FEMINISM, TRADITION
AND
MODERNITY

FEMINISM, TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Edited by

CHANDRAKALA PADIA

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To

My parents and to

my mentor

PROF. S.K. SAXENA

who make me

tread my path self-critically

and

nurture my faith

in values all through

Foreword

In the last few decades, feminist theory has emerged as one of the most challenging areas of thought. Earlier, feminist movements and theories have been confined to European and North American perspectives ignoring the diverse realities and socio-cultural background of the third world women. Now, new methodologies and rich perspectives have sprung up to analyse the complexities of the situation and problems of third world women. In the Contemporary World, there appears to be more need for the critique of modernity and Western hegemony, the focus on difference and identity, the emphasis on the relationship between culture and gender, and the deconstruction of colonial and post-colonial representations of South Women as a dependent 'other'.

I believe that the present book emerging out of the national seminar on Feminism, Tradition and Modernity may prove to be a watershed in developing the above perspective. All the papers presented in the seminar clearly lay down how the present feminist studies suffer from deepseated ethnocentric and eurocentric biases; how the Indian reality has been studied and viewed from some borrowed Western frameworks; and how this all has resulted in narrow understanding of India's rich tradition of sociological thinking. Indian Feminist movement should be rooted in Indian tradition, of course with orientation towards modern needs and aspirations of Indian nationhood.

I congratualate Professor Chandrakala Padia for taking initiative in this direction and presenting an indigenous model for dealing with the problems of women in India. All the paper presenters deserve applause. I feel privileged to be a part of such a meaningful seminar that may create a new history in Women Studies.

Indian Institute of Advanced Study V.C. SRIVASTAVA
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla Director

Preface

A seminar is no mere happening. It is an exercise in serious reflection from diverse points of view, and it must target a matter of obvious relevance. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study has surely acted on purpose. Few subjects are more urgent and contemporary than the one chosen for the present seminar. So, if we, the participants, have reason to be grateful to the Institute and its Director, as we surely are, it is essentially because of the *subject's* clear significance.

At the same time, it is not easy to deal with the subject chosen, as a whole and clearly. Feminism may, quite generally, be taken to signify a renascent concern for women's welfare. But the concepts of tradition and modernity are pretty complex. Nor is it easy to see how exactly they are related, in fact and in principle, to the role and status of women in society.

Two points, here, are indeed a little ticklish. First, in our study of traditional texts, do we always take care to relate them to the specific socio-cultural contexts in which they were written? What looks odd to us today may well have been *demanded* by their day. Secondly, tradition is not merely a matter of practice; it is also to be found embodied in books, as argument and as distillation of wisdom from long and deep observation of life-experience. So, though social practices may well have been improper in a particular period of history, is it not possible that the books of those days may yet be able to provide some gems of insight for situating women in relation to tradition and modernity?

Luckily, the essays which the present work comprises are enlightening enough. This is partly because of the sheer variety of disciplines which the essayists represent. A virtual bouquet of viewpoints is at work in this book. Specialists in literature, philosophy, ancient Indian history and culture, political science

and sociology-all have helped in making the present venture click happily.

It is noteworthy that male contributors to this volume have been just as keen to throw light on the subject as women participants. This itself may be regarded as a welcome index of things to come.

I may now move to the end of this introductory note with a sort of apology and a word of gratitude. *My* name, as a contributor, occurs *twice* in the book. This may make it look a little uneven; but, I explain, the closing essay, 'Gandhi on Women', *had* to be included simply because scholars who had been invited to write on the crucial subject could not somehow find it convenient to do so.

Finally, as Convener of the Seminar, I may touch a quiet note of gratitude: to Professor G.C. Pande, Chairman of IIAS, for helping me in fixing the subject of the seminar; to the Institute's Director, Professor V.C. Srivastava, for generating the basic urge in me to cope with such a formidable job and, for providing essential facilities to all those who took part in the Seminar, as also to his office staff for their secretarial help; and to all the scholarly participants for making me better alive to the many ways of dealing with the subject gainfully.

The book is dedicated to Professor S.K. Saxena (Former Professor of philosophy, Delhi University) whose intense sense of values have ever baffled me—I would not have been what I am today without his benevolent guidance.

