

Epic legacies: Hindu cultural nationalism and female sexual identities in India 1920-1960

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Epic Legacies: Hindu Cultural Nationalism and
Female Sexual Identities in India
1920-1960

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own, and that work published and unpublished by others has been clearly referenced.

Signed:.....

Contents

1. Acknowledgments
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
48. Prologue: Present Misery For Past Glory, Or, Delight and Disgust: Hindu Women in the work of William Jones and James Mill
83. Chapter One: The Object of Controversy: (Re) Forming Hindu Women
163. Chapter Two: The Epic Model of Chastity
192. Chapter Three: *The Finest Flower of Indian Heritage and Culture*: Exploring the Context and Location of C. Rajagopalachari's Epics
245. Chapter Four: 'Woman But Not Female': The Epic Model of Chastity in C. Rajagopalachari's *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*
321. Conclusion
331. Bibliography

Acknowledgements

My maternal grandmother Satya was married at sixteen and had to change her first name to one chosen by her in-laws when she did so. She lived in Lahore and in the great migration of August 1947 became a refugee with millions of others. She settled in Delhi, along with her three small children and husband. She lost everything in the Partition, and I do not think she ever recovered from the experience. My paternal grandmother Leela was married at thirteen, had her first child at fourteen, and was widowed by the age of thirty-five with five children. She always wore white, she never re-married or worked. Neither of them ever spoke about their experiences or what they had lived through. This thesis is, in part, their story.

I would like to thank Bill Schwarz who took a floundering student and project and turned them both into something good.

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This thesis is for my mother Meera 1947 -2004.
Thank you for staying with me.

Abstract

Epic Legacies: Hindu Cultural Nationalism and Female Sexual Identities in India, 1920-1960

The thesis investigates the cultural interventions of Hindu nationalist, C. Rajagopalachari (CR), by offering a close reading of his re-tellings of the Hindu epics, *The Mahabharata* (1951) and *The Ramayana* (1956). It positions them alongside the writings of M. K. Gandhi and the key responses to Katherine Mayo's controversial text *Mother India* (1927). The thesis explores the central female protagonists of the epics – Sita and Draupadi – asking how these poetic representations illuminate the ways in which femininity was imagined by an influential Hindu ideologue during the early years of Indian Independence.

Using close textual analysis as my principal method I suggest that these popular-literary representations of sexual identities in Hindu culture functioned as one means by which Hindu nationalists ultimately sought to regulate gender roles and modes of being. I focus on texts emerging in the years immediately before and after Independence and Partition. In this period, I suggest, the heroines of these versions of the epic texts are divested of their bodies and of their mythic powers in order to create pliant, de-sexualised female icons for women in the new nation to emulate.

Through an examination of the responses to Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), and of Gandhi's writings, I argue that there one can discern an attempt in the Hindu Indian script to define female sexual identity as maternal, predominantly in service to the nation.

These themes, I argue, were later articulated in CR's recasting of the Hindu epics. CR's epics represent the vision of gender within Hindu nationalism that highlights female chastity in the epics, elevating female chastity into an authentic and perennial virtue. I argue, however, that these 'new' representations in fact mark a re-working of much older traditions that carries forward ideas from the colonial period into the period of Independence. I explore this longer colonial tradition in the Prologue, through a textual analysis of the work of William Jones and James Mill.

Thus my focus concerns the symbolic forms of the nation – its mythologies and icons – as brought to life by an emergent Hindu nationalism, suggesting that these symbolic forms offer an insight into the gendering of the independent nation. The epics represented an *idealised* model of Hindu femininity. I recognise, of course, that these identities are always contested, always unfinished. However I suggest that, through the recasting of the epic heroines, an idea of female sexuality entered into what senior Hindu nationalist and Congressman, K.M. Munshi, called 'the unconscious of India'.

Introduction

(i) Research Questions and Method

This thesis explores the connection between emergent Hindu nationalism and the cultural representation of female sexual identities.

The thesis traces the nexus of concerns around the representation of the female body and women's identities in India between 1920 and 1960, and attempts to explore through close textual reading of a Hindu nationalist version of the epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* by C. Rajagopalachari (CR), the idea that the iconic main female protagonists, Sita and Draupadi, were subject to a 'strategy of disembodiment' and that this strategy had implications for the way in which women were represented in nationalist discourses in modern India. My research attempts to expose how the re-worked epics conceived of women's identities and sexual identities in these influential stories, and considers the role of these re-worked identities in the cultural discourses of Hindu nationalism.

The 'strategy of disembodiment' is a literary technique whereby these, and other important female figures are actually disembodied. For example, the author relates that they are turned to stone, made of mist, or are illusions; their bodies are obscured by clouds or fragrances; or they are silenced by having words put into their mouths.

A close-reading of the episodes where 'strategies of disembodiment' occur in the re-told epics can be understood as signals of the attempts by ideologues of Hindu nationalism to organise symbolically the representation of female sexual identities. The thesis explores

the idea that, by representing the (disembodied) epic heroines as cultural icons for emulation by women in the new nation, the texts contributed to the shaping of a female identity that was de-sexualised and in service to the masculine priorities of the nation, for example as guardians of culture in the home, or as chaste nationalist mothers.

A further question that emerges through the close-reading of the epics and the other texts in this thesis is: how was the contest between nationalism and sexuality presented? I wish to engage with the idea that, to some extent, nationalism is always gendered and 'sexualised': all nationalist projects attempt to mobilise men and women in different ways, and may call upon a range of gendered images, for example, heroic men, or self-sacrificing women. The literary analysis of the texts presented in the thesis studies how those gendered images underwrote the idea of the new nation, and further questions how the contest between nationalism and sexuality manifested itself as twentieth-century nationalists, for example CR, began to develop a Hindu nationalist version of a new culture for India.

I plan to examine renditions of two of the most important symbolic manifestations of Hindu culture – the epics – as re-told by eminent politician, freedom-fighter and Hindu nationalist, C. Rajagopalachari (1879 – 1972). In doing this, I will attempt to investigate the connection between emergent Hindu nationalism and the representation of women and female sexual identities

The thesis also explores some of the other discourses, texts, ideas and images that emerged from the arena of Hindu nationalism between 1920 and 1960 in order to ask what the connections are between the values of Hindu nationalism and the suppression of women's sexual identities in India. I propose to investigate these connections through

close textual reading and literary analysis of certain key texts written by Indian men who identified themselves as speaking for the nation and contributing to the formation of a new national culture for India. Part of the content of this new culture was the setting of the boundaries for female behaviour and identity.

In this Introduction, I will offer some of the historical definitions of nationalism and Hindu nationalism, and then go on to map out a theoretical framework for the literary analysis of texts that follow in the thesis. I will then conclude by discussing my choice of texts and anticipate some of the arguments that follow.

(ii) Nationalism

Historian Eric Hobsbawm asserts that:

there is no *a priori* definition of what constitutes a nation.¹

He begins by asking the question ‘What is a (or the) nation?’ He identifies a key element in the constitution of the nation – that is that the claims of the group who belong to it purport to exist in a way that is fundamental and primary, even though ‘the nation’ is a relatively new formation. Hobsbawm argues that despite attempts to establish a central criteria for nationalism – such as language, or common geographical space, or a common history or culture – these components, singularly or combined do not provide a

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

satisfactory definition.² There is a good reason for this: ‘nations’ are essentially unstable categories in themselves, being:

historically novel, emerging, changing, and even today far from universal entities.³

As such they are very difficult to fit into categories or definitions that are permanent and universal. In addition the criteria of language and culture are themselves unstable, shifting and ambiguous⁴ and this makes the nation ‘unusually’ convenient for competing discourses to invest with value and meaning. This is what we see happening as the new nation of India comes into being: there are competing discourses vying for control over content and meaning of the new national culture, of which the discourse of Hindu nationalism is one.

Though there are arguments for defining a nation by ‘its members’ consciousness of belonging to it’,⁵ Hobsbawm rejects this, which brings us back to his first assertion – that there is no *a priori* definition of ‘nation’.

He does, however, turn to the definitions supplied by anthropologist Ernest Gellner to discuss some terms of nationalism. He establishes that ‘nation’ is neither primary, nor unchanging, that it belongs exclusively to a specific and historically recent period, and, again quoting Gellner, that

there is an element of artifact, invention and social engineering

² Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 5.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 8.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 6.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 8.

which enters the making of nations.⁶

This is important because the idea that nations are a somehow divinely ordained way of classifying groups, that they have some inherent political destiny is a myth. Nations, as both Gellner and Hobsbawm emphasise, are contemporary constructions based on the re-working of pre-existing cultures or even the invention of completely new cultures – a process that often obliterates what has gone before it.⁷ Keeping this in mind, it is possible to see in emergent Hindu nationalist practices, such as the versions of the epics examined here, an attempt to re-work certain cultural traditions to create new national culture for India, and to establish them as having always existed, and having the meanings embedded in them, that they do in their nationalist incarnations.

One conclusion is that nationalisms (based on the re-working of culture) come before nations:

nations do not make states and nationalisms, but the other way around.⁸

The texts explored in this thesis are good examples of this. Using an authoritative voice they attempted to create a new national culture for India, one that had the appearance of tradition but was invested with contemporary values. The Hindu nation to which this culture belonged was seen as something that had always been there, suppressed by foreign invasion, but now ready to emerge with its ancient values intact. Actually

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1983), pp. 48-9, cited in Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 10.

⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1983), pp. 48-9, cited in Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 10.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 11.

though, it was a new national culture, with the appearance of tradition, but invested with contemporary values.

Hobsbawm is careful to point out however, that official state ideologies about the nation, national culture and the role of citizens, ideologies that are articulated in texts such as CR's *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, for example, are not guides to what is in the mind of each individual citizen – that would be impossible. This means it is also impossible to assume that the identification with the values of the nation excludes other types of identification for most people, and also that even where people do identify with the nation, this identification can change, even quite suddenly. In addition, identification with the values of the nation is always combined with identification and loyalty to other groups, structures and ideas.⁹

Hobsbawm's recognition that national identity is made up of many different loyalties, 'belongings and affiliations', seems to reflect in some ways alternative discourses, including feminist discourses, which recognise the desired hegemony of the elites. This hegemony historically ignores or marginalises the roles and voices of women, minorities and Others, that are nevertheless influential in the shaping of history.¹⁰ His point, referenced above, that identification with the values of the nation is not necessarily the only or the dominant identification, but is one of a set of identifications also echoes some of the concerns of alternative discourses. Feminist theorists Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary-Ann Tétreault observe however, that Hobsbawm's argument in *Nations and Nationalisms* does not make the distinction between 'civic and ethnic nationalism', nor does it address the question of gender. It is worth quoting their critical point in full:

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations...* p. 11.

¹⁰ Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault eds., *Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 26.

[*Nations and Nationalism*] does not explore the ways in which overlapping identities of class, citizenship and religion might interact with and support each other; nor does it question whether the range of overlaps may be more circumscribed or expanded for certain sectors of the population than for others. Most obviously, gender is never mentioned, and the impression is left that either women and men experience national identity similarly, given similarities of class and background (or less generously that women are simply irrelevant to the study of nationalism).

Nilsson and Tétreault do concede though that Hobsbawm's analysis implicitly signposts a central dilemma in the study of gender and nationalism by recognising the difficulty of analysing 'the view from below' that is, what ordinary people think and feel about the nation.¹¹

Perhaps one of the most influential theories of the nation in contemporary scholarship is Benedict Anderson's. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues that the nation is a cultural construct, a construct that is collectively imagined by all those engaging in certain shared experiences – education, visual or aural exposure to the same kinds of media, attending the same cultural institutions – 'sharing the same mental map of the nation and its surrounding world'.¹² In addition, nations are always imagined as limited: they do not imagine all members of the human race one day belonging to them in the way a religion does, they are imagined as sovereign: free to govern themselves by their own rules and values, and they are imagined as communities, which Anderson defines as a 'deep horizontal comradeship...a fraternity.'¹³

¹¹ Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault eds., *Women, States and Nationalisms*... p. 27.

¹² Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlör, 'Asia in Theories of Nationalism and National Identity', in John Hutchinson and A. D. Smith eds., *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol. III (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 848.

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso, 1991).

This notion of fraternity cannot help but raise questions of gender. Andrew Parker *et al.* see this observation as raising the issue of gender and sexuality.¹⁴ Further, in Anderson's comparison of national identity with gender identity,¹⁵ they see a crucial definition being articulated: that national identity, like gender, is based on difference.¹⁶

However, there is an argument to be made for the use of the term 'fraternity' and thereby Anderson's theory of nations as being exclusive of women. Though the idea of the nation as an imagined community is a powerful one – one that opens the way for the discussion of the cultural imperatives of nationalism, and allows for the discussion of the symbols and images mobilised by the nationalist project – it also raises some urgent questions about gender:

If the nation is imagined as a 'deep horizontal comradeship', a 'fraternity', ready to die for one another, how *do* men and how *can* women belong to the national 'fraternity'? In what ways is the imagined community of the nation gendered? When and how do women participate in the imagining?¹⁷

Nilsson and Tétreault also comment that:

If, as *Imagined Communities* suggests, the 'nation' fuses the past and the future, how do other forms and practices of communal transcendence (e.g. the family, sexual behaviours, reproduction) connect to the nation?¹⁸

The discussion of some of the critical theory that follows attempts to provide a

¹⁴ Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Somner and Patricia Yeager, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London, Routledge, 1992).

¹⁵ '...in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nation just as he or she 'has' a gender.' Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Somner and Patricia Yeager, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, p.5.

¹⁷ Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault eds., *Women, States and Nationalisms...* p. 29.

¹⁸ Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault eds., *Women, States and Nationalisms...* p. 30.

framework for the close-reading of the texts studied in the thesis to address this point. Before turning to these, however, there is one more observation on Anderson's work that should be acknowledged. Partha Chatterjee's argument with Anderson is based on the point made in *Imagined Communities* that the historical experience of nationalism in western Europe, in the Americas, and in Russia had supplied for all subsequent nationalisms the model from which nationalist elites in Africa and Asia had chosen the ones that were useful and appropriate to them. Chatterjee's central objection to Anderson's theory, is that if the rest of the world is obliged to choose nationalisms from the models made available to them by the west, what, as he puts it, 'do they have left to imagine?'¹⁹

By making Europe and America 'the only true subjects of history', the originators of even those forms of nationalism which must be considered forms of resistance to the imperial project and at their very heart anti-colonial, nationalism in the postcolonial world could be seen as an extension of the colonial project.²⁰

Instead, Chatterjee argues, the basis of many key nationalisms in Asia and in Africa is difference: difference from western forms of society and difference with western culture. His development of this argument is absolutely central to understanding the texts explored in this thesis, and it is considered in some detail in the theoretical section below.

(iii) Hindu Nationalism

Historian Christophe Jaffrelot offers a useful historical definition of what is meant by

¹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995), p.5.

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments...* p. 5.

Hindu nationalism. His first important point is that Hindu nationalism is a modern phenomenon, that it was constructed as an ideology between the 1870s and the 1920s and that it was in the 1920s the doctrine was crystalised. This point is reflected by the chronology of the texts examined in this thesis.²¹

Jaffrelot argues that the modern Hindu nationalist movement does not accurately resemble the original characteristics of Hinduism which easily integrated and adapted itself due to a special process he calls ‘traditional Indian xeneology’: a world view which was based on Brahmanic superiority and disregarded any Other. This world view allowed for assimilation of all foreign elements, and admitted only to the uniqueness of the Brahmin texts and the Sanskrit language as being in a direct and influential relationship with the laws of the universe: this is *dharmā*.²² In addition, Jaffrelot also points out that the term ‘Hindu’ was the original designation of those people living beyond the Indus river, and that these people did not term themselves as such until the medieval period.²³

Because it did not admit to any Other at this stage, the community did not need to define itself as a collective with a coherent, shared, identity. Though Jaffrelot points to evidence of Brahmin resistance to incursions on sacred practices by Others and outsiders, such as cow slaughter, he asserts that it is almost ‘impossible to detect’ any form of communal identity before 1860.

Jaffrelot admits that this hypothesis means that the collective identity we associate with Hindu nationalism ‘originates directly in received cultural elements such as religion and

²¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925-1990. Strategies of Identity Building, Implantation and Mobilisation (with special reference to Central India)* (London, Hurst & Co., 1996), p. 5.

²² Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*... p. 2.

²³ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* ... p. 4.

language'. Though, as a historian, he indicates he will not discuss this aspect, he recognises that such elements do play a role in the formation of nationalist identities, 'but only after passing through a process of re-interpretation',²⁴ and it is this point that is central to the texts studied in this thesis: evidence of re-interpretation can clearly be seen when the texts considered in this thesis are exposed to scrutiny. They are examples of the re-working of tradition, in order to build a new national culture that was at once contemporary and yet rooted in ancient values.

Jaffrelot suggests that re-interpretation, or re-organisation, was launched as a response to a series of threats, real and imagined. Historically these are identified as three kinds of threat: the threat of a militant Muslim minority, of Christian missionaries, and the impact of imperial rule.²⁵ Cultural re-organisation took the form of 'stigmatising and emulating' these Others, and Hindu identity was to be defined in opposition to them, by drawing on ancient cultural values located in the Vedic so-called 'Golden Age' while at the same time assimilating those cultural features of the Other which were considered useful for the contemporary formation of the new nation.²⁶

I explore one influential formation of the 'Golden Age' theory in the Prologue to this thesis, suggesting that the 'Golden Age' theory had its roots in Orientalist writings about India. The theory surfaces again in the responses to *Mother India* in Chapter Two, in Gandhi's mobilisation of the epic women in Chapter Three, and of course in the paratexts of CR's re-worked epics – themselves narrations ostensibly located in that Golden era.

²⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* ... p. 5.

²⁵ The analysis of cultural historians and theorists opens out this historical argument to the consideration of gender, and adds other perceived threats to these, for example the threat of the emancipated or westernised woman and the related threat of the disintegration of the family. This introduction goes on to address these wider points.

²⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* ... p.6.

The 'Golden Age' theory had very specific implications for women. Their elevated status in the ancient past was a symbol of the civilised nature of Hindu society, and their humiliating status in the present, that is, in the nineteenth century when debates about reform for women emerged, was a direct result of foreign invasions. Jaffrelot identifies the use of the 'Golden Age' as one of the cornerstones of emergent nationalism.²⁷ It is the 'Golden Age' theory that also points to the beginnings of a connection between the term 'Hindu' and its religious imagery and practices, and a particular type of nationalism.

(iv) Nationalism and Religion in India

Although the theories cited so far in this introduction – those of Anderson, Jaffrelot and Hobsbawm – define nationalism as being an entirely modern phenomenon, historian A.D. Smith offers a different theory when considering the relationship between nationalism and religion. His focus is the historical and social origin of nations. Rather than describe society as 'traditional' (religious) or 'modern' (nationalistic), Smith points to the similarity in the desires of modern nationalism and the organisation of ethnic communities even in the pre-modern period. This accounts for the proliferation of myths, symbols, rituals and cultural practices, all signifiers of the ethnic group, which are adopted in the construction of the modern nation.²⁸

Smith posits that the formation of the modern nation was enabled by the existence of a relatively homogenous core set of cultural references. While the multiplicity of traditions and practices in Indian may problematise this point, it is certainly possible to apply what

²⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement...* p. 11.

²⁸ A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-8 & 64-9.

follows from it:

that the nature of modern nations is at best understood by examining their antecedent cultural attributes of memory, myth and symbol embodied in customs and traditions.²⁹

It is possible to attempt an understanding of the nature of Hindu nationalism by looking at the epics, those rich sources of memory, myth and symbol, and investigating what their re-worked images might represent for women in the new India.

Returning to Eric Hobsbawm's theory of nationalism, Hobsbawm offers that the link between religion and national consciousness can be very strong. He also suggests that this link functions best when nationalism becomes a force of the masses, rather than when it is a minority movement.³⁰ Hobsbawm reminds us that religion is an ancient and proven way of establishing a common bond between those who may have nothing else in common, and that while religion *per-se* may not be a mark of proto-nationalism, the images and cultural practices belonging to religion are a key factor:

the holy icons on the other hand, are a crucial component [of proto-nationalism] as they are of modern nationalism. They represent symbols and rituals or common collective practices which alone give palpable reality to otherwise imaginary communities.³¹

Significantly, Hobsbawm identifies the religious icons most useful to the nationalist

²⁹ This reading of A.D. Smith from Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab*: Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia, Vol. 8 (London, Routledge, 2000), p.15.

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms*...p.67.

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*...p.71. Hobsbawm is arguing for the religious icons of Christianity, but his point is relevant when applied to India. A.D. Smith makes this point with specific reference to India and Indian nationalism giving the example of Hindu nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak's use of the figure of the goddess Kali: A.D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London, Duckworth, 1971), p.18.

project as those associated both with the land, and with a claim to the ruling of that land, icons that are,

associated with a state, i.e. in the pre-national phase, with a divine or divinely imbued king or emperor whose realm happens to coincide with a future nation.³²

It is a logical step to apply this particular part of Hobsbawm's discussion on religion and nationalism to the ideas in the texts that this thesis covers. There are many connections between the key texts, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, that fulfill Hobsbawm's criteria. Not only do both epics speak of the ancient divine rulers of India but Gandhi actually used the *Ramayana* to talk about a new age for India, particularly in his speeches to women, when he used the term *Ramaraj*, the new rule of Rama.³³ In addition, the 'Golden Age' theory of Hindu culture makes claims for the historical veracity of the epics, a point explored in the Prologue to the thesis.

Historian Peter Van Der Veer argues that religious identities were transformed in the colonial and postcolonial periods in the context of the rise of nationalism. He suggests that religious discourse was actually a major force in the constitution of changing social identities in the late colonial and the postcolonial period, and that, in India, religious identities are not 'primordial attachments', but are the specific result of changing forms of religious organisation, one of which is religious nationalism: an organisation that 'articulates discourse on the religious community and discourse on the nation'.³⁴ In this

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*... p.72.

³³ See: M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Press, 1969), Vol. XXXII, [229], p. 538.

³⁴ Peter Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (London, university of California Press, 1994), p. x.

sense, the identity considered 'Hindu' in modern India has been influenced by the social processes that can be in the service of nationalism: culture, education and media, so that what is considered 'Indian' relies on symbols, images and practices drawn from the Hindu religion. Van Der Veer also comments that:

Hindu religious traditions have, from the start, been creatively used for the construction of the idea of an Indian nation.³⁵

Harnik Deol picks up this point in his discussion of the Punjab. He observes that from its inception, Indian nationalism has been 'suffused' with images that reflect a glorious Hindu past. However, the purpose of using Hindu images was not to speak only to Hindus, but to use culturally familiar icons and images to galvanise the people, whatever their religion, into anti-colonial protest. He makes the connection between Indian nationalism and Hindu culture:

The dominant version of Indian nationalism, articulated by leaders of the Indian national congress imagined an Indian nation cast in the idiom of the majority Hindu religious tradition. Thus the Hindu religion formed the basis of Indian national identity.³⁶

Deol considers the special nature of the relationship between religion and nationalism in India. It is commonly held that with the emergence of the 'scientific state', and the onset of the practices of modernity that accompany nationalist discourses, religious modes of thought go into decline. This is not the case with India, where religion remained 'the dominant social bond' that defined the character of the new nation, and that flourished in

³⁵ Peter Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*...p.12.

³⁶ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*...p. 26.

tandem with the development of parliamentary democracy.³⁷

Deol also points to the importance of recognising that enhanced means of communication in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century facilitated the spread of religious culture, and that in India, this contributed to the rise of national consciousness. In agreement with Partha Chatterjee, Deol considers Indian nationalism as distinct from western forms of nationalism, but for this reason: that the apparatus of modernity, particularly of enhanced communication and print culture enabled the growth of a religious framework within which nationalism could operate.³⁸ The epics and the Hindu rhetoric contained in the responses to Katherine Mayo do come under the banner of print culture, and their dissemination both as books and through newspapers (CR's epics began life as weekly installments in the weekly paper *Kalki*) are credible examples of Deol's theory.

Deol, using the historian's perspective, stays close to Chatterjee (discussed in detail below) in his point that leading ideologues of nationalism in India disparaged the spiritual poverty of life in the west. They believed it was possible to create a modern nation-state while at the same time preserving a 'vigorous private and public religious life'.³⁹ Though he does not indicate, as Chatterjee convincingly does, how this was effected, he does make the point that the modern nation-state was not constituted by a decline in religious influence, but that rather:

the nationalist movement was characterised by religious reform.⁴⁰

³⁷ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*...p.9 & p.18.

³⁸ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*...p.22.

³⁹ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*... p.26.

⁴⁰ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*... p.26.

In this context 'reform' can be taken to mean the kind of re-working suggested by Jaffrelot, Hobsbawm, and especially Chatterjee. The epics are excellent examples of this, as are the responses to Katherine Mayo that call for a re-invigorated Hinduism to counter the anti-Hindu accusations in Mayo's book.

Deol makes a further point about the connection between Indian-ness and Hindu religious nationalism. He suggests that the dominant version of Indian nationalism, even as imagined by the Indian National Congress, from its very beginning combined the discourses of the nation-state and of the majority Hindu tradition so that they were inseparable.⁴¹ In addition, Indian nationalism, which conceived of the nation as Hindu, denied not only the caste and sectarian differences among the Hindus, but also obstructed the identities of other religious traditions:

Even anti-Brahmanical religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were claimed to be part of the Hindu rashtra, or 'nation' on the grounds that they originated in India.⁴²

Anthropologist and activist Madhu Kishwar also comments on this strategy. She points out that pre-nationalism, which for her purpose is the pre-colonial period, the diverse groups that occupied India were able to co-exist because, unlike the European model, there was no centrally organising religious authority. Kishwar argues that this implies that communities were independent of political elites, and that religious and secular domains also remained somewhat segregated.⁴³ She observes that with the advent of nationalist thought in the nineteenth century came the potential for violence in the name

⁴¹ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India...* p. 40.

⁴² Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India...* p. 29.

⁴³ Madhu Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xiv.

of the nation. One of the key features of the combination of religion and nationalism in India for Kishwar, is the desired reach of the modern nation-state 'into every aspect' of a citizen's life, and its ability to subsume the minority group under its own umbrella.⁴⁴ Kishwar argues that in order to exert its influence over the widest possible majority, the Hindu nationalist rationale decreed that Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains were not really different from Hindus, or, in any case, were converts from Hinduism, and that they then supported this argument with the addition that the term 'Hindu' is not a religious marker but a cultural one, denoting all the people of India, those who live beyond the Sindhu river.⁴⁵

All of these historical concepts of nation and nationalism do not, however, take into account the central place of gender to theories of nationalism.

This is considered in the following section.

(v) Gender and Nationalism

This thesis considers the ways in which women's sexual identities in India were subject to attempts at control and regulation. The arguments that follow outline a framework for the close-reading of the texts examined in this thesis and consider a number of questions: on what grounds did these attempts take place? What kinds of women were envisaged as being subject to them? Why is it important to talk about the regulation of sexual identities?

⁴⁴ Madhu Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism...* p. xviii.

⁴⁵ Madhu Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism...* p. xviii.

Behind the attempts to control, regulate and represent Indian women, Mary E. John and Janaki Nair point to a ‘conspiracy of silence’⁴⁶ regarding sexuality and sexual identities. They suggest that the debate on sexual identity is a crucial yet neglected field in discussions about sexuality in India, and call for an examination of the areas which produce ideas, images and discourses about sexuality – the institutions and practices in India which have long been involved in the ‘subject of sex’.⁴⁷

Following this, they also argue for a renewed debate on sexuality, particularly as it relates to women in India. Politically, and academically, sexuality is a subject of intense interest, in large part because of feminist engagement in the lives of women and their rights over their own bodies. Nair and John argue that for too long it was not women’s sexual experiences that were at stake, but ‘the elaborate codes of honour inscribed on their bodies.’⁴⁸ They identify that it is the upper caste, middle class woman who provides the ground for the formulation of questions about modernity and tradition, and they also point out that it is this female body that is positioned as the guardian of the nation’s morality. The texts that I call on in this thesis demonstrate this in a number of different ways. In the nineteenth century, when debates about ‘reform for women’ were at their most active, Ramabai Ranade’s ‘autobiography’ *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* (1938) provides an excellent example of the way in which some aspects of reform for women colluded with and re-enforced dominant patriarchal ideas about the status of upper caste, middle class Hindu women as chaste, patriotic and dutiful. Textual analysis of Ramabai’s work helps to suggest some implications for the representation of Hindu

⁴⁶ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence...* p. 3.

⁴⁸ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence...* p. 8.

women in future nationalist discourse. In addition, careful reading of her text suggests that Ramabai, the child-bride, was herself a good example of the way that women were expected to negotiate the divide between modernity and tradition.

John and Nair acknowledge the feminist arguments which precede theirs, those arguments which claim that there has been a decline in sexual freedoms for women in India, illustrated by a recuperation of sites of suggested female sexual autonomy, for example devadasis or courtesanal cultures. These narratives of sexual liberty fail, however, because they do not take into account the ways in which it is the very same patriarchal discourse that constitutes the 'wife/non-wife'. The implication is that these two identities, formulated by the same patriarchal concerns, are not separate, but are actually bound together in such a way as to make those freedoms and privileges that are available to one inaccessible to the other. The second part of Chapter Two of this thesis looks in detail at the books published in response to Katherine Mayo's 1927 text *Mother India*. These texts contain a wealth of material that illustrates to what extent narratives of the sexual liberty of women in the ancient past may be considered evidence of sites of female autonomy.

John and Nair's concluding remarks point out the three significant sets of discourses in the last two hundred years in India in which sexuality has been present. This is a significant claim; it suggests that these discourses have had a seamless history. However, the events of Partition in 1947 arguably present a real rupture to any category in which gender and sexuality figure.

It is still useful to cite their categories here, keeping in mind that that the history of these discourses is not uninterrupted. The first set is as an undefined area of demographic

discourse, secondly as a site of vigorous contest in social reform legislation, and third as a subject forming part of anthropological investigations into the family and conjugality in India. The purpose of signaling these specific arenas is to show that there was a common discursive field shared by the colonial administration whose urge was to ‘make sense’ of the bewildering variety of peoples and systems, and nationalist discourse, whose need was to define the role and place of the citizen/subject for the emergent nation.⁴⁹

That is not to say that women were either silent or inactive in the building of the nation, or indeed in the discourses about their rights, interests and their own sexual identities. In her excellent overview *Women in Modern India*, historian Geraldine Forbes privileges women’s activism, voices and experiences in the fields of education, reform, legal rights, work and women’s movements in order to create a history that demonstrates that Indian women have not been as silent or passive as some accounts would suggest.⁵⁰

In her discussion of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, a bill which was agitated for as a direct result of the controversy over the publication of Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*, Mrinalini Sinha points to the political significance of the contribution of women. The nature and topic of the controversy, Sinha argues, ‘promoted women as subjects with their own collective public identity’, as opposed to members of a community bound by patriarchal values.⁵¹

Partha Chatterjee also asserts that women did take part in the nationalist struggle, and that evidence of their lives and their concerns can be found in those autobiographies,

⁴⁹ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence...* p. 19.

⁵⁰ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV. 2 : Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), and for this point, p. 4.

⁵¹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: the Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2006), p. 10.

written by educated women, such as Ramabai Ranade.⁵² As my close-reading of Ramabai's autobiography attempts to show, though, Chatterjee does point out that the 'self' is elusive in these texts – rather they are a 'narrative of changing times, changing manners, and customs, and changing values'.⁵³

I now turn to arguments that address the centrality of gender in the politics of cultural nationalism, in particular the importance to the project of cultural nationalism of regulating, harnessing and subordinating female sexual identities into the service of the building of a post-independent national identity and culture for India.

The centrality of gender to the project of nationalism has been well documented. Before exploring some of the arguments that make a case for the centrality of gender to the nationalist project, it may be helpful to provide outline definitions of what is meant by 'state', by 'civil society' and by 'nation'. State implies the government, ruling power, the formal body politic. Civil society refers to everything else in society that is private, including religion, social and cultural organisations and most media. The nation refers to the 'imagined community' discussed above. It is important to recognise that nationalist discourses had an agenda not only in the obvious sphere of influence, the 'nation' but also attempted to shape civil society, that is private life.

The relationship between women and the state is a complex one, both as members of groups that are acted upon, and as participants in the processes of building and modifying the nation. Flora Anthias and Nira Yurval Davis highlight some key starting points for any discussion about gender and nationalism. They suggest that the relationship of the state and 'collectivities'; that is, ethnic, social and gender groups, are significantly

⁵² Partha Chatterjee, 'Women and The Nation', in *The Nation and Its Fragments...* pp.135-157.

⁵³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments...* p.38.

constituted around the role of women.⁵⁴ They then remind us that there is no unitary category of women. However, they illustrate five possible ways of understanding women's participation in the process of nationalism. They are: i) as biological reproducers of members of the nation, ii) as the guardians and perpetuators of ethnic group boundaries iii) as key participants in the distribution of culture, iv) as signifiers of difference with 'Others'; other ethnicities, nationalities, women, and as symbols within nationalist ideological discourses, and finally v) as participants in national, political, social, economic and military struggles.⁵⁵ By providing this preliminary set of categories, they argue that gender is central to the project of nationalism in multiple ways, though none are privileged, or static.

(vi) Women, Nation and Culture

Partha Chatterjee's well-respected argument discusses the symbolic identification of women with the 'inner', 'spiritual', authentic essence of the community, outside of the reach of imperial control. Chatterjee moves away from the political claims of nationalism to address its roots in the cultural world. He uses India as a key example, saying that nationalism created its own domain of authority within colonial society long before it commenced the struggle for political power with imperial rule.⁵⁶ Chatterjee argues that this was achieved by the division of the social world and its institutions into the material and the spiritual. The material is 'outside', it is scientific, secular and rational. The

⁵⁴ Nira Yurval Davies and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London, Macmillan, 1989), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Niral Yurval Davies and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State*...p.7.

⁵⁶ Chatterjee uses Bengal as the location for his argument, but his conclusions have a much wider relevance.

spiritual is the ‘inner domain’ that bears the unique identifying marks of Hindu culture.⁵⁷ In the case of India, the late nineteenth century saw a period of social reform where activists looked to the colonial state to implement change. Subsequently, a strong resistance to colonial intervention emerged, especially in those matters pertaining to ‘national culture’. The argument is that this second phase, the phase of resistance, was ‘already the period of nationalism.’

Chatterjee helps us to understand the centrality of gender to the nationalist project as it is conceived here. He begins by asking what is meant by the ‘inner’ domain of national culture, and offers that it is a pure, uncolonisable space of Hindu male authority. That is not to say that this space remains static. It is here in this ‘inner domain’, that is launched what he defines as:

nationalism’s...most powerful, creative and historically significant project.⁵⁸

The project was the fashioning of a new national culture that was modern, progressive, but nevertheless, emphatically not western. One expression of this new culture, located in the inner domain, was the reshaping of the Hindu family. Though nationalism also addressed participants through what Benedict Anderson calls ‘print capitalism’ that is, language, print media, literature, drama, and art, and in the case of Hindu nationalism, further turned its attention to secondary schooling, it is the arena of the family that nationalism’s assertions of sovereignty and uniqueness were most significant and dramatic. Where imperial observers and early liberal reformers had focused on the

⁵⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*... p. 6.

treatment of women, now nationalism declared ‘women’s issues’ (those which relate to women, to their bodies, lives, status and rights among other things) an area of ‘Indian Tradition’ that was off limits to any form of intervention other than by the nation itself. Any reform of ‘traditional society’, an essential aspect of cultural identity was to be undertaken by nationalists, not the colonial administration.

Again, Chatterjee is not arguing that the closing off of issues relating to women for nationalist intervention only served to create a static and unchanging environment – quite the opposite. Ancient forms of traditional culture were being refashioned, a ‘new patriarchy’ was being formulated, one which behaved differently to the traditional order, but was nevertheless also distinct from the western model of family. The new woman would be ‘modern’, but she would display the signs of national tradition and so distinguish herself from western women.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, there was considerable interest in, and agitation for, social reform. Within this, reform for women, reflected in both domains that Chatterjee highlights was hotly debated by men and women. There then followed a noticeable decline in reform movements and a change in popular attitudes towards them. Chatterjee argues that this was not simply the result of censorship by a regressive conservatism on the part of the nationalist project, which would suggest that reform itself was driven by progressive ideas from Europe. He argues that Hindu nationalism resolved the ‘women question’ in a very specific way, hence its disappearance from view. The success of this nationalist resolution lies in situating the ‘women question’ in the domain of nationalist autonomy: the inner world of culture. The inner domain of national culture had its own context too: a Hindu tradition in need of national refashioning. This

tradition, ‘discovered’, critiqued, and subjected to ideas of reform by the colonial administration, was based on the hegemonic Brahmanical texts, beloved of European orientalist and politicians alike, to which all Hindus were supposed to be in total obedience. Chatterjee points out that the ‘women question’ was accepted by Hindu nationalism as a problem ‘already constituted for it’, and that it was a problem of Indian tradition.⁵⁹ This problem would be addressed in part, by reworking key aspects of Hindu tradition in order to make them operable in the modern world. Chatterjee’s observation here reflects both the research displayed in the Prologue to this thesis, and also suggests why the re-worked epic texts were so important to the nationalist project.

So far, Chatterjee has described a model typical of the conceptions of gender roles usually found in traditional patriarchy, however, the Hindu nationalist resolution is unique in its response both to the situation of colonial rule, and its response to the critique of Indian culture and traditions because of the way it engages with the west and with traditional forms of culture in India. What he shows us is the selective appropriation by Hindu nationalism, of western skills and values in the material world, made possible by the uncontaminated nature of national culture preserved and embodied by women in the spiritual, inner domain. The struggle for independence and for political power would be fought and won by Indian men in the outside world: therefore it was necessary to copy and master those skills and values associated with western values, science and progress which operated there. In turn, the spiritual, inner domain, the core of national culture, was to be protected at all costs – not least because this was the site of colonial failure – a place where India was pure, Indian identity sacrosanct and inviolable.

⁵⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *Fragments of a Nation...* p. 120.

Chatterjee suggests that the Hindu nationalist reworking of tradition to provide a new cultural model for independent India was not a rejection of the west and a regressive dismissal of modernity in favour of tradition. Rather it was the attempt to make modernity operate within the boundaries of a newly defined tradition. Gandhi's speeches to the women that invoke the heroines of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, as well as the text and paratexts of CR's epics are all important contributions to a new tradition that was both modern, and yet, authentic. Why was there a need for a new tradition? Chatterjee argues that 'the inexorable force of circumstance' – colonial rule, agitation for social reform in the early part of the century, the theme of change which dominated all forms of discourse – meant that old norms were no longer acceptable. The development of new norms was not only desirable but necessary.⁶⁰ The principles of these new norms needed to be carefully thought out, so that they were suitably modern for the new nation, but in no way an imitation of the west. This is what gives the dichotomy of the inner/outer spheres its uniquely Hindu nationalist flavour, for the rhetoric referring to the outer sphere constructs it as a place of legitimate competition with the west, where as the inner, the domain of culture, mobilises the authority of the Hindu tradition with specific reference to women. The epics, authentic examples of Indian culture, whose content embraces all aspects of human life were ideal vehicles for this kind of mobilisation. The women of the epics proved incredibly useful as carriers of the kinds of values that Hindu nationalism wished to ascribe to 'its' women, and to describe 'its' women to the world.

Chatterjee also gives the earlier, nineteenth-century example of Bhudeb – another prolific nationalist writer to illustrate an equally important nationalist construct of Indian female identity: that of women as chaste goddesses:

⁶⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *Fragments of a Nation*...p.125.

In the Arya system there is a preponderance of spiritualism, in the European system, a preponderance of material pleasure. In the Arya system the wife is a goddess. In the European she is a wife and a companion.⁶¹

Spirituality, which must be preserved, is equated with and is nurtured by goddess-like women, and the basis and content of 'spirituality' is Hindu. There are implications for this recasting of women as goddesses. Women were the guardians of culture and civilised behaviour, no matter what changes occurred in the outside world, they were to maintain the spiritual (feminine) virtues of the inner world. This model also dictated nationalist thinking on reform, that reform for women was only acceptable as long as the spiritual 'essential' virtues were maintained. Reform for men and women in manner and degree was to be distinctly different: this was the nationalist resolution to the 'women question'. There is evidence of this resolution in the paratexts that belong to CR's epics where he addresses the readers of the texts, the young men, the 'students', engaged in the study of science and modern technologies to learn from the heroic values of male protagonists, while women are to take heart from the suffering of the epic women, who though divine, had the same burdens and trials as their contemporary sisters. The goddess model is particularly applicable to the divine Sita, who is revered for her wifely virtue, and yet remains the willing subject of her husband's censure.

It would seem then, that there are two types of modernity at work here, both contributing to the development of a new national cultural tradition. Chatterjee points out that men and women, in their respective spheres of outer/inner were to be 'modern' but women in their habits, dress, religiosity and symbolic location embodied a 'reconstituted

⁶¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*...p.131.

classical tradition.’ Educated, but non-competitive, modest, chaste, emphatically different from western women, as her essential femininity became more fixed, the ‘inner’ domain began to widen. Subjected to a new, entirely legitimate form of subordination by a new patriarchy, women were offered a controlled freedom: to appear in the world as representatives of national culture. Here Chatterjee puts forward the crucial point – that the new national culture which idealised its women as goddesses and educated mothers – enabled women to be exposed to the world without fear of threat to the inner domain of which they were the symbolic representations and guardians. The implications are clear. The mythological image of woman as goddess and as chaste self-sacrificing mother in fact ‘served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home.’⁶²

(vii) Conjuality and Domesticity in the New Nation

In this thesis I attempt to investigate the discursive management of female bodies by indigenous and imperial males through the control of symbolic, textual representations of women. The Imperial discourse existed in order to substantiate claims for the colonial management of Indian society, and the indigenous to substantiate and consolidate nationalist claims for the civilised and chaste nature of Hindu Indian domestic life. So how was this done? And who was doing it?

The first section of this thesis looks at specific moments in the late colonial period, between 1799 and 1920, when a renewed interest in the representation of women for different political ends was in evidence. This section of the thesis points to the discursive management of female bodies by both colonial and indigenous males as part of a

⁶² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*...p.131.

strategy, in the first instance to validate colonial rule, and in the second as a site of projection for the civilised and chaste nature of Hindu domestic life.

There is in this period a significant change: imperial and orientalist observations about India and Indian women, observations that were followed or appeared in tandem with indigenous liberal ideas about reform, were then abandoned in favour of the management of female identities by nationalist cultural rhetoric.

I turn to Tanika Sarkar's seminal argument in order to consider this shift and how it happened, in order to suggest that one of the ways in which Hindu nationalism attempted to implement its strategies was through a specific representation of the conjugal model and of women as dutiful wives and mothers in the re-worked epic texts. Sarkar suggests that the project for Hindu nationalism was, in its emergence in the nineteenth century, concerned with defining a space for its activities that was beyond the reach of imperial intervention.⁶³ Hindu nationalists increasingly described this enclosed space, inviolate and autonomous, as the 'Hindu way of life.'⁶⁴ Further to this, Sarkar points out that not only did nationalism target the domestic arena, but that family life and the household were also constructed along political lines. The implication was that successful governance of the household entitled the Hindu male to a share of political power in the world.

It is the domestic location that provides the key model of relations for nationalists: the model of conjugality. Sarkar argues that conjugality was ideally relevant to the enterprise

⁶³ Tanika Sarkar, like Partha Chatterjee locates her arguments in nineteenth-century Bengal, but her key points have much wider and contemporary relevance.

⁶⁴ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001), p. 36.

of governance of the household and therefore legitimacy of access to political power in the world. She introduces the idea with the point that:

Conjugality was based on the apparent absolutism of one partner and the total subordination of the other. As such it was the one relationship that seemed most precisely to replicate colonial arrangements.⁶⁵

She goes on to say that the conjugal relationship could be conceived as an ‘embryonic nation’, one where skills and expertise honed in the world of conjugality could equip the individual for a share of power in the world.

In order for this to work, Hindu nationalists had to naturalise those aspects of conjugal relations that were specific to Hindu culture, which they could then position as distinct and superior to western models of courtship. The most obviously fitting practise was non-consensual, irrevocable infant marriage. This is important because the naturalisation of this process, Sarkar argues, was effected by defining it in terms of mutual desire and love. It is the mutuality, the conscious choice on the part of the woman for an indissoluble marriage, which extends beyond the death of her husband, which constitutes the Hindu nationalist claim to power. ‘Their’ women were chaste, faithful unto death, a distinction which signals their identity as Hindu and Indian and which sets them apart from other women. As Sarkar argues:

The politics of women’s monogamy, then, is the condition of the possible Hindu nation: the one is often explicitly made to stand in for the other.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p.39.

⁶⁶ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...*p. 41.

The politics of conjugality and its situation at the heart of Hindu nationalism works well as a framing theory for the significance of the representation of women in CR's epics. Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have female protagonists who are held up as examples to women of wifely duty and discipline in CR's tellings. The model presented by the non-consensual irrevocable infant marriage is upheld in the epic texts as the successful model of any Hindu marriage, based on the dutiful and willing submission of the wife to her husband. CR also clarifies this in his book *Our Culture*, where he recognises that the Indian conjugal model is unique, and is based on:

the supreme natural importance of the mother...Indian culture lays down a subordinate but highly respected status for the young wife in all situations. She is released from this and raised to a higher level when she becomes a mother, then too she observes the external form of subordination but with dignity. She suffers it with a quiet sense of humour.⁶⁷

It is not only the virginal child-bride who may embody the nation's moral superiority. It is also widows. The widow's suffering and privations are constructed as willed and desirable to her, and by cheerfully submitting to the humiliations and strictures of ritual widowhood, she creates and stores a reserve of potent spirituality for the whole Hindu order. Sarkar comments that:

strict ritual observances root the widow's body in ancient India, thus miraculously enabling her to escape foreign domination. The nation needs ascetic widowhood.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1963), p. 45.

⁶⁸ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 41.

CR upholds this, again in *Our Culture*, where one of his definitions of what constitutes the cultural life of the new nation is: ‘...the rigours of widowhood’.⁶⁹

Sarkar positions Hindu conjugality, whose uniqueness is signalled by the unbreakable monogamy and chastity of its women, at the heart of Hindu nationalism. This nationalist view positioned the family as an opposition to, and a rebuke of, alien rule. The domestic space, the household, the family and especially the conjugal relationship came to stand for the last independent domain of the Hindu male. Sarkar argues that colonial practice bore this out, so that the distance kept by the colonial administration served to consolidate the nationalist conviction of the ‘interior’ world of the home as an inviolate space.⁷⁰

In fact, it is the gap between what the colonial administration desired to regulate and what it did not, that provided the space for the claims of a place of autonomy. The Hindu woman embodied this autonomous space, categorised by the purity of Hindu cultural practice in evidence there. Sarkar argues that this was in part due to the construction in popular and colonial public discourse of the middle class Hindu male as effeminate and emasculated, but that on the other hand, women’s bodies were still held to be pure and loyal to orthodox Hindu culture. The Hindu female body was, she points out:

not a free body, by any means, but one ruled by ‘our’
scriptures, ‘our’ custom.⁷¹

The point here is that ‘our’ scriptures and ‘our’ customs, good examples being the epic stories, were also subject to nationalist re-workings and would therefore necessarily

⁶⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.15.

⁷⁰ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 199.

⁷¹ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 202.

reflect those values which would facilitate nationalist control over the representation of female bodies and identities. In the epics, the conjugal relationship – between Sita and Rama, and between Draupadi and her five husbands – are *the* central relationships. By re-working them to operate within, and on behalf of, contemporary nationalist concerns, the values supposedly embodied by women and signalled by sati and child marriage – practices that were already heavily scrutinised, threatened and contested in the modern world – could continue to be upheld.

Sarkar's argument indicates the importance to Hindu nationalism of establishing a woman's chastity before, during and after marriage, and also of establishing her unique capacity for suffering. Both of these positions rest on the normalisation of practices directly involving, affecting, indeed, relying on women – child marriage and sati.⁷² Nationalist discourse relied on the participation of Hindu women in those practices as being willing and desiring. This consensual involvement in traditions that can very easily be read as painful and subjugating to women, Sarkar suggests, 'reveals a strategic and organising silence at the heart of [the] image of desire and pleasure.'⁷³ What is described as the consensual joining of souls, both in the case of non-consensual child-marriage and in the case of sati, is actually an attempt to control social stability through the management of female sexuality.

The positioning of conjugality as central to the project of Hindu nationalism highlights the connection between sexuality and nationalism as a whole. These two discourses have

⁷² Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 203.

⁷³ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 206.

been identified as ‘two of the most powerful global discourses shaping global notions of identity.’⁷⁴

Parker *et al.* bring under a more general canopy the arguments about nationalism and gender that have specifically been applied to India by the theorists discussed. Their enquiry is interested in how nationalism and sexual identities interact with, constitute and illuminate each other, and uses as its theoretical starting point, G. L. Mosse’s model of nationalism and respectable sexuality, constructions which, he argued, emerged in tandem in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. As discussed earlier, they also call on Benedict Anderson – in a different way from Chatterjee – by revealing how his account of the nation raises issues of gender and sexuality at every step.⁷⁵

These two important accounts of nation point to and uphold the deeply ingrained depiction of the female body as the homeland. Parker *et al.* argue that this trope of female body as nation not only mobilises the men of the nation to march to her defence against foreign violation, but depends ‘for its representational efficacy on a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal.’

One of the key identities ascribed to women in nationalist culture is that of mothers of healthy, ethnically and socially (class and caste) pure children, protectresses of the domestic sphere in the colonial world and guardians of Hindu culture in the new nation. The role of domestic educator closes off potential for alternative ways of being. This point is argued by Thomas Blom Hanson in his definition of ‘controlled emancipation’, ways in which nationalist doctrines afforded women a limited and controlled visibility

⁷⁴ Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Somner and Patricia Yeager, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London, Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

⁷⁵ Andrew Parker *et al.*, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*... p.5.

and agency in a certain sphere.⁷⁶ CR's epics are excellent example of the type of culture – a re-worked culture – that women were the guardians and transmitters of. Indeed, he is explicit in his appeal to mothers, both in the paratexts, and in the actual body of the text.

(viii) The Place of Partition in the Thesis

In a thesis which covers the period 1920 – 1960 special mention must be made of a defining event of that period: the Partition of India. Much has been written about Partition.⁷⁷ Historical accounts of Partition deal mostly with the political actions and consequences that led up to it, and only touch on the 'violence that accompanied it.'⁷⁸ In addition to historicist approaches, scholars have engaged on many levels with the different aspects of Partition that are deeply troubling and uncertain particularly the abduction of women, and yet others that deal with the oral histories of devastation and violence.⁷⁹ There are also more recent histories that strive to bridge the gap between the analysis of high politics and oral history and memory.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Thomas Blom Hanson, 'Controlled Emancipation: Women and Hindu Nationalism' in Fiona Wilson and Bodil Folke Frederikson eds., *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism* (London, Cass, 1995), pp. 82-94, for this point, p. 85. Hanson's argument uses evidence from the twenty-first century right wing organizations to make its claims, but he makes clear that these are contemporary manifestations of a previously established and ongoing idea in Hindu nationalist culture, and is therefore relevant to this thesis.

⁷⁷ For example see: B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (Bombay, Thacker & co., 1946); Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985); Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987); Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided. Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994); Mushirul Hasan ed., *India's Partition, Process, Strategy, Mobilization* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ Gyanandra Pandey: *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.4.

⁷⁹ For example see: Ritu Menon & Kamala Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Abduction of Women During Partition' in *Review of Women's Studies, Economic and Political Weekly*, April 24 1993; D. A. Low and H. Brasted, eds., *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (London, Sage Publications, 1998); Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, eds., *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998); Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Inventing Boundaries:*

Partition occupies two different places in this thesis. One is as a means of understanding more about the relationship between the terms Hindu, Indian and Hindu nationalism. The other is a space of silence or even denial: this is the space that Partition occupies in relation to the Hindu nationalist re-workings of the epics by CR.

I will consider each of these in turn. Gyanandra Pandey points out that the violence of 1947 created new subjects and new subject positions. Most importantly:

Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus were all redefined by the process of Partition...perhaps most fundamentally as Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus.⁸¹

Pandey argues that it was during Partition that the connection between Hindu, Indian and national citizen was forged. He offers a definition of Hindu nationalism, suggesting that the term does not refer to nationalists who happen to be Hindus. Rather, it is an indication of the 'brand' of nationalism, one 'in which Hindu culture, Hindu traditions and the Hindu community are given pride of place'.⁸² He goes further to say that in the mainstream media in 1947, as a result of communal tension, to be Indian meant to be Hindu - the terms were interchangeable. To illustrate his point he refers to a newspaper article of the time that asks the question 'Whose country is this?' and then goes on to

Gender, Politics and the Partition of India (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000), Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, 2 Vols. (New Delhi, Roli Books, 1995) and Shahil Marayam, *Resisting Regimes. Myth, Memory, and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸⁰ For example see Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007); Sarah Ansari, *Life After Partition: Migration, Community and Strife in Sindh* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005); Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007). I owe this point, and these references, to Joya Chatterji, 'New Directions in Partition Studies', review in *History Workshop Journal*, No.67, 2009, pp. 213-220.

⁸¹ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p.16.

⁸² Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p.154.

consider the ethnic groups that constitute the nation. This editorial hardly mentions the Hindu community because the Hindus are ‘not a constituent. They are the nation’.⁸³ To be Hindu was, during and after Partition, to be automatically Indian, but this connection was not made explicit. To do so would have been to admit that key foundations of nationalist rhetoric – for example ‘history’ and ‘culture’ – were not uncontested. The implication of this was that the seamless history of the glorious Hindu past that provided the (re-worked) values for the new nation were not solid and given. As Pandey suggests:

To present an argument about *belonging* as a political argument would be to concede that the nation was a political project first and foremost, and to acknowledge its historicity. The progress of the nation could not mean exactly the same thing to all parts of that imagined community. To acknowledge this however, would be to foreground the question of political power and to what end that power should be used – which in turn would defeat the nationalist claim that the nation was a natural, moral community.⁸⁴

Pandey does acknowledge that after Partition, Hindu nationalists were a silent majority. He suggests that they did not need to promote themselves as a group with legitimate rights in the new nation, because, ‘insomuch as they were Hindu, they were Indian. It was enough in this age of high nationalism to claim the latter designation’.⁸⁵ There is also a point to be made for the attempted control of the more militant aspects of Hindu nationalism after Partition that created enhanced opportunity for the transmission of the cultural message of Hindu traditionalists. Christophe Jaffrelot makes the distinction between Hindu nationalists, whose outlook was xenophobic and militant, and Hindu traditionalists, whose main objective was the promotion of Hindu culture. There is

⁸³ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p.159.

⁸⁴ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p.160.

⁸⁵ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p. 159.

enough common ground between the two groups however, for the latter to be designated cultural nationalists, particularly since cultural nationalists not only supported the idea of the nation, but believed that it relied on the strengthening of the majority community: a train of thought with a more than strong resemblance to that of militant nationalism.⁸⁶

After the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu nationalist, the most aggressive political arm of the movement was banned by Nehru's government. This was the RSS,⁸⁷ part of the Hindu Mahasabha, and its relegation by Congress was designed to remove the overtly dangerous and volatile aspects of Hindu nationalism from the political arena.⁸⁸ However, as Christophe Jaffrelot points out, after Partition, Hindu traditionalists, or cultural nationalists, carried out several projects that had the strong approval of the militant faction. One of these was their continued support of K.M. Munshi's *Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan*, which published CR's epics.⁸⁹

Although CR was heavily involved in the discussions leading up to and resulting in the Partition of India, his engagement with the event is a striking absence in his writing, given the political and cultural position that he occupied. It may be that this was his standard response to such a seismic trauma. On receiving the gift of a book of photographs of a devastated Hiroshima, he responded by saying:

People should not be reminded of such things. They are too painful...it is not good for people to remember all that they have suffered...⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*...p.84.

⁸⁷ The RSS: The *Rashtriya Swayamsevik Sangh*, the cultural arm of the the Hindu right wing, comprised of volunteers, and aggressively militant in nature. See Tapan Basu, Pardip Datta, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar and Sambhudda Sen, eds., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1993).

⁸⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*...p.87.

⁸⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*... p.84.

⁹⁰ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji* (London, Macmillan, 1962), p. 43.

Gyanandra Pandey refers to this kind of denial as a consequence of Partition: that those who lived through it had to build new lives and new memories that did not have to carry the reckoning of the terrible violence into the future, ‘reckonings that are “best forgotten”’.⁹¹ Yes there it was a special kind of ‘eliding’ that was practised by Hindu nationalism.⁹² It is Pandey again, who, when comparing the literature that analyses Partition with that of the Holocaust, points out that nationalist discourse attempted with considerable success, first to separate ‘Partition’ from ‘violence’, and second, through a ‘recitation of past deeds’ that went ‘hand in hand’ with an encouragement towards public forgetting, replaced the trauma of Partition with an aestheticised version of history in the national memory. This version of history relied on the production and transmission of new, yet archetypal myths.⁹³ Pandey’s comment, worth quoting in full is that:

with the new reach of nationalism and of the modern state, and new sites of memory that they have established it is not fantastic to suggest that history itself appears in the form of memory – a national memory...the world today is populated not only by the historical memory of various groups, dependant on museums, flags and publicly funded celebrations. It is also flooded with the mythical histories of nations and states, histories that are themselves an institutional site of memory, locked in a circular, somewhat parasitic relationship with other, more obvious *lieux de mémoire*.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*... p.15.

⁹² Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*... p. 3.

⁹³ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*... p.195.

⁹⁴ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*... p. 9. The term belongs to French theorist Pierre Nora. See: Lawrence D. Krizman ed., Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past under the direction of Pierre Nora*, trans., Arthur Goldhammer, 3 Vols. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998).

By ‘mythical histories’ Pandey is not referring to the epic mythologies. However, these can be considered a type of *lieu de mémoire*: they are the less obvious, yet still institutional, site of cultural memory, that contribute their own re-working of Hindu culture and Indian history to the more obvious locations that the history of the Partition occupies.

As Governor General of India in 1947, CR called for a public forgetting of the genocidal violence of Partition, asking the people to:

put aside hatred and memories of happenings which promote hatred. In Delhi, or elsewhere in the North, I ask people to forget recent terrible tragedies – tragedies which cannot physically be forgotten.⁹⁵

and instead offered the nation his re-worked Hindu epics: ‘the inherited bricks of national memory’,⁹⁶ his wish being that these literary endeavours would be able to in some way heal the breach of historical events:

Since literature is closely related to life, so long as the human family is divided into nations, literature cannot escape the effects of such a division. But the highest literature transcends regionalism and through it, when we are properly attuned, we realise the essential oneness of the human family.⁹⁷

This can also be read as an example of one of the ways nationalist discourse maintained silence on the reality of Partition – by insisting on the unity of the people of India and

⁹⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Rajaji's Speeches: Governor General, 1948*, (New Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), p. 14.

⁹⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, ‘Preface to the Sixth Edition 1958’ in *Mahabharata* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1999), p. (xx).

⁹⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, ‘Preface to the Second Edition 1952’ in *Mahabharata* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1999), p. (xi).

their traditions. This is a technique that has proved singularly effective – Indian historical writing, as Pandey suggests

has never escaped from this constraint to demonstrate oneness. Writings on Partition bear the marks of it until today.⁹⁸

A close-reading of CR's texts offers us the possibility that Partition is a silence at the heart of his re-worked version of culture for the new nation. However, it should be acknowledged that such a close textual reading can do no more than alert us to this possibility.

(xv) *Ramayana and Mahabharata: Epic Legacies for the New Nation*

The work on nation, on gender and on culture, and on Partition explored above provides an overview of terms and theories relevant to this thesis. I now turn to my choice of texts.

This thesis asks questions about the nature of Hindu nationalism, and explores some of the means by which Hindu nationalism attempted to shape cultural life in India, in particular the representation of women's sexual identities. The texts under consideration exemplify this choice in multiple ways. The main texts considered in the thesis all engage with the agenda of Hindu cultural nationalism by contributing ideas and images to the nationalist vision of a single culture for India. These texts all attempt a re-working of tradition, whether through a unique mobilization of the epic heroines, as it the case with Gandhi, to invoking a glorious Hindu past, which can be seen in the responses to Mayo, to a complete re-working of the central mythologies of India, as with CR's epics. These

⁹⁸ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p. 42.

attempts are all careful to present a certain version of femaleness, a re-worked ‘traditional’ Hindu femaleness. Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid identify this as a key nationalist strategy:

The recovery of tradition through the proto-nationalist and nationalist periods was always the recovery of the ‘traditional woman – her various shapes continuously re-adapt the ‘eternal’ past to the needs of the contingent present.⁹⁹

The thesis recognises that Hindu nationalism is a complex formation, and so, examines one aspect of its evolution. This aspect is the re-working of culture – CR and other nationalist writers, including Gandhi and the authors who responded to *Mother India* strategically referred to the old and familiar legends of Hindu life and manipulated them to conform to the values of emergent Hindu nationalism. The discussion of James Mill and William Jones in the Prologue is designed to illustrate that the re-invented traditions promoted by these Hindu nationalists actually carry forward certain assumptions from the colonial period. In the words of a senior Hindu cultural nationalist, the epics as told by CR represent

the Collective Unconscious of India.¹⁰⁰

These versions of the epics are so important precisely because they are so well known. They represent an attempt by Hindu nationalism at cultural hegemony. The paratexts are key to this, for they describe exactly what the texts stand for and how the reader (whether

⁹⁹ KumKum Sangri & Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989), p.10.

¹⁰⁰ K.M. Munshi, ‘Kulapati’s Preface’ in C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 6.

man or woman) should engage with them. There were – and are – many different versions of the stories, however these versions, given the position of their author have a political weight and legitimacy that make them appropriate objects of an investigation into Hindu cultural nationalism.

