultural preservation. Moreover, she alludes to the perceived demographic threat of Muslims, pointing to the widespread fear that Muslims reproduce in large numbers and have also been gaining numbers due to participating in Love Jihad. The combination of these anxieties draw attention to a relationship between women's responsibilities towards (re)producing Hindu nationalist subjects as well as the promotion of anti-Muslim sentiment which is central to Hindu nationalist ideology. The aim of my project is to unpack the relationship between conceptions of gender and women's roles which are central to the development of anti-Muslimness within Hindu nationalism. First, a brief historical and organizational background of the Hindu nationalist movement.

Hindu Nationalist Movement: A Brief Background

Ideological History

Hindu nationalist organizations are collectively known as the *Sangh Parivar* (Family of the Sangh; hereafter the 'Sangh'), due to their association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (literally: National Volunteer Organization; RSS). The Sangh defines its goal in terms of "uniting" Hindu society and preserving "its culture" through raising awareness of a "glorious" collective past for its revival in the future.

The historical period considered glorious, “a Golden Age”, is said to have deteriorated due to “foreign invasion” (Mughal and British) or the “Age of Decline” (Bachhetta, “Babri Masjid”, 273). Thus, the objective for the Sangh has been the “restoration” of the Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) within the current political apparatus by claiming that Hindus are the only legitimate citizens who have eternally belonged to the territories of *akhanda Bharat* (undivided India).

The primary organization of the Sangh, the RSS, came into being in 1925, primarily inspired by the 1923 publication by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*. Savarkar’s book identified Hindus as the only community to have legitimate citizenship rights to the Indian territory. Several scholars have pointed out that the conceptions of history, temporality, racialized identity, and nationhood that have been central for Hindu nationalist ideology developed along with British colonial periodizations and gendered characterizations of Indian history and society (Bhatt; Jefferlot). This points to the distinctly modern nature of Hindu nationalism, despite its emphasis on the timelessness of Hindu culture, identity and practice.

Upper caste/class personalities who were significant in shaping the RSS as an organization were influenced by complex intellectual flows between Europe and India. These theoretical strands were central to the formation of elite Hindu identity in colonial north and central India. Hindu nationalism has also co-opted and instrumentalized classical (Brahminical) texts to propagate a homogeneous, cohesive and racialized Hindu identity. Theories of “primordial nationalism” which have framed Hindu nationalist organizations since their advent were influenced by transnational theories of Aryanism. These were central to “neo-Hindu” organizations

such as the Arya Samaj, which was founded in the late 19th century and promoted anti-Christian, anti-Muslim nationalism, as well as the Hindu Mahasabha, which developed in the early 20th century (Bhatt 3). The second *sarsanghachalak* of the RSS, MS Golwalkar also drew upon theories of Italian and German nationalisms to conceptualize a homogeneous and cohesive Hindu identity tied to national territory (Bacchetta, “Babri Masjid”, 273).

At the core of Hindu nationalism are a complex web of theories of indigenous hierarchies, interpretations of Brahminical texts, colonial conceptions of time, religion, territory and nationalism. Significantly, these have developed ideas of Hindu inclusion and Christian and Muslim exclusion, based on the narrative of past Hindu oppression under Mughal and British rule. This has culminated in the objective of establishing the Hindu Rashtra, where a culturally and religiously cohesive polity rules the state. Ideas about gender have been central for the development of these ideologies and instrumental in the formation of the Hindu self opposed to Muslim and Christian others that has been essential to the development of nationalist ideology

Organizational Structure

The RSS and several of its offshoots function on a national, state and regional scale. The Sangh has a hierarchical structure and also appoints *sarsanghchalaks* (leaders). While the Sangh has described itself as a “non-political”, cultural organization, political parties such as the now defunct Jana Sangh and the BJP are a part of it. Moreover, the Sangh has been prominent in sociopolitical debates and provides para-military and ideological training at *shakha* (neighborhood cell)

meetings. Since 1926, the *shakha* has been a central feature of the RSS and later, of other organizations. Traditionally, *shakha* meetings take place daily, instituting a routine of physical exercise and drills, martial and weapon training, lectures, playing sports, Hindu nationalist prayer sessions which involve praying to deities, *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), and saluting the iconic saffron flag. Thus, the *shakha* utilizes disciplinary techniques which contribute to the the creation of Hindu nationalist “docile bodies” (Foucault 136).

The Sangh Parivar is comprised of a variety of organizations which overlap ideologically or in membership with the RSS. These not only include the political organizations mentioned above but also others dedicated to vocational training, community care, professional unions and issue-related organizations. Exclusive female organizations, such as the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (National Volunteer’s Committee; hereafter, the ‘Samiti’), formed in 1936, have also played a significant role in the development of Hindu nationalism. Significantly, the RSS and the Samiti do not necessarily ascribe to identical theories but are involved in a similar project of establishing Hindu supremacy (Bacchetta, “Ideologues”).

Another important organization of the Sangh is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Organization; hereafter ‘VHP’). Formed in 1964, the organization works towards “consolidating” and “strengthening” Hindus within and outside of India. The VHP functions with the objective of expanding “Hindu society” through reaching out to Hindus abroad, emphasizing cohesion through eliminating caste and class differences, preventing “forced conversions” and “reconverting” Muslims. Much of the funding for VHP based activities comes from Hindus in the USA and Britain¹.

¹ For a discussion on transnational flow of money into the Sangh Parivar, see McKean, “Divine Enterprise”

The Babri Masjid Affair

The VHP has been primarily known for mobilizing efforts around the *Ramjanmabhoomi* (birthplace of Ram), which led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth century mosque built by Babar in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Hindu nationalist groups claimed that the Babri Masjid had been built in place of a temple commemorating the birthplace of Rama, from the epic *Ramayana*. The *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement was organized to campaign for the replacement of the Babri Masjid by a Rama temple. The *Ramjanmabhoomi* has also often been cited as a moment when female participants of the Sangh rose to significance, being involved in advocacy and militancy. Sadhvis such as Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati were at the forefront of this movement, motivating the crowds which had gathered. As Kalyani Devaki Menon notes, Sadhvis were also formally organized with the establishment of the Sadhvi Shakti Parishad (Organization of Sadhvi Strength) by the VHP (80).

Nationalism and “the Patriarchy”

Theories of nation-building and political identity which are central to Hindu nationalism are, like other nationalisms, constituted on conceptions of gender and sexuality. Hierarchies of gender are based on conceptions of inclusion and exclusion, of formulating a united self as opposed to a different Other. Women have been construed as symbols, biological reproducers and advocates for the nation. Moreover, they have played an active role in the construction of nationalist movements, subjects and culture. Integrating power structures, of gender, race and

sexuality, which stem from colonialism and the colonial gaze are also central to understanding the development of postcolonial nationalisms.

As Edward Said points out in *Orientalism*, colonial administrators perceived the Orient itself as feminine and it was “created as the weak, irrational, non-martial ‘other’ in contrast to a strong martial European ‘self’” (Banerjee 169-170). In the context of British colonialism in India, Hindu men were perceived as especially effeminate². Sikata Banerjee has argued that Indian masculinity was held in contrast to an ideal of “Christian manliness” developed in the 19th century, which included a range of attitudes surrounding one’s body, morality, social relations and community structures. This notion of masculinity considered patriotism, physical strength, chivalry and moral ideals of benevolence, modesty and heroism as ideal (Banerjee 170). Social reformists and nationalists such as Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay emphasized inverting the gendered colonial gaze. Moreover, these figures were significant for the development of Hindu nationalism as a masculinist or masculinizing movement.

The conception of Hindu nationalism as a masculinist and “patriarchally” organized movement have given rise to questions of women’s conscious choice in participating in such a project. Hindu nationalism is perceived as a “religious fundamentalist” and right-wing movement, opposed to “secular” liberal feminist movements geared towards women’s emancipation, has especially made these questions potent. Women’s participation within a movement which emphasizes women’s roles as mothers, associated with domesticity and piety, has often been considered paradoxical. On the one hand, women appear to be “oppressed” under

² Sikhs, who Hindu nationalists consider as closely related to Hindus, were construed as a “martial race” who were physically and morally superior to Hindu men (Banerjee 170).

Hindu nationalist “patriarchy” while on the other, they are participants in a “public” political sphere. The perception of women’s political participation in a religious nationalist movement as paradoxical is based on binaries of private/public, religious/secular and the idea that women’s submission and oppression are relegated to the private sphere and perpetuated by the religious order.

The notion of women as passive objects of hegemony, or acting against their “own interests”, has been rejected by a variety of feminist scholars. However, these perceptions have often been applied by “Western” and/or liberal feminist scholars to women from postcolonial societies. Elaborating on the gendered colonial gaze which gave rise to narratives of “saving” Oriental women has especially problematized this application (Spivak; Abu Lughod). Moreover, Third World feminist scholars have emphasized the importance of recognizing the different contexts which give rise to gendered structures of power in the postcolonial world (Mohanty). These illustrate that male and female subjects, theories and practices of piety and family relationships might have significant differences in constitution in the postcolonial world.

Moreover, Saba Mahmood points out that even studies of women which have dispelled conceptions of women as passive objects of hegemony while emphasizing them as active agents have continued to locate moments of resistance as expressions of agency. Mahmood argues that the binaristic opposition of freedom/resistance perpetuates the belief in a “nascent feminist consciousness” which implies that the desire to be free and resist hegemonic structures is natural. These invoke liberalist notions of individual autonomy which emphasise “one’s ‘true will’” and “self-directed action” or “‘real motivations’” (Mahmood 2009). Drawing on the works of Michel

Foucault and Judith Butler, Mahmood emphasizes that concurring discourses of power shape individual desires and “agentival capacities”. Her research shows that both cultivation and resistance of a subjecthood is part of this paradigm of power.

Women and Hindu Nationalism

The aim of my project draws upon these theoretical frames to unpack the gendered character of Hindu nationalism and the diverse subject positions which are prescribed by male and female participants of the Sangh. More specifically, my project focuses on the intersection of female identity and the production of anti-Muslim ideology and practice within the Sangh. Following the work of postcolonial feminist scholars, I draw attention to British Orientalism, colonial processes of knowledge production, elite anti-colonial nationalist struggles and the ideological history of the Sangh Parivar to elaborate on the ways in which women have been central to the production of anti-Muslimness within Hindu nationalism. In what follows, I bring forth research by feminist scholars, ethnographic accounts and contemporary web-based Hindu nationalist popular media to unpack the relationship between women and Hindu nationalism.

The statement by Sadhvi Prachi on reproduction and conversions provides an important framework for the questions I address in this project. In chapter 1, I unpack the theoretical underpinnings of “Love Jihad” and the significance of women’s bodies for maintaining Hindu numerical supremacy. Considering the production of classificatory data in the colonial census and its influence on electoral politics, as well as Orientalist stereotypes of Hindu/Muslim men, I will illustrate the

relationship of this concept to previous anxieties surrounding Muslims which have involved on women's bodies.

In chapter 2, I look at Hindu nationalist women's organizations and illustrate the significance of cultivating a nationalist motherhood which contributes to the production of Hindu nationalist subjects and sensibilities. Here, I will draw connections with the ideologies of womanhood and motherhood which developed in anti-colonial nationalist movements in the late 19th and early 20th century. Furthermore, I will draw attention to advocacy and recruitment efforts of these organizations which have involved historical and divine figures of Jijabai and Durga to construct the notion of ideal womanhood. These have placed importance on the development of a Hindu nationalist history of oppression and resistance which serve as a guide for women's political actions.

Lastly, in chapter 3, I will expand on the discussion of Hindu nationalist oppression to the production of nationalist affect and the mobilization of participants to perform acts of violence. I will focus on here on the speeches, performance and position of Sadhvi Rithambara, a female ascetic who was (in)famous for her role in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement which lead to the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Throughout the course of my project, I will also elaborate on themes of time, space, territory and national identity and their relationship with gender.

I. Love Jihad: Preserving Women's Bodies

In August 2014, several BJP leaders and other members of the Sangh Parivar in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh rallied against Love Jihad, expressing their anger at an alleged case of rape, forced marriage of a 22 year old Hindu woman to a Muslim man

and her subsequent religious conversion. In September 2014, the 22 year old woman from Meerut who made the allegation revoked her complaint. In her statement, she explained:

I was staying with my parents, but I ran away from home because I feel a threat to my life from my parents and relatives...I went with the boy belonging to a different community out of my own will.

(Qtd in “U-turn by Meerut girl on ‘love jihad’”)

As in this case, police have found that alleged cases of Love Jihad have most often been consensual inter-faith relationships rather than evidence of a larger conspiracy of Muslim men seducing and forcefully converting Hindu women (ibid.; “Love jihad’ and religious conversion polarise in Modi’s India). In the above case, which gained significant visibility in a variety of media sources, the woman in question not only appears to have been pressured by her family but has also become an important figure for the Hindu nationalist campaign against Love Jihad. The idea of Love Jihad invokes questions about the relationship between families and the Sangh, religious conversions and women’s choices, especially in matters of love and marriage.

A common thread through the discussions of Love Jihad is the image of secretive, disguised Muslim men, seducing and tricking Hindu women into loving and marrying them. Disguise and deceit not only imply women’s lack of choice in this scenario but also invoke a history of uncertainty about Muslim men’s actions and intentions.

The Hindu nationalist campaign to protect women from deceptive Muslim men is part of a rhetoric of “saving women” which follows from Orientalist fantasies of colonial administrators saving women from native men, who were characterized as aggressive, hyper-oppressive, sexual predators (Spivak; Abu-Lughod). Moreover, Love Jihad points to the ways in which women’s romantic and sexual relations,

expressed across the divisions of politicized identity categories, threaten the perceived “purity” and cohesion of these divisions. Thus, the notion of protecting “our” women from “them” is an attempt at erasing the ambiguities of identities, of both, the Muslim “Other” and the Hindu self.

The proposition to save Hindu women from Muslim men is intertwined with the significance placed on demographics in political participation and thus, from women’s reproductive capacities. In what will follow, I will illustrate the significance of the numerical imaginary in nationalist politics and its relationship with women’s bodies. This developed through the debates on widow remarriage in the mid-late colonial period, late colonial *shuddhi* and *sangathan* movements lead by the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, and post-Partition, state initiated campaigns dealing with forced abductions. These cases illustrate two simultaneous concerns: first, for women’s welfare and protection, and second, for the preservation of identity categories through women’s bodies.