I am at loss of words to express my gratitude to my parents Smt. Savitri Ginodia and Shri R.P. Ginodia without whose divine presence and benign support the project would not have been a reality.

I also owe my gratitude to Professor Nalini Pant and Dr. Anuradha Banerjee for their generous support and valuable insights.

I also thank Ms Snehi Chauhan for meticulously reading the proofs of this book; and to Mr. N.K. Maini for his invaluable technical assistance.

Last but not the least, I acknowledge the unfailing commitment and support of my son, Dr. Abhishek Chandra in completion of this work.

Message

G.C. PANDE

The seminar on *"Feminism, Tradition and Modernity"* being organised by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, is particularly appropriate in this year dedicated to women. For a long time, human history has been recounted principally as the history of kings and priests, and consequently as the history of either violence or of the renunciation of the world. The life of the common people where women hold the central place, has been almost totally neglected. Even the modern emphasis on social history is largely concerned with institutional, legal or economic structures. The human face of history, with an appropriate emphasis on the role of women, is still to come of age.

The modern feminist movements have arisen largely as protest movements and often seek to promote the image of woman after the image of man. The slogans of abstract equality and freedom have been raised, so that women might be able to compete with men in fair measure. While the iniquitous restrictions, under which women have lived through the ages, certainly need to be removed and a new social order needs to be created where women would have the same opportunities of education, training and work as men, it is also necessary to give adequate emphasis to the *distinctive* role and capacities which women bring to the social order.

The Indian tradition visualizes the woman as the other half of man. In other words, it emphasizes the complementarity of the relationship between man and woman. *In a proper social order, they would not be competing but cooperating.* In fact, the whole idea of a competitive society is a peculiar feature belonging to the modern western society and being sought to be emulated by non-western societies, though in a very imperfect manner. In India, for example, the principle of reverse discrimination largely offsets the competitive principle. Traditional societies, by and large, are not

based on competition. The principle of ubiquitous competition, in fact, overemphasizes the value of economic production and has been the offspring of an individualistic and capitalistic industrial system. It needs to be adopted with much modification.

Apart from being viewed as the complementary half of man, the woman is regarded in the Indian tradition as the mother who is also the first teacher of her children. Doubtless, in pre-modern conditions, women's lives were oppressed by repeated pregnancies, which were often uncontrolled and unsafe and took a heavy toll of the lives of women as mothers. Happily, this situation can now be corrected with preventive advancements of medical science. Nevertheless, *the centrality of motherhood in a woman's life remains unquestionable.*

Women, again, have been viewed in Indian tradition as the image of loveliness and delight. It is said that Mother Sarada once asked Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa what she was to him. His reply was "*Sudhu Anandamayee*"—pure delight. All arts and literature are focused on this aspect of womanhood.

While wishing success to the seminar, I would plead for a holistic view, which sees women and men as together constituting a larger unity. For such a realization, it would be necessary to create a new educational environment for both women and men. I am sure that under the able leadership of Professor V.C. Srivastava, Director of the Institute, and the learned scholars gathered for the seminar, it will be eminently successful.

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Introduction

Contemporary feminist discourse in India has come a long way in putting an edge on feminist consciousness and thought. With a fair measure of success, it has tried to expose the gender bias present in many of our literary texts, political treatises and historical documents. Nor has it failed to show that patriarchal bias all along vitiates the very ways in which questions about women are posed and answered.

Such attitudes have to be examined with care. But because they themselves may be tainted with prejudice, our way of looking at them has to be balanced and impartial. We can neither merely acquiesce in all that the traditional texts say, or are supposed to say about women, nor reject it impatiently in toto. We have to discover and seize the basic human values in them and to reject what is offensive to common sense and disrespectful to human dignity.

Care has to be exercised, I may add, not only in respect of the study of our ancient texts but quite as much in our concern with modern writing on feminism; for, most of our scholars and researchers today have accepted and built upon the Western models a bit too glibly, at times to the extent of blind acceptance. Such uncritical following has not only led to a misreading of our ancient texts that are unduly faulted, but also to suggestions and views that are neither warranted by these texts which are unfairly held responsible for the plight of women, nor are helpful to the preservation of values that still sustain our family life today.