What links these texts, that were written at different times and at different moments in the evolution of Hindu nationalism is their engagement with discourses of identity, of female sexual identity, and of a new national culture based on a reworking of tradition. The close textual explorations of these works and the accompanying research in this thesis is not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of the emergence of Hindu nationalist culture but rather a series of significant snapshots that identify important moments in the development of that culture, in particular those moments where the relationship between nationalism and female sexuality comes under debate. The close-reading and analysis of these texts attempts to plot the ‘discontinuous evolution’ of a certain strain of ideas – ideas about female sexual identity – that appear in the colonial period and continue to emerge at points into the postcolonial period.

CR’s *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and his *Our Culture*, Gandhi’s writings, the responses to Mayo and the earlier work of James Mill and William Jones all offer the opportunity for a fruitful close-reading, one that reveals the rich symbolic potential for the nationalist project, of the images and ideas that they discuss.

The texts represent attempts by nationalist and proto-nationalist discourses to control, re-cast or symbolically organise the representation of female identities and especially sexual identities in the new nation. The ways in which these texts were received is not in the scope of this thesis. Rather the method of close-reading is employed to focus on the

way that an eminent Hindu nationalist sought to ‘retell’ the epic stories of India in a way that would exploit all of their potential as vehicles for the re-worked cultural values of the new nation state.

As a final point, Mrinalini Sinha observes that the controversy over Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* momentarily brought about new possibilities for women in the public sphere. Sinha describes the controversy over Mayo’s book as an ‘event’, in that it caused a break, or a rupture, in the dominant colonial understanding of Indian society, and also in that it produced a host of nationalist commentaries – unstable and unpredictable, that left the ‘facts’ of *Mother India* vulnerable to re-articulation.¹⁰¹ More importantly, one direct result of the controversy was the development of a new type of political nationalism, one that agitated for the Child Marriage Restraint Act: a Bill that, Sinha argues, not only promoted women as subjects with their own collective public identity, but also enabled focus on women’s individual rights outside of their communities and families:

the nationalist refashioning briefly – but importantly – provided public legitimacy (even if more rhetorically than substantive) for an alternative constitution of women: that is, as paradigmatic citizen subjects of a nation-state-in-the-making.¹⁰²

However, the potential for the re-working of women’s identities within a nationalist framework was short lived. The recognition of individual rights for women was in direct conflict with the nationalist view of the nature of the collectivity in India. This view decreed that the public and private spheres remained separate, and that women were responsible for the maintenance of family values and the preservation of traditional

¹⁰¹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2006), p.5.

¹⁰² Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*...p.10.

culture. Women certainly had a role in the nationalist agenda, but it was not based on the recognition and enactment of individual rights. To quote Sinha:

Women's political agency under these conditions was recruited for reconstituting a collective identity that was premised once again on the renewed separation between the social and the political...the consolidation of a new political orthodoxy in the aftermath of the Mayo controversy nipped in the bud the political possibilities created by the rhetorical mobilisation of women as paradigmatic citizen-subjects.¹⁰³

Though Sinha's argument is historical, she introduces the idea of the 'closing' of possibilities by the nationalist orthodoxy in the wake of the Mayo controversy.

The epics play a key role in this closing off: though of course, they have varied histories, and they take many forms. What the thesis does is focus on one manifestation, a manifestation that shows how Hindu nationalist intellectuals, for example CR, attempted to rework the stories during the nationalist period with the effect of operating a closure on the discussion of femininity. In addition to 'closing', the purpose of the epics and their paratexts was to proscribe the boundaries of femininity: the paratexts to CR's epics are key to this as they help to identify these texts as symbolic political interventions in the world of culture.

¹⁰³ Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India*...p.11.

Prologue: Present Misery for Past Glory, or Delight and Disgust; Hindu Women in the work of William Jones and James Mill

This chapter aims to provide a prologue to the work of politician, freedom fighter and Hindu nationalist, C. Rajagopalachari (CR), whose re-working of the Hindu epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are examined in this thesis. The work of James Mill (1773-1836) and William Jones (1746 – 1794) provide an introduction to the themes and concerns which would influence dominant discourses within Hindu cultural nationalism, in particular the representation of Hindu women. My argument for the cultural representation of women in post-partition India considers CR's Hindu nationalist interpretation of the ancient past of India in the narration of these epic stories, and particularly the role of the epic women, Sita and Draupadi.

(i) Introduction

In this chapter I suggest that there is a trajectory, recognizable as early as the eighteenth century in the work of William Jones and James Mill, of the transformation of the Indian female subject as a figure of delight to the chaste nationalist mother.

This observation provides the prologue to the thesis; a suggestive context to later cultural debates and rheorics on the subject of Indian female identity, and sexual identities in particular. Here, I examine key texts by Sir William Jones in order to provide examples of the Orientalist position on Indian 'history' in particular Jones' combination of myth and history as historical truth.

Sir William Jones was a Supreme Court Judge in Bengal and was a well respected linguistic prodigy (he spoke thirteen languages fluently, and twenty-four reasonably

well). A life long devotee of India, he was the founder of the Asiatic Society and was known from an early age for his orientalist scholarship. His most important contribution to that field was the development and propagation of the theory of the common linguistic roots of classical Sanskrit, Latin and Greek. It is his contribution to the ‘golden age’ theory of ancient Hindu civilization, particularly in his poetry and hymns to the Hindu deities that are most relevant to this thesis. The ‘golden age’ theory had particular appeal to orthodox, traditionalist and reformist Hindus, and upper and lower castes. From different angles, all looked at the past as an age of lost glory and blamed the present for their declining status. Jones articulated this idea in his creative work, and also offered the western world the seductive image of India as ‘...inventress of delightful and useful arts...’¹ Jones’ promotion of the glories of ancient India reveals his perpetuation of the mythology of the emancipation of Hindu women in ancient India. Although he invests his Hindu female figures with characteristic mildness, virtue and fertility, there is also evidence of a certain unwitting eroticisation in his representation of Hindu female deities, including, importantly, Draupadi.

The relevance of Jones’ work lies in his attempt to legitimise British rule in an Indian idiom. He used the culturally familiar forms of epic poetry and characters from Hindu mythology to talk about British rule in India. This utilisation of the epic model as a means of supporting a group’s right to hegemony also proved an effective tool in the Hindu nationalist repertoire, not only for C. Rajagopalachari, but also for Gandhi, and the left-wing socialist reformer E. Ramasami Naicker. I do not suggest a direct connection between the work of William Jones and these later writers. I do suggest, however, that Jones’ work contributed to the ongoing idea in the political

¹ Sir William Jones in A.M. Jones ed., *The Works of Sir William Jones* (London, G.G. Robinson and

imagination that the Hindu epics provided a perfect location for the exposition of ideologies that were designed to reach the widest possible audience.

Jones' ancient India was a civilised society run by a successful combination of secular patriarchal values and priestly controls. This description maps coherently on to the values of conservative Hindu nationalism, which saw the role of the Hindu religion as one integral to the successful function of the secular state. Jones' imaginative and exotic descriptions of India and its ancient culture provide one half of the dialogue which later indigenous writers would engage with. His values, both towards Hindu civilization, the nation and gender can be assimilated with relative ease in to the overall concerns of the nationalist project. In this sense, Hindu nationalists in the early twentieth century were not obliquely writing back to Orientalists such as Jones, but rather building on certain claims, constructions and observations made in their work.

This prologue then moves to discuss the work of James Mill. Mill is useful here not only because of his strong critique of William Jones' method and approach to India, but also as the other half of the dialogue with which indigenous writers and thinkers later engaged. Mill's distrust of the imagination, combined with his belief in the secular creed of utilitarianism produces an image of India very different from that of William Jones. Mill's notion of a civilised India was of a country and a people that could only be brought out of its state of darkness and barbaric practice by the correct administration of British social and political policy.

Mill's critique of the status of women to some extent clarifies a set of anxieties about Indian women which would preoccupy later indigenous reformers. His observation that there was a lack of social and political rights afforded to women, combined with

R.H. Evans, 1799), Vol. 1:2.

his fear and distrust of what he saw as the sexually explicit representation of women in Hindu culture, informs some of the subsequent debate of Hindu reformers in the nineteenth century. I look particularly at his references to the status of women in *A History of British India* (1862) in order to reveal those Imperial attitudes towards indigenous culture and morality that would be the subject of appropriation and recuperation by later nationalist writers.

I suggest that Mill, using the work of other observers on Indian life and culture, develops and represents the image of the salacious ‘nautch girl’ and the brutalised house wife as the two polarities of Hindu female experience. He offers these images up to the gaze of his European readership as an objective critique of their position, yet I suggest that his language still contains elements of a sexual imagination at work. Mill’s critique of the status of Hindu women was a thinly veiled attack on Hindu masculinity, using sexual weakness as the sign of moral and intellectual weakness on the part of the Hindu male.

I argue in this section that Mill in effect tries to destabilise the notion of a civilised ancient India, and further provides a complex and conflicting set of ideas and representations of Indian culture and identity that would set the discursive stage for cultural nationalism’s engagement with notions of identity and sexuality.

This chapter also examines the precedents for the relationship between culture, sexuality and the Indian nation which are set in the colonial period. Janaki Nair suggests that the underlying assumptions about Indian women were absorbed through the colonial encounter and refracted through the gaze of the colonial subject, in

particular, the Indian nationalist, to construct an image of Hindu women that was pure and chaste.²

In post-Partition India, the cultural contextualisation and representation of women in the contemporary world has been endowed with an impressive past. This acts as a cultural palliative, and provides a framework for the acceptance of the ancient female virtues of maternity, suffering, and sexual purity in need of protection from an ever present threat.³ Uma Chakravorty calls this nationalism's most successful construction:

...the image of womanhood in the lost past, as a counter to the real existence of women in the humiliating present.⁴

The ancient Indian woman, was by virtue of her Hindu identity, not only different from other women, but was also turned into a homogenous entity. The models in the work of Orientalist and Utilitarian scholars not only represented a specific notion of the Hindu woman to the world, but also provided some of the terms of reference which Hindu nationalists would use to construct their own models with attributes located in ancient sources, but with contemporary concerns, for post independence woman to emulate.⁵ William Jones and James Mill provide examples within colonial discourse of the polarities which govern the debate on women as worshipped or degraded by Hindu culture. William Jones' Hindu woman is a 'figure of delight' while Mills' is an object of both disgust and pity.

² See Janaki Nair, 'Nationalist Patriarchy and the Regulation of Sexuality' in *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (New Delhi, Kali For Women, 1996).

³ Kumkum Roy, 'Where Women are Worshipped the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of The Ancestress of the Hindu Women' in Urvashi Butalia and Tanika Sarkar eds., *Women and the Hindu Right* (New Delhi, Kali For Women, 1995), p. 11.

⁴ Uma Chakravorty, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?' in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kumkum. Sangri & Sudesh.Vaid, eds., (New Delhi, Kali For Women, 1989), p. 30.

⁵ Kumkum Roy, 'Where Women are Worshipped...' in *Women and the Hindu Right*, p. 10.

The ancient history of India, identified by Romila Thapar as being recorded as Hindu, was ‘discovered’ for Europe by a small selection of scholars, Max Muller among them, who interpreted and translated Sanskrit texts in order to access ancient Hindu philosophy and culture.⁶ The history of ancient India as presented to Europe by Indologists of the nineteenth century is one which focuses on languages, mythology and philosophy. Their studies, as Thapar suggests, were ‘fragrant with exotica’ for their European readers. This version of the ancient past was narrated, and then consolidated by Orientalist research and discourse, of which the work of William Jones is a useful example. The subsequent disfavour of the Orientalist model for its lack of engagement with the emergent values of rational thought and individualism of the nineteenth century is exemplified by James Mill’s Utilitarian critique of William Jones.⁷

James Mill’s Utilitarian approach, and William Jones’ Orientalism provide a contrasting vision of India and Indian culture and morality. The move from William Jones’ collected works, to James Mill’s *A History of British India* (1817), shows the inception and early progression of the transformation from figure of delight to chaste mother; the identity that would eventually be ascribed to Hindu women. This identity, I will suggest, is a product of both Orientalist fantasy and Utilitarian critique.

James Mill’s *A History of British India* (1817) is a key text for highlighting the constructions and anxieties which would later influence the terms of the debate on women, sexual rights and morality for Hindu nationalists. Initially, this will mean analysing Mill’s rhetorical devices, in order to understand the relationship between power and knowledge in the definition of the ‘other.’⁸ It is through Mill’s style that

⁶ Romila Thapar, *A History of India, Vol.1* (London, Penguin, 1966), p. 16.

⁷ Romila Thapar, ‘Communalism and Writing Ancient Indian History’ in *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (New Delhi, People’s Publishing House, 1977), p. 2.

⁸ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill’s The History of British India and*

various clues emerge as to the translation of Indian culture both for Europe, and as will be shown, for the educated Indian elites, including M.K. Gandhi, who would increasingly utilise the English language and English text in order to convey their notions of Indian identity and gender roles to the emergent, independent nation.⁹

The purpose of Mill's *History* was not merely to contribute to the debate on the form of British rule in India; the nature of British rule in India was crucial to the polemic of Mill's argument as a whole. India was at the centre of the political struggle taking place in England in the early nineteenth century between the traditional conservatism epitomised by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791) and the philosophy of Utilitarianism expounded by Mill and Jeremy Bentham.¹⁰ Mill's rhetoric was an attempt to critique the British establishment in its entirety, but one of its main focuses was an attack on the 'liberal imperialism' of Sir William Jones.

Jones' brand of Orientalism made a significant contribution to the idea of the 'golden' or Vedic period of Hindu culture, and also provided a nostalgic methodology by which to study Indian 'history'. This methodology gives women a prominent place in ancient Hindu society – a 'curious and literal visibility' as suggested by Kumkum Roy.¹¹ However, this reading of the past, based on Orientalist research allowed the definition of the 'authentic' Indian woman to be constructed as specifically Hindu, acting, or behaving in a specifically way. The emphasis on the ancient or Vedic past as Hindu not only marginalises non-Hindu beliefs and cultures, but also allows for the

Orientalism (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 1.

⁹ The examination of methods of colonial interpretation of Empire, and the response by indigenous academics and writers has been considered by, among others, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, Routledge, 1978), and *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1993), Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983). Gandhi would use English text in newspapers such as *Harijan* and *The Hindu* to explain the various meanings behind his changes of dress and in his responses to letters written asking him what being an Indian meant. See Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London, Hurst & Co., 1996), and M.K. Gandhi, *To the Women* (Allahbad, Allahbad Law Journal Press, 1941).

¹⁰ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, pp. 2-7.

creation of a space of Hindu superiority which needs explicit cultural defence from outsiders.

(ii) *Figures of Delight: Sir William Jones and the Golden Age of Hindu Culture.*

By India, in short, I mean the whole extent of that country in which the primitive religion and language of the Hindus prevail to this day with more or less their ancient purity.¹²

The work conducted and inspired by Sir William Jones contributed to nationalist understanding of the ancient past and subsequently the definition of gender roles in four ways. First, his narrative is constructed in a variety of idioms, including the enthusiastic romanticisation of ancient Indian culture. This enthusiasm was a result of the supposedly spectacular nature of the ‘scoop’ – the thrill of the ‘discovery’ of an entire ancient cultural world independent of Greco-Roman culture, albeit a ‘discovery’ which was destabilising for European self-perception. Second, is his attempt to clarify a common heritage of Indo-European language and culture. Third, is his legitimisation of British rule in a specifically Indian idiom. And fourth, perhaps most significantly, is his collapsing of ‘myth’ and ‘fact’ in historical narrative.

Sir William Jones’ initial reaction to India was one of pleasure and anticipation. Jones was a prolific philologist and he was particularly interested in the relationship between Indo-European languages. He had started his career as a tutor and translator, but early on in his life acquired a reputation as an Orientalist. He commenced his legal studies in 1770, and after a short term as a circuit judge in Wales, he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Bengal, largely due to his proficiency in Sanskrit and Urdu.¹³ He had an undoubted and genuine enthusiasm for Indian culture; in his

¹¹ Kumkum Roy, ‘Where Women are Worshipped...’ in *Women and the Hindu Right*, p. 10.

¹² Sir William Jones, ‘Third Anniversary Discourse’ in A. M. Jones ed., *The Works of Sir William Jones*, Vol. 1: 19.

¹³ Garland H. Cannon and Kevin Brine, *Objects of Enquiry: Life Contributions and Influence of Sir*

essay to the Asiatic Society, which he had founded in 1784, entitled: *A Discourse on the Institution of a Society for Enquiring into the History Civil and Natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia* (1784), he states:

It gave me inexpressible pleasure to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of Asia, which has ever been esteemed the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, and customs and languages as well as the features of men.¹⁴

India is designated as female by Jones, specifically in this case, with reference to her role as ‘inventress of delightful and useful arts.’ The gendering of India as the seductive female underwent an almost complete inversion by Hindu nationalists whose representation of India as the chaste Mother is the antithesis of Jones playful lady. It is precisely this trajectory - from a figure of delight to the chaste mother which this thesis is attempts to explore.

Jones’ romantic and effusive prose perfectly captures the ancient India that Hindu nationalism would promote in order to refute later writings by men such as Mill, and to authenticate its own gender policy. Using Jones’ vision of the past as a starting point, the history of the Hindus could be seen as one which, from a condition of high civilisation, was subjected to a series of invasions – by Muslims, and by the British, and these in turn accounted for the decline in the status of women, from their condition of, as Roy tellingly phrases it, ‘near idyllic bliss.’¹⁵ Essentially, this moved the focus of responsibility for the low status of women, commented on by administrators and missionaries alike in their critique of Hinduism, on to foreigners, invaders and colonisers. This not only exonerated Hindu males from the

William Jones (New York, New York University Press, 1995), pp. 1-3, 48-55.

responsibility of enforcing a suppressive patriarchy, but also validated that patriarchy as a necessary protection of Hindu women from the threat of the outside invader, especially the Muslim male.¹⁶

The second strategy developed by Jones and later used by Hindu nationalists was an argument about the common origins of Indo-European language and culture. Jones' approach was to attempt to 'reveal' the common roots of the origin of language and culture between the India and west. His motivation for doing so was partly because of the need for such a basis of comparison in the eighteenth century. The Orientalist ideology, in its early and specific sense, dictated that the basis of British rule would be one of understanding the culture which they sought to dominate. By providing a common basis of comparison, it followed that Britain's empire would be unified by the belief in the shared origins of cultural practice and linguistic roots.¹⁷ Jones attempted to demonstrate this in his essay *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India* (1788), where he proposes to show the common origins of the Gods of the polytheistic or pagan religions of Ancient Greece and Italy, and those of Hindu India. To this list he includes the ancient beliefs of, among others, Egypt, China, Persia and Syria.¹⁸ The importance of the connection lies in the fact that the polytheistic, pagan religions of Europe had the same imaginary quality as the puranas of India, especially the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Jones' work in this field created a particular space of historical 'truth' from which nationalist, and other politically motivated tellings of the Hindu epics could emerge.

¹⁴ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 1: 2.

¹⁵ Kumkum Roy, 'Where Women are Worshipped...' in *Women and the Hindu Right*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Kumkum Roy, 'Where Women are Worshipped...' in *Women and the Hindu Right*, pp. 11-12.

Roy goes further to explore how this strategy allowed for the expression of anger by Hindu women against an 'alien' enemy who is the cause of their oppression by their own fathers and husbands.

¹⁷ J.Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Sir William Jones, 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India' in *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. 1. (1788), p. 221.

Just as the precepts of democracy and civilised behaviour had their roots in Greek and Roman philosophy for Europe, so for Hindus and nationalists, the ancient texts of the Hindus: Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Shastras and Puranas (epics) would provide just such a basis for a genealogy of civilised behaviour for independent India.

The legitimisation of British rule in an Indian idiom was constructed by Jones through a series of texts, the methodology of which would later be reflected exactly in Hindu nationalist production of the Hindu epics. In particular, Jones' works - the unfinished *Britain Discovered* (1787) and his nine 'hymns' to the Hindu deities (1785) - reveal an earnest desire to legitimise British rule in the epic model, and also, to redeem India from the 'barbarism' of Hindu practices.¹⁹ Jones' aim was to provide Britain with a national epic poem in the manner of Homer or Virgil. He meant *Britain Discovered* to be 'an heroic poem on the excellence of our constitution, and the character of a perfect king of England.'²⁰ Furthermore, in a passage which arguably contains the same moral principles later advocated by CR in his own paratexts to his tellings of the Hindu epics, Jones states that *Britain Discovered* will display:

in a striking light the most important principles of politics and morality, and to inculcate these grand maxims, that nothing can shake our state, while the true liberty of the subject remains united with the dignity of the sovereign, and that, in all states, virtue is the only sure basis of public and private happiness.²¹

The emphasis here, which would later be reiterated by CR falls on the ideas of the meanings of virtue and morality, privately (in the home) and publicly (in the contemporary world) for a civilised person. Though *Britain Discovered* appears for

¹⁹ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 23.

²⁰ Lord Teignmouth ed., *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of Sir William Jones*, (London, J. Brettal & J. Hatchard, 1804), p. 476.

²¹ Lord Teignmouth ed., *Memoirs*, p. 477.

Jones to be a paean to the existing genius of the British spirit, CR would use the same ideas to inculcate a specific gendered morality and virtue in the new Indian citizen.

Britain Discovered tells the story of Prince Britan, a Phoenician, who, disgusted at the idolatrous and pagan practices of his own people, sets forth to discover the land ruled by the nymph Albione, ‘attended by damsels of her own nature.’ There he will

...reign in peace and be the progenitor of a noble race who would profess a true and benevolent religion and excel all other nations in learning, art and valour.²²

This land has been revealed to him by his guiding, or ‘attendant’ spirit. The first draft of the epic, in what seems a strange reversal of the Rama and Sita story, Jones has Albione, disguised as a young warrior, rescue her captured and inactive lover from the gardens of Mammon, as Rama rescues Sita from the Garden of Ravan at Lanka, aided by his ‘attendant spirit’ the monkey God, Hanuman.²³

Eighteen years later, Jones returned to his draft and revised it, showing the Prince visiting various sites of mythology, including, for example, the city of Carthage. The action then switches to India where Jones shows the Gods convening on a mountain. They are aware that Britan’s army is imminent, and interestingly, it is the Goddess Ganga who addresses her fellow deities. She:

expresses her apprehensions of his ultimate success, but advises the most vehement opposition to him; declaring, that his victory will prove the origin of a wonderful nation, who will possess themselves of her banks, profane her waters, mock the temples of *Indian* divinities, appropriate the wealth of their adorers, introduce new laws, a new religion, a new government, insult the *Brahmins*, and disregard the sacred ordinances.²⁴

The Indian Gods, at Ganga’s instigation, decide to obstruct him and there ensues a great battle complete with moving mountains and warring Gods, including Rama,

²² Lord Teignmouth ed., *Memoirs*, p. 479.

mirroring some details, if not the specific events of the Hindu epics. Britan is victorious, and returns to Albione who heals his wounds from battle. At their marriage, a Druid advises that Indians be ruled by their own laws.

Britain Discovered would also, therefore, *encapsulate* the four points important to Jones, and later to Hindu nationalism. First, the enthusiastic imaging of ancient Indian culture in the figure of Ganga addressing the Gods. Next, the legitimisation of British rule in an Indian idiom, namely, a fantastic epic poem, a strategy which would be appropriated by Hindu nationalists to legitimise the values of a revised of Hindu culture as the national culture of India. Thirdly, there is the clarification of a common heritage of Indo-European language and culture. Lastly, we see the collapsing of ‘myth’ and ‘fact’ in historical narrative.

In the image of Ganga addressing the Gods, the fantasy prefigure of the educated, high caste Hindu woman can be seen. Her call to arms echoes Draupadi in the epic *Mahabharata* addressing her five husbands and exhorting them to fight to avenge her honour. Though Jones’ motive in using a female figure for this address may have been his own fascination with the pantheon of Hindu goddesses which he later explored in his *Hymns* it provides an accurate example of the kind of elevated status that Hindu nationalism would ascribe to the Hindu women of the ancient past.

Implicitly, through his use of the epic model in *Britain Discovered*, and his *Hymns* to the Hindu deities it is possible to suggest that the predestination of Britain to rule India ensconced in the form of an epic poem which validates that rule, can be seen again in the use that is made of the epic Hindu poems in reaffirming the right of Hindus to practise and attempt to enforce a specific, religiously influenced, cultural hegemony in post-partition India. Indeed, an epic text whose purpose was the

²³ Lord Teignmouth ed., *Memoirs*, p. 480.

definition and articulation of the culture and values of a modern nation precisely describes the function of CR's *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* in post-Partition India.

Jones was actually contributing to the legacy of the historical right of Hindu rule, and the *right* of Hindus to rule the geographical space of India. The Hindu epics would be used in precisely the same way, the project being to rescue 'civilised' Hindu culture, through the revelation of the epic texts, from Muslim and British degradation, and to consolidate the construction of ancient femininity which Jones presented, for example in the figure of Ganga.

The *Hymns* to the deities present some complex and interesting ideas. Jones starts with a *Hymn to Camdeo*, whom he compares to the Greek Eros and the Roman Cupid. He prefaces the poem with an *Argument* or explanation in which he presents the common linguistic roots of the name of this God, and the name of Cupid, and the Latin word *libido*.²⁵ He presents (K)Cama²⁶ (Camdeo) the God of love, who:

According to the mythology of *Hindustan* [...was...] the son of MAYA, or the general *attracting* power, and married to RETTY, or *Affection*; and his bosom friend is BESSENT or *Spring*...²⁷

Significantly, the consort of the God Kama is properly known as Rati or sexual desire. Jones seems to be giving a wilful misreading of this, offering a much milder, diluted image. Briefly then, the first *Hymn* is to the God of Love, firmly placed in a Hindu context, and accompanied by the appropriate females – mother and consort.

²⁴ Lord Teignmouth ed., *Memoirs*, p. 480.

²⁵ A.M. Jones ed., *The Works of Sir William Jones*, Vol. 6: 313.

²⁶ It is worth pointing out that Jones at this point does not mention the sacred text specifically connected to *Cama* that is, the *Kama Sutra*.

²⁷ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6:313.

The poem in seven stanzas, praises Love as a strong, manly and desirable emotion.

He introduces the Goddess Retty in forth stanza thus:

Thy consort mild, Affection ever true,
Graces thy side...²⁸

Here we see clearly the quintessential Hindu wife, mild, affectionate, a foil to her husband's vigour. Whereas Cama's beloved companion Spring, gendered as male receives two stanzas, his wife is allotted two lines. The couplet which heads the last stanza:

O thou for ages born, yet ever young,
For ages may thy *Brahmin's* lay be sung!²⁹

- suggests that the story and Cama's genealogy were related to Jones by a Hindu Brahmin priest, obviously a male, hence the appearance of the feminine aspect of desire as mild, receptive and affectionate in keeping with Brahmanical rules on female conduct.³⁰ Jones' effusive poem ends on a note of restraint, which prefigures CR's anxieties about the force of sexual desire and romantic love:

Thy mildest influence to thy bard impart,
To warm, but not consume, his heart.³¹

There follows the introduction to his *Two Hymns to Pracriti* or 'created nature,' using as his source, *Kumarasambhava*, a poem by Kalidasa, an ancient poet whose dramatic telling of *Shakuntala* was the subject of various Orientalist translations and re-workings.³² He situates his source material as both authentic, and historical, by

²⁸ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 314.

²⁹ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6 : 316.

³⁰ For an excellent introduction to these values see Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife; The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989). Leslie provides a thorough introduction to the aims and reach of Tryambakayajvan's treatise, as well as a full translation and commentary.

³¹ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6 : 316.

³² See for example: William Jones, *Sakuntala* (1789), Sir Monier Williams, *Sakuntala* (Oxford, 1796), James George Jennings, *Sakuntala, A Play in Five Acts and in Verse* (Indian Press,

referencing Kalidasa, however, he also acknowledges his ‘conversations with learned *Hindus*,’ perhaps a less stable source, as inspirations for the odes.³³ Kalidasa’s poem tells the story of how Parvati won Shiva in order to conceive the warrior god, Kumara. In this introduction Jones attempts to explain the function and presence of the female pantheon of divinities. He explains that,

The *female* divinity in the mythological systems of the East represents the active *power* of the *male*...³⁴

He goes on to reveal the names by which the female principle is known; Parvati, Cali, Durga and Bahvani, but his sense is objective. He is not making an argument for Hindu respect of women proved by the existence of these goddesses; the rhetoric that Hindu nationalists would utilise in their arguments to demonstrate the elevated status of Hindu women. Indeed, the first two manifestations of the female principle of Pracriti which Jones chooses to immortalise are Durga, and Bhavani. Though arguably this poem contains hints of an aggressive, re nascent Hinduism,³⁵ in the Ode to Durga he seems more interested in what I will consciously call the sub-plot-romance-love-story of Shiva and Parvati, even though Durga is an appropriate choice of subject matter, being ‘the patroness of *Virtue*’³⁶

He considers it inappropriate to explore in detail her ‘martial character’ for which she is usefully upheld in post partition India as a symbol of female power, to legitimise female violence.³⁷ Instead it is the ‘soft,’ ‘meek’ and ‘prostrate’ Parvati who is the

Allahbad, 1902). There are over 1000 listings for this poem in the British Library catalogue, and they include a ballet and an opera as well as translations in French, Hindi, Dutch, Bohemian, German, Bengali, Spanish and Swedish.

³³ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 317.

³⁴ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 318.

³⁵ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 38.

³⁶ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6 : 321.

³⁷ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 321.

For Durga as a nationalist figure of female strength see Anja Kovacs, ‘You Don’t Understand, We’re At War! Refashioning Durga in the Service of Hindu Nationalism’ in

predominant female figure in this hymn. The second Ode in this section is to Bhavani, who personifies in divine form, fecundity. This poem appears as a fanciful interlude, combining the figures of Laxshmi, goddess of wealth, and Bhavani with her power of initiating procreation. Jones is more concerned with the proclivity of nature, as opposed to human, and the ode is a hymn to creation in the natural sense. It is possible to suggest that the emphasis on creation in the poems reflects Jones' own creativity as he 'calls in to being a newly defined Hindu world...'³⁸ Certainly the poems are full of imagery assigned in this period as representative of unproblematic femininity and fertility, images which Mill would later call in to question.

It could be said that in the *Hymn to Lakshmi* the first evidence in these poems of the Orientalist model of the eroticisation of Hindu women occurs. During this period, and, I would suggest, within Jones' work as a whole, the written construct of the eroticised Hindu woman is an elusive one – European men had little access to upper caste Hindu women, and lower caste women and maidservants would certainly not have appeared immortalised as divine figures.³⁹ It may be found with better success in the works of later authors - Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, (1817), Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug*, (1839) and Richard Burton and F.W. Arbutnot's 'translation' of the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, (1883) for example. Nevertheless, it appears in this poem as a mixture of sensual Orientalism and coy appreciation:

Not long inswath'd the sacred infant lay,

Contemporary South Asia, Dec 2004, Vol. 13, no.4, pp. 373-388 and Paula Bachetta, *Gender in the Hindu Nation: RSS Women as Ideologues* (New Delhi, Women Unlimited, 2004).

³⁸ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 37.

³⁹ For official attempts to regulate sexual contact between Indian women and English men see K. Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes, Policies and their Critics 1793 - 1905* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980). This work concentrates on the early intermarriages and interactions of British men with mistresses, prostitutes, and other 'accessible' i.e. lower caste women.

(Celestial forms full soon their prime attain):
Her eyes, oft darted the liquid way,
With golden light emblaz'd the darkling main ;
And those firm breasts, whence all our comforts well
Rose with enchanting swell;
Her loose hair with the bounding billows play'd
And caught in charming toils each pearly shell,⁴⁰

The image of a Hindu woman, growing rapidly to maturity under the male gaze, breasts swelling, hair floating in the breeze is explicitly erotic. The same innocent prurience appears less explicitly in his descriptions of Parvati, though not at all in the *Hymns to Ganga and Saraswaty*. Indeed, Ganga appears literally here as a river, though in the essay *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India* there is an illustrated plate which depicts Ganga in profile, as a chaste Brahman woman, head and bosom covered, carrying two lotus flowers.⁴¹

The fourth area under examination, which could be described as a strategy of the collapsing of myth into history, is perhaps the most significant for this thesis. Jones explicitly wrote about what he meant by truth in his Introduction to *The History and Life of Nadar Shah* (1773), commissioned by the King of Denmark:

The very soul and essence of History is Truth, without which it can preserve neither its name or its nature, and with which the most indifferent circumstances in a barren chronicle are more interesting to a sensible reader, than the greatest events how copiously and elegantly soever they may be described, in a romance or a legend...⁴²

Despite this remark and others like it, Jones was convinced that some sort of historical narrative could be recovered from the Indian legends. In his paper for

⁴⁰ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 359.

⁴¹ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 1: 263.

Asiatick Researches, called ‘On Asiatick History’ he writes that, although ‘truth and fiction are blended so as to be indistinguishable...it is possible to collect some rays of Historical truth...’ from Sanskrit literature, and that in the Puranas (the epic texts),

...we may discover some disfigured but valuable, pictures of ancient manners and governments, while the popular *tales* of the *Hindus*, in prose and in verse, contain fragments of History; and even in their dramas we may find as many real characters and events.⁴³

Jones’ ease in blending fact and fiction perhaps stemmed from his own religious beliefs. In his attitude to Mosaic chronology, he also ignored the distinction between myth and history.⁴⁴ Perhaps crucially, Jones also did not engage with the question of the treatment and status of women. His attitude towards the texts he elucidated for the benefit of the Asiatic Society and Europe in general seem devoid of any recognition that what was being articulated in these texts was the repression and degradation of women. It is possible that because his research led him mainly to consider the various Gods and Goddesses, he believed that gender difference was unimportant – that essentially the existence of such powerful goddesses as Laxshmi and Ganga indicated that women in ancient India enjoyed an elevated status. Jones did contribute to the development of the re-telling of the epic texts specifically in relation to women. In his poem, *The Enchanted Fruit, or The Hindu Wife*, ostensibly a story from the *Mahabharata* he describes the golden age of Hindu civilisation – the ‘lovely age’ or ‘pure’ time as such, not for its material prosperity or moral strength, but because:

Nature then reigned, and Natures Laws,

When females of the softest kind

⁴² Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 5:539.

⁴³ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 5:539.

⁴⁴ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 33.

Were unaffected, unconfin'd⁴⁵

The poem goes on to reveal the abuses suffered by women in the present or Cali Yug (dark age), principally critiquing the practice of polygamy. In order to refute this as a Hindu norm, and to uphold the idea that the practice of polygamy was instigated by Muslim invaders, Jones invokes the Hindu Draupadi -

Prespost'rous ! that one biped vain
Should drag ten housewives in his train,
And stuff them in a gaudy cage
Salves to weak lust or impotent rage!
Not such the Dwaper Yug! Oh then
ONE BUXOM DAME MIGHT WED FIVE MEN.'⁴⁶

I have included the emphasis of the original in order to illustrate the sensationalism of Jones' representation of Hindu women. To describe Draupadi as a 'buxom dame' is significant. The use of the word 'buxom' could be read as a signifier of vitality and fertility, but perhaps more tellingly, 'buxom' suggests the equation of Draupadi with the comical lower class heroines of Shakespeare – Maria in *Twelfth Night*, or Juliet's Nurse. Jones was perhaps aware that the figure of Draupadi was for the Hindu orthodoxy a site of an ambivalent energy that is not necessarily feminine or maternal, given her polygamy. He attempted here to marginalise her in a different way by situating her as the accessible, jovial lower class woman, large-breasted and matronly. I would like to suggest that the space Draupadi actually occupies is darker and ambiguous, though this again, is not the strategy of the nationalist characterisation. The categorisation of her softness and joviality does conveniently de-problematise her for Orientalists and provides a formula, though not the exact terms by which she

⁴⁵ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6:180.

could be represented in the future. In this attempt to exonerate masculine Hindu culture from the subjugation of women in the ancient past, Jones gives the story of Draupadi as one of her attracting the attention of the five Pandava brothers and subsequently marrying them, rather than being ‘won’ by one of them (Arjuna), and then forced to share her with his brothers through the instigation of his mother. He describes the five brothers, and then gives his description of Draupadi:

‘To these a dame devoid of care
Blythe *Draupady* the debonair,
Renown’d for beauty and for wit
In wedlock’s pleasing chain was knit.’⁴⁷

Again, whether just for reasons of rhyme, or because of his understanding of the story of the *Mahabharata*, this seems like a wilful misrepresentation of Draupadi. She was not a character ‘devoid of care’ as her very birth by fire was instigated by her father’s desire that she and her twin brother would avenge him against certain wrongs. She is rarely described as ‘Blythe;’ her quickness to anger and the force of her anger being crucial to the action of the *Mahabharata*. Due to her problematic polygamous status, she is even less frequently held up as the ideal Hindu wife – a category more suitable for Sita, in the *Ramayana*. In fact, in this poem, Jones is invoking Draupadi as a model for young European women to save them from vanity and love of their person and their dress. In *The Hindu Wife*, the five Pandavas and Draupadi are required to confess their sins in order to do penance for stealing a sacred fruit. Their confessions, if true, will replace the sacred fruit on the tree and avert the wrath of the sage to whom it belongs. Draupadi’s confession begins with her admitting as a young woman, her love of ornament and knowledge of the power of her own beauty. The

⁴⁶ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 181.

fruit however, rises only two cubits instead of the required ten. She then confesses that a Brahman whom her husbands had sent to instruct her in the Vedas and Puranas had become rather enamoured of her while relating accounts of Krishna and his nine Gopis – particularly

..how they adored and he repaid
their homage in the sylvan shade.⁴⁸

Fearing the worst, her husbands become ‘...pale with fear...’ but as she relates, as though concluding a bawdy tale:

“By Tulsy’s leaf the truth I speak,
The Brahman ONLY KISS’D MY CHEEK!”⁴⁹

Two significant points emerge from these lines. Jones is articulating here the idea that Ancient Hindu women were well educated, and had access to the sacred texts such as the Vedas and Puranas, even though the *Mahabharata* is itself a Purana, would have been primarily transmitted orally.⁵⁰ Secondly, Jones uncritically allows the Brahman male to appear in a sexually ambiguous situation with a Hindu woman, and emerge unscathed, even though Brahman priests were supposed to be *bramachariyas*, meaning celibate, mentally and physically. It is also interesting to note that the only ‘confession’ with the implication of sexual misconduct comes from the only woman – Draupadi. This suggests that anxieties about female sexuality, and indeed the negative sexualisation of the Hindu male, are present in this enthusiastic orientalist passage. The poem continues to describe a fully armed, martial Britannia rescuing Hindu women from the darkness of superstition and scandalous practices

⁴⁷ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 183.

⁴⁸ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 196.

⁴⁹ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 197.

⁵⁰ For a refutation of this see Kumkum Roy, ‘Where Women are Worshipped...’ in *Women and the Hindu Right*, pp. 10-29.

which enslave them. It is also here, then, that the colonial rhetoric of protecting Hindu women from Hindu men can clearly be seen.⁵¹

The poem indicates that although Jones was aware of the epic texts he did not translate them himself, though he fully intended to do so.⁵² It was also certainly the case that he relied heavily on the indigenous literati for aid with his source material, and they of course were Brahmins.⁵³ It has been noted that a significant, indeed, characteristic, feature of Orientalist research was that it ignored the politics of caste, class and particularly, gender, possibly because these distinctions were utterly internalised by British society.⁵⁴ Jones did however, make a translation of the Laws of Manu, or the *Manusmriti*, the ancient Brahmanical code regulating behaviour for Hindus. The Laws of Manu have been vilified by contemporary feminist critique for their definition of the completely subordinate and legitimately degraded position of Hindu women to the appropriate male.⁵⁵ Jones' interest in this work arose from his official position as High Court Judge. He understood the need for an authoritative translation of both Hindu and Muslim books of law for the use of the British administrators who had to rely on both munshis and Brahmins to translate the indigenous laws by which they were to make their legal judgements. Jones provides what could be considered a standard translation of the laws including those which indicate that a woman's husband is her God; that she may have no right over her body, even if he is drunk or abusive; the rules concerning widowhood; the prohibitions on female education; the insistence on exogamy which contributed to the

⁵¹ See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 138-172.

⁵² Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol.1: ix. In a list entitled *Desiderata*, Jones records his intention to translate both the epics from Sanskrit. He also made a draft of part of the *Ramayana* (Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 399).

⁵³ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 6: 318 – 322. Jones speaks of the 'many *Pandits*' from whom he has heard the classic mythological stories.

⁵⁴ See Uma Chakravorty, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi' in *Recasting Women*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ See for example: Kumkum Roy 'Where Women are Worshipped...' in *Women and the Hindu*

isolation of women from their known contexts; the dire consequences for ‘disobedient’ women. Nevertheless, his overall view of this text is worth quoting at length:

The work, now presented to the European world, contains abundance of curious matter extremely interesting both to speculative lawyers and antiquaries, with many beauties which need not be pointed out, and with many blemishes, which cannot be justified or palliated. It is a system of despotism and priestcraft, both indeed limited by law, but artfully conspiring to give mutual support, though with mutual checks; it is filled with strange conceits in metaphysics and natural philosophy, with idle superstitions and with a scheme of theology most obscurely figurative, and consequently liable to dangerous misconception; it abounds with minute and childish formalities, with ceremonies generally absurd and often ridiculous; the punishments are partial and fanciful...the very morals, though ridged on the whole, are in one or two instances (as in the case of light oaths and of pious perjury) unaccountably relaxed; nevertheless, *a spirit of sublime devotion, of benevolence to mankind, and of amiable tenderness to all sentient creatures, pervades the whole work; the style of it has a certain austere majesty...*⁵⁶

This could be called a ‘wilful misreading’ which allows Jones to uncritically applaud the Manusmriti. Though he implicitly recognises the abuse of women that the Manusmriti advocates ‘many blemishes that cannot be justified or palliated,’ he proposes that its true worth lies in its ‘spirit;’ an example of the benevolent, civilised Hindu ancient past, where tensions could be glossed over through style and poetic rhetoric. In his commentary on the epics, CR would have a similar response, guiding the reader towards the ‘sublime’ aspect of the epics in order to neutralise whatever aspects of the tellings might not be in keeping with the idea of an idyllic past, and in order to neutralise the traumatic events of contemporary Indian history. In fact, the contradictory nature of Jones’ Orientalist vision: abhorrence of superstitious practices versus an idealisation of the Oriental past, is perhaps the strongest trajectory between

Right, pp. 10-28.

⁵⁶ Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 5: 455. My emphasis.

his work and that of CR. In a nationalist context, to question the historical validity of the glory of ancient Hindu India would be to appear anti-nationalist and anti-Hindu in the strongest sense.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, to conclude on the influence of Jones, I have illustrated here the most important Orientalist attitudes and ideas which would be significant for Hindu cultural nationalism.

The Orientalist's Ancient India was defined as Hindu, masculine, run by a successful combination of secular patriarchal values and priestly controls. Jones also contributed to the genealogy of the epic poem as politically useful by presenting it as a powerful tool in the definition of statecraft and civil duty, combining imagination with patriotism. Though Jones was certainly enthusiastic about Hindu culture, he contributes both to the limiting of identities and to the process of marginalisation of Hindu women in public culture through his dilution of the agency of the female figures in the Hindu pantheon.

(ii) *Totally Devoid of Delicacy: James Mill's Hindu Women*

The wildness and inconsistency of Hindu statements evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and history...⁵⁸

The trajectories of influence and response become more complex with the introduction of Mill's *History of British India*. While the Orientalist project revealed, created and consolidated a Hindu past that could be assimilated with relative ease in to the nationalist project, sharing as it does, broadly similar concerns, with particular reference to women, Mill provided an altogether more disturbing prospect. That Mill's work would have been more widely read is without question, and his observations, though perhaps not his solutions, are at times pertinent, especially in the

⁵⁷ Romila Thapar, 'Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History,' in R. Thapar, H. Mukhia, B. Chandra eds., *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1977), p. 3.

⁵⁸ James Mill, *A History of British India* (London, Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 1826), Vol.1:2:142.

case of women. Mill's work was the basic text of administrators and historians alike, and the official text book for the Company trainees at Haileybury college: his scathing attack on Hinduism therefore required the strongest defence.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the dichotomy of remaining culturally 'pure' and investing in 'truth' meant that CR and other nationalists including Gandhi, and the educationalist, Dr A.S. Altekar, would not be able to refute entirely the accusations clarified in *A History*, nor would they be able to fully accept them. *A History* provides an important prologue to the texts discussed in this thesis for three main reasons. First Mill's view of the ideas of truth, or history contained within the sacred texts, and the implication of this for later tellings, second his attack on Hindu morality and sexual practices, and thirdly, most importantly, his attack on Hindu masculinity through his critique of the status of women.

It is in Book One of *A History*, entitled, 'Of The Hindus' that Mill begins his attack on the Orientalist project. The opening sentence reads:

Rude nations seem to derive a peculiar gratification from the pretensions to remote antiquity. As a boastful and turgid vanity distinguishes remarkably the Oriental nations they have in most cases carried their claims extravagantly high.⁶⁰

He goes on to further destabilise Orientalist argument by suggesting the impossibility of finding 'truth' from events that are figuratively rendered. In complete opposition to Jones, Mill's vision of Hindu India refuses either to condone the idea of a glorious past, or of Hinduism as a sublime religion, excepting a few minor superstitions. The landscape of Ancient India was one of dark barbarism, a state from which, according to Mill, the country had never emerged.

⁵⁹ Romila Thapar, 'Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History,' in R. Thapar,

His attack on the epics is an attack on Jones' presentation of their value to the West, the result of a 'wild and ungoverned imagination' which was essentially dangerous to the project of Empire. Far from acknowledging Jones' body of work as the rediscovery of a history for India, Mill confidently states: 'This people indeed, are perfectly destitute of historical records.'⁶¹

In fact, the fanatical polemic of his work indicates a zealous desire to annihilate in the minds of Europe any validation for the use of mythological histories and their role in describing a civilised, elevated national identity for India.⁶² Whereas Jones presented in scholarly detail the supposed linguistic and cultural links between Kama, Cupid and Eros, and even went so far as to conceive of a cross cultural history of Ancient Britain along the lines of an Indian epic, for Mill, this idea is beyond ludicrous. His rational, secular mind refutes all possibility of any element of truth in the epic texts:

The works in which the miraculous transactions of former times, are described, are poems. Most of them are books of a religious character, in which exploits of their Gods and their commands to mortals are repeated or revealed. In all, the actions of men, and those deities are mixed together in a set of legends, more absurd and extravagant, more transcending the bounds of nature and reason, less grateful to the imagination and taste of a cultivated and rational people than those which the fabulous history of any other nation presents to us.⁶³

Mill recognised that the idea of the present state of India being a state of decline from one of high civilisation represented by the epics essentially prevented reform. In his project to liberate India from Hindu culture, Mill is particularly interested in the morality, or lack thereof which he believes the Hindu system perpetuates. I would

H. Mukhia, B. Chandra eds., *Communalism...* p. 4.

⁶⁰ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol.1:2:133.

⁶¹ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol.1:2:144.

⁶² J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 126.

⁶³ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol.1:2:144.

suggest that it is unlikely that he would have received his entire picture of immorality from Jones' unintentionally titillating, but fairly innocent depictions of the Hindu Gods and, in particular, Goddesses. Clearly, Mill had to rely on Jones' work for his picture of India.⁶⁴ However, it is obvious that he was using other sources, some of which, like the Abbe Dubois, allowed him to contribute to two new layers of identity for the Hindu woman: the salacious *nautch* girl (dancing girl), and the brutalised house slave.⁶⁵ I offer this opinion based on the retelling of certain similar legends offered by both Jones and Mill. There is, for example, the story of Krishna and his nine Gopis:

When he grew up to youth, the indulgence of licentious love was his great occupation and enjoyment. It is a small part of a picture which I can, or need to expose to view. The scenes with the young shepherdesses are painted by the Hindus in all the glowing colours of oriental poetry...

Though there is an implied eroticism in Jones' romantic poetry, it is Mill who draws explicit attention to an eroticised reading of the Krishna legend for the European reader. The accusation of a 'wild ungoverned imagination' levelled at Jones by Mill was perhaps unfair. From the vehemence of his descriptions of the 'gross and disgusting picture of the universe presented in the writings of the Hindus' it is possible that Mill was using his own sexual imagination, albeit a highly anxious, suspicious one. From his reading of Orientalist texts Mill articulated an image of India that was condemnatory in the strongest sense, and fuelled by sexual anxiety:

It is by no means unnatural for the religion of a rude people to unite opposite qualities, to preach the most hard austerities, and at the same time to encourage the loosest morality. It may be a matter of controversy to what degree the indecent objects employed in the Hindu worship imply depravity of manners; but

⁶⁴ J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 140.

⁶⁵ Abbe J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, trans. Henry K. Beauchamp (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1897).

religion which subjects to the eyes of its votaries the grossest images of sensual pleasure, and renders even the emblems of generation objects of worship: which ascribes to the supreme God an immense train of obscene acts, which has them engraved on sacred cars, portrayed in the temples, and presented to the people as objects of adoration, which pay worship to the Yoni and the Lingam cannot be regarded as favourable to chastity.⁶⁶

The tone of this passage is one of absolute knowledge and authority. The nature of Indian sexual morality as perceived by Mill through his reading provides a key argument for his justification of the continued necessity of British rule based on Utilitarian principles. The erotic carvings on the temples of Khajuraho and Orissa celebrating cosmic unity and fertility were tantamount to pornography for Mill, a corrupting influence on both the European and Indian mind, though this corruption was essentially affecting the masculine mind. The attempt to sexualise the Hindu male as a sign of his mental weakness was a new strain introduced by missionaries and Utilitarians.⁶⁷ Mill described Hindu men as having ‘a feminine softness in both their persons and address.’⁶⁸

Tanika Sarkar has suggested that the degradation of the Hindu male body is symbolic of the impact of colonial rule on Indian society as a whole, and it is possible to add to this by suggesting that one of the main projects of Hindu nationalism was not only to recuperate the male body, but also to de-sexualise the ‘rampant’ Hindu culture described by Mill.⁶⁹ That the focus remained on Hindu masculinity was to have specific repercussions for the nationalist project, which reconstructed Hindu masculinity as a site of empowered self control, and, as one strategy, projected the identity of the uncontrollable sexual animal on to the Muslim male.⁷⁰ Interestingly

⁶⁶ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol. 1:2:364.

⁶⁷ See Tanika Sarkar, ‘The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationality in 19th Century Bengal’, in *Studies in History*, 8:2 (1992), pp. 213-35.

⁶⁸ James Mill, *A History of British India* Vol.1: 2: 399.

⁶⁹ Tanika Sarkar, ‘The Hindu Wife...’ in *Studies in History* p. 216.

⁷⁰ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 16.

though, both the sexual accusations relating to the level of civilisation levelled by Mill and the effort to negate these accusations resurfaced in the 1920s with the publication of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, which I discuss in chapter one.

Mill's attack on Hindu masculinity made its strongest argument in his discussion of the status of women. His now famous observation, which I will nevertheless repeat here, that:

Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women. Hardly ever are they mentioned in their laws, or other books, but as wretches of the most base and vicious inclinations on whose nature no virtuous or useful qualities can be engrafted.⁷¹

was perhaps the most influential attack that Hindu masculinity and Hindu culture had yet sustained. I suggest that it was the most successful, because Mill contextualised the treatment of women as an indicator of the level of civilisation which a society had attained. He states:

Among rude people the women are generally degraded; among civilised people they are exalted. In the barbarian, the passion of sex is a brutal impulse, which infuses no tenderness; and his undisciplined nature leads him to abuse his power over every creature that is weaker than himself. The history of uncultivated nations uniformly represents women as in a state of abject slavery from which they slowly emerge as civilisation advances.

Several points of discussion emerge from this quotation. Primarily, the idea of an uncontrolled sexual impulse and an 'undisciplined nature,' peculiar to the Hindu male is one which Gandhi would engage with in his written work, as is the 'abject slavery' Hindu women.⁷² That this sexual behaviour was sign of the moral and physical weakness of the Hindu character would be refuted in a number of ways by Nehru⁷³

⁷¹ James Mill, *A History of British India, Vol. 1:2*: 385.

⁷² M.K. Gandhi, *To the Women*, (Allahbad, Allahbad Law Journal Press, 1941).

⁷³ Nehru's ideas of the importance of the health and strength of the physical body can be most strongly seen in his letters to Indira Gandhi as a child, in Sonia Gandhi, ed., *Freedom's*

and Gandhi,⁷⁴ in their focus on a ‘healthy’ body, and interestingly, in the underground pornography of pre- and post-partition India, which focused on health and exercise as the path to a healthy sex life.⁷⁵ It is Mill’s last sentence which would be completely re-worked by Hindu nationalism. The Hindu project reclaimed the Hindu Goddess of Jones’ ‘civilised’ ancient past and ‘revealed’ her subjugation by barbaric invasion of Muslim and British men, invasions which resulted in the reduced status of Hindu women. Rather than emerging from a state of barbarism, Hindu society was emerging from a state of forcibly repressed civilisation.

For Mill, the question was one of economics. The superstition, effeminacy and laziness of the Hindu male had kept him in a state of necessity resulting in a persistent struggle for the basic requirements of life. He states:

It is only in that improved state of property and security, when the necessities of life have ceased to create perpetual solitude, and when a large share of attention may be given to its pleasures; that the women, from their influence on those pleasures, begin to be an object of regard.⁷⁶

The notion of ‘pleasure’ described by Mill would sit uncomfortably with the Hindu nationalist ideology. Women were certainly not for ‘pleasure’ and Mill’s use of the term is ambiguous, although it is possible to assume he was referring to domestic comfort, rather than physical or emotional pleasure. There is little need to point out the irony of the idea that in a civilised society women would be *objectified* for their influence on the ‘pleasures’ that could be enjoyed by their men.

Daughter: Letters Between Indira Gandhi and Jawarhalal Nehru 1922-39 (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

⁷⁴ See M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography, Or, The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (London, Penguin, 1982).

⁷⁵ See for one example Prof. K. Deyer, *Sexual Beauty of the Female Form* (Amritsar, Steno House Agency, 1936). I am referring here to the juxtaposition of medical health text with explicit erotic pictorial representation.

⁷⁶ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol. 1:2: 384.

Mill goes on to quote at length the Laws of Manu which describe the function and morality of women as corrupt and incapable of independence. His tone is scathing as he describes the ways in which the *Manusmriti* legally degrades women. When it comes to sexual behaviour however, Mill is less confident.

Though initially Mill appears to be for reform and progress for women, he is in fact ambivalent. Having constructed the Hindu woman as in a 'state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex' and also, 'It is to be observed besides that the women have no choice in their own destiny: but are absolutely at the disposal of their fathers.'

He enforces the idea that Hindu women are victims of an oppressive, patriarchal regime. However, he also describes them in their other popular incarnation, the Indian woman who is:

...totally devoid of delicacy; their language is often gross and disgusting, nor do they feel more hesitation in expressing themselves before men, than they would in front of their female associates. Their terms of abuse or reproach are indelicate to the utmost degree...it is not possible for language to express, or the imagination to conceive, more indelicate or grosser images.⁷⁷

For this description, Mill relied on both E. Scott Waring's *A Tour To Sheeraz* (1804) and the Abbé Dubois' *Hindu Manners, Customs and Practices*.⁷⁸ Dubois' work, an attempt at objective socio-anthropology is a thinly veiled contemptuous attack on Brahmins. In particular, he points his attack on what he sees as the explicit sensuality of Hindu culture. His statements on the status of women are clearly directed at the corrupt Brahmin culture which subjugates them:

⁷⁷ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol. 1:2: 399.

⁷⁸ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol. 1:2: 399.

Subjected on all sides to the moral ascendancy of man, the very idea that they could possibly place themselves in a state of independence and out of men's power is not allowed to cross their minds. The opinion is firmly established throughout India that women were only created for the propagation of the species, and to satisfy men's desires. All women are therefore obliged to marry, and marriages are carefully arranged. If by that time they have not found a husband, they very rarely keep their innocence much longer.⁷⁹

However, though his attack on Hindu masculinity through a critique of the status of women may have been pertinent, his opinion in general, which clearly influenced Mill, is one of a 'natural tendency' to 'excite [their] lewd imaginations,' regardless of gender.⁸⁰ While leveling abuse at Hindu males, with accusations of hypocrisy, false celibacy and homosexuality, his opinion of Hindu women is no higher. He states:

Experience has taught that young Hindu women do not possess sufficient firmness, and sufficient regard for their own honour, to resist the ardent solicitations of a seducer. Therefore, measures cannot be taken too early to place them intact in their husbands' hands.⁸¹

Mill's confusion as to the character of Hindu women is indicative in some part of his distrust of the imagination, and the forms which inspire the imagination.⁸² While his motives were based on ideas of Utilitarian reform, a secular methodology in which there was no place for sexual experience, he himself could not refrain from recording explicitly sexual material, albeit in Latin.⁸³ He is referring to passages from N.B. Halhed's *Gentoo Code*, and Dr. Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1799). It is interesting to note the full title of Halhed's work: *A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordinations of the Pundits, from a Persian translation made from the Original Shanscrit Language*. This indicates that the quotations which Mill guides his reader

⁷⁹ Abbé Dubois, *Hindu Manners...* p. 206.

⁸⁰ Abbé Dubois, *Hindu Manners...* p. 308.

⁸¹ Abbé Dubois, *Hindu Manners...* p. 207.

⁸² J. Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings*, pp. 150 -194.

to in Latin, are in their fourth translation – from Sanskrit to Persian, to English, to Latin. It has been argued that Mill was reacting against the ‘libertine tradition of radicalism’ with its creed of hedonism, sexual pleasure and the indulgence of appetite.’⁸⁴ Further to this, in disguising explicitly sexual material in his own work in Latin, the language of scholars which the majority of women in England would not have studied, the concurrence of *A History* and the nationalist project is suggested. While the nineteenth century would see the beginnings of social reform movements for women, sexual behaviour, culture and morality would continue to be sites of contest and of protest. Matters of sexual identity or of desire would be disguised in technical or archaic language as in the case of *The Kama Sutra*, or proscribed and regulated by the philosophy of self-control by nationalist textual responses to the challenge of articulating a new identity for citizens of the emergent nation.⁸⁵

Mill’s *History of British India* provided a critique of Hindu culture which could be used in a number of complex ways, both positively and negatively by Hindu nationalists. His suggestion that the level of civilisation can be judged by the status of its women contributed to the logic embraced by reform movements for women in the nineteenth century, but at the same time he attempted to destabilise utterly the notion of a civilised, cultured Hindu past in which the new nation could base its identity.

The commentary on Hindu culture and the representation of both Jones and Mill contribute to the setting of a discursive stage where the debates on women, sexual identity, culture and the nation emerge. The space between the two positions of Hindu women, the figure of delight and the chaste mother is a site of suturing of culture and sexuality, where sexuality, particularly women’s sexuality becomes

⁸³ James Mill, *A History of British India*, Vol. 1: 2: 398.

⁸⁴ Abbé Dubois, *Hindu Manners...* p. 308.

⁸⁵ See for example, K. Ramaswami Iyengar, *The Kama Sutra (Or the Science of Love)*, (Lahore, Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1921) and S.C. Upadhyaya, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (Bombay,

something that is alien to Hindu Indian culture. The concept of female sexuality as a threat to the fabric of Indian society and cultural values, as a disruptive force which destabilises the nation, and the *image* of the nation becomes subject, in the post-colonial period, to government by reformers and Hindu nationalists.

It is both the representation of Hindu women, and the critique of their status in the work of both these imperial observers which provide both material and motivation for the subsequent debate on women's bodies and women's sexual identities. In texts written by women, and in texts written about women in India, it is sexual identity which comes under the closest scrutiny, and which is determinedly recast as an identity which is chaste, maternal, domestic and self sacrificing. As I will discuss in the following chapter, women's bodies become symbols of virtue and repositories of authentic Hindu culture, representing not only the purity of Hindu Indian culture, but also of that culture's superiority to the west.

Taraporevala, 1962).

Chapter One: The Object of Controversy: (Re) Forming Hindu Women

(i) Introduction

This chapter aims to explore some of the far reaching trajectories of the representations and ideas about sexual identity and civilised behavior discussed in the Prologue. It is comprised of a series of case studies which look at texts and ideas emerging from nineteenth century debates on social reform for women, and also twentieth century textual responses to *Mother India* (1927); a sensational account of India by American journalist Katherine Mayo.

The purpose of these case studies is to provide textual evidence for the argument that Hindu cultural nationalism had a specific preoccupation with female sexuality and its regulation. I study how these texts may both unwittingly reinforced colonial observations about the subjugation of Hindu women, and also display their own set of concerns about the possible consequences of an unchecked, active, female subjectivity particularly sexual subjectivity, on the nation.

This chapter provides a starting point to the exploration of cultural nationalism in this thesis, by looking at the ideas driving the work of Hindu reformers concerned with the status of women in the nineteenth century. I take a brief look at the debates surrounding reform for women and then introduce some of the key terms and ideas which were appropriated by Hindu nationalism in an attempt to manage the cultural representation of women. Of particular interest is the autobiography of Ramabai Ranade, wife of the Hindu social reformer and high court judge Mahadev Govind Ranade. This work, entitled *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* (1938), ostensibly relates Ramabai's life story as a child-bride and then as a reluctant but

influential representative of reform for women. I argue that Ramabai is a disembodied presence in her own autobiography, partly through the process of translation, and also because the text colludes and enforces the dominant patriarchal ideology on the status of Hindu women. I do not mean to undermine the radical and important nature of Ramabai's work or her life by this argument. I reflect on the meaning of the title of her autobiography, and the omission of the details of her experience as a child-bride, in order to suggest some implications for the representation of Hindu women future nationalist discourse.

I then turn to the work of the American journalist Katherine Mayo, whose scandalous text *Mother India* evoked a series of impassioned and revealing responses from the educated male elite. Mayo's book and the responses to it were published before Ramabai Ranade's autobiography came out in English: my decision to discuss Ramabai first rests on her text emerging from the context of the indigenous drive for reform. Mayo's work however belongs to a genre of writing that can be categorised as sensational and publicity driven, with an underlying political, Imperialistic motivation. It does not belong in the genre of work that emerged out of a serious consideration for social reform in India.