In this chapter, I argue that Love Jihad is a novel iteration of existing anxieties surrounding identity, demographics and women’s bodies, infused with a rhetoric of saving women. I first illustrate the construction of supra-local ethnic identities of Hindu and Muslim and their relationship to the colonial census. Then I will discuss the significance of demographics in colonial and early postcolonial social reform campaigns. Lastly, I will unpack the claims of Love Jihad through analyzing posters which have been distributed in print and online. In this last section, I will delve into the use of the terms “Love” and “Jihad” to show the association of this campaign with the global “War on Terror”.

Identity and the Colonial Census

Love Jihad's claim over women's sexuality and desire is intertwined with historical Hindu nationalist anxieties surrounding the population increase of Muslims. In 1909, Lt. Colonel U.N Mukerji released the pamphlet *Hindus: The Dying Race* and in 1924, the Arya Samaj missionary, Swami Shraddhanand's³ wrote *Hindu Sanghathan: Saviour of a Dying Race*, as a response, after claiming to have studied statistics and the census for thirteen years. Thus, the idea of Hindus being a "dying race" amongst upper-class, upper-caste Hindus was influential in early Hindu nationalist movements (Sethi, 1547; Bhatt, 62). These anxieties draw attention to the ways in which "a numerical imagination" contributed to the development of naturalized group identity. These had direct implications for relationships which transgressed these identity boundaries as they were perceived as a threat to Hindu demographic supremacy. In this section, I will illustrate the ways in which the colonial census contributed to the construction of a racial identity categories and the consequences of demographic fears.

The colonial census promoted a classificatory logic in order to govern and discipline native subjects. As Bernard Cohn has argued, data collection for the census was part of a process of "objectifying" the Indian populace. Gathering and classifying data on the population into categories was based upon preconceived theories of family, land, marriage and social groups such as religion, caste and class. Cohn explains that in the mid nineteenth century, British officials felt that "caste and religion were the sociological keys to understanding the Indian people" (242). Thus, the parameters of data collection for the census contributed to the classification of

³ See Bhatt 62-75

the Indian population. Classificatory logic not only shaped conceptions of property and social relations but, for native subjects, also contributed to questions of identity, society and the development of an “Other” on the basis of caste and religion.

This is not to suggest that the data collection for social stratification was novel to the British colonial state. As Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, Mughal rulers also had sophisticated means to count and control their subject population. Additionally, indigenous systems of classification, such as those based on caste, were prevalent before British imperialism. The census then must be understood as an interaction between “two theories of difference [which] share a critical assumption: that bodies of certain groups are the bearers of social difference and moral status” (Appadurai 119). The production of numerical knowledge reformed and congealed existing social stratifications. Furthermore, the census conducted in British India was unique in that it was not only used to justify and control the Indian population but also to “argue and teach...bureaucratic discourse and practice” (119). The pedagogic nature of colonial systems of knowledge production is crucial to understanding the regulatory power of the postcolonial state.

While the 1871 All-India census made data collection regarding peoples across the country its primary task, it was preceded by extensive research regarding land settlement, taxation and ecological variability. It is in this period that a numerical imaginary was established which contributed to the objectification of the native population (Cohn). According to Appadurai, this production of knowledge “unyoked social groups from the complex and localized group structures and agrarian practices in which they had previously been embedded” (“Modernity at Large”, 126). The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the enumeration and classification of people at the

village community level. The collection of data and its categorization was developed with the intention of creating a consistent system which could be applied to the all-India level (Cohn, 243).

Social stratification and enumeration was seen as essential to understanding, accessing and governing the native population, seen as exotic. From 1870 to 1931, the All-India Census was an important source of quantitative information which influenced hypotheses regarding social practices as well as policy and reform efforts. “This concern with explaining and controlling exotic behaviors is a crucial piece of evidence that empiricism and exoticisation were not disconnected aspects of the colonial imaginary in India” (Appadurai, “Modernity at Large”, 128). Furthermore, the intricate struggles of data collection and the large amount of information lead to the privileging of “numerical majorities” (ibid.). While essentialism regarding social groups preceded the census, the enumeration of social groups solidified these previous stratifications and placed emphasis on an “idea of communities characterized by bioracial commonalities and bioracial differences” (ibid 130).

The emphasis placed on numerical data and social hierarchies influenced Indian nationalism and continues to do so today. The concept of “majority” and “minority” groups inspired the structure of electoral politics which are focused on bloc voting. As Robert Frykenberg suggests:

“for the Indian context, electoral politics became both a politics of *representation* (of the people to the people—a game of mirrors in which the state is made virtually invisible) and a politics of *representativeness*, that is, a politics of statistic, in which some bodies could be held to stand for other bodies because of the numerical principle of metonymy...”

(Qtd in Appadurai, “Modernity at Large”, 131)

Thus, the construction of all-India identity categories based on religious group can be seen as a result of the importance accorded to these social stratifications. Ayesha Jalal and Sugandha Bose have noted, “British social enumerators...invested the great religions of the subcontinent, Hinduism and Islam, with a degree of supra-local significance and cohesion never achieved before” (137). Census based electoral politics influenced the construction of political parties which gained popularity on the basis of “ethnic” identity⁴, such as the All-India Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha (All-India Hindu Assembly). The former used Muslim nationhood as a mobilizing strategy before the idea of a territorial, divided “Pakistan” had been conceived (153) while the latter advocated for the concept of a Hindu Rashtra much before *Hindutva* had been published by V.D Savarkar.

Enumeration, Fertility and Masculinity

Representation of native subjects in numerical form also inspired questions regarding social identity amongst Indian subjects. Appadurai notes that this contributed to social critique as well as activist movements of resistance where colonized subjects reconditioned colonial notions of “body, society, country and destiny” (133). However, Orientalist interpretations of the census which influenced data collection processes also authorized and elaborated tropes surrounding bioracial difference, fertility, reproduction and gender. For instance, the census report for the United Provinces⁵ in 1911 claimed: “It has long been known that Musalmans are more fertile than Hindus and their chances of life are better: and the figures of the

⁴Throughout this project, I follow Appadurai’s claim of Hindu and Muslim as *ethnic* identity categories: “the idea of a naturalized group identity” (“Modernity”, 7).

⁵ The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh correspond approximately to the contemporary state of Uttar Pradesh (UP)

last decade merely strengthen this view...” (Qtd in Gupta, “Hindu wombs”, 178). Fears surrounding Muslim male fertility were explicitly constructed as a demographic contest within census reports. This can also be observed in the 1921 census report which concluded: “Both relatively and absolutely Hindus have lost;...Hindus have decreased during the last decade by 347 per 10,000, or just under 3.5 per cent” (ibid.).

For elite Hindu reformers, demographic fears raised questions regarding group cohesion and were central to social reform movements such as *shuddhi* (literally: purity) and *sangathan* (consolidation). While these movements were directed at mitigating caste differences and consolidating a Hindu society, the goal of achieving purity was instrumental in fashioning a homogenous Hindu identity. These movements can be seen as antecedents to present day concerns surrounding women’s desire, sexuality and conversion as iterated in the Ghar Wapsi and Love Jihad movement.

As discussed earlier, British ideals of Christian manliness constructed the colonized Hindu male subject as effeminate and lacking in moral and physical prowess. Moreover, as multiple postcolonial scholars have noted, colonial officials also painted the Muslim man as a hyper-patriarchal, sexual aggressor and sought to “save” oppressed colonial female subjects (Abu-Lughod; Spivak). These Orientalist fantasies, closely associated with demographics contributed to ideas of Hindu and Muslim masculinity in colonial India. Manisha Sethi explains that the perceived numerical and physical strength of Muslims became central to male Hindu anxieties: “the Muslim with his alleged ‘hyper fertility’ and ‘proclivity for violence’ came to

occupy the position of the predominant Other- more dangerous and hated than even the Britisher” (1547).

Sexual and physical *excess* characterized Muslim men. The stereotype of the Muslim male as sexual predator was developed in tandem with the “mythology beginning from Alauddin Khilji⁶ ...about the forceful abduction of Hindu women, their rape, pillage and conversion” (Sethi 1547). This makes clear that the threat of the Muslim Other has become central to Hindu nationalism’s historical narrative where “foreign invasion”, especially under what is characterized as “Muslim” rule is construed as a period in which Hindu women were abducted and raped. Thus, the census fueled anxieties surrounding Hindu male effeminacy and had significant sociopolitical consequences especially for unmarried and widowed women.

Saving Hindu Women from Muslim Men

The significance placed on fertility also shaped the perception of women’s bodies as “vessels or reservoirs of future Hindu warriors” and on this account, women became central for preserving “the Hindu race” or in other words, maintaining a Hindu majority in India. The *shuddhi* movement of 1920 demonstrate the burgeoning significance of social difference as well as the collaboration between the family and state (Gupta, “Hindu women”). This is also evident in the debates surrounding the acceptance of widow remarriage. The relationship between identity and a concern for women’s wellbeing can also be observed in the post-Partition program to “restore” and “recover” women who were considered “abducted persons” by the Indian and Pakistani state (Das; Menon and Bhasin). These three moments

⁶ Khilji was the second ruler of the Khilji dynasty in 11th and 12th centuries

draw attention to the ways in which enumeration, women's reproductive capacities and identity have been instrumental in social reform movements in India.

Widow Remarriage

Widows in India, especially of upper-caste background, were most often not permitted to remarry and compelled to live as ascetics. Charu Gupta has argued that the debates about the treatment of widows in the United Provinces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were influenced by an intersection of social reformist concerns and theories of Hindu/Muslim difference. While criticizing the exclusion and mistreatment of Hindu widows, much of the writing by Hindu publicists⁷ rested on the assumption that widows were "by nature" lustful and Muslim men were "by nature" sexual predators (Gupta, "Hindu wombs", 183).

Since widows were located outside of the domestic sphere, their sexuality and reproductive capacities were considered threatening. Unlike the unmarried woman whose chastity could be controlled, the widow who lacked "legitimate' access to sex"⁸ was considered dangerous for maintaining the family (ibid. 172-73). The prevalence of this theory made asceticism the most ideal mode of being. This not only meant that widows were to abstain from social relations with other men but also that they were barred from any form of *sringar*⁹ and could not eat hot foods or betel which

⁷ Gupta defines "Hindu publicists" as "those who used printed pamphlets and the public media consciously or unconsciously to promulgate a particular 'Hindu' point of view, and through their speeches, meetings and writings, asserted community differences and communal antagonisms. Many of them were influenced by or were members of the Arya Samaj, but they also included some Sanatan Dharmists, Hindu Mahasabha activists, Hindi literati, Congress members and leaders of various caste associations" ("Hindu wombs", 167) Thus, her work displaces the notion that early Hindu nationalist opinions were a minority opinion at the margins.

⁸ The belief that the sexual desire of widows was to be regulated was based on the concept that "women had eight times the sexual urge of men, and that it was extremely difficult to control" (Gupta, "Hindu wombs", 173)

⁹ Widows were prohibited from "apply[ing] perfume or adorn[ing] [themselves] with flowers....The use of *mehndi* (*henna*), jewelry...and *kajal* (*lamoblack*)" (ibid.)

would inspire sexual urges. Disciplining and regulating the behavior of widows was considered important because it was believed that widows' unfulfilled sexual desires "lead to abortion, infanticide and prostitution" (ibid. 176). The lustful nature of the widow was made more dangerous when considered together with the perceived hyper fertility and hyper sexuality of Muslim men. This rested on the belief that widows would be easily seduced, allowing Muslim men to seduce and consequently, convert them.

Census reports which explicitly pointed to the decline of the Hindus were essential in the producing the belief that Hindu women's wombs needed to be preserved and protected from Muslim men. The census report from 1911 cited earlier makes this evident:

"The prohibition of the remarriage of widows does not effect the Muhammadan. The figures bear this out...The Muhammadan widows are only 14 per cent of the female population as against 17 per cent among Hindus...At the child-bearing ages (15-40), when this factor will chiefly effect the rate of increase, under 3 per cent of Muhammadan women are widows whilst the Hindu rate is over 4 per cent' (Qtd in Gupta 178)

The above passage forges a clear association between census figures, differences between Hindu and Muslim widows, and an emphasis on their reproductive capacities through comparing the percentage of widows based on "child-bearing ages".

Advocates of widow remarriage also argued on the basis of humanitarian concern for the treatment of widows but most often, these were mobilized to explain the appeal of marrying Muslim men. Consider the poem below written by the Hindu poet Ayodhyasingh Upadhyay:

*'Gode mein isaiyat islam ki
betiyan bahuein lita car hum late!
ah ghate par humen ghata hua*

man bewail ka ghata jar hum ghate!!'

(In the lap of Christianity and Islam/we have lain our daughters and daughters-in-law!/we have suffered loss after loss/in treating them as less we have become lesser in number!!)

(Qtd in Gupta, 182; translation mine)

The claim “by not respecting widows, we have dwindled in numbers” establishes a causal relationship between the treatment of widows and the demographic threat of the Other. In other words, a concern for the welfare of widows was most often placed amongst fears of the Other gaining numerical supremacy. Another pamphlet cited a remarried widow, Gulab Devi, who cautioned that preserving Hindu society required a regulation of widows:

‘Find some way to protect the reproductive and mothering capacity of Hindu community Otherwise these *devis* (goddesses) of yours, who produced Ram, Krishna, Bhim, Arjun and Harishchandra¹⁰ will produce Khudabaksh, Rahimbaksh and Karimbaksh. They will get cows slaughtered and temples destroyed. Then the identity of this Hindu community, which could not be wiped out even by tanks and swords, would vanish in thin air’
(Qtd. in Gupta 187)

This quote not only re-emphasises the relationship between widow’s reproductive capacities and a numerical preservation of Hindu society but makes evident the significance of women for the preservation of the Hindu identity. Even though the threat here is primarily a widow’s ability to produce Muslim children, the “mothering capacity” alludes to the elision of cultivating Hindu patriotic-piety in children and instead promoting aspects of Muslim identity which threaten Hindu ideological supremacy.

Writings on mistreatment of widows evokes sympathy and draws attention to widows’ vulnerability to Muslim men which emphasizes their need for protection.