How can one explain this intellectual perversity? I would say, as follows:

> By and large, we have ignored our long tradition of sociological thinking that has always been careful of the internal diversity of

Indian social reality and so sensitive to the intrinsic non-absoluteness of sociological constructs.

Western thought holds the field today in almost every region of intellectual activity, and quite a few of our scholars today find it convenient to fit the Indian social reality to borrowed (Western) frameworks of thought, with scant regard for our own history of social theory and practice. In doing so, many of us have unquestioningly accepted all Western assumptions and constructs. This, in turn, has distorted the proper tenor of our discourse and methodology. The scholars in question first arbitrarily select such extracts from our philosophical texts as appear to lend point to Western theory, and then pick, at their convenience, such emphases from modern Western theory and thought as serve to highlight what is admittedly condemnable in our attitude to our women today. These self-styled spokesmen of modernity are quite uninformed about the essentials of traditional Indian sociological thought. Any sociological criticism will be inadequate if it restricts itself only to the level of phenomena and does not pay due attention to their conceptual foundations.

It seems imperative, at this point, to briefly highlight some of the cardinal features of Indian cultural tradition. It advocates an integrated working of the body, mind and spirit, without which attainment of the ultimate end of life, that is, self-realization is not possible. It is quite different from the predominantly material civilization like that of the West today. By and large, our emphasis has been on the need to rise up to a fuller vision of the Eternal by following the dictates of conscience, morality and *dharma* and higher psychological practices. Our whole social system, and our philosophy, religion and yoga, art and literature—all are, in principle, directed at this end. This is to be seen not only in our most ancient scriptures and books of knowledge and sāstras like the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads,* but in the Smrtis which are products of a much later period. To quote Manusmṛti:

सर्वामात्मनि सम्पश्येत्सच्चासच्च समाहितः ।
सर्व ह्यात्मनि संपश्यन्नाधर्मे केरूतू मनः ।। (Manu, XII, 118)

> Let man discriminate between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false, the real and the unreal; and thus discriminating, let him yet one-pointedly ever behold everything in the Self, the transitory as well as that which abides. He who beholdeth all in the Self… his mind strayeth not into sin.

The underlying idea that resonates most clearly in our basic philosophical tradition is that a person is not only an individual among other individuals, but is, in principle, knit indissolubly with a family, a community, and ultimately with the whole human race. This is the reason why we have never looked on society as a mere aggregate of individuals, but rather as a living organism where everyone is a complement of the other, and should therefore, help in creating, sustaining and reinforcing an evolved social order.

Naturally, different roles are assigned to different persons, in accordance with their individual natures and aptitudes. There is no place here for the Utopia of wholly independent and isolated individuals. The dominant emphasis has always been on collective social interdependence. Superficially, this may seem to be oppressive, undemocratic; but in practice, such a view makes for the promotion of social cohesion and stability, and an overall improvement in the quality of life. In the hierarchy of a social structure so conceived, the so-called subordinates and superiors are both allotted specific and socially helpful functions. The former gets a chance to cultivate deference, loyalty, and obedience reasonably; and the latter, to develop the attitudes of nurturance and concern in such a way that the *subordinates* capacity for self-effort may not be harmed.

Unfortunately, this behaviour pattern, which is still there in quite a few Indian families, is often misunderstood by Western scholars as sheer passivity and compliance. They miss the fact that these sets of values for subordinates and superiors are reciprocal. The relationships involved are oriented towards the well being of the extended family as a whole. The practice of hierarchical values tends to orient the husband and the wife towards caring for the larger family. *Generally, the emphasis is on doing of one's duty (dharma), as against the egoistic play of individual tastes and wishes, that is, on the inner cultivation of the right sense of*

values than on merely formal propriety. The entire value system rests on the need to cooperate with, and to understand each other, and also to appreciate individual differences and abilities.