I chose Mayo's book also because it emerged during a period that has been recognised as crucial to the formation of Hindu nationalist ideology. As discussed in the introduction, it has been argued that Hindu nationalism was constructed as an ideology between the 1870s and the 1920s and in the 1920s the doctrine was crystallised.¹ The growth of Hindu nationalism both inside and outside the [dominant] Congress party went hand in hand with the 'rediscovery' of Hindu (and Muslim) cultural and religious values, acclaimed at least equal to those coming from the west.

¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*

Religious reformism developed in tandem with political nationalism, and the strengthening of separate identities.

I do not focus on Mayo's text, but rather the responses to it. I investigate how these responses, while attempting to counter the sexually derogatory claims made by Mayo, actually reveal certain anxieties about female sexual subjectivity and serve to undermine the notion of complexity in female sexual identities.

The responses are also a rich source of ideas regarding the perceived essential difference between western culture and western women from Indian culture and Hindu women. In these texts, the west is constructed as immoral, decadent and without spiritual values. Part of this construction relies on the fact that *Mother India* was authored by a woman whose culture and society apparently had no means of controlling or regulating her.

The responses to Mayo's book serve to reveal popular anxieties about a range of issues that women faced in the early part of the century. The respondents' agenda was twofold: to deny the allegations made by Mayo, and therefore assert a particular form of Hindu, patriarchal identity, and also to represent the true nature of Indians and the Indian philosophy of sexual behavior. This was an essentially moral position; sexuality is contextualised firmly in normative models of heterosexual conjugal relationships.

The responses employ a range of different techniques to convey their message. Newspaper editor and social reformer K. Natarajan employs a scholarly tone to reference the ancient past of India in order to refute Mayo's claims. These references to the past were designed to build an image of a successful cultured civilization which had been suppressed by colonial intervention, but that was strong and ready to re-

(New York, Colombia University Press, 1996), pp. 11-79.

emerge in a way that was utterly functional with the demands of modern life. He uses comparisons with the Bible and the worlds of Ancient Greece and Rome to substantiate his points in a methodology that arguably owes something to the work of Orientalist scholars such as William Jones. Natarajan's text unconsciously perpetuates the narrative of progress developed for India by orientalists such as Jones, and other colonial administrators and commentators and thus is, I argue, unwittingly divided against itself.

The anonymously published *Sister India: A Critical Examination of and Reasoned reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's Mother India*, written by one Shataram Ganpatrao Warty differs markedly from Natarajan's gentle scholarship. Warty's mission in this text is to refute at all costs Mayo's sexual accusations against Hindu men. His language reflects a deep concern with reasserting a strident and potent masculinity that is specifically Hindu. He acts as a defender of his country and of his women, both too weak to speak for themselves. Though there are discrepancies in his visualisation of a cultured, civilised India, reflected in his caste prejudice, nevertheless, Warty does his best to illustrate the former glory of Indian civilization, and indeed, Indian Imperial projects in the past. What differentiates Warty's response from the others in the family is his focus on Mayo herself. He attempts to undermine her argument by accusing her of frigidity and perversion, suggesting that if she had been married, and therefore sexually active, she would never have been able to cast slanderous sexual aspersions on Indian men. Warty is articulating an important idea here – one in which marriage for women is used as a euphemism for sexual knowledge (of the correct kind) and also as a signifier of true adult womanhood. Marriage in this way functions as a necessary lesson of human life that is taught to women by the appropriate male.

His involvement in this line of argument leads him to fantasizing about actually having sexual intercourse with Mayo, making his text every bit as suggestive as hers. Warty includes another important type of rhetoric in which he discusses the essential difference between Indian women and western women. All of the family of responses engage with this idea in different ways, and Warty is no exception. His neat differentiation rests on the importance of family life to the Hindu, and the role of Indian women within in it. Indian women are desexualised bodies, in service to the family, and therefore the nation – western women enter into base sexual contracts with anyone, without regard for family or nation.

The third important aspect of Warty's critique, and one that also appears in other texts, is his misreading of a western text which talks about women. In this case it is Otto Rothfeld's semi-erotic *Women of India* (1920) that attempts a categorization of Indian women by type, including that 'type' of Indian woman, the dancing girl. Warty misquotes Rothfeld in order to illustrate that the gender segregation practised in India actually contributes to women's power in the social environment. By including Rothfeld's text as a reference, Warty is actually lending authority to a thinly veiled sexually charged fantasy of the eroticism of 'oriental' women.

Dhan Gopal Mukerji, an expatriate Indian living in America, is the author of the third text referenced here, entitled *A Son of Mother India Answers*. Mukherji's technique is to utilise a discourse of science and rationality to answer Mayo's claims. The crucial failure of this text is Mukherji's argument concerning the revision of the 1891 Age of Consent Act which attempted to raise the age of consent in India from twelve to fourteen.

Articulating the rhetoric of difference, Mukherji suggests that the revision was rejected by Imperial authorities, because Indian women mature faster than western

women, and their bodies are able to bear children sooner. This stereotypical racist fantasy of the early ripening of Indian women in hot climates undermines the more salient points he makes in relation to the provision of hospitals and medical research in India.

The most fruitful of all the responses, and one which incorporates all the key arguments of these texts, misreading, difference, sexual anxiety and comparison with the ancient past, is C.S. Ranga Iyer's *Father India*. Iyer's text is in the form of a dialogue with Katherine Mayo, and there is some indication that he has taken to contents of her book personally. He becomes entangled in the arguments of *Mother India*, to the extent that his own arguments become confused and contradictory. Iyer's misreading of one text in particular, Judge Ben B. Lindsey's *The Revolt of Youth*, provides a compelling example of the ways in which western texts were appropriated in service to the Hindu nationalist project. Lindsey's text provides an invaluable source of misquotation for Iyer to support his argument for the emasculation of western men, as a result of the freedoms enjoyed by western women. A series of concerns about masculinity informs Iyer's texts. His desire to represent Hindu conjugality and gender relations in their most normative, heterosexual light lead him to discuss even marginal activities such as prostitution in this context.

What we see in these texts is a recasting of the vulnerable body of 'mother' India as a virile and powerful male, who exposes the weaknesses and flaws of western society through a superior morality. All of these texts attempt to validate those abuses of women's human rights which were traditionally sanctioned in India, such as child marriage, by recourse to a rhetoric of ancient tradition which by virtue of its 'authenticity' was uncontestable, and certainly not open to scrutiny from the outside.

The texts are important for several reasons. In them we can see a strong spirit of protest against the stereotype of the barbaric and licentious orient which Mayo attempted to perpetuate. The texts all serve to clarify contemporary anxieties about the emancipation of women and the role of women in sexual life, but more than that, they show how sexuality was, in an unprecedented way, part of a wider public debate about Indian identity in the 1920s. This debate was concerned with coding, defining and setting boundaries for the individual citizen of the emergent nation. Within this, sexual behaviour was of crucial importance. These texts have a place in any history of sexual morality in India, and also in them we witness a change in the nature of the debate on sexuality. Not concerned with desire or intimacy, these texts use the language and function of sexuality as a means of talking about the protection of the family unit and therefore civil society as the sacred centre of Hindu life. Rather than a private, or even an indigenous discussion, the responses to *Mother India* explode the discussion outwards into the world. This is a new way of talking about sexuality in India in English, which is not concerned with the erotic, but rather with the mechanics of sexual behaviour whose purpose is to produce children within a heterosexual relationship: marriage. There is an overriding sense of the fear that the emancipation of women, of the kind that has produced Katherine Mayo, will result in the destruction of the family, and the conventional way of Hindu life. The texts attempt a definition of sexual relations in India that is firmly within the context of family relationships and marriage – it is talked about by men and controlled by men, and serves the purpose of perpetuating the patriarchy which drives orthodox Hindu society.

I conclude this chapter with a brief look at the work of Saraswati Dayanda, the Hindu educator and reformer. I have included his educational programme for young

people to show that ideas about controlling sexuality and gender relations within a specifically Hindu nationalist framework had a clear history, in this case going back to the late eighteenth century. Dayananda published his *Light on Truth* in 1875 as part of his reform programme for female education. In it he describes a system whereby boys and girls are totally segregated in the education system from birth and their curriculums are designed to prepare them for marriage. Their parents and teachers keep a diary of their characters, and these diaries are matched up when the young people are of marriageable age. Dayananda's militant Hindu nationalism causes him to see women solely in terms of breeding healthy sons for the new nation, and he exhibits the militant chauvinist mistrust of female sexuality. His work is particularly interesting because in it we find again, the disruption of notions of privacy, intimacy and individuality – a diary written by others, a sex life controlled and regulated by outside forces.

This chapter aims to show and discuss the anxieties that were experienced by the emergent Hindu right, and also to demonstrate the public nature of the cultural debate on sexuality and the individual. It introduces some key terms used by Hindu nationalists in their writings, and argues that these were appropriated for the ideological management of women.

I suggest that there is a process taking place in the collective male imagination in the late nineteenth century which begins to culturally prioritise the value of chastity and the status of 'wife' for Hindu women, not just in the past, but as a necessity for the future. This cultural prioritisation takes place in those arenas not necessarily connected specifically to the development of legal or political policy, but through texts in dialogue with the world around them. By this I mean specifically texts,

published within the context of reform for women, and texts published as a response to outside critiques of Indian society.

Although these texts make claims for female subjectivity, and the superiority of Hindu culture, ironically they mask and gradually re-code the articulation, significance or suggestion of female subjectivity and further to this, that the superiority of Hindu culture is predicated on the de-sexualisation of the representation of Hindu women. This points to the inception of the strategy with which Hindu writers and reformers would attempt to codify and regulate women's identities and bodies in service to the new nation.

I explore the development of certain cultural currencies which are used to negotiate debates on women's reform, and female sexuality in India, and also to illustrate the kinds of imaginings, or fantasies at work in the exchange of these currencies, fantasies which emerge from both marginal and silent spaces, as in Ramabai Ranade's *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* (1938), and also from the implicit and explicitly articulated sexual anxieties about female sexual behaviour that are present in responses to Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*.

(ii) A Note on Reform

In the discussions on reform by for example, reform groups such as the Brahma Samaj, public discussions in newspapers, and public agitations for legal reforms, there were four dominant areas: education, sati, child marriage and widow remarriage that all have a connection to ideas of the female body and the controls required socially, religiously and legally, to regulate it.

The debates about the status of women were conducted in two integrated arenas from the mid 1800s to the late 1920s. The first was in the public forum of social reform where Indian male activists such as Rammohan Roy (1772 – 1833),² Iswar Vidhyasagar (1820 –1891),³ Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842 – 1901), and Kandukari Verasalingam (1848 – 1919) debated and defined the changes needed in order to ameliorate the social and civil status of women. Subsequently, the second, was in what could be called the arena of contemporary cultural comment – in journals such as *The Indian Review* and *The Indian Social Reformer*, and in texts by Hindu males, for example those which responded to Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*. The social reformers and cultural commentators appear to have built on, and used as a framework the ideas found articulated in the Orientalist and Utilitarian schools of thought.

The four dominant areas of reform for women were directed at changes within a tightly defined social and family structure as opposed to caste and class relations. The agenda for reform at this stage did not consider franchise for women, birth control, the right to divorce, rights in the workplace, or amelioration of economic relations. Given its area of engagement, focus on the status of women at the beginning of the nineteenth century could be seen as a direct response to the abuses of Hinduism highlighted by Mill in *A History*.

The ideas for effecting reform, based on the four key ideas were also a call for a return to the past – the past articulated, as I have argued, by William Jones, where

² I will not discuss the work of this important reformer here, as it is extensively documented. For biography see: S. R. Bakshi ed., *Raj Rammohan Roy* (Faridabad, Om, 2002); for influence on education see Reena Chatterji, *Impact of Raja Rammohun Roy on Education in India* (New Delhi, S. Chand, 1983). For letters see Sophia Dobson ed., *Raja Rammohun Roy: Life and Letters*, (Calcutta, Harold Collet, 1914); for collected works see R.P Chanda and J.K. Majumdar eds., *Raja Rammohun Roy, Letters and Documents* (Delhi, Anmol Publications, 1987).

³ For details of Vidhyasagar’s goals and achievements in the field of female education and widow remarriage see: S.K. Bose, *Iswar Chandra Vidhyasagar* (New Delhi, National Book Trust,

women enjoyed equal, if not an elevated status with regards to education and civil rights. The reform movements concentrated with paternalistic concern on the issues that affected women of their own (upper) caste to a large extent, allowing women of lower castes to continue to be represented as prostitutes and servants. This in itself is a significant indicator of the sexual anxiety which surrounds many of the critical voices in this debate – the accessibility of the lower caste women was not in question, it was the upper caste Hindu woman who was in need of both protection from outside interpretation, and reinvigoration in the domestic, that is in the home and within the national, sphere.

Male reformers in the mid-nineteenth century wrote both in English and the vernacular, indicating that they wanted their ideas to reach the indigenous population and colonial authorities. In many ways both reforms that were politically agitated for, and the cultural comment that was preoccupied with the issue of the ‘Indian woman’ were responses to colonial critique. Their work was less specifically concerned, as other writers such as CR, Gandhi and Dayananda would be, about using the epics as the location of contemporary role models for women. Rather, they were continuing the argument between Mill’s utilitarian critique and Jones’ Oriental ideal.

The continuation of this contest of ideas and representations of India as adopted and re-worked in to a dialogue of reform by Hindu male activists initiated with force and momentum the construction of Hindu female identity which would be utilised with such success by Hindu nationalists.

(iii) The Culture of Reform: Verasalingam's Critique of Muddupalani

The contest between Mill and Jones that provides the prologue for my discussion of the responses to *Mother India* also serves to contextualise the paradox presented by Hindu men politically agitating for reform for women in the mid-nineteenth century. Two in particular prove fruitful for the discussion of this paradox: Kandukari Veerasalingam and Mahadev Govind Ranade.

Verasalingam presents this paradox as the conflict between the genuine desire to promote education for women, and an anxiety about female knowledge about sexuality which meant that female education was to be subject to rigorous moral restrictions. Verasalingam was born in 1848 in the Telugu-speaking district of Godavari in Madras. As a Brahmin, trained in classical Telugu language and literature, he spent his life promoting the dialect as the language of reform. This was significant in that the reforms he advocated, mainly in the arenas of widow remarriage and education for girls, and was, to some extent, successful in implementing were without reference to the critique of Hindu India articulated by colonial administrators. Because his ideas did not reference the imperial critique of Hindu India as barbarous, and in addition were articulated in Telugu, these reforms were not equated with the kind of modernity or westernisation implied by other activists.⁴ Verasalingam was a member of the *Brahmo Samaj* and *Prarthana Samaj*, both groups implicated in the drive towards the homogenisation of the Hindu religion; unsurprisingly therefore, his basis of reform was religion, specifically, a rejuvenated Hinduism.⁵ This rejuvenated

⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 25.

⁵ The *Prarthana Samaj* of Bombay was started by a missionary from the *Brahmo Samaj* organisation that had been set up by a group of Bengali Hindus including Rammohun Roy in 1815. The purpose of the group was prayer and reform along Hindu lines, but rejecting the popular practices of worshipping the images of Gods, dogma and the rule of the Brahmins. For a useful history of this group and its wide influence see David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, Princeton University

Hinduism was based on the purification of the religion, social reform, and vernacular education.⁶ He was also heavily involved in programmes for widow remarriage and female education. It is within the sphere of education that the paradoxical nature of Versalingam's belief lies. While a staunch and successful advocate of vernacular education, the vernacular in this case being Telegu, the literary culture that Verasalingam approved of for women was circumscribed in that it was contained by his own commentary as to its morality.

The case in point is the eighteenth-century poet Muddupalani.⁷ Her Telegu poem, *Radhika Santuranam* (Appeasing Radhika) focuses on the story of Krishna and his most beloved consort, Radha. What is unusual about the poem is its transgressions of accepted norms of Hindu female behaviour: normally, Krishna woos and wins Radha who is filled with divine and sexual longing for him. Though Radha is represented as desiring, the story usually centres around Krishna's conquest of her, and his pleasure. Maddupalani's poem reconstructs Radha as taking the initiative, and it is her sexual satisfaction that brings the poem to its artistic resolution.⁸ The poem is based on the classical aesthetic of *rasa*, meaning 'juice' or 'essence'. According to this principle, a perfect work of art will contain all of the nine *rasas*, or basic human emotions, including joy, pain, sexual pleasure and anger, in appropriate measure depending on the subject matter. For Muddupalani's twentieth century translator, Bangalore

Press, 1989).

⁶ *Autobiography of Kandukuri Veerasalingam Pantalu*, trans. Dr. V. Ramakrishna Rao and Dr. T. Rama Rao, (Rajamundry, Addelpally, & Co ltd. no date), Pt. 2: 172-175.

⁷ Though this thesis is specifically concerned with Verasalingam's critique of *Radhika Santuranam*, the history of the reception of Muddupalani's poem is itself interesting and important, as it was banned in its 1902 edition by colonial authorities. This edition did not include the preface where Muddupalani proudly traces her female genealogy through her mother and aunt, both poets. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India: Vol. 2 The Twentieth Century* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-15.

⁸ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 8.

Nagaratnamma, the *Radhika Santuranam* achieved this rare balance: ‘filled to the brim – but not spilling over.’⁹

Verasalingam was obliged to include a reference to *Radhika Santuranam* in his *Andhra Kavula Charitramu* (1887). While he was forced to admit that Muddupalani was a scholar, well versed in the sacred languages, her poetic voice was categorised by him as appropriately ‘Soft and melodious...’¹⁰ Verasalingam appears to have made a desperate attempt to ascribe ‘proper’ female qualities on to Muddupalani by this statement. However, he necessarily needed to undermine her authority, stating scathingly that she was ‘one who *claims* to be an expert in poetry, music and dance,’ and going further to reveal his anxieties about her dangerous subject position, saying:

This Muddupalini is an adulteress. Many parts of the book are such that they should never be heard by a woman, let alone emerge from a woman’s mouth. Using *siring rasa* as an excuse she shamelessly fills her poems with crude descriptions of sex.¹¹

He goes on to admit that this is not surprising since:

She is born in to a community of prostitutes and does not have the modesty natural to women.¹²

Several pertinent points emerge here. It is clear that publicly articulated knowledge by a woman about sexual pleasure was unacceptable. Though Verasalingam was committed to female education, the knowledge which women should have access to would certainly not include anything of a sexual nature, particularly not written by a woman, even if the text was an ‘authentic’ cultural property which fulfilled the other criteria of antiquity, indigenous language and spiritual basis. The conjunction of

⁹ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 2 Nagaratnamma’s translation appeared in 1902 published by Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrula & Sons.

¹⁰ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 2.

¹¹ K. Verasalingam, *Andhra Kavula Charitramu Vol. 3: 143* cited in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 3.

¹² K. Verasalingam, *Andhra Kavula Charitramu Vol. 3: 143* cited in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 3.

‘woman’ and sexual knowledge represented a dangerous freedom which had not only to be avoided by all means, but strenuously criticised. The warnings had to be put in place by those men responsible for education reform; sexually knowledgeable women were prostitutes and adulteresses, good, ‘natural’ women had no need or desire to read, talk or learn about sexual behaviour or sexual pleasure, or perhaps more significantly, no need to focus on their own bodies as sites of experience other than for maternity or service.¹³ Verasalingam was suggesting that modesty was natural to women, not taught, though he was of course not addressing the influence of caste and economic circumstance which determine moral values. For the ‘natural’ women, in her appropriate contexts of virgin daughter or wife/mother, the autonomy embodied by *Radhika* was seen as a pernicious influence, which would destabilise family values. Veerasalingam reflects anxieties about the critique articulated by Mill in his observations of Indian women and Hindu society. In this sense, the shaping of a new respectability was the task of the early reformers, who were attempting the transition of society which incorporated the continuity of tradition and the progress of modernity, while crucially remaining essentially Indian. The trajectory begun by Jones, taken up by Mill and re-worked by early reformers saw the inception of the ideology that a modern India would be built on the management of women’s identities, especially sexual identities, of the past, and of ‘authentic’ culture in the future.

(iv) *The India They Loved: Writing Hindu Women in Ramabai Ranade’s ‘Autobiography’*

¹³ Partha Chatterjee makes this point. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 131.

Mahadev Govind Ranade rejected the precepts of the orthodox wisdom that decreed women should not be educated; however, he wished to maintain the domestic system of Hindu family life which in turn, it could be argued, was itself maintained and perpetuated by the cultural laws that circumscribed women's lives. The problematic contradictions between desirable modernity and the moral dilemma of female emancipation meant that his position was not as actively radical as his ideology suggests. His life and ideology provide an excellent example of the paradoxical nature of reform at this time. Ranade was educated at Elphinstone College, Bombay, and rose through the ranks of the legal system to become a high court judge in Bombay. His questioning of the customs and beliefs of traditional society led him to join a Widow Remarriage Association, and in 1870, the *Prarthana Samaj*. His interest in promoting reason over superstition in the practice of the Hindu religion developed specifically in to an interest in social reform for women.¹⁴ The Hindu faith, therefore, provided both the context and the boundaries of his ideas of reform. He was created a sub-judge in Poona in 1871 and, though he remained committed to real social change in a public sense, his home life, suggestively, became the arena for a revealing test of his philosophy.

In 1871 his wife of twenty years died, and his father instigated a marriage for him with an eleven year old girl. Though he protested, the match went ahead. His father was an extremely devout and orthodox Hindu, and their family a large extended one, including widows, and his father's second wife and children. It was due to this paternal influence combined with Ranade's own deeply held belief in his duty to his father, and the importance of maintaining family continuity, that he agreed to marry the child. Interestingly, there is no record of paternal disapproval at Ranade's

¹⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 25.

purposeful education of his wife, Ramabai, who would go on to become one of India's most eminent social reformers. Rather, it is the women of the household who are represented as being initially hostile to Ramabai's education, even though, it is recorded that Ranade's father was emphatically against his son marrying an educated woman.

Following his marriage, Ranade continued to be active in social reform. Though his personal world occupied the ambiguous space between tradition and modernity, embodied by his wife, he pressed on for reform which rejected religious literature including the epic texts on the grounds of their post - dating the 'Golden Age' of Hindu civilisation which he firmly believed in, as opposed to the *Manusmriti* and the *Vedas* which supposedly pre-date or are of the 'Golden Age.' It was the epic texts, the *Puranas*, which had corrupted both society and religion, and only gradual change could restore Hindu society to its former glory. Though Ranade would not utilise the sacred texts as examples of reform, he did believe that change would come from within society itself. He pointed to the given Indian Hindu values which would naturally begin to assert themselves with the rejection of those cultural practices highlighted as abuses by colonial administrators and western writers. This would be a key point for CR, who, unlike Ranade, understood the power of the sacred texts to control and indoctrinate the individual and would combine their strong cultural influence with exactly this ideology of intrinsic Hindu morality. Ranade's essential philosophy regarding reform was that it must come from within: while education and reform movements might contribute to the evolution of Indian society, it was the individual (male) who was responsible for change in his immediate environment. It is not, strictly speaking, Ranade's work that is a fruitful source of material for the thesis; in fact, it is the autobiography of his child-bride that, from its title onwards

provides evidence of the nature of the kinds of ideas and images which would prove useful building blocks for the representation of women in the culture of the new nation.

Ramabai's autobiography is a testimony to her husband and the philosophy he espoused, embodied of course, by her. Her title: *Himself, The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* (1938), is suggestive of the paradox which the early reformers found themselves living out and indicates the traditional relationship her husband maintained with her. Orthodox South Asian wives traditionally do not refer to their husbands by name or in the first person, only in the third person. By prefixing the 'autobiography' of her life with "Himself" she contextualises her female Hindu identity as correctly formed and shaped by her husband, and perhaps gives a reassurance to Hindu males that the result of her 'schooling' did not have the pernicious effect usually feared of female education. Indeed, to the contrary, the autobiography represents the ultimate success for reform for women devised by men. It is successful because Ramabai represents *her self* as adhering lovingly to her actual duties as a wife in the home, and as faithful to the concept of spousal duty and conjugality in the outside world, despite being able to read English and being active in the public sphere. In fact, *Himself* raises some interesting points in relation to the objectives and results of early reform for women. Writing from what Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have called the 'eccentric location' of the subject position occupied by women writing in India, Ramabai's text colludes with and enforces dominant ideologies about the nature of women and their roles as constituted both by early reformers and later nationalists.¹⁵

The epigraph reads:

¹⁵ Susie Tharu and K.Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, p. 38.

To my husband and his father through whom I was introduced to the India they loved.¹⁶

The epigraph clearly shows the nature of Ramabai's interaction with the outside world. The India 'they loved,' is essentially, emphatically different to the India which Ramabai had been taught about as she became as a female child bride; that of the domestic space despotically ruled by women, with a strict hierarchy that descended from the husband's mother and his female relations with the new bride at the bottom of the domestic order. The India of her husband and father in law, a place of reason outside the internal politicking of the domestic space, is revered by her as a world safely contained and controlled by the men in her family. This India – a space of dynamic ideas and reform, belongs to the men, and access to it is strictly through them. Importantly, the epigraph indicates love of country inspired by her husband and father in law, rather than a love of them as individuals, or of their life together. There is an implicit act of subversion which could be read in to this – that the most important bond to emerge from her relationship with Ranade was her new, legitimate and public connection to her country. However, that this should be the case is entirely proper given its historical context. The love of husband and family is entirely synonymous with love of nation, and this became keystone of nationalist thought.

Anne McClintock points out that the family, and indeed the gendered formation of 'nation' is the 'indispensable' metaphor in the drive to unify and homogenise both past and future narratives about nation and identity. The strength of the trope of the family lies in its ability to be categorised as 'natural' and authentic. For women, citizenship, the legitimate relationship with the nation, was to be mediated not by access to civil and social rights, but by the social relationship with a man, through

¹⁶ Ramabai Ranade, *Himself, The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, epigraph. (New York, Longmans & Co., 1938).

marriage and the family.¹⁷ Rather than subversion, the epigraph is an act of personal submission, underlined by the ambiguity, perhaps a result of translation, of denoting India as the space that ‘they’ loved, rather than that she (Herself) loved.

The introduction to *Himself*, written by an English woman, Katherine Van Atkin Gates involves itself both with the priorities of orientalist discourse in its language of representing and understanding the Indian female other, and also with the masculine priorities of nineteenth century reform for women which were still concerned with protecting traditional family relationships.

In what appears as an elaborate form of ventriloquism, Gates was encouraged to make the translation by a Dr. A MacNicol of Edinburgh, :

... a Lifelong and sincere friend of India, he has written extensively, endeavouring to interpret the oriental mind and character.¹⁸

Ramabai’s story could be said to be further marginalised by this double interpretation; firstly from Hindi into English – the title states that Gates is both translator and *adapter*, and secondly through contextualisation. Gates reveals that certain passages have been cut out of the original, and that she has, in the author’s voice, inserted several paragraphs in order to make otherwise obscure Hindu customs and practices clear to the English reader.¹⁹ The introduction serves to frame the text as a curious object of study for a European audience, rather than a fascinating or perhaps, morally instructive life, worthy of recognition. In this sense, the *motif* of translation functions as a further framing device of the text for a western audience. This motif is implicated in a politics of eradication – both in the denial of the linguistic specificity of the text, and in the way that Ramabai’s voice itself becomes

¹⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 357-358.

displaced. What follows is a search for clues about her life – the actuality of experience of being a child bride. The twenty first century reader is required to make a pact to ‘release’ Ramabai’s voice from her western editor, with mixed results.

Gates presents her endeavour:

with the hope that it may help the West sympathetically to study and understand the beauty of the ideals of the Hindu woman in her home, of her selflessness and tact, and of the sincerity of her attitude towards the one she has been taught to make the object of her worship.²⁰

Gates’ admiration for Ramabai’s story is rooted in a contradictory belief in the correctness of her situation. It is contradictory, because while her admiration does not imply an explicit critique of the submissive status of the Hindu wife, it cannot wholeheartedly approve. Gates attempts to use Ramabai rather as Jones used Draupadi in *The Hindu Wife*; as a figure for emulation by young western women, hence her plea in the introduction for the sympathetic response of the western reader for the:

...beauty of the ideals of the Hindu woman *in her home*...²¹

This makes *Himself* a kind of conduct book which privileges ideas of self-sacrifice (‘selflessness’) and self-suppression (‘tact’) as elevated female virtues across the boundary of ethnicity. By referring to Ramabai’s attitude towards her husband as ‘sincere’ Gates confers on Ranade approval of his masculinity. He is an appropriate ‘object of worship’ despite the fact, acknowledged by Gates, that Hindu wives were ‘taught’ to revere their husbands. In fact there some tension between Gates’ apparent approval of Hindu domesticity and her need to justify in detail for her western audience, the reasoning behind the title of *Himself*. She states:

¹⁸ Ramabai Ranade, *Himself*, p. (viii).

¹⁹ Ramabai Ranade, *Himself*, p. (x).

The second part of the title is equally understandable to the oriental mind. No Indian wife could write about herself without revealing how completely she is the reflection of her 'lord and guru' and how dependent upon his attitude towards her is her happiness. No price is too great to pay for his continued favour. Therefore, the title of *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady* is both technically and psychologically correct.²²

The tension is apparent in the utter distinction made by Gates in her definition of Indian women as 'the Hindu wife.' Her statement 'no price is too great...' indicates that she acknowledges that female subjectivity is sacrificed in this case for domestic harmony and maintenance of a male dominated power structure. She promotes the notion that Hindu women are essentially different to 'other' women, an important point which would be recuperated in later nationalist strategy. In a sense the tension exists between the admiration of the Hindu model of female submission and domesticity, and the desire to be independent and autonomous, outside the boundaries of male control. It is largely a question (ironically enough) of the limits of self knowledge. Gates projects the 'submission' of Western women in to the past, and by doing so evades the confrontation of the reality of American women's lives in nineteen thirties America, the period when this translation was made. The strategy for this evasion is the editing of the submissive, Hindu woman's voice.

Gates in a sense makes the distinction to ensure the separation of two different types of female experience – the 'liberation' of Western women was suitable only for Western women, just as the domestic purity of the South Asian women was suitable for them. This brings in to being a system of exoneration for Western feminists or women in general from any kind of responsibility in terms of response or action towards the ways in which Hindu women were represented. While Gates' essentially

²⁰ Ramabai Ranade, *Himself*, p. (x).

²¹ K. Van Atkin Gates, Introduction to *Himself*, p.(x). My emphasis.

racist categorisation of Hindu women as happily subservient was meant as *objective* view of difference, Indian males, as will be shown, were not so coy, or so uncomfortable, in their solidification of this boundary of difference between Western women and ‘their’ women.

Gates’ response to Ramabai’s life story is to add superdefinition to her status as wife. Paradoxically, given the radical nature of Ramabai’s education and public life, Gates locates her and her story firmly in the home, and clarifies with a sense of awful finality the status of appendage willingly embraced by Ramabai. The quotation above, understood in this context essentially reads: *no Indian wife could write herself: she is the reflection of her ‘lord’ and ‘guru’.*

Ramabai’s autobiography reflects both the paradox between the actively conducted campaign for social reform, and the desire to maintain the traditional structure of family life based on ‘authentic’ Hindu values, that was faced by the early reformers. Perhaps more significantly, it illustrates the extent to which women’s lives were represented in keeping with the priorities of masculine Hindu culture.

The extraordinary silence of the work lies in its almost objective detachment from the reality of her position – rather than a guide of experience for other young girls who had been married as children, *Himself* rather perversely, romanticises and validates the system, where a benevolent father/husband figure may take on the education of his young daughter/wife for her improvement.

Rather obviously, as suggested by the title, *Himself* provides an example of the homogenising strategy that would gather momentum and force with the writings of later nationalists. Here is an example of the incarnation of the monolithic figure of

the ‘Hindu’ woman who denies and obstructs the important heterogeneous nature of Hinduism and Hindu practice.

Though it is also an autobiography of a Hindu Lady, as Ramabai herself states:

From the beginning, I determined that this story should not be about myself; that I would write only of him. But the surprising thing is that wife is like a shadow! You may tell it to leave you but it can't!²³

Ramabai's self denoted title of shadow could be read recuperatively to suggest that it is the male body which depends, for proof of its existence in the material sense, on the presence of a shadow. This indicates a reciprocity of roles – the proof that the male body exists is in the shadow provided by the female body. However, this reciprocity is still problematic in the disembodiment, the very fleshlessness, of female identity and experience. In fact, Ramabai *herself*, through the strategy of narration of her husband's life, and the strategy of translation exists disturbingly only in the margins of her own work: a shadowy presence in her own text.

The wife indeed, is ‘like a shadow;’ a disembodied reflection of the shape of masculinity and its priorities and values, a gendered space/body abstracted from caste, class and identity. This body is not the site of any subjective female experience, but instead an idealised reflection of the values of the high caste, educated, Hindu male.

(v) The Wickedest Book Ever Written: Defending Mother India

This could be read as a somewhat of a *coup* for Hindu masculinity which had rather suffered at the hands of a western woman before Gates, in the form of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* – a scathing, virulently anti-Hindu account of the subjugated

²² Ramabai Ranade, *Himself*, p. (viii).

status of Hindu women at the hands of their husbands and families. This combination of Imperial propaganda and titillation focuses on sexual behaviour, serial child abuse in the home, and the rape of child brides. The text encourages communal tension between Hindus and Muslims, the point being that the cruelty and barbarism of certain practices was specifically instigated and condoned by Hinduism.²⁴ Mayo's objective however, was not the feminist highlighting of serious abuses, but to indicate that Indians were not fit to rule themselves, in line with contemporary colonial opinion.²⁵ Importantly, Mayo's work, dedicated to 'The People of India' elicited an unprecedented response from reformers and colonial administrators alike.²⁶ The work is notorious, and has received wider reception and longevity than *Himself*, even though, Ramabai's text was essentially supposed to articulate an authentic voice of the 'modern' Indian woman.²⁷

Before addressing the responses to *Mother India*, I will give some brief details about its author.²⁸ Katherine Mayo was born in Ridgeway, Pennsylvania in 1867. Her chosen vocation of novelist and journalist left her no stranger to controversy; her sympathies were strongly for the establishment, and she lent the support of her pen in several books, for example, promoting the Pennsylvanian police force. Mrinalini

²³ Ramabai Ranade, *Himself*... p. 220.

²⁴ See Mrinalini Sinha, 'Reading *Mother India*: Empire, Nation and the Female Voice' *Journal of Women's History*, 6:2 (1994), p. 11. Katherine Mayo's follow up work: *The Face of Mother India* (New York and London, Harper Bros., 1935), was even more violently anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim was banned in India by colonial administration for this reason.

²⁵ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1927), p. 32. See also Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India* (New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1971). Jha discusses Mayo's political motivations and connections to official British Imperial propaganda.

²⁶ See also: E. Woods, *An Englishman Defends Mother India* (Madras, Ganesh & Co. 1930). For contemporary critical analyses of Mayo's work see Mrinalini Sinha's introduction to *Katherine Mayo, Mother India: Selections from the Controversial 1927 Text* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998), pp. 1-66 and Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham and London, Duke university Press, 2006).

²⁷ However, Rama Joshi's claim that *Mother India* '...was so influential that it is still read by Western feminists today...' as a critical text is spurious and highly debatable – see Rama Joshi 'Gender and Imperialism in British India' *Economic and Political Weekly* 20:43 (1985), p. WS-72.

²⁸ For biographical material on Katherine Mayo, please see Mary E. Handlin, 'Mayo, Katherine' in E.T. James, J.W. James and P.S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: 1670-150, A Biographical*

Sinha suggests that it was the 'gendered and racial urgency' that she gave to these police stories that made them so successful as propaganda.²⁹

Sinha also argues that Mayo, a member of the ethnically exclusive Society of Mayflower Descendants, was unhappy about the political and social threat posed by immigrant Indians to the USA, and that this was a motivating factor behind the writing of *Mother India*.³⁰ She goes on to say:

Mayo had always favoured a strong Anglo-US Imperial alliance that would jointly keep at bay the demands of various 'natives' and their liberal sympathisers for the devolution of greater political responsibility into the hands of indigenous people themselves.³¹

Mother India is a racist text, and therefore was viewed as a possibly dangerous one, with its potential to incite strong feelings. Yet Mayo's decision to exploit both Imperial and nationalist investments in the 'women question' meant that *Mother India* incited a huge swathe of textual responses rather than anti-Imperial violence.³² The focus on the barbaric treatment of Hindu women was dealt with by Hindu men in kind – through written responses in English. *Mother India* played on existing tropes, of the kind argued by James Mill about the appalling condition of India's women. This argument was utilised by Mayo as evidence for the continuance of the Imperial project in India and the inability of Indians to rule themselves. Sinha's analysis supports my argument, that Mayo's 'revelations' were in fact just sensationalised reiterations of accusations of barbarism which had been levelled at Indian culture from colonial observers since the nineteenth century, and further that these 'revelations' proved more disabling than enabling for the project of reform,

Dictionary: Vol 2 (Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 515-17.

²⁹ Mrinalini Sinha ed., *Mother India*... p. 7-8.

³⁰ Mrinalini Sinha ed., *Mother India*... p. 13.

³¹ Mrinalini Sinha ed., *Mother India*... p.17..

³² For a discussion of the ideological management of the 'women question' by both Imperial and nationalist observers, see Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', *Cultural Critique: 7* (1987), pp.119-56. This reference also appears in Mrinalini Sinha ed.,

entangling respondents in her exaggerations on the degrading sexual nature of Hindu Indian cultural life.³³

It is worth examining some of the responses to *Mother India* in detail, as they reveal a broad range of attitudes towards gender, reform for women, and crucially, attitudes towards sexual behaviour and morality. These responses, neglected by previous scholarship are important for several reasons. They provide an insight in to how culturally generated anxieties about women's bodies and autonomy took hold, and further show what, in this period, those anxieties were. The responses, in the form of published books, establish this debate firmly in the realm of culture, not just for educated elites, but for anyone with a working knowledge of English to have access to.

The most significant of the responses are K. Natarajan's *Miss Mayo's Mother India: A Rejoinder* (1927), followed by: *Sister India: A Critical Examination of and Reasoned Reply to Miss Mayo's Mother India* (1928) by 'World Citizen' (Shantaram Ganpatrao Warty), *A Son of Mother India Answers* (1928) by Dan Gopal Mukherji and *Father India* (1927) by C. S Ranga Iyer.

Natarajan's text is actually a long pamphlet, published as a series of articles in *The Indian Social Reformer*, a magazine of which he was the founder editor. *Miss Mayo's Mother India* has an introduction by another public reformer, Mr G. A. Natesan, editor of *The Indian Review*. The public positions of both these men indicate that this particular text may have had the widest circulation, and indeed, it was the first response to Mayo that was published. The other texts certainly reiterate points made by Natarajan, and follow his focus on the comparison of the sexual morality of India versus America.

Katherine Mayo's Mother India... p.28.

The purpose of the rejoinder, as stated in the introduction was to point out: ‘particularly to English and American readers, how Miss Mayo betrays her mortal aversion to things Indian.’³⁴ The introduction then goes on to contextualise Natarajan’s response in light of his interests and activities:

...the abolition of child marriage, enforced widowhood, and dedication of women as devadasis, purity, total abstinence, removal of caste restrictions on sea voyages, inter-dining and inter-marriage, the removal of untouchability, women’s education, the abolition of animal sacrifices, etc.³⁵

This slightly confusing list is indicative of the moral authority which Natesan wishes to confer on the author of the text, presenting him as a man who is strongly active in the fashionable campaigns for social reform such as ‘the abolition of child marriage’ yet also holds really radical ideas of reform such as ‘inter-marriage’ and ‘inter-dining.’ At the same time, he conforms to those values perhaps dearest to the heart of the Hindu orthodoxy; ‘purity’ and ‘total abstinence,’ though it is unclear whether this abstinence refers to meat, alcohol or sexual intercourse. The open ended ‘etc.’ at the end of the passage allows for the addition of those social reform issues which have not been noted, but perhaps are dearest to the heart of the reader. This makes Natarajan a trustworthy, creditable authority for both indigenous (male) and Other (non Indians, women) readers, who he both acknowledges as audience, yet positions as other by positively defining himself against them.

Natarajan uses a variety of sources to refute or diffuse the statements made by Mayo. The opening sequence of Mayo’s book describes in lurid detail a scene outside a temple dedicated to the goddess Kali in Kalighat, Calcutta. Mayo describes the sacrifice of a goat, following which there is a scramble by the women outside to lick

³³ Mrinalini Sinha ed., *Mother India*... pp. 34-35.

³⁴ G. A. Natesan, *Introduction to K. Natarajan, Miss Mayo’s Mother India: A Rejoinder*

up and preserve the blood of the sacrifice in order to secure the birth of a son.³⁶ Natarajan refers his readers to a ‘recent’ fictional account of the life of St. Paul ‘by the anonymous author of *By An Unknown Disciple* (1918),’³⁷ that describes daily life in biblical Jerusalem. Here, one may discover that the sacrifice of animals was ‘of a daily occurrence, perhaps on a larger scale’³⁸

There is no incongruity in citing a contemporary fictional account of the life of St. Paul as evidence for the scale of animal sacrifice in pre-Christian Jerusalem. Natarajan is making the connection, much as William Jones did, for a common heritage of ancient traditions, in order to illustrate that animal sacrifice was not confined to India, but existed within a Judeo-Christian tradition. India appears as both ‘ancient’ and the contemporary at the same time, or thus de-historicised, appears as an ‘amorphously aesthetic space’ much as the India of Orientalist observers was constituted.³⁹ Natarajan is in fact validating this ‘picturesque’ India created by European writers for European audiences.

Though he appears to be colluding in the European image of a picturesque India, his attack on the West is fixed in the present. He points to the material, or sensual values of western culture, stating that Mayo does not take in to account thousands of animals ‘who are daily sacrificed to the great belly god in Europe and America.’⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that Natarajan uses the metaphor of sacrifice, different from plain consumption. As opposed to the Hindu notion of sacrifice for the greater good, or even personal gain, he infers that western society gives a religious value to the

(Madras, G. A. Natesan & Co. 1927), p. (iii).

³⁵ G. A. Natesan, *Introduction* to K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. (v).

³⁶ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1927), pp. 13-16.

³⁷ The author is Lucy Phillimore. See L. Phillimore, *Disciple, By An Unknown Disciple (A Novel)*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), and L. Phillimore, *Paul, Saint and Apostle (A Novel)*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1927).

³⁸ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 6.

³⁹ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of British India*, (London, University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 85.

bodily greed for food. It is perhaps an idea which can be aligned with Gandhi's fetishised vegetarianism which relates to the physical purity of the individual and subsequently of society.⁴¹

Natarajan saw *Mother India* as 'the product of a fanatic frenzy for the superiority and supremacy of the whites' though he is careful to keep a balanced view, acknowledging that Mayo's book is not representative of American opinion.⁴² Through Mayo, he produces a more specific attack on the British administration, recognising that the India Office in London had seen in Mayo a champion for Imperial rule. It is no coincidence that the statement from the India Office cited by Natarajan sees the prime function of Mayo's work as 'uncovering' abuses towards women:

October 10th, 1925...Am sure her book will not be much to speak of; but we have given women votes in this country and Miss Mayo's thesis about the oppression of Indian women by their own men, may have electoral value.⁴³

Though there seems to be in this, and the other responses to Mayo's text, the unifying argument that the solution to India's problems would be independence from British rule, the text seems more specifically concerned with the allegations of sexual deviance which Mayo cites as the root cause of the 'inability' of Indians to rule themselves. The vehement reaction to Mayo's thesis was a major contributing factor to a de-sexualised representation women and of Indian culture, both in the ancient past, and in a contemporary sense. This is clearest in Natarajan's discussion of the *Shiva lingam*, which Mayo correctly identifies as a phallic symbol, though she

⁴⁰ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 8.

⁴¹ See M. K Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (London, Penguin, 1927), pp. 66-69, 292-294.

⁴² K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 12.

⁴³ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 16.

incorrectly states that it functions as little more than a constant reminder of its sexual function to the Hindu mind. Natarajan cites the Hindu philosopher Vivekananda, who suggests that this is the ‘inveterate tendency of the Westerner to look at things from the physical and objective side.’⁴⁴

By ‘objective,’ Vivekananda seems to mean literal, or visual, indicating the inability of the ‘rational’ Westerner to fathom the inner significance of the *lingam*. The perspective of ‘science’ precludes the ability to empathetically understand the inner significance not only of the symbol, but of Hindu culture as a whole. The *Shiva lingam* could be said to be representative of many things, including fertility, masculinity, creativity, caste or religious sect. At the same time Natarajan confers upon Hindu culture a spirituality devoid of sensual or sexual connotations. In order to refute Mayo’s claim, he first turns to Francis Swiney’s *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross* (1908) which suggests that the origin of the symbol of the cross was also phallic. This however is too close to Mayo’s statement that the *Shiva lingam* is indeed a phallic symbol. Whereas when speaking on the illiteracy of women, a comparison between the ancient past of Greece, Rome, Palestine and India will suffice, when considering the male organ, any ‘negative’ claim must be entirely eradicated.

This is achieved through a sort of chronological system of proofs which begins with comparison with western ideas on religion and modes of worship, and ends in a denial, by an indigenous source which perversely results in the desexualisation of the phallus.

He therefore continues by quoting from James Bisset Pratt’s *India and Its Faiths* (1915) which states that though the *lingam* had its origins in phallic worship, devotees

⁴⁴ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo’s Mother India*, p. 55.

no longer see any sexual significance in the symbol. While this may be the statement closest to the truth, Natarajan is still uncomfortable with the idea that a Hindu practice specifically representative of masculinity can be aligned with explicit sexuality. He concludes the discussion by offering various other sources which utterly deny the phallic origin or symbolism of the *lingam*, including a reference to those devotees of Saivism (the worship of Shiva).⁴⁵ It is clear from this system of proofs against the sexual or phallic origin of the *lingam* that Natarajan is unwilling or unable to ascribe any positive value to the *fact* of the *lingam's* origin being that of symbolically representing the phallus.⁴⁶

Though Natarajan as a social reformer cannot deny the 'half truth' of Mayo's statements, his anxiety about sexual behaviour leads him to the extreme of denying the existence of any kind of sexual practice outside of marriage. Where he has to acknowledge sexual intercourse, as in the case of incidences of the consummation of the marriage between child brides and their older husbands, he introduces an exonerating caveat, for example:

it is known that in the early days of the Mahomedan conquest, a consummated marriage afforded a protection to girls which nothing else did.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 57. The other authorities cited as follows are all European or American: Prof H. H. Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (London and Madras, Christian Literary Society of India, 1904), suggests that the *lingam* symbolises 'the shanku shell, lotus, club and discus.' Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India* (London, John Murray, 1883), suggests it represents 'the feet of Vishnu'. Rev. J. E. Padfield, *The Hindu at Home* (London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1908), suggests it represents 'the foot, or a mark in honour of Laxshmi'.

⁴⁶ See Phillip Rawson, *Oriental Erotic Art* (London, Book Club Associates, 1983); pp. 29-65. Though Rawson's explanation for the de-sexualisation of this emblem is the most credible, as he attributes it to the Brahmin fear of losing spiritual 'power' through ejaculation, I do not think that Natarajan ascribed to this idea in its explicit acknowledgement of sexual function. This philosophy *is* relevant in relation to Gandhi who would meditate on the economy of 'energy' with reference to ejaculation and the practice of Brahmachari.

⁴⁷ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 21.

How consummating the marriage, as opposed to the status of being married afforded protection to girls is unclear. The suggestion is that sexual intercourse would mark or cordon off the female body from the danger of the ‘outside’ male, and that this was a policy understood between men, regardless of religion.

He then goes on, in defence of the Hindu wife, to compare the picture given by Mayo of Hindu wives as illiterate, superstitious, and husband worshipping, to the description of the Hebrew wife from Proverbs XXXI:10 –28. Further to this, he claims that ‘The Hebrew woman, like the Hindu woman, did not know how to read and write. Neither did the women of Ancient Greece and Rome.’⁴⁸

Whether this statement bears scrutiny or not, for Natarajan, the connection between these women and their contemporary counterparts is seamless and relevant. The precedent of an ancient past in which all women were denied education serves as a reasonable, rational explanation for the present state of illiteracy among women in India, even though it sits uncomfortably with the common assumption that in the ‘Golden Age’ of Hindu civilisation, women were educated and had an equal social status to men. It is interesting that Natarajan chooses to make this connection with a generalised global ancient past, rather than refer to the numerous literate women of that past, or of his own period, such as Ramabai Ranade. Natarjan’s text is in fact, divided against itself, by unwittingly reinforcing the narrative of progress developed for India by colonial administrators and commentators.

He then brings his argument in to the present by comparing the Hindu wife’s devotion to her husband, with that of the American woman: ‘There is, no doubt, a wide gulf between the Hindu woman’s feeling for her husband, and that of the American woman’s’:

⁴⁸ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo’s Mother India*, p. 24.

Someone wrote the other day that when it is no uncommon thing for a woman to have five husbands in eight years, the term 'marriage' ceases to have any meaning.⁴⁹

He is illustrating the difference not only in the institution of marriage in India and America, but also suggesting a fundamental difference between Indian and American women. Though he acknowledges that neither system is perfect, this difference is the cornerstone of his defence. The easiest method of defence is the comparison between the laudable chastity, however regulated, enforced, or mythical of the Hindu woman, and the loose morality of the Western woman. This includes, and relies on a personalised attack on Mayo's own sexuality. The first indication of this in Natarajan's text is during his discussion of what could be considered her most outrageous and sensational claim, that Hindu mothers serially and legitimately sexually molest their own children. It is worth quoting Mayo's accusation here:

In fact, so far are they from seeing good and evil as we see good and evil, that the mother, high caste or low caste, will practice upon her children – the girl 'to make her sleep well,' the boy 'to make him manly' an abuse which the boy, at least, is apt to continue daily for the rest of his life.⁵⁰

In response to this he states:

Anyone who knows the high honour in which mothers and motherhood is held in India will have no hesitation in describing Miss Mayo's statement as a frigid, calculated lie...this statement alone brands Miss Mayo as – but it is needless to say more.⁵¹

What is interesting about this statement is the notion of that Mayo is 'frigid' – a psychologically based inability to enjoy sex, or to have penetrative sex combined with the ambiguous reference to her as an unidentified but morally (sexually?) perverse woman: a prostitute? a child abuser? Paradoxically, it is not a licentious imagination

⁴⁹ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, p. 33.

⁵¹ K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 79.

which fires Mayo's claim, but a prurient imagination which fires Natarajan's claim. Rather than contain the idea of sexuality and perversion, Natarajan creates a space here for the sexual imagination to function beyond any boundaries, in deciding what exactly he believes Mayo to be. The fact that he wishes to contain sexuality and perversion is made clear in his discussion of Mayo's statement that the molesting of young boys leads them to practise masturbation throughout their lives. Given the historical context, it is fair for Natarajan to see masturbation as a vice, however he claims that this particular vice simply does not exist in India:

It is well known that this is not one of the vices *which at any time* was said to be common among the Hindu people. The universality of marriage, and early marriages in India remove the main cause which has led to the extensive prevalence of this vice in modern countries.⁵²

This is an impossible claim to knowledge. Natarajan's own sexual imagination about the absence of sex in Hindu culture operates as a substitute for factually based knowledge about sexual behaviour and practice.

Natarajan's response to Mayo's *Mother India* illustrates the key principles around which other Hindu male writers responding to her work would organise their arguments. The first, as in Natesan's introduction, reveals and consolidates the authority, both in a modern sense as reformers, and a traditionally Hindu sense, as chaste moralists, to speak on this subject. The second is the strategy of comparison and difference between Hindu and American women, especially in relation to their husbands and sexual experiences or desires. It is this idea which enables the key strategy of de-sexualising the identity of Hindu women and of Hindu culture, and the valorisation of chastity and virtue in the domestic space as inherently Hindu and female, and on which the success of the new nation of India depended. The third

point, which is also implicated in this strategy of de-sexualisation, is the use of the ancient past as the location of authentic and rational explanations for the current status of women.

(vi) World Citizen's *Sister India*

It becomes further apparent that though Mayo's attack on Hindu women created an opportunity for Hindu men to re-present Hindu wives and mothers in the texts which responded to her accusations in a way that fitted with patriarchal priorities, what was also at stake was the issue of how Hindu masculinity was perceived by the 'outside' world. *Sister India: A Critical Examination of and Reasoned Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's Mother India* provides a clear example of this, and is also the most sexually paranoid of the responses. Written by Shantaram Ganpatrao Warty under the pseudonym 'World Citizen,' the choice of title symbolises the author's relationship to his country – that of a protective brother, the male who has perhaps least authority after husband and father, but who is, nevertheless, responsible for defending his 'sister's' honour. The title, which suggestively infers a cosmopolitan and international outlook, actually positions the author as 'brother' therefore instantly confers the legitimate authority which Natesan articulates for Natarajan in his introduction. By situating the author's subject position in the family, it also provides that chaste morality, which is so crucial in refuting Mayo's claims. The second part of the title positions the author as a modern, secular and rational figure of authority who will use reason to destabilise Mayo's wild statements about Indian life and culture.

⁵² K. Natarajan, *Miss Mayo's Mother India*, p. 79. My emphasis.

The aim of the book, given in the preface is ‘to place before the people at large, in India and in the United Kingdom and in America, a truthful picture of the social and political ills of India and their causes.’⁵³

This rational, objective aim is followed by an apology which reveals the masculine priorities of this response:

In a discussion of this character, some warmth is necessarily generated. It is not easy to avoid it especially when we feel strongly and write sincerely. And who would not feel strongly about a matter like this? When the whole manhood and womanhood of India are held up to ridicule, when their past and present are unscrupulously maligned...what self respecting Indian would shrink from presenting an erect posture...?⁵⁴

The dual meaning of ‘manhood,’ used here subconsciously, coupled with the proudly advocated ‘erect posture,’ reveals the regeneration of the masculine spirit which Warty believes should be and will be on exhibition in this text. He opens his discussion by commenting on the morality, not simply of the Western woman, but of the Western reader:

The taste evinced by the vast number of readers there in reading such a dirty, indecent book as Miss Mayo’s *Mother India*, the universal reception given to such blasphemous writing, show conclusively to what mental degradation society in the West has fallen...We have heard it said that the majority of English and American readers, especially the women have developed a special liking for divorce cases, immoral news and society scandals, and often they read nothing else.⁵⁵

The implication of this, particularly of the emphasis on female readers, is of course, that Hindu society, controlled and regulated by masculine priorities reveals its moral superiority by the fact that its women do *not*, and in fact, cannot, read such material. He is pointing not only to the physical degeneracy of Western life, but also to the fact

⁵³ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India: A Critical Examination of and Reasoned Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s Mother India*, (Bombay, Karnatak Press, 1928), p. (ii).

that that this degeneracy has an intellectual sanction. The reception given to Mayo's work indicates 'the truth regarding English reader's immoral tastes. To us, this has been the measure of their mental degradation and moral fall.'⁵⁶

The fault then, is less with Mayo's thesis, but as Warty suggests, with the intellectual appetite of the West which engages with the thesis. The very act of *reading* becomes a morally charged issue, an act which denotes whether a person is 'clean' or 'pure' meaning, morally sound, whatever the reader's response may be.

Though Warty also recognises the political usefulness of Mayo to the perpetuation of the British administration in India, his main argument with her is her humiliation of the Hindu male:

it is the duty of every Indian to bear in mind this insult, though he is at present impotent effectually to resent it...Would not then the full grown Hindu, whatever his miserable position at the present day and under foreign rule may be, feel and remember the insult to his civilisation and culture, to his woman kind and his religious notions.⁵⁷

In this paragraph he is making clear the responsibility of each individual Hindu male to take responsibility for the reinvigoration of Hindu culture and how it is perceived by the world. By his gendered prefixes, Warty reclaims, and re-asserts the *ownership* by the Hindu male, of culture, the female body, the family and religion, wresting these bodies and arenas from the control and representation of the 'West'. This compensates for the 'effectual' experience of castration both by the colonial system and by Mayo's text.

Given this there is some tension between the proposed presentation of a cosmopolitan India(n) in the global arena, which Warty adopts, in naming himself

⁵⁴ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. (iii).

⁵⁵ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 15.

‘World Citizen’ and in his epigraph to the text which reads: ‘To All Races and Peoples of the World,’ and his actual view on the equality of all humans. When discussing the incidents at the Kali temple as related by Mayo, though he claims that ‘not only Brahmins but the lower classes in Bengal’⁵⁸ worship Kali in an unspectacular devotional manner, he ends his discussion of this episode by emphasising that in any case:

Only the lowest and most ignorant of Indians are Kali worshippers.⁵⁹

This evidence of caste prejudice highlights the upper caste brahmanical anxieties about the representation of Hindu men as ‘uncivilised.’ The discrepancy seems to be the desire to represent the Hindu male as tolerant, cultured, pure, sophisticated and civilised, but to still retain those class and caste boundaries which enable Warty at least to admit to the presence of ‘barbarous’ elements, but to relegate them as belonging to that unenlightened section of society, which will later in the text also be responsible for any (rare) instances of drunkenness or sexually transmitted diseases, particularly syphilis.⁶⁰ The relegation of sexually immoral behaviour to the lower castes also forms in part, the strategy for the protection and de-sexualisation of the identity of the upper caste Hindu woman.

The tone of the book is distinctly divided in to a rational response to Mayo’s political criticism, and an emotional response to her sexual accusations. When discussing the impact of colonial rule, and the glory of the ancient past, as well as when making his argument for Indian self rule, Warty’s tone is sensitive, rational and measured. This is particularly evident in chapter three, when he illustrates the

⁵⁸ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 24.

⁵⁹ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, pp. 60-61.

impossibility of Mayo's having done anything like detailed field work research, in terms of time expenditure.⁶¹ Though rational, his reinvention of the ancient past is a interesting re working of history, presenting a Hindu, nationalist resolution to the preceding years of 'foreign' domination, both Muslim and British. He begins with a long panegyric on the complete superiority of ancient Hindu civilisation over every other nation, not only in the spheres of science, arts and philosophy, but also as a dominant, colonising force:

Their ships travelled to all parts of the world. They braved the seas and curbed the waves...Thus not only in philosophy, law, astronomy and other sciences and the arts, but in the building of Empires, in colonisation, in trade, commerce and industry, the Indians of the 'long past history' not only held their own but excelled every other nation in the world.⁶²

This re-membering of India is in response to Mayo's suggestion that it was due to the ancient Hindu failings of inertia and barbarism that resulted in their being colonised.⁶³ Warty inverts this and suggests that it was due to the Hindu's superior refinement that the Muslims, in possession of merely brute strength were able to colonise India and 'sap their manhood.'⁶⁴ It is interesting that in Warty's created ancient history, the colonising force of the Hindus is seen as a positive achievement to be proud of, suggesting as it does for him, virility and successful masculinity.

It is in his discussion of Mayo's central thesis that the 'problem' with the Hindu population is that they are sex mad, that paranoias about the regulation of female sexuality emerge most strongly. Mayo's allegation is as follows:

The whole pyramid of the Indian's woes material and spiritual – poverty, sickness, political minority, melancholy, ineffectiveness...rests on a rock bottom physical base. This base is

⁶¹ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, pp. 35-41.

⁶² 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 45.

⁶³ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 45.

simply his manner of getting in to the world and his sex life thenceforward.⁶⁵

Warty provides a counter rhetoric which creates a semi-fictional account of how Western society appears to the Hindu who is of course, (sexually) morally pure. Significantly, the responsibility for moral degeneracy is located and exhibited specifically by the female gender:

Kissing and lovemaking in public will meet his eye everywhere. If merely from the surface of things he [the Hindu male] should draw his conclusions...he thinks that all the girls there are flirts or that they are used to having promiscuous intercourse with the other sex, would it be a right conclusion?⁶⁶

Further to this, he then focuses his attack on Mayo herself. This attack is revealing in the extreme as to Warty's opinion of the function of sexuality and his rationalisation of female sexual experience. He attributes Mayo's prurient sexual imagination to her own subject position:

She is an old maiden of 49, and has all along been absorbed in the attempt to understand the mystery of sex. If she was a married lady, she would have easily understood what this mystery was. But to a maiden, it would remain a mystery for ever; and she thinks and thinks, her mind is so transfused with the idea of sex that she can think of nothing else. In anything she sees, the sex idea inevitably comes; she has what they call a 'sex complex'; she is sex mad.⁶⁷

There are a few interesting assumptions here, not least that Mayo is a virgin and indeed, that all unmarried women are virgins. Knowledge of sex is the sole property of married women, which knowledge comes directly from experience 'given' by a legally and religiously sanctioned male. In the sexual economy in play here, Mayo does contribute her own sexual fantasies in the way in which she constructs of India,

⁶⁵ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 102.

however, these act as a catalyst for Warty to generate a defence mechanism against his *own* sexual fantasies which appear as his impossibilities of knowledge.

Warty continues with this displaced form of imagining by thinking about actually having sexual intercourse with Mayo:

We say, it has not been given to her to know the mystery of sex. As long as she remains unmarried, it will remain a mystery. As soon as she gets married, she will at once begin to think otherwise. She will be an improved girl and an improved woman. Her thoughts will receive a new tone. Her mind will feel relief...Let her get married and enjoy the honeymoon, and then she will begin to talk like a transformed being.⁶⁸

Legitimate sexuality can only exist in the controlled sphere of the marriage relationship. 'Marriage' functions as an unwitting euphemism for sexual intercourse. This suggestion clearly indicates what happens to women outside the regulation of male control. The 'lesson' of intercourse, bestowed by the legitimate male has the power to 'improve' women. It is clear that for Warty, childhood ends with heterosexual intercourse: the 'girl' is both improved by the experience of intercourse, and reaches maturity to become a 'woman.' The 'woman' is improved by intercourse however, because for her to have intercourse means that she is *married*, i.e. in a sanctioned and regulated environment.