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These assumptions were furbished with publications by organizations and popular magazines which sought to illustrate the plight of Hindu widows who were compelled to marry across ethnic divisions. Gupta points to the writing of the teacher and author of children's books, Zahur Bakhs, who often wrote pieces for *Chand*, a Hindi magazine prominent in UP, in the early 1920s. Assuming the voice of a widow, his pieces titled "Main Mussalman Kaise Hui" (How I Became a Muslim) or "Main Isai Kaise Hui" (How I became a Christian) blamed both Hindu society for oppressing widows while also arguing that ethnic Others had exploited widows' vulnerability (Gupta, "Hindu wombs" 184-5). Similarly, a three part series by the Vidhwa Sahayak Karyalaya (Office to Help Widows) of Agra also included writing in the voice of widows as well as personal accounts with titles such as "Rampyari urf Shirdara Begum"¹¹, "How I became Fatima from Champa", "Shahzadiya Devi, Who was Rakko before". These stories also included pictures where in "on one side was depicted the Hindu widow in 'Hindu clothes', and on the other was the same woman as a married Muslim in 'Muslim attire'". These stories portrayed widows as victims who, once converted, felt further oppressed by Muslim family and society. Nevertheless, the emotional appeal of these publications was that they assumed the voice of a widow. Gupta also cites another passage where the Hindu widow inverts the sentiment expressed by Gulab Devi, framing it directly as a threat to Hindu men. The last segment of the series included stories of Arya Samaj activists who had "saved" them from Muslim men and housed them at the Kashi Vidhwa Home (Widows' Home).

The shift towards the legalization of widow remarriage suggests the interplay of three factors: the mistreatment of widows in Hindu society, the perceived threat of

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Muslim demographical ascendancy and Orientalist stereotypes regarding the sexual aggressiveness of Muslim men. The analysis of popular publications also draws attention to a rhetoric of women's vulnerability and victimhood which inspired Hindu reformers to save widows from Muslim men. These publications illustrate that (male) Hindu reformers not only presumed that Hindu widows were in a state of false consciousness but also literally assumed Hindu widows' voices. This achieved two important ends. First, the narrative style inspired Hindu men to think of saving widows as their duty. Additionally, the dramatic and personal nature of the titles also sought to paint Hindu widows as desirable and erotic. Thus, the discussion surrounding widow remarriage can be seen as not only a reclamation of Hindu wombs but also of Hindu women's sexuality.

Partitioned States and "Abducted" Women

Love and sexuality expressed across the divisions of politicized identity categories threaten the perceived purity and cohesion of these divisions. While the legalization of widow remarriage and the *shuddhi* movement illustrate the threat of Muslim contamination in Hindu society, anxieties surrounding women's reproductive capacities and the limits of enumerated identity categories has also been expressed in the postcolonial era by modern (secular) states. The discussion of the women after the Partition of India and creation of Pakistan who were legally defined as "abducted persons" points to how women specifically complicated categories of Hindu or Sikh/Muslim as well as Indian/Pakistani (Das; Menon & Bhasin).

During the mass exodus of populations in India and Pakistan, multiple cases of rape, abduction and forced marriages of women were reported. After the Partition, India and Pakistan established a program to “return” women to their respective families which in India was known as the “Abducted Persons (Restoration and Recovery) Act of 1949”. Veena Das has argued that the state response to the violence women faced minimized women’s needs and desires and instead was an exercise in restoring national honor and asserting a liberal modernity through claiming regard for women’s rights. Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin have also pointed out that an emphasis on national honor was central to the establishment of this program.

Das further explains that the program points to a collaboration of the family and the state, where the honor of both was prioritized over women’s choice and consent. Moreover, she points out that “the honor of the nation was at stake because women as a sexual and reproductive beings were forcibly held by the other side” (Das 68). As in the case on widow remarriage and the *shuddhi* movement, the emphasis on reproductive capacities is evident here as well. Das points out that in some discussions of the Act, both India and Pakistan sought to restore women in equal numbers and of a suitable age where their reproductive capacities could be capitalized on.

Das problematizes the concept of “abducted persons” by drawing attention to multiple cases where women were forcefully returned to their families and their own choice in the matter was not taken into consideration (71). Thus she claims that the discourse of the state coercively produced victims. While social workers who worked with women cited instances of women’s desires to not return to their old families, like the state, they presumed that the women were “under a state of false

consciousness regarding their consent in marriages” (Das 73). These coercive methods of responding to violence illustrate the ability of the state to:

“put upon [a woman] an obligation to *remember* that her abductor, to whom she is now married, is the murderer of her husband or her father. The women themselves are therefore caught in an impossible situation, where an obligation to maintain a narrative continuity with the past contradicts their ability to live in the present”

(Das, 73; emphasis in original)

This illustrates the ways in which the state delegitimized narratives and memory of violence in its attempt to embed the violence committed against her in a narrative of violence committed against her large-scale community. In silencing women’s chosen responses to violence, women were instantly perceived to belong to fixed categories of Hindu/Sikh or Muslim. The liminal position of these women appears to have raised anxieties surrounding the boundaries of newly territorialized, national identity categories of India and Pakistan. The ambiguous nature of the women’s identities can be understood as a threat to the burgeoning national identity which had recently been physically demarcated.

Responses of elite reformers and the state to the mistreatment of widows and violence against women following the Partition draw attention to theories of protectionism which reflect their gendered nature. Moreover, the development of enumerated ethnic identities and anxieties surrounding demographics also show that these concerns are intermingled with aspirations to preserve “wombs” which have been attached to naturalizing ethnic and national identities.

Producing the threat of Love Jihad

Discussions of Love Jihad have gained considerable visibility in Indian and international print and online media sources, sparking debates surrounding

romantic intimacy, choice, marriage, patriarchal family structures and public displays of affection. Hindu nationalist advocates of the concept of Love Jihad have used multiple poster images which have been popular on blogs and Facebook pages. The availability of these posters online and the use of image-editing software draws attention to the ways in which the internet has influenced the images included on posters and their availability.

The fear of forced religious conversion by Muslim men in disguise which is at the heart of this campaign resonates with the public notices which were disseminated during the 1920 *shuddhi* movement. Posters from the *shuddhi* movement addressed men, cautioning them to monitor women's movements to protect them from Muslim men (Gupta, "Love Jihad", 14). Contemporary Love Jihad posters propagate similar ideas regarding the vulnerability of Hindu women and the perceived threat of Muslim men. Blogs with these posters have also included detailed instruction on how parents may monitor unmarried women's activities, including movement, phone and internet use. In this section, I will unpack the ways in which these posters exacerbate stereotypes regarding the threat of Muslim men.



Figure 1. "A poster by Sree Rama

Consider the poster above released by a militant hindu nationalist sub-organisation comprised of young men, Shree Rama Sena (“the Army of Lord Rama”). The poster claims that the forced conversion of Hindu women is a part of the “perverse love rackets of venomous fanatic animals” (Figure 1). This reference to “animals” here is accompanied with the inclusion of a minotaur like creature, half-animal, with horns, red eyes, sharp fangs and half-human, with a stylized beard, and arms, with fur and/or in gloves, reaching out below to the figure of a woman yet facing the audience. The portrayal of the Muslim Other as a morphed, monstrous creature alludes to a grotesque, unnatural nature, evoking feelings of horror and uncertainty. These conceptions reestablish Orientalist images of Muslim Others, as wild, dangerous and predatorial, propagated by colonial administrators as well as Hindu social reformists in colonial India. This imagery and the inclusion of terms such as “perverse”, “venomous” and “fanatic” also resonate with contemporary conceptions of “terrorist-monster” which rest on notions of sexual deviancy which must be disciplined (Puar and Rai 117).



Figure 2. Source: hinduexistence.org

Moreover, figure 1 and 2 both illustrate conversion by presenting the figure of a woman with Hindu and Muslim identity markers. In figure 1, the woman on the one side is clad in a sari and wearing a bindi, while on the other side is wearing a black *niqab*. The dividing line on the woman's body appears to be in itself an attempt to erase the ambiguity of her identity through visible cultural markers. Here, the ambiguity of the monstrous, minotaur-like creature appears in contrast to the certainty of the woman's bifurcated identity. The fact that the bindi, traditionally, is associated with Hindu marriages also alludes to the woman's marriageability. Similarly, in figure 2, a woman face appears in an image-edited *niqab*, her eyes behind prison bars and her bindi, here being a marker for her Hindu identity, is bleeding. Again, the bindi and the veil function as physical markers, marking ethnic identity on women's bodies.

The inclusion of the English term "spoil"¹² here alludes to the (virgin) purity of the Hindu woman which has been violated through trickery. Unlike figure 1, the woman in figure 2 appears to literally be confined behind prison bars, suggesting that this is a Hindu woman "trapped" in the life of a Muslim woman. In this narrative,

¹² Interestingly, none of the marathi terms mentioned above the English ones translate to "spoil". The term above spoil, *faswanook*, can mean fraud, trickery or deception

unmarried Hindu women are faultless, retaining their moral purity. It is in fact their naïveté which causes them to be vulnerable of the “trap of Love Jihad” (Figure 2). The vulnerability and purity of Hindu women legitimizes the savior rhetoric that is evident in these posters.

The mention of a “love racket” in the poster also de-emphasises the legitimacy of consensual intimacy between Hindu women and Muslim men. These are also evident in Figure 2 where words such as “love” and “deceit” encourage the perception that women are being converted and married against their will. Similar to the social workers after the Partition who attributed women’s resistance to being “recovered” or “returned” as “false consciousness” (Das 72), and the Orientalist fantasies described above and evident in debates on widow remarriage, Love Jihad assumes that Hindu women would not consensually marry Muslim men and must be “protected” or “saved”.

Recall here that the underlying narrative by Hindu nationalist groups has been that Muslim men disguised as Hindu men are forcefully converting Hindu women under the false pretense of love. The conception of Muslim men being “disguised” alludes again to their perceived mysterious, suspicious nature. This again draws attention to an uncertainty of identity categories which are at the heart of violence against ethnic Others (Appadurai, “Dead Certainty”). Again, through wearing physical markers such as wearing a *tilaka* (powder marking) on the forehead or a *kalava* (sacred thread) on the wrist, Muslim men are able to appear Hindu, physically marked as “one of us”. Thus, it is a transgression of the naturalized, demographic identity boundaries which again arouses the question: “how many of ‘them’ are now among ‘us’” (ibid. 228-9). In this regard, Muslim men’s bodies,

through appearing Hindu, encapsulate an ambiguity which stands in opposition to the pure, marriageable body of the Hindu woman who appears in these posters (Figures 1 and 2).

Love, Family and the Sangh

In both these posters, the notion of love seems to be consistently evoked as a parallel to deception. Both posters include direct transliteration of Love Jihad as well as *prem* (love; Figure 2) and *premjaal* (love trap, here translated as “love racket”; Figure 1). To understand the invocation of the English term love here, it is important first to place this concept within the Indian social and legal norms surrounding romantic intimacy, marriage and family. Marriages where two individuals have chosen their partner are commonly referred to as “love-marriage”, in contrast to “arranged-marriage” where the family has sought a partner for their child, usually of the same class, caste and religious background. The assumption of pre-marital romantic intimacy is not the norm (Mody 333)¹³.

In social and legal terms, the family plays a central role in romantic relationships and marriage in India. In *Marriage and Modernity*, Rochona Majumdar has noted that the development of arranged marriages in India is related to the emergence of the “joint family”¹⁴ and the “marriage market”¹⁵ in late colonial

¹³ Pervez Mody explains: “Marriage, then, is not concerned with whether or not the couple are ‘in love’ - in fact, in the case of Hindus, it is geared around the assumption that ideally the girl and the boy are strangers to each other and that it is their obligation to their parents that makes them sometimes reluctant, though consenting, parties to the marriage...Hence, the construction of the relationship between love and marriage is that love should never precede marriage; but equally, marriage does not preclude the possibility of a loving and intimate relationship” (333)

¹⁴ Majumdar defines “joint family” as “several ‘households’ (what scholars would call an ‘elementary’ family, complete or incomplete) either actually living together under the same roof or sharing the idea of the joint family as a normative ideal” (4)

¹⁵ The concept of the “marriage market” is central to Majumdar’s study of marriage in late colonial Bengal. She argues that conceptions of “arrangement” had their basis in market related developments and were distinctly modern, she says: “The practice is not without a past, but I call it modern because its

Bengal. Struggles surrounding conceptions of family, individual freedoms, choice and agency have featured prominently in social, legal and pop-cultural discourse. In her ethnography on love marriages in Delhi, Perveen Mody has pointed to the violent struggles between families and individuals, whereby several elopements were legally registered as kidnappings or abductions. These are especially common in cases of romantic intimacy which occur across community boundaries and are seen as a threat to family honor.

The discussion surrounding Love Jihad draws attention not only to Hindu nationalist organizations but also to the complex, contested conceptions of family, agency and marriage. The use of the term “love” in Love Jihad carries the weight of love-marriages and elopements which are viewed as transgressions, especially when occurring across ethnic boundaries. Recall here the August 2014 case in Meerut with which I started this chapter where, in a later statement, the woman made explicit that she was threatened by her parents. She also claimed that she had approached the police seeking temporary housing due to this threat. From this perspective, Love Jihad can also be understood as a collaboration between the family and the Sangh which seeks to delegitimize individual desires¹⁶. In this sense, Love Jihad is similar to the post-Partition campaigns which also functioned on the basis of a relationship between national and family honor (Das).

performance from the late nineteenth century involves the use of institutions and ideas central to any understanding of modernity: urban life, Western education, the print media (the publication of matrimonial advertisements seeking brides and grooms), monetisation of relationships (the escalation in the practice of dowry), cultivation of distinction and cultural capital (debates about what constitutes a tasteful wedding), and law (certain legal reforms to do with property and ideas of rights and personhood).” (2)

¹⁶ I do not intend to suggest that this choice or desire arise from a “free will” but recognise that these are constituted by existing hegemonic regimes.

This is also evident in a statement released by Hindu nationalist organizations at a press conference in Mumbai in September 2014. In a press notice, the organizations demanded legislation to prevent Love Jihad:

In order to prevent any danger to the unity and integrity of the Nation, a stringent law should be enacted in the country against deceit and atrocities committed on the women. This Act should make provision for awarding stringent punishment to the accused from the Muslim community on the basis of the statements given by the girls (an[d] their relatives) from a non-Muslim communities like Hindu, Jain, Sikhs, Christian, Buddhist, etc.