In such a social set-up, it is obvious, women could never be regarded as inferior to men. Our traditional texts, in fact, accorded her a very high position in society, mainly because of her exceptional nurturing abilities. But the trouble with contemporary feminist theory is that it glibly equates all that is traditional with conservatism, repression, blind faith and backwardness; and, on the other hand, sheer rationality and freedom, and progress in science and technology—which hold the field today—with the only marks of true modernity. What is worse, the two words, *tradition and modernity,* have been generally so interpreted as to favour imperialism, exaggerated individualism, and blind nationalism. Such an impatient and ill balanced attitude has led to crass indifference to the details of truth and reality.

This attitude, however, has not sprung of itself. The colonial bias has been at work. It is this which has led to a gross misinterpretation of the role and value of women in our ancient texts and to a wholesale distortion of our educational curricula towards western literature and values, and away from Indian cultural traditions. However, such defects can be remedied. We have only to realize that our word for tradition—that is, *paramparā*—does not exclude progress, but only signifies continuity of progress in the light of, without being tied down to past experience. Further, this *paramparā* has always rejected *that* anthropology which promotes alienation; *that* ontology which believes in pure naturalism; *that* epistemology which believes in sheer empiricism; and *that* motivation which aims at repression of others, as against eliciting their willing cooperation. Positively, it has always stood for participation, care for spiritual values, and idealism, and wisdom as against mere scholarship. These are the values that have existed since times immemorial and have all along provided coherence and stability to Indian society. *It is only the greed-centered people who impose their selfish will on others and treat them as mere tools and instruments, to the total neglect of the ideals laid down*

in Śāstras. It is these people only who should be blamed for the distortion of the texts to serve their own selfish ends.

Therefore, there is an obvious need to turn to our time-honoured view of *paramparā,* which has never been indifferent to spiritual values. It is in this connection heartening to note that the once fashionable modes of thinking have already been outgone in some fields of learning. Psychology, for instance, has recently taken a leap from its experimental and cognitive forms to clinical, then humanistic, and finally transpersonal psychology. Indifference to the ethico-religious slant of our tradition, as outlined above, has resulted in a gross underestimation of the value of our texts leading, incidentally, to quite a few blunders in scholarship, both Indian and Western. Who does not know that the Ṛg Vedic verse X. 18.7. was interpreted for long in such a way that it could be taken to prove that Sati Pratha has the sanction of Ṛg Veda. Several *mantras* which did not support this interpretation were tactfully ignored. The truth, on the other hand, is that Ṛg Veda not only allowed re-marriage, but encouraged it for the clear purpose of individual welfare, social cohesion and stability. Besides, other *mantras* of Ṛg Veda (X. 18.8) clearly direct the widows to arise from the front of the husband's dead body and resume their household duties. A similar wrong has been done to *Manusmṛti.* Scholars quote those verses from it freely which appear to impose some restrictions on women, but tactfully ignore those verses where she is provided with innumerable rights and privileges.

I may now set out to say something about the essays that make this volume. This may help the reader to pick the material which is like to interest her (or him) most, in accordance with one's individual academic concern. The varying length of these *prefatory remarks* is not to be taken as an index of the comparative worth of the essays they relate to. In each case I have only tried to pick the salient points and to put them briefly, but clearly. The essays in respect of which my remarks may seem to be rather inadequate are those which, in their full form, I received very late, that is, when due space had already been devoted to comments on essays received in good time.

Now, two enlightening attempts to provide a proper theoretical perspective to the subject of the Seminar are papers presented by Professor Kapil Kapoor and Professor Avadhesh Kumar Singh. Professor Kapoor's paper is titled as *Hindu Women, Traditions and Modernity.* The following should serve as an adequate preamble to it:

> As in other areas of knowledge, so in women's studies as well, we have tried to fit the Indian reality to some borrowed Western frameworks. In the process, we have accepted the assumptions and constructs of the shifting western feminist theories—assumptions and constructs that are more often than not culture/history bound—and then select Indian social phenomena, knowledge texts, specifically sociological texts *(Dharmaśāstras),* epics, *purāṇas* and literary texts are picked to demonstrate the adequacy of Western theories and to rubbish the Indian tradition. As the Indian traditions, reality, and context are different, and as India has a tremendously rich tradition (continuous and cumulative) of sociological thinking that has always taken into account the multiplicity and diversity of Indian social reality and has also been sensitive to the intrinsic non-absoluteness of sociological constructs, it is not only advisable but imperative to look into the whole question of the condition and status of women by locating oneself in this Indian paradigm. In not doing this we are either cussed or dishonest.