That Warty is expounding a philosophy which sees the 'unmarried' i.e. uncontrolled or unregulated female as a threat to society becomes even more apparent in his discussion of Mayo's claim that Hindu mothers molest their children. He counters this with a discussion of 'nurses' and 'old maids' in America. He relates how 'old maids' in America are in the habit of rearing monkeys that they teach to 'practise' on

⁶⁷ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 103.

⁶⁸ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, pp. 104-105.

them, meaning, give them sexual pleasure.⁶⁹ This is clearly a piece of salacious propaganda on a par with Mayo's own slanders, designed, perhaps consciously to give the maximum offence to American readers, and the maximum enjoyment to Indian readers.⁷⁰ There is though, something to be said for his choice of creature. Monkeys hold a special place in the Hindu upper caste imagination and are pivotal to the story of the *Ramayana*. It is the monkey God Hanuman who not only rescues Sita from the demon Ravan's palace, but physically touches her: air lifting her to her consort Rama across the water. This precedes Rama's accusation of her infidelity. The monkey God and his tribe are often depicted as playful, childlike, virile and adventurous. The two readings that can be offered here function equally well in the economy of the sexual imagination. The first is that the monkey is a euphemism for the Hindu male (boy), pleasuring the Western woman. The second, more resonant reading is that this displays some anxieties about the figure of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*, given his contact with the body of Sita.

It is Warty's statements about children's nurses that can possibly be taken more seriously. While Mayo accuses Hindu mothers of 'pleasuring' their children, Warty goes a step further to suggest that unmarried European and American women use children for their own pleasure: Obliquely citing Western books by 'famous British doctors' he claims they relate how:

...the male children especially are initiated into the mystery of sex by the nurse herself, who voluntarily exposes her own organ to

⁶⁹ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ While bestiality was acknowledged in England at least, there being legal sanctions against it, this was more usually in relation to male sexual intercourse with horses and sheep – see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London, Penguin, 1984), pp. 97-98, 118-119, 134. However, Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1732), does show in Plate 2 the 'fallen woman' with a monkey, with the suggestion it was kept for her sexual pleasure, which *may* be construed as preliminary evidence of the cultural reference of behind this accusation. See Ronald Paulson, *The Art of Hogarth* (London, Phiadon, 1975), p. 97.

their tender fingers, to give them some sentimental entertainment, and herself some joy and satisfaction.⁷¹

and:

One British authority who has made life long research into the rise and growth of sexual sentiment in man from early childhood to youth has given a realistic picture of his own early experiences and states that when he was barely three years old, his nurse was initiating him into sexual sentiment by practising his finger on her organ.⁷²

The 'nurse' in this case is exposed as a dangerous substitute for a 'proper' mother, and one which will necessarily undermine the masculinity of the nation by *using* the male child to give herself that sexual pleasure which she cannot legitimately achieve with an adult man, as she is unmarried. Not only is this a critique of Western female morality, but also of the family system where mothers 'neglect' their children and expose them from birth to a highly sexualised world. In comparison, Warty, like Natarajan portrays the Hindu household as not only devoid of, but seemingly anti – sexual to the extreme of violent opposition:

The Hindu household is such that even a word of indecent meaning relating to sexual matters uttered by a young child draws the wrath of the elderly persons especially the mother, and meets with stern rebuke and sometimes corporeal punishment.⁷³

The ascetic dwelling on sexuality results in violence in this case. In fact sexuality is inexorably linked to violence, manifested in the violence of the denial of sexuality, and in the imagined violence of the experience. His fears for the male child at the hands of the rapacious female extends to the value he ascribes to the male child's body and the female child's body. Of note also is the reference to the mother as the

⁷¹ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 112.

⁷² 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 113.

⁷³ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 112.

guardian of male chastity, who shows her displeasure at ‘any reference to sexual matters’ by exhibiting anger and violence.

In answer to Mayo’s allegation that young boys are regularly given over to temple-prostitution for the satisfaction of grown men, he states:

No such practice has ever been heard of in India. The practice that prevails in certain areas of the country among the lower classes is in regard to *girls* who are attached to temples and are called Devdasis... The point that has to be noted is that the practice that prevails is in regard to *girls*, and not in regard to *boys*.⁷⁴

Though he makes some slight statement that this is an issue under reform, it is clear that it is more acceptable to prostitute little girls than little boys. Rather than forcing a distinction between Western and Indian women here, ‘women’ pose a general emasculating threat. This deep mistrust of women in general is apparent when he questions Mayo’s source for the statement that most Hindu men over thirty are impotent:

What an idea! Where did Miss Mayo acquire this experience of impotency? Who were her informants and what are their credentials? Are they males or are they females?⁷⁵

That he makes the gender distinction here is important, suggesting as it does a paranoia that indigenous female informants may have maliciously provided this information, true or otherwise, in order to undermine Hindu masculinity. In order to recuperate and destabilise his own fears, he immediately follows this statement by responding to Mayo’s claim that the Hindu male in possession of wealth and or years is even more likely to be impotent:

If it were indeed a fact, so many of our elderly princes and chiefs, and many other wealthy gentlemen would not be going to England

⁷⁴ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 115. Emphasis his, from the text.

⁷⁵ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 114.

frequently and staying there for months together, to pass jolly good time in company with English beauties.⁷⁶

Warty's meaning is unmistakable. The myth of the lost colonising power of the ancient Hindus is resurrected in this statement. Both distance/difference between Hindu women (desexualised passive bodies), and Western women (rapacious oversexed bodies) and the perceived shared power of women to betray or undermine the patriarchal system that relies on the maintenance of the family, can only, in this fantasy, be mediated and controlled by the Hindu male. The desexualising and sexualising respectively of women's bodies extends to a view of marriage itself for Warty. Having already suggested that marriage in this text is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, where girls are induced to 'improve' through legitimate sexual knowledge, Warty illustrates that in the Hindu system women are trained into this from birth, where as in the West, marriage is simply a base sexual contract with no regulations or prior training:

To the Hindu woman, marriage is a life companionship and not a mere contract for sexual relationship into which it has degenerated in the West...When a young girl, she is taught to like and love a young man to whom she is wedded.⁷⁷

It is following this point that Warty introduces a bizarre method of defence which will be pursued with even greater vigour by C.S. Ranga Iyer in *Father India*. This involves a spectacular misreading of a text about women, in this case Indian women, in order to validate and substantiate a point. Natarjan follows a similar line of validation by using quotations from Milton, Tennyson and Havelock Ellis to support points about Hindu culture and practice, however, in Warty's case, his source is a British civil servant, Otto Rothfeld, author of *Women of India* (1920). Warty uses

⁷⁶ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 116.

⁷⁷ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 135.

Rothfeld to illustrate that gender segregation actually contributes to women's 'power'. The quote he uses is as follows; 'Their very aloofness, their seclusion, gives them half their charm: and they know it...In India, women are so much valued and attain half their power because they are occasionally seen and seldom met.'⁷⁸

Rothfeld's statement is a sexually charged fantasy of the knowing, veiled 'oriental' woman. His text, a systematic categorisation of the 'types' of women to be found in India is altogether in this vein. *Women of India* in fact begins by referring to, and quoting at length the *Kama Sutra* as written by that "professor of love" Vatsyana, setting the erotic tone for the rest of the text.⁷⁹ He describes the form, costume, delicious passivity and allure of Indian women in great detail over two hundred and twenty pages. As well as categorising Indian women by region, class and caste, there is a special chapter devoted to that 'type' of Indian woman known as the 'Dancing Girl.' That the statement above is an over coded sexual fantasy rather than an approval of gender segregation is apparent when, further in the text, he categorically states that one of the evils of Hindu society is the sequestering of women to *purdah*.⁸⁰

Warty's argument depends on an overdetermined notion of the feminine. Having vacillated between rationalising the subjugation of Hindu women, and denying that such subjugation exists, his final argument betrays male insecurities, both Western and Indian, regarding women competing with men in the outside world. Hindu women rule their households, are chaste and pious, their bodies inviolable and their spirits selfless and predicated on the idea of service. This notion of femininity functions only in conjunction with the terrifying spectre of the 'masculine' woman:

⁷⁸ Otto Rothfeld, *Women of India*, (London, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton & Kent, 1920), p. 8.

⁷⁹ Otto Rothfeld, *Women of India*, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Otto Rothfeld, *Women of India*, p. 26.

The part which women play in the daily affairs of life in the Hindu family and also outside the home is not inconsiderable. They may not possess the masculine temper of the Western woman and may not be found rubbing shoulders with men in every walk of life in the spirit of rivalry, and competition and sometimes even antagonism. The Hindu woman's is a spirit of co-operation and assistance and in their own way they admirably lighten the burden and responsibility of the cares and management of the family.⁸¹

The 'natural' expression and conduct of femininity appears here as a male domestic fantasy. As with Warty's discussion of Mayo's own sexuality, submission in marriage and domestic life is the natural role of women, and any agency displayed outside this is 'unnatural.' His crucial point, which until now has been implicit in the text is the pernicious effect of an English education, and Western ideas of female emancipation on the family:

It is not out of place to point out here that this progress [i.e. of Indian social reform for women] is hampered by the kinds of undesirable activities which women in the West engage themselves, and the impression these create on Indian minds.⁸²

Warty is indicating that the responsibility for the lack of progress in reform for women in India lies with Western women. It is clear that the real threat of women's enfranchisement in a social and civil sense was taken seriously, and that a woman with concern for her individual subject status outside the confines of the family as a threat to the very fabric of Hindu society. The 'peaceful home' so lovingly delineated by Warty relied on the unquestioning acceptance of gender roles by women in order for it to function.⁸³ Mayo's text, for Warty, is an illustration of the dangers of female emancipation, which can only result in disaster:

it is but fair to all concerned that we should not disguise our own view of women's progress. We frankly consider it would be an

⁸¹ 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 155.

⁸² 'World Citizen', *Sister India*, p. 161.

⁸³ See also Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and its Women' in *The Nation and Its Fragments...* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.116-135.

evil day for India if Indian women indiscriminately copy and imitate western women. Our women will progress in their own way in the direction of freedom and liberty, preserving their virtues and suitably combining their best with what is best in Western women. What has often been termed in the West as the emancipation of women is only a glorified name for the disintegration of the family.⁸⁴

The importance of the family as the location of authenticity – of both Hindu culture and gender definitions is clarified here. However, with the reputation and perception of Hindu masculinity at stake both from spurious sensationalism such as *Mother India*, and in another sense from the very focus on even those emancipatory reforms which Natarajan and Warty considered valid, a strategy was required to protect the continuity of the Hindu family that could comfortably negotiate the space between ‘tradition’ or the past, and modernity.

This strategy emerges in these texts as ‘national culture’ - a reworked, modernised but nevertheless recognisably Hindu-based tradition generated from the space of nationalist and patriarchal sovereignty: the home, and the emblem of national culture - was the pure and chaste Hindu woman.

To this end, Warty concludes his text with a telling quotation from the poet Rabindranath Tagore: ‘Let us hope to be rid of the lurking persistence of barbarism in man, not through elimination of noxious elements, but through the education of mind and *discipline of true culture*.’⁸⁵ Culture, then, is defined as a set of authoritative limitations which mark out and control civilised behaviour. Dhan Gopal Mukerji invokes this authority at the beginning of his text *A Son of Mother India Answers*. He styles himself as ‘an Indian who speaks on Hindu culture.’⁸⁶ This is a similar strategy to Warty’s – by positioning himself as the ‘son’, the successful fulfilment of the

⁸⁴ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ ‘World Citizen’, *Sister India*, p. 241.

⁸⁶ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers* (New York, E. P Dutton & Co. 1928), p. 15.

Hindu woman's destiny, and also as a speaker in American universities on Hindu culture, he is at once legitimated in the context of the family, and functions in the capacity of an indigenous authority on India in the contemporary world. Mukerji bypasses most of Mayo's arguments to focus on her sexual allegations.

He begins with a discussion of the 1891 Age of Consent Act. While he states that the revision of the Act in 1926, to raise the age of consent from twelve to fourteen was rejected by British authorities, not by the Indian legislators involved, his crucial point is that girls in India mature faster than their Western counterparts, due to the climate. Here the strategy of difference emerges once more – the Hindu woman's body becomes ready to bear children at an earlier age due to climate:

Probably it will serve us better to remember certain peculiarities about India. Our climate is mostly tropical. In such a latitude, a plant grows as much in a week as it would in a month in *New England*. About human beings it can safely be said that a young girl of twelve in India is as old as a young woman of fifteen in America.⁸⁷

Mukerji explicitly feminises nature in order to make a point about masculinity. There is evidence of a colonial form of rhetoric here which genders nature as female, waiting to be cultivated or colonised by man.

Mukerji not only ignores the social and economic politics which would enforce early 'maturity' or motherhood on a human being. More importantly, Mukerji is implicitly acknowledging the dependence of the 'legitimate' penetration/impregnation of the female body on the definition of 'the age' by which it was understood that the 'girl' became a 'woman.'⁸⁸ An important consideration is the focus placed by reformers, politicians and cultural commentators (all men) on the 'age' rather than the

⁸⁷ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ Himani Bannerji, 'Age of Consent and Hegemonic Social Reform' in Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects, Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism* (London, Anthem Press, 2001), p. 78.

‘consent.’⁸⁹ While there are convincing arguments that The Age of Consent Act functioned as a facilitator of the expansion of hegemony of the colonial state, it is possible to suggest that the issues of authority, social and intimate domination and the regulation and definition of women as ‘bodies’ which Bannerji highlights surrounding the Act function as an incipient hegemonic process for the Hindu male with nationalist priorities, based on the maintenance of gender roles. Hence Mukerji’s insistence that Hindu women ‘mature’ faster than Western women, and therefore may be penetrated legitimately. His desire to legitimise the ‘age’ of maturity as twelve years due to climate is noted in his tautology – he repeats the point four times.⁹⁰ Interestingly, by the penultimate time he articulates this point, the definition has become looser:

Let me reiterate here that a girl *passed twelve* in tropical India is *much older* than a girl of the same age in New England.⁹¹

Mukerji is ascribing on to Hindu women the stereotyped and racist fantasy which connected the ‘tropical’ climate, abundant vegetation, humidity and heat with early puberty and a curiously passive ultra-sexuality. Bannerji posits that this was essentially a European patriarchal discourse which makes this connection between women and nature.⁹² As can be seen here however, the idea of the sexually ‘ready’ girl/woman is compelling enough for it to be re-worked by Hindu males in to a legitimisation of the Hindu patriarchal concerns about maintaining the continuity of the family structure. Rather than a spectacular misreading of an extant text as with Natarajan, Warty, and as will be seen, with Iyer, Mukerji instead complies with sexist and racist ideologies about women which deny agency or personality, and instead

⁸⁹ Himani Bannerji, ‘Age of Consent...’ in Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects*, p. 84.

⁹⁰ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 27, p. 31, p. 49, p. 54.

⁹¹ D.G. Mukherji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 49.

⁹² Himani Bannerji, ‘Age of Consent...’ in Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects*, p. 87.

perceives women as a ‘biological organisation.’⁹³ It is interesting that he ignores the widespread and determined agitation against the initial Act of 1891, which revealed colonial sympathies for the indigenous patriarchy, and also revealed the extent to which the universal language of that patriarchy would be utilised by both colonial administrators and the Hindu orthodoxy in order to regulate female sexuality and preserve the purity of the domestic space.⁹⁴

Mukerji’s affiliation to colonial modes of thinking is further revealed in his main anxiety about the state of Hindu culture. His desire is for India to be modern in a scientific and rational sense, and this emerges in his discussion of syphilis. Mayo suggests that ‘almost all’ women attending gynaecological clinics in India are affected with the disease. While Mukerji betrays some moral aversion to unregulated sexuality in his language, using the word ‘tainted’ repeatedly, as opposed to ‘suffering from’ or ‘infected’, it is his apprehension of the lack of the technical apparatus in India which he believes has left the country vulnerable to attack:

It is a pity that all Hindustan has not yet developed a very elaborate system of hospitals and clinics where a scientific thesis can be tested out in the light of carefully assembled facts. Our lack of scientific apparatus leaves India at the mercy of Miss Mayo’s wild accusations.⁹⁵

Mukerji is suggesting a companion system of regulations to accompany the internal, supposedly civilising limitations imposed by ‘culture.’ He sees the solution to India’s problems in the law and science as a way of sterilising and purifying society. This is evident when he refers to Mayo’s allegations of homosexual juvenile prostitution, and the rapacious nature of Hindu holy men. Mukerji’s main argument is that if the cases

⁹³ Himani Bannerji, ‘Age of Consent...’ in Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects*, p. 87.

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of these and points further to this, see Mrinalini Sinha’s chapter ‘Potent Protests: The Age of Consent Controversy’ in Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 138-180.

⁹⁵ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 51.

which Mayo mentions in these two respects are so numerous, then the police would have taken action. He calls for her to expose these men to the law, representing Hindu society as one which operates solely and emphatically within the confines of the secular, civil law.⁹⁶ Again when discussing Mayo's claim of the widespread nature of sexual intercourse with child brides, Mukerji retorts, 'That cannot be true, for as I have already mentioned, our penal code does not permit any sex-relation with a girl below twelve.'⁹⁷

His belief in the intrinsic morality of Hindu society leads him to focus the latter half of the book around the question 'Are Indians Moral?' By Indians, Mukerji means Hindus, as he proceeds to cite a Judge Sleeman on the honesty and integrity of the Hindus, Sir Lepel Griffin, President of the East India Association, on the high morality of the Hindus, and Sir Michael Sadler, President of the Calcutta University Commission on the intellectual and spiritual excellence of the Hindus.⁹⁸

Again, the unproblematic use of Western sources speaking about India is in evidence here. That he has some sympathy and admiration for the ostensibly rational and scientific approach of the West towards social problems is clear. He goes so far as to illustrate some sympathy for Mayo's point of view, and in particular her rhetoric.⁹⁹

Unsurprisingly, this admiration does not extend to Mayo's sexual allegations.

Once again, Mukerji recurses to a purifying, functional, scientific approach as a solution to gender inequality:

The next thing that India should be told is that the relation of man and woman should be based on hygiene and eugenics; physiology should displace metaphysics.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 41.

⁹⁷ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 49. It is significant that the quote regarding the 'maturity' of the twelve year old girl in India follows *immediately after* this sentence.

⁹⁸ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, pp. 43- 45.

⁹⁹ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 90.

What Mukerji is describing is essentially the status quo, divested of its *religious* codification. Eugenics - the science pertaining or adapted to the reproduction of fine offspring, and physiology - a natural philosophy or natural science, prefigures the immanent Hindu nationalist focus on women's bodies as the bearers of fine healthy sons for a new nation.

While Mukerji does go on to advocate that women unequivocally should chose their own husbands, and that access to divorce should be as easy and socially acceptable as he imagines it to be in England and America, this too is in the context of scientifically sterilising or purifying gender relations:

That reform, I hope, will put the relation of the sexes on a scientific basis throughout India.¹⁰¹

Mukerji's conflict between his utter belief in Western science, as opposed to the philosophical doctrines of Hinduism, and his desire to refute Mayo's allegations resolves itself in an uneasy compromise. Either science will rationalise and sanitise Hindu society, or the sexual problems of India will be the expression of India's modernity:

In order to test the soundness of her thesis about the sex life of the Hindu, we must seek the opinion of sex – experts and other specialists for more light on the subject. If they agree that the same trouble that underlies the unrest of the modern West is eating up India, Indians need but rejoice. For that makes us as modern as the rest of the world. Nowadays, a single touch of sex makes the whole world kin.¹⁰²

Mukerji's implicit divesting Hindu society of the 'irrational', or the 'emotional' is an additional strain of thought which would be utilised in the formation of the idea of culture for CR. Mukerji also adds to this formation the equation of scientific thought and ideas of 'progress'. Radically, though arguably unwittingly, he states the premise

¹⁰¹ D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 92.

for the paranoid fear which underlines these texts - that a 'touch of sex makes the hold world kin.' By this he does not mean sexual intercourse within marriage, but that element of subjective choice and liberty practised by women when emancipated from limiting, traditional modes of being, which is in part, as Warty, Natarajan and Iyer suggested, the consequence of the perverse form of Western female emancipation. The consequence of this emancipation, which leads to 'kinship' with the whole world, clearly undermines the profoundly desired isolated uniqueness of a homogenous, national culture for India.

(vii) Spectacular Misreadings: C.S. Ranga Iyer's *Father India*

By far the most interesting of the responses to Mayo's *Mother India* is C.S. Ranga Iyer's *Father India*. That Iyer took the attacks on Hindu culture and morality made in *Mother India* personally is clear from the outset. His text presents itself as a dialogue with Mayo, in which he responds to her points in a conversational style. In fact, Iyer becomes completely entangled in Mayo's text, to an extent validating her through the strategies he uses to debunk her.

His initial claim is that Mayo is a:

...Cassandra like propagandist...¹⁰³

His use of Cassandra, the mythical prophetess associated with predictions of doom, but whom the God Apollo, whose advances she had rejected, caused no-one to believe, is an odd comparison not least because she was *right*.

He does not explore this comparison, but goes on to discuss Mayo's indictment of child mothers, stating that there is no evidence which says that the Vedic texts

¹⁰² D.G. Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers*, p. 92.

¹⁰³ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India* (London, Selwyn & Blount, 1927), p. 10.

advocate child marriage. For the benefit of his non Hindu readers, Iyer further elucidates that:

What the bible is to the Christian, the Vedas are to the Hindu.¹⁰⁴

There is no indication that the modes of access to these two texts is different, access to the Vedas being based on caste and sex. Furthermore, the mention of the Vedas as *the* text of Hinduism, comparatively with the Bible signals an attempt to remodel that religion as monotheistic. Iyer is making a case for the equality of Hindu women in ancient Hindu civilisation, using mythical figures from the Hindu epics to further his points. Again, there is no ideological, or indeed, historical, absurdity for Iyer in comparing the mythical women of the ancient past to the status of women in 1927. However, he implicitly acknowledges that the status of Hindu women is degraded by using as the point of comparison, American women:

...the women of Ancient India had as much privilege as the American woman of today...¹⁰⁵

He then gives some interesting examples of the women of the ancient past, and in doing so gives a curious re-writing of their stories, glossing over the details which would indicate that the examples of emancipation he uses are more complex in their implications for gender relations:

Women enjoyed more liberty than before...Arjun, the famous hero of the Mahabharat...eloped with Krishna's sister and married her. Kunti, the mother of the Pandava heroes, had a son before her marriage. Who became Karuna, growing in obscurity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 23.

The details which Iyer fails to relate, which may be found in even the most ideologically loaded re-telling of the *Mahabharata*, including CR's which will be under examination later in the thesis, are these. That Arjuna was not only already married to Draupadi, but he abducted Krishna's sister by force. Kunti, granted a boon by the Sun God, used it before her marriage and was divinely impregnated by him – no physical contact takes place. When she realised she was pregnant, her shame and fear of social approbation given her unmarried status was so great, she abandoned the baby in the river, and he was rescued and raised by a charioteer, even though she herself was a royal princess. The outcome of Karuna's (Karna's) story is that he is unknowing killed on the battle field by his own brother.

The utopian ideal presented by Iyer of (polygamous) young lovers running away to be married, and single mothers having sex before marriage mirrors the very (im)moral values that he will later criticise at length in western society.

Having already implied his recognition of the degraded status of Hindu women by his comparison of their ancient counterparts with contemporary American women, he goes on to give a meagre paragraph of explanation:

Presumably there was a sex war in which man rose superior to woman and abolished all her rights and liberties. The coming of the Muslims whose religion confined women to an inferior place, completed the overthrow of the feminine sex.¹⁰⁷

Here the ambiguous delineation of a *presumed* 'sex war' implying a finite, violent conflict between two opposing sides is attributed to an undefined social and religious category of 'man.' This is followed by the communalist anti-Muslim rhetoric which would be further utilised by the Hindu right to devastating effect in the following years up to 1947 and beyond.¹⁰⁸ This anti Muslim rhetoric functions particularly well

¹⁰⁷ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p 23.

¹⁰⁸ Further to this, please see the implicit communal tension in the chapter 'Riots, Political and

as an articulation of both the misogyny and the immorality of ‘the Muslims’ from which Hindu women required protection. Iyer himself, like Warty, sees women as a vulnerable, overdetermined construct; an essentially domestic and limited creature, implied by his gender prefix of ‘feminine’ as opposed to female.¹⁰⁹ He further realises this idea in his praise of Saraswati Dayananda, whose education policy is discussed below. He upholds Dayananda as a champion for women’s rights, emphasising that he was:

...not an English educated man, but a Sanskrit scholar, [who] came as a messiah to preach the restoration of women to their ancient pedestal of glory. Himself a strict Brahmachari (celebrate [sic]) the Sanyasi (monk) took up arms against the sea of social trouble.¹¹⁰

Once again, Iyer uses the imagery of violence to illustrate a point about gender relations. Moreover his sentimental and idealised portrait of women in this quotation constitutes them as perfect, inviolable, literally out of reach. With this as his starting point, he embarks on the main argument of his response – a comparison between the loose and vulgar morality of the American girl, and the chaste and self sacrificing nature of the Hindu woman. In order to accomplish this, he uses a text by one Judge Ben B. Lindsey, author of *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (1925) and *The Companionate Marriage* (1927). Ben Lindsey was a Judge in Denver, responsible for the Juvenile and Family Court. His radical belief was that the hypocrisy of the older generation had disenfranchised the youth of America, and that only open and frank discussions of sexuality, especially between parents and their daughters would solve this. He was also against the criminal sentencing of juvenile ‘sex offenders’ that is, young people who had pre-marital sex and were liable to be prosecuted as a result in the America of

Communal’ in C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, pp. 120-142.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of the further implications of using the term ‘feminine’ as opposed to ‘woman’ or ‘female’, see Himani Bannerji: ‘Attired in Virtue’ in Himani Bannerji, *Inventing Subjects...* p. 124.

¹¹⁰ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 23.

the 1930s. Further to this he genuinely believed that those girls, in particular, who made ‘mistakes’ were as likely to be honourable citizens, wives and mothers if society did not penalise them, as those brought up in seclusion and ignorance. In 1931 he was debarred by American conservatives for his radical views, and his own ‘loose’ morality which refused to condemn the young for their sexual behaviour. He famously burnt his thousands of case notes in order to protect the anonymity of the young people who had confided in him.¹¹¹

Iyer presents Lindsey thus:

Judge Lindsey is an aggressive social reformer who wants radically to change existing customs and systems with a view to improve the condition of the United States.¹¹²

This sentence implies that Iyer not only read Lindsey’s book, but also that he approves of his methods of radicalism and aggression. While Lindsey was certainly a radical, the section of society that he felt needed reform was his own generation, and the hypocritical false morality that was imposed on children and young people in America. His philosophy was based in the belief that society inevitably changed, and that the values of the young eventually became establishment values. He indicates that the sexual morality which the older generation found so disturbing did not mean that the young were morally corrupt, rather:

it does mean that they are changing out social code; and it is my judgement that they are going to win through, if not with us, then without us.¹¹³

The evidence that Lindsey presents about the state of American society is partly in illustration of this point. It quickly becomes apparent that Iyer has given a wilfully

¹¹¹ Ben B. Lindsey & Rube Borough, *The Dangerous Life* (London, Harold Shaylor, 1931), pp. 285-286.

¹¹² C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 26.

¹¹³ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (New York, Boni & Liveright, 1925), p. 45.

blind, and indeed, a spectacular misreading of this text. Iyer paraphrases Lindsey in order to illustrate the degeneracy of American youth. Lindsey is represented by Iyer, through the selective use of quotation as sexist and sexually paranoid. Lindsey seems to reflect perfectly the repressive conservative attitude which Iyer believes is required in order to stem the unstoppable force of American immorality. As a clarification of the levels of displacement and projection which Iyer attains, it is clear why this book is so useful, since Lindsey's narrative is manipulated to speak out mainly against American girls.

Iyer first introduces Lindsey to illustrate that American girls manipulate the boys. This is his main anxiety which, as will be seen, becomes increasingly more explicit. Lindsey describes a scene at a dance, where the girls allow the boys to dance provocatively with them. Iyer introduces the description thus:

It may be said by Miss Mayo that kissing and hugging are no crime. Not kissing and hugging only Miss Mayo, but a *particular kind of dancing, the style of which* the judge records in the words of a *typical girl who uses boys* as dancing partners.¹¹⁴

Lindsey's recording of the language used by the young 'flapper' is indeed highly suggestive. Iyer's tone of justified outrage is especially focused on the fact that the girl does not really care about the *feelings* of the young men she uses/dances with.

Lindsey's quote, as cited by Iyer is as follows:

“Don't you resent the way they dance,” enquired the Judge. “Do you mean the button shining?” she asked casually. “Not at all, close dancing affects some girls.” “I am telling you the truth,” she went on, “Most of the girls don't get any special thrill out of close dancing itself, and we go to parties with these young crummet munchers and snuggle pups because we like to dance and for no other reason.”

¹¹⁴ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 25. my emphasis.

There follows a conversation in which the Judge asks whether she does not feel compromised by the fact that the boys clearly get a thrill out of close dancing with her, to which she replies:

“What those young fools get out of it is nothing to me. Why should I bother my head about what they think; if they want to make themselves miserable, that’s their affair. I should worry. Let them boil. Don’t I get the dance and after the dance, why, I’m through with them.”

Iyer clearly finds it distressing that this particular girl does *not* allow any sexual intimacy, and that her motive is to dance. He resents her contemptuous attitude towards men, and the fact that she leaves them frustrated. Iyer ignores the paragraph which immediately follows, where Lindsey illustrates that most young people find a limited form of contact such as dancing acceptable, and that the young woman cited in particular was:

...extraordinarily keen and intelligent. She is sixteen. In spite of the cynical vigour of her language, she is refined and well poised in her language and manner.

He goes on to emphasise that the adults of her circle would be shocked to know

...how much more restrained and well poised she is than they have any notion of.¹¹⁵

Iyer of course, does not take this in to account. When Lindsey refers to his ‘cases’ as children from good, *cultured* homes, he is not pointing to the rebellion of the girl against her parents, but rather the inadequacy of her parents’ culture to guide her. Iyer contextualises Lindsey’s relation of the conversation with:

From the oriental standpoint, this is immoral, Such is the sex atmosphere in which the girls of America live.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 57.

¹¹⁶ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 28.

For Iyer, it is not that the young women are victims of the 'sex atmosphere' but that they are responsible for it. This is clear from his omission of 'boys' from the above quote. This is suggestive of a general fear and mistrust of female sexuality. He is illustrating the cultural difference between India and the West, as he says, Katherine Mayo needs to examine:

the country of which she is so proud, though the country which she attacks is far more chaste and moral.¹¹⁷

Here the strategy of projecting inherent difference (chastity) between India(n) and Other women is in evidence. He uses this morally correct absence of the erotic in Hindu life and culture to defend against Mayo's allegations against child brides and mothers, implying that the legal and religious sanction of marriage makes their status legitimate and more significantly, morally acceptable:

Miss Mayo condemns the girl mothers and their children in India, but these girls are lawfully wedded and their children born of lawful wedlock, not like the innumerable illegitimate children born of unmarried mothers in their teens.¹¹⁸

There is no recognition of the debate, even within India, on child marriage, nor does Iyer recognise any female subjectivity, focusing instead on the issue of legality: whether the sexual activity was taking place within a sanctioned relationship. For his evidence of the immorality of America's girl-mothers, he again refers to Lindsey. Lindsey's attitude was the antithesis of this however. His view was that it would be better if the older generation acted as guides and counsellors as opposed to 'hostile critics.' He is explicit on this point, believing it was better to have the child illegitimately, and be a good responsible parent, than to be socially stigmatised for

¹¹⁷ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 28.

it.¹¹⁹ Lindsey's main argument was that the atmosphere of shame and secrecy that was enforced on to children by their parents resulted in a lack of communication between generations which was resulting in a society where the young were disenfranchised and alienated even from what was good about their own culture. He gives statistics of abortion and teenage pregnancy, and other juvenile social problems to illustrate that the young need trust and respect, in order to motivate them. Iyer however see this as an opportunity to laude the patriarchal values of the Hindu system which controls women's bodies and therefore regulates and owns reproduction:

Surely nothing so dreadful exists in India. In America custom and society drive girls in to appalling secrecies but in India, things are better off because the Pundits have faced facts and solved the problem of life in reference to climatic and other considerations...in tropical countries girls mature more quickly than in the cold countries of the North.¹²⁰

Iyer's staggering corollary is that the age of twenty in England corresponds to the age of fourteen in India. Totally without irony, he proclaims this 'fact' came from 'An educated Englishwoman, a member of a Commission which enquired in to the condition of young women in England.'¹²¹ Here again, the Orientalist's, and indeed by this point, I would suggest, the Hindu fantasy of the legally and socially sanctioned 'ripe' child is in evidence. The maturity that Iyer and Mukherji refer to is by no means an intellectual state, but rather the physical capability to withstand intercourse and bear children. The fact that the statement connecting climate to sexual maturity is made defensively in each case speaks for itself. In fact, to Iyer the female body is worthy only of contempt, being weak, and open to penetration and pollution. His

¹¹⁸ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 30.

¹¹⁹ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 116.

¹²⁰ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 34.

¹²¹ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 34.

problem is not so much initially with Mayo's thesis, or her gender as a subject, but her misguided gendering of *India*. Iyer proceeds on a deluded tirade which quotes Lindsey as saying, 'Such things were undeniably then going on in Denver, and they still are going on in Denver – and in every other town in the United States of America,'¹²² to prove his point about the prevalence of sexual degeneracy in America. In fact, this quote follows Lindsey's point that the older generation is fundamentally flawed in its attitude:

[their] methods of handling the questions of sex are methods of hypocrisy, deceit and fear. Such things were undeniably going on in Denver, and they are still going on in Denver – and in every other town in the United States of America.¹²³

Iyer uses this quotation out of context, as an introduction to the statement which reveals his pathological need to (re)member/gender his country as successfully patriarchal, as preceptor, as progenitor:

Judge Lindsey's facts about Mother America are more appalling than Miss Mayo's half truths about Father India!¹²⁴

He recasts the vulnerable female mother of Mayo's text as an omniscient and virile Hindu male, who can withstand any attack, and indeed produce a flawless counter-attack. For Iyer, it is not solely Mayo's own gender which limits her vision, but her gendering of India.

Incongruously, in the next chapter he destabilises this construction of India as a strident Hindu male. He is responding to Mayo's accusation that Hindu males become sexually active before they are mature enough. Unsurprisingly, Iyer does not produce the argument which connects sexual maturity to climate in the case of male children. Instead he calls on Gandhi, the antithesis of his aggressive domineering

¹²² Ben B. Lindsey in C.S.Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 36.

¹²³ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 40.

“Father India” to refute her statement. His response is revealing of other sexual anxieties. He claims Mayo formed this idea from reading Gandhi’s autobiography, and then goes on to state:

Gandhi was violently sexual when young, though he remained true to his wife. He even once visited a brothel, he says, but his sense of loyalty to his wife, which religion instils in to every Hindu, saved him in time.¹²⁵

In fact, Gandhi does not mention his wife as he reason for his inability to sleep with the prostitute. Rather, he attributes what he interestingly refers to as being ‘tongue tied’ to Divine intervention.¹²⁶ Iyer, like Mayo, is in fact re-interpreting Gandhi’s writing to articulate his own peculiar fantasy of matrimonial fidelity; for as Gandhi himself wrote of the incident:

...all these occasions must be regarded as moral lapses: for the carnal desire was there.¹²⁷

For Iyer, as for Gandhi, sexuality is a violent and painful impulse which goes unchecked at the peril of the individual’s and subsequently society’s morality. The idea that the moral restrictions advocated by religion, in this case Hinduism are inherent finds expression here. The ‘civilising’ force of Hinduism magically guards against moral lapses. With this in mind, he goes on to comment on Mayo’s statement that the ‘Hindu boy takes many wives.’

Iyer acknowledges that while Muslims are restricted to four wives:

Hinduism is generous as the tropics in its extravagance.

He makes the point that polygamy is practised in secret in the West – what he is really alluding to is extra-marital affairs. Here again, the use of ‘marriage’ as a euphemism

¹²⁴ C. S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 36.

¹²⁵ C. S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 40.

¹²⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography, Or, The Story of My Experiments With Truth* (London, Penguin, 1929), p. 37.

¹²⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography...* p. 38.

for sexual intercourse. Iyer qualifies sex outside of marriage as a kind of marriage, hence his use of 'polygamy' rather than adultery or infidelity. He is implying the social and legal sanction of 'immoral' behaviour in the West, one of the consequences of the kind of female emancipation which Warty protested against. There is also an equation of sexual intercourse as a rite of ownership; the woman you sleep with becomes your 'wife'.

There seems to be some conflict in his argument and imagining of women however. It is possible to suggest that for Iyer, the sexual penetration of the western woman is actually a kind of defilement, or degradation even if that penetration results in a child. This can be clearly seen in the dichotomy of the American sex-mad teenage girl which he 'borrows' from Lindsey, and Iyer's own construction of the American mother:

How many of the weak mothers of the west put up with the disloyalty of husbands either for economic considerations, because they are dependant on them, are too unable or unwilling to work, or for the sake of the children. This is when they know their husbands are disloyal. What of innumerable cases where the husband carries on his affair on the sly?¹²⁸

Iyer does not give the parallel response of a Hindu wife to this situation, but instead (re)presents the Hindu male, stating ambiguously that:

In the East, men do not generally practise *polygamy*. It may safely be said that ninety-nine point decimal nine per cent of the educated people – educated in the western fashion have only one wife. Ninety five percent of the uneducated people have also only one wife.¹²⁹

Hindu women, by their (dis)appearance in this statement as 'wife' are denied any (sexual) agency by Iyer. Further to this, 'wife' may stand for the female body which the 'men in the East' have penetrative intercourse with. Through his interchangeable

¹²⁸ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 42.

¹²⁹ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 42. My emphasis.

use of marriage with intercourse, and polygamy with infidelity, he objectifies the female body as a thing which may be legally and religiously *owned* through sexual intercourse.

This is not the case with the western woman however. From the terrifying energy of the sexually rapacious teenager, to the enervation of motherhood, for Iyer, the Western woman is both the instigator and victim of the atmosphere of sexual degeneracy which Iyer attributes to the West. In spite of this, Iyer believes fundamentally that it is American men who are emasculated. He scornfully describes the 'boy fathers' who do not own up to their responsibilities, however, he re-focuses his attack on the main figure of anxiety: the manipulative woman. In order to do this, he again turns to Lindsey. The American woman is the prophetic precursor should India go 'the way of the west'. Iyer uses Lindsey to highlight the unnatural and perilous future of society under the rule of the emancipated woman:

In Miss Mayo's country, where liberty runs riot, the aggressor is the girl in her teens, from the eleventh age upward. American girls have a charter as wide as the wind. The boy is the straw in the wind.¹³⁰

Iyer is profoundly concerned with the habits of these 'spoiled' girls, and reiterates the point of the aggression of the American girls, concluding the chapter with the statement:

...the commoner feature of American life seems to be that the assault comes from the girls.¹³¹

The violence which Iyer associates with sexual behaviour is exacerbated by the agency of the American woman. What is implicit in these criticisms of western sexual morality is the notion that Hindu Indian women, who mature rapidly, are then

¹³⁰ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 43.

¹³¹ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 49.

married off with equal haste, in order to control this dangerous and castrating manifestation of female sexuality. It is particularly interesting, given Iyer's combination of violence and sexual behaviour, that he should have used *The Revolt of Modern Youth* as a supporting text. Lindsey's judgement is based on 'the biological and psychological fact' of an awakening interest in sex in adolescents.¹³² His only solution was the sexual education of young girls, which he states quite explicitly.¹³³ He prefers dealing with young women, since he believes that they naturally articulate their questions in a reasonable and mature way, years before their male contemporaries. Page after page, Lindsey admires the openness and honesty of young, 'sophisticated,' sexually active girls whom society – and Iyer, brand as immoral. In fact, Lindsey's unwitting provision of abundant quotations for Iyer's purpose, springs from the fact that Lindsey believes that the male sexual impulse is base, predictable, and therefore manageable, but that women's decisions are more important, not simply for the morality of society, but for her own sense of self.¹³⁴

Lindsey's vision of the future could be said to be Iyer's nightmare:

the responsible interest taken by girls in such subjects...means that women are going, sooner or later, to come to definite conclusions; and that from those conclusions will come a woman-made code of sex morality on which the women of the future will act...What that code will be...I don't pretend to say. But I am certain that women will create it, and that it will be saner and better than our present code.¹³⁵

For Iyer, the only moral code controlled and defined by women is in relation to prostitution. It is in his discussion of prostitution that Iyer makes his most significant contribution to the de-sexualising of national culture. Even here, the anxieties previously hinted at regarding the need to de-sexualise the identity of the upper caste

¹³² Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 113.

¹³³ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 114.

women are explicitly articulated. In response to Mayo's statement that the Devadasis are drawn from upper caste families, Iyer apoplectically rejoins:

In India, the prostitutes form a class by themselves. It is untrue to say that they belong to respectable families of rank and position. The mother of a prostitute was a prostitute once. The daughter of a prostitute becomes a prostitute. Prostitutes are not drawn from families of high caste or rank.¹³⁶

Whatever the author may maintain regarding the evils of the caste in the chapter entitled 'Peasants and Untouchables' it is clear from this statement that caste is fundamentally required in order to produce the distinction between upper caste women (mothers) and lower caste women (prostitutes).¹³⁷ Further to this, caste is fundamental in the preservation of that boundary: prostitution is inherited from mother to daughter, within the class of prostitutes. The women of the sacred upper caste Hindu family are therefore permanently protected from this particular vice. However, it is not enough for Iyer to relegate prostitution to the strict boundaries of 'a class of their own.' There follows another impossible claim within the economy of the sexual imagination at work in these texts, and is worth quoting at length:

The idea of allowing these young girls to grow in the atmosphere of the temples is to instil into them some religion, some fear of God, so that when they come of age they may not indulge in promiscuity, but be the mistress of one man. The prostitutes of India are, therefore, one of the most god-fearing and loyal class of mistresses known to that unfortunate profession...a Devadasi who is in the keeping of one man does not go to another man so long as she is in the former's keeping.¹³⁸

The density of impossibility in this single statement reveals the limitless extent of Iyer's fantasy. Not only are prostitutes monogamous, but they are, in effect simply

¹³⁴ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 120.

¹³⁵ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 120.

¹³⁶ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, pp. 51-52

¹³⁷ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, pp. 98-109

¹³⁸ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 52.

unmarried wives. As sexually active women, the threat they pose is mitigated by their designation as faithful ‘mistresses.’ The religiously instilled loyalty practised by Hindu men is curiously absent here. The temple, a space dominated and controlled by a strictly male hierarchy functions as an alternative to the family and the home for the regulation of female sexuality.

Iyer then presents the two views of reform – first the modern social reformer who would make prostitution illegal. However, says Iyer, the consequences of this reform would be the ‘corruption’ of good girls, once their male contemporaries had no recourse to their ‘monogamous’ sexual partners. Instead, Iyer presents the orthodox Hindu view that maintains the system of Devadasis is less immoral than the sexual freedom as quoted by Lindsey, which results in:

at least fifty thousand girls in New York, living with men who are not their husbands; - girls who should become mothers and don’t dare to have children because of the attitude that society would take towards them.¹³⁹

Iyer contributes to this ‘painful truth’ as disclosed by Lindsey, by stating:

The position of the Devadasis is exactly the same as far as living with men who are not their husbands is concerned, but she considers it a privilege to breed healthy and good looking children, after the birth of which she gives up her profession, and lives with the father of the child as his mistress, either in her own house which he visits, or in his house.¹⁴⁰

There is obviously no mention of the future prostitution of these ‘healthy and good looking’ children in this version of events. What Iyer is protesting is not that American women live with men outside of wedlock, but that they do not ‘breed.’ His interpretation of Lindsey’s statement ‘should become’ is within the context of orthodox Hindu belief that for women, sexual experience is a means of fulfilling their natural duty of motherhood. There is no mention by Iyer of the other skills which are

¹³⁹ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 107.

part of the Devadasi tradition, the most significant of which is dancing, particularly the important dance form of Bharat Natyam,¹⁴¹ but which also include singing, recitation and temple duties.¹⁴² The Devdasi for this reason is possibly the only figure who can negotiate the space between authentic culture, and an increasingly marginalised sexuality. The two spaces of sex and culture are so incongruent in the imagination of the emergent intellectual practices being formulated within these texts, that the Devadasi must necessarily exchange her cultural authority and acumen for ‘morality’ and be re-formed as a maternal prostitute.

Where Lindsey in the next paragraph to the one quoted states that what is needed is the further emancipation of women, and a change in society’s values regarding marriage and birth control, going so far as to state that:

all these departures from our present day marriage code are being practiced right now by many persons whom it would be monstrous to accuse of being ‘immoral’ in any ordinarily accepted meaning of the word. These persons, however unconventional their lives, look upon Love as a sacred thing...and live in a way which seems to me often more truly moral than the relations of people who are legally married, who cohabit and yet, do not love each other.¹⁴³

Ignoring this, Iyer promotes the Indian prostitute as the better woman because she fulfils her gender duty, despite the glossed over fact that what she actually does is have sexual intercourse for money, with a majority clientele of married men. The economic exchange inherent in the profession is curiously absent from Iyer’s explanations. Hence the equality of the American girl who lives with the man of her choice, and the religiously sanctioned Indian prostitute who is paid and kept by the man who chooses her. Iyer does not, as he might have done, talk about the upper

¹⁴⁰ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 55.

¹⁴¹ Santosh Chatterjee, *Devadasi: Temple Dancer* (Calcutta, S.K.Chatterjee, 1945), p. 94.

¹⁴² See Kali Prasad Goswami, *Devadasi: Dancing Damsel* (New Delhi, APH Publishing, 2000) and A. K. Singh, *The Devadasi System In Ancient India: A Study of the Temple Dancing Girls of South India* (New Delhi, HK Publishers, 1991).

caste courtesans of ancient India, who were renowned for their skills and to some extent managed to live outside the boundaries of patriarchal control.¹⁴⁴ Instead, he forces the dubious mantle of monogamy, religious observance and motherhood upon those lower caste prostitutes whose existence is unavoidably necessary to the preservation of upper caste Hindu values, especially the inviolability of the upper caste female body.¹⁴⁵ As Iyer concludes: 'In my own opinion even the picture of Miss Mayo, whose veracity I challenge is not half so terrible as the painful truth disclosed by Judge Lindsey.'¹⁴⁶

However, as can be expected from Iyer, the coherence of his ideas on the subject of Devadasis/prostitutes is not maintained throughout the text. Reflecting the Devadasi's unique position as an authority of authentic culture, and a sexually knowledgeable woman, Iyer's Devadasi appears again in the chapter 'Errors and Exaggerations' as a professional dancer. Iyer does not mention prostitution. He is trying to effect a comparison between Mayo's interpretation of India, and the hypothetical reaction of an orthodox Hindu girl to England. He describes her shock at the western manner of dancing, stating that:

In the East, dancing is only for the professionals – the 'deva – dasis' (nautch angels). These professionals dance not with men but alone, singly, by themselves.¹⁴⁷

There is the suggestion that the 'Devadasis' of the previous section are in fact, for Iyer, different from the 'deva – dasis' of this section. However, the disturbing repetition of her solitary performance places Iyer in the position of a voyeur, and the

¹⁴³ Ben B. Lindsey, *The Revolt of Modern Youth*, p. 169-170.

¹⁴⁴ See Veena Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesan of Lucknow, India' *Feminist Studies*, 16:2 (summer 1990), pp. 259-87.

¹⁴⁵ See S.D. Punekar & Kamala Rao, *A Study of Prostitutes in Bombay* (Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1962), pp. 3-6.

¹⁴⁶ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁷ C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India*, p. 81.

‘professional’ as the sexual object of his gaze. Iyer cannot equate this ‘deva – dasi’ with the prostitute of the last section to the extent that this ‘deva - dasi,’ the one who only dances alone, is not really a woman, but, fervently, an ‘angel.’

Iyer’s response to Mayo both contributes his own displaced fantasies, and those fantasies, newly articulated which constitute part of the genealogy of sexual fantasy which troubles the intensely desired cultural ‘purity’ of the emergent nation. His (mis)reading of Lindsey reveals the limitlessness of this displaced fantasy, to the extent that it is possible to suggest that *all* prostitution in India is actually predicated on religion and monogamy.¹⁴⁸ It is Iyer according to his own will, who is ‘preceptor’ of the conservative, of the right-wing nationalist imagery which would focus specifically on the de-sexualised, yet child bearing, chaste Hindu women, Mother of the new nation of India.

This cultural comment on the status of women was part of the larger drive for ‘progress’ or modernity which would eventually lead to independence from colonial rule. Women were in fact crucial symbols, if not *the* symbol, of how successful this ‘progress’ was being effected, as Lata Mani’s famous observation so succinctly states:

Tradition was thus, not the ground on which women were being contested, rather the reverse was true: women became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated.¹⁴⁹

It is clear then, that the themes of tradition, nationalism and reform for women were intertwined for an emergent nationalism, but that they were over coded with anxieties about sexuality, both culturally represented, and actually practised. The enabler for

¹⁴⁸ The disturbing influence of this particular view can be found in Kakolee Chakraborty, *Women as Devadasis* (New Delhi, Deep & Deep, 2000) which not only valorises Indian prostitution along the same lines, but uses as source material both Abbe Dubois, and Dr. A.S. Altekar’s phallogocentric *Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation* (Benares, Culture Publication House, 1938).

¹⁴⁹ Lata Mani, ‘Contentious Traditions: The debate on Sati in Colonial India’, in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women...* p. 118.

this cohabitation was as Mani suggests, the pervasive idea of the salvation of Hinduism, and therefore, India through the ‘purity’ of the Hindu woman.¹⁵⁰ The purpose of this salvation was the ‘recuperation’ of a pure and authentic Hinduism, and, importantly, the stringent protection of the weak and subjugated aspects of culture; women, who were (are) the location of Hindu tolerance and higher spiritual consciousness, family values and successful civilised morality, against their corrupt manipulation by the dominant aspects, which were so sensationally highlighted and exacerbated by Katherine Mayo.

The idea of protecting the vulnerable woman from both the strong, and from their own weaknesses, fits neatly in to a patriarchal ideology. In the case of Hindu women, both the outside and inherent danger took the form of a loss of chastity or a sexual threat. The two forms of protection, from the outside threat of the Muslim and Other males, and internal danger of a woman’s own lack of self control (an idea though prevalent, is at odds with Verasalingam’s belief of the ‘natural’ modesty of women) can be seen to be acknowledged in both ideas for women’s education, and in the later nineteenth century women’s movements.

The strategy of double protection for Hindu women – from the outside, and from the self, has a number of implications – not least that this strategy denies individuality, personal agency, and complexity of character. Instead, a new icon of femininity was under construction, educated and socialised into the family, India and the world by men. Women in India at the beginning of the twentieth century were objects ready to be reformed, through methods of persuasion, social action instigated by the elite male intelligentsia, education designed to modernise their traditional roles, and

¹⁵⁰ Lata Mani, ‘Contentious Traditions...’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women...* p. 118.

legislation.¹⁵¹ These fields, legal, social and educational, are explicit and *conscious* arenas where ideas for reform and change could be safely articulated without real reference to the alternative lives and potentials of women.¹⁵² Unconsciously however, the same intellectual ideas were being articulated in the culture texts which responded to Mayo. In this context, reform for women could be read as part of the ‘progress’ towards a modern India which could compete morally, culturally and economically with the West. The re-forming of women’s lives was designed so that they could support this ‘progression’ from their natural arena, the home; it did not necessarily enable women to participate in the new modernity.

Historian Sumit Sarkar has identified this as the characteristic nineteenth-century reform – ideas of female emancipation combined with an insistence on ‘puritanical restraint and discipline.’¹⁵³ He points to the fact that these first generation reformers concentrated their efforts on the women of their own families, allowing them a ‘controlled and limited emancipation,’¹⁵⁴ in their own homes. In fact, the idea of the danger of sexual immorality resulting from the emancipation of women was/is, I would like to suggest, the implicit and indeed, sometimes explicit obsession of reformers from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, when CR’s *Our Culture* was first published.

Uma Chakravorty highlights this obsession in the work of early nationalist reformers concerned with female education. One such reformer, the hugely influential Swami Dayananda Saraswati, wrote extensively on female education and rejuvenated

¹⁵¹ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, p. 27.

¹⁵² Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid, ‘Reflections on Women and Culture’, in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture* (Bombay, Research Centre for Women’s Studies, 1985), p. 1.

¹⁵³ Sumit Sarkar, ‘The ‘Women Question’ in Nineteenth Century Bengal’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁴ Sumit Sarkar ‘The ‘Women Question’’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture*, p. 161.

Hinduism in his seminal work *Satyartha Prakasha* (Light of Truth, 1875). Dayanada was an orthodox Hindu brahmachari who believed in a rejuvenated Hinduism, free of its worst abuses. Only this could create a strong militant nation in keeping with the qualities of the lost ‘Golden Age’ of the Hindu past. Dayanada, like Ranade, blamed the decline in Hindu civilisation on the events narrated in the Puranas, specifically the *Mahabharata* war. Dayananda’s main philosophy was, in order to re-inject Hinduism with vigour and masculinity, Hindu religious life must take on the qualities exhibited by Europeans - qualities which, due to a shared Aryan heritage, were essentially common to both European and Hindu males.¹⁵⁵ In this new system of militant, nationalist Hinduism, the role of women for Dayananda was specifically tied to their function as progenitors of the ‘race’ and his writing on this reveals a deep anxiety about controlling female sexuality. Motherhood was the only reason for a woman’s existence, and this was to be an educated motherhood designed to rear a special breed of men. In his desire to regulate sexuality, Dayananda lists a full set of rules and regulations for both mother and child starting from intercourse, through conception, confinement and birth.¹⁵⁶ Dayanada exhibits the distrust of an orthodox Hindu male for women’s sexuality, which is traditionally perceived to be a threat to salvation. What is unique to his perspective is his transformation of the destructive nature of female sexuality into service for the nation through breeding.¹⁵⁷ Dayananda was a pioneer in the articulation and incorporation of ideas of female sexuality in a dominant, nationalist, male Hindu discourse, transforming problematic female sexual desire in to the desire bear morally, spiritually and physically ‘healthy’ children. His

¹⁵⁵ Uma Chakravarti, ‘Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁶ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, trans., Dr Chiranjiva Bharadwaja (Madras, Arya Samaj, 1932), p.19.

¹⁵⁷ Uma Chakravarti, ‘Whatever Happened...’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women*, p.57.

anxieties about sexuality are apparent in his conception of a reformed Hindu school system. He states:

The Boys school should be at least three miles distant to that of the Girls'. The tutors and other employees, such as servants should, in the Boys' school, be all of the male sex, and in the Girls' school, or of the female sex. Not even a child of five years of the opposite sex should be allowed to enter the school.¹⁵⁸

There follows a bizarre list of the eight kinds of forbidden intercourse for the junior Brahmachari which illustrates a deep rooted the fear of sexuality, as it includes any and all kinds of contact, mental or physical, between children of the opposite sex:

1. Looking upon them with the eye of lust
2. Embracing them
3. Having sexual intercourse with them
4. Intimately conversing with them
5. Playing with them
6. Associating with them
7. Reading or talking of libidinous subjects
8. Indulging in lascivious thoughts.¹⁵⁹

What is particularly disturbing is the clear indication that this list was designed for children, yet it equates play, conversation and friendship between sexes as inherently sexual and therefore dangerous and taboo. The inclusion of a ban on sexual intercourse in a list designed for school children is not only disturbing, but suggests a perverse imagination which problematises sexuality out of all proportion. In the genealogy under examination here, this implication of adult sexual behaviour being circumscribed for children is a difficult and dangerous space. There is the further sinister implication that genders should absolutely be denied any real knowledge of the other, and that this ignorance should be legitimated through education. This idea is reiterated in Dayananda's prescription for choosing a bride. Speaking on the advantages of exogamy, he states that:

¹⁵⁸ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 29.

Any two persons who have in their childhood, lived near each other, played and quarrelled together, loved one another, noticed each others faults, imperfections, tempers, misbehaviours and perhaps sometimes even, seen each other undressed, if married to each other, can never love each other well.¹⁶⁰

Though Dayananda insisted that the only successful marriage could be one made of mutual choice and affection, it is hard to see how this would have been accomplished in his system, as children would be absolutely segregated until they were of marriageable age, then their respective pictures would be sent to the appropriate male or female teacher.¹⁶¹ This teacher, in conjunction with the child's parents would have kept a 'diary' of the character and nature of the child since birth. Once a match had been decided, the couple in question would be given each other's 'diary' in order to decide whether they were agreeable to the match.¹⁶² On no account should they meet before the marriage,

...since the meeting of young people may lead to bad consequences.¹⁶³

While Dayananda insisted that male and female children should be educated,¹⁶⁴ and that the earliest age a girl should be married was sixteen,¹⁶⁵ nevertheless, women's education was to be focused on religious duty proscribed by the Vedas, and the birth and care of strong Hindu children. The idea of the 'diary;' a supposedly intimate, personal and subjective record of an individual life which in this case would be written by others, correlates with Ramabai Ranade's autobiography being the relation not of her own life story, but her husband's. What seems to be emerging is an anti –

¹⁵⁹ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁰ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 78.

¹⁶¹ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 83.

¹⁶² Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 94.

¹⁶³ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁴ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁵ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, p. 40.

individual writing of the individual or the self, a self which is representative of Hindu national values, or Hindu morality, and the use of this writing to relate this value laden self to the world.

Within the paradoxically limitless confines of the sexual fantasy of Hindu national purity which emerges so strongly from these texts, can be traced a genealogy, an accumulative and increasing collection of thoughts and ideas about women and female sexuality which are at the heart of the gender debate as regards national identity. The writers under discussion here are themselves marginal; their ideas however would be consolidated and enforced by both Gandhi and CR. This means that this genealogy, generated on the margins, and in the (un)spoken anxieties of Hindu male reformers and commentators is actually central, and potent. Where the writers who commented on Mayo texts gave birth and form to the intellectual process of 'purifying' India it would be Gandhi's writings on female sexuality, the value of chastity, and indeed, on *Mother India*, which would nationalise, homogenise and realise these ideas as the inherent nature of civilised Hindu behaviour.

Chapter Two: The Epic Model of Chastity

Theirs must be the strong, controlling, purifying, steady hand, conserving what is best in our culture, and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sitas [and] Draupadis...not of amazons and prudes.¹

(i) Introduction

This chapter brings together the three main themes of the thesis - cultural nationalism, female sexual identities and the Hindu epics and explores how they work together through a close reading of the occurrences of the epic women in Gandhi's writings. In this chapter I argue that Gandhi developed and propagated 'the epic model of chastity' to talk to women. This model deployed the epic heroines, particularly Sita, and established them as chaste national icons for women to emulate. Their chastity was, in Gandhi's discourse, liberating and empowering, giving them freedom to say 'no' to their husbands' sexual demands and focus all their energy on nationalist pursuits suitable for women, such as, spinning, raising children and practicing self-control.

Gandhi made full use of his position as a public speaker to the masses in order to talk specifically to women about their participation in the struggle for independence and their new national identities. This chapter examines the way that Gandhi used the events and the female characters of the Hindu epics in order to talk to women both about their role in the independence movement, and to address their potential for empowerment in the world of sexual relations – albeit in a controlled way. If the responses to Mayo nudged a dialogue about sexuality into the margins of the public

¹ M.K. Gandhi, 'The Position of Women' in *Young India*, October 17th 1929 in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To the Women*, (Allahbad Law Journal Press, Allahbad, 1941), p. 22.

cultural arena, Gandhi's writings and speeches to women thrust this dialogue into a central position.

Gandhi habitually used the epic protagonists Sita, from the *Ramayana*, and Draupadi, from the *Mahabharata* to talk to women. His radical philosophy was that women controlled both their own sexuality and that of their men, and it was proper for them as citizens of the emergent nation to exercise that control. His deeply held belief of *swaraj*, or self-rule, meant precisely this; that women were not victims of objectification or of male 'lust' but capable of *swaraj* which extended beyond their own bodies, in to the bodies of their men. Astutely, Gandhi tempers the radical nature of his philosophy which puts women in control of their own sexuality and that of their men by using the epic women as role models. Sita, the perfect wife, and Draupadi, the revered princess, are figures from the Hindu pantheon whose places in the popular imagination brought with them virtually uncontested notions of virtue, chastity, wifely duty and suffering, particularly in the case of Sita. For Gandhi, Sita and Draupadi function as versatile signifiers of traditional values and necessary change.

This is the 'epic model of chastity', through using the women of the epics as chaste nationalist icons for women in the new nation, Gandhi was able to articulate a particular kind of emancipation for women, and it was one that functioned within a recognisably Hindu framework.

Gandhi's empathy and skill in speaking to women was the result of a certain amount of identification on his part with the reality of women's lives and their concerns and he exhibited a great skill in transgressing gender boundaries. This may have been due to the Vaishnava culture in which Gandhi was raised, that acknowledges the feminine

side of male nature and raises the quest for knowledge of this side to a spiritual level.² His empathy with women found responsive chords in his audience, and his use of the well known and beloved epic heroines to talk to women about their own lives built on this responsiveness. In complete reversal of this, in CR's re-worked versions, the characters and mythologies of the epic heroines are narrated in such a way so that gender hierarchies and boundaries remain static.

(ii) To the Women of India

At the end of the nineteenth century, given the popularity of movements and debates focused on reform for women, the themes of which are noted in Chapter One of the thesis, the Indian woman was ready to re-define herself in the domestic role, to demand an education and to participate in the struggle for independence. While this 'new' woman was, for the first time, venturing across both the domestic threshold, and to an extent, the socio-economic divide to communicate with other women as in the case of Ramabai Ranade, the moral and political agendas of self-rule and Indian nationalism contributed to the eventual perpetuation of a system of cultural repression through the formation of a new national culture based on Hindu values. This culture identified women as the guardians of tradition, and ascribed to them the values of maternity, chastity and willingness to suffer.