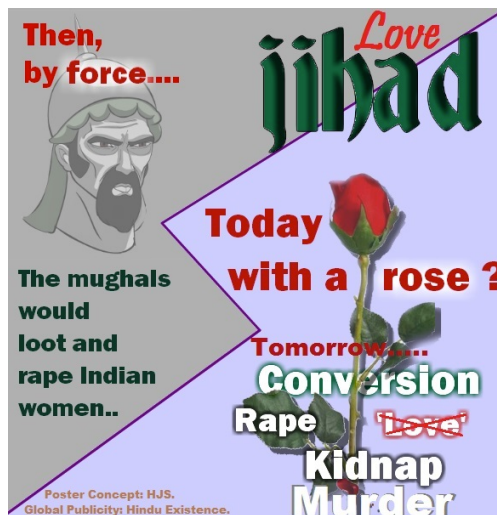
(Hindu Janajagruti Samiti 2014)

This statement calls for the preservation of national unity and utilizes the rhetoric of protecting women “against deceit and atrocities”. Furthermore, it mentions the importance of statements from a woman’s relatives. In several of the “exposés” conducted by popular media sources, statements from family and relatives have also been included as evidence of Love Jihad. Significantly, the above statement also draws attention to a unique collaboration between ethnic communities uniting against Muslim communities.

Past violence/Future threat

Central to Hindu nationalist ideology has been the construction of narrative of historical victimhood of Hindus, oppressed under Mughal and British colonial rule. Thus, Hindu nationalist ideology perpetuates itself through producing a narrative continuity between the Mughal era and contemporary Indian Muslims, and British colonialism and contemporary Indian Christians. The image of Muslim men as sexual predators has also been maintained on the construction of the Mughal era as a time period where Hindu women were sexually assaulted by Muslim men. The

narrative continuity between past Hindu oppression under Mughal rule and the future threat of Muslim demographic ascendancy through Love Jihad is captured in this poster (Figure 3):



The jagged line in the above poster delineates past violence, appearing in gray, from contemporary threat, appearing in purple (figure 3). The uncertainty of the future is established through asking the viewer: “Today with a rose? Tomorrow...” in red. The cancellation on the term “Love”, amongst the terms “conversion”, “rape”, “kidnap” and “murder” alludes to the false nature of love. On the left side of the image, the hanging statement “Then by force...” appears above a cartoon figure symbolizing Mughal men, blending into the gray background of the past. Wearing a turban, the figure has chiseled features, is bearded and frowning deeply, connoting the aggression, (hyper)masculinity and strength of Mughal men.

An explicit connection to the Mughal era is made in the statement: “The mughals would loot and rape Indian women...”. Here, the category of “Indian women” is projected onto a Mughal past for the construction of a future threat. The

relationship between love and threat is also evident in the use of the color red, in contrast with the color green, the traditional color of Islam and also the color of the Mughal flag, which appears on the words “Jihad”, on the claim regarding Mughal violence and as a glow on the word “conversions”. The color scheme also appears to contribute to a narrative continuity between the violences of the past and the threat of deception in the present.

“Jihad”

The above poster makes evident the connection being established between Love Jihad as a contemporary threat and the past dishonor on women’s bodies which must be “avenged” (Sethi). For one, these narratives appear to be associated with and exacerbated by Orientalist stereotypes regarding Muslims. The term “Jihad” in Love Jihad also co-opts the discourse of the global “War on Terror” which has made terms such as “Jihad” common parlance, associated with stereotypes regarding violent Muslim men. The invocation of the Mughal era, then, also functions as evidence of Muslim “backwardness”. Thus, the concept of Love Jihad complicates the normative schism of established in the “clash of civilizations” hypothesis between a secular, advanced West and a backward religious non-West which needs disciplining. The importance of anti-terrorist rhetoric for Hindu nationalism further illustrates the existence of a transnational network facing a perceived Islamic terrorist threat which must be curtailed.

Hindu Men Saving Muslim Women

Burgeoning discourse on women’s rights in Muslim majority countries and amongst Muslim minority communities in the West has also been central for the production of Love Jihad ideology. For instance, the blog [“Struggle for Hindu](#)

existence” edited by a prominent Hindu nationalist figure, Upananda Brahmachari, and the Facebook page, “Save Mother Land of Hindus is Hindustan” also disseminate news stories regarding violence against women in the Middle East or in Pakistan. For example, consider the poster below from the facebook page (Figure 4):



The poster uses images from contemporary issues around the world to propagate the belief that Muslim women are significantly more oppressed than Hindu women with the claim “How Islam spoils the life of Muslim women”. Here again, the category of “Muslim women” appears naturalized and eternal, as if bearing no relationship with “Islam”. In the poster, six factors are presented: the burqa, marriage to older men, lack of education, suicide bombing, polygamy, verbal divorce and Shariah law. These are accompanied with images from around the world: of women wearing blue burqas (most popular in Central Asia and Afghanistan, and required by the Taliban), a newly married couple, the Pakistani activist, Malala Yousafzai, a potential female suicide bomber, a Muslim family and an image of an acid attack survivor. These six points and the accompanying images take for granted that women are adversely affected due to these factors and that all of these activities are solely associated with Islam.

The format of the poster, with few words and multiple images, appears to be in accordance with the format of most internet memes.

The transnational circulation of images and news surrounding “terrorism”, “jihad” and “women’s rights” exacerbate pre-existing perceptions of Muslim women as particularly oppressed due to Islam. Hindu nationalist groups have consistently claimed that Hindu religion and society respects and reveres women (Basu 171). Central to this proposition is the notion of *nari shakti* (women’s power) and the power and strength accorded to mother figures which has been central to the development of nationalism in India. It is from this position that Hindu nationalist organizations has developed their position against personal laws¹⁷¹⁸, which are a central feature of Indian secularism and family law. For instance, the prominent Sadhvi, Uma Bharati argued against personal laws claiming: “I feel for my Muslim sisters...but they do not seem to feel for themselves. How can they agree to wear the *burqa*? How can they abide by Muslim law” (Basu 171). The BJP has also often characterized the Indian National Congress (henceforth referred to as the Congress) as “pseudo-secularist” due to the latter’s reluctance to expand the Uniform Civil Code to family laws. These debates shed light on contested terrains between religion, family and the state. Moreover, similar to the colonial state and the post-Partition campaign

¹⁷ “India has a dual law structure: uniform criminal and civil laws, but separate personal laws for different religious communities. The Indian Constitution approves a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) applicable to all citizens irrespective of their religion, but it exists at present only as a Directive Principle. Personal law, since it is envisaged as a means of securing community identity and respecting religious difference, operates therefore within rather than despite a constitutional commitment to secularism” (Needham and Rajan, 29)

¹⁸ Rochona Majumdar also notes that the concept of “personal law” is intertwined with the separation of the family and state which was central to the advent of British colonial rule in India (4).

to recover abducted women, Hindu nationalists assert their modernity through participating in the globalized campaign to “save Muslim women”¹⁹

II: Nationalist Motherhood: Reproducing the Hindu Nation

Beliefs surrounding women’s oppression and a need to formulate an organization dedicated to developing women’s self-defense and emphasizing *nari shakti* (women’s power) were central motivations for Laxmibai Kelkar, the founder of the Samiti. While there are multiple stories regarding the inspiration for the organization, most scholars cite an incident where Kelkar notices that a woman is sexually harassed and her husband and passers-by are bystanders (Bacchetta “Ideologues”, 131). This incident spurs her inspiration for joining the RSS, an organization which emphasizes discipline, self-defense and community. The Samiti was formed after Kelkar proposed this idea to the first sarsanghachalak of the RSS, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgekar and she founded the Samiti in 1936.

Organizations within the Sangh Parivar conceive of motherhood as the primary mode of political participation for women. The importance accorded to motherhood is intertwined with the belief that women are custodians of culture, tradition and spirituality, which developed in anti-colonial, nationalist movements of the 19th and 20th century. Women’s organizations, especially, are central in

¹⁹ One instance of these debates was evident in the highly controversial ten year Supreme Court case *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* regarding the right to alimony. Zakaria Pathak and Rajeswari S. Rajan have argued that the discourses surrounding the case saw the displacement of the woman, Shah Bano, and instead brought to the forefront debates between politicized Hindu and Muslim activists and the law regarding women, family, secularism and Indian law. The scholars have argued that narratives of protecting Muslim women were central to Hindu nationalists and the government. Thus, the concern for Muslim women expressed by Hindu nationalist groups can be translated as “Hindu men are saving Muslim women from Muslim men” analogous to Gayatri Spivak’s phrase “white men are saving brown women from brown men”(263).

developing the concept of *nationalist motherhood*, which is seen as a defining feature of Hindu culture and Bharat, as the ideal nation. Ideal nationalist mothers are viewed as compassionate teachers, essential for the development of *samskaras*, or “cultural values”, in their children. In this sense, *samskaras* involve the cultivation of patriotic/piety, which not only implies developing Hindu piety but also involves imbuing a reverence for Bharat and for the Sangh Parivar in children. Thus, within Hindu nationalist ideology, women are considered responsible for not only the literal but also the ideological reproduction of the Hindu nation.

While in the previous chapter I discussed the importance accorded to women’s bodies and reproductive capacities by Hindu nationalist groups, I wish to further elaborate on this claim further by drawing attention to feminine subjecthood as imagined by women’s organizations. In this chapter, I will discuss the development of nationalist motherhood as a crucial position for female Hindu nationalist subjects. Historical and goddess figures such as Jijabai and Durga are instrumentalized in the discourse to inspire women to not only be compassionate and benevolent mothers but also tactical activists, dedicated to the nation. Thus, in relation to their male counterparts, Hindu nationalist women’s organizations reproduce, resist and reconfigure various conceptions of female identity, agency and history. In this chapter, I focus on the evocation of the Jijabai and Durga in recruitment and advocacy efforts of women’s organizations to understand the ways in which nationalist motherhood serves as the ideal subject position for women within the movement.

Women and Indian Nationalism

In the previous chapter, discussing the relationship between demographics, women's bodies and reproductive capacities, I pointed to an emphasis on women's association with nature. However, women have also been seen as symbols of culture, tradition and spirituality in colonial and postcolonial India²⁰. British colonial systems of power influenced concepts of femininity and masculinity and contributed to a reconstitution of gender relations and hierarchies. This is not to suggest that hierarchical gender relations did not precede British colonialism but instead to show that burgeoning ideologies of anti-colonial nationalism appropriated and reconstituted categories of feminine and masculine. The construction of womanhood in this period, as well as ideologies of motherhood, were crucial in the formation of independent India.

Drawing attention to debates on the "women's question" amongst elite social reformers, Partha Chatterjee has argued that late nineteenth century nationalism construed the feminine, and women, as symbolic of culture and tradition. Indian nationalists sought to preserve the traditions, indigenous culture and spirituality of the country—the "inner" sphere—while mastering the material or "outer" sphere, (associated with science, governance, education etc.) which had made Western civilization capable of becoming powerful colonizers around the world. The inner/outer dichotomy rested on the assumption that the East was spiritually superior, and that the inner, domestic, feminine realm was unchanged by the effects

²⁰. This complicates Sherry Ortner's argument of women as associated with nature and men as associated with culture. Ortner argues that there exists a universal binary of female as close to nature, male as close to culture. Within this conception, women's association with motherhood and domesticity limits their agency through restricting their access to the public sphere, and in turn, their participation in politics and wage labor. Several marxist and socialist feminist theorists have argued against a binary between public and private which devalues women's labor within the household and depoliticizes the private sphere (Hartmann). Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood have also argued against a division of public/private in relation to the development of Western secularism.

of colonialism. These conceptions influenced the construction of femininity and women's roles in Indian society. For instance, even while social reformists argued to permit women's education and the "cultural refinement" of women, the westernization of women was perceived as a threat to the "essential nature" of the country. Chatterjee points out that the primary duty of the educated "new woman" was the maintenance of traditional family life and the preservation the sanctity of spiritual culture (254-255). Thus, for elite nationalist social reformers, women were symbolic of the "essential culture" of the country, its traditions and spirituality, which had remained unchanged by British colonizers. From this perspective, the subjugation of the nation, culture and traditions materialized in the figure of the suffering Indian woman.

Bengali Motherhood

Within this construction of womanhood, the figure of the Bengali mother also gained an important status, becoming a symbol of the indigeneity of native subjects. Jasodhara Bagchi's analysis of the hagiographies and writings of elite social reformers and intellectuals such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Vidyasagar, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Anurupa Devi, Mahasweta Devi has drawn attention to the exalted status of their mothers. As women, mothers served to emphasize the individuality, cultural superiority and uniqueness of colonized subjects which was threatened under colonial rule. Thus, the figure of the Bengali mother was developed as ever giving, compassionate and kind-hearted as well as suffering and self-sacrificing. Moreover, the romanticization of motherhood was also related to the feminization of male colonial subjects by colonizers:

As the stable centre of a fragile colonial society, she provide[d] constant solace to the humiliated son; on

occasion her heroism act[ed] as...inspiration to lift up the
downtrodden spirit of the son (Bagchi 66)

Thus, women as mothers were prominent in the nationalist project, serving as symbols of indigeneity while caring and providing for their sons, who were considered the principal nationalist subjects. Bagchi has argued that the elevated status of benevolent, sacrificing mothers made it “the ‘ultimate identity’ of Bengali women” and in turn, facilitated women’s economic deprivation (66).

Nationalist conceptions of motherhood also relied on the prevalence of goddess worship in Bengal and influenced both, mothers and goddesses. For instance, in Bengal, the goddess Shakti, in the form of Chandi, Kali or Durga, was a prominent goddess. Thus, nationalist motherhood developed as a combination of the affectionate Bengali mother figure as well as the fierce elements of Durga. Mother goddess figures served to “hinduise the tone of nationalism in Bengal” while imbuing motherhood with sacrosanct qualities (Bagchi 66). At the same time, the image of Durga as powerful and angry was also domesticated to fit within the nationalist imagination of motherhood. Anja Kovacs describes images of Durga for Bengali nationalists which portrayed her as “an ideal mother figure; ‘the presiding deity of Bengali kitchens and the sickbed’” (375). Thus, for the nationalist project, female identity was desexualized in the form of mother and goddess figures, emphasizing the purity of women, and in turn, of the nation. Moreover, mothers in the national imaginary were characterized as affectionate, benevolent, sacrificing and suffering as well as consoling, encouraging and, in times of crises, heroic.