Accepting and applying Western frameworks uncritically has the further limitation of not being truly sensitive to the evolution of western thought itself in the relevant domain. As is evident, *we* often get trapped at a point while Western theory, as *theory,* naturally moves on. An important case in point is the current questioning of 'modernity' itself—a critique that is growing very strong but one that hasn't yet found a place in our rhetoric. Thus the deep-seated ethnocentric and evolutionary prejudices are being questioned and the whole idea of progress is seen as a major myth latent in the collective European mentality, a myth that once bred optimism in all thinking, including that in the social sciences, about the future of humanity. Pessimism has now replaced optimism and concepts such as 'development' and 'growth' are now suspect as they have begun to be seen as simply loaded valuations

of 'change'. 'Modernity' is not an evolved state as it was made out to be, but simply another form of culture. There is, therefore, the realization that to handle the current global crisis, we have to go back to 'the pre-modern vision of all non-Western peoples … that everything is connected and man is subject to fundamental religious and natural laws' (Jorge Armand, 2000).

There is a collapse of 'ethical reference'. The values and basic social conventions that have existed since times immemorial, and have all along determined human relations, especially the family and gender roles; and also have the fundamental role in giving coherence to society, have lost their authority and force. No alternative set of values has replaced them. On the contrary, such traditional religious beliefs and socio-political ideologies are being replaced by a shapeless and stultifying belief in economic power, money, consumerism and status. Hindu society, on the other hand, is not so impoverished yet. Some basic values still here serve as cementing bonds. What is more, Hindu society is not a static society, certainly not in the sphere of women, and it is [quite] amenable to reform by law. So it is desirable in the interest of total understanding, to put this dynamism at the centre of every debate about women's condition in India; and, further, to look for the roots of this change, and amenability to change, not just in contemporary thought, but in the attested, long tradition of dynamic sociological thought of India.

As its very title indicates, Professor Singh's essay, *Constructing an Indian theory of Feminism* proposes to construct an Indian theory of feminism without ignoring the problems that beset such a venture. A reference to literary works is one of its key features. What it says *on the subject chosen* may be prefaced with the following remarks:

> A great part of our feminist discourse adopts Western paradigms as its model. So it glibly accepts the Western agenda of feminism as our own, and proceeds in utter indifference to our own tradition. This is hardly proper, for our very way of looking at life and the world differs from that of the West. In respect of women too, our traditional view is distinctive. Does the West have any parallel to the thought, expressed in some of our ancient texts, that a wife can be a redeemer of her

> husband? Further, because of the traditional emphasis on *dharma,* which not only calls for righteous living in general but for the proper discharge of our basic duties in our individual social set-ups, our society is duty-oriented rather that right-oriented. What is more, an Indian woman is generally the focus of a complex network of human relationships which makes for familial stability by imposing various duties upon her, not merely as a wife or mother, but {say} as a *bhabi.* It is noteworthy that all these relations bear separate names. This lends definiteness to a woman's sense of what exactly she is expected to do for, and how exactly she is to behave in respect of, different members of the family. Nothing is here amorphous.

This is not to suggest that it is all well with women in India. Surely not; they are in fact subject to various handicaps and unfair discrimination generally. But the point is that all such ills are to be remedied without upsetting the forces that make for the stability of Indian society even today, and still save the majority of our women from aping the West in undesirable ways, such as parading the body 'in the interest of fashion'. Above all, because of the very need to be true to the specific character of our present society, a homegrown feminism has to take special notice of the lot of our *dalit* women. The small, but articulate minority of about '3 per cent well placed women ensconced in secure luxuries of life' may find it difficult to do so, but it is necessary. Otherwise, our feminism will lack the requisite comprehensiveness of notice on which our traditional thought has ever been insistent.