It is at the crucial juncture of reform for women and emergent nationalism that a new path of enquiry emerges, beginning with the question discussed in the introduction to the thesis: *what happened for social reform for women to become absolutely synonymous with traditional values?* As explored in the introduction to the thesis,

² Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (Chicago, university of Chicago Press,

Partha Chatterjee suggests that nationalism resolved the ‘women’s question’ according to the parameters of its own ideological framework, recasting women as representative of the home – the authentic location of Hindu national identity.³ Mrinalini Sinha observes, in keeping with this, that the cultural products such as Mayo’s *Mother India* served to incorporate women in to the nationalist project by allowing them to define themselves against the west, and articulate their politics within a nationalist framework.⁴ Further to this, the subjugation and subsequent liberation of women was seen by some reformers as a moral issue rather than a social or historical experience, especially for the most prolific and effectual male champion of women’s rights: M.K. Gandhi.⁵

It is appropriate to focus on Gandhi’s work in the period when Katherine Mayo published *Mother India*. Gandhi’s response is radically different to those examined in the previous chapter, even though he was personally implicated in the text; Mayo devotes a section to the discussion of Gandhi’s various illnesses and his ‘hypocrisy’ in allowing himself to be treated by a Western surgeon using Western medicine while in prison. In his formal response, titled *A Drain Inspectors Report*,⁶ Gandhi compares Mayo’s work to that of a drain inspector who judges a nation on the state of its worst drains. Given Gandhi’s preoccupation with sexual behaviour, it is interesting that he does not as much as mention any of Mayo’s more spurious sexual accusations. Instead, he focuses on those sanitary, health and economic problems that Mayo comments on, albeit in a sensationalised form.

1990), p.127.

³ Partha Chatterjee ‘The Nationalist Resolution of the Women Question’ in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women*, pp. 233-268.

⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Reading Mother India...’ *Journal of Women’s History* 6:2 (1994), p. 27.

⁵ See Madhu Kishwar, ‘Gandhi on Women’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 20:40 (1985), pp. 1691-1701.

⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXXII (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Press, 1969), Vol. XXXIV. pp. 539-547.

He was writing unsurprisingly, for the western world, using a combination of gentlemanly understanding, and a fatherly moral disapproval:

But why am I writing this article? Not for the Indian readers, but for the many American and English readers who read these pages from week to week with sympathy and attention... That a book like Miss Mayo's can command a large circulation furnishes a sad commentary on western literature and culture.⁷

He begins by commending Mayo: 'The book is cleverly and powerfully written,' though he precedes this by undermining the culture from which she was writing, stating: 'she does not give one an elevated idea of the western standard of judgement.'⁸ His tone is gentle and humorous, as if he finds the sexually paranoid fervour of Iyer *et al* distasteful and inappropriate. In fact, he comments that, 'the agitation set up against the book is in danger of being overdone.'⁹

The issues which Gandhi engages with were limited to the pointed accusations against him, for example his medical treatment by a western doctor in prison. Mayo accuses Gandhi of hypocrisy by allowing himself to be treated by a western doctor, given the negative views on western medicine involved in his critique of modern civilisation.¹⁰ He uses the opportunity of his response to her and to the world to illustrate his view of the body as a necessary evil:

So far as my opinion about hospitals and the like is concerned, it stands, in spite of my having subjected myself [to] surgeons Indian and English trained in the western school of medicine. Similarly, I use motor cars and railways... I hold the body itself to be an impediment to my progress...¹¹

⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 545.

⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 541.

⁹ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 547.

¹⁰ See M.K. Gandhi in Anthony J. Parel ed., *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 62-66.

¹¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 542.

The only other comment he makes with regard to corporeal or sexual matters is with regard to Mayo's slur on the Vaishnavite caste mark, or shiva lingam, as obscene. Having been brought up a Vaishnavite in an orthodox household, it was impossible for Gandhi to let this pass unaddressed. True to form he denies any sexual significance to the lingam.

Mine were orthodox people. I used to have the mark myself as a child but neither I nor any one else in our family ever knew that this harmless and rather elegant looking mark had any obscene significance at all. I asked a party of Vaishnavites in Madras...they knew nothing of the obscene significance.¹²

Accurately, Gandhi pinpoints Mayo's political agenda as the real cause of concern:

Her case is to perpetuate white domination in India on the plea of India's unfitness to rule herself.¹³

Rather than lash out at Mayo personally, Gandhi true to his belief urges his followers to look in to themselves to eradicate the 'substance' which he believes underlies Mayo's accusations.¹⁴ However, given the zeal which has been aroused in his contemporaries, Gandhi advises restraint: 'a cautious reformer may make some use of it.'¹⁵

A telling comment transfers the taint of obscenity to the corruption of modern western practice, rather than to Mayo personally, a technique Gandhi utilised in *Hind Swaraj*: 'it has remained for our Western visitors to acquaint us with the obscenity of many practices which we have hereto innocently indulged in.'¹⁶

¹² M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 542.

¹³ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 544. See also Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, ed. Mrinalini Sinha (Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998), pp. 1-20.

¹⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 546.

¹⁵ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 546.

¹⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIV, p. 546.

Gandhi's general distrust of the effects of modern civilisation on women in particular are held dramatically in check in his response to Mayo. It is possible to suggest that the 'substance' to which he refers is the unchecked sexuality which leads to destruction of the individual and society – a sexual degeneracy grossly exaggerated by Mayo, but no less real for Gandhi. His theory of *swaraj* was based on the control of this sensuality, an individual freedom which would expand to include a nation of free people, a *swaraj* which in 1927 was far from near accomplishment. His own recourse, and the path he advised to others in times of anxiety regarding sexual behaviour was to recite the name of Rama;¹⁷ it is fitting that *Drain Inspectors Report* ends with a quote from Tulsidas, one of the two 'original' scribes of the *Ramayana*.

It was also from 1926 onwards that Gandhi began to consolidate what can be called the 'epic model of chastity' as a system of living and a form of identity for Indian women. This model of chastity, epic in both form and reference relies on mobilising certain epic heroines as icons for emulation by contemporary women. I aim to explore how Gandhi invests the epic women with qualities, including chastity in service to the nation, in order provide women with figures who embody the desirable female values for the new nation.

It is also appropriate to consider Gandhi's work at this juncture for two significant reasons. The first is his view of nationalism, as explained in his manifesto *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Gandhi's methodology for the liberation of India from British rule was closely linked to ideas of the self-control of the body and mind. The second, crucial point is his contribution to the debate on sexual behaviour. Gandhi's openness to discussion of all things sexual brought the discussion of sexuality into the public

¹⁷ See for one example, M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXIII [438], p. 236.

sphere in an unprecedented way, given his status and authority. Though an underground, or sub-culture of ‘explicit’ sexual media – books and magazines – existed, it was Gandhi who created a unique widely accessible space for the discussion of sexual desire and behaviour, no less for women than for men, for married couples and single people.¹⁸ His view on sexual desire was that, like all the senses, it should be subjected to the rigorous control of the mind in the spirit of public service reveals his methodology of the transformation of moral virtue in to civic duty, and is illustrative of perhaps the most significant of the three parameters suggested below.

These three parameters can be described as: firstly the symbolic representation of ‘authentic’ culture by Hindu women through maternity and domesticity, secondly the definition of Hindu female identity versus western female identity, and thirdly social change based on Hindu moral values. These parameters provided the dominant boundaries for Gandhi’s discourse on women and the new nation state of India. The requirement was not only for an authoritative figure to consolidate these boundaries, but equally importantly, a female role model to embody them. Sita and Draupadi, along with other key women from the epic texts, were an obvious choice. Sita and Draupadi, already iconic and recognisable figures; in both cases absolutely central to the plot, narration and resolution of the two epics, they function as very rich signifiers of both orthodox Hindu values, and progressive femininity in service to the new nation.

The new nation for Gandhi was to be built on a redefined notion of Hindu *dharma*. Whereas *dharma* in the orthodox world means the maintenance of hierarchical status

¹⁸ See for example Prof K. Deyer, *Rati Sastra* (Amritsar, Steno House Press, 1933), *Sex Pictorial* (Amritsar, Steno House Press, 1936), and *Sexual Beauty of the Female Form* (Amritsar, Steno House Press, 1936).

through rituals and duty, Gandhi expanded this to include values that were vital to the new nation – equality, liberty and mutual respect.¹⁹ This redefined *dharma* was a realisation of the potentialities which Gandhi saw as already extant in the Hindu epics: the *Bhagvad Gita*, the book containing the moral message of the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*.²⁰ The new nation then, was to be built on a foundation of *swaraj* as self-rule, which in turn would lead to political *swaraj*, the government of India by Indians. The personal and political concept of *swaraj* was suggested, and had its location in the Hindu tradition. Gandhi's concept of self-rule was based on the principles of *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non – violence) and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). India would be free, only when the individual soul was freed from the worldly, or sensual commitments which prevented the true realisation of *dharma* and public service.²¹

Hind Swaraj (1909) is a critique of the 'modern civilisation' that in Gandhi's eyes glorified brute force and the rule of hatred. This should be countered, he argued, by soul force, or truth force, that is the living energy of *ahimsa*, against which, brute force is powerless.²² The keys to the successful achievement of *ahimsa* lie in a conceptual purity, and in personal sacrifice and suffering.²³ This suffering is explicitly gendered in Gandhi's writings on women. Sita's first appearance in the *Collected Works*, also in 1909 is in direct relation to her suffering,²⁴ whereas later appearances relate to her purity. The concept of purity was vital to Gandhi, an

¹⁹ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. (xvii).

²⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed., Anthony J. Parel, p. (xvi).

²¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed. Antony J. Parel, p. 73.

²² M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed., Anthony J. Parel, p. 85.

²³ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ed., Anthony J. Parel, p. 90 : 'Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering'.

²⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. IX, [322], p. 499.

‘emotional necessity’ which is voiced repeatedly in his writings on nation and *brahmacharya*, and in his autobiography.²⁵

Gandhi related to these so-called feminine attributes of purity and suffering in service to the nation, he himself being at once a male and female role model, nurturing mother and autocratic father.²⁶ Further to this, and in fact crucially to both the conception of ‘nation’ and of personal *swaraj*, was Gandhi’s definition of the purpose of *brahmacharya* in service to the nation.

As he believed that all creation, especially procreation, was essentially violent, it is the avoidance of this violence which frames his discourse on sexuality.²⁷ Anger, which leads to violence, resulted, for Gandhi, in the destruction of *virya*, or vital [male] essence, the essential energy which would be the building block of *swaraj*. Gandhi also linked *virya* to male seminal fluid. In this sense, it was the preservation of this *virya* which would lead to the ultimate success of the struggle for independence – men were designated the creators of the new nation, while women, both in terms of their responsibility in orchestrating and enforcing their husbands’ control of this essence and were allocated the preservation of the cultural values of the nation. Extending this idea to the metaphor of the traditional family, there seems to be a sort of gendered role reversal taking place – where men ‘create’ and women ‘protect’. The implications for women however, result in a curious blend of emancipating discourse and pride in suffering and denial and a new, modern adhesion to the domestic sphere. Indeed, to be franchised, one must perform the requisite service to *dharma*:

²⁵ E. Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non Violence* (London, Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 117.

²⁶ E. Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth*, p. 106.

²⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXII, p. 359.

...real rights are a result of the performance of duty.²⁸

These duties for women: the regulation of male desire, de-eroticised conception, and maintenance of the home, in service to the nation were to be embodied and explained through the use of Sita and Draupadi as role models. The partnership of husband and wife was to be a serious, devoted and sexless one – a partnership exclusively of ideal service to the exclusion of ‘enjoyment.’

It was Gandhi’s writings which mobilised the women of the epic texts, particularly Sita, as role models for women who were active in the struggle for independence. In spite of his affinities with some of the anxieties displayed by early reformers and by the respondents to *Mother India*, as Gandhi began to expound his own gender philosophy for the new nation, the discourse on women was radically altered. The conflict of orthodox traditional views of Hindu women and yet, the desire for reform in key areas of female experience, were dealt with by Gandhi in a brilliantly simple way.

Gandhi had always relied on the epic texts for parable-like figures suitable for emulation, to talk about everyday life. By resurrecting the protagonists of the Hindu epics, as icons for modern women, Gandhi swiftly dissolved the dichotomy experienced by men such as M.G. Ranade by allowing particularly Sita and Draupadi to function as versatile signifiers of both sacred, immutable traditional values, and the inevitable process of change. Through re-tellings of Sita and Draupadi’s ‘experiences,’ Gandhi was able to talk about female strength, autonomy, leadership and female sexuality within a recognisable, Hindu framework.

²⁸ M.K. Gandhi in Anthony J. Parel ed., *Hind Swaraj*, p. 85.

The emergence of a newly active role for women of the middle and lower castes/classes, created through the struggle for independence, was particularly active in organising the production and selling of *khadi*, which was traditionally seen as women's work.²⁹ By 1926, Gandhi was already adept at using the figure of Sita as the example for women's participation, and indeed leadership in the *khadi* movement. Operating neatly within the three parameters outlined above, (the symbolic representation of 'authentic' culture by Hindu women through maternity and domesticity; the definition of Hindu female identity versus western female identity; and social change based on Hindu moral values), Gandhi inaugurated Sita into the service of both female 'purity' and the production of *khadi*. At a speech at a women's meeting in Comilla in January 1926, he extorted women to:

...attain the virtues of Sita, and to wear clothes made by their own hands as Sita used to do and also follow the example of Sita by leading a simple and pure life.³⁰

For Gandhi, the role of women in the struggle for the new nation was explicitly tied to women's fidelity to (t)his mobilisation of Sita as a national icon for modern women. At a women's meeting in Benaras on January 9th 1926, he stated:

The first thing is that if you want *swaraj*, or *Ramaraja* in India you have to become as pure as Sita... Only a woman who keeps body and mind pure is worthy of our reverence. Therefore, sisters, wear *khadi*, ply the *charka* and become pure.³¹

He added to this at a speech later that day. Addressing the women specifically, he said:

I ask them to be pure as Sitaji. When she was put through the ordeal, when she entered the fire, she did not get burnt, the flames

²⁹ E. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, p. 402.

³⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, [222], p. 525.

³¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [229], p. 538.

did not so much as touch her. No foreign cloth ever came in to contact with Sitaji's body.³²

Gandhi's use of Sita as a figure suitable for emulation by contemporary women raises several interesting points. The first is that when addressing meetings of women, he often, if not always, explicitly used *Ramaraja* (the rule of Rama) in place of *swaraj* (self-rule).³³ This not only illustrates how influential the epic model was deemed to be when addressing women, but also figures the emergent nation as Hindu, paternalistic, and therefore not strictly 'self' ruled for women, or indeed, those of other faiths. It could be suggested that this was acceptable simply because Gandhi was the first male leader with both personal integrity and political power who understood and promoted women's activity en masse in an explicitly public, political arena. An additional palliative was his articulation of the marriage of Rama and Sita as the ideal,³⁴ a partnership of *equals*, with each partner fulfilling the correct gender role.³⁵ Most interesting is the equation of Sita's ordeal by fire, which she undergoes at the demand of Rama as a test of her sexual purity, with the wearing of foreign cloth. It is a complex metaphor which deserves closer examination. The fire, which does not touch her body proves her chastity; it does not contaminate or harm her. Gandhi's suggestion is that the foreign cloth does have these powerful properties of impurity and contamination, which the intrinsic purity of the wearer *does not have the power to nullify* - as was the case with Sita in the flames. Only the wearing of indigenous, hand-spun *kadhi* can demonstrate female chastity - just as the flames of the Hindu ritual 'demonstrate' Sita's purity. It is not the fire and the foreign cloth that are comparable as would first appear, but the test of purity by fire, and the wearing of

³² M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [230], p. 539.

³³ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [202], p. 498.

³⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXI, [555], p. 511.

³⁵ See M.K. Gandhi, 'A Fair Friend's Questions' in *Young India*, October 21st 1926, in A.T. Hingorani

kadhi which are synonymous: the public display of suffering and chastity which defines Hindu female identity.

Significantly, the combination of authenticity, sexual purity and national identification were increasingly to be embodied by Gandhi's Sita, rather than by Draupadi. Gandhi's writings in *Young India*, *Harijan*, national newspapers, and speeches at public meetings functioned as both a civil education and a moral guide for the citizens of the new nation. His writings and thoughts on women represent a combination of intense sexual anxiety on his part, and a strong belief in the innate goodness and purity of women, which breaks from the traditional ascetic view of dangerous female sexuality. While Gandhi may have successfully negotiated the divide between the belief systems and practices of orthodox Hinduism and modern reforms for women, there is evident tension in his conceptual purity of women, and his dearly held belief and practice of *brahmacharya*. As a *brahmachari*, or celibate, Gandhi intrinsically believed that sexual passion was a dangerous and corrupting force. His rules for avoiding the arousal of desire in young men are fuelled with a sort of breathless panic:

You should be vigilant so that you may not have involuntary nocturnal emission during sleep, and if you should feel the desire aroused at any moment during the night you should without a moment's delay, get out of bed immediately and drink some cold water, and then sit in cold water and pour a jug of cold water over the genitals....³⁶

Although the practice of *brahmacharya* did not, for Gandhi, consist solely of abstaining from sexual thoughts and sexual intercourse, this formed a predominant part of the writing he produced on the subject.³⁷

ed., *To The Women*, p. 5.

³⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXII [40], p. 45.

³⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII [168], pp. 168-169.

The significant link between Gandhi's views on women and sexuality, and his utilisation of the epic heroines to describe aspects of female identity for women in the new nation make an important contribution to the cultural anxieties which underline the representation of women in the new culture of the modern nation. Not only did Gandhi's views reach the widest possible audience within his lifetime, they could be considered to provide the foundation of this representation, constructed on the ground prepared by texts such as Ramabai's 'autobiography' and the responses to *Mother India*.

Gandhi's philosophy of the subject, or of the individual, was arguably inseparable from his belief *brahmacharya* as the ultimate way of living in both a fulfilled, and in a morally correct way. His slogan of *swaraj* applies equally to the individual as it does to the body-politic. While Sita is the perfect national icon with her combination of wifely competence, self sacrifice and devout Hinduism revealed through tests of her sexual purity, the figure of Draupadi is more difficult to utilise. Her problematic status lies in the initial fact of her polyandry, a fact that for Gandhi needed to be mitigated in order for her to be an efficacious, appropriate role model. In a talk to the Ashram women in 1926, he gave the following explanation:

Draupadi had five husbands at one time and yet has been called chaste. This is because in that age, just as a man could marry several wives, a woman, in certain regions, could marry several husbands. The code of marriage changes with time and place. But from another point of view, Draupadi is a symbol of the mind. And the five Pandavas are the five senses brought under control. And it is indeed desirable that they are so controlled. Since all five senses were under the control of the mind, (Draupadi) could have been said to have wedded the five senses (Pandavas).³⁸

³⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [202], p. 486.

This disembodiment of Draupadi and her husbands renders her polyandry, and thereby her 'promiscuity', irrelevant. Gandhi here is priming his female audience to extrapolate from Draupadi's myth only those aspects that can function within the three significant parameters outlined above. What is radical is Gandhi's insistence on the politics of control within the relationship, control which he believed should rest completely with women. However, this supposed hegemony comes with its own responsibilities, particularly that of controlling male sexual instinct and impulse. His aim was:

...a thoroughgoing desexualisation of the male female relationship, in which women must take the lead. 'If they will only learn to say 'no' to their husbands when they approach them carnally...if a wife says to her husband: "no I don't want to," he will make no trouble. But she has not been taught....I want women to learn the primary right of resistance.³⁹

In order to be completely explicit, Gandhi takes his idea of Draupadi as 'spirit' or 'mind' one step further. He is commenting on her prayer to Krishna at the point of her humiliation in front of her husbands and the court. She is about to be forcibly undressed, when she starts to pray. As the perpetrator pulls on her sari, it simply continues to extend in length - though I would suggest, contrary to the case of Sita, protecting her implied chastity, rather than proving her 'real' chastity. Gandhi states:

When there is greater presence behind the word, its value becomes greater. The same is the case with Draupadi. She may even be regarded as an imaginary character created by Vyasa. Such a woman may or may not have existed. But the great strength of Vyasa's penance and the recitation by crores of people of the prayers put in Draupadi's mouth by him have raised the value of that prayer.⁴⁰

³⁹ M. K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [202], p. 487.

⁴⁰ M. K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, [202], p. 487.

In an extraordinary move to reassure himself, and his audience that he is by no means advocating either Draupadi's polyandry, or the defiance which results in the attempt to strip her, he suggests that she is a figment of the Hindu male imagination – *she may or may not have existed*. Here she is a figure of the sexual imagination, right down to the effort to forcibly undress her in public. Draupadi's polyandry renders her a legitimate object of public property and appropriation in the most intimate, and indeed, colonising way – by having words *put in to her mouth*. It is Vyasa's words, which he has given her, which not only protect her chastity in the context of the epic narrative, but also redeem her as a sacred figure in the Hindu pantheon. It is possible to suggest that this attitude is part of a drive to masculinise Draupadi's character and identity in order to interpret her polyandry.⁴¹ That is not to say that by attributing masculine qualities to Draupadi makes her a martial alternative to the expression of authentic femininity as embodied by Sita. Rather, Gandhi uses the episode of her disrobing to highlight the religious duty of women to spin *kadhi*.⁴² Though Gandhi did talk about Draupadi in the context of her aggression, he would more often, judging by the comparative frequency of their appearances in his writings, use Sita, the more versatile, pliable representation of Indian female identity.⁴³

Interestingly, although men had come out in defence of Hindu femininity when attacked by others, Gandhi attacked the orthodox opinion, still held with conviction, that women lacked self-control, and were inherently sexually dangerous. While Gandhi's drive to purify the female character was also an exercise in creating subjective autonomy and strength, at the same time he indicated that perhaps female sexuality was both inherently dangerous, and inseparable from the fact of femaleness.

⁴¹ See also: M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII, [40], p. 44.

⁴² M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, p. 97.

⁴³ See for example M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, p. 108.

In his discourse on the Gita, he illustrates that the true monk should not even be aware that they observe *brahmacharya*. From a man, this implies one who has ‘made himself a eunuch’ but:

...if the person is a woman, she should not be conscious at all of being a woman.⁴⁴

For Gandhi, sexual desire in the male gender appears to be located in the phallus, but for women, sexual desire is located in the consciousness of female identity. The idea that male sexuality is brute lust, and that female sexuality is a consciousness, or force which is designed to inspire that lust, is an important one for Gandhi. Women’s consciousness of their sexual desire implies that this desire may be *controlled* consciously. Not for women the dangers of ‘involuntary emission’ or objectifying their husbands, or themselves, for their lust. This consciousness is empowering, and it is the most worthy form of self-control that women may achieve. Gandhi is explicit in his discussion of this idea, again, through Sita:

Sita was pure in body and mind. When she was put through her ordeal on her return from Lanka, the flames did not even touch her. Why? Because she was pure not only in body but also in mind...real beauty consists in making mind and body pure. Only a woman who keeps body and mind pure is worthy of our reverence.⁴⁵

This idea extended to bodily violation – rape and abuse. Using Sita as an example, Gandhi illustrates the danger of violation through mutual sexual desire, not forced intercourse, depending on the woman’s intrinsic purity of mind:

A woman’s virtue is violated through both the man and the woman acting voluntarily, and if a woman is self controlled and pure in

⁴⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII, p. 150.

⁴⁵ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXII [229], p. 538.

mind, violation of her virtue is impossible. This is true in two senses. One is that the Shastras proclaim, and it must be believed, that the body of one whose mind is pure in every way is protected by the mind itself, just as Sita's mind protected her body...Ravana could not outrage Sita's modesty, and the reason was not that he did not possess brute strength, but that he knew that if he tried to assault her his body would be burnt to ashes that very moment; and so he tried to win her consent through all manner of means...but they were of no avail in the face of Sita's strength of mind. And the second meaning is that, if a woman's mind is pure, her virtue is not violated and she is not stained by sin, even though she may have been raped...she may remain confident that, if her mind is steadfast, her body will always remain inviolable.⁴⁶

It is possible to suggest that rather than de-sexualise the 'married' relationship, this philosophy of voluntary, willing violation rather perverts the sexual act and renders it, not unfitting considering Gandhi's beliefs about bodily privation, somewhat sado-masochistic. The physical trauma of sexual violation has no currency for Gandhi, even if strength of mind in this case translates in to denial (in the psychoanalytical sense) of male violence against the female body.

At the same time, through their own will and self-control, women were endowed with the ability to counter the social code that penalised women who were sexually knowledgeable, even if that knowledge was the result of violence and rape. In this context, Sita functions as an orthodox figurehead for Gandhi's radical views, radical in the sense that within this particular politics of purity, women were to be instigators and leaders in a visible and prominent way. Purdah and seclusion would not effect this empowered purity for Gandhi, and to this end, he attributes to Sita a seductive agency and strength of character:

Chastity is not a hothouse growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by a wall of purdah. It must grow from within and to be worth anything, it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a

⁴⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII [439], pp. 434-435.

very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men to be men must be able to trust their womenfolk... Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent even as he was himself. But for robust independence, Draupadi is perhaps a better example. Sita was gentleness incarnate. Draupadi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhima to her imperious will. She stood in no need of protection from any one of the Pandavas.⁴⁷

A pattern emerges here which Gandhi reiterates throughout his work. This is the inseparable connection of Rama and Sita as husband and wife, and the isolation of Draupadi from her husbands. Indeed, Draupadi's first appearance in the *Collected Works*, also in 1909, is as follows:

Draupadi's separation from the Pandavas proved a blessing to them and the entire Hindu nation sings the praises of her resoluteness.⁴⁸

Draupadi, 'imperious' and 'in no need of protection' is divorced from the awkward fact of her polyandry.

Gandhi believed in the education of 'married women' as opposed to 'girls'. Once again, as emerged in the responses to *Mother India* this could be read as 'married' meaning sexually active or knowledgeable, which knowledge being imparted by the husband, but this time, the 'knowledge' was to be used only in the service of the new nation (to bear children) rather than in the service of gratifying desire. However, the model of the monogamous, *de-sexualised* marriage was for Gandhi, the cornerstone of successful society, and for the struggle for independence. Husbands were still to function as educators, but not in the instruction of sexual knowledge:

I have ... repeatedly suggested that every patriotic husband should become the wife's own teacher and prepare her for work among her less fortunate sisters. I have also drawn attention to the implications of the suggestion. One of them is for husbands to

⁴⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII, [40], pp. 44-45.

⁴⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. IX [109], p. 174.

cease to treat their wives as objects of their enjoyment but to regard them as co-partners in their work of nation building. We cannot have Rama without Sita. And Sita got her real schooling under the gentle care of her partner during those terrible years of exile and probation.⁴⁹

Draupadi is problematic to this theory because in these terms, not only her physical relationships, but also her *education*, was to be conducted by not one, but five men. Importantly, Draupadi is not allocated the prefix of purity, but rather appears as ‘imperious’ or ‘proud’⁵⁰ as opposed to Sita, who appears as ‘spotless’ and ‘immaculate.’⁵¹ This is a significant distinction in understanding the function of both figures in the new tellings of the epic texts.

It is possible to suggest that the long period of separation enforced on Rama and Sita by her abduction renders their marriage as the ideal for Gandhi. Sita’s position in the Hindu pantheon means that her relationship to her husband, and to those who worship her, is flexible – that is she may appear as a mother or a sister, rather than as the wife of someone else, albeit another divine figure. The ideal marriage she shares with Rama is articulated according to the principles Gandhi outlines with reference to *Thurston’s Book of Marriage* (1927):

Ordinarily, the relationship between a man and a woman should be similar to that between a mother and son, a sister and brother, or a father and daughter. It is obvious that the relationship between husband and wife can be something in the nature only of an exception.

Towards the end of 1927, Gandhi began to use Sita as a champion not only of kadhi, but also of the lowest caste known as ‘untouchable’. Gandhi refers conspicuously less to Draupadi, but instead begins to combine the qualities he previously attributed to

⁴⁹ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII [147], pp. 148-149.

⁵⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII [186], p. 186.

her, to Sita. In the cause of the untouchables, he illustrates that Sita embraced her servant Nishadaraja, and exhorts women:

I would like you to imitate Sita's virtues, Sita's humility, Sita's simplicity, and Sita's bravery. You should realise that Sita, for the protection of her virtues did not need the assistance of Rama, her Lord and master,. The chronicler of the history of Sita and Rama tells us that it was the purity of Sita which was her sole shield and protection.⁵²

In this way it becomes clear that Sita's monogamy renders her the more powerful signifier of the values of purity and self-control which are central to Gandhi's writing on gender. The development of Sita as a complex, multifaceted repository for the components of Hindu female identity lies in the details of her experience in the *Ramayana*. Whereas Draupadi incites her husbands to violence, is nearly disrobed in public, and is the object of male fantasy within the story - as for example when, during their last year of exile, Draupadi is coveted and pursued by a general of the King with whom they are hiding. Sita's experience, particularly as re-told by CR, foregrounds the values of patience, suffering and chastity. These were the qualities which Gandhi saw women bringing in to the public arena:

Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent in to public life should result in purifying it.⁵³

The purification of public life by women started in the home. It was in the control of their husbands' sexuality that women would become truly independent citizens of the new nation:

⁵¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIV [121], p. 142.

⁵² M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXV [27], p. 33.

⁵³ M.K. Gandhi, 'Position of Women' in *Young India*, October 21st 1926, in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To The Women*, p. 13.

Woman must cease to consider herself the object of men's lust. The remedy is more in her hands than man's. She must refuse to adorn herself for men including her husband, if she will be an equal partner with man. I cannot imagine Sita ever wasting a moment on pleasing Rama with physical charms.

Gandhi's ideal of purity was in fact the complete 'eradication of desire.'⁵⁴ Sexual intercourse and sexual desire was strictly for procreation. He reiterated his views on the life of a married couple – that they should be towards one another as friends and companions, that they should sleep in separate beds if not preferably in separate rooms, and that each should devote their lives to service, the barrier to which was 'lustful' contact. The sexual union that produced children however, was for Gandhi an inevitable consequence rather than the sacred event held by Hindu orthodoxy. However, despite his preference for each human life to be devoted to service, he venerated motherhood. He exhorted male students to remember that 'woman was your mother, before woman became your wife.' The slightly disturbing amalgamation of mother and wife in the same woman nevertheless almost completes the representational journey of the Hindu Indian woman from Jones' 'figure of delight' to the chaste mother. For Gandhi, the chaste mother was the moral guardian of society. He admonished his contemporaries who wrote literature that concentrated on descriptions of physical form to purify their pens by thinking first of their mothers. This would guarantee the production of chaste literature. Sudhir Kakar expresses the view that Gandhi's relationships with women were dominated by this fantasy of all women as mothers, and his need to maintain an idealised relationship with the maternal body. This idealised relationship was necessarily (and for Kakar, was also a defence mechanism against sexual feelings towards women) an exercise in the belief

women need not, or least only minimally, be sexual beings, or experience sexual desire.⁵⁵ This particular rhetoric of motherhood served as a liberating discourse firmly within the benevolent, patriarchal mould.

In a sense, the Sita who embodied *swaraj* for women, and was recast by Gandhi as a monolithic figure, was a homogenous representation of the Indian woman. Gandhi's idea of the new nation of India saw all people as first citizens of this nation and then as members of a religion or sect. Sita, then takes on the transgressive and migratory qualities which are actually realised by Draupadi within the telling of the *Mahabharata*, which Gandhi, and CR after him, felt it impolitic, or indeed were unable to confront. Gandhi's chaste Sita was the forerunner to the concept of an All India *Ramayana*, and she was to represent and be representative of all 'Indian women'. Gandhi was the first to realise the potential strength and emotional appeal of such a model, saying:

Let all of you share each other's misery and happiness. Only then can you become like Sita. Sita did not consider herself a citizen of Ayodhya. She always considered herself as belonging to the whole of India.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Gandhi's Sita was a radical model, one who could be used to talk about all castes and kinds of women.⁵⁷ However, the convincing argument for Sita's prominence for Gandhi lies in his fantasy of her innate purity as compared to Draupadi's dubious morality. While he makes no explicit comment as to Draupadi's intrinsic purity, and in fact she appears less, or not at all in the *Collected Works* after

⁵⁴ M. K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII, [247], p. 236.

⁵⁵ Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (London, Penguin, 1990), p. 125.

⁵⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXV [[241]. p. 359.

⁵⁷ See for example M.K Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXV [113]. p. 174 where Gandhi states: 'Sita was not superior to a prostitute'.

1935, to Sita he attributes an innocence and gendered virtue fundamental to his concept of femininity:

Had she been proud of her purity she would have been nowhere.
But she was not even conscious of it. She was pure because it was impossible for her to be otherwise.⁵⁸

The double interpretation of the last part of this quotation deserves attention. As will be shown, in the re-tellings of the *Ramayana*, it was indeed impossible for Sita to *be otherwise*, given that she was represented by those who had an interest in maintaining the dominant ideological boundaries of Hindu culture and gendered morality. Indeed, written by Gandhi, Sita could not *be otherwise*. It was literally impossible.

Gandhi's use of Sita becomes increasingly sophisticated in his later writings, using her story implicitly, almost as a background reference, particularly with reference to his theory of self-assassination, where the force of self-control would cause the soul to leave the earthly body if it was in danger of violation:

It has been suggested that a girl who is gagged and bound so as to make her powerless, even for struggling, cannot die as easily as I seem to think. I venture to assert that a girl who had the will to resist can burst all the bonds that have rendered her powerless. The resolute will gives her the strength to die.⁵⁹

It is entirely possible that this statement and others like it were influenced by Gandhi's reading of Sita's fire ordeal, and her final rejection by Rama, where she calls for the earth to swallow her. The connection has been made between the deep current in the Hindu imagination that connects resistance against authority with self-immolation, or self-assassination.⁶⁰ This also finds expression in the Hindu practice of

⁵⁸ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol., XXXV [113], p. 174.

⁵⁹ M.K. Gandhi, in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To The Women*, p. 102.

⁶⁰ See Sally J. Sutherland, 'Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behaviour and Female Role Models in the Sanskrit Epics' in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, 1:1989:63, pp. 70-82.

dhurna, or sit-in strike, a practice which Gandhi was severely critical of, even though his own philosophy of *satyagraha* appears as a modern, highly political version of the Hindu tradition of resistance through suffering and self-sacrifice.⁶¹

Though Gandhi's Sita is radical, his reading of her rejection by Rama coheres with the patriarchal and paternalistic politics present in CR's telling. Gandhi presents a highly romanticised analysis of Rama's actions:

Through his secret agents, Ramchandra elicits public opinion and finds that Sita is the object of censure in a particular washerman's home. He was well aware that this adverse criticism was groundless; Sita was dearer to him than his own life, nothing could lead to a difference between him and her; nevertheless he renounced her realising it was improper to let such criticism continue. As a matter of fact, Ramchandra and Sita had become one; they lived for and in each other; nevertheless he thought it necessary to endure the physical absence of that Sita for whom he had led an army in to battle, whose presence he desired day and night. Rama honoured public opinion in this matter.⁶²

There is clearly a paradox here between Gandhi's view of contemporary public opinion of female morality, as in the case of rape, where he criticises those who hold women contaminated by their violation, and the onus put on the adherence to public opinion in the case of Sita. It is a curious, though not unsurprising feature of the interaction with the *Ramayana*, that this part of the story has to be glossed over in order to preserve Rama's integrity as a spiritual leader. There is some tension between the Rama who 'desired' her presence 'night and day' and the austere figure whose name Gandhi advised the repetition of in times of unwonted sexual arousal. Though in this quotation Gandhi is using the story to expound his own philosophy of the singular unity of the partnership marriage, his radical philosophy cannot come out in defence of Sita, or as a critique of Rama, especially given that the charge against

⁶¹ M.K. Gandhi in Anthony J Parel ed., *Hind Swaraj*, p. 95, fn.

Sita is of sexual promiscuity. The idea that Sita, albeit unwillingly, had exposed herself to public censure may be under examination here. Gandhi's main fear of the impact of degenerate modern civilisation on Indian women was largely expressed through fears about visibility. When discussing 'the modern girl', Gandhi is explicit in his condemnation:

I have a fear that the modern girl loves to play Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. She loves adventure...the modern girl dresses not to protect herself from the sun and the rain, but to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary.⁶³

He goes on to say that the 'non violent way is not for such girls.' This exclusion of the 'modern girl' who draws attention to her self by overtly sexualising her looks by using make up and wearing revealing clothing is an anathema of femininity for Gandhi. He suggests Sita as he model for women to gain not only personal *swaraj*, but the respect of men. Society's responsibility is to:

...produce women pure, firm and self controlled as Sita...if we do produce them, such modern sisters will receive the same homage from Hindu society as is being paid to their prototypes of yore.⁶⁴

Here, Gandhi introduces for women the absolutely compelling idea of being respected for who they are, not what they look like. At the same time he equates female physicality, corporeal enhancement and individual representation of personality with dangerous, demeaning sexuality. He is suggesting that while women take pride in their appearance, and find empowerment through being sexually attractive, they are not worthy of respect. Without this respect, which results from the

⁶² M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXV [374], p. 490.

⁶³ M.K. Gandhi, 'Student's Shame' in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To The Women*, p. 106.

⁶⁴ M.K. Gandhi, 'Regeneration of Women' in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To The Women*, p. 19.

subjugation of this kind of sexual expression, women will always be victims of ‘male lust’ since they have done nothing to make themselves physically invisible and morally more visible to the men around him. Though Gandhi is addressing women specifically within a Hindu context, this philosophy is closer to the edicts of orthodox Islam, which would make it a kind of modelling of the self on the Other. This strategy, part of the homogenisation of Hinduism in to what appears to be a universal, nationally held, monotheistic religion, emerges as a powerful tool, later adopted by the far right-wing.

In using Sita, the monolithic Hindu woman, as a role model, particularly for the ‘modern girl’ Gandhi made the epic texts politically useable in a new way. They could become modern, applicable guides for the emergent nation which would encourage women to identify with the ultimate de-eroticised woman of the ancient past who was venerated and adored in the present. Gandhi continued to use Sita and to a lesser extent, Draupadi in his speeches and letters to women. By 1940, these comments were much condensed repetitions of the ideas he had expounded in the twenties.

The crucial point in Gandhi’s use of Sita in his political speeches and writings is his close, intimate identification with her. Not only did he speak of Sita and her life as though she had really existed, but also as if he personally knew her.⁶⁵ His intimacy with Sita was not that of a father, or even a husband, but a close, feminine relationship characterised by a sort of longing for the realisation of the specifically gendered values which she embodied. Though this may be attributed to merely political motivation, there is no doubt that Gandhi’s identification with women, through Sita,

⁶⁵ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXIII [186], p. 186.

was genuine and deeply felt. At a speech at a women's meeting at Colombo in 1927, he stated:

I have mentally become a woman in order to steal in to her heart.⁶⁶

The transgressive nature of Gandhi's relationship with Sita – his own crossing of the gender boundary in order to be close to her, and to speak to other women would be the subject of recuperation by CR in his telling of the epic *Ramayana*. While Gandhi and CR worked together closely in the political struggle, though they were both committed to a unified India, and to a traditional way of living untainted by the worst of western modernity, Gandhi brought Sita and, to a lesser extent Draupadi, too close for comfort, too real for CR. His tellings of the epic texts, still in print today provide the definitive nationalist reconstruction of Hindu women's identity as chaste, de-sexualised and disembodied.

⁶⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. XXXV [199], p. 289.

Chapter Three: *The Finest Flower of Indian Heritage and Culture: Exploring the Context and Location of C. Rajgopalachari's Epics*

“Rajaji says that there is no women’s problem.”¹

(i) Introduction

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (1879 – 1972), a Brahmin from South India, was a dominant figure of Indian political life for over forty years. He was born in the village of Hosur in the Salem district of South India in 1879. He was at the very centre of political events during India’s crucial years 1930 – 1947, holding key positions of political power, and actively participating in policy that defined a newly democratic, independent nation.² CR experienced the struggle in a unique way, both as a political prisoner (he was imprisoned five times between 1921 and 1942), and as a senior statesman. He was Premier of Madras twice between 1937 and 1957, and was the only Indian Governor General of India, succeeding Mountbatten in 1947. In 1959, at the age of seventy, he started the right wing Swatantra Party to provide a credible opposition to an increasingly ‘socialist’ Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru.

This chapter presents a brief overview of CR’s life, political beliefs and other writings. It is in his role the guardian and expounder of Hindu Indian culture for the emergent nation that I am most interested. He regarded his retelling of the epic stories as the most

¹ M.K. Gandhi in A. T. Hingorani ed., *To the Women*, p. 25.

² CR was General Secretary of the Indian National Congress 1921- 22, Prime Minister of Madras 1937- 99, assisted Gandhi in talks with Jinnah in 1944 and was pro-partition as the price of India’s freedom. He was Governor of West Bengal 1947- 48, Minister of Home Affairs 1950-51 and Chief Minister of Madras, 1951- 52. For a detailed chronology of his professional life, please see S.P. Sen ed., *Dictionary of National Biography* (Calcutta, Institute for Historical Studies, 1974), pp. 440-443.

important aspect of his life's work, and it is this aspect of his legacy that has endured: the stories, published first in 1951 are now in their fortieth edition.

This chapter is designed to introduce CR and his ideas, in order to understand the context and location of his epic stories. I use as my basis for analysis those few biographies of him that exist and also look at his speeches and writing on Indian culture. I suggest that CR eschewed biography and autobiography, and instead expressed himself and his values to the world through his re-tellings of the epic texts. This chapter also takes a brief look at CR's political career, in particular his creation of the Swatantra Party.

Though he was a senior national figure and activist, CR nevertheless seems to have overlooked one of the most radical manifestations of India's struggle for freedom: the involvement and participation of women. In any study of the movements and the writing, political and cultural, which emerged from the Indian struggle for freedom, particularly from the time of Gandhi's involvement and leadership, it is impossible to ignore the unprecedented scale of women's involvement. Women participated both on the ground, as activists and as politicians, and as international ambassadors.

These were immensely fruitful years for South Asian women in all arenas, on a domestic and on an international level.³ The fact that some of the most culturally influential material produced at this time, from within this environment, exhibits a certain tension in the attempt to reflect this reality opens up a rich field of enquiry in to the strategies of nationalist discourse in its definition of the new citizen and of gender roles.

³ There is a wealth of material on women's participation in the struggle for freedom in India. Of particular interest see: Aparna Basu, 'The role of Indian women in the struggle for Freedom' in B.R Nanda ed., *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing, 1976) and Geraldine Forbes, 'Women and the Nationalist Movement' in *Women in Modern India*, pp. 121- 156.

The Hindu epics are an obvious choice to examine manifestations of social change taking place in India after partition. Romila Thapar has called them ‘the texts *par excellence*’ for their ability to contain and represent the changing nature of society. Thapar argues that the Hindu epics have always been symbolic of social change, suggesting that they are not only symbolic, but that they embody the very process of change. Reflecting social developments as significant as the emergence of the caste system, she also points out the hegemonic potential weighted in favour of brahmanic culture, inherent in their very flexibility.⁴ In as far as Thapar suggests that each of the major early versions of the epics reflected a specific social background in the way the story was projected, CR’s *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* under examination here provide an excellent example of the model of Indian female identity as envisioned by Hindu nationalists engaged with the formation of a new national culture for India.

In both Sanskrit and other early versions of the epic, there featured long lists of genealogies, tributes, lengthy discourses on the nature of kingship, the listing of all officials and complex descriptions of administrative structures.⁵ This is not the pattern that the texts under consideration here follow; rather in their condensation and selectivity, they are absolutely modern and, as will be shown, reflect a very specific and contemporary ideology which was concerned with containing and codifying pressing aspects of social change.

Partha Chatterjee, writing on the instances of women’s participation in the struggle for freedom in the late nineteenth century, correctly identifies the need for an inquiry into the *manner* in which the hegemonic claims of nationalist culture were fashioned. By

⁴ Romila Thapar, *Exile and The Kingdom* (Bangalore, The Mythic Society, 1978), p. 26.

⁵ Romila Thapar, *Exile and the Kingdom*, p. 18.

bringing the terms of this inquiry to bear on the period of intense nationalist activity from 1930 – 1960, it is possible to suggest that an investigation into the *manner* of CR's contribution, will prove fruitful to the understanding of nationalist culture's imperative for women.⁶

This chapter will examine CR's political and personal position with regard to his understanding of the role of Hindu women in Indian society, in order to provide a background for a reading of his tellings of the epic stories. It will explore those biographical sources that exist in order to provide an idea of his personal position of how women should appear, and also his political views on women and their rights.

I have argued that Hindu women were written out of their own texts, for example in the case of Ramabai Ranade, and also how the defence of outside criticism resulted in the denial of sexual desire in the Indian subject in general, for example in the family of responses to Mayo's *Mother India*. The translation of Ramabai's autobiography and the responses to Katherine Mayo relied on actually writing and publishing in English, and in terms of content, the misreading of key source texts. For the translation of Ramabai's autobiography almost by default, and the responses to Mayo more explicitly, the aim was to validate a superior position of Hindu sexual morality against the west, and particularly, the moral superiority of the chaste and willingly submissive Hindu woman.

I have discussed how as the consciousness of India as a nation came in to being, the status of women in India became a, if not the, leitmotif for the emergent state of the nation. The discourses surrounding the status of women can be read as arguments for the desired moral code of the cultural and civil life of independent India, particularly in the use made of the epic protagonists as role models for women. To this end, in order that

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments...* p. 137.

these role models maintained cultural authority, the definition of culture was a significant and important project, particularly in the ways that ideas and images relating to sexual identities were negotiated and regulated by cultural properties such as literature and film.⁷ CR occupies an important position in this regard: he was a political figure who ‘wrote’ Indian culture and about culture extensively, one who made a significant contribution to the hegemonic claims of Hindu culture as normative for India.

I have also argued that part of the nature of the debate on culture and identity was made up of a series of sexual anxieties and imaginings, an important record of which was made explicit by Gandhi, who used the epic texts as models for behaviour and identity for Indian women, combined with his own philosophy of *brahmacharia*, or mental and physical celibacy. Gandhi not only foregrounded and politicised the epic protagonists of Sita and Draupadi, but also equated sexual desire with a violence and destruction fatally detrimental to the new nation, in a message that was pervasive and far reaching. Gandhi’s ‘epic model of chastity’ provided a successful meta-narrative for the telling of the epic texts which CR produced. CR’s role as an author or ‘teller’ combines a technique of anaesthetising female agency, present but dormant, with Gandhi’s anxieties about female sexual power. Where Gandhi, however, was explicit in his comments to and articulation of the role of women in the necessary struggle to suppress sexual desire, CR denies to himself and to his reader even this limited and objectified role. A detailed textual analysis of CR’s epics follows in the next chapter.

⁷ See Somnath Zutshi, ‘Women, Nation and the Outsider in Contemporary Hindi Cinema’ in Niranjana Tejaswini *et al* eds., *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism In India* (Calcutta, Seagull, 1993).

(ii) A Political and Cultural Life

Considering that this chapter aims to provide the personal and historical contexts for CR's epic tellings, it will be useful to start with the title of this section which is taken from a book of essays on CR issued for his 89th birthday. Titled *A Garland of Tributes* (1967), the volume contains essays by his political contemporaries, friends, and family. The titles indicate both the regard in which CR was held as a politician and his place as a moral leader. They also indicate the lengths to which his supporters would go to create a hagiography of his life and achievements: for example, the ambiguous, unintentionally provocative *Divinely Endowed* by Anantarama Dishitar. The titles range from *Simple and Gracious* by Navaratna Rama Rao, one of his closest friends, to *A Moral Colossus* by K. Iswara Dutt. The essays refer to his role as a teacher, a national figure, a leader of the satyagraha movement, a writer, a man of religion, and *India's Authentic Voice*.⁸

That CR had claim to these titles is undisputed. This claim is located in his contribution to the moral map of India which has endured beyond his political policies. He was considered and indeed considered himself an exponent of Hindu culture as evinced by his writings, and a preserver of the moral values necessary for civilised society, both through the law, and through religion.⁹ It was in these roles - pedagogue, savant and a man of religion - that his sense of identity was strongest, and it is in these roles that he is most often described.¹⁰

⁸ D.V. Gundappa, 'India's Authentic Voice' in *A Garland of Tributes*, cited in C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari: A Biography* (London, Sangam Books, 1993), p. 249. The other titles may also be found cited on this page.

⁹ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I* (Bombay, Bharathan Publications, 1978), p. vi. M.K. Gandhi referred to CR as his 'conscience keeper'. Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. viii.

¹⁰ For numerous examples of this see T.Sadasivam ed., *Rajaji '93 A Souvenir*.

His political career spanned fifty years, and he was present and involved in some of the most important processes and decisions of the struggle for freedom from British rule, and afterwards, in independent India. Though he came from a traditional Brahmin family, noted for the orthodoxy of its members,¹¹ his father insisted that he complete an English education which led to a career in law at which CR excelled.¹² His introduction to English literature by his teacher John Guthrie Tait was to have a lasting influence on his life and cemented his love of the English language as a means of expressing important ideas in a rational way.¹³

In 1920 he left his legal practice to join Gandhi's freedom movement, and became Gandhi's main advocate in South India. In addition to his political career he also produced translations, or tellings, of the Hindu epics and holy texts such as the Vedas, short stories for children,¹⁴ political articles,¹⁵ the meaning of Indian culture in *Our Culture* (1965) and his own *Jail Diaries* (1927).

It is the re-telling of the epic texts, which CR professed to be his most important public service. Reflecting on his long career, he stated that the re-tellings of the epic texts were

...the best service I have rendered my people¹⁶

(Madras, T.Sadasivam for Rajaji '93 Souvenir Committee, 1971) and B.K. Ahluwalia ed., *Facets of Rajaji* (New Delhi, Krishan Gopal Abid, 1978?).

¹¹ BL Microfiche, *Indian Leaders of Today 1942*.

¹² C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari: A Biography* (London, Sangam Books, 1993), pp. 1-5.

Also J.P. Waghorne, *Images of Dharma: The Epic World of C. Rajagopalachari* (Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1985), pp. 55-61.

¹³ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 3. See also Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji* (London, Macmillan, 1962), p. 22, p. 75, p. 93. See also Sankar Ghose, *Leaders of Modern India* (New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1980), p. 331 and B. Chatterjee, *A Thousand Days With Rajaji* (Delhi, Affiliated East West Press, 1973), p. 59. It is interesting that Chatterjee, CR's Military Secretary notes that CR's speeches lost meaning and spirit in their translation from English into Hindi: see Chatterjee, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 58.

¹⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Stories for the Innocent* (Bombay, Bharatya Vidhya Bhavan, 1963).

¹⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mankind Protests* (Bombay, Bharatya Vidhya Bhavan, 1965).

¹⁶ J.P. Waghorne, *Images of Dharma* p. 8.

This statement provides an insight into CR's psychological position at the time of their publication in the 1950s. His role as a spiritual guide and moral advocate for India was for him a priority, above and beyond his political struggles on behalf of the Indian people. Psychologically he saw himself as a teacher, a Brahmin knowledgeable in the translation of Hindu religious doctrine for lay men and women.

In addition, and importantly given his actual political position, the quotation reveals CR's awareness of the imperative of the emergent state to imagine and define both national identity and culture and, arguably, thereby, gender relations through cultural means located in the orthodox Hindu world. The texts which CR wrote contained his manifesto for India, dressed as the beloved epic stories sacred to Hindus. Their context is in CR's own relationship to history and the past, and his own gender politics in so far as they are displayed in his written work, speeches and political policies.

(iii) CR and His Biographers

In order to examine CR's relationship to history and the past, biographies of him prove useful sources. The ways in which CR was remembered are represented by two categories: the few biographical accounts of friends, and the analysis of his positions of political power before and after independence. The biographies which fall in between these two very different types of textual posterity are *Rajagopalachari: A Biography* (1993) by his son Narasimhan, *The Rajaji Story* (1978) by Rajmohan Gandhi and Monica Felton's *I Meet Rajaji* (1962), an unofficial 'biography'. Felton's text is actually a description of a series of encounters that took place with CR. Nevertheless, it is the

only one with which, I would argue, CR did collaborate, and the only one written by a woman, and a non-Indian.

The fact that CR, a contemporary and close friend of Gandhi and Nehru, who both wrote autobiographically, and a man who survived them both, should have so relatively little written about him compared to his contemporaries is partly his own design. There is little recorded interest from him in the biographies that were written during his lifetime, and though approached, his firm intention was not to write autobiographically about his life.¹⁷ This was partly to do with the fact that CR believed the ego to be detrimental to cultured behaviour; rather, he posited humility as the morally correct approach to life.

His opposition to autobiography reflects this, and he is recorded as saying:

...when a man writes about his own life he cannot help putting himself at the centre of everything, in a way which would reflect credit on the individual, even when writing about mistakes or errors.¹⁸

An obvious consequence of CR's refusal to write his own life story is the shaping of his personality and contribution by those who wrote him. While his son Narisimhan chose to present an appreciative account of his life and work, this most recent account is essentially fragmented and not comprehensive. The reader is drawn towards the dynamics of the relationship between father and son, which are hinted at but never exposed. The compelling nature of this account, by CR's son who was his close companion and also politically active, means that the reader is constantly searching for

¹⁷ J.P. Waghorne offers the suggestion that part of the reason for CR's reticence was that the act of autobiography was against the Hindu tradition which teaches the slow elimination of the ego – the very base of personality in the western tradition of the theory of personal development: See J.P. Waghorne, 'The Case of the Missing Autobiography' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLIX, No.4 Dec 1981, pp. 589-601.

¹⁸ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. vii. It is interesting to note that this biography was 'initiated' by a group specifically concerned with writing his life story, the Rajaji Biography Committee, headed by CR's son Narisimhan who also produced a biography of him.

more information against the factual backdrop of historical events. Narisimhan himself states that his book is designed to supplement specifically Rajmohan Gandhi and Monica Felton's biographies. He also positions his text as supplementary to the biography written by Masti Venkatesa Iyengar.¹⁹

Iyengar's book, titled *Rajaji: A Study of His Personality* (1975) says very little about CR's personality or personal beliefs. Though Iyengar introduces his work by saying:

This book is not a biography of Rajaji, it is merely a study of his personality...my interest in Rajaji's life centres around his personality and not the things he did or the events through which he lived.²⁰

his text comprises of an anthology of material written by other admirers of CR and previously printed. Most of this material appears in *Rajaji '93 A Souvenir* (1971), a book of tribute essays commissioned for CR's ninety-third birthday. Fundamentally, Iyengar does not conduct a rigorous investigation into CR's 'personality', nor does he contribute any original information concerning the views that CR held. Perhaps unwittingly, Iyengar simply presents a picture of:

...the things he did [and] the events through which he lived

and indeed also organises the book chronologically, as in a conventional biography.

The singular exception to this is, interestingly, the death of CR's wife. Iyengar attempts to ventriloquise CR's reasons for not re-marrying, overlaying this ventriloquism with some quite severe anxieties about women's roles even within the prescribed arena of the home:

¹⁹ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, title page.

²⁰ Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, *Rajaji: A Study of His Personality*, (Bangalore, Subodha Press, 1975), p. (ii).

Rajaji's father, after a reasonable interval, suggested remarriage. The man cannot lead a lonely life. The children need some person to look after them. This is the argument. Experience has shown that while the second wife is a tolerable substitute for the first one, and sometimes even a better wife, the children as a rule do not get a second mother. They only get a step-mother and except in rare cases, the step mother neglects them or does them all the harm she can. Rajaji must have had these thoughts in his mind.²¹

The evidence of CR's relationship with Manga, his wife, will be examined later in this chapter. It is important to note however, the continuity in language, rhetoric and methodology contained within this statement, and the responses to Mayo, both of which reflect orthodox Hindu wisdom on gender roles and responsibilities. The act of ventriloquising another individual's most personal moral beliefs, and subsequent actions based on those beliefs coupled with the impossible claim to knowledge in the phrases '...must have thought...' and '...experience has shown...', could indeed earn this biography a place in the same genre as the family of cultural commentaries on *Mother India*. CR does talk about step-mothers in three of his short stories, *Stories for the Innocent*. In the story *Royappan*, CR delivers a homily that shows a violent step-mother and loving, but dead natural mother who comes to the child in dreams, when he sleeps behind the idol of a certain Hindu deity. The resolution of this tale is a moral lesson on the nature and importance of motherly love, and of the power of Hindu symbols to transcend religious faiths – the boy had converted to Christianity.²²

Rajmohan Gandhi, CR's grandson by his daughter Laxshmi provides a comprehensive biography. As I discuss later, it is Gandhi who reveals the details of CR's marriage for

²¹ Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, *Rajaji...*, p. 11.

²² C. Rajagopalachari, *Stories for the Innocent*, pp. 85-90.

the first time. His agenda is not only to provide a biography of CR but to situate him and unmask his influence in the political history of India from 1900 – 1972. Gandhi provides the wider narrative for CR's life, and clarifies CR's relationship to history and the past as one of a fearless warrior, whose vision was firmly fixed on the future. Gandhi, also the grandson of M.K. Gandhi through his father Devadas, M.K. Gandhi's son, writes CR's life in the light of this relationship. This biography then, is understandably primarily a history of the *satyagraha* movement in India particularly in the South.

Both Gandhi's and Monica Felton's biographies affect a certain context through their titles. The term 'Rajaji' is one of respect and affection, and this intimacy is combined with the agenda of the biographers. Both *The Rajaji Story*, and *I Meet Rajaji* locate the figure of CR within a wider narrative which deviates from the details of his life and thought. Gandhi's objective was to create both a history of south Indian participation in the struggle for freedom, and a record of CR's life and times. Felton figures prominently in her biography, writing not only about CR, but specifically about her relationship with him. It is in this respect that Felton's biography is significant, as it is she who, more than his male, Hindu, Indian biographers, engages with CR on the subject of women, their position and their rights. By way of contrast, looking at an example of an Indian women writing about CR, for instance in the *CR '93 A Souvenir*, it is striking to note the manner and content of his dialogue with her. Mrs Mary Clubvala Jadhav, in a piece entitled 'A Leader, Unexcelled' describes how he commented that her sari was too 'gaudy' for an 'elderly lady' and how in a speech to the All India Women's Commission on the subject of 'The Rights of Hindu Women to own Property under the Hindu Code Bill' he

concluded a long discourse by saying that the place of women was in the kitchen and in the household.²³ Unintentionally subversive in its albeit unwitting recording of CR's chauvinism in a book filled with plaudits, Mrs Jadhav's anecdote nevertheless is a powerful indicator of CR's position on women, even when addressing the premier political body of the women's movement in India.²⁴

The attitude towards the recording of his own life story, combined with the writings which he did produce for posterity provide a subtle, but rewarding account of CR's relationship to the past, and his vision of the future. Felton mentions the difficulty in persuading CR to talk about the past, and he himself comments that:

...it bores me to remember the past...²⁵

This is an altogether fascinating statement from a self-confessed preserver of Indian culture, the keeper of a daily diary and a man acutely sensitive to the relationship between event and history. A telling heading of one of the tributes in the last souvenir to be published in his own lifetime is entitled the 'Unrepentant Futurist' in which the writer, S. Narayanaswamy records that CR :

...believes that those who indulge in retrospect and autobiography writing are engaged in a futile preoccupation and have implicitly confessed that they have no future.²⁶

In one of his speeches as Governor General, he encouraged his countrymen and women to:

²³ Mrs Mary Clubvala Jadhav, 'A Leader, Unexcelled' in *Rajaji '93 A Souvenir*, p. 201.

²⁴ For the history and influence of the AIWC see Aparna Basu and Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-1990* (New Delhi, Manohar, 1990).

²⁵ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 7 and p. 20.

²⁶ S. Narayanaswamy, 'The Unrepentant Futurist' in *Rajaji '93*, p. 196.

...put aside hatred and memories of happenings which promote hatred. In Delhi, or elsewhere in the North, I ask people to forget recent terrible tragedies – tragedies which cannot physically be forgotten.²⁷

Contained within this statement is an acknowledgement of the physical horrors of Partition, and of the impossibility of forgetting them. The physicality of trauma; the murders, migrations and bodily violations of Partition present a problem for CR – the evidence is material and visible as well as psychological. One of the most universally devastating actions of Partition was the abduction of women, and the ways in which women's bodies and identities were re-appropriated and re-coded by opposing religious groups in order to inflict the most severe of communal blows.²⁸ Actions at this extreme of violence towards a collective through its most intimate site, the family, can incur a rupture not only in society but in the function of the memory of the nation-state, and of the individual.²⁹ Testimony to the success of this rupture in memory is provided by the recognition of the absence, the 'curious void' of social history, non-official and marginal voices in contemporary work on Partition.³⁰ This silence, of which CR was both an instigator and a practitioner, makes space for the ancient past to be reinvented as a fresh

²⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Rajaji's Speeches: Governor General, 1948*, (New Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), p. 14.

²⁸ See Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, 'Recovery Rupture, Resistance: Abduction of Women During Partition' *Review of Women's Studies, Economic and Political Weekly*, April 24, 1993 pp. WS 2 – WS 11 and D. A. Low and H. Brasted eds. *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (London, Sage Publications 1998).

²⁹ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London, Penguin, 1997), pp. 200-202.

³⁰ Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture....' In *EPW*, April 24, 1993 P WS2. Menon and Bhasin also point to 'the silence almost unfailingly imposed' on Hindu women after 'recovery'. The political debates and definitions of women's rights after the events of partition serve to renew the ideology of Hindu women as responsible for the upholding of honour within the community, and also serve to destroy female autonomy by insisting on the definition of the abducted Hindu woman as a victim of an act of transgression which 'violated that most critical site of patriarchal control: her sexuality', p.WS8.

cultural future in the form of the epic stories. His turn to the epics in this sense replaces a willingness to engage with more contemporary history.