Bharat Mata

The relationship between women as mothers and goddesses, territory and nationalist politics is most prominent in the goddess figure of Bharat Mata (Mother

India), who rose to prominence in the late colonial period and was crucial in mobilizing communities for anti-colonialist activism. Personifying the nation as a female entity is a common feature around the world²¹²². In *The Goddess and the Nation*, Sumathi Ramaswamy provides an analysis of iconography and images which portray the physical body of Bharat Mata as superimposed onto a map of akhanda Bharat. Her analysis of “bazaar art”²³ from around the country depicting Bharat Mata makes evident that she was represented in a variety of ways, depending on the sociopolitical context. While often conceptualized as the mother goddess of a secular nation, Bharat Mata was most often fashioned after Hindu goddess figures, adorned with multiple arms, jewelry and the lion as her vehicle.

Bharat Mata was also often depicted in relation to the warrior goddess, Durga in some of her depictions. In popular Hindu iconography, Durga is most often depicted as a passionate warrior, as *Mahisasurmardini* (the slayer of the buffalo demon, Mahisasur), holding multiple weapons and symbolic artifacts in her ten arms. She is “the collective fire” of Vishnu and Shiva in a female form (Kovacs, 373). In Bankim Chattopadhyay’s iconic novel *Anandamath*, the figure of Bharat Mata encompasses various forms of Durga over time. In the form of a “mother of the past”, she is Jagaddhatri²⁴ (Ramaswamy 109). In her present form, she is Kali, “haunting the cremation ground and dancing on Shiva’s chest, signifying the reversal of order

²¹ For example, Britannia (Great Britain), Germania (Germany), Helvetia (Switzerland)

²² Afsaneh Najmabadi’s discussion of Iran as a female beloved or mother points to the the contributions of patriotism “for the binarization of gender and the heteronormalization of sexuality” (97)

²³ Ramaswamy cites Patricia Uberoi’s definition of “calendar or bazaar art as a particular style of popular color reproductions with sacred or merely decorative motifs...the art style extends beyond calendars and posters. In fact it is a general ‘kitsch’ style which can be found on street hoardings, film posters, sweet boxes, fireworks, wall paintings and advertising and in the knick-knacks sold in fairs” (34). This illustrates the pervasiveness of goddess imagery and shows that common imagery blurs distinctions between “fundamentalist” and “secular”, drawing attention to the images which are central to nation building.

²⁴ A form of Durga, can be translated as “the protector of the world”

and suggesting a parallel between the land of Bharat and a cremation ground”. In the future, the mother will take the supreme form of Durga, “the ten armed mother, the symbol of power with all her shining weapons” (Jha). Establishing a relationship between Bharat Mata and Durga was also essential to constructing the former as a divine figure.

Bharat Mata’s relationship with Durga again draws attention to her seemingly paradoxical position: on the one hand, Bharat Mata is a vulnerable woman in need of protection, while on the other hand, she is fierce, angry, heroic warrior figures. Many early illustrations of Bharat Mata portray her as a solemn mother, robbed of her glorious past by imperialism and in need of protection by her children (Ramaswamy 26). Other illustrations also depict her in a more angry, warrior like form, rousing her sons to revive the perceived grandeur of the pre-colonial, and for Hindu nationalists, pre-Mughal era (Ramaswamy 28). Bharat Mata, as a goddess and a woman, became the venerated symbol of the nation’s vulnerable “inner sphere”, its spiritual superiority, culture and tradition. As a mother, Bharat Mata was also conceived of as benevolent, and had bestowed upon “her children” the material resources found on the Indian landscape. Bharat Mata was also suffering and in “times of crises”, like Durga, she was angry and roused her sons to protect her and preserve all that she had given them. These various characteristics of Bharat Mata made her an important symbol for anti-colonial nationalist struggles.

The figure of Bharat Mata was also prominent in Hindu nationalist narratives in the colonial period, first with the construction of the RSS and later in the discourse and writings of the Samiti in the early-mid 20th century. For Hindu nationalists, the children of Bharat Mata were Hindu, and restoring her glory meant reclaiming her

not only from British colonialists but also Muslims. Within the RSS narrative, Bharat Mata was mostly construed as a suffering, domesticated figure: “The RSS’s Bharat Mata is a chaste mother, victimised by Muslims and in need of the protection of her virile sons” (Kovacs 375). In this version of Bharat Mata, physical strength is characteristic of masculinity while victimhood and vulnerability is characteristic of feminine figures. However, as I noted in the previous chapter, the early 20th century saw physical strength becoming an ideal for women in Hindu nationalists discourse. The co-existence of vulnerability and heroism has not been considered a paradox for Hindu nationalist organizations. In fact, in “times of crisis”, women took on the roles of “valiant warrior” and “sister-in-arms” due to their roles as mothers (Sethi 1547).

Unlike the RSS, the Samiti, as the earliest women’s Hindu nationalist organization emphasized Bharat Mata’s relationship with the Devi Mahatmya²⁵, establishing her relationship with a variety of goddesses including Parvati, Durga, Kali and others. In the Samiti’s narrative, Bharat Mata is not a docile victim in need of male saviors and retains her strength, passion and rage. In fact, the image of Bharat Mata as a victimized figure is inverted as she is considered “the protector of society”. In other Samiti texts, Bharat Mata is described as the creator of a “unique nation having glorious traditions”, “the very source of all power’, and ‘the origin of all divinities” (Qtd in Kovacs 376; Qtd in Bacchetta 146). This draws attention to the fact that the ideology of the Samiti and its activism does not identically reproduce the narrative of the male counterpart organizations (Bacchetta “Ideologues”) . Differences in the Samiti’s rhetoric in comparison to the Sangh also illustrate that the former not

²⁵ The Devi Mahatmya is a part of the Hindu scriptures, Puranas, and tells the story of Durga’s victory over Mahishasura

only makes female figures visible and prominent but also portrays them as complex and diverse characters.

Nationalist Motherhood: Imparting Samskaras

The invocation of goddess figures, such as Durga or Bharat Mata by the Samiti and other women's organizations within the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement illustrate the ways in which considerable agency is accorded to these figures. For instance, the Samiti and RSS differ in the practice the festival of Vijaya Dashmi, which is also considered to be the founding day for both organisations:

While for RSS the festival commemorates the victory of the god Rama over his enemy Ravana who had kidnapped Rama's wife Sita, for the Samiti it is the day of the victory of the goddess Durga, of whom Rama is a devotee, over the demons. Although the *Ramayana*, the epic that recounts Rama's exploits, contains both meanings, the Samiti has opted to emphasise female agency rather than male agency in its interpretation

(Kovacs 376)

Women's Hindu nationalist narratives resist, appropriate and change important aspects of the popular Hindu nationalist discourse. Moreover, goddesses and historical nationalist women have held prominence in the discourse of the Samiti since its advent and continue to do so in the recruitment and advocacy efforts of other Hindu nationalist women's organizations. While female figures embody a variety of subject positions, they are most often mobilized for the production of a nationalist motherhood, which involves both the dissemination of samskaras and can also include warrior womanhood.

Historical figures who were prominent in pre-colonial anti-Mughal and later anti-British struggles are celebrated in Hindu nationalist discourse at large. This draws attention to the construction of a narrative continuity from pre-colonial and

colonial era to the present, underscoring a Hindu struggle against ethnic Others. Within Hindu nationalist women's discourse, female figures from the Mughal era, such as Rajput queen, Rani Padmini, the mother of the first king of the Marathas, Jijabai and the Maratha warrior queen, Rani of Jhansi are often invoked (Sethi 1550; Kovacs 376; Menon 35; Ganneri and Sen 283; Bannerji 175; Sarkar 193). This again shows that women's historical narratives replicate important themes of Hindu nationalism while centering these narratives on female figures. The visibility accorded to these actors points to the construction of a female-centered Hindu nationalist historiography. Moreover, these stories constitute a nationalist female subject, mobilized in the service of Hindu nationalism. In this section, I will illustrate the ways in which these histories propagate nationalist motherhood through focusing on women's stories of Jijabai.

Jijabai

Jijabai was the mother of the celebrated Maratha king Shivaji who resisted and fought against Mughal rule in present day Maharashtra in the seventeenth century. In Samiti narratives, Jijabai is held as the ultimate example of the ideal of *maturtva* (benevolent motherhood). Through a variety of stories and anecdotes, Hindu nationalist women across class and caste backgrounds²⁶ depict Jijabai as a strong-willed figure, dedicated to arousing Shivaji's patriotism and inspiring him to struggle against Mughal rulers. In her ethnography, Menon recalls her experience at

²⁶ Namrata Ganneri and Atreyee Sen's comparative study on the historical figures of import in the Samiti's written and Mahila Aghadi's oral stories points to the ways in which these stories enable a construction of female subjecthood across class and caste lines. Ganneri and Sen make evident that stories of Jijabai are also prominent in the Mahila Aghadi, an organization associated with the Shiv Sena and made up largely of lower-class and/or caste women living in slums in Bombay. Samiti and Aghadi women tend to differ in the historical figures which they invoke. However, Jijabai remains a prominent icon for both organizations. Ganneri and Sen have argued that this indicates a method by which "women across class, caste and organizational backgrounds attempt to forge powerful ties to universal motherhood and womanhood" (Ganneri and Sen, 283).

a *shakha* meeting in Sultanpuri in Delhi, where Samiti member, Aparna Pandit, was retelling a story of Jijabai to a group of young women from a small and historically excluded community of Balmikis²⁷. Aparna claimed that the story, which had been published earlier, in the January-March 1999 issue of the Samiti's *shakha* guide ("*boudhik pustak*"), was important as "it would teach...[the young women] the importance of being 'active' and 'aware'" (Menon 32). This demonstrates how Aparna rouses nationalist sentiment in the audience by telling a history of Hindu oppression and resistance. Additionally, the vignette draws attention to the context in which Jijabai is operationalized within Hindu nationalist ideology:

One day when Shivaji was a boy, he was sitting with his mother. From where they were sitting they could see a hill upon which was flying a green flag. His mother said to Shivaji that when he grew up he would have to fight so that the flag on top of the hill would be our saffron flag and not the green flag of the foreigner's *raj*. In the printed version of the vignette Shivaji asks Jijabai, while playing an Indian dice game called *chauser*, 'What are the terms for victory?' In her response she points to a green flag on top of the nearby Kondana Fort and asks that it be replaced by a different color when she wins the game. The next sentence states that Shivaji satisfied these 'inspiring terms for victory'

(Qtd in Menon 32)

This anecdote insinuates that Shivaji's commitment to the nation and his ability to succeed had been a result of Jijabai's patriotic values and dedicated motherhood. This specific vignette also sheds light on the anti-Muslim framework within which this story of the everyday relationship between mother and son operates. While an earlier, printed version of this story makes the Muslim adversary explicit, Aparna refurbishes this paradigm using a metaphor of flags with colors associated with

²⁷ These group of young women are of Dalit background and "had been resettled from slums in central Delhi in one of the various attempts to 'clean up' the city during the Asian games in the early 1980s". (Menon 32)

Hindu nationalism (saffron) and Islam (green). Nevertheless, the vignette places more emphasis on Jijabai's dedication to a "nationalist" cause which she inspires in her son. Thus, Aparna is able to show the young girls how they, "under the guidance of the Samiti, can participate in the construction of the nation" (Menon 33).

Moreover, this scenario shows that the story of Jijabai is used both for rousing women to participate in the movement as well as "to transmit cultural ideals, their understandings of the past and women's roles in it" (Menon 33).

Narratives of Jijabai construct a "mythico-history", inserting female figures in normative nationalist historical narratives and inspiring women in the present day to cultivate an ideal motherhood. In the above anecdote, the figure of Jijabai was instrumentalized for inspiring young women to become politically involved, indicating their capacity to effect significant change in the nation. Jijabai's awareness of a history of victimhood, reverence for Maratha culture and patriotic dedication to defeating the Mughal "Other" are imbibed by Shivaji, who went on to become victorious. In other stories, Jijabai is also tactical and superior to Shivaji: "Shivaji was said to have sought guidance from his mother (ranging from strategies of war to daily governance), and his mother persuaded him to sustain the war against the Muslims [sic]²⁸" (Ganneri and Sen 296). This draws attention to the fact that Hindu nationalist women's discourse considers mothers positions as powerful and crucial in the formation of the nation, placing emphasis on the process of implanting samskaras in their children. Nevertheless, most often, it is sons who are involved in the material, "outer", sphere of overt political action. Thus, ideal womanhood here is again imagined a preservation of the "inner" sphere, the "natural" and superior

²⁸ Shivaji fought for the Marathas against the Mughal rulers, not "Muslims".

culture, which is the backbone of the “outer” sphere. The figure of Jijabai, as the ideal nationalist mother, indicates the emphasis being placed on women to pass down a memory of victimhood as well as a reverence for tradition, encourage patriotic fervor and support defensive battles against “Others” using practical and tactical means.

Samskaras

The significance placed on imbuing children with *samskaras* in Hindu nationalist organizations parallels Jijabai’s role in developing Shivaji as a patriotic warrior. Thus, ideal mothers are not seen only as vessels for reproduction of (male) Hindu children but also as responsible for developing in them Hindu cultural values and a knowledge of the community’s history in them. M.S Golwalkar, the second *sarsanghchalak* of the RSS emphasized this in his “Call to Motherhood”:

‘Let our mothers make the children wake up early in the morning, make them salute their elders, and offer worship to the family deity.’ They should teach girls to avoid European dress and not to ‘expose their bodies more and more’ and they children to resist ‘a blind aping of the West’. They should keep alive the observance of sacred occasions and ceremonies and take children on regular visits to temples.