CR's intimation that the mind can 'forget' what the body cannot also indicates his willingness to consciously, or unconsciously, create an environment in which what is remembered or recorded is in keeping with certain ideas about what is good and right in Hindu culture as a response to the failure of spiritual leadership and values demonstrated by the Partition crises. Within the doctrine of Hindu orthodoxy which advocates the power of the mind over the transient site of the body, and within nationalist rhetoric where personal suffering is incorporated into the sacrifice required for the success of the movement, this rupture of memory coexists with various strategies for reinventing both the past and the future. The aim of these strategies is to provide a way of containing physical acts on a wide scale that are traumatic. It follows that remembering and reinventing can be affected through a removed medium: for example the writing of morality tales or the telling of epic tales, and must also involve *a priori* the mental strength of will to distance oneself from the physical event. It is apparent that though CR's philosophy of absolute erasure is at the extreme, the codifying of Partition trauma was widespread and functioned in both the public and private spheres. One example of particular interest is recorded in the Constituent Assembly Debate of December 1947 in which an MP, speaking of the need to 'rescue' abducted Hindu women stated:

We all know our history, of what happened in the time of Sri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this...As descendants of Sri Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive.³¹

³¹ Cited in Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, 'Recovery, Repture...' in *EPW*, April 24, 1993, p. WS 3.

This fragment not only affirms the flexibility and popularity of the epic model, but also that model's roots in its particular connection to issues focused on women. Its value also lies in its function as a way of public remembering, mythologising the event, masking its complexities.

Privately, CR exercised his policy of 'erasure' though not without anxiety. In the fragment of his diary reproduced by his son, he makes two very interesting comments.

On May 5th 1947 he comments:

It is a true paradox that when I have much worthy of noting down,
I fail to find the leisure or the thought to make diary entries.³²

This indicates CR's self-conscious awareness of the purpose of a personal diary, and his desire to record his feelings, which he acknowledges as 'worthy', testifying to their importance by marking their absence in his text. His desire to reveal his personal feelings about the events of 1947 would perhaps indicate to himself, and to others around him a lack of self-mastery in his character, the kind of self-control valued so highly by adherents to Gandhi's system. Rather than do this, he comments *in the diary*, on his inability to *keep a diary*:

It is remarkable how I fail to think of this diary just when most
important things happen. It is an incurable defect in me that I can't
keep a diary.³³

It is indeed remarkable. The act of remembering in an individual, intimate way is for CR both an act of desire and denial. This finely balanced position is further illustrated by his reaction to his wife's demise. CR never mentioned his wife, particularly by name,

³² C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 145.

³³ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 146.

after her death in August 1915, not even in his own diary.³⁴ Felton comments that his wife Alarmelu (Manga) had been

a very beautiful woman, intelligent, domesticated and charming, the perfect model of a Hindu wife.³⁵

The only surviving photo of her, cut from a group shot shows a young enigmatic face with a clear, direct gaze. She was notoriously shy, which may explain CR's reluctance to speak of her, though his son Narisimhan comments in his biography of his father that:

Though plunged in grief, CR did not give much visible expression to his grief... His sorrow he kept to himself. Without being unkind to him, I could say that in this respect he was characterised by a certain reticence.³⁶

This 'reticence' was commented on by friends and observers alike. P.D Tandon in a collection of essays on leaders of modern India describes CR as 'not a man, but a technique.'³⁷ CR's close friend, A.V. Raman, commented on his son-in-law Devdas Gandhi's death that 'Many people think he is heartless, a man of iron. But he is full of suppressed emotions, emotions which he consciously suppresses.'³⁸ Yet on Raman's own death, CR's daughter, Namagiri tells Fenton: "My Father... feels widowed. We cannot tell whether he will be able to bear it."³⁹ The loss of his friend induces him to grieve as if he as been 'widowed' yet his wife's death produces in him a silence, as if she had never existed. This may have been a product of CR's own brand of self-discipline:

³⁴ See Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, pp. 112-113 for diary extracts in which CR refers to Manga, though not by name.

³⁵ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 115.

³⁶ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 6.

³⁷ P.D. Tandon, *Leaders of Modern India* (Bombay, Vora & Co. 1955), p. 97.

³⁸ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 55.

³⁹ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 99.

his son comments that he was essentially a disciplinarian.⁴⁰ Yet, other instances of grief or emotion reveal that his discipline over mourning his wife is unique. For example, on the death of one of his early heroes, Lokmanya Tilak, CR is found ‘weeping.’⁴¹

Manga’s ‘disappearance’ from CR’s biographies is striking. Those biographies written in his life time or by CR’s contemporaries avoid any but the most fleeting mention of Manga, most probably out of respect for CR’s own wishes. In the accounts which exist, however, theirs appears to have been a devoted relationship – his silence is possibly for CR the ultimate ‘protective’ barrier between the outside world or the public space and his wife. It is possible to suggest that this deeply held conviction extends to his writing of Hindu women in his epic texts.⁴²

Before examining the details of CR’s epic texts in the following chapter, I will explore how his particular education in terms of his career as a lawyer and politician, and his knowledge and love of classic European literature, and his understanding of Hindu culture influenced his writing.

(iv) On Marriage, Sexuality and the Law

It could be argued, that CR’s epics are both statement and a confession of his values. They are also his contribution to history both as a record of India’s past glory, and a manual for a just and healthy modern independent society.

⁴⁰ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 64.

⁴¹ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 17.

⁴² For an introduction to Hindu attitudes to mourning in this period see Partha Chatterjee, ‘On Civil and Political Society in Post Colonial Democracies’ in Sudipto Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani eds., *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Though primarily exegetical, CR's epics by virtue of the 'I' or *autos* evident in his interjections into the text could be considered in the light of an autobiography of the kind which sees the subject displaced within their own narrative. This was the case with Dayananda's 'diary' project, and with Ramabai Ranade's autobiography. CR's epics certainly fulfil the criteria particular and special to autobiography, by rendering in a 'peculiarly direct and faithful way' the experiences and the future vision of a people, which experience and vision reflects that which is behind and informing all the literature of a people.⁴³ However, the formal criteria of autobiography that requires a first person narrator problematises the descriptive use of the term. Though the epics convincingly relate values that CR held personally, and those values that he would inculcate in the citizens of India, he is not hidden in the text, much as the private man is hidden in his biographies. He is more present in his epic texts as an individual voice than in the biographies that talk about his life. CR imbricates his values, and, I would argue, his self, the self that is publicly narrated, the self which identifies with the nation, into a preliminary biography of the nation state of India. Not just historical, but autobiographical in that the epics relate the 'vital principle' the 'mode of living' the 'spirit' of India. This is a definition both of self, and of the nation. It is both past and future.⁴⁴

The epic texts represent a method of remembering which is heroic, spiritual and contained in a known universe. They had already proved useful host narratives in that they, by their nature and extant status, could invest current events with a particular

⁴³ James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment' in James Olney ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 13.

⁴⁴ These phrases are taken from a definition of what is meant by *bios* or life, in James Olney, 'Some Versions of Memory/ Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography,' in James Olney ed., *Autobiography*, p. 239.

meaning, linking the everyday struggle to a sacred ‘history.’ CR could locate his values, or the meaning in an arena in which trauma, or the event, was mythologised, and where individual choices could be discussed in the context of the collective life of the country or nation. Considering that CR left no formal autobiography, the epic texts are in a sense, replacements. While J.P. Waghorne suggests that the epics relate not personal, but political, emotions, that they prelude the birth of a new political order through their healing and redemptive qualities,⁴⁵ it is fair to say that in this instance, the political and the personal are convincingly interrelated; the personal for CR being as much the practice of *dharma* and good citizenship, as was his blueprint for the nation.

What Waghorne does suggest, in keeping with the theory that the epics also allow for the relation of events and trauma within a knowable universe, is that the writing of the epics for CR functioned as means for ‘healing’ historical problems, of resolving political and personal difficulties. The implication is that the missing women of Partition – abductees, wives and mothers will reappear with some permanence in their textual incarnation, as chaste national figures, as not only moral messengers, but connected to divinity through marriage and divine procreation.

Where Waghorne suggests that CR used the epic texts to deal with uncertain historical situations instead of using a more conventional political medium, I would argue that the epics have always been a useful political tool, and had certainly been used by Gandhi as such, specifically to talk about gender. It is impossible when discussing CR, his views on gender and his method of articulating them, to ignore the circumstances of his first and only marriage. The details appear, not surprisingly, in the most recent, and the most

⁴⁵ J.P. Waghorne, *The Epic World of CR*, p. 6.

complete, of the biographies published about CR. Written by his grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, the first volume was published in 1978, just after CR's death.

Echoing the situation of both Justice M.G. Ranade, and indeed, M.K. Gandhi, CR, having resisted the idea of marriage for some time, was approached in 1898 by the parents of Manga, to arrange the marriage which had been discussed with CR's mother before her death. Manga was the daughter of a Hindu vaishnavite preacher whose hereditary role was to confirm the orthodoxy of young vaishnavite boys by tattooing their arms with the symbols of the conch and wheel, tattoos which CR also carried.⁴⁶ Gandhi relates how CR observed his future bride offering worship at the temple and was 'charmed'.⁴⁷ He agreed to the marriage which took place shortly afterwards. CR was a young man of twenty; Manga was just ten years old. She remained with her parents for two years, after which she came to live in CR's family home. She was to give birth to her first child Krishnaswami the day after her thirteenth birthday. As Rajmohan Gandhi relates:

In less than two years, another boy, Ramaswami was born. That his wife faced the pains of childbirth at so early an age was to embarrass CR all his life.⁴⁸

That CR's feelings about marriage were not completely confined to the 'father/child' relationship which he discusses with Monica Felton (cited further on) illustrates that his views on marriage did include a sexual contract. His experience of sexual behaviour leading to the pain of labour, and the eventual death of his wife after bearing five children

⁴⁶ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story :I*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 16.

more or less in succession, had a clear effect on him. When asked to marry again, his response was to say:

“I do not wish to have a sixth child”.⁴⁹

CR saw marriage as both a sexual contract resulting in offspring, and a burden, particularly marriage between older people.⁵⁰ His belief was that men married for two reasons: the first to share the ‘difficulties of living’ and the second:

...a sudden burst of feeling like the explosive force that motivates the firing of a gun.

He quickly contains this statement, concluding with:

A man who is preoccupied with his work needs a wife to take over domestic responsibilities.⁵¹

Here CR, like Gandhi, equates sexual feeling with violence, with the *feeling* that *motivates* the firing of the gun, not the action of the gun firing. CR was a keen marksman, and had a good collection of guns, so this metaphor may have seemed to him to be unexceptional, or innocent.⁵²

Yet there remains the reading that for CR the role of women in reality, and Indian women in particular was divided in to these two categories: the role of wife, that is child-bearing and inoperative in the world of work, and the role of woman, dangerously sexual and inciting of violence. CR seems to have had a fear of the exhibited female body,

⁴⁹ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 115.

⁵¹ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 72.

⁵² C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 186.

combined with a curious, perhaps deliberate, naivety about the economics of sexual desire from an early age. Rajmohan Gandhi comments that thirteen-year-old CR was distressed at the sight of a ‘common nautch girl’ (dancing girl), usually associated with exhibitionism and sexual innuendo, at his brother’s wedding and observed that:

...she was hideous...[and]...wondered what people found in her.⁵³

The appearances of CR’s daughter Namagiri in his own work and the work written about him also provide a slight though significant point of contact in understanding CR’s position on women. Widowed in 1932, at the age of twenty six, she spent the rest of her life as CR’s beloved companion and housekeeper. She was the intermediary between CR and his visitors, both personal and political from 1932 onwards, and yet she is an elusive figure in the texts about CR in which she appears, including his own diary. Monica Felton, in a way that can only be considered extraordinary by a female biographer, *never* names her, calling her throughout, ‘..Rajaji’s daughter..’⁵⁴ This may not be that unusual; even Gandhi’s message to her on the death of her husband read: ‘...Remember you are the daughter of a brave father...’⁵⁵

Most significant is the way that CR himself refers to Namagiri in his own diary, sections of which are reproduced in his son’s biography of him. In most affectionate terms, he calls Namagiri ‘Papa,’ the name usually reserved for a father or father figure. Given the paucity of information, it is impossible, and indeed spurious to try and extract any

⁵³ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ For one example, Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 236. It should be noted that this seems to be a standard response from Gandhi; on the death of her husband Ranjit, Gandhi sent an almost identical message to Nehru’s sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. This message also situates Vijaya Lakshmi as wife, sister and daughter, despite her quite outstanding independent political achievements. See Anne Guthrie, *Madam Ambassador* (London, Macmillan & Co., 1963), p. 107.

psychoanalytical meaning from this, though the pseudonym clearly invites it. However, it is possible to suggest that by thus naming her, CR in fact both separates her from her mother (who must not be mentioned) and re-figures her identity as masculine and her genealogy patriarchal. In *Rajaji 93 A Souvenir*, the caption of a photograph of CR and of Namagiri supports this, by referring to her ‘motherly affection’ and ‘matronly care’ of her father.⁵⁶ CR’s and his biographers’ reconfiguring of Namagiri’s position in the family - from daughter to parent - may be seen as a radical and subversive act, however, CR saw the parent-child relationship as one akin to, and surpassing that of husband and wife. The following comment was made to Monica Felton in the context of his views on child marriage:

...though most people seem to think the idea repellent, I see no reason why an old man should not marry a very young girl. After all, the relationship of marriage is in some ways not so very different as that between father and child. The physical aspect can be adjusted.⁵⁷

It is possible that this comment was made to affect an act of recuperation for the unease CR felt about his own sexual relations with his wife when she was basically still a child. Nevertheless, it is clear that CR saw the conjugal relationship very much as the father – *daughter* relation in terms of authority, guidance and agency. It is this format that, as will be shown, the gender relations in CR’s epic texts portray, though clearly not without problems. CR’s politics and culture of the Hindu family exclude any room for the voicing of abuses towards women which take place within the family network, whether of domestic violence or sexual or emotional abuse. The implication of the parent child

⁵⁶ T. Sadasivam ed., *Rajaji '93 A Souvenir*, p. 273.

⁵⁷ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 115.

relationship in the Hindu world being free of any abuse provides a kind of morally pure conceptual framework within which to locate the desexualised marital relationship.⁵⁸ However, this is one of very few recorded comments that CR made on an issue directly relating to the condition of women in modern Hindu society. That is not to say he would have been unaware of the parameters of the cultural and legal public debates surrounding the issue. By the time CR entered in to political life, ideas for reform for women, and indeed legislation regarding such reforms had come in to being,⁵⁹ and the debate had a history. In addition to this, CR's successful legal career would have necessarily exposed him to the legal controversies surrounding reform for women, the most obvious example being the 1891 Age of Consent Act.⁶⁰ The weight attached to the 'women' question involved not only the actual alleviation of those aspects of women's lives which circumscribed them, but also an intellectual reply to the criticisms, such as Mayo's *Mother India*, which had been levelled. Further to this, the 'women question' had been taken up explicitly by Gandhi.

The scarcity of CR's interaction with the political issues concerning Indian women, as shown by the quotation heading this chapter, and with Indian women as agents within his writing, can be connected to his initial training as a lawyer. CR, a believer in the appropriateness of the Hindu scriptures as guides for life and for the new nation, was trained in the legal system developed in India through colonial collaboration to provide a substitute for the indigenous forms of authority which predated its advent. The way that

⁵⁸ For a suggestive comment on the depth and longevity of this attitude of denial, please see Sara S. Mitter, *Dharma's Daughters* (New Jersey, Rutgers, 1991), p. 184 fn.

⁵⁹ See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*. Also relevant, Arachana Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India* (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1992).

⁶⁰ See Mrinalini Sinha, 'Potent Protests: The Age of Consent Controversy' in *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 138-172.

women and women's bodies were constituted by law has been described by Tanika Sarkar as both the compromise with, and adoption of, indigenous patriarchal norms regarding Hindu women by colonial law makers,⁶¹ and as a debate over the community's right to 'inflict her death', sexual and actual, upon her.⁶² There is little question as to whether CR would have been aware of the debates which surrounded the controversial Age of Consent act of 1891 – proved, if by nothing else, than by the fact that though he married Manga when she was ten, he did not consummate the marriage until she was twelve, the minimum age set by the Act, passed just seven years before his marriage. By the time the debate on child marriage and consummation of child marriage was reopened in terms of the law, in 1927, Manga had died. If it can be accepted that, as Nivedita Menon suggests, justice is formulated and constituted by specific moral imperatives at particular historical moments,⁶³ then the legal constitution of women and their rights at the time of CR's induction to and practice of the law proves significant, not only in understanding CR's method of engagement with the debate on behalf of nationalist culture, but also his reworking of Gandhi's legacy of Sita and Draupadi as politically radical figures.

It is Sarkar who situates conjugality at the heart of the theories of emergent Hindu nationalism, and who identifies the practitioners of this nationalism as intellectuals, professionals, newspaper proprietors and landowners.⁶⁴ This implies that the critique of colonial rule by these nationalists which deliberately contrasted the Hindu male's forced

⁶¹ Tanika Sarkar 'Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism: Resisting Colonial Reason and the Death of a Child Wife' in Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (London, C. Hurst & Co. 2001) p.194.

⁶² Tanika Sarkar, 'A Pre History of Rights? The Age of Consent Debates in Colonial Bengal' in Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 227.

⁶³ Nivedita Menon, 'Rights, Bodies and the Law: Rethinking the Feminist Politics of Justice' in Nivedita Menon ed., *Gender and Politics in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 264.

⁶⁴ Tanika Sarkar, 'Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism...' in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 191.

relinquishing of rights in the outside world with the voluntary, loving subjugation of women in the home 'reimagined' the family as the site of protest *against* the British and their laws. This contrast relied on the centrality of conjugality, that is, the relationship between husband and wife, rather than, in its later incarnation, of the importance of the relationship of mother and child.⁶⁵

One significant aspect of Sarkar's analysis is her connection between the importance given to the opinion of indigenous nationalist lawyers and judges and the colonial authorities responsible for the implementation of the western based legal system. This connection suggests that CR as a practising and successful lawyer would have been aware of the implicit authority of the Hindu *dharma shastras* in the shaping of the act and in the resolution within the courts to refer to these *shastras* in matters concerning family law.⁶⁶

The inclusion of Hindu custom, usage and precedent as a valid basis for civil law with its concurrent implication that Hindu women's bodies were pure, loyal, and subservient to the Hindu shastras alone in terms of public authority then adequately and equally reflects the situation of women in terms of private authority in the home.⁶⁷

Where the law in this sense upheld and legalised male Hindu rights and norms then, it follows, that for CR, his understanding of women's rights as citizens was unalterably connected to their identity as Hindu wives, daughters and mothers. The unique qualities of Hindu women were brought to bear in the understanding of their legal rights and the law – a capacity for suffering, the discipline of chastity before marriage and deprivation

⁶⁵ Tanika Sarkar, 'Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism...' in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 198.

⁶⁶ See J.D.M. Derrit, 'Translators Preface' in Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. v.

⁶⁷ Tanika Sarkar 'Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism' in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 202.

in widowhood, non-consensual child marriage and the sacred destiny of maintaining the perpetual continuity of authentic culture through the preservation of the family. Re-engaging with these debates in the arena of the family – a newly designated site of protest, enabled nationalist discourse to be continuous with Hindu ideas of female identity being solely domestically located, and based on the idea of service.

The further implications of this in terms of the law was as Sarkar also points out, the complete lack of any individual identity for women, particularly legal identity outside the situation of family or kin, to which her rights could formulate and attach themselves.⁶⁸ I would argue that the influence of the history of the legal position of women under both civil and religious law provides a fitting framework for CR's moral and gender positions in that the cultural model he promoted supports this aspect of the law.

The law was not CR's only influence in his writing of women. The Hindu woman's 'uniqueness' and her difference from western women was not contested by CR, nor was her difference constituted as a type of autonomy. Where western women could appear and have agency publicly for CR, this is possibly due to his proficiency in understanding the differences in the cultural performance of gender.

It is apparent that CR could have admiration for western women, and western women writers: CR's biographer, Monica Felton, is a credible example of this. The appearance of the western women represented in his diary, and of his understanding of women as evinced by his reading also support the idea that he understood the cultural imperatives which governed the politics of emancipation. This awareness of difference does not extend to a notion of separateness or individuality; it operates solely on a cultural level.

⁶⁸ Tanika Sarkar 'A Pre-History of Rights..?' in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* p. 227.

This means that while CR was sensitive to the difference in the enactment of female identities, at base, women were essentially the same, regardless of ethnicity.

The diary extract is in itself a tantalising fragment. It is an extraordinary account of CR's social and political engagements for the year 1947, written in English, in a sparse style interspersed with CR's sense of wry humour and irony. The list of issues that he engaged with is truly staggering – from end-game politics, through textiles, prohibition, Hindustan aircraft, speeches, exports, science, education in schools in the space of a few days. These events are recorded alongside bizarre details,⁶⁹ and at times his scarce use of language resembles a kind of brutal fatigue, particularly during the summer months of violence which surrounded Partition, for example the entry for July 10th to July 17th reads:

Partition meetings (army division)', 'more meetings' 'More meetings – partition affairs', 'meetings and meetings.'⁷⁰

When recording engagements, CR comments on the behaviour and character of the European ladies who he meets at the formal and social events of the year. He makes notes on their charm, their conversation and their wisdom. His admiration for the ladies of the British administration has also been recorded in his speeches:

...every British high official's wife somehow felt it her duty to work and harmonise with the tasks allotted to the position they enjoyed. Every one of them has done honorary social service in a manner which extorted our admiration.⁷¹

⁶⁹ For example: "December 8th 1947, Music Conference, French for Love" in C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 170.

⁷⁰ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 176.

⁷¹ *Rajaji's Speeches: Governor General 1948*, p. 68. See also CR's letter to General Sir Roy Bucher, commending the latter's wife cited in Gen. Sir Roy Bucher, 'A Real Friend' in *Rajaji '93 A Souvenir*. He was also a friend and admirer of Edwina Mountbatten with whom he maintained a correspondence; see C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 188.

The language of this compliment is not without interest. While the gently ironic coupling of duty with the enjoyment of position is a subtle criticism of the illegality of their position in India, the word ‘extorted’ communicates a sense of unwillingness which challenges the rest of his statement. The approval which has been forced from Hindu male society is acknowledged however, as is the individual effort implied by ‘each’.

By contrast, the eminent Indian campaigner, politician and activist Sarojini Naidu, appears thus:

Joined Mrs Naidu’s court. Huge crowd of women and others.⁷²

The tone of this statement belies the fact that Naidu and CR campaigned together in the struggle and worked together after independence, and were well known to each other personally and as political colleagues. In an emotional eulogy CR referred to her as:

...my great and beloved sister, our incomparable playmate and fellow toiler.⁷³

The statement from the diary however, communicates a certain unease at Ms Naidu’s visibility and authority. The ‘women and others’ present at Ms Naidu’s scathingly referenced ‘court’ are also interpreted by CR through his reading of the English classics, particularly Anthony Trollope, Jane Austen and William Thackeray. CR was also

⁷² C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, pp. 171-172.

⁷³ For Sarojini Naidu and CR see Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi and Romila Pruthi, *Sarojini Naidu: Charismatic Indian Woman* (Jaipur, Pointer Publishers, 2000), p. 207 and Padmini Sengupta, *Sarojini Naidu* (Bombay, Popular Press, 1966), p. 334.

passionately fond of Shakespeare, and used Cordelia's first speech to her father in *King Lear* as a metaphor for Congress' relationship with the British.⁷⁴ In Trollope he found a:

...beautiful delineation of the feminine mind...⁷⁵

and of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, with its anti-heroine Catherine:

Jane Austen's understanding of women is really remarkable. There must be at least three hundred and thirty varieties of female character, and she understands nearly all of them...⁷⁶

He also, rather surprisingly, came out in defence of Thackeray's character Becky Sharp:

I have never agreed that Becky Sharp was a really bad woman. She was, it is true extremely calculating, but she was driven by the circumstances of her early life to do what she did.⁷⁷

Perhaps CR's sympathy for Becky's 'early life' arose from Thackeray's characterisation of her father as a violent drunk, who eventually dies of drink. Prohibition was the one cause for which CR campaigned unswervingly all his life, and it was to him an overridingly moral issue.

The claim that CR allowed his knowledge of these nineteenth-century heroines to influence his thinking about Indian women, and the writing of his female literary characters is substantiated by both personal and political philosophy. Monica Felton,

⁷⁴ C.R. Narismhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 96. CR believed *King Lear* to be 'The greatest of plays by the greatest of poets.' See Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Rajaji Story: I*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 204. It is possible that CR was thinking of Trollope's Barsetshire novels, particularly *The Warden*, in which the situation of Mr Harding could be said in parts to closely resemble CR's. Certainly Trollope's depiction of clerical life, and the struggles of a religious conscience would have struck a cord with CR.

⁷⁶ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 117.

⁷⁷ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 138.

during a conversation about their reading, put the question of sexual difference to him, and he replied:

“It is not very great. All females of whatever species have much the same characteristics. It is easier for female animals to understand females of different species than to understand males of their own.”⁷⁸

While CR’s predecessors had made a claim for the superiority of Hindu women, and Gandhi had mobilised ideas of essential difference from western women in the service of the struggle for Independence, CR’s at once generalises and separates the entire gender. His is a strategic and organising silencing of female agency and subjectivity both historical, contemporary and potentially. In conversation, CR’s metaphor of the animal world, rather than the political world of nation states works rather well for him. Though he is clearly referring to women as ‘animals’ in the sense that they are human organisms, by using ‘species’ he recontextualises his statement. By covertly de-humanising all women, a space is opened for the articulation of the fantasy of female ‘sameness’, and thereby the rules required to govern women, and the single dimensional models suitable for female emulation.⁷⁹

(iii) Political Morality, *Dharma* and the Epic Stories

Politically, CR honed his generalised statement quoted immediately above in order to define its relation specifically to Indian women. In *Our Culture* (1963), after forty years in politics, he wrote what might be considered his definitive statement on Indian culture

⁷⁸ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 117.

⁷⁹ For the legal implications of ‘sameness’ meaning ‘equality’ under the law, see Nivedita Menon ed., *Gender and Politics in India*.

and civilised citizenship for the new nation. In the section ‘Theology and Philosophy’, he speaks once again on the institution of marriage:

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Indian culture - and in this, the Hindu is not different from Indian Christian, or Indian Muslim, the merger of the feelings, rights and the personality of the wife in those of the husband is carried to the point of the complete wiping out of the wife’s individuality, whatever shining exceptions there might be. The domination of the husband over the wife which is common enough all over the world, is in the Indian way of life very thorough; and it is traced to the force of religious doctrine universally accepted among high and low, literate as well as illiterate.⁸⁰

This statement shows CR’s awareness of the issues surrounding the subjugation of women in social and religious life. It can also be considered a proto-nationalist, patriarchal statement in the prefix ‘Indian’ before the major faiths. His comment however is free from approbation. His reference to the other two main faiths of India, and further on, his acknowledgement of the universality of his view ‘...which is common enough all over the world...’ re-assert the divisive and homogenising strategies articulated to Monica Felton.

The key to this statement lies in CR’s explanation of the underlying religious motivation of the suppression of female identities. CR was a deeply religious man who believed in the moral order of the universe. One of his political biographers, A.R.H Copely, subtitles his book on CR’s terms in office from 1937 – 1959 *A Moralist in Politics*. Joanne Waghorne’s work on CR’s epic texts position him firmly as a religious writer. CR’s religious beliefs could certainly have conflicted with his ‘rational’ and ‘objective’ political, public personality, yet the two necessarily had to function in synchronicity for

⁸⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture* (Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1963), p. 45.

CR. Political policy concerning issues of family and culture had to have moral substance; CR was no political careerist, his political achievements could only be measured, in his own view, by the extent to which he realised his moral ideology.⁸¹

This moral ideology had its roots both in the idealised past which is recognisably Orientalist, and in the idea of a rejuvenated Hinduism. The extent to which CR personally trusted the scriptures of Hinduism is revealed for example in his Agriculturalist Debt Relief Act, one of his first political manoeuvres as Premier of Madras in 1937. The Act invited criticism from CR's opponents for its 'leftist tinge', which CR explained by locating the basis for the act in the ancient concept of *dumdupat*, as expounded in the Manusmriti, the ancient text on the Hindu law of *dharma*.⁸² The other 'highlight' of this presidency was the legislation over temple entry. CR's son and biographer, Narasimhan, calls this legislation CR's first 'nation building activity',⁸³ even though to implement it required that CR cooperate with the colonial programme of office acceptance, a fact which Narisimhan attributes with its subversive potential, in order to justify the acceptance of office.⁸⁴ The acts concerning temple entry and prohibition reveal CR's commitment to his moral values on a national level. Why CR's moral approach should have prevented him from engaging with any issue directly related to the status of women is a pertinent question, considering the ease with which female roles and bodies may be overwritten with moral proofs and arguments.

It is the female body which was the specific problem for CR. In conversation with a Russian couple, Sergei and Olga Obraztov, CR reveals his suspicion of visual art,

⁸¹ A.R.H. Copely, *The Political Career of C. Rajagopalachari 1937 – 1959: A Moralism in Politics* (New Delhi, Macmillan, 1978).

⁸² C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 89.

⁸³ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ C.R. Narisimhan, *Rajagopalachari*, p. 91.

especially cinema.⁸⁵ Rather than a sign of progress, as an accessible form of art and culture for the masses, CR saw cinema, and its implied or perceived degeneracy as a step backwards for India, a descent in to the ‘glorification of immorality’. When the conversation move to puppetry, Sergei Obraztov disagrees with CR’s claim that puppets are no substitute for real actors, by illustrating the range of meaning a female puppet can express. The exchange was as follows:

“...a puppet can be all ‘shes’. My wife and all women. I have seen many naked women in Paris - ”

“Don’t see them!”

“I saw them with my wife.”

“You still should not see them.” Rajaji interrupted with some heat.

“The naked woman is an ugly creature. But the easiest thing to entertain quickly is sex...”⁸⁶

CR ‘sees’ women as sexual. Their visual presence and appearance; on stage, in film, and in public life is a signifier primarily of a sexual nature which is explicit – ‘naked’ and without cultural or morally instructive purpose. For CR, the female body must be coded and or hidden. Just as earlier when CR equates gender relations and sexuality in the private sphere to mean notions of either procreation or filial/patriarchal duty, in the public sphere, that is, culturally, the representation of women must be regulated to reflect their most important function; that which benefits the collective. Whatever CR’s personal feelings regarding marriage and sexual activity, the allotted role of wife and mother, was the remit for women after receiving the ‘requisite satisfactory minimum of knowledge’⁸⁷ that would constitute an education. The question remains, satisfactory to whom?⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 173.

⁸⁶ Monica Felton, *I Meet Rajaji*, p. 175.

⁸⁷ C.Rajagopalachari, *Rajaji’s Speeches: Governor General 1948*, p. 72. CR claimed he himself ‘learnt his religion from his mother’, E.P. Sen ed., *Dictionary of National Biography* (Calcutta, Institute of

One of the ways in which CR codes the very desire of women to be educated is by locating their ability in the orthodox Hindu world, suggesting that ‘perhaps’ girls have a natural ability for learning, because the Hindu goddess of learning is a woman. The figure of the mother provides another important code for CR; as ‘educator’ she is the transmitter of culture and traditional values in the family sphere.⁸⁹ While he does not invoke Sita or Draupadi by name in the context of these learned mothers, the epics have a specific purpose to this end:

Our people who framed our legends and mythologies knew these things very well. They knew that learning is best looked after by women folk.⁹⁰

This is a subtle self-acknowledgement on CR’s part, for of course, it is he who ‘frames’ the indigenous legends and mythologies for the new mothers/readers in independent India, it is he who teaches the teachers. Where CR is as hesitant as Gandhi is willing to name Sita and Draupadi as role models for women, nevertheless, he does utilise a version of Gandhi’s *Ramaraj* on his acceptance of the politically significant, as well as emotive position of India’s first Indian Governor General:

There is no country which can be governed more easily than India, because no force is necessary. You only have to appeal to their

Historical Studies, 1974), p.441.

⁸⁸ For a good idea of what was intended by a ‘requisite...minimum’ and indeed whose satisfaction female education would result in, see Dr. A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation* (Banares, Motilal Banarsidass, 1956), an astonishing, phallogentric, but nevertheless popular work which recommends that women be taught in Hindi, with a curriculum which substitutes maths, history and geography with hygiene, house decoration and domestic science, pp. 27-28. This work, according to scholar Geraldine Forbes was ‘for years’ the only history of Indian women available. See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, pp. 255-256.

⁸⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Speeches*, p. 71.

⁹⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Speeches*, p. 71.

tradition and their culture. All the old Kings of the past – Janaka⁹¹ and Sri Ram are still alive and governing our hearts. I am not the Governor General, Sri Ram is the Governor General.⁹²

The significant link between government, self-government and the epic model is revealed here. CR's second political biographer, A. R. H. Copley, points out the necessity of understanding the ways in which CR believed himself to be speaking from a living and still creative religious culture.⁹³

This culture, while invested with 'authenticity, with sacred distance, located in the knowable universe as a record of the past, was also the exponent and location of the concept which would be integral to CR's formation of his epic morality, and the foundation of the thinking behind his own right wing political party, the Swatantra Party.⁹⁴

The concept, that is driving force behind both CR's articulation of culture and his morality is the idea of *dharma* or duty. Understanding the way in which CR and other Hindu nationalists used the philosophy of *dharma* to talk about civil behaviour and national culture is crucial in two ways; firstly, to the understanding of the philosophy of CR's epics, and secondly to the understanding of the progress of Hindu cultural hegemony in the supposedly 'secular' and democratic political environment of India.⁹⁵

⁹¹ King Janaka is the father of Sita, and Ram is her husband in the epic *Ramayana*.

⁹² C. Rajagopalachari, *Speeches*, p. 12.

⁹³ A. R. H. Copley, *The Political Career of C. Rajagopalachari 1937 – 1954*, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁴ There are several works on the formation and ideology of the Swatantra party other than the key texts referred to here. Of particular interest: Motilal Jaghiani, *Jana Sangh and Swatantra* (Bombay, Mankatalas, 1967); M.R. Masani, *Congress Misrule and the Swatantra Alternative* (Bombay, Manaktalas, 1966); V.P. Rasam, *Swatantra Party, a Political Biography* (Nagpur, Dattsons, 1997); and H.R. Parischa, *The Swatantra Party: Victory in Defeat* (Bombay, The Rajaji Foundation, 2003).

⁹⁵ See Meera Nanda's convincing and passionately argued *Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays* (New Delhi, Three Essays, 2002).

The most frequent use of *dharma* is that which signifies the total sum of the duties to which the individual must adhere and practise according to his *varna* or status. The practice of this duty is for the sole benefit of the *jati* (the extended family) and thereby, the community or nation rather than the individual. In classic Hindu legal terms, *dharma* signifies the laws that maintain the world. These fundamental laws and their preservation are associated in the Vedic period with those sacrifices which maintained cosmic order. This concept of *dharma* then widened to include the moral world as much as the physical, thereby insuring that the ‘norm of ritual becomes the norm of conduct.’⁹⁶ *Dharma* is also related to the future, in that it is the action which, providing it conforms to the order of things, allows the individual to realise their full potential. While the foundations and sanctions of *dharma* are religious, it is practised as a social philosophy, though it is important to remember that the social order including caste system and gender relations are seen as one with the ‘natural’ order.

Dharma is also seen as the superior authority to the companion philosophies of *Artha*, meaning worldly or material gain, and *Kama*, meaning the pursuit of pleasure. While all three in the classical Hindu sense are equally legitimate, and prime motives for human behavior, and have their corresponding sciences, it is *dharma* that takes precedence over the other rules of law. The *dharma sutras*, the interpretation or comment on the law of *dharma*, detail three sources from which it springs – Veda, Tradition and Good Practice.⁹⁷ Manu, in the Manusmriti adds inner contentment, or conscience, only permitted to those of great virtue as a recourse after the failure of the three other sources. Though the main ‘source’ of *dharma* is in the Vedas, this does not mean the vedic texts.

⁹⁶ Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, p.3.

⁹⁷ *Shastra* meaning science, *sutra* meaning interpretation or comment and *smriti* meaning tradition.

Here is the heart of the ambiguity and fluidity which is apparent in the theological doctrine of Hinduism which leaves it open not only to interpretation but to fantasy and abuse. For 'Veda' is essentially the sum of all knowledge both revealed and hidden or lost. The Vedic 'texts' articulate what is kept of what is revealed. This does not mean that what is hidden or lost is not itself sacred, authoritative or important. Neither do these texts contain those kind of solid injunctions which could be utilised in the construction of a science of *dharma*. It is here that Tradition or *smriti* is vitally important. Tradition is not the divinely revealed Veda or knowledge, but an 'indirect perception founded on memory' and it signifies a complete body of sacred literature including the epic stories.⁹⁸

The philosophy of Hindu *dharma* then, involves the upholding of the social world, indistinguishable from the natural world, by duty determined by class, caste and gender. That the rule of *dharma* should be emphasized also points to a distinctly non-secular, non-democratic project of Hindu nationalism, not only in political life as regards the duties of citizens but in cultural life as regards the duties of men and women in the family. It is a term which sees its Hindu nationalist rhetorical powers consolidated in this period, and which sets the core assumptions of Hindu *dharma* as a cultural code for the future.⁹⁹

CR's concept of *dharma* was the combination of the conviction of the value of self-restraint and the development of moral life, which would influence and govern the

⁹⁸ Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, pp.8-9.

⁹⁹ See: S.Gopal, 'Nehru, Religion and Secularism' in R. Champalakshmi and S. Gopal eds., *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996), P. Upadhyay, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism' in *Modern Asian Studies* 26(4): 815-853, and G.Larson, *India's Agony Over Religion* (Albany, SUNY press, 1995).

political and economic policies not only of Swatantra, but the policies CR effected which pre-date Swatantra, like the temple entry and prohibition acts, cited above.¹⁰⁰

The importance of the *dharmic* principle is revealed in its appearance in the section of Swatantra's election manifesto for 1962 dealing with religion. Though the party reassures the electorate of its religious tolerance, and adherence to democracy and the rule of law, nevertheless the manifesto states that

...over and above the rule of law, we recognize the rule of dharma, a God – orientated inner law to be resuscitated and welcomed and fostered by the Government of the country.¹⁰¹

Also significant is the inclusion of the importance of *dharma* as the final, emphatic point of the manifesto, stating that 'above all, the Swatantra party seeks to restore in the body politic the Gandhian principle of giving first priority to the rule of *dharma* as the true basis for enduring moral progress and material prosperity.' The philosophy of *dharma* is politically expedient, in its emotive association with Gandhi, and as a philosophy at the heart of righteous Hindu behaviour. Although its context is supposedly in the framework of a secular political party, Swatantra's secular status is problematised by this emphasis of the 'rule of *dharma*' over 'the rule of law'. Crucially, CR and Swatantra anticipate here the explicit communal and religious nature of India's political life that would result in the BJP's rise and subsequent election to power in the 1990s.

¹⁰⁰ Though the idea of temple entry for untouchables appears as more leftist than conservative, it is a gentle, non-radical reform in that CR's substituted the mandatory clause for a 'permissive' bill, based on the idea of 'local option' meaning local authorities had power over its implementation according to their principles and inclination. See H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.19.

¹⁰¹ *Swatantra Party Election Manifesto* (Bombay, Western Printers, 1962), p.20.

The Swatantra party, founded in 1959 aimed to provide a liberal, non-leftist opposition to Congress, not for the purpose of a reactionary return to the past, but precisely in order to affect the kinds of gradual, non-radical reforms previously formulated by CR as Premier of Madras. CR's conservatism was to be a bridge between the reactionary demands of a return to the 'golden age' 'discovered' by orientalist scholars, and the radical demands of communal, militant and chauvinistic Hinduism.

This system, in its stability and order would reflect the fulfilled and ordered world of the epic text. It is no coincidence that CR's right-wing conservative opposition to Congress has its origins in the initial demands of the Princes to maintain lands, rights and income.¹⁰² Many non-aristocratic members of Congress, including CR upheld their demands for various reasons, but the most significant of these was their affinity with the preservation of the traditions that surrounded the divine right of the Princes to rule India. The arguments put forward by the supporters of the Princely class relied on the emotive of appeals to this tradition. Presented as conservative arguments, for example: '...the traditions of Kingship and the instincts and responsibilities of hereditary rule are ingrained in our being.'¹⁰³ and '...[the Princes are] custodians of ancient dynastic traditions..[which]..they have the greatest duty of preserving.'¹⁰⁴ It was further asserted that the people 'look upon their rulers as a precious legacy of India's glorious past.'¹⁰⁵ The most telling of these arguments posit the Princely position of paternalistic rule and Hindu tradition against the 'dynamic machine made civilization of the West,' an argument designed to appeal to overtly anti-colonial feeling above and beyond that which

¹⁰² H. L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p 24.

¹⁰³ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 26.

was anti-aristocratic. In the critique of western political institutions, the Princes and the Princely states represented the protection and perpetuation of a superior autochthonous culture in the inner domain of culture, which would mitigate the effects of mechanisation and industrialisation imported from the west that had to be implemented in the outside world.¹⁰⁶

The position of the princes was one of authentic aristocratic conservatism, defending the traditional caste system in the form of protecting the rule of *kshtriya*'s in adherence with the principle of *dharma*. While CR was by no means for all of the demands of the Princely classes, his sympathy lay in his understanding of their symbolic cultural value. CR, showing the pragmatism which tempered his moral conviction pressed for a new type of government in which the Princes retained their symbolic value, and demonstrated the *dharmic* way of life by their example.¹⁰⁷

CR further exhibited his conservative credentials in the articulation of a doctrine which was organised around the concept of the idealised Indian village. This ideology has its roots in several assumptions – that rural India was ‘authentic’ India, in a reaction against the poisonous effects of British Imperialism on traditional village life, and in connection with this a reaction against the dislocations resulting from industrialisation on the Indian village. This doctrine did not demand a return to the past; what is central is its *belief* in an idyllic past, and a rejection of material gain in favour of spiritual gain. The Indian village, a harmonious and just community, utilised the caste system as the logical division of labour and services free from damning constraints including untouchability manifest in its later incarnation. The individual citizen prioritises the good of his family,

¹⁰⁶ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ See H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 87 and C. Rajagopalachari, *Speeches*, p. 59.

extended family and the village community over his own desires. Social progress and change are affected by those in the elite who listen to the demands of the individual and then use their superior position in terms of wealth, education or status to bring about change – this is the doctrine of trusteeship.¹⁰⁸

This quality of life experienced by the happy peasants of times past could only be achieved in a contemporary context by placing an emphasis, if not an insistence, on smaller communities concerned predominantly with the maintenance of Hindu spiritual riches over western materialism in the cultural sphere.

CR's advocacy of the doctrine of trusteeship is devastating in terms of gender. Apart from the emphasis on spiritual well-being in the face of desperate and degrading poverty, there is no attention to the balance of power in rural communities particularly inequalities based on gender.

CR's vision would be realised wholly on the practice of his definition of culture as *dharma*. Both CR's economic and social models depended on the correct functioning of culture. This is the responsible individualism which he understands by the notion of trusteeship. Only through the restoration of culture and spirituality could India progress and be true to 'her destiny' and the doctrine of trusteeship is emphasised in this connection. The doctrine of trusteeship's connection to culture is based on a patriarchal hierarchy which excludes female influence and subjectivity unless it is as mother-educator operating within the remit of CR's definition of culture and spirituality. If we ask how culture and spirituality can be secured, we reach what Erdman suggests is the 'bed rock' of CR's beliefs.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party*, p.91.

In part it depends on restricted material wants and commitments, defined by CR as: ‘a deliberate preference for simplicity and a conscious rejection of the complicated life and multiplication of wants, this being consistent with the philosophy and ethical code of our people.’¹¹⁰ CR links this to the maintenance of *dharma* or moral duty which is no ‘mere Indian superstition or eccentricity’ and the maintenance of *dharma* requires the sustenance of those institutions which have been inculcated over the centuries in India. Of these institutions, the primary is the *jati*, or joint family. CR stresses that this institution is weakened though not wholly undermined by ‘the impact of Western individualism and *perverted movements of social reform*.’¹¹¹ The *jati*, which benefits, and indeed cannot survive without the practice of *dharma* equally faces extinction if the majority of Hindu women were, for example, to pursue a career, marry outside their *varna*, practise birth control, or choose to remain single and independent. Arguably, those movements of ‘perverted social reform’ are those which point to the liberation of women from the rigours of orthodox Hindu religiosity as desirable. The emphasis on the family clearly indicates what early Hindu nationalism defined as the role of women in the nation, and as CR candidly puts it: ‘it is not a single jump in India, from the family to the nation.’¹¹²

A deconstruction of the Swatantra banner may provide a revealing and supportive point in addition to this. *Swa*, meaning ‘self’, coupled with *tantra* meaning loosely ‘to expand’ is not the obvious choice for a political party headed and named by a figure like CR, simply because of *tantra*’s connotations with that branch of Hinduism which believes in the enjoyment of the material life, and in the largely untapped resources of the

¹¹⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.23.

¹¹¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.27. My emphasis.

¹¹² C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.29.

human body called *kundalini*. In fact, the tantric branch of Hinduism gives supreme importance to the body, and admits that the mysteries of the universe may be found in the body. The search for these mysteries can be conducted in tantric practice through sexual union.¹¹³ I would argue that CR uses the emphasis of the personal *swa* or ‘self’ prefix as a self-referential signifier of the authority of his values, values he presents in his epics and in *Our Culture*. It is arguable that by using the prefix *swa* CR is attempting to assimilate the sexual energy of tantra for self-discipline. I would suggest that this self-discipline, politically heralded by the Swatantra party, and personally embodied by CR in his role as bard and teacher extends to the disciplining of *shakti* or energy which is seen as female. The female principle inherent in both Hindu tantric practices and the dynamic power of the bard has its creative/destructive energy become a force for nurturing the home and the family.

This is not a new reinvention in the nationalist model. Tanika Sarkar identifies the process of ‘fetishisation’ which the nationalist project subjected both religious and patriotic female icons to, divesting them of their latent violence and destructive capacities and substituting instead the sweetly feminine and domesticated mother.¹¹⁴ CR’s literary figures, iconic in their own right, could also be identified as being subjected to this model.

Waghorne’s analysis links CR’s role as politician and teller of the epic stories. She identifies CR with the Indian bardic tradition, which suffered from the British inclusion of Brahmins as legal practitioners in the colonial system. The introduction of new forms of administration resulted in the neglect of certain forms of artistic patronage

¹¹³ Dr. K. Satyendra, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Delhi, Ivy Publishing House, 2000), p. 31.

¹¹⁴ Tanika Sarkar, ‘Nationalist Iconography’ in Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation...* pp. 251- 267.

such as court bards and poets.¹¹⁵ What is significant about locating CR within this tradition is the role of the bard in two Kingmaking rituals: the *Rajasurya* and the *Ashva Medha* horse sacrifice. Both rituals endow the ‘King’ with the necessary ‘vital’ power to rule, and the bard is involved in the temporal period immediately before the sacrifice, before the ‘King’ is firmly established. Believed to embody both masculine and creative/destructive feminine - *shakti* - energies, it is the bard who calls the new order in to being. The bard is therefore allied with the resolution of both personal and political crises. Waghorne suggests the bard appears as a mediator of energy, assuring that the power of the sacrifice will be used in accordance with *dharma* by the ‘King’ in his earthly duties. He is also the ‘energizer’ who regulates the King in his duty, ensuring that the duties subscribe to earthly laws. In effect, the bard is an intermediary between what is seen in the Hindu world as the stabilising forces of the cosmos, and the creative, yet potentially destructive and damaging power, of new historical events.¹¹⁶ The bard is both interpreter of history, and national teacher, and for Waghorne, he is fundamentally a figure operating within the remit of orthodox Hinduism.

Using the close parallel of both interregnum and establishment of a new order with the Indian situation in 1930 – 1960, Waghorne invests CR and his epic texts with a similar function as the Hindu bardic figure. It is the embodiment of the two kinds of energy within the figure of the bard - stable, masculine and creative/destructive feminine, also called *shakti* - which are highly suggestive. The disciplining of the feminine *shakti* is self-discipline, self-discipline is culture, and culture is the practice of *dharma*.

¹¹⁵ J.P. Waghorne, *Images of Dharma*, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ J.P. Waghorne, *Images of Dharma*, pp. 20-23.

(v) 'Our Culture'

CR formally equates *dharma* or duty with culture in *Our Culture*. In a series of statements he defines culture as '...predominantly self restraint: sharing your substance with the poor, the rigours of widowhood, austerity, sanyas...' rather than music or art. On these more conventional forms of cultural expression he states

the fine arts, music, dance and painting and entertainments of many kinds are all cultural means, not merely to give pleasure but to operate control and limit indulgence in sensual pleasure. Incidentally they give pleasure but the main purpose is sustained control of the instinct for sensual pleasure.¹¹⁷

This is not only a statement on the nature of cultured behaviour, but one which also sets quite impossible boundaries on the function of culture. To suggest that those things that give sensual pleasure are actually designed to inhibit is revealing in its anxiety about the power of culture to display and inculcate values. It is worth noting that CR uses 'sensual' rather than 'sensory', pointing to the root of his discomfort which equates sensual with the erotic or arousing. Rather than the sublimation of the 'instinct for sensual pleasure' CR advocates its repression. CR utilises the ideas of self-control expounded by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, but he manipulates them. *Hind Swaraj* meditates on the nature of power and the possibility of harnessing non-violence as both a *dharmic* and a successful means of protest. The philosophy of *swaraj*, or self-rule, expounded in *Hind Swaraj* offered the double meaning: self-rule for India, and the rule over the self by Indians. CR extends this

¹¹⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.15.

to mean that all cultured and civilised behavior is specifically Hindu and dominated by ideas of external and internal controls. He states:

...it may be truly said that culture is the habit of successful self control; and that nothing that reduces self control or which does not help self control is culture.¹¹⁸

The practice of citizenship in the new nation is closely allied with those Hindu values which had come to be synonymous with the struggle for freedom under Gandhi. The extension of these values beyond the struggle for freedom of a foreign oppressor, into the realm of culture and everyday behaviour, points to another form of oppression in the definition of the boundaries of pleasure and of the expression of diverse identities and modes of being.

Culture in independent India has as its core assumptions Hindu ideas of *dharma* and internal and external self-control. CR is rigid in his tautology; for him 'culture can have only one meaning though its forms are many and varied.'

In the same way, civilisation has only one meaning:

'...the control of the senses and the willing acceptance of it.'¹¹⁹

For CR civilisation, dharma and culture under the banner of self-restraint are the foundation strength and national unity both past and future. Despite the rending of the country during partition CR sees Hindu culture as '...the one silver thread which gleams unbroken...'¹²⁰ By ignoring the massive scale of social and political upheaval during

¹¹⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. 15.

¹¹⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. 15.

¹²⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. (iv).

Partition, this comfortable picture allows for those institutional practices which limit the expression of individual identities to be venerated as full of potential and strength:

‘The nation did not break up but held together by reason of castes and the joint families and the dharma of the nation.’¹²¹

Within CR’s discourse there are severe contradictions that mirror the contradictions of the Indian state after Partition. These contradictions lie not only in the fantasies which rely on the articulation of a Hindu golden age or in the denial of the trauma surrounding Partition, but also in the core values of the new nation-state. While tolerance, democracy and equality are presented as political and social realities, there is evidence that Indian politics became increasing communal and conservative, and that caste and gender injustice not only continues but proliferates.¹²² Inherent in the contradiction of CR’s rhetoric and the rhetoric of the state is the notion of a secular society. The main institution targeted by the state - the family - is neither treated nor represented as secular, but inviolably Hindu.

The implications of this in terms of gender mean that female identity is not only predicated on wifely status ameliorated by motherhood, but that this identity should be practised in accordance with the rules of Hindu *dharma*. CR’s explanation of this is worth quoting in full:

It may be remembered however, that I am referring to the external, which is that which culture is concerned with. The wife is not in fact, nobody in India and her share is often a larger share in family life than that of the husband. But this issues out of nature, the supreme natural importance of the mother; and India is not an

¹²¹ C.Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.35.

¹²² See Paul Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence, New Cambridge History of India Vol IV:I* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

exception in that respect. Externally however, Indian culture lays down a subordinate though highly respected status for the young wife in all situations. She is released from this and raised to a higher level when she becomes a mother; then too she observes the external form of subordination but with dignity. She suffers it with a quiet sense of humour.¹²³

A brief consideration of what is meant by ‘internal’ and ‘external’ may be helpful before analysis of this rich quotation. The notion of the ‘external’ signifies CR’s major departure from Gandhi. While it is clear from the material included above, that CR invested value in the act of internal self-control, so important in Gandhian philosophy, which results in cultured behaviour, for him the practice of culture and self-control was crucially public: a statement to other citizens and to the world, and overseen by a paternal Government. CR’s statement that:

Culture is not just character or morality...culture is external rather than internal...¹²⁴

points to the explicit, dominating and public nature of both cultural properties and cultured behaviour. Whereas the forum for the epics had been oral, Brahmanical and in the Hindu temple, these cultural properties were now reaching the widest possible audience through their public sale and their message. Self-control in the Gandhian sense is released from the confines of those very particular struggles - the struggle for freedom from foreign oppression and the struggle for self-mastery - and exploded to be the means by which Indians announced themselves to the world and each other. In addition, the control of the senses effected by the rule of culture is to be mediated and overseen by the government, as the other part of the dual controls of civilisation. This is a further, and

¹²³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. 45.

¹²⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p.10.

rather sinister contradiction in CR's rhetoric. The reach of the democratic and secular state in India is not limited to those aspects of civil and international life which are essentially public, funded by public money and explicitly stated in party manifestos. CR's nationalist philosophy and rhetoric is designed to infiltrate the most intimate sites of being, and to order the most personal of values according to Hindu philosophy.

This sinister aspect of the desired reach of the state allows that organisation, or persons such as CR operating of behalf of that organisation to formulate policy and articulate ideology based on controlling individual expression. This is a project that involves the closing or limiting of debates surrounding the role of women in society. The wife who suffers 'with a quiet sense of humour' who operates within the confines of *stree dharma*, is the product of a series of controls, originating at government level and finally enforced by male members of the *jati*, specifically father then husband.¹²⁵

The combination of culture, dharma and civilised behaviour is further authenticated in nationalist rhetoric by the use of the term 'natural'. In keeping with orthodox Hindu wisdom on the nature of the universe, the material world is, when functioning correctly, a manifestation of the natural order of things. Women are defined by their biological function, and offered the palliative of a kind of controlled emancipation within the family – the 'subordinate but highly respected' status afforded to young wives and mothers.

¹²⁵ A good indicator of the culture surrounding this rhetoric can be found in other kinds of texts being produced in tandem with political rhetoric promoting the rule of *dharma*, especially those directed specifically towards women. One outstanding example is: Sri Swami Sivananda, *Stree Dharma or Ideal Womanhood* (Rishikesh, The Divine Life Society, 1960). This text, prefaced by a photograph of its author begins with a poem entitled 'What is Woman'. There follows several prayers, and the text proceeds to articulate every cliché and patriarchal fantasy regarding Hindu women and their designated, *dharmic* duty of chastity, obedience and suffering, giving some idea of the way in which *dharma* was to be practised by women.

This notion of the supreme natural importance of motherhood is reflected, for CR in the Hindu pantheon that allows every deity his consort. He points to the worship of the divine mother as signifier of the esteem Hindu women are held in:

This aspect of Hindu religious practice has a great impact on the status of women in Hindu culture.¹²⁶

This statement may equally be taken to read that this practice has a great impact in the limiting of women in Hindu culture, and further illustrates the limits of the Hindu nationalist agenda in this period as far as the status, rights and roles of women were to be represented by them. The new form of citizenship for women looks curiously like the old – the intellectual philosophy behind CR’s thinking on women seems to be that tradition, spoken in modern terms, in English, presented through the form of the epic texts, will *feel* in some way new – that the very recognition of subordination is as much of concession to modernity and change as will be conceded in terms of gender. When CR says that the worship of the divine mother:

gives all the dignity and importance to women in Hindu society, notwithstanding the definitely subordinate status allotted to them in formal and external practice.¹²⁷

he is locating female identities in the narrowest possible forum, bestowing a cultural identity upon Hindu women which relies not only on their relationship to men as dutiful wives and daughters, but also on fulfilling a sexual contract with the correct man in order to produce children.

¹²⁶C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. 46.

¹²⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture*, p. 46.

In his speeches, writings and his telling of the epic stories, CR is indeed, as Joanne Waghorne suggests, fashioning a public body for Indian citizens, as well as for himself. His aim, to provide an enduring cultural model for India, is one which involves the masking or marginalisation of trauma, adherence to the rule of *dharma*, the responsibility of the individual to prioritise the good of society, and in a covert way, the unchanged role and status of women. Waghorne's statement that CR, through the writing of the epic texts:

...ultimately created a body for his Mother India – a new being now free to hold all of her children within the womb of her own cultural traditions¹²⁸

is proclaimed without irony, yet, grotesque and disturbing though this image is, there is some truth in it. As I will discuss in the following chapter, both Sita and Draupadi are not born of women, but are 'found' or 'invoked' by their fathers. CR in keeping with the tradition he is determined to uphold is himself seen in this model. The body fashioned for 'his' Mother India is the chaste, iconic body of the Hindu epic texts.

¹²⁸ J.P. Waghorn, *Images of Dharma...* p. 161.

Chapter Four: *Woman, But Not Female: The Epic Model of Chastity*
in
C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata and Ramayana*¹

(i) Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed close-reading of the re-worked Hindu epics: the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* by C. Rajagopalachari. I aim to explore the textual, symbolic, literary representations of women that appear in these renditions of the epics and to consider what these representations might mean for female identities and women's sexual identities in the new nation.

I begin by discussing the paratexts of CR's re-tellings of the epic stories: the prefaces and the introductory material. I rely primarily on Gene Genette's useful analytical framework of the paratext to extract insights in to the aims of the text's publishers, the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, and of CR. It is in the paratexts that the political and social motivation of the work is revealed; the stories were designed to educate and instruct individuals in notions of correct citizenship, family responsibility and gender roles in the emergent nation. I argue that it is in the paratexts of the *Ramayana* that the nation is constructed as Hindu, and bound by Hindu cultural values.

Using close textual analysis, I look at each epic in turn, first the *Ramayana* and then the *Mahabharata*. I examine four key stories in the *Ramayana*: those of Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Surpanakha and Sita in order to expose what I have termed

¹ This phrase is taken from a comment by CR after watching a performance of the Bharat Natayam dancer Rukmini Devi; "...it seemed as though some divinity were manifesting itself through the form of Rukmini Devi, so full of grace and beauty were her movements. One saw Woman but not the female". *Swarajya*, April 11th 1936 p. 8.

the strategy of disembodiment employed by CR in order to undermine the complexity and agency of the women protagonists of the story. By disembodiment, I mean, those extant parts of the female protagonists' legends that contain an element of actual disembodiment, which CR isolates and prioritises as part of his message about appropriate female behaviour. Kakaiyi is vilified for her adamancy and her power to incite desire in her husband; CR's strategy is to represent her as capricious and childlike. Ahalya is turned to stone as a punishment for adultery and Surpanakha is violently mutilated for her sexual agency. In Sita's legend there are many instances of this strategy; hers is a sacred body in many ways, and CR promotes those versions of the story that avoid her being touched.

The way that CR retells the stories of Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Surpanakha and Sita reveals concerns about their potential agency, their manifest desirability and their independence from patriarchal controls. It is this control that CR seeks to recuperate by manipulating their legends to serve a new purpose; a re-working of a traditional culture that will re-assert masculine authority in the contemporary world through the example set out in the ancient texts of the epics. I argue that the meanings which I extract from the re-tellings, out of the many moral messages of the stories, is one critical in holding together the way that CR imagined women's roles in the new nation – female bodies and female sexuality are dangerous and untrustworthy, and must at all costs be regulated.

CR uses narrative intervention to guide the reader more fully into sympathy with his sense of the emergent Hindu and Indian nation, and it is in these

interventions that we can see a contemporary Hindu nationalist philosophy being expressed. I argue that these interventions serve to further deny the *Ramayana* its diversity, and to this end I include the alternative versions of the episodes that CR re-tells, alternatives that proliferate throughout South Asia.

Importantly, it is through close analysis of the retelling of Sita's mythology that I find the opportunity for readings of resistance against the patriarchal mould. Though CR constructs Sita as part submissive Hindu wife, and part dangerous body, I argue that her very figure, with all its accretions of history, resists his attempt to categorise her in this way. Further to this, I argue that within the legend we can read her subversive refusal to be complicit in her own submission. CR's own discomfort with the events of the *Ramayana*, signaled by his interventions, serves to make space for alternative readings of the epic, readings which allow for resistance, multiplicity and open-endedness in the meanings of the story.

I then turn to CR's re-telling of the *Mahabharata*. In this telling, rather than look at the ways in which its diversity has been limited and manipulated, I expose the instances of silence or omission in certain legends and consider the meaning of these omissions. I begin, as with the *Ramayana*, by looking at the paratexts to the *Mahabharata*, and then analyse the legends of Satyawati, Kunti and Draupadi.

I argue that the paratexts of the *Mahabharata* complement those of the *Ramayana*, fleshing out the imagined nation space with the identity and values of its citizens. In these paratexts, CR points to the *Mahabharata* as the location

of the fundamental values of the Indian people, and invites non-Indians to consider the *Mahabharata* as a representation of the values of both ancient and modern India.

It is in the close reading of the legends of Satyawati, Kunti and Draupadi that I find evidence of silencing. CR selectively chooses those aspects of their legends that fit the values of the patriarchal Hindu world. Thus, Satyawati is disembodied – her pre-marital sexual relationship and the divine reinstatement of her virginity are omitted, while Kunti’s agency in her authority over her sons, manifest in her command to share Draupadi, is circumscribed. In Draupadi we find a more disturbing form of silencing. CR’s discomfort with her polyandrous marriage compels him to represent Draupadi as weak and asexual. He strips her of her attributes of knowledge, learning and statecraft. Her desire for vengeance, which drives the action of the story, is entirely omitted. I argue however that, as with Sita, Draupadi’s potential as a subversive figure remains, despite her recasting by CR.

What I argue through the reading of both of these epics is that there is a multiplicity and agency in the representation of the epic women, but that CR works to produce a fixed and conservative version of womanhood.