(Qtd in Sarkar 187)

This makes evident that mothers are responsible for enforcing disciplinary practices which would contribute to the cultivation of Hindu nationalist subject. However, this concept is intertwined with the development of *samskaras* where discipline and devotion is not only to “elders” or the “family deity” but extended to include the larger Hindu nationalist *parivar* and the nation. Sarkar explains: “*Samskaras*... include deference to family elders, Hindu historical heroes and deities and to RSS great men” (188). This conception blurs the boundaries between family, deities, historical figures, the Sangh and the nation. Thus, nationalist mothers are important

for reproducing Hindu nationalist ideology, and in particular a concept of Hindu nationalism which is intimately related to the organizational structure of the Sangh.

The relationship between women, families and Hindu nationalist organizations must be understood as already existing in a close knit network. Women's organizations also expand the Sangh Parivar most often through forming and maintaining relationships with other women within the community. The Samiti influences women's decisions in terms of marriage, education and career. Through being involved in the members' families, the Samiti maintains community cohesion. If a member or someone from their family is in a medical or emotional crisis, members of the Samiti and even *Adhyapikas* from the shakha (teachers) are intimately involved with a member's relatives²⁹. Sarkar also notes that in case Samiti members lack access to a formal shakha structure, Samiti members redesign shakha activities including festivals and ceremonies in "a home-based format" similar to a "correspondence course" (200). These are also extended to newly married women who may not initially be able to be involved in shakha activities. This makes evident that the shakha, as a meeting ground, is not the only space for imagining and formulating the ideal female nationalist subject, but that this extends into home space. Moreover, draws attention to the fact that Samiti maintains a localized, regional structure, maintaining close-knit ties amongst members and enmeshed within existing social networks of families, relatives and friends.

The Sangh and the nation are collapsed into the family sphere and destabilize binaries between a domestic, non-political private sphere opposed to a national, political public sphere. Hindu nationalist women are crucial to this network as

²⁹ For instance, if someone from a Samiti member's family is ill, "Samiti members take turns cooking and nursing" (201).

mothers imbuing samskaras, a sense of nationalist patriotic/piety, in their children. Within this framework the development of nationalist motherhood also involves instilling tradition, history and a political consciousness in women, with the intention that they would impart them to their children. As the story of Jijabai earlier made clear, these historical narratives comprise ideas of Hindu victimhood and resistance against Muslim and Christian “Others”. Thus, the concept of samskaras seek to capture Hindu nationalist ideology, including reverence for historical figures, deities and the Sangh, all working as devotees of Bharat Mata, towards the common goal of (re)establishing the Hindu Rashtra.

Warrior Womanhood: Developing Militancy amongst the Durga Vahini

While the Samiti constitutes female political subjects as powerful mother figures, warrior womanhood is not considered contradictory to women’s roles as mothers. For instance, a document by the Samiti reads:

‘A Hindu woman is an eternal mother, a symbol of love, sacrifice, dedication, fearlessness, sanctity and devotion. The tender-hearted woman becomes bold and aggressive, if time demands.’ (Qtd in Kovacs 376)

Motherhood is considered “eternal”, alluding again to its naturalness for female actors. Moreover, mothers are again defined in terms of “inner” qualities relating to tradition and spirituality (“sanctity”, “devotion”), as affectionate (“symbol of love”, “tender-hearted”) and “sacrific[ing]”, but also in terms of fierceness (“fearlessness” “bold”, “aggressive”). Recall here the figure of Bharat Mata as maternal, suffering and benevolent but also angry and passionate. The prevalence of this image shows that in moments of urgency, when Hindu society and/or nation are under threat, that warrior womanhood becomes a requisite for women.

For Hindu nationalist groups, urgency to develop the Hindu Rashtra is at least partly defined by a rising threat of the ethnic Other. For instance, Savitri Devi, who was closely associated with the Sangh once explained the role of Hindu women in the face of a “threat” (eg. sexual violence) from the Muslim community:

‘We would first of all like...the Hindu woman to ‘feel’ personally insulted whenever they come to know of any such action; that is an insult, not merely to such and such family or person but to the Hindus as a whole. They should feel ashamed and they should feel indignant; they should promote to action their husbands, their brothers, their sons.’ (Qtd in Sethi 1548)

In this quote, it becomes apparent that cultivating Hindu womanhood involves becoming one with Hindu society, where they must “‘feel’ personally insulted” for “Hindus as a whole”. Here, women are not automatic symbols for Hindu society; that relationship must be cultivated. Women are implored to develop a sense of unity between self and society and consequently, of identical offense when either is violated or dishonored. Savitri Devi insinuates here that feelings of shame and anger must be directed at their male relatives, who were incapable of protecting Hindu society/them.

Durga and Durga Vahini

The relationship established between urgency, threat and honor are evident in the establishment of the Durga Vahini (literally: vehicles of Durga), which formally developed in the early 1990s, around the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Kovacs notes a document on the Durga Vahini which claims: “‘Today, Mother India is in danger again. And to save her, it is necessary that Durga’s power is revived”. Thus, the development of the Durga Vahini is intertwined with the notion that the “time has come”. Consider the origin story of the Durga Vahini on the VHP’s website:

The blood-stained scenario in Ayodhya on that day rather forced them [Durga Vahini] to forsake their normal

female tenderness and affinity; and assume a most
splendorous form by creating a living, sturdy womens
wall around to protect their brothers who were being
assaulted by the security forces with lathes and bullets

(vhp.org)

Here, “tenderness” and “affinity” are seen as natural for women and it is the threatening situation, to Hindu society and to their brothers, which provokes women to act and even protect them. Moreover, the above quote invokes the image of Durga (“assume a most splendorous form”). Throughout the document, and in their very name, it is clear that Durga is the ideal figure whose ferocity the Durga Vahini must cultivate. The structure of the Durga Vahini follows that of the Samiti, but with an increased emphasis on physical training, including training in martial arts, “*chhurika* (dagger wielding)” and shooting guns which are said to build their “self confidence” (vhp, Pahuja).

Durga Vahini’s motto reads “Service, Security and Sanskars³⁰”. These are overlapping categories as the organizations is not only involved in social service for orphans, women and elders but also preventing “obscenity”, conversions, and banning “vulgar posters” (vhp). This illustrates the ways in which the Durga Vahini are involved in imbuing samskaras and discipline in the community and the nation as a whole. Moreover, VHP makes evident that developing young women’s samskaras are important for the development of society at large. Nevertheless, Durga Vahini also include debates on “noble progeny” in their discussions on building the nation.

Regarding samskaras, the document also states:

Since good Sanskars are imbibed by them [Durga Vahini],
the mothers in the families also are becoming aware
about our culture and Sanskars and therethrough we are
getting succor for the formation of a healthy society. [sic]
(vhp.org)

³⁰ Common spelling of samskaras

This illustrates an inverse relation, where the organization is like a mother, imparting samskaras in the Durga Vahini and the Durga Vahini in turn are imparting samskaras in their mothers. As young women responsible for imparting samskaras in their own families and in society at large, and as militants striving to embody Durga, the Durga Vahini are based on the conjecture that “time has come”.

Women participants of the Hindu nationalist movement construe their position as nationalist mothers as a position of significant political power due to their responsibility to imbue samskaras in their children and amongst other women. Moreover, warrior womanhood is imagined as another role, or a different manifestation which is not perceived as contradictory to motherhood but extended from it. Nationalist mothers are “provoked” into taking on militant roles due to the urgency of establishing the Hindu Rashtra, that is, a threat from Muslim communities. In what follows, I further elaborate on historical narratives of oppression and the construction of a future threat which has been central on producing a sense of urgency and mobilizing Hindu nationalist subjects to commit violent acts.

III: De/Claiming the Nation

Hindu nationalist ideology propagates a narrative continuity from past oppression at the hand of Mughal and British rulers, to present oppression, primarily from Muslims in India and Pakistan. As I noted in the previous chapter, women as nationalist mothers are central in cultivating a sense of eternal Hindu oppression in the form of samskaras and highlighting a tradition of resistance. In this chapter, I

illustrate how male and female Hindu nationalist subjectivity is formulated and mobilized for large-scale acts of violence. More specifically, I will focus on the speeches and performances of Sadhvi Rithambara in the lead up to the destruction of the 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid.

Binaries of disciplined/unruly, abstinence/excess and benevolence/violence have been central to the characterization of the Hindu self opposed to a Muslim Other. Where “true” Hindus are imagined as vegetarian, monogamous and physically weak, Muslims are considered to be “gaubhakshak” (cow-eaters), polygamous and strong. Here, the stereotype of Hindu men as effeminate/Muslim men as sexual predators also reflect a similar binary of austerity/excess. The sense of protecting Hindu society, territory, nation are predicated on conceptualizing the nation as the Bharat Mata, a feminine body which has been violated and must be reclaimed. Here, I find useful Bishnupriya Ghosh’s discussion of “unruly bodies” which are also associated with excess and must be disciplined.

Ghosh argues that Hindu nationalism constructs Bharat Mata’s body, the national territory, as rendered impure, violated and dismembered, due to “foreign invasion” and the Partition. Consequently, the struggle to reclaim akhanda Bharat and establish the Hindu Rashtra are considered processes of purifying Bharat Mata’s sacred body. This struggle involves both, cleansing the polity through expelling Muslim people, as well as cleansing the territory through demolishing the Babri Masjid, which is considered a “taint” on the “sacral geography” of Bharat Mata (Ghosh 268). These again draw attention to intersecting notions of women’s honor and national honor.

Sadhvi Rithambara's ability to establish the binary of austere/excess, unruly/disciplined is particularly germane due to her own position as a celibate ascetic. Moreover, Rithambara's performances are especially important in signaling to Hindu nationalist members that the "time has come" to avenge historic injustices. This indicates that Rithambara is much like the nationalist mothers discussed in the previous chapter who are impelled to rouse male subjects to act in the face of violation. In other words, Sadhvi Rithambara's own position as a *female* ascetic, most often rousing male Hindu nationalist subjects to preserve the sanctity of Bharat Mata, becomes particularly pronounced even though she has the privileges of male speech (Ghosh 271).

In this chapter, I first expand on the relationship between sexualized bodies and national territory through analyzing the metaphors and stories which are central to Sadhvi Rithambara's speeches. Second, I discuss Sadhvi Rithambara's live and recorded performances which are central to the production of nationalist affect. Rithambara's performances are central to developing a sense of unity, anger and urgency, and thus, mobilizing Hindu nationalist subjects to commit physical acts of violence. Lastly, I will focus on Rithambara's own position as a female ascetic of the Hindu nationalist movement.

Disciplining Others

Moreover, these have been intertwined with the idea of pure Hindu women's bodies which must be preserved and protected, most often from the perception of Muslim men as hypersexual and violent. While in my first chapter, I pointed to the ways in which these anxieties have transpired in struggles against a concept of Love

Jihad, these stereotypes are also evident in controversies surrounding the consumption of Indian and Western popular media³¹. In a majority of these controversies, Hindu nationalists have also taken a position against cultural imperialism, alluding to the increase in public visibility of sex and sexuality, claiming that these are antithetical to “Indian culture”³². These illustrate attempts at essentializing Indian and Hindu culture (“us”) and demarcating it from Others through regulating portrayal of sexual bodies and desires.

Limiting the portrayal of sexualized bodies and the sexualizing gaze also intersects with disciplining ethnic Others. Paola Bacchetta has argued that both “xenophobic queerphobia”, the expulsion of self-identified queer persons to a category of “non-Indian” (alluding to same-sex relations as “brought in” by British colonialists), and “queerphobic xenophobia”, the explicit and metaphoric assignment of queer identity categories to those considered ethnic Others, are central to Hindu nationalist ideology (“Exiles its Queers” 143-144). In other words, Hindu nationalist identity depends upon two intersecting forms of Othering: first, the disciplining of “unruly” or “queer” bodies³³—“sexual outlaws who are nonproductive citizens such as

³¹ Ghosh points to disputes surrounding the legal controversy surrounding the screening of 1994 film *Bandit Queen*, the 1996 Miss World Pageant which took place in Bangalore, the television show *Baywatch* and Deepa Mehta’s 1998 film, *Fire*, which showed same sex relations between two women. (262). Hindu nationalist groups have argued that such media exhibits content of a sexual nature which is against Indian (read: Hindu) culture and a consequence of the increasing Westernization of media. For other instances of Hindu nationalist criticism of popular media, see Jefferlot

³² Most of these controversies also involve conceptions of Western media as uncultured and of Western women as immodest. These notions also have roots in the prominent in the colonial conceptions of British women as promiscuous which were also prominent in debates surrounding the “women’s question” amongst elite social reformers of the late colonial era (See Chatterjee 1989).

³³ I would like to caution, like Bacchetta and Ghosh, that the term “queer”, and especially identity categories of homosexual, gay, lesbian or trans to describe same-sex relations or, for lack of a better term, gender non-conforming persons, has a complex genealogy. These identity categories cannot be unproblematically transplanted to Third World contexts. Thus, the term queer is utilized here as a “transient theoretical measure” to refer to “dissonant-gendered” or sexed bodies (Bacchetta 144-45, Ghosh 262).

the ‘sodomite,’ the ‘prostitute,’ the ‘lesbian’”— and second, the disciplining of Hindu nationalist Others- Christians, Muslims and Westernized Indians (Ghosh 262).

Consider the case of the popular visual artist M.F Husain whose paintings of nude women were controversial, especially from the 1990s until 2006, when he moved to Qatar in self-imposed exile. Not only were his paintings condemned by the BJP and VHP, Hindu nationalist organizations such as the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal attacked his home and studio, and defaced his art works. In 2006, Husain faced legal charges for his paintings depicting nude women, interpreted as Hindu deities (Ramaswamy 5). Husain’s own position as part of the national elite (often characterized as “Westernized”) and as a Muslim, make this even more objectionable for Hindu nationalists. Multiple Hindu nationalist groups claimed that Husain’s paintings were a “cultural crime” and he “was accused of visually raping Hindu-Indian womanhood” (Ghosh 263). Reading his paintings as sexual violence draws attention to an attempt at regulating Husain’s gaze in order to preserve the sacredness of the Hindu female body.

Bharat Mata as an “Unruly Body”

Hindu nationalist action establishes a relationship between the sacred space of the Hindu woman’s body and the the sacred feminized “geo-body” of Bharat Mata (Ramaswamy 36). As I pointed out in the last chapter, the figure of the mother/goddess Bharat Mata was juxtaposed with the pre-Partition map of India, the map of akhanda Bharat. Within this narrative the Partition is conceptualized as a “dismembering” of the sacred body of Bharat Mata. Regarding the Partition, Rithambara once said: “What do we have? An India with its arms cut off” (Qtd. in

Ghosh 267). Goddesses including Bharat Mata are often depicted in Hinduism with multiple arms holding the boons the goddess bestows upon her devotees. Thus, the “we” Rithambara refers to here is Hindu society who have been estranged from the riches given to them by Bharat Mata. This also relates back to the discussion of women’s bodies as symbols of an “inner sphere”, as carriers of indigenous spirituality and tradition which endured the effects of British colonialism.

In her speeches, Sadhvi Rithambara repeatedly draws parallels between the sexual violence committed on women’s bodies and the violence of ethnic divisions committed on the feminized territory of the nation. Rithambara’s appeals are an attempt to restore the sacralized female body/nation through eliminating “the excesses that have accrued on this body” (Ghosh 265). For instance, Rithambara argued against the Mandal Commission recommendations, which extended reserved seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government education institutes³⁴, seeing it as a fragmentation of Hindu society. Similarly, Rithambara has also argued that “experiments in Hindu-Muslim unity” can be understood as “a dissection ‘carried out on the Hindu chest as if he is a frog, rabbit or cat’” (Qtd. in Ghosh 267). Here Muslim strength and violence is perpetrated against a weak or passive Hindu *body*. The animalistic imagery employed here also contrasts other images of Muslim men as animals with large appetites, sharp teeth and claws (Bacchetta 152).

The above statements illustrate Sadhvi Rithambara’s use of corporeal and animalistic metaphors to express discontent with the lost unity of Hindu society and an attempted unification of Hindus and Muslims as citizens in “secular India”. In another speech, Sadhvi Rithambara explicates the situation in Kashmir and links this

³⁴ Here I am referring to Rithambara’s disapproval of the Mandal Commission recommendations. *See for instance*, Pathak & Sengupta

to Hindus becoming a minority. She articulates these fears through simultaneously contesting Muslim personal laws which permit polygamy, claiming:

‘The state tells us Hindus to have only two or three children. After a while, they will say do not have even one. But what about those who have six wives, have thirty or thirty-five children and breed like mosquitos and flies?’

(Qtd in Ghosh 267)

Here, Rithambara not only emphasizes the threat of Muslim demographic supremacy, which I discussed in Chapter 1, but in claiming that Muslims are like “mosquitos and flies” she alludes to dengue and malaria, invoking images of disease implying that the nation has been contaminated. This becomes apparent as she follows up this statement with an image of the Indian landscape. She says:

Why should there be two sets of laws in this country?
Why should we be treated like stepchildren? I submit to you that when the Hindu in Kashmir became a minority he came to Jammu. From Jammu he came to Delhi. But you Hindus are on the run all over India, where will you go? Drown in the Indian Ocean or jump from the peaks of the Himalayas?

(Qtd in Ghosh 267)

Thus, Rithambara sutures together images of unnatural reproduction, which has an influence on the relationship of Hindus with Bharat Mata (becoming “stepchildren”), and with her geo-body (“drown[ing] in the Indian Ocean or jump[ing] from the peaks of the Himalayas”). Rithambara brings together multiple images in her oration to provoke fears of Hindus becoming a minority and develop a position on the conflict in Kashmir. The juxtaposition of animalistic, reproductive and cartographic metaphors reiterate the perception that the body of Bharat Mata is suffering due to Muslims.

Corporeal and animalistic metaphors which expound on the notion of a “sick body-politic” have also been a part of earlier Hindu nationalist rhetoric. For instance,

Bacchetta points to a statement by the prominent RSS leader, M.S Golwalkar who denounces Congress' "secular territorial nationalism" by claiming that:

It is like attempting to create a novel animal by joining the head of a monkey and the legs of a bullock to the main body of the elephant! It can only result in a hideous corpse...If at all some activity is seen in that body it is only of the germs and bacteria breeding in that decomposing corpse. And so it is that we see today the germs of corruption, disintegration and dissipation eating into the vitals of our nation for having given up the natural living nationalism the pursuit of an unnatural, unscientific and lifeless hybrid-concept of territorial nationalism

(Qtd. in Bacchetta 154)

Thus, secular territorial nationalism is perceived as a miscegenation of animal body parts which leads to the nation becoming a "decomposing corpse". Golwalkar sees the integration of Hindus and Muslims results in a monstrous nation. Conceptions of "unnatural" and "hybrid" re-emphasize that Hindus are the only legitimate, natural children of Bharat Mata. Moreover, invocation of monstrous imagery highlights anxieties surrounding the relationship between bodies and the Other's identity (Appadurai, "Dead Certainty"). This also connects the secular state to the unruliness of Bharat Mata's body/landscape.

Muslims and the Feminized Body Politic

Sadhvi Rithambara alludes to contrasting images of the Indian state as an "unruly body" and Bharat Mata as a pure, healthy, giving body in a variety of subtle metaphors. The ways in which Muslims have tainted the pure, healthy body of Bharat Mata in apparent in this popular metaphor:

Wherever I go, I say, 'Muslims, live and prosper among us. Live like milk and sugar. If two kilos of sugar are dissolved in a quintal of milk, the milk becomes sweet!' But what can be done if our Muslim brother is not behaving like sugar in milk? Is it our fault if he seems

bent on being a lemon in milk. He wants the milk to curdle. He is behaving like lemon in milk by following people like Shahabuddin and Abdullah Bukhari. I say to him, Come to your senses. The value of milk increases after it becomes sour. It becomes paneer. But the world knows the fate of the lemon. It is cut, squeezed dry and then thrown on the garbage heap. Now you have to decide whether you will act as sugar or like lemon in milk.

The parable invokes three distinct images of becoming like “us” or becoming an “Other”. “Living like milk and sugar” appears as a directive for citizens, dissenting subjects as well as minorities, who are implored to dissolve in the nation. The first expression of antagonism against Muslims appears in the fact that they have not been integrating properly, “not behaving like sugar in milk”. In the second moment, Muslims are portrayed as something different altogether and as wanting to maintain this difference, they are “bent on being a lemon in milk”. What this means is made clear with the mention of prominent Islamic “fundamentalist” figures, Shahabuddin and Abdullah Bukhari. As a different entity, they are causing the milk to change into a different dairy product, paneer. In the last image, Rithambara returns to the lemon, the consumption of which is common knowledge: “It is cut, squeezed dry and then thrown on the garbage heap”. Here, the penalty for being a different entity, as Muslims, is explained as exploitation, execution and expulsion.

Muslims are constructed not only as Others who are “among us” but also as a minority who, instead of integrating, are changing the very nature of the nation (curdling milk into paneer). Rithambara alludes to other minorities who have assimilated better than Muslims, for instance:

the sugar image evokes the reputed Parsi lore of entering India, begging for asylum, promising to dissolve among Hindus like sugar in milk, thereby sweetening the body politic but not occupying space or insisting on cultural difference. (Ghosh 268)

Furthermore, the allegory is inspired by the poetry of Tulsidas for whom lemons are symbolic of selfishness. Rithambara's invocation of lemons again alludes to the binary of Hindu benevolence opposed to Muslim selfishness.

The use of milk in this parable is also striking, considering the significance placed on cows in the Hindu/Indian imaginary. Cows have held significance in Hinduism especially due to their association with Lord Krishna, who is a cowherd and also affectionately known as *makhan chor* (butter thief). Peter van der veer also notes the importance of cows for brahminical rituals and the significance placed on the usefulness of cows in providing milk, which can be turned to other dairy products. In late colonial North India, the figure of *Gau Mata* (Mother Cow) developed in similar ways to Bharat Mata, both being nurturing, benevolent mother figures symbolic of indigenous identity.

Moreover, the cow as a divine mother goddess, also had to be protected from "beef-eating" Muslims. These notions manifested in cow protection movements in North India from 1880 to 1920, many of them organized by the "Gau Raksha Sabha" (Society for the Protection of Cows) (van der Veer 83-99; Bacchetta "Babri Masjid", 264; Gupta "Icon of Mother", 4296-7). People were mobilized to boycott Muslim shops and a variety of bills were proposed to protect cattle and curb butchers. Gendered readings of these movements also point to the prominence of the belief that cow-killing had lead to Hindu men "grow[ing] weak and poor from a lack of milk and ghee" under British colonialism³⁵. Thus, "the body of the cow itself was invested

³⁵ For instance, one member of the early Hindu nationalist organization, Hindu Mahasabha claimed:

Today our mother cow is being slain by the infidels in innumerable numbers...Our helplessness, mental weakness and physical impotency is explicitly telling us that among the many reasons for such changes [today], the main one is the decline of cow wealth

Lectures, letters and pamphlets of prominent members of the cow protection movement also used gendered imagery. For instance, one letter read:

with the divine and she herself became the proto-nation” (Gupta, “Icon of Mother” 4295). Contemporary Hindu nationalists have also organized to protect cows.

“Gau-Raksha” movements became formally organized under the VHP in the early 1990s due to the efforts of another prominent Sadhvi, Vijayraje Scindia. Earlier this year (2015), beef became banned in the states of Maharashtra and Haryana (“A Ban on Beef in India is not the Answer”).

Additionally, milk is also literally associated with Bharat Mata’s maternalism. Milk establishes an important connection between the subjects of the nation who have been birthed and nurtured by Bharat Mata. Sumathi Ramaswamy makes this evident in her analysis of an image of Bharat Mata published in *Intiya* magazine in 1909. In the image Bharat Mata appears superimposed on a map of akhanda Bharat, suckling four infants: “through suckling the shared mother’s milk...the four infant citizens are conjoined in a web of sibling intimacy that may be characterized as patriotic milk kinship” (24).

Thus, the invocation of milk in the lemon-sugar-milk parable insinuates to its association with cows and mothers. Both are venerated in their form of Gau Mata and Bharat Mata and have been important symbols of Hindu society and national subjecthood since the late colonial period. As mothers, they are considered benevolent and important for cultivating strong Hindu children, while as women, they are also associated with purity, chastity and vulnerability. Moreover, the hindi for curdled milk is also a sexual metaphor and highlights “the defiling of the feminine purity of associated with cows and milk” (Basu 166). Thus, Sadhvi Rithambara’s

Mard unhi ko janen jo rakshak hain Gau Mata ke
(We consider as men only those who are the protectors of mother
cow.)

(Qtd in Gupta 4296)

repeated iteration of this metaphor illustrates her ability to wield together powerful imagery of a body politic, imagined as a mother/goddess, infiltrated by Muslims.

Body and Territory: the Babri Masjid Agitation

Sadhvi Rithambara's call to heal the body of Bharat Mata which has become "unruly" or "sick" extends to Indian territory which is ideally imagined as akhanda Bharat. The concern over the fragmentation of Bharat Mata is not only with regards to the Indian polity but also the sacralized physical landscape. Within this rhetoric, the Babri Masjid features as a physical taint on Bharat Mata's body.

The Babri Masjid demolition took place on December 6, 1992. Militant Hindu nationalists razed the mosque using hammers, pipes and sticks in an operation which took approximately fourteen hours. The operation took place in the presence of "vastly outnumbered and out-armed police" (Bacchetta 2000, 256). Associated violence took place between Hindu and Muslim communities in various cities across India and also in immigrant communities in England. In India, the National Women's Conference reported cases of sexual violence against Muslim men and women. The BJP was voted into power in 1998, their manifesto including her commitment to constructing the Sri Ram Mandir (Rama Temple) at the site of the Babri Masjid. The significance placed on the Babri Masjid indicates its symbolic value in Hindu nationalist ideology as a physical manifestation of the perception that Hindus and Muslims are inherently different and have been eternally in conflict.

Before the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Sadhvi Rithambara delivered a famous speech inciting a large crowds of supporters in Delhi (henceforth referred to as the Babri Masjid speech). In a video of the speech, Rithambara is rousing the

audience in rhyming couplets of metaphors and stories. Interspersed within her dialogue is a call to her audience to raise their arms with her and chant after her:

“Kaho garv se! ‘Hum Hindu Hain! Hindustan humara hai!’ (Say with pride! ‘We are Hindu! *Hindustan* is ours!)”³⁶. Each time, she reminds the crowd that in demolishing the mosques, they, as Hindu nationalist subjects, are standing up against Muslims.

For instance, she poetically claims:

*Ram-Krishna-Ganga ka birodhi jo humse takrayega
woh kutte ki maut yahan par dekho mara jayega”*
(The opponents of Rama-Krishna-Ganga who challenge
us / over here, have a look, they will die a dog’s death)

and again soon after:

*Durga ke beton ko jinh ne lalkara hai, kaho garv se,
“Hum Hindu Hain! Hindustan humara hai!”*
(Those sons of Durga who have been provoked, say with
pride/ ‘We are Hindu! *Hindustan* is ours!)

In these statements Sadhvi Rithambara constructs the audience’s unity, their relationship with India and antagonism towards Muslims. Through chanting and raising her arms, Rithambara energizes the crowd and presents the territory of India (“*Hindustan*”) as the birthright of Hindus. Furthermore, she emphasizes the audience’s commitment to righteous action and antagonism towards Muslims by pitting Hindu subjects, as “sons of Durga” against Muslims who are “opponents of Rama-Krishna-Ganga”. Invoking divine figures, she reminds the audience of their religious duty while arousing feelings of aggression and strength.

In both statements she also re-articulates that Hindus have been “challenge[d]” or “provoked” by Muslims and must rise up in defense. Thus, the continued existence of the Babri Masjid is portrayed as a present-day offensive action

³⁶ In her speech she stresses the “Hindu” in *Hindustan*

of Muslim violence against Hindus. Rithambara also inserts a specific site (“over here”) where Muslims will be brutally defeated (the animalistic proverb: “die a dog’s death”). In doing so, Rithambara situates the conflict in a physical territory where Hindus can assert their dominance. Emphasizing Hindu unity and strength, Sadhvi Rithambara insinuates that reclaiming the territory would be equivalent to reclaiming the nation-space for the Hindus.