Examining CR’s biographies, writings and speeches provides a context and opens a space for the discussion of the impact of his re-tellings of the epic texts on the development of cultural nationalism in India. On a philosophical level, CR has been affiliated to a tradition of Hindu bards, ‘priests of temporal power,’ calling a new nation into being through his narration of the epics.

As a politician, CR was a conservative; both in his vision of Indian society and social structure, and the gradual means he proposed to effect social order, and in addition, he considered himself and was considered to be a moralist in the political arena.

In terms of remembering and recording the past, he eschewed autobiography, collaborated with only one known biography and preferred instead to re-present the old stories, the epics as his contribution to national culture. He looked to a future built on the 'rock, not sand' of 're-communication with the sages of our land.'²

This interest in returning to the founding mythologies of the Hindu tradition leads us to explore the role of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in post-Partition India. To what extent are they religious texts, and to what extent cultural texts? Do they speak for a religious or a secular society? What values do they herald, and whose voices do they represent?

CR explores key themes concerning women: sexuality, childbirth and motherhood, marriage and virtue within the encapsulating discourse of dharma and self-restraint through Sita, Draupadi and other key women in the epics. *Dharma* and self-restraint also provide the framework to discuss and resolve the anxieties, and the ambivalences about the female body and female desire, about what it represents, and how it should be represented. Although, correctly, the scholarship on the epic stories in all forms and languages points to the multiplicity and diversity of their meanings, there is a strong suggestion that these narrations of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are a signal contribution to a desire for the cultural hegemony of the Hindu tradition, of which the texts are banners. Cultural anxieties about women's bodies and sexual identities are negotiated in CR's re-telling of the epics as a set of strategies of silence

² C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1951), p. 7.

and of disembodiment. The contribution of the women characters to the wider nationalist project also deserves exploration.

This chapter will look at CR's telling of the two epics in turn, starting with the *Ramayana*. I will begin by briefly locating the epics in their cultural and historical moment and attempt to identify their desired audience and readership. Through the close reading of the representation of Sita and Draupadi and of key incidents, this chapter will identify and clarify some instances of the strategy of silence and of disembodiment, and their implications. Finally I will examine those instances of claims for the cultural 'authenticity' of these tellings.

(ii) Reading the Paratext; Constructing the Nation I

In order to locate the texts in their cultural and historical moment, it is necessary to look at the aims of the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan which published the English version, and its successive thirty-six editions. Using Gerard Genette's useful analytical framework of the paratext gives theoretical insight into the Bhavan's aims in this series. Genette characterises paratexts as liminal devices that mediate relations between the text and the reader. He further defines these devices as the productions that surround the main body of the text: the prefaces, introductory remarks, chapter headings and title pages, which both serve the text and control it. This privileged and influential series of auxiliary paratexts allow for the 'correct' reading intended by the author and those who align themselves with the author. The paratext is characterised by the intentional assumption of responsibility for the values which follow in the main text, yet despite this authoritative and quite arguably manipulative location, Genette suggests that the paratexts are an 'undefined zone,' a space without boundaries, either reflectively, that is towards the text, or reflexively, towards the 'world's discourse'

about the text.³ This means that there are no rules as such for the paratext; its ideological potential is limitless. Richard Watts takes Genette's definition a step further to examine the function of the paratext in a post-colonial context. Watts uses the Foucauldian notion of the 'institution's' government of entry into the text, which ensures the deliberate and considered nature of the 'beginning.' Foucault observes that our entry in to the text is never neutral, but is governed by institutions, backed up by socially sanctioned forms of 'knowledge.' Thus, the 'start' of a text is its *beginning*, the way in which the reader is inculcated in to the possible meanings of the text. Watts further incorporates Stephen Greenblatt's theory of 'circulation' as the transformation of the meaning of a cultural artefact: the idea that as texts change context, format and availability, their meanings open up. Thus we can see a useful tension in the paratext in the post-colonial context. Whereas the reader is being instructed in a certain way of reading the text, its very reach and availability in its translation to English, and cheap paperback form, opens it up to circulation and so, to difference.

Watt's analysis provides further insight into what the paratexts of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* signify. As he points out, a notable feature of the twentieth-century paratext is the enactment of the 'struggle over who has the right to mediate, and who maintains the authority to present and interpret literature.' It is also in the post-colonial paratext that an 'intense mediation' not only of the text's gender, political and aesthetic positions takes place, but also, broadly, the mediation of the text's cultural specificity.⁴

In terms of the project of Hindu cultural nationalism, this mediation of cultural specificity is perhaps not so much broadly defined as invoked. CR's epics can be

³ Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,), p. 2.

⁴ Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (London, Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 3-4.

considered in the light of this idea of invocation, or ‘beginning;’ representing as they do, the inception of a reworked symbolism and meaning for these religious stories as politically and culturally useful specifically to the nationalist project.

The Bhavan, started in 1938 by K.M. Munshi, aimed for the renaissance of Hindu culture through learning. Its stated objective was ‘the re-integration of Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in all their pristine vigour.’⁵ There is a contradiction to be pursued in this quotation – one which is a recurring theme in the texts explored in this thesis; the tension between the need for contemporary attitudes to be acknowledged while preserving tradition.

The Bhavan provides a crucial paratext to all its works, one which was included up until at least 1995, on the inside cover reverse and front end paper. This epistemic exercise, printed in saffron ink, consists of a nine point statement that displays the Bhavan’s nationalist credentials affiliated to Hinduism and the rule of *dharma*. The instruction of the Bhavan, designed to be more ‘formative than informative’ aims at the absorption and expression of the ‘permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.’⁶ These values are both intellectual and moral, as might be expected from works of this nature. But the texts published by the BVB regardless of subject matter are also provided with Hindu spiritual context:

The re – integration of Bharatiya Vidhya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, ideas, forms and art of creative life energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.⁷

⁵ K.M. Munshi, ‘Kulapati’s Preface’ in C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 5.

⁶ Author Unknown, Point No. 2 of ‘What Bhartiya Vidhya Stands For’ in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front reverse.

⁷ Author Unknown, Point No. 5 ‘What Bhartiya Vidhya Stands For’, in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front end paper.

This continuous process is *dharma*, and this is the context in which the texts issued by the Bhavan should be read. Having affirmed the dharmic principle in a scholarly way, the methods of teaching and the pupil teacher relationship are outlined. This relationship adheres strongly towards the Hindu traditional model of guru and pupil, and presupposes a male pupil and teacher. The teacher is required to adopt the ‘*Guru* attitude’ towards his pupil, taking a personal interest, not only to inspire achievement in scholarly endeavour, but to ‘enter in to his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles’ and to create ‘a spirit of consecration’ in the individual.⁸

The purpose of the texts then, is to instruct in certain lived values, and to consecrate them, intimating that these values become not only a practice of the contemporary, of the ‘now’, but are related to and part of the past in a permanent way, and formally dedicated to a religious purpose. The next point of the publishing statement clarifies this, by stating that the ‘ultimate aim’ of the BVB is:

to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which is flowing from the supreme art of creative life energy as represented by Shri Ramchandra, Shri Krishna, Bhuddha and Mahavira...⁹

Though this statement goes on to include contemporary exponents of the Bhavan’s philosophy such as Gandhi and Dayananda, the above list is composed of ancient mythological and devotional figures. Their teachings and values are brought in to service of Hindu culture, framing the text and providing their authority, though the teachings of Buddha, or the Jain Mahavira may not espouse the exact values of the Bhavan. Their inclusion in this list is an example of the appropriation and misreading

⁸ Author Unknown, Point No. 7 ‘What Bharatiya Vidhya Stands For’ in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front end paper.

⁹ Author Unknown, Point No. 8 ‘What Bhartiya Vidhya Stands For’ in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front end paper.

of authoritative figures no matter what their affiliation or creed in order to validate a specifically Hindu nationalist agenda in the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism in this period. The final point of the publishing statement seems to foreclose any acceptance of difference by its articulation of the nature of the Bahvan's objectives regarding the result of its teaching, and it is worth quoting in full:

Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present to the world.¹⁰

This final point acknowledges the necessity for 'scientific and technical training' as components for the success of independent India. Yet this necessary knowledge is neither authentic, nor is it on its own effective: it is to be learnt and practised within the context of specific cultural values. If scientific and technical knowledge are the means with which the emergent nation engages successfully with modernity, these forms of knowledge must be authenticated by a culture whose values remain resistant and have been consciously constructed to withstand 'unreasoning' passions for change. That the term 'passion' is connected to anxieties about the influence of change is no coincidence. Just as for Gandhi, for CR, 'passions' imply a lack of mastery over the self, and over the desires that deviate from those acceptable cultural norms which dictate human behaviour and interaction.

¹⁰ Author Unknown, Point No. 9 'What Bhartiya Vidhya Stands For' in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front reverse.

The key to understanding the nature of these cultural values which will, in a sense, manage the new citizen's engagement with modernity lies in the suggestion that cultural values, here classified as 'forms' or 'attitudes' may be:

...replaced by another form or attitude which is a *truer and more effective* expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidhya...¹¹

It is acknowledged that there is a new kind of Hinduism, a new set of values being developed and promoted in these texts; the conscious reworking of culture which may mine those extant ancient or commonly practiced mores but which take into account the new kinds of threat to which the Indian citizen is and has been exposed through the colonial encounter and exposure to the western gaze. This new culture is explicitly associated spiritually, perhaps even in an uncontestable way, with the Truth, and on the rational level of the everyday with 'effectiveness.'

Hidden in this statement is the culturally validated agenda for India's women, in the reference to 'generations' who will present Hindu culture and values to the world. The status of student, and the pursuit of scholarship is distinctly male, in spite of political and social movements advocating education for women that had been current since the late nineteenth century. This first paratext, coercive and putatively authoritative, positions the reader firmly as male, not only the student of those fields designed to ameliorate material conditions, and associated with modernity, but also as the owner and arbiter of intellectual, spiritual and cultural knowledge.¹²

This theory is fleshed out by the subsequent prefaces and introductions that precede the story of the *Ramayana*. Interestingly, both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*

¹¹ Author Unknown, Point No. 9 'What Bhartiya Vidhya Stands For' in C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, front reverse.

¹² This distinction between students and women is further suggested by two volumes of collected works by M.K. Gandhi in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To the Women* (Allahbad, Allahbad Law Journal Press, 1941), and its brother volume, A.T. Hingorani ed., *To the Students*, (Allahbad, Allahbad Law Journal Press, 1935).

share Kulapati's (K.M. Munshi) 'Preface' and CR's preface to the sixth edition, published in 1958, suggesting the coordinated values between the two texts. This is a signal, not only of the kind of hegemony and authority invested in the stories, but also of their common purpose, despite their narrative differences.

Kulapati's preface which appears opposite the long list of reprinting dates for the text, extends and emphasises the message of the anonymous paratext of the inside covers. In it he suggests that:

Nothing more inspiring has been written by man than the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which are the Collective Unconscious of India.¹³

The reader, in engaging with this statement, becomes witness to not only the narration of the meaning of the epic texts of India, but also to the inception, the beginning, the development of an ideology.

In this sense, Kulapati's appeal to the 'Unconscious' reflects the theory suggested by theorist Louis Althusser that ideology is only minimally related to consciousness, being a 'system of representations' which are profoundly unconscious. These systems are able through cultural means to represent 'structures' of images or concepts, ideologically managed and so unconsciously impose themselves on the masses.¹⁴

Althusser famously characterised ideology as 'the lived relation between men and their world...that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence.'¹⁵ In this useful definition of ideology's function, it can be seen how the paratexts work to relate the imagined life and history of the epics to the 'real' and so come to create an ideological framework for the 'real' and lived culture of independent India, as a nation.

¹³ K.M. Munshi, 'Kulapati's Preface' in C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 6.

¹⁴ L. Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, pp. 230-233 ((London, Penguin, 1969).

¹⁵ L. Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 233.

Anderson's now familiar thesis that the nation is an imagined community can be incorporated to provide a basis for the idea that the claim of the nation on the imagination of the people, on our imaginations is ideological. The ineffable, those hopes, aspirations and dreams which constitute individual desires for the future, are bound up with the 'real,' meaning the way in which lives are governed by the institutions that attempt to contain us. The institutions that emerge in the particular moment of the post-Partition edition of the epic - the nation, the fantasy of the democratic secular state, Hindu culture as a homogenous entity - are in fact being created as they are being read. The imagined community constitutes itself through the readers of the text who are addressed and interpellated as members of a functioning, real nation with its historical and cultural memory, even if that nation may not exist as a political entity. The nation is then able to be characterised as eternal and unchanging, even as it undergoes massive upheaval, in this case, the trauma of Partition.

By using Althusser in this way, the paratext can be recognised as the site in which the cultural ideology of the nation is organised. Kulapati attempts such an imposition here in the powerful suggestiveness of a coherent unconscious motivation for moral, righteous behaviour, delineated in the epics and *recognised* by Indians. In Althusser's model, ideology operates in tandem with the specific reality of the socio-political life of a society – it is a 'lived relation' and it is lived by people, not consciously, but 'as an object of their world, as their world itself.' That the creation of a new world, post-independence and post-Partition was in progress is evident, yet here there is also evidence for the creation of a new identity for Indians and for India, based on the recuperation of the Hindu epics as vehicles for Hindu nationalist values and for the delineation of gender identities and roles.

Feminist scholar Rumina Sethi argues that Althusser's thesis constructs the populace as unthinking and passive, completely unresistant to the imposition of ideas.¹⁶ Her highlighting of the agency of the subaltern against nationalist ideology which counteracts Althusser's theory is important, yet it is equally important to acknowledge the suggestive power of Kulapati's statement. Not only does the idea of a collective state of mind create the fantasy of a pre-colonial national unity, but that collective state of mind represented by the values of the Hindu epics is the internal signifier of authentic citizenship for the new nation. The statement is contestable of course, given the multiplicity and heterogeneous reality of the Indian social fabric, yet here is an example of Foucault's 'beginning' that Watts identifies as a characteristic of the post-colonial paratext; the epics may have had a specific role, in India access to the texts of the epics may have been controlled by those with a knowledge of Sanskrit or by Brahmins, and they may have had a limited function, but their function is now exploded, they are emphatically positioned as collective, thereby intimating that the collective is Hindu, and the Indian citizen is Hindu.

This re-positioning of the epics, taking them from their ancient, Sanskritised or even oral tradition space, and into the realm of nationalist culture through the claim of the collective unconscious can be described using Geeta Kapur's term 'tradition-in-use.' Tradition becomes a signifier which is fluid and open to improvisation in order to serve contemporary political needs, and here, I would suggest cultural requirements.¹⁷

CR's initial preface to the *Ramayana* is both a justification for and a confession of his own position and the position occupied by the epic. Keeping in mind the authoritative controlling and initiating nature of the paratext, CR uses his preface to contextualise the moral purpose of his telling for Indians, and to indicate the purpose

¹⁶ Rumina Sethi, *Myths of the Nation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 21.

¹⁷ Geeta Kapur, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories,' in *Social Scientist*, 183 (1990), p. 56.

of producing the story in English. The immediate and conscious gendering of suffering for women which is articulated in his first preface is a strong signifier of not only historically perceived gender roles, but also of the nature of gendered identity in the new nation. CR sees the function of the stories as a process of ‘elevating the mind’ of his fellow citizens not through the commonly understood heroic values contained in the epic, but through ‘the sorrows borne by Kunti, Kausalya, Draupadi and Sita.’ These are key women from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and suffering is their remit. The emancipatory potential of these literary characters is circumscribed before the narration begins, and further, the cementing of suffering as women’s lot reveals the regressive nature of this type of cultural nationalism where the regeneration of the epic model freezes the potential for the development of women’s identities through the telling of traditional stories. Representation, then, is predetermined for the female characters in the epic through their suffering, and for female citizens through their understanding of these role models.

There is a connection between the past and future that motivates this telling of the *Ramayana*. As CR states:

In presenting this English version to a wider circle of readers spread all over the world, I think I am presenting to them the people of Bharat just as they are, with all their virtues and their faults. Our classics really embody our national character in all its aspects, and it is well that the world sees us as we really are, apart from what we wish to become.¹⁸

Here again is the claim for the epics standing as not only instructive, ‘effective’ mythologies, but actually being representatives of a homogenous national culture. In this way CR’s instruction as to their nature is actually creating the canon of national culture even as it positions the epic narratives within that canon. The reader is

¹⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.8.

instructed not only as to what the epic stories are, but who Indians are and what values constitute Indian national identity. In the preface to the third edition, CR goes further, in keeping with Kulapati's previous claim, stating that the original epic narratives, ascribed to the sages Valmiki, Vyasa and Tulsidas, were not actually original creations, but 'built out of the inherited bricks of national memory prior to their own time' thus creating a tautology of reference to the collective nature of the people, and the formation of that people's values and identities under the cultural banner of nationhood. Even the purpose of the epics in their former incarnations was intended to 'keep this nation in the straight path.'¹⁹ The purpose of these explicit statements is to make a claim for a history of their usage as 'national' cultural products, and thereby make a claim for their authenticity of their usage as such for the new, independent, post-Partition nation. The epics are positioned as fundamental not only to the promotion of specific values, but for the project of national identity, revealed by the awkward statement that 'Thorough familiarity with our ancient heritage is necessary if we desire to preserve our individuality as a nation.'²⁰ Individuality is seen as the collective investment and belief in a reworked ancient Hindu culture against the encroachment, past and forthcoming of the West.

The responsibility for implementing the cultural code of the epics was to lie with 'young people', but specifically young men. This reflection of the text as circumscribed for women, and as a form of knowledge that is to be mediated by men in the family again connects this very contemporary production to the manner in which knowledge and moral instruction were traditionally transmitted. CR explicitly states:

¹⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 9

²⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 10

I appeal particularly to the young men in schools and colleges to read these books. There is not a page in them but after reading you will emerge with greater courage, stronger will and purer mind.²¹

Taken in the light of the statement above, in which women's experience is articulated as suffering, it can be seen that the priority for men was not only to study those lessons normally associated with attending school and university, but also to develop those characteristics of strength, courage and purity, all of which had been a focus of attack for the degradation of the Hindu male by colonial observers in the nineteenth century.²² There is the implicit suggestion of the re-establishment of a social hierarchy which culturally privileges the male in the post-colonial nation, a hierarchy which respects the traditional social order of the Hindu world, while creating new spaces in which to engage with emerging global ideas of progress through higher education, science and technology.

Married to this rhetoric which instigates the formation of gender identities, CR's paratext further establishes the role of mythology in contemporary culture as part of the project Hindu cultural hegemony. India is *conceived* of as culturally homogenous, both in the past and for the future, and readers are extorted to:

keep in our minds the fact that it is the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that bind our vast numbers together, as one people despite caste, space and language that seemingly divide them.²³

Within this narration of an extant mythology, the development of the myth of the nation can be seen to be emerging. As a starting point, the nation, in this mythology, has always existed and been identified with by the people, and the people who are identified as Hindu. As such, the epics, which previously provided the mythological

²¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 9.

²² Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, pp. 1-24.

²³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 10.

‘skeleton’ to the nation’s religious and cultural life are to have the same function in the post-colonial state, having had their authority legitimised and normalised through the rhetoric of the paratext.

(iii) ‘A Blueprint for Right Human Action;’ Content and Context in the *Ramayana*

The ‘original’ and certainly the earliest text of the *Ramayana* is attributed to Valmiki and is the source material for the ongoing scholarly translation started by Robert P. Goldman. In addition, two other tellings - Kampan, a south Indian Brahmin writing in the twelfth century, and Tulsidas, a scholar affiliated to *bhakti* or ritual, worship writing in the sixteenth century - provide the core tellings which have had predominant influence in India.

By 1951, the time CR’s *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were released in English in a complete paperback book, the epic stories were already a cultural phenomenon. Though their status as religious sacred texts was recognisably ancient, their launch on the mass market, serialised in newspapers and as children’s stories gave them a whole new context, and method of being both accessed and manipulated. The dominant example, contemporaneous with CR’s tellings, is the critique of the *Ramayana*, *Characters in the Ramayana*, by E. Ramasamy Naicker, the radical South Indian socialist and left-wing reformer, commonly known as E.V.R.²⁴ His political beliefs were motivated by a passionate anti-brahmanical stance which motivated him to champion the rights of the marginalised lower castes - the Dalits, and his telling of the *Ramayana* was used as a vehicle for these beliefs. E.V.R.’s use of the *Ramayana* in this way, at this time, gives some idea of the recognition among the political elite of

²⁴ This title is Richmon’s translation of the Tamil original first published in 1930, but politically mobilized in the 1950s. The English translation, published in 1959, was entitled *The Ramayana (A True Reading)*.

the epic story's power in articulating strong political and social messages. E.V.R used his critique of the *Ramayana*, which he associated with Brahmin controlled Northern dominance of the South, to articulate a separate identity for Tamils.²⁵ E.V.R's use of the *Ramayana* extended from the publication of his exegesis to, in 1956 iconoclasm, in the advocated burning of Rama idols in Madras. Richmon highlights E.V.R's attack on the *Ramayana* as one that played a crucial role in the fusion of religious texts and political interests. CR's *Ramayana* follows the pattern of this fusion, though clearly, the texts function to different ends. Whereas E.V.R wished to effect social change through his interpretation, CR's tellings point to the desire for a certain cultural hegemony in which his telling is privileged as timeless, authoritative and reflective of the values of the nation.

CR's *Ramayana* has strict narrative and content boundaries, and it is worth exploring this point in a little detail. It is important to take into consideration the multiplicity of tellings, and the diversity of the narrative tradition of the *Ramayana* across South Asia. The basic story remains the same, the same characters often appear, yet within the framework of the story, events, outcomes and moral positions are specific to the audience/group, or location of the story. A.K. Ramanujan gives a list of some twenty-two languages, excluding English or any other European language in which the story can be found.²⁶ In addition to this diversity, the *Ramayana* has always been politically expedient and usefully free floating as a repository of contemporary cultural values.²⁷ I have mentioned that the epics can be seen not only symbolic of social change, but embodying social change; here, with CR's tellings, emerges an 'All India' *Ramayana*: a definitive telling for the new nation. This telling

²⁵ Paula Richmon, 'E.V. Ramasami's Reading of The *Ramayana*' in Paula Richmon, ed., *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 179.

²⁶ A.K. Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred Ramayanas' in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas*, p. 24.

²⁷ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, p. 156.

inhibits the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the story, and also attempts to fix ideas about gender through its representation of the characters.

CR attempts to affiliate the mythic kingdom and its structure with the new nation.²⁸

On the first page, he describes the Brahmanic Hindu ritual of a horse sacrifice, initiated by the King Dasaratha to invoke fertility in his wives:

In short, yaagas in those days were something like our present day State sponsored big scale conferences and exhibitions.²⁹

Immediately following this explicit connection of the secular, contemporary state's public functions with the practice of animal sacrifice to invoke divine favours, CR follows with a scene set in heaven, in a conference of gods. This seamless connection between past and present, myth and reality had been practised before in the form of Mritunjay Vidyalankar's *Rajaboli* (1808). *Rajaboli* was commissioned by Fort William College to provide an introduction to India for civil servants about to be dispatched. It is the first 'history' of India in Bengali that is in print, and is essentially a text based on the traditional narration of the lineage of Kings already in circulation among the Brahman literati. It begins by outlining its time-frame; a meticulous situating of the origin of the text's beginning using the lunar calendar and its demarcations of time. Kings rule over ages which last for up to three thousand years, and these kings are appointed by divine will. Partha Chatterjee identifies Mritunjay's 'history' as belonging to the puranic tradition of which the epics are also part.³⁰ This history of India is important to this thesis for two reasons.

²⁸ Ashis Nandy discusses the idea of the Indian state as both protector and liberator of culture for political ends, particularly 'ethno chauvinist or fundamentalist projects.' In his investigation of political culture he suggests that culture is used to "capture the nation state" in order to legitimise it. See 'Democratic culture and Images of the State' in *Time Warps* (London, C. Hurst and Co, 2002), pp. 36- 60.

²⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 17.

³⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *Fragments of a Nation*, p. 79.

The first is that it sees the puranic form as a legitimate way of retelling the political and social history of India, and secondly because it moves seamlessly from mythology and mythological figures into historical reality, with the rule of the Emperor Shah Alam II, occupying the throne at Delhi when *Rajaboli* was written. Chatterjee points out that *Rajaboli* must be read as a Hindu nationalist history whose allegiances are ‘entirely pre-colonial.’ This allows for his unproblematic inclusion of the genealogies of kings of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* with those whose appear in later ‘rational’ historiographies.³¹ Chatterjee also identifies the primary importance of adherence to *dharma* for the success of the rule of the kings. As I have discussed, the philosophy of *dharma* is crucial to CR both culturally and politically, and his epics reflect this. Though it has been suggested that Mritunjay’s history predates any true nationalist consciousness, his text anticipates CR’s in its strategies and themes. In this sense, pre-colonial historiographies such as *Rajaboli* help to create the conditions by which later nationalist writers could manipulate and integrate the present, rational history and mythology for political and cultural usage.³²

In CR’s text, the story runs as follows:

King Dasaratha had three wives; Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. They were the mothers of Rama, Lakshmana and Bharata respectively. Their sons were conceived as a result of consuming a divine drink given to their husband. These sons, divine avatars, were emblematic representatives of the *ksatriya* or warrior caste and adhered

³¹ Though *Ramayana* scholar and historian Wendy D. O’Flaherty suggests Rama was known to be a mortal king before the advent of the mythology of his divine status. See W.D. O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (London, Penguin Classics, 1980), p. 197.

³² Partha Chatterjee, *Fragments of a Nation* pp. 83-84 Both Ranajit Guha and Rumina Sethi argue however, that *Rajaboli* marks the beginning of ‘an independent and self supporting historiography, where history self consciously supersedes the mythical elements of the text’. See Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: a Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications* (Calcutta, K.P Bagchi, 1988), pp. 28- 32 and Rumina Sethi, *Myths of a Nation*, p.14.

strictly to the laws of *dharma*. After an initial training in the forest, Rama wins the hand of Sita, daughter of King Janaka. Dasaratha decides to abdicate and crown Rama King. On the eve of his coronation, Kaikeyi, goaded by her maidservant Manthara, demands the King grant her the boon, promised to her years before, in return for her saving his life, and also to fulfil the conditions set by her father before she married him, that her son would be King. She insists that the king banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years and replace him as King with her own son, Bharata.

Rama refuses to let his father break his word, and leaves for the forest with Sita and Lakshman. Bharata meanwhile refuses to accept the throne, vilifies his mother and agrees to act as regent, placing Rama's sandals on the throne. Towards the end of their time in the forest, Rama and Lakshman are sexually propositioned by the *rakshasa*, or demoness Surpanakha. They reject and mutilate her, and she goes to her brother, the ten-headed Ravana, King of Lanka for revenge. Ravana abducts Sita through a series of tricks which eventually leave her unguarded, and takes her to his island fortress.

There ensues a great battle in which Rama, and his allies the monkey race of Vaanaras led by Hanuman, triumph. When the couple are finally reunited, Rama, suspicious of Sita's fidelity and paranoid about public opinion, rejects her. She undergoes a trial by fire to prove her purity and emerges unscathed. They return to the capital city Ayodhya where more rumours of Sita's adultery come to the ears of her husband. Acting according to *dharma*, he banishes the pregnant Sita to the forest. She takes refuge in the ashram of Valmiki, expounder of the *Ramayana*. Years later, the twins Lava and Kusa, born to Sita, attempt to reunite their parents by reciting their story at the great Asvamedha or horse sacrifice, designed to bestow the status of Emperor on Rama. He is moved to take Sita back, but demands further proof of her

chastity, whereupon she calls for her mother, the earth, to swallow her up. Sita disappears and Rama is reunited with his sons.

This is a specific retelling of the epic and a close reading of certain key episodes proves revealing as to its moral and social message. The stories of Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Surpanakha and especially Sita are worth exploring. The representation of Kaikeyi reveals ambivalence about female autonomy and power, and female sexuality. It is also important for its politics of the marital relationship. I suggest that CR, in his representations of Sita and Kaikeyi, attempts to develop the notion of wifely duty by contrasting their behaviour as wives. Ahalya's story is the first in which an example of the strategy of disembodiment occurs. Her story is also an excellent introduction to the theme of the gender difference regarding sexual morality. Surpanakha provides an insight in to ideas of female beauty and sexual subjectivity. All of these themes then meet, and for CR are resolved in the character of Sita.

This is not a comparative literary analysis – I do not use the excellent Sanskrit translations by G.H. Bhatt, U.P. Shah, George L. Hart or Sheldon Pollock, for example, as a reference point to compare differences with or discrepancies in CR's tellings. Sanskrit scholars' necessary objectivity towards the text fails to explore the ethical and political implications of the story, implications that are particularly potent with regards to the representation of women.³³ The *Ramayana* is a story with vast human, social and cultural meaning in India, and it is as a contribution to that meaning that CR's *Ramayana* is analysed here.

I will begin by offering a close reading of key episodes, followed by an examination of how these relate to the formation of a gender identity that was limited for women in the new nation. I will also examine CR's narrative interventions in the story and their

³³ See the critique by J. Moussaief Masson, 'Fratricide among the Monkeys: Psychoanalytic Observations on an episode in the *Valmikiramanam*,' in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95, no.4 (October-December 1975) p.672.

implications for framing the purpose of this particular telling. Finally I will examine the place of this telling of the *Ramayana* in the building of a new national culture for independent India.

CR introduces the reader to Manthara, Kaikeyi's maidservant with the lines:

Manthara is one of the best known characters in the *Ramayana*. Every man woman and child knows and detests her as the cause of Rama's exile, Dasaratha's death and all the sorrows which befell the royal family.³⁴

This statement positions Manthara, rather like Eve, as the cause of the downfall of a civilisation. Even though CR reiterates a tautology of predestination about the events of the *Ramayana*, CR contextualises the hunchbacked Manthra's actions as being solely responsible for the actions and reactions of the other players in this story.

It is worth noting that on introducing Kaikeyi, the third wife, CR does not address her situation in a contemporary context, as he does with the archaic practice of animal sacrifice. There is no reference to marriage reforms, or the immorality of polygamy; she is a third wife because the King's other wives had borne no children:

The King took a third wife for the sake of progeny.³⁵

There is some anxiety in CR's defence of Dasaratha's actions – he had after all promised Kaikeyi's father that in return for her hand in marriage, her son would be King. CR worries about this promise, stating: 'In such a promise given by a childless King, there is nothing surprising and nothing wrong.' Her further extols the virtues of Rama and cites tradition and royal custom, pleading with his reader

³⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 51.

³⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 51.

...how could Dasaratha violate the royal custom and ignoring Rama's claim anoint Bharata?

The reader is complicit in exonerating Dasaratha's behaviour, and this is a key feature of CR's exegetical style. It is an interactive text, one which demands through the paratexts and through CR's interventions, a moral loyalty from its readers.

Though Kaikeyi is vilified for her part in the banishment of Rama, there is the suggestion underlying this text that she deserves punishment because she is sexually attractive and martially accomplished. CR acknowledges her beauty:

... stretched on the ground, devoid of her ornaments and putting on a face of grief and anger, she looked inexpressibly beautiful. So great was her beauty.

He then compares her with her supine body and unbound hair to a 'naga goddess,' the naga cult being associated with the worship of snakes and with fertility.³⁶

She is also an accomplished and courageous charioteer, rescuing the wounded Dasaratha from the battlefield by driving away his chariot after his charioteer was killed. She is also the acknowledged 'favourite consort' and it is to her that Dasaratha turns for pleasure. There is an obvious problem in conveying the idea of Dasaratha's sexual enjoyment of his wife because of the text's claim that he has married her 'for progeny.' CR circumvents this by creating for Kaikeyi a childishly sensual environment, quite at odds with the dishevelled and disturbing beauty of the previous paragraph:

He entered Kaikeyi's chamber to ... spend in pleasant talk the night before the coronation. The junior queen's residence was a beautiful palace with lovely gardens and tanks, birds playing in the water and peacocks dancing with tails spread out and trees

³⁶ O.C. Handa, *Naga Cults and Traditions in the Western Himalaya* (New Delhi, Indus Press, 2004), pp. 24-30.

resplendent with bright flowers...he did not see the Queen who he was eager to meet. Of all his consorts, Kaikeyi was the one whose company he sought for joyous relaxation from the cares of state, for she never interfered and always waited for him...with a warm embrace. The King was perplexed. He went round and looked in vain for her...thinking she was playing a sweet game of hide and seek...³⁷

The 'pleasant conversation' and 'joyous relaxation' stand as benign substitutes, diffusing Kaikeyi's sexuality. CR compounds this by introducing the playful and childish game of hide and seek. The image of a powerful King, who wields 'absolute authority,' indulging in innocent relaxation is juxtaposed by CR in his representation of Dasaratha as a husband. Suddenly, as he sees his young wife, distraught on the floor, he is:

The poor guileless King, all unconscious of having given any offence, behaved with all the doting fondness of an old husband...

Dasaratha's innocence is predicated on his weakness for his wife. He is later described as looking at her 'with hungry joyous eyes' when she finally deigns to tell him what troubles her. In a slip from his elevated rhetoric, CR utilises a military idiom completely of his time when he says that, on seeing this look

She knew her man and began to speak boldly.³⁸

CR implies through this episode that sexual attraction, particularly of older men for younger women, will lead eventually to the destruction of the family. This is not an indictment of age disparity in a relationship, but a warning against allowing room for an unnatural imbalance of power in the marital relationship. Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyi, made after she saved his life with her skill as a charioteer and knowledge of

³⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.57.

³⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.59.

the battlefield, and his promise to her father is degraded, as a ‘...boon that for ever will taint the fame of our dynasty with the ignomy of lustful dotage.’

The key to understanding this lies in the anxiety surrounding Dasaratha’s sexual attraction to Keikeyi. The qualities that CR ascribes to Keikeyi – obstinacy, cleverness, irascibility, ambition and greed - are attributed to her as faults in a woman, and unforgivable in a wife. CR makes a direct appeal to the reader, once again demanding their sympathy and moral judgement:

What shall we say of this scene? A great emperor, famous for his long and glorious reign, crying and rolling on the ground, clasping his wife’s feet and begging for mercy.

CR is building a particular model of disobedient femininity embodied by Kaikeyi, specifically as a young wife; indeed, the chapter detailing her demands is titled ‘Wife or Demon?’ Dasartha’s distress at her behaviour is ascribed by CR specifically to her gender and marital status, and his delusion a result of his weakness for female beauty:

Cheated by your face, I thought you a woman and took you for my wife. Like a deluded man, tempted by the flavour of poisoned wine, I was lured by your beauty in to marrying you...O, how sinful are women and how pitiless!³⁹

His warning to the readers of the text occurs in the phrasing of this statement, once Kaikeyi has told her son Bharata of her actions:

Kaikeyi felt glad at her apparent success. She could not look in to the future and its sorrow, for what greater grief can come to a woman than the scorn of her own son.⁴⁰

³⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 69.

CR is alluding to the cultural importance for women of producing male children, and the (unstable) honour, status and identity this bestows. The form of the question invites the reader to meditate on this, and it coercively encourages the reader to agree.

This is supported by his conclusion to this section when he encourages the reader to identify with Kaikeyi's 'greedy passion' in particular as 'familiar phases in our daily lives.' Sumitra, Lakshman's mother and middle wife, in her discourse with Kausalya, Rama's mother, further supports CR's promotion of this cultural condition for women, by saying:

“You are indeed blessed among women, for you are the mother of a hero who has scorned a kingdom and preferred to uphold his father's honour...shed all anxiety about your heroic son...”⁴¹

Although the element of predestination, articulated by the character of Rama as he urges his brothers not to be too harsh on Keikeyi is a feature of the discourse in this section of the text, CR, in his representation of Keikeyi as a wife and mother, cannot help remarking that when tempted:

Keikeyi was weak like any other woman.⁴²

Compare this to the words he gives to Sita when Rama tells her of his impending exile:

It is to me a strange doctrine that a wife is diverse from her husband and his duty is not hers...if Rama has to go in to the forest, the command includes Sita also who is part of him...

Sita, the iconic image of wifely obedience has her own mythology which CR selectively represents. I have shown how Sita was mobilised by Gandhi as part of

⁴¹ C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 83.

⁴² C.Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 55.

women's involvement in the struggle for independence. To give an idea of the success of this model, in a survey done in the late seventies that listed twenty-four goddesses, literary heroines and famous women from history an overwhelming percentage chose Sita as their ideal female role model.⁴³

She is commonly held to have been found in a furrow of earth by her father, King Janaka, and brought up in the Kingdom of Mithila. CR uses natural imagery as a trope for Sita's beauty, going on to add:

The beauty of the goddess earth mortal eyes cannot see in its fullness...⁴⁴

suggesting that Sita's divine beauty is not visible to the human eye: it is a spiritual beauty. This is the first in a line of narrative devices to disembody Sita, in order that her cultural and sexual purity remain unquestionable.

The first selective telling of Sita's myth is the story of Rudra's Bow. This bow, immensely heavy and ornate, 'which no ordinary man could move', was gifted to King Janaka by the sage Varuna. CR omits the part of the legend which describes how Sita, as a child would lift this bow with ease and play with it as if it were a hobby-horse. Instead he moves straight to that part of the story which has King Janaka declaring that he will marry Sita to the man who can lift it. Her physical strength is negated, in favour of a more traditional and authoritative model of paternal control over the events of the narrative.

It is worth examining the legends of Ahalya, and Surpanakha before further exploration of Sita's character in order to introduce some of the issues that are resolved by her character. As part of their princely training, Rama and Lakshman are

⁴³ Cited in Sally J. Sutherland, 'Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behaviour and Female Role Models in the Sanskrit Epics,' in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* (109 no.1 Jan-March 1989:63), p.63.

⁴⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 34.

apprenticed to the sage Viswamitra in order to learn the philosophy of *dharma* and the mastery of weapons. During their travels in the forest, they come upon a deserted ashram, and Viswamitra narrates the story of Ahalya, who had lived in the ashram with her husband the sage Gautama. One day, on seeing Ahalya, the king of the gods, Indra, becomes ‘filled with unholy lust,’ and so takes the form of her husband in order to seduce her. Though she is not fooled by the illusion, she is ‘vain of her beauty’ and allows herself to be seduced. Their ecstasy is short lived however, for realising her husband’s spiritual power Ahalya warns Indra to leave. He does so, but meets her husband returning from his morning worship. He sees immediately all that has occurred and places a curse on Indra:

“Lustful beast as you are, dead to all truth and righteousness, may your manhood fall away from you.” Indra at once became a eunuch and went back to the Devas in ignominious shame.⁴⁵

CR does not follow Indra’s progress, though the story follows that Indra, on returning to heaven and making a plea to his fellow deities is forgiven and he is re-endowed with his testicles. It is interesting to note that A.K. Ramanujan’s translation of Valmiki’s Sanksrit text has Indra being divested of his testicles, the repository of the reproductive agent, and not the phallus as in CR’s telling.⁴⁶ The accepted Sanskrit source is concerned with destroying Indra’s reproductive capability while CR makes the punishment for adultery a more specific attack on the phallus, symbol of masculine sexual power. Though Indra is quickly redeemed, Ahalya, unsurprisingly, does not get off so lightly. Her husband curses her to suffer a long penance, saying,

“Living on air, you shall stay here, unseen by anyone...”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 41.

⁴⁶ A.K. Ramanujan, ‘Three Hundred *Ramayan*s’ in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayan*s, p.26.

⁴⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.41.

Ahalya is literally disembodied for her sexual transgression, rendered invisible, and will only be redeemed when Rama sets foot in the ashram. This he accordingly does and CR treats his reader to ‘glowing’ descriptions of her redeemed body, purity filling it with light, shining ‘like a goddess’. Cleansed of her sexual desire, her husband returns to the ashram and:

...received his repentant and purified wife back to his affection.⁴⁸

Kampan’s telling, to which CR does not allude, has Ahalya transformed in to a block of black stone, while Indra is covered in a thousand vaginas. After a short time, Gautama relents and changes the vaginas in to a thousand eyes, while Ahalya remains imprisoned in stone, conscious but incapable of sensation or expression. Kampan also suggests that Ahalya’s husband was totally spiritual and indulged in no physical contact with her, a fact, which Ramanujan highlights, lends a certain subtlety to her motives in succumbing to Indra.⁴⁹

CR’s selective manipulation of the story rejects such fantastic detail for a more ambiguous, yet curiously more rational, punishment for sexual desire and adultery. Rather than a rock or stone, in CR’s telling, Ahalya’s body disappears. Indra’s punishment is left unresolved, and Ahalya, disembodied, is redeemed through suffering and penance. It is only the forgiveness or approbation of an appropriate male that will render her once more visible to the world.

I would suggest that CR’s manipulation of Ahalya’s legend goes some way to capture and convey to a mass reading audience the division of the world into ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ spheres, discussed in the introduction to the thesis, that Partha Chatterjee refers to when he describes the ‘nationalist resolution to the women’s question’. In

⁴⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 41.

⁴⁹ A.K. Ramanujan, ‘Three Hundred *Ramayanas*’ in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas*, p. 30.

one sense it is a simple moral fable about the punishment for adultery, which is not unusually, harsher for the married woman, but in another sense Ahalya's story suggests the danger of visibility for women, particularly in the display of physical beauty. Further to this, CR shows that redemption comes in the form of male sanction (through Rama's touch) and that the return to the home and family unit, symbolised by her husband's return, is the natural conclusion to the purification of Ahalya's body. That CR's manipulation of Ahalya's story is both deliberate, and not without anxiety is shown by his concluding comment:

That is Ahalya's story as told by Valmiki. There are in other puranas and popular stories slightly varying versions, but these need not trouble us.⁵⁰

Though CR acknowledges other tellings, including 'popular' versions his coercive aside to the reader is a subtle promotion of his telling as superior. CR goes on to explain the moral of Ahalya's story:

Calm consideration of such situations would show that they are just portrayals of similar difficulties in our day to day life...The lesson of Ahalya's episode is that, however deadly one's sin, one may hope to be freed from the consequence by penitence and punishment.⁵¹

Ahalya's story is for CR one which illustrates certain dangers, but also resolves them with specific punishments, and these are to be applied to every day life. He does not engage with Gandhi's sophisticated views of (to some extent equal) sexual responsibility, a key part in his, Gandhi's, mobilisation of women in the struggle for freedom. This is even clearer in CR's treatment of Surpanakha, who unlike Ahalya is not sought for pleasure, but disrupts the public sphere by seeking her own pleasure.

⁵⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 41.

⁵¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.41.

With the exception of Sita's banishment, the mutilation of Surpanakha provides one of the most disturbing moments in this telling of the epic, revealing as it does the negative attitudes towards women's bodies, female beauty and female agency. It is also the catalyst for the chain of events that lead to Sita's abduction and eventual repudiation by Rama.

Valmiki's Surpanakha, according to CR, was 'horribly ugly, but had the power to assume any lovely form at will.' In Kampan's telling, included by CR, Surpanakha initially presents herself to the two princes as a beautiful woman, and is driven off and mutilated by Lakshman only after she physically attacks Sita. The problem of mutilating a beautiful woman is resolved by her recourse to violent action.

CR seems to prefer the fleshier and more confrontational Kampan to the 'brief and simple' treatment of the incident by Valmiki. At the end of his retelling of Kampan's version, he says:

Kampan departs widely from Valmiki in this episode and he makes a beautiful episode of it...the Tamil poet appears to have felt something wrong or wanting in Valmiki's story and has woven an episode showing how bestial passion works.⁵²

It is worth examining both versions that CR gives in a little detail. CR starts with Valmiki's telling which sees the demoness Surpanakha catch sight of Rama in the forest, and become 'filled with uncontrollable desire...' She introduces herself as an independent woman, saying that her brother is the great King Ravana, but that she is:

...not subject to their control, but am a free person – free to do what I like and please myself.

⁵² C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 143.

After propositioning Rama and insulting Sita, Rama and Lakshman proceed to tease her as to which of them would be a more suitable mate. CR is quick to redeem the Princes' behaviour, intervening at this point:

Some critic might ask whether it was proper to thus torment a woman, especially a woman in love. But if we exercise our imagination and have before us a monster of ugliness we can understand the situation. It is true that she could assume a charming form if she chose, but in the intoxication of lust she seems to have omitted even this allurements.⁵³

Kathleen Erndl discusses the anxiety of narrators of the *Ramayana* story as concerns this episode, saying that the desire to show that Rama is chivalrous and fair is countered by a 'deep suspicion' of female subjectivity and sexual agency, when unmediated by the appropriate male.⁵⁴ Erndl suggests a certain ambivalence on the part of teller of this episode towards the actions of Rama, of Lakshman and of Surpanakha, and it is arguable that CR's ambivalence manifests in his interventions which attempt to explain the actions of these three characters. Rama and Lakshman torment Surpanakha because she is ugly – she forgets to adjust her physical appearance because she is under the influence of her sexual desire. The explanations demand from CR that we, the readers, *understand* their actions, in an attempt to reconcile the discomfort caused by this episode. By these frequent and direct appeals to his readership - the readership outlined in the paratexts - CR's interventions attempt to create a group who identify with him, with the values of the text and each other.

CR's telling of Valmiki's episode is resolved by Surpanakha's attempt to harm Sita. Before she can touch Sita, Rama intervenes and instructs his brother to teach the *rakshasi* a lesson. Lakshman takes up his sword and mutilates her, and drives her out

⁵³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, pp. 137-8.

⁵⁴ Kathleen M Erndl, 'The Mutilation of Surpanakha' in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas*, p. 67.

of the forest. It is of real significance that CR does not here or in his telling of Kampan's version give the details of Surpanakha's experience. He does not say how she was harmed. This silence, this gap in the narrative signals ambivalence, but also effectively creates a silence around the violence inflicted on Surpanakha's body. In Valmiki, Lakshman cuts off her nose and ears. Kampan's telling to which I now turn goes a little further.

CR begins by describing Surpanakha's transformation into a beautiful woman. Her language becomes demure and informed as she asks Rama to take her for his wife according to the Vedas. CR shows a deep suspicion of the beautiful Surpanakha, who after a failed first attempt to lure Rama away is described thus:

The fire of her desire unquenched, she spent the night, somewhere,
somehow.⁵⁵

This sentence intimates a certain male fascination with the sexually active woman. Ambiguous and suggestive, the imagination, which CR calls on so often in this text, is left to wonder what Surpanakha got up to in the night. There is also a clear ambiguity about whether her actions are motivated by lust or love. She speaks of 'securing his [Rama's] love' and tells him the moment she saw him she 'fell in love,' yet almost in the same breath she is vilified for her 'lust,' she is 'under the influence of lust,' 'impelled by brute passion' and 'in lust she had quite lost her wits.' The tautology of her drives is obsessive, claustrophobic and punishing, and of course, Surpanakha is punished. In the original Kampan, the details of her mutilation, which CR omits, Lakshman cuts off her ears, nose and nipples. That the female breast as symbolic both of female power and of maternal nurturing qualities is mutilated illustrates a deep contempt for Surpanakha's body and her actions. By mutilating the breast,

⁵⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.142.

Surpanakha is unfit to suckle children and unable to fulfil her gender duty as a mother.

Female sexual desire emerges as a negative force, love and desire cannot co-exist for the female subject - true love is pure, disembodied love; it is suggested, though it is ambiguous, that Rama and Sita abstained from sexual relations during their exile.

Kampan also points to Surpanakha's mutilation as the logical outcome of her lack of empowerment through chastity; her lack of self-control means her other powers will ultimately fail.⁵⁶

Through articulated sexual desire, Surpanakha renders her body impure and therefore fair game. She is mutilated, humiliated, and the actions of her tormentors justified. CR goes so far as to suggest that Surpanakha, 'who had suffered because of her own uncontrollable desire' directs her anger at her mutilation towards Sita 'who stood between her and her desire, and whose beauty and virtue she hated as darkness hates light.' Perversely, the sexually expressive woman even desires the men who abuse and mutilate her and directs her anger towards the representative purity of Sita.

Goodness and desire are incompatible for CR, and female sexuality must be managed by the institution of the family. Erndl, speaking about another contemporary popular *Ramayana*, reminds us that of the three possible statuses for women – unmarried daughter, wife and widow, none of which permits a woman to choose her own sexual partner. Just as a family's honour is invested in the chastity of its women, so is the nation's.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Kathleen M Erndl, 'The Mutilation of Surpanakha,' in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas*, p.82.

⁵⁷ Kathleen M. Erndl, 'The Mutilation of Surpanakha,' in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas* p. 79. The *Ramayana* which Erndl is referring to is the Pandit Radhesyam Kathavacak's, *Radhesyam Ramayana* (Bareilly, Sri Radhesyam Pustakalay, 1960). It is a fantastic popular polemic: at one point Lakshman turns to Surpanakha and says "O shameless! O disgracer of your family! If you have not been married then tell your guardian to get you married somewhere...if you have already been married then serve your husband! He is your God and should be worshipped! Wish only for his happiness..."

It is Surpanakha who suggests and instigates Sita's capture, down to the very last detail. CR has her going to Ravana her brother and in a disturbing image, describing how when she saw Sita, she imagined her in bed with her brother. Essentially her sexual arousal of her brother in her description of Sita makes him plot to carry her off.

Sita and Surpanakha represent the classic opposition of 'good' and 'bad' or 'chaste and unchaste women who appear almost universally in mythologies folklore and fairy-tales. Sita is light, pure, chaste and submissive by nature, contrasted to Surpanakha's dark countenance, strident independence, sexual activity and bad behaviour. Though the male characters are also divided in to good and bad, with female characters, the division is always described in terms of their sexuality – consider also erotic, demanding Keikeyi and virtuous unassuming Kauslaya.⁵⁸

The difference between good and bad women, expressed in terms of sexuality reflects a basic mistrust of all women. It would stand to reason, therefore that the good woman, represented by Sita should come out of this epic intact. However, this basic mistrust of all women is clearly manifest in CR's telling, and Sita does not escape intact. The character of Sita is a complex and subtle construction which does not fit neatly into the tradition of the perfect wife that re-worked Hindu national culture holds so dear.

Sally J. Sutherland suggests more poignantly, that rather, the representation of her character depicts the 'psychological concerns' of family conflict and reflects the attitudes of a patriarchal society towards women.⁵⁹

Sita is held up as the epitome of *streedharma*, and the model of perfect female behaviour. She is mobilised by nationalist writers of this period, including Gandhi for

⁵⁸ Robert P. Goldman discusses this opposition in Robert P. Goldman trans., *The Ramayana of Valmiki, Vol. 1: Balakanda* (Princeton, Princeton University Press) p.54.

⁵⁹ Sally J. Sutherland, 'Female Role Models...' in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109 No.1, 1989 p.63.

various ideological ends in order to instruct women as to their duty and behaviour.

Another contemporary popular telling exhorts;

Sita's life presents an ideal which should be the goal of the female sex. If there are five Sita's in one hundred women the world would present quite a different picture to the one we see at the present day. It would be a matter of great pride if our patriots, instead of trying to achieve difficult things will apply their energy towards raising the status of women by teaching them to reach the high ideal of Sita.⁶⁰

Sita's virtues are those of obedience, deference to her husband, universal motherhood, and above all, chastity. Though she herself is childless until the end of the epic she is referred to as mother by her husband's emissaries and brothers. The mother figure is beyond reproach, her body has fulfilled its function and need no longer be viewed as sexually dangerous. There is however, a cultural anxiety about leaving even married women and mothers alone with any man who is not their husband. This is reflected in CR's telling.

In CR's telling, Ravana's plan to abduct Sita centres around luring both brothers away from her. He persuades the *rakshasa* (demon) Mareecha to disguise himself as a golden deer and play in the forest before Sita. Ravana decides that 'true to the character of women,' she will desire the deer and insist on its capture whereupon Mareecha may lure the brothers away.⁶¹ The character of Sita, perfection itself up until this point, is now described in the same bracket as all women. Female flaws are inherent and inescapable in CR's narrative, while those of the male characters do not spring from nature, but rather as part of the working of divinity, fate, destiny, or as in *bhakti* tellings, as a route to salvation.

⁶⁰ Narayna Hemchandra, *Sita, Light of India*, (Ahemabad, Gujrat Gazette Press, 1950), p. 63.

⁶¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 151.

Rama gives chase to the deer at Sita's request and kills it; as it is 'dying' Mareecha cries out for his brother and wife in Rama's voice. Sita orders Lakshman to Rama's rescue but he, suspecting foul play, refuses to leave her. Sita begins to hurl abuse at him, calling him a traitor and a spy, threatening to kill herself and finally accusing him of desiring her sexually. It is at this point the Lakshman refers to her, in this epic, as 'more than mother' for the first time. Sutherland points out that this episode plays on a culturally generated incest anxiety – that one who should and does represent a son should desire her for his own 'wife.'

CR allows Lakshman to attribute Sita's accusations to her gender. Violently, he proclaims:

“...I swear your suspicions are wrong. I see now that after all you are a woman like other women, quick to think evil of others.”⁶²

It is Sita's own wilfulness and demands - the opposite qualities to subordination and female virtue - which render her vulnerable to abduction. She is not afforded Lakshman's prescience, when he fears that his departure means 'a great tragedy' for Sita is immanent. Sita's own disembodiment occurs in the telling of this episode, and it is worth examining CR's treatment of Valmiki, Kampan and Tulsidas. The oldest, Valmiki, has Ravana lift Sita into his chariot and take her to Lanka. Kampan relates how Ravana lifts Sita and the ground she is standing on, and does not touch her. This is CR's favoured telling, as he informs us:

Kampan's version is followed by most popular expositors because it is less painful to our feelings.⁶³

⁶² C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.159.

⁶³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 312.

She is nevertheless being abducted by a ten-headed demon; however, this is mitigated by the fact that he does not touch her. CR has real anxieties about this, and echoes Gandhi's view regarding the rape and violation of women's bodies:

It is no sin or shame to an innocent woman if a villain behaves like a brute. Yet mistakenly, we in this country look on the violence of a brute as causing a blemish to the woman's purity. It is in deference to this wrong feeling that Kampan departed from Valmiki.⁶⁴

CR connects Gandhi's radical, utterly contemporary notion that women who are violated against their will are neither responsible for the violation, nor morally degraded, to the philosophy of Kampan, a twelfth-century poet. There appears to be no problem in his seamless connection of a contemporary view on sexual violence with an event in the ancient epic, suggesting that Kampan's disembodiment of Sita was in order to spare her the approbation of society.

Tulsidas, the devotional *bhakti* poet goes a step further and relates how the Sita who is abducted is not the real Sita but *maya*, an illusion. The real Sita appears at the end during the trial of her chastity by fire. Though CR wishes to suggest it is out of respect for Indian women that these illusive or untouchable bodies are used in lieu of the real Sita, the distancing of Sita's body for her abduction is problematic. The narrative techniques only serve to enforce and exacerbate the problem of Indian patriarchal opinion to which CR refers. Instead of indicating that the abduction of the real Sita does not mean that she is defiled, CR promotes Kampan's telling in which she is not touched, or Tulsidas' in which she is a replicant.

⁶⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 312.

The standard feature of Sita's legend is the trial by fire. After a great battle, Sita is rescued from Lanka and brought before her husband. He is torn by suspicion and accuses her saying:

It gives me no joy to have you back, for dubiety envelopes you like a dark cloud of smoke.⁶⁵

Sita's body is obscured by darkness, like Ahalya transformed to black rock or Surpankha's dark swarthy features. Sita inhabits the marginal space between 'good' and 'bad' women; the influence of her husband's suspicion renders her body invisible. Rama asks Sita what she would do since he cannot live with her, as she has been so long in the house of another man. He goes on to explain that he waged war with Ravana in accordance with the laws of *dharma*, not from 'mere attachment' to Sita. The demon's insult was to Rama, and he was avenged. CR's narrative here indicates that Sita stood only for a principle; she is not real. Her physical, mental and emotional torment are not considered in terms of her subjectivity. She represented the locus of pride and honour for Rama. Here Sita's abduction is painfully resonant of attitudes after Partition, where recovered abducted women, were nevertheless rejected by their own and until recently their stories suppressed, lost or unexamined.⁶⁶

Sita however, proposes a trial by fire as a test of her chastity. She orders Lakshman to build a fire and as she enters it, the gods appear and condone her. Agni, god of fire, presents her back to her husband who says that he recognised her 'irreproachable purity' and had tested her to satisfy the people.

⁶⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 307.

⁶⁶ See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi, Penguin, 1998); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin ed., *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998); J. Bagchi and S. Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in East India* (Kolkata, Stree, 2003); Mushirul Hasan ed., *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000).

This ostensibly is where the story ends for CR. Rama and Sita return in glory to Ayodhya. He omits the last book of the *Ramayana* - the Uttarakanda - in which Rama again rejects the pregnant Sita and, after the birth of their twins, offers to accept her back if she will undergo another test of her chastity. She denies him and calls for her mother, the earth, to swallow her up.⁶⁷

CR avoids telling the final sequence, and instead provides a long theological discussion on the divine nature of Rama and Sita as representing the divine father and supreme mother. He goes on to recommend his version to children, looking upon the male characters as fathers and brothers, there to help and to guide.

CR then resolves his discomfort with the female characters through Sita. He appeals to India's *mothers*:

Mothers, too I know have been reading this story with joy...only women can realise and re-live the experiences and feelings of Sita. The story of Sita as told by Valmiki and Kampan can be fully appreciated only by women. Sita's sorrows have not ended with the *Ramayana*, they go on still, in the lives of our women.

CR's resolution is clear: the validation and strength of the male characters, and sympathy for the terrible lot of women. He elaborates further, removing the responsibility of Sita's suffering from the poets, in a wonderful collection of denials and impossibilities:

I have followed the story of the Prince of Ayodhya as told by Valmiki. There was a legend, current among people I think, even before Valmiki's time, that after recovering Sita, for fear of scandal, Rama sent her away to live in the forest. *This pathetic*

⁶⁷ CR's is not the only popular and influential telling to ignore the Uttarakanda – many popular post-partition tellings exclude it, particularly those for children. More significantly, the phenomenally successful state sponsored TV series of the *Ramayana*, broadcast nationally to eighty million people weekly did not plan to include it. Only a serious strike by sanitation workers in Jalandhar forced the government to sponsor the concluding episodes. See Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas*, p.3. For a critique of the TV serial see Romila Thapur, 'The *Ramayana* Syndrome' *Seminar*, Vol. 353 January 1989.

episode must have sprung from the sorrow laden imagination of our women. Valmiki disposed of this old legend through the ordeal of fire on the battle field. Even that ordeal does not seem consistent with Rama's character.⁶⁸

CR then compounds this explanation with another which suggests that Rama's divinity ended when he killed Ravana; therefore in his treatment of his wife he was acting in accordance with his times. Or, CR suggests, if we choose, we can see the Uttarakanda as '...a mirror of the endless and voiceless suffering of our womenfolk...', though we must remember that sorrow and joy are alike in the 'play of God'. Women's suffering is a manifestation of God's *leela*, or joyous play with the universe.

CR attempts to push the Uttarakanda into the margins of culture, into the realm of legend and female imaginings that have no part in the potential embodied in his text to be the canonical versions of the epic in the cultural life of the new nation. CR's anxiety about the place of the Uttarakanda deserves a few last words. In a moment of unintended double meaning, CR posits that the '*untold* sufferings of women' took shape as the Uttarakanda, and then frames this with an extraordinary statement:

...whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer...⁶⁹

Speaking to the nation, allowing the nation to decide whether the suffering of women springs in its epic form from the people, or whether the literature creates the model of that suffering to be followed by the people provides an interesting dilemma which diverts cultural attention from the value of female suffering, or indeed, as to

⁶⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p.311. My emphasis.

⁶⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana*, p. 312

whether that is what the Uttarakanda is about. Finally, such is CR's profound anxiety about this episode, he re-writes the Uttarakanda in his book of children's short stories, *Stories for the Innocent* (1964). In this, Sita asks Rama for leave to banish herself to the forest, and instead of leaving while pregnant with his sons, the sage Valmiki, whose ashram she stays in provides the un-pregnant Sita with two little boys to adopt. She commands Rama to make a golden idol of her, which has the power to 'make him forget the mortal world from time to time.'⁷⁰ CR negotiates the problem of sexual intercourse between the couple which results in the pregnancy, and Sita's purity, as well as Rama's banishment of her, by narrating these events as part of Sita's instigation, providing her with ready-made children at the hands of an ascetic, and denying her character the complexity of its mythology.

There is a deep discomfort on CR's part about the events of this last book. I suggest that it is marginalised for reasons other than its tragic nature, or its problematisation of Rama's character. If, as CR suggests, the Uttarakanda was propagated by women, it can also be seen as an act of reclamation by women, and this is what makes it so unsettling to the masculine nationalist psyche. Sita, rather than undergo another test of her purity after suffering the most profound rejection, and mental and emotional abuse by her husband removes her self and her body from both the internal and external spheres of masculine (nationalist) control. Sutherland reads this as the expression of the disaffection of the subordinate which turns in on itself; a masochistic impulse which uses self-harm as a form of revenge. In this way Sita's actions transcend those of 'wife' and become a culturally recognised act of counter-aggression against oppressive authority.⁷¹

⁷⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, 'Uttara Kanda – Revised' in *Stories for the Innocent* (Mumbai, BVB, 1968), pp. 209-214.

⁷¹ Sally J. Sutherland, 'Sita and Draupadi....' In *Journal of the American Orientalist Society*, 109, No.1 1989

Using this reading, Sita's aggression, inward and self-denying, might work very well for CR's nationalist telling of the *Ramayana*. However, I would like to pose this alternative. Sita's act of escapology is certainly aggressive and challenges the patriarchal authority which has dictated her actions, and which she had cheerfully submitted to. Yet she was born of the earth, truly a woman of India, and this must be recognised as a radical fact. Sita calls on the land not in a passive demand for protection but to collude with her in her act of defiance against patriarchal moral values.

CR's cultural nationalism, in its attempt to manage an archetype of Indian femininity as powerfully representative as Sita, cannot have her exerting this kind of agency, leaving either her husband or the domestic space. Her relationship to India, as with Ramabai Ranade, must be secondary and subservient to the service of her husband, allowing the primary relationship with India - the land, the concept - to be between Indian males and 'Mother India.' The ideal woman in CR's *Ramayana* emerges as one who must remain chaste to be visible, to be part of India, and her chastity may be contested at any point. The suppression of female sexuality in order to liberate the male subject so that he may be mentally and physically free to serve the nation, an ideology developed by Gandhi, does not necessarily mean the suppression of male sexuality in the cause of female political action and liberation.⁷² Visibility means that Sita's physical presence in the geographical and psychic space that is India is mediated and controlled by masculine and patriarchal values. Sita, by refusing to be re-tried, and by placing herself outside the sphere of patriarchal judgement and social censure, but still profoundly *within* India, problematises her construction as the perfect wife.

p.78.

⁷² See Uma Chakravati's chapter 'Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi?' in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*.

The *Ramayana* appears before us not as a single text but many. Jaina tellings promote Ravana as the hero of the story, a great King undone by passion.⁷³ In another, Sita is his daughter but he does not know it.⁷⁴ One South Indian folk telling is worth mentioning in a little detail. The epic actually begins with Sita's birth; Ravana and his wife long for a child and are given a magic mango by Lord Siva. Siva warns Ravana to share it equally with his wife, which he intends to, but instead eats the fruit and gives his wife the stone to lick. It is he who becomes pregnant, and gives birth to Sita through his nose. He is advised to abandon her and the story continues with her discovery by Janaka. Other South Indian tellings valorise Sita, who when her husband cannot cope with slaying the ten-headed Ravana, goes in to battle and slays him herself. In tribal tellings, to the distress of any Hindu devotee of Kampan or Valmiki, Sita is willingly seduced by both Ravana and Lakshman.

What this illustrates is the wealth of alternative tellings that embrace many sexualities, proclivities, ethnicities and concerns, and that exist all over India, and much of the rest of Asia. Nationalising through the paratexts, author intervention's pointing to a specific moral code, and by the formation of gendered identities that adhere to orthodox Hindu norms, serves to deny the multiplicity of difference, the important heterogeneity which creates and sustains the story, and which reflects certain identifiable realities within India. The tragic, limiting insistence on the chastity and non-desire of the female subject is at complete odds with the possibilities that were available to post-Partition tellers of the epic, given the existence of alternative tellings, and the nationalist rhetoric of a secular nation in which women would experience equality and freedom.

⁷³ A.K. Ramanujan, 'Three hundred *Ramayanas*' in Paula Richmon ed., *Many Ramayanas* p.33.

⁷⁴ The theme of incest runs deep in Hindu mythology and culture. W.D. O'Flaherty discusses this with reference to the *Ramayana* in her *Hindu Myths*, pp. 25-36.

(iv) Reading the Paratext; Constructing the Nation II

CR's telling of the *Mahabharata* was the first text to be published by the BVB in 1951. Its status as first testifies to its importance in the cultural life of India, and its importance for the emergent nation. CR's *Mahabharata* provides the climate conditions for the Bhavan's subsequent publications. I have examined the general paratexts which introduce all the Bhavan's books, and also the specific paratexts of the *Ramayana*. I now turn to the paratexts of the *Mahabharata* – the six prefaces printed in each edition of the text.

CR's *Mahabharata* is introduced by six prefaces. These prefaces appeared editions one to six of the text and all six are included in each reprinting of the text at least until 2002.

In the preface to the first edition, CR starts by locating the work as a part of national literature, and one which influences 'national character.' He suggests that the figures of rational historiography have less influence on the development of the ideals that form an individual character than literary heroes and events. In order to illustrate his point, he gives a list of figures from the canon of European literature:

Don Quixote, Gulliver, Pickwick, Sam Weller, Sir Roger do Coverley, Falstaff, Shylock, King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, Alice and her wanderings...⁷⁵

This curious list of characters is designed to represent a national character and imagination – as real to the British people as historical figures. That the only women on this list is Alice - a child trapped in a capricious and imaginary world is interesting: though in his journals CR mentions his knowledge of Austen and Thackeray, he does

⁷⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. (vii).

not include Lizzie Bennett or Becky Sharpe in this list of influential literary figures. Alice is suitable for her childishness and her location in a fantasy world, and CR's inclusion of Alice points to his own refusal to reference female icons for women with whom identification is made easier by similarities in status or experience, or by any notion of adult agency.

CR goes on to firmly position the *Mahabharata* as national literature by pointing to the specific appeal of the story to Indians, claiming that:

as long as the human family is divided in to nations, the personae and events of one national literature have not an equal appeal to all.

At this point, CR separates the *Mahabharata* from the canonical European references, and points to the special nature and the inherent Indian-ness of this story. Writing in 1951, this becomes a statement that both refers to the nation and contributes to its creation, allowing the *Mahabharata* to stand as a herald for the nation's values and ideals. CR goes on to mention those characters which evoke deep associations for Indians:

Hanuman, Bhima, Arjuna, Bharata or Sita...

Though this is the introduction to the *Mahabharata*, CR shows his deep ambivalence to Draupadi's character by neglecting to mention her in this list of those characters that should influence national character. Instead he replaces her with Sita, the good wife of the *Ramayana*. In the following paragraph he gives a brief explanation about the function of his text. He bemoans the 'complexity' of life which means that children no longer learn these stories at their mother's knee, and desires his text to

replace this part of the cultural education of children. He contextualises the main characters, using both the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*:

...the sweetness and sorrows of Sita and Draupadi, the heroic fortitude of Rama and Arjuna, and the loving fidelity of Lakshman and Hanuman...⁷⁶

Here Draupadi appears, contextualised by ‘sweetness and suffering’ and in partnership with Sita. This represents an attempt to assimilate their very different characters, and to create not only the image of a monolithic Hindu/Indian woman, but also to define her character as one who is ‘sweet’ and one who suffers.

In this and the following preface, CR is interested in proclaiming not only the national credentials of the *Mahabharata* but also the position of his telling as authentic and part of a sacred genealogy. In the preface to the first edition he is keen to point out that his telling is free from the ‘garish’ fantasies of *kalakshepam* and cinema, which divest the story of its dignity and, importantly, its ‘approach to truth.’ I have noted in the previous chapter that CR had a deep suspicion of the exhibited, or ‘realised’ female body and here, in the influential paratext, where his authority is privileged, the masking or veiling of the female body becomes a sacred truth. Sweetness, suffering, and in the preface to the second edition, misfortune, become the substitutes for both a body, and for agency in terms of Draupadi’s character.

In the preface to the second edition in 1952, CR explicitly marks out the boundaries of female experience for the women in the epics, and contrasts it to the hyper-masculinity of the male characters:

Bhishma, the perfect knight: the venerable Drona; the vain but chivalrous Karna; Duryodhana, whose perverse pride is redeemed by great courage in adversity; the high souled Pandvas, with god

⁷⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. (vii).

like strength as well as power of suffering; Draupadi, most unfortunate of queens; Kunti, the worthy mother of heroes; Gandhari the devoted wife and sad mother of wicked sons of Dhritarashtra...

It is impossible to ignore that in this description of the male and female protagonists, suffering, when attributed to a male character, is associated with power. More subtle is the marking of Draupadi as unfortunate. Married to 'god like' heroes, and undergoing the same privations as them, losing in battle her sons by them, should perhaps signal the power of her suffering. The event upon which the action of the *Mahabharata* turns - her attempted forced disrobing - may mark her for CR as unfortunate; however, it is also possible to suggest, given the drive towards the regulation of female bodies and female sexuality that the key to Draupadi's misfortune lies in the fact of her polygamy. She is not an easy female character to regulate, as Sita is. In this sense my reading of her character and role in the *Mahabharata* is different to the model employed for the reading of Sita's role. In this section I will look at the omissions and obstructions to the full realisation of Draupadi's character and of her mythology, and the emancipatory potentials inhibited by these omissions, rather than referring to the multiplicity of tellings that liberate Sita's legend.

I return to CR's claim for the authenticity, or sacred 'truth' of his telling, in order to examine the next section of the preface to the second edition of the text in 1952. CR writes that:

The *Mahabharata* discloses a rich civilisation and a highly evolved society which, though of an older world, strangely resembles the India of our own time, with the same values and ideals.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. xii.

He then goes on to explain the ancient feudal structure and the practice of one King proclaiming himself emperor, an act which required the agreement of surrounding royalties and kingdoms. CR indicates that ‘adherence’ to the ancient indigenous project of imperialism was ‘generally voluntary’ thus separating it in intent, form and practice from British imperialism. His statement functions as a signifier of CR’s complicity both with the ‘Golden Age’ theories of Hindu nationalism, and with the Orientalist fantasies of ancient India, further confirmed by his statement on women of ancient India:

Women were highly honoured and entered largely into the lives of their husbands and sons.⁷⁸

The obvious contextualisation of women as wives and mothers is promoted as a successful social feature of pre-colonial India. It is the following paragraphs, which detail the influence of the *Mahabharata*, that signal that we may want to approach this statement with caution. CR commits us to the idea that the *Mahabharata* ‘has moulded the character and civilisation of one of the most numerous of the world’s people’ and further to this that:

If a foreigner reads this book – translation and epitome though it is...he may be confident that he has grasped the spirit of India, and can understand her people – high and low, rich and poor.⁷⁹

Some salient points emerge here. The status of women in ancient India, as honoured wives and mothers, is one that is emblematic of modern India, closely connected to civilised behaviour, and the spirit of Indian identity in the contemporary moment. CR’s use of the word ‘epitome’ has a double meaning which cannot be ignored – both

⁷⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. xiii.

⁷⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. xiv.

an abstract, or summary of a text, but more commonly a *perfect example* of a particular quality or type. His language in this section can be seen as a series of validating and authenticating techniques for his own text, initiating ways of looking and understanding the role and status of Indian for the indigenous reader, and also for the male ‘foreigner’.

This preface to the second edition ends on a martial note, informing the reader that the *Mahabharata* ‘...has another name, known among scholars – JAYA – which means victory, conveying the moral herein indicated.’ This inclusion of the reader into the academic discipline of scholarship of the *Mahabharata*, and the nationalist fervour of the invocation to victory do indeed contain a strong message. Aligning himself with those right-wing conservative values discussed in the previous chapter, CR’s telling of this story anticipates and attempts to inspire the consolidation of a particular kind of militancy, an unreconstructed masculinity in the conveyance and reception of Indian culture.

The brief, exhausted preface to the third edition in 1953, one short paragraph, refers again to those strategies of authentication and influence discussed above:

One may tour all over India and see all things, but one cannot understand India’s way of life unless one has read the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, at least in a good translation.⁸⁰

This short statement highlights the concerns of the *Mahabharata* in this telling – the detailing of the meaning of Indian character and national identity. If the paratexts of the *Ramayana* create the conditions for the imagining of the nation as a space, the paratexts of the *Mahabharata* point to the creation of the identity and the values of the inhabitants of that space.

⁸⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. xv.

The preface to the fourth edition introduces elements of CR's own biography, and contains CR's premise, discussed earlier, that the retelling of the epics has been '...the best service I have rendered to my people.' He comments at the end of this preface that the English translation of the *Mahabharata* is a fulfilment of the intentions of the 'ancient sages of our land' who '...had never thought of any land or sea boundaries' and would have approved of this narrative as 'a form suitable for the present-day international world.'

The pragmatism of this statement can also be read as the kind of 'double-speak' highlighted by P.K. Vijayan in his discussion of hegemonic hinduvta masculinities. Pointing to the inherent unrealisability of the ideal/paternalistic nation state - unrealisable because in order to be striven for, or desired, the ideal nation-state must exist just beyond the boundaries of possibility - Vijayan discusses the different hegemonic interests of those investing in the creation of the ideal state. While one voice may proclaim the eternal enduring existence of the ideal Hindu nation, unified and homogenous, another will adopt a 'strident, masculinist rhetoric of action to be taken' towards the creation of the desired ideal nation. It is the consequence of this practice however, which inhibits or prevents alternative discourses or actions (in terms of gender) to be realised. As Vijayan neatly suggests:

...the projection of the nation as utopia...at one level dovetails innocuously with the existing hegemonic discourses of development and the desire for progress. Its ulteriority, however, is in the deliberate insertion of its own agendas...as the agendas of and for the nation – and *desired by* the nation.⁸¹

The move to avoid fragmentation associated with modernity, to assert the place of an ancient 'national' culture as the basis for social life in the modern world, is evident

⁸¹ P.K. Vijayan, 'Outline for an Exploration of Hinduvta Masculinities' in Brinda Bose ed., *Translating Desire; The Politics of Gender and Culture in India* (New Delhi, Katha, 2002) p. 98.

here. The rhetoric of this paratext is evidence of an attempt to cope with modernity, and does this by instituting the epic stories in this form, as the basis for a national identity that is both gendered and based on reworked Hindu cultural values.⁸²

The preface to the sixth edition that I discuss above in the *Ramayana* section, bears this out as CR invokes the essentialness of (Hindu) mythology for the development and sustenance of ‘national culture’, and connects this mythology to a homogenous idea of India by saying that it is the epic texts that:

...bind our vast numbers together as one people despite caste, space and language.⁸³

(v) ‘Their Devoted Wife’; Duty and Silence in CR’s *Mahabharata*.

I now turn to the body of the text and the story of the *Mahabharata*. The quote above is taken from the synopsis of the story that CR gives before embarking on the one hundred and seven stories that make up his text. It is Draupadi’s first appearance in the synopsis which does not mention her marriage or attempted disrobing. The work has a massive range: the current Sanskrit translator of the critical edition of the *Mahabharata*, Dr James L. Fitzgerald, describes it as the second largest epic poem in the world, running to 100,000 stanzas, formalised in ancient Sanskrit around 350CE, though it continued to develop in numerous literary versions in all of India’s vernaculars. In this sense, the diversity of the tradition follows a similar trajectory to that of the *Ramayana*. I would therefore refer to my comments on the implications of

⁸² See also, Thomas Blom Hanson, ‘Controlled Emancipation’ in Fiona Wilson and Bodil Fokke Frederikson, eds., *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism* (London, Cass, 1995), p. 83. Hanson gives a useful description of ‘cultural nationalism’ in India, and also points to Hindu nationalism’s ‘fundamental ambivalence *vis-à-vis* modernity’ an idea which contributes to the understanding the ambiguity towards modernity in CR’s paratexts.

⁸³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. (xx).

the control of diversity of the story in the previous section, and apply them here.⁸⁴ In this section I am concerned more specifically with the contradictions inherent in CR's narration and manipulation of Draupadi's legend and his cultural nationalist values. I will examine her status as a wife and mother, and explore the key stories of her legend in this telling, highlighting and discussing the silences which make them open to critique. I will also look briefly at the treatment of the legends of two other key wives and mothers in the epic: Satyawati and Kunti.

CR's telling runs as follows:

King Santanu, intoxicated by the goddess Ganga, has a son by her, called Devavrata. He lives with his mother until of age, and then returns to the earthly palace of his father. In order to secure more sons, the King, looking for a bride, becomes enamoured of a fisherman's daughter, Satyawati, whose fragrance intoxicates his senses. She agrees to marry him on the condition that her sons will be King, whereupon Devarata renounces the throne and takes a lifelong vow of chastity. As he does so, the Gods shower him with flowers and rename him Bhishma – one who takes a terrible vow.

Satyawati bears two sons, Chitraganda, killed early in battle and Vichitravirya. As the time approaches for Vichitraviya to marry, Bhishma, finding the princesses Amba, Ambalika and Ambika of Kasi suitable, abducts all three of them from their *swayamavara*, or husband-choosing ceremony. Unfortunately, the eldest princess Amba, in love with King Salva of Saubala, refuses to marry Vichitravirya. Bhishma sends her back to her lover who considers her polluted and rejects her. She is returns

⁸⁴ For an overview of the scholarship on the diversity of the *Mahabharata* tradition see: Barend A. Van Nooten, *The Mahabharata Attributed to Krsna Dvaipayana Vyasa* (New York, Twayne Publishers, 1971). Also, John Brockington *The Sanskrit Epics*, (Leiden, Brill, 1998). This work contains an excellent, extensive bibliography on a range of *Mahabharata* scholarship.

to court and is subsequently rejected as a bride by Vichitravirya, who knows she loves another, and by Bhishma who has taken a vow of celibacy. When she can find no-one to take revenge on her behalf against the powerful Bhishma, she undergoes severe penance in order to be re-born as a man, Sikhandin, who would avenge the wrong done to her by Bhishma.

Meanwhile, Vichitravirya must impregnate his wives. CR's telling narrates that the queens gave birth to a son each: Dritarashtra, born blind, and Pandu, cursed to die should he experience sexual intercourse. He also mentions the birth of the wise Vidura, born to Ambalika's serving woman. Pandu is subsequently married to Madri and Kunti, whom he takes to live a life of penance in the forest. Kunti is the bearer of a boon which allows her to choose six divine fathers for her six sons. Having used the boon once unwisely as a girl, she gave birth to Karna, whom she abandoned in the river. He was later found and adopted by a charioteer. Now married to an essentially impotent King, she shares the boon with Madri and between them they bear Yudhishtra, whose father is Dharma; Bhima, whose father is god of Winds; Arjuna, fathered by Indra, king of the heavens; and the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, fathered by the Ashwins. These five are known as the Pandavas. One day, taken by the charms of the spring forest, Pandu forces himself on Madri and dies. Madri emolliates herself on his funeral pyre and Kunti takes the children back to Hastinapura where they are welcomed by Dritarashtra and his wife Ghandari, who has bound her eyes out of love for her blind husband. She has given birth to one hundred sons, Duryodhana being the eldest, and they are called the Kauvaras.

The princes grow up together during which time Durydhana becomes increasingly jealous and insecure of their knowledge, goodness and prowess. After an unsuccessful attempt to murder them, the Pandavas leave Hastinapura with their mother. It is

Arjuna who wins the hand of the princess, Draupadi, but is commanded (unintentionally) to share her between his brothers, so she marries all five of them. The Pandavas then build their own city, unequalled in terms of splendour and justness of rule.

Ever jealous, Durydhana invites Yudhishtra to a fixed game of dice in which he loses everything, including his brothers and his wife. Durydhana, unable to resist humiliating Draupadi, orders her to be stripped in front of the court. When Krishna intervenes with a miracle, the elders come to their senses and return to the Pandavas all they have lost. However, Yudhishtra, bound to the *kshatriya* code of honour cannot refuse the invitation to a second game. He loses and the forfeit is for himself, his brothers and their wife, to live in the forest in exile for thirteen years. In the fourteenth year of exile they must remain completely undetected for twelve months.

The Pandavas complete their forfeit, but after fourteen years, Durydhana is not prepared to return their wealth or their kingdom. Thus the great *Mahabharata* war commences, with two halves of the same family on opposite sides of the battlefield. Before the battle starts, Krishna expounds the divine *Bhagvad Gita* to Arjuna. Though the Pandavas emerge triumphant, the cost in human life is enormous – both sides are utterly decimated. It is seen as the end of an era.

These are the bare bones of CR's simplified version. I have not included the subsidiary legends he also narrates. Even so, the massive complexity of this story is at once apparent.

I will begin by looking at Satyavati's legend. CR introduces her, not visually, but by her smell. Seeking the source of this heavenly fragrance, the King comes upon:

...a maiden so lovely that she seemed a goddess. A sage had conferred upon her the boon that a divine perfume should emanate from her.

CR goes on to indicate that the King, having ‘kept his senses under control’ since the departure of his first wife, the goddess Ganga, now sought Satyawati’s hand in marriage. Her father, while admitting that his daughter, a

maiden like every other, has to be married to someone...⁸⁵

offers her only on the condition that her sons will become King after him, superseding the ‘godlike’ Bishma. The King returns to the palace ‘sick with baffled desire’ until his son asks him what is wrong. The King is described as prevaricating, by saying he desires more offspring, being ‘too ashamed’ to admit the truth: that he is ‘mad with passion’ for Satyawati, and that in order to have her he must submit to the ‘shame’ of disinheriting his first born son.⁸⁶ It is Bishma who negotiates the marriage for his father by taking a vow of chastity.

Though the description of Satyawati as a ‘goddess’ immediately confers upon her that divinity which redeems her as being the object of lust for the King, it is important to recognise that CR contextualises her story with a meta-narrative of shame. Julia Leslie discusses the paradox within Hindu Indian culture which reveres the feminine as represented by the ‘goddess’ while at the same time ‘devaluing the female’ in the form of the woman.⁸⁷ Added to this, discourses of honour and shame have been identified by Susan Viswanathan as having at their centre the need for the control of women’s sexuality, and allowing its expression only in legitimate spaces. This emerges from a fear of the uncontrollable nature of female sexuality and sexual desire and its implications for the control over procreation. Shame on the family comes from association with inauspicious women; widows, menstruating women, women

⁸⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 9.

⁸⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Julia Leslie & Mary McGee eds., *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

who have had the 'bodily experience' of childbirth and unmarried, and especially sexually active unmarried women. Viswanthan also points out an important distinction that:

...these are male discourses. They look at honour and shame from the point of view of men, and women are merely the sites or symbols. Though women's bodies and their sexuality are central to this discourse, they are never the subjects of it. Literature does not explore women's own understanding of their sexuality or how they experience shame. This is because the focus is not on shame as an individual emotion, but as a principle of social organisation and relationships.⁸⁸

Here, then, CR has the King experience the shame of association with a lower-caste woman whose dangerous sexuality both repels and attracts him. Why should this be shameful though, when Satyavati, as represented by CR, is a goddess-like virgin who smells of flowers? We come to the first omission or silence in the text. Satyavati's divine fragrance, given to her by the sage Parasar, was in return for sexual favours. Born of a fish-mother, and adopted by her fisherman father, Satyavati though beautiful emitted the odour of fish. She agrees to have intercourse with Parasar, and so he creates a dark cloud which obscures their bodies, so they will not be seen. In return for her body, the sage gives her the fragrance that so attracted the King. She also bore a child from this union, the sage Vyasa, whom she would later call into the sexual service of her daughters in law.

CR's silencing of Satyavati's legend means that the King must have the shame of pollution transferred to him. Subversively, her legend lends her autonomy in the social relationships of court life, as we shall see, but it is this autonomy that CR denies her. He points to her sexual pollution through the device of the King's shame

⁸⁸ Susan Viswanathan, 'Sexuality and Power in Feminist Discourse in India,' in Menakshi Thapan ed., *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 316.

but negates her dangerous attraction by omitting her legend. It is also possible to suggest that the reinstatement of Satyawati's virginity by Parasar provides a confusing model for CR – her sexual behaviour outside marriage has no negative consequences.

In comparison, I will later turn to CR's treatment of Kunti's legend – Kunti, the honoured mother of the five Pandavas. The silencing of Satyawati's legend extends in turn to CR's treatment of the sexual politics surrounding the births of three key figures in the *Mahabharata*; Pandu, 'father' of the Pandavas, blind Dritharashtra father of the Kauvaras, and the wise courtier and warrior, Vidura. In CR's text, two paragraphs, in two separate chapters, relate these births:

Vichitravirya had two sons, born respectively of his two queens,
Amba and Ambalika⁸⁹

And

Lord Dharma, who was thus cursed by the sage Mandavya,
incarnated as Vidura and was born of the serving maid of
Ambalika, the wife of Vichitravirya⁹⁰

I will briefly outline the omissions in the text, and then turn to their implications.

Vichitravirya, son of Satyawati, dies of a wasting disease, without having had any children. In despair, Satyawati turns to Bishma, and urges him to do his duty to the family and beget sons with his sisters-in-law. This he refuses to do. Satyawati then offers to call on her first son, Vyasa, to perform this service. Vyasa appears immediately at his mother's summons, but in no condition to approach the Queens, as he was undergoing severe penance, and his figure was filthy and emaciated. He asks for a year's grace, but Satyawati refuses. He therefore has sexual intercourse with Ambika, who closes her eyes in repulsion during the act. Her son Dhritarashtra is

⁸⁹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 35.

therefore born blind. Next is Ambalika, who pales in fear as he approaches, and so gives birth to the pallid Pandu. Unwilling to suffer his caresses a third time, the two Queens persuade their serving maid to act as a substitute. She thoroughly enjoys intercourse with the sage and is passionate and responsive. Her child is Vidura.⁹¹

CR excludes the details of Satyavati's legend, most significantly the fact that Vyasa is her son, and that she summons him to impregnate the Queens, and in doing so not only denies her agency and influence in courtly life, but also in a curious move partially denies Satyavati's status as a mother. The cultural importance of motherhood to the nationalist project, well recognised, and discussed earlier in the thesis, is denied to Satyavati and instead, by omitting this part of her legend, her maternal status is masked - subjugated to the imperative of divesting her of her authority over her own person, and that of her son - in order to manage anxiety about her sexuality. This can be extended to show that what is occurring here is not only a management of Satyavati's sexuality, but of her body, and the product of her body: her son. Rather than allowing the incidents of the narrative to work for him as he does with Ahalya and Surpanakha, the cloud which obscures Satyavati's transgression is omitted in favour of a disembodiment which cannot even be symbolic; with her subjectivity utterly denied she is a cipher. The lived realities of women's lives, particularly in the period CR was writing, after Partition, remain unacknowledged in this text by the removal of Satyavati's voice and agency, by her disembodiment at the very inception of the story.⁹²

⁹¹There are some clear problems with these events in terms of the description of upper and lower caste women's sexuality, and Vyasa's power over the outcome of the physical health of their progeny that would benefit from further discussion.

⁹²See Seemanthini Niranjana, 'Femininity Space and the Female Body' in Menakshi Thapan ed., *Embodiment; Essays on Gender and Identity*, pp. 107-124. Niranjana argues for a discourse on the 'body as situated' rather than solely symbolic or encoded in order to access the lived reality of women's lives, the active orchestration the experience of being female through the body, not just the inhabiting of a socialised, mapped or constructed body. This means the 'blending of the biological

I now turn to Kunti's legend which has some parallels with that of Satyawati. Kunti is introduced to the reader through her patrilineal heritage. Daughter of the scion Sura, she is noted for her 'beauty and virtue' and is given in adoption to Sura's cousin Kuntibhoja, and is thereafter known by her adoptive father's name. Pleased with her duty and care of him during a visit to her adoptive father's house, the sage Durvasa blesses her with a mantra by which she may invoke any god to 'bless her with a son equal to him in glory.'

Curious about this gift, Kunti invokes the Sun god, who appears before her. Once again, the metaphor of darkness is utilised:

At once, the sky grew dark with clouds and under cover of them the Sun god approached the beautiful princess Kunti and stood gazing at her with ardent soul scorching admiration.⁹³

Realising her error, she explains to the god that she was merely curious. Kunti expresses her unwillingness to have intercourse with the god in terms of her status.

Kunti was aghast and said "I am an unwedded girl, dependant on my father. I am not fit for motherhood nor do I desire it..."

In this episode CR cannot deny Kunti the reinstatement of her virginity, which the sun-god promises her, she being 'mortally afraid of being blamed by the world'. Instead, he remains ambiguous about her impregnation – no physical contact takes place, and he inserts a comment on the nature of divine births:

Kunti conceived by the grace of the Sun, the giver of light and life to all the world. Divine births take place immediately without the nine months weary course of mortal gestation.⁹⁴

fact of womanhood with its ideological or cultural dimension' in order to be able to speak of the *body* as a subject.

⁹³ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 36.

⁹⁴ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 37.

CR navigates Kunti's sexuality and her sexual curiosity by narrating the conception of Karna as an act of grace. This ambiguous phrase implies a kind of immaculate conception – the breaking of her virginity is equated not with penetration, but with giving birth. The medical terminology implied by 'gestation' reduces Kunti's body to a biological organism, a breeder of male offspring. Though the divine nature of the birth allows Kunti to remain a virgin, the nature of her actions - motivated by sexual curiosity - must be contextualised. CR utilises the concept of shame, telling us that Kunti, 'to hide her fault' puts the baby Karna in a box and abandons him in the river. The conclusion of this chapter dealing with Kunti relates the circumstances of her marriage. She selects King Pandu at a *swayamvara* ceremony in which the bride freely chooses her own husband from a collection of suitors. Kunti returns with him to his kingdom, Hastinapur. CR then relates that he takes another wife, Madri and - providing context for his narration of Kunti's story - states:

In the old days the kings took two or three wives for making sure of progeny and not for mere sensual pleasure.⁹⁵

Kunti is excluded from the conclusion of the chapter bearing her name and dealing with her story. Negating the element of choice exerted at her marriage-ceremony, and reiterating his reduction not only of her, but the other royal wives' function to provider of progeny for the King, CR provides an uneasy conclusion to this part of Kunti's story, by relating that she and all women are cursed for her abandonment of Karna, which eventually results in his death at the hands of his brothers:

“You deceived us mother,” said Yudhisthira, by hiding the secret of his birth from us. You thus became the cause of this great sin. May women never be able to keep a secret henceforth.”

⁹⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 37.

Intervening, CR goes on to comment:

This is the poet's story of how Yudhisthira cursed all women in his anguish over having killed his own brother. It is a common notion that women cannot keep secrets and this story is a beautiful conception illustrating that popular belief. It may be that in worldly affairs, it is an advantage to be able to keep secrets, but it is not a great virtue from the point of view of moral character, and women need not grieve over incapacity of this kind, if indeed Kunti's legacy persists. The affectionate temperament natural to women may perhaps incline them to openness.⁹⁶

The detailed explanation of the curse firmly locates contemporary women, the women CR is speaking to, outside the sphere of 'worldly affairs' and firmly in the home. The idea that women's open nature will not allow us to keep secrets implies a veiled anxiety at the idea of an interior life of women, one which is inaccessible to male knowledge or control. Affectionate nature leading to an inability to 'keep secrets' is a suggestively childlike attribute, a fond description of the little girl who is always 'found out'.

The most striking thing about the inclusion of this incendiary detail of Kunti's story is that it occurs at the expense of a significant omission of her legend. In an omission almost parallel to that of Satyawati's legend, CR denies Kunti the control over her own sexuality and that of her sons, in his treatment of one of the most crucial, and also beloved stories which make up her legend. This is the polyandry of Draupadi, Kunti's daughter-in-law. CR's telling is an attempt to explain and contain the fact of Draupadi's polyandry and mitigate the fascination in her marriage and sexual relations with five brothers, which gives her an uneasy place in the pantheon of Hindu deities.

After Arjuna has won Draupadi's hand by a feat of strength at her *swayamvara*, he takes her to the forest retreat where he, his brothers and mother are hiding after an

⁹⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 412.

attempt on their lives. In order to deal with this incident, I will refer to three other popular tellings of the *Mahabharata*; one by R.K. Narayan, a contemporary of CR's, another, a romanticised, but detailed re-telling by William Buck, and the third, the only complete critical translation from Sanskrit, by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. These three translations span a broad time frame – Ganguli's was first published between 1883 and 1896, while Buck's appears in 1973. Narayan's telling was first published in 1958. I will use these three texts to create a frame of reference, in order to temporally localise CR's anxieties, manifested through his treatment of Draupadi and Kunti in his narration of this part of their legend.

CR's version is as follows:

Dharmaputra also confided to the king that they were the Pandavas; he also informed him of their decision to marry Draupadi in common....[Draupada] was surprised and disgusted when he heard they would jointly marry Draupadi.

Draupada voices his objections, to which Yudhisthira replies:

“Oh king, kindly excuse us. In time of great peril, we vowed that we would share all things in common and we cannot break that pledge. Our mother has commanded us so.”
Finally, Draupada yielded and the marriage was celebrated⁹⁷

By having Yudhisthira narrate the circumstances of their marriage to Draupada, rather than relate the details of this part of the story, CR effectively silences Kunti and Draupadi, and negates their agency by putting the narrative both given and received under male control, in a hierarchical way, Yudishthira being the eldest brother and Draupada, Draupadi's father. He also introduces an element of approbation, by describing Draupada's reaction as one of 'disgust.'

⁹⁷ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, pp. 72-73.

The story commonly runs that Arjuna, on arriving back at the forest dwelling with Draupadi, jokingly calls out to his mother to see the alms he has received that day. Without seeing, she orders him to share whatever it is equally with his brothers as is their custom with alms. She is shocked when she realises her error, and takes back her command, but her sons, respecting her authority will not hear of it. They agree to marry Draupadi jointly, *after soliciting her consent*.

CR narrates that the Pandava's have made a pact to share 'all things in common' and Draupadi is considered in this telling as one of those 'things.' By having Yudishthira say 'our mother has commanded us', he avoids any mention of Kunti's discomfort, or of Draupadi's consent. I have argued earlier that CR equates marriage with sexual intercourse and the birth of children. I have also argued that there is a genealogy of discourses which use marriage as a euphemism for sexual intercourse and sexual intimacy. Though CR points to Kunti's maternal authority over her sons, his ambivalence towards Draupadi, specifically in relation to her marriage, and therefore to her sexuality means that she is removed from the action of this incident, though it is concerned with the most unique feature of her legend, and indeed of her extraordinary status.

R.K. Narayan, in his telling of the *Mahabharata*, describes the scene following Kunti's command thus:

There was an awkward pause as the five brothers stood around uncertainly and Draupadi stood apart with downcast eyes trying not to stare at the five men who were to share her. What a predicament for the girl, who thought she was marrying one man and found four others thrown in unexpectedly!⁹⁸

⁹⁸ R.K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata* (New York, Viking Press, 1978), p. 54.

Narayan then goes on to describe Kunti's discomfort, her attempted withdrawal of her command, and her appeal to Yudhishtira for his advice on the situation. As he is contemplating the right course of action, Narayan tell us that:

...all the brothers studied the face of the girl and their hearts beat faster, for already, Manmatha, the God of Love was at work, stirring their blood and affecting their vision..⁹⁹

Narayan then goes on to describe how, having come to their decision, the brothers and Draupadi return to the court of her father in order to celebrate their nuptials. Though King Draupada is 'stunned' he transfers responsibility for the decision to the protagonists, telling Yudhishtira:

You and your venerable mother and my daughter...please talk it over amongst yourselves and tell me what should be done.¹⁰⁰

This telling, the one closest chronologically to CR's incorporates the elements of choice, mutual desire and agency. Though Narayan is by no means radical, referring continuously to Draupadi as 'the girl' he is sensitive to her characterisation, and encourages the reader to consider her position. In the confrontation with her father, we see Draupada investing her with an authority over her own destiny by suggesting dialogue with her mother-in-law and husband.

Narayan also includes the mythology of Draupadi's legend, describing how her situation was ordained by a previous life. He relates the legend of Nalayani, one of the 'five ideal women' who, married to a repulsive man, suffers his physical and domestic demands without complaining. After many years, she is rewarded by her husband, who offers her any boon. She tells him she wants him to:

⁹⁹ R.K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ R.K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata*, p. 56.

...love me as five men, assuming five forms, and always coming back to and merging in to one form.

This he does, and they spend many pleasant years together. One day, tiring of their life of 'abandon', her husband leaves her to retire to the forest. Unwilling to accept this, Nalayani, through severe penance, is granted a boon by the gods. When asked what she wanted, she muttered 'I want my husband' and repeated this five times. When she realised that the gods had taken her literally, and that she would be re-born with five husbands, she protested. Narayan concludes her legend thus:

Nalayani was born as the daughter of Draupada, without being conceived in the womb, but out of a sacrificial fire. Justice and goodness have to be reinstated in this world. The Kauvaras are evil incarnate...for the good of the world they must be wiped out and Draupadi will play a great role in it.¹⁰¹

Narayan, by including Draupadi's mythology, legitimises and validates her place as an equal player in the *Mahabharata* story. She is not merely a vehicle for progeny, a 'thing,' a passive daughter or wife. Her mythology is an example of the power of female *tapas*, and further, an ancient sanction of her polyandry. Finally, Narayan points to 'the great role' Draupadi will play in the action of the *Mahabharata*, making the reader aware of her importance to the narrative. Her morality and sexuality are not called into question; being divinely ordained, her polyandry is celebrated as she has the respect of all five of her husbands.

Buck goes a step further in his telling. In the scene where Draupadi is brought home by Arjuna, he describes the first meeting of the brothers with their wife. Draupadi is first introduced to all the brothers by name:

¹⁰¹ R.K. Narayan, *The Mahbharata*, pp. 57-58. Note that Panchala, or Panchali which Draupadi is sometimes referred to as, includes the prefix 'panch' which means 'five'.

The Pandavas all looked at Draupadi, and the Princess of Panchala looked at them. Then his brothers looked at Arjuna, and he said “Yes.” Draupadi said “This I will do.”

Krishna then appears and tells Draupadi she has chosen well. They return to the palace of her father where Yudishthira informs him:

“...There is one thing – Draupadi had chosen us all for her husbands.”
“She is a woman. I will follow her heart,” answered the King.”¹⁰²

In this version, Draupadi not only has agency, but her choice is respected on the basis of her desire, even by her father. She is described as looking at her husbands, with an equal gaze and they at her, and the decision to marry all five of them is attributed to her.

I now turn to the translation of the Sanskrit text by Ganguli. This telling provides us with possibly the most authentic form of this episode, being subject to the least embellishment, and also containing no intervention from the author. In this direct translation, Ganguli reveals both Kunti’s authority, and the original text’s concerns with Draupadi as a character. Kunti realises her mistake:

And anxious from fear of sin and reflecting how everyone could be extracted from the situation, she took the cheerful Yajnaseni (Draupadi) by the hand and approaching Yudhisthira said:
“The daughter of King Yajnasena upon being represented to me by thy younger brothers as alms they had obtained, from ignorance, o King, I said what was proper, vis Enjoy ye all what ye have obtained. O thou bull of the Kuru race, tell me how my speech may not become untrue, how sin may not touch the daughter of the King of Panchala, and how she also may not become uneasy.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² William Buck, *Mahabharata* (California, University of California Press, 1973), pp. 41-44.

¹⁰³ Kisari Mohan Ganguli, *The Mahabharata* (Calcutta, Bharata Press, 1893-1896, 9 Vols.).

This thesis references the complete on-line edition of the text at:
<<http://www.sacredtexts.com/hin/maha/index.htm>>, p. 380.

Ganguli also provides evidence of the invocation of the god of desire, and translates from the Sanskrit the legend of Nalayani, stating that Nalayani is awarded her five husbands in return for her penance and virtue.

I have included these alternative tellings, which closely resemble each other, to illustrate the specific nature of CR's omission of this legend. We can see how in the other narratives there is reference not only to Kunti's mistake in not realising she was requesting her sons to share one woman - an important lack in CR's version - but also of any communication between the brothers and Draupadi. CR's silencing of Draupadi's story undermines her legend both as a virtuous role model, and as a role model for women in intimate relationships. Her polyandry is glossed over as an incidental feature of the *Mahabharata*. This representation of Draupadi's relationship, avoids suggesting the sharing of her body between her husbands, and creates a cultural image of Draupadi that is amorphous, silent, a 'docile body' regulated by a wider cultural imperative.¹⁰⁴

The absence of this key feature of Draupadi's legend, which in its other popular forms describes a certain empathy between herself, her father, mother-in-law and husbands indicates a response to perceived female transgression, the transgression of multiple sexual partners. CR makes no attempt to intervene or to exonerate Draupadi as he does, not only with incidents of male polygamy, but also in the case of those parts of the *Ramayana* which make him uncomfortable.

CR strives to represent Draupadi as the model of submissive femininity; when she is first her introduced in the text she is described as filling the room:

...with the sweetness of her presence and perfect beauty

¹⁰⁴ I take the term 'docile body' from Susan Bordo's reading of Foucault. She points out that it is in the pursuit of an ideal femininity that 'female bodies become docile bodies.' Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight; Feminism Western Culture and The Body* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), pp.165-6.

CR goes on to describe her as:

...coily glancing at the valiant princes...¹⁰⁵

When Arjuna wins her hand, a riot breaks out, as he is dressed not as a prince but as a poor Brahmin. As the violence erupts around them, he tells us that:

Draupadi said nothing, but stood holding on to the deer-skin in which Arjuna was clad.¹⁰⁶

Throughout the narrative, Draupadi is variously described as ‘ashamed’ ‘anguished’ ‘shy’ and ‘helpless.’ Her representation in this text is an attempt to make her character comply with certain orthodox notions of Hindu femininity so that she provides continuity both with the monolithic construction of Sita and historical continuity of the nature of Indian women.¹⁰⁷ Her status as polygamous wife, sexually active and bearing children by five different men, is profoundly disruptive to the nationalist model with its concurrent rhetorics of self-control, female virtue and wifely duty.¹⁰⁸

The key scene in this epic, the dice game, turns on the attempted disrobing of Draupadi. CR narrates this scene with two significant omissions. Having described how Yudhishthira has staked everything, including himself and his brothers, in a dice game with his cousin, Draupadi is called for. Before she will consent to appear she demands an answer to the question of who was staked first, she or her husband

¹⁰⁵ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷ See also, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender Culture and Postcolonialism*, (London, Routledge, 1993), pp. 133-135. Talking about the discourse surrounding Indian women of ‘modernisation – without-westernisation’ in order to make them symbols of continuity rather than conflict, Rajan suggests that this ensures that women do not overreach the specific cultural and political imperatives for which they have been appropriated.

¹⁰⁸ For a revisionist alternative, written by a woman, see Irawate Karve, *Yuganta* (Pune, Deshmukh Press, 1969), in which she suggests that Draupadi is the source of the unity of the brothers, and that her marriage destroys the possibility of dissention among them.

himself. Durydhana, instigator of the dice game, demands that she come to the assembly and ask the question herself.

She refuses and is dragged to the assembly by her hair. She addresses the elders, claiming she was unfairly staked as her husband had already lost himself,

Then stretching out her arms, and raising her flowing eyes in agonised supplication she cried in a voice broken with sobs:
“If you have loved and revered the mothers who bore you and gave you suck, if the honour of wife or sister or daughter as been dear to you, if you believe in god and dharma, forsake me not in this horror more cruel than death!”

CR replaces Draupadi’s long discourse on dharma, morality and the law with this supplication to masculine notions of wife, mother, sister and daughter. Draupadi, learned in statecraft, emerges in front of the assembly and delivers a speech, illustrating that she has been unjustly staked. As an aside, anthropologist Irawate Karve, in her *Yuganta*, a telling of the *Mahabharata* story, says that if only Draupadi had made an emotional appeal, instead of ‘standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pundit,’¹⁰⁹ things would have gone much better for her.

CR involves Draupadi in a patriarchal discourse that locates her, and all women only in their relationships to men. Rather than allow her to expound on the legality of the dice game, he undermines her intellect with this melodramatic statement.

Interestingly, CR given his anxieties about Draupadi’s sexuality, is reluctant to locate her specifically as a wife or a mother. The significant omission from this scene is Draupadi’s initial refusal to come in to the presence of the court because she is menstruating. CR omits this vital detail, suggestively removing a key part of Draupadi’s protest, because he refuses to engage with her as a fertile body, the implications of which are her ability to bear children through sexual intercourse with

¹⁰⁹ Irawate Karve, *Yuganta*, p.126.

her five husbands.¹¹⁰ I have argued that the female body is a site of anxiety and revulsion for CR, and this is apparent in his comment on the decline of the order of the universe in the legend of Vritra:

...as a result of this sin, parts of the earth turned alkaline and became unsuitable for cultivation, and women came to be afflicted with the physical troubles and uncleanness peculiar to them.¹¹¹

Draupadi's appeal is unsuccessful; in order to humiliate her further, Durydhana orders her to be stripped of her clothing. Draupadi, begins to meditate on Lord Krishna, who performs a miracle. As her garments are removed, another takes its place, while Draupadi stands in total meditation. This miracle is a testament to her virtue and her spiritual strength; in CR's telling though, Draupadi, does not stand in meditation. After issuing a plea for protection, *she faints away*.¹¹²

Draupadi's lack of consciousness is symbolic of a lack of control over the situation and over her own body. Instead of standing resolute in deep and practised meditation, she is helpless and supine. CR represents Draupadi as unable to cope with the ordeal, rather than emphasising her spiritual strength.

CR also omits to narrate her vow never to bind up her hair but with Duryodhana's blood.¹¹³ The omission of this powerful detail negates Draupadi's role as bringer of vengeance, and denies her part of the complex motivation with which she persuades

¹¹⁰ For details of purifying rituals and codes for menstruating women, see Julia Leslie, *Religion, Gender and Dharma: The Case of the Widow Ascetic* (British Association for the Study of Religion, 1991), p. 12.

¹¹¹ C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 232.

¹¹² C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 113.

¹¹³ See Anjali Monique Bandyopadhyay, *The Religious Significance of Ornaments and Armaments in the myths and rituals of Kannaki and Draupadi* (Ph.d thesis, McGill University, Canada, unpublished), pp. 63-64. There is also a reference to the erotic significance of unbound hair in both E.R. Leach, 'Magical Hair' in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain*, Vol. 88, 1958 pp. 147-64 and Gananath Obeyeskere, *Medusa's Hair* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 33-34, 45 -50. These references are cited in Uma Chakravarti 'Inventing Saffron History: A Celebate Hero Rescues an Emasculated Nation' in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair eds., *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998), p. 256.

her husbands to go to war. Her role as bringer of vengeance is a key part of her legend; she is born in order to effect it. Her father Draupada, having been humiliated by an elder of the Pandava family, Drona, performs a great *tapas* in order to have a daughter who will wed Arjuna and thus give him power in that family, and a son who will slay Drona. CR narrates it thus:

The king performed tapas, underwent fasts and conducted sacrifices in order to win the gratified gods to bless him with a son to slay Drona and a daughter who should wed Arjuna. His efforts were crowned with success with the birth of Dristadyumna who commanded the Pandava army at Kurukshetra and...slew the otherwise unconquerable Drona, and [sic] birth of Draupadi, the consort of the Pandavas.¹¹⁴

CR omits the circumstances of Draupadi's 'birth' where she emerges fully grown from the sacrificial fire precisely for the purpose of revenge. It is one of three strong, potent images – her connection with fire; the erotically charged symbol of her wild unbound hair finally tamed and dripping in the blood of her enemy; and particularly her spiritual rigour which serve to make her a fierce and accomplished woman and a source of inspiration and strength. These key elements of her nature are subjugated to an orthodox and limited model of femininity where at the moment of her greatest triumph in effecting this very public miracle, she faints.¹¹⁵

CR negates Draupadi's potential position as martial and dangerous. *Mahabharata* scholar Alf Hiltebeitel has noted the connection between Draupadi and the goddess of destruction, Kali in the text. Though there is no explicit comparison, Hiltebeitel points out that:

¹¹⁴ C. Rajagoalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. 51.

We know this, not because earlier texts tell us about Kali, or even gives us direct allusions to her, but because the epic alludes to such themes through its depictions of Draupadi.¹¹⁶

CR does not accord Draupadi her status as a goddess to be worshipped in her own right. Her polyandry means that she cannot be subsumed in the service of nationalist ideology – she has no home, she has no ‘husband’ she has no mother – being born of fire, the deity of which is male. Her representation in this text reflects the deep ambivalence and anxiety of males towards women who function both as sexual objects and as mothers.¹¹⁷ Draupadi’s sons appear only once in the text, in one sentence, when they are about to go to war. CR’s refusal to engage with any details of Draupadi’s mythology are also reflected in the absence in the text of Bhishma’s second wife, the rakshasa, Hidimva, but not of their son Gatotchka, and also reflected in only the briefest mention of only one the other four wives of Arjuna, Subhadra.¹¹⁸

Though I have argued that Sita subverts her status as submissive wife, Draupadi, whose status is already subversive, is a less easily appropriated model. Her sexuality renders her dangerous, and therefore marginalised in the world of the nationalist epic. CR’s treatment of Draupadi has some serious consequences. While promoting the *Mahabharata* as a key cultural text for India, her character is denied voice and space. This is an essentialised vision of the text, and the culture that CR purports to represent: a cultural essentialism that effectively argues against the existence of female sexuality. In order for Draupadi to constitute and be representative of an authentic Indian subject, her subjectivity is manipulated and denied. Though CR tries to close off opportunities for Draupadi to assert her sexuality and her autonomy, his

¹¹⁶ Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi Vol 1* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1988) p. 151.

¹¹⁷ Sally J. Sutherland, ‘Speaking Gender: Vac and the Vedic Construction of Women’ in Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, eds., *Invented Identities...* p. 75.

¹¹⁸ See N.J. Allen ‘The Hero’s Five Relationships: A Proto Indo-European Story’ in Julia Leslie ed., *Myths and Mythmaking; Continuous Evolution in the Indian Tradition* (London, Curzon Press, 1996).

omissions allow for his representation of her to be a site where her surprising lack of sexuality and autonomy can be contested. In this sense her character resists the representation of this text; CR's uncomfortable rendering of her is stalked by the ghost of her true identity, seeking vengeance.

Draupadi is recognised as the sexually awakened woman by Indian feminists, self-affirming and courageously questioning of patriarchal rights and norms. Her silencing in CR's telling is evidence of the mortal fear her character invokes in patriarchal cultural discourse. Her refusal to identify herself with the model of the submissive Hindu wife is at once compelling and dangerous. However, the fear that Draupadi's character elicits is her strength; the very details of her marriage suggest her sexual awakening and affirmation. Though in this nationalist re-telling her voice is denied, her character remains a symbolic site of resistance, protest and embodied sexuality.

Conclusion

In this thesis I explore the connections between emergent Hindu nationalism and selected cultural representations of female sexual identities. Through the close reading of selected texts published in the period 1920-1960 I study the recurrence of a series of themes about women's roles and women's sexuality in the new nation after independence. My reading of these texts examines their common themes and concerns. I suggest that these concerns manifested themselves as attempts by Hindu nationalist ideologues to organise symbolically the representation of female sexual identities. I argue that one of the significant ways this attempt was made was through nationalist re-tellings of the Hindu epic mythologies of India, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, particularly through the representation of their central heroines, Sita and Draupadi.

The purpose of recasting the epic heroines was to create icons of femininity that operated within the boundaries of a re-worked tradition, a tradition that was being formulated by Hindu nationalism as the emergent culture of the new nation. This new national culture relied on symbols and mythologies from the world of Hinduism to define what it meant to be Indian in independent India. Not only concerned with implementing a homogenous culture based on Hindu values for India, this brand of nationalism also asserted its authority through the regulation of female identities in the inner world of culture.

My investigation begins in the colonial period, where a careful reading of two different modes of colonial rhetoric - orientalist and utilitarian - reveals some of the far-reaching images and ideas about Hindu women. These ideas and images,

formulated in the colonial period, illustrate that the re-invented traditions promoted by Hindu nationalists actually carry forward certain assumptions about women made by Imperial observers. The way in which Hindu women are represented in the works of William Jones and James Mill provides examples of how colonial observers viewed women in India and how they perceived their status. In doing so, these texts allude to the glory of the Hindu past, and the barbarity of the present moment, both useful constructs for Hindu nationalism to build upon in their definition of the genealogy of national culture - a culture that had been repressed by years of colonisation. This trajectory appears in the responses to *Mother India* discussed in Chapter One. I argue that the texts involved in the controversy over *Mother India* unwittingly reinforced colonial observations about the subjugation of Hindu women, *and* also displayed their own set of concerns about the possible consequences of an unchecked, active, female subjectivity - particularly sexual subjectivity - on the nation.

In the nineteenth century, debates about reform for women began to gain prominence and credibility. These debates centred on the practices most severely criticised by indigenous and imperial observers – sati, widow remarriage, child marriage and female education – and all were in some way related to debates about female sexuality and the role of women in the family and in society. Women were able to participate in these debates through the medium of their own autobiographies; however, read closely, these works are revealed to have a dual function. As they spoke more about the changing times and changing attitudes of their world and the men around them, they continued to collude with and reinforce dominant ideas about the submissive status of Hindu women. Further to this, as I show using the example of the English translation of Ramabai Ranade's autobiography *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, the 'self' is a shadowy presence in these texts, a

disembodied voice that hesitates to speak, or is unable to speak, its own life experiences.

By the early twentieth century, high profile debates on reform for women had lost some of their visibility and urgency. This disappearance does not mean that issues concerning women had been resolved, but rather that they had been resolved in a specific way by Hindu nationalism: by removing them from the arena of legislation and public debate into the inner sphere of culture. Partha Chatterjee calls this ‘the nationalist resolution of the women’s question’, and shows how this resolution relied on a re-working of Hindu tradition.¹ This resolution separated the world into the outer sphere of modernity and progress where men could emulate western advances, and the inner domain of culture that remained pure, free of the taint of the coloniser, a domain of nationalist sovereignty. Women were positioned as guardians of this realm – but more than that, were represented as actually symbolising the un-colonised, unchanging values of traditional culture.

A key argument of this thesis is that the recasting of the female figures of the epics provided idealised icons for emulation by women in the new nation. I make my argument for the relevance of these figures to the nationalist project in Chapter Two by giving a close reading of those of Gandhi’s speeches to women where the epic heroines appear. I argue that Gandhi developed and propagated the ‘epic model of chastity’, by deploying the epic women, particularly Sita, as chaste nationalist icons for women to follow.² Though Gandhi’s discourse, which combined reverence for chastity with an ideal of national service, was in some ways empowering to women, it

¹ Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Nation and Its Women’ in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 116-135.

² See for example: ² M.K. Gandhi, ‘The Position of Women’ in *Young India*, October 17th 1929 in A.T. Hingorani ed., *To the Women*, (Allahbad Law Journal Press, Allahbad, 1941), p. 22.

was a controlled emancipation that configured women either as chaste nationalist mothers, or celibate volunteers in service to the nation.

Gandhi's speeches to women provide a good introduction to the Hindu nationalist discourses on the position of women. In Chapter Three, I look at the life and work of Hindu nationalist ideologue C. Rajagopalachari in order to provide a context for the close reading of his versions of the epics that follows in Chapter Four. I argue that CR avoided writing an autobiography, and that, instead, his contribution to the nation was in the form of his epic texts. I argue that his personal life and experiences, and the influence of one of the defining events of his political life - Partition - give a context for his writing of the epic texts, positioning them as a means of remembering and reinventing Indian history. This unique way of remembering extends to his writing of women in the epic texts. I argue that CR's writing of the epics at that particular moment, after the trauma of Partition, and the hard-won liberation of Independence, represented a strategy in nationalist discourse to encourage a public forgetting of the violence and trauma - in part through a 'recitation of past deeds' - and by doing so replaced the trauma of Partition with an aestheticised version of history in the national memory, aestheticised by the separation of the 'violence' from the 'Partition'. This version of history relied on the production and transmission of new, yet archetypal, myths.³

I argue in this chapter that the writing of the epics for CR functioned as a means for 'healing' historical problems, of resolving political and personal difficulties. A close reading of CR's texts offers us the possibility that Partition represents a silence at the heart of his re-worked version of culture for the new nation. I further suggest that in the writing of the epic women in these nationalist versions of the stories -- his child-

³ Gyanandra Pandey, *Remembering Partition...* p.195.

wife, and the missing women of Partition (abductees, wives and mothers) -- will reappear with some permanence in their textual incarnation, as chaste national figures, as not only moral messengers, but connected to divinity through marriage and divine procreation.

In Chapter Four I argue through close reading and textual analysis, that CR's epics represent a symbolic intervention on the part of Hindu nationalism into the world of culture. His attempt to author a hegemonic version of the epic stories is signalled in the paratexts to his *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. A careful reading of the paratexts reveals their Hindu nationalist credentials: while positioning them at once as the cornerstones of an ancient tradition, the paratexts also contextualise the stories as guides for men and women in the new nation. They instruct the reader in the meanings of the epics, and outline their position in the culture of the new nation. They belong to that part of nationalist discourse that asserts that though they are examples of Hindu culture, they belong *to India* and engagement with them is a prerequisite for belonging to the new nation as an Indian citizen.

I focus on these particular texts out of a larger field as exemplary registers of this discourse. In particular I look at the recasting of the female figures in the epics, and argue that CR uses a strategy of 'disembodiment' in order to tame, control and edit the powerful mythologies of the epic heroines, in order to make them suitable icons for women in the new nation. I argue that this represents an attempt by nationalist discourse at a 'closing off' of possible identities for women in the new nation, replacing the potential for multiple ways of being with a single, monolithic, Hindu version of femininity that was chaste, dutiful and maternal.

I explore the way in which CR's Sita represents an attempt to construct an image of the ideal woman: desexualised yet maternal, sweet, submissive and dutiful. I also

attempt to illustrate that through intervention at key moments, CR shapes his Sita into what has become the stereotype of ideal Indian womanhood: chaste and passive. The efficacy of this representation of Sita is highlighted by Uma Chakravarti in her essay on the Sita myth:

From earliest childhood one hears the Sita legend recounted on any number of religious and secular occasions and thus one absorbs the ideal of feminine identity she symbolizes through the everyday metaphors and similies that are associated with her name.⁴

Through a close reading of Sita's character and that of Kaikeyi, Ahalya and Surpanakha, I suggest that CR uses the strategy of 'disembodiment' to render these women safely submissive. This strategy, that literally divests them of their bodies, provides an image of women that is appropriate for the new nation – chaste, desexualised and firmly located in the inner world of culture. I suggest as well that there is some emancipatory potential in the re-working of Sita's mythology by CR, but it is buried deep, and requires a tenacious reading to uncover it.

Draupadi, heroine of the *Mahabharata*, presents a more problematic figure for CR as well as for Gandhi. The complexity of her character and her marital status make her less easy to appropriate into nationalist discourses of the 'good wife' and the 'good woman'. Draupadi is dynamic, defiant and argumentative. Rather than disembody her, CR omits key parts of her mythology that show her as a learned, or a fertile, or a vengeful woman. His sweetly suffering Draupadi is little more than a cipher and does not even have the ideological potency of her milder counterpart Sita. This is evident

⁴ Uma Chakravarti, 'The Development of the Sita Myth: A Case Study of Women in Myth and Literature' in KumKum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture* (Bombay, Research Centre For Women's Studies, 1985), p.53.

even in the introduction to the *Mahabharata* where CR, in his list of important characters in the epic replaces her with Sita.⁵ Draupadi cannot be recast as an ideal of Indian womanhood: her character is assimilated into that of Sita, so that essentially she displays the same values.⁶

This is a re-working of tradition that sees the epic women, despite their complex mythologies that show them in lights other than compliant wives, being recast to represent an image of Hindu women, at once authoritatively ancient, and yet appropriately modern. I return to Lata Mani's famous observations on women and tradition. Mani is examining the debates on sati in colonial India, but her theories on the connection between women and tradition have resonance with and relevance to my argument. Mani argues that tradition and modernity were 'contemporaneously produced'.⁷ In CR's epics we see just such a production – a re-worked tradition that was of the past, yet belonged to the present and future. The relevance of Mani's discussion however, lies in her comments on women. She points out that tradition in certain discourses is 'interchangeable with 'religion' and 'culture', but that women are neither the subjects or objects of this discourse, even when it ostensibly engages with issues, like sati, which are literally a matter of their life or death. Instead, women are 'ground'. I will repeat here Mani's key point that I refer to in Chapter One:

Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of women was being contested. Rather the reverse was true:

⁵C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata*, p. (vii).

⁶ Uma Chakravarti, 'The Development of the Sita Myth...' in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture...* p.52.

⁷ Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India' in Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989), p. 90.

women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated. What was at stake was not women, but tradition.⁸

In the texts that respond to Mayo, in CR's epics and writings on culture, in Gandhi's mobilisation of the epic heroines, images and ideas about Hindu women were re-organised, debated and contested within nationalist discourses. What was at stake was the cultural life of the nation, the understanding and practice of Hindu tradition, a tradition of which the epics were symbolic pillars.

R. Rhadakrishan has suggested that the lack of fruition in the political area for the 'women's question' was precisely the reason that women came to be so coercively spoken for by Hindu nationalism.⁹ Yet in the sphere of culture, not just of politics, Indian women have found themselves represented by others: by colonial observers, by putative reformers and by Hindu nationalists, and they have fought at the margins to represent themselves. As Anne McClintock succinctly points out:

No nationalism in the world has ever granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation state, [women have been] subsumed only symbolically into the national body politic.¹⁰

This symbolic inclusion, however, creates its own space to contest the representations put forward by the Hindu nationalism. For example, Draupadi's role,

⁸ Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions...' in KumKum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women...* p.118.

⁹ R. Rhadakrishan, 'Nationalism, Gender and Narrative,' in Andrew Parker et al eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, p. 80.

¹⁰ Anne McClintock, 'No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,' in *Transition*, 51 [1991], p.120, cited in Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, p.7.

and the role of other key women in the epics in the epics have been largely ignored by Hindu cultural nationalism, partly, I would suggest, because of the difficulty in involving the women of those narratives in the project of wifely obedience and duty. Though the figure of Sita is required to carry the burden of representation of the chaste wife, a description that would ill fit the polyandrous Draupadi, there are parts of her mythology that speak of strength and autonomy.

The multiple identities increasingly coerced into silence by Hindu nationalist rhetorics of family, duty and female chastity in the texts I have considered here indicate by their absence that there are alternative stories of, voices about, and theories of, identity and sexual identity buried in the texts, which have emergent potential in the hands of the careful questioner. While these versions of the epics may have attempted to mediate women's participation in cultural life in India, they cannot determine it.

Texts and discourses that rely on strategies of disembodiment or disempowerment in order to talk about women have the effect of creating an experience of 'exile' or alienation of the self from the body. This is especially so when, as Mani suggests, tradition is made more important than women and when women are burdened with the guardianship of tradition.¹¹ These attitudes, colonial and postcolonial, continue to haunt women: woman as chaste wife and mother is valorised, while alternative identities -- single women, widows, lesbians -- are considered immoral and illegitimate.¹²

I do not wish to suggest that this is more than just a fragment of a wider debate, or that sexual identity should be prioritised over the wider claims of human social

¹¹ Ketu.H.Kartrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2006), p.157.

¹² Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body...* p. 157.

equality.¹³ I do wish to suggest, though, that the placing of the idea of diverse sexual identities into discourses of gender, nation and mythology has to be beneficial, both for scholarship, and for our lived realities.

¹³ I use fragment in the sense that Chatterjee concludes his introductory chapter 'Whose Imagined Community,' in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments...* p.13.

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