Here I find Paola Bacchetta’s analysis of the spatial significance of the Babri Masjid especially useful. Bacchetta argues that temples, within the Hindu nationalist imaginary are also constructed as an “inner”, domestic sphere, “a feminine space, an appropriate home to Hindu deities as well as Hindu nationalist sons”, in contrast to mosques which are masculine territory, associated with the body of Muslim men (“Babri Masjid”, 278). From this perspective demolishing the Babri Masjid is removing “a Muslim male body part violating the purity of the Mother(land) which Hindu males have failed to protect” and reclaiming the feminine body/territory which existed in the space (ibid., 279). Sadhvi Rithambara’s invocation of Durga in the above speech then serves not only as a reminder of the ferocity of the divine mother, but also of her purity and vulnerability which she implores the male subjects to protect. Thus, the Babri Masjid functions as both a symbol of Mughal military invasion and, in continuing to exist, a symbol of Hindu male weakness and effeminacy. From this perspective, the destruction of the mosque is more than a struggle over space but a symbolic “castration of the sexually aggressive Muslim male, and thus the restoration of Hindu male honor” (ibid.).

Producing Nationalist Affect

Throughout this chapter, I have drawn attention to Sadhvi Rithambara's speeches which imbricate the metaphoric and the real, mythic figures against the historical actors, women's bodies and Bharat Mata, akhanda Bharat against the landscape of India. Bodily and animalistic metaphors alluding to "unruly" excessive bodies and pure, disciplined bodies are juxtaposed against historical and contemporary political actors and spaces. Combining a variety of images, Rithambara constructs a narrative continuity from the Mughal era to contemporary Indian politics, urging her audience to avenge a historical subjugation of Hindus by Muslims.

Sadhvi Rithambara's ability to transmit nationalist affect through performance is crucial to her appeal and the development of Hindu nationalist subjecthood. Often speaking in rhyming couplets, in a high pitched tone, Rithambara simultaneously transmits feelings of anger, vengeance, urgency as well as those of belonging, unity and moral righteousness. For instance, in the Babri Masjid speech, Rithambara spoke strenuously, without losing her breath. Recall here that her 1992 live speech was also interactive as she asked her audience repeatedly to echo her words, "We are Hindu! Hindustan is ours!", as she raised her both her arms above her head in a symbol of unified strength. Each time, she explicitly asked them to arouse in themselves feelings of nationalist pride ("say with pride!"). Mimicking Rithambara's physical gestures and repeated utterances produces feelings of passion, collective determination and strength for her audience.

Rithambara's success in arousing feelings of nationalist reverence and devotion often depend upon the audience imitating her emotional performances.

Consider Menon's account of a speech she attended by Rithambara in 1999 regarding the Kargil War³⁷:

The large auditorium of the Constitution Club on Rafi Marg in New Delhi was filled to capacity, and yet the room was quiet as Sadhvi Rithambara's voice trembled with emotion, and tears streamed down her face. Several in the room wept along with her, caught in the spell of her powerful oratory. As she continued her speech her voice became more angry and passionate until she was almost screaming the words to a silent auditorium: 'On Islamabad's chest will rest India's flag, up till Rawalpindi and Karachi...up to the Indus River it will all become India. Then for eons and eons there will not be a devil like Jinnah. There will be a Kashmir but there will not be a Pakistan. (91)

Sadhvi Rithambara again invokes the figure of Bharat Mata, generating nationalist pride and assuring her audience of a better future. Here Rithambara, like other Hindu nationalist activists, was acting in accordance with the BJP lead initiative to focus on producing nationalist affect in the wake of the Kargil War³⁸. Rithambara construes the image of akhanda Bharat using bodily metaphors ("chest") alongside specific sites on the landscape ("Islamabad", "Indus River" etc) and the historical figure of Jinnah. Menon has argued that this speech indicated the ways in which Rithambara's speech contributes to "the processes through which individuals come to view themselves as subjects within specific ideological formations" (Menon 91). However, the audience interacts with Rithambara not only in the ideological sense but also through mimesis of her affective performance. By crying with her (in the above speech) or chanting and raising their arms along with her (in her Babri Masjid speech), the audience unintentionally reproduces Rithambara's performance. Thus,

³⁷ Armed conflict between India and Pakistan took place primarily at the Line of Control in Kargil, Kashmir from May to July 1999

³⁸ Menon notes that with the upcoming elections looming, the BJP deflected attention away from media controversies surrounding intelligence data by focusing instead on "produc[ing] nationalist affect through screening clips on national television about the soldiers who were dying in Kargil" (Menon 84)

Rithambara's bodily actions appear to be crucial for the cultivation of Hindu nationalist subjecthood as she serves as a model, making evident to the audience the affective responses they must produce.

Notice also the transformation from feelings of sorrow to the rising feelings of rage and passion. Menon describes her rising voice as reflecting the rising feelings of anger, reaching the moment when the Indian flag finally reclaims the body/territory of Bharat Mata ("on Islamabad's chest will rest India's flag"). The saffron flag and the trident (Lord Shiva's weapon) have been important symbols for multiple Hindu nationalist organizations. Ghosh observes that Rithambara's invocation of a phallic flag image "fly[ing] over the maternal body body-politic", often occurs in tandem with her rising voice. Ghosh argues: "The mounting crescendo itself performs a phallic rise, drawing to a resounding close various stories and parables..." (266). Moreover, this rising pitch of Rithambara's voice also transmits feelings of deep strain and urgency. This is also apparent in Sarkar's response to one of Rithambara's popular cassettes:

For over sixty minutes, extreme stress is continuously conveyed and the speech seems to be improvised as if on a battlefield—an inspired voice speaking recklessly from the gut (1995; 194)

These responses make clear that Rithambara's performance are important for producing feelings of passion, urgency, anger, and unity, and for guiding the audience to perform Hindu nationalist subjecthood.

Live versus Recorded Performance

The nationalist affect produced in Rithambara's live performances is crystallized in audio cassettes, and more recently, in video recordings available

online. These recordings make Rithambara's speeches a preserved artifact which changes the production of her performance, makes her accessible to diverse audiences, especially women who might not have access to her public performances. While the interactive, *maidan* (plaza) setting prompts the audience to perform in specific ways, the change in soundscape shifts the modes of interaction and the affective meanings produced for the audience. Moreover, her live performances tend to be responding to certain political situations, recorded speech allows her performance to be reproduced multiple times in different micro and macro sociopolitical contexts.

In live performances, Rithambara is most often speaking from atop a stage and is interacting most often with male Hindu nationalist members. Their collective responses, in laughter, chants or prayer, would emphasize their unity, their "patriotic milk kinship" and a collective adherence to the Hindu nationalist cause. In contrast, Rithambara's archived speeches might develop a more private relationship with the listener(s), shifting the interactivity such that the listener(s) is/are now the agent capable of regulating her speech, playing it multiple times, pausing, fast-forwarding or rewinding etc. Moreover, her performance can also be accessed in different locations which might also make different stories or metaphors more relevant. For instance, played in the car, her allusions to the moral decay of everyday life could become more salient while played in the home, her invocation of domestic politics and metaphors become more powerful and enhance her appeal for women.

While so far, I have noted multiple situations where her call to action is directed to the sons of Bharat Mata, Rithambara does not sever women's relationship with Bharat Mata and emphasizes their significance for the Hindu nationalist

movement. In a speech establishing soldiers who died in the Kargil War as martyrs who sacrificed for Bharat Mata, Rithambara praises their mothers and widows, saying:

Our greatest respects at the feet of those who gave their lives at the feet of Bharat Mata. We salute that mother's womb, that mother's lap, that mother's love, her affection, in whose shadow our country's brave soldiers learned to sacrifice for their motherland. We salute those widows who laid their *sindhuri* (married) nights, their happy days, at the feet of Bharat Mata.

(Qtd in Menon 90)

Here, Rithambara is drawing a parallel between the “feet of Bharat Mata” and the “feet”, “womb[s]” and “lap[s]” of nationalist mothers who have produced and nurtured soldiers who fight for the protection of their collective mother, Bharat Mata. Moreover, Rithambara not only extolls the mothers who have cultivated male Hindu nationalist subjects but also the sacrifice of wives, alluding to sexual metaphors (“*sindhuri* nights, their happy days”). Here, it becomes apparent that women's roles, as benevolent, sacrificing mothers and wives are significant for the Hindu nationalist movement. Recall also Rithambara's statement regarding her own relationship with her mother: “If Shahabuddin has drunk his mother's milk, I have also drunk my mother's milk” which I cited earlier. Here, it can also be inferred that Rithambara is also alluding to the importance of her own mother in cultivating in her a Hindu nationalist subjecthood. In this sense, she is similar to Hindu nationalist mothers, goading on male subjects to rise to restore the “unruly” body of Bharat Mata yet recognizing the contribution of the daughters of Bharat Mata in their roles as mothers and wives.

The significance of these statements in Rithambara's speech not only draw attention to Rithambara's own position, as a woman renouncer, but also point to her

appeal to women, and relatedly to families. Besides praising women for their association with the Hindu nationalist project, Rithambara also weaves in domestic metaphors and politics in her speeches. Recall here the lemon-sugar-milk parable which invokes a common domestic scene. Listening to a metaphor based on making paneer produces different affects for a male audience gathered at Rithambara's live performance, for whom this activity might be more distant, than for a female audience listening to the parable at home, for whom this activity would be more familiar. Considering the intermeshed, family like network within which Hindu nationalist organizations operate, these cassettes allow Sadhvi Rithambara to become a familiar, household name.

Renunciation and Politics

Central to Sadhvi Rithambara's powerful position in Hindu nationalist movements is her role as an ascetic. Ascetic men and women (Sadhus or Sadhvis respectively) are dedicated to achieving *mokṣa*, liberation from *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). Theoretically, Sadhus and Sadhvis are supposed to live in austerity, devoid of material attachments and away from society to achieve this goal through meditation. Sadhvis and Sadhus from Hindu nationalist and other organizations have argued against this concept in a variety of ways. Kalyani Devaki Menon shows that Sadhvi Rithambara draws on the Bhagavad Gita (hereafter the 'Gita'), a Hindu scripture which part of the epic, *Mahabharata*, to argue that her political action is inspired by sacred duty. She says:

To live in the face of death? To live in the world and yet be free from the world? Have we ever fulfilled our duty by sitting in the forest? This is why even renouncers have to help society while staying free of human affairs (*insani batein*). We have to fulfill our duty/responsibility (*daitva*)

not run away from it. We should not run away from problems. Today it is very important for India (*Bharat*) to understand the message of the Gita (Qtd in Menon 80)

The above quote makes evident that for Rithambara sociopolitical involvement and action are essential features of the spiritual path and do not impede Sadhvis from remaining detached from the material world. The message of the Gita here achieves two ends: it inspires Hindu citizens of India to take seriously their (religious) duty towards the nation and also serves to justify her own position as a renouncer in the Hindu nationalist movement.

The relationship between political action and renunciation which Sadhvi Rithambara advocates can be understood as an extension of the value of *seva* (service). The relationship between renunciation, community service and political action was also a crucial for anti-colonial nationalist figures in the late nineteenth century. For instance, Swami Vivekananda “argued that renouncers should participate in the religious and cultural revival of the nation and engage in efforts to ameliorate the socioeconomic conditions of the country” and made *seva* a requirement at his monastic organization, the Ramakrishna Order (Menon 86). The association between renunciation and political action was also central to M.K Gandhi’s anti-colonial nationalist project. Gandhi too considered the Gita an important text for mobilizing nonviolent action (Menon 87).

The image of Gandhi as simple and selfless was appealing to diverse religions, classes, castes and regions. Gandhi’s ascetic lifestyle was important for the creation of a supra-local, Indian national identity. Sadhvis and RSS *pracharaks* (preachers) also appear to be committed to be beyond selfish pursuits and committed to a larger, objective out of religious duty. This is important as Sadhvis also want to gather

people across caste, class and region to congeal a “mega-ethnic grouping”, a national scale Hindu identity (Appadurai, “Dead Certainty”, 277).

This prominence of Sadhvi Rithambara and other female ascetics suggests that it is not simply the ascetic lifestyle but also their femaleness which accords them a powerful position in the Hindu nationalist movement. Following Amrita Basu’s argument, I would contend that, for one, the sexuality of Sadhvis is conceived of as less dangerous than that of other women due to their celibacy (Basu 162). Sadhvis are conceived of as chaste and pure which endows them with a moral authority. Moreover, Sadhvi Rithambara is similar to nationalist mothers in that she uses her position as a woman to goad male subjects to protect and reclaim Bharat Mata’s lost honor. This was evident in her Babri Masjid speech, Rithambara roused the male subjects by urging them to dispel their weaknesses and demonstrate their collective unity and aggression through direct action. However, as a renouncer of the material world, she is also not required to adhere to gender specific conventions with regards to family, intimacy, marriage and domestic space. Her performance further illustrates a transgression of sex-typed roles where Rithambara is granted the privileges of male speech, evident in her use of violent metaphors, aggression and sexual innuendoes and aggression to depict Bharat Mata.

Within the Hindu nationalist narrative, Muslims are construed as past oppressors from the Mughal era as well as a future threat due to their perceived appeasement by the Indian secular state. These images which arouse feelings of anger and powerful resistance are juxtaposed with images of feminine purity, the disciplined body of Bharat Mata and other divine mothers, which fuel feelings of

belonging and righteousness. Here, “the idealized sacral body of the motherland is always the *nostalgic dream*” (emphasis mine, 265). Thus, Rithambara is involved in constructing an imagined national future, the Hindu *Rashtra*, which is concurrently the revival of a “glorious past”.

Conclusion

I was inspired to write this project after watching the film, *The World Before Her* by Nisha Pahuja. The film juxtaposes the Miss India Beauty Contest against the Durga Vahini. I was interested in the motivations for the participants to be actively involved in a movement that has long been associated with violence. Moreover, considering the context of the Narendra Modi’s elections, I was especially interested in the sociopolitical contexts which inspire citizens to be involved in a nationalist movement.

Throughout the process of researching and writing this project, there have been numerous riots instigated against Muslim communities, churches have been attacked, there has been increased censorship of popular media, bills proposing a ban on forced conversions and the more recent ban on beef. Looking to the gendered formation of the Hindu nationalism movement, the roles women occupy within it and its relationship to past and present violence has been an important process, relevant in the current Indian context. Moreover, these have given me insight into the theories of exclusion and inclusion, ideologies of territorial nationalism and the colonial histories of the movement.

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