Professor Malashri Lal's elegantly written paper, *Literary Feminism in India: In Search of Theory,* seeks to explore the possibility of evolving theoretical frameworks for literary feminism in India, keeping in view the interface of tradition and modernity which co-exist as a simultaneity in our social practice—a fact which and is consequently reflected in fictional representation by women as well as men writers. Tradition, in so for as it relates to women of exceptional substance, reminds us of legendary figures like Mira and Shakuntala. The plastic stress of literary imagination can easily blend the two without resorting to 'Western theoretical models'. This is not only possible, but has in fact been done by some of our own English writers. Nor is there anything intrinsi-

cally implausible about such literary endeavour. In the author's own words:

> The original Mira's aloneness, her willful choice of her 'lover' and subsequent rejection of socially compelled 'marriage', her insistence upon mingling with common people—the devotees of Krishna—irrespective of caste and creed, her resistance of authority, devising strategies for self-survival, her departure from 'family' and 'society' are key points that make her a useable reference for contemporary women'… And as for the Shakuntala legend, have not its contemporary versions succeeded in highlighting the feminist ideas of the maternal giving priority to the mother-child dyadic unity to which the biological father is an unimportant detail?

It has struck me that the essay opens with a touch of quiet anguish. Why should not women English writers like Arundhati Roy speak 'in a *gendered* voice' when they protest 'against the ravaging Narmada Dam'? Is it not a proven fact 'that displacement of families during natural or human-made calamities effect women and men *differently beyond* the common lot of deprivations'? (Emphasis mine).

The finale, however, is a message of hope, though it opens with a question:

> Can there be an Indian theoretical frame for 'feminism'? … 'Yes' [if not absolutely] … unlike many other countries, India has a continued tradition of practiced mythologies… They offer… a mirror of society … In the magic of those tales and their adaptability to time-place syndromes lies at least one major potential for our own feminist orientations. I have *caught* merely the surface of one such enterprise.

I hope I have the author's permission as I emphasize the word *caught,* and not *merely the surface.* The seizure and the way to it are by no means superficial.

Dr. Kavita A. Sharma's essay "Exploring the Icons: Sita and Radha" is striking in virtue of both its opening and end. She begins by interpreting *tradition* as *'an* opinion or belief or custom' and not as a *body* of customs, thought and practices handed down from the past; 'true modernity', as the recognition that an accepted value has now become 'valueless', not as being quite

bereft of value originally; and feminism, as importantly an attempt to explore how middle class women, well educated and capable, could put meaning into their lives, and secure equality [with men] before law, and greater economic parity in many areas. The conclusion, arrived at after considering a good deal of scientific data, runs thus:

> The basis and origin of human life is female, and it is from the female that nourishment and nurturing come.… The male is constantly in struggle. The feminine is constantly in surrender, in deep trust… [and] *is happy, not trying to reach anywhere.…* A change is required.… [Men] have to become… more and more loving… trusting… Radha says to Krishna: … your [true] reign will begin [only when] swords and daggers… [have been rejected] … and after water lilies destroyed long ago, begin to bloom [anew]. … [Nor will] Sita's grace [ever] fail [to sustain]… this… suffering *Earth:*
>
> The Earth never tires or stales or despairs,
> For the pulses of Sita's
> Heart of compassion sustain and foster
> Our evolving Life Divine."

Dr. Anuradha Banerji's contribution to this volume is a lucid and sensitive, yet thoughtful essay on *imaging of women in Indian literature.* It is, on the one hand, refreshingly free from feminist jargon of writers today, and is therefore likely to provide a kind of relief to readers of this work; and is, on the other hand, spiced with some piquant references to the sad lot of our women as imaged in Indian *literary* writing on the subject. I, in fact, feel moved to open my remarks on the essay by citing some extracts from these references:

> In her father's house her cousins did not want to spare even that corner space for her where a redundant object might lie". *(Rabindra Rachnāvali,* Vol.12, p.332; as translated by the essayist herself)
>
> Time lifts the curtain unawares
> And sorrow looks into the face…
> Who shall prevent the subtle years
> Or shield a woman's eyes from tears
>
> (Sarojini Naidu's poem 'Pardah Nashin',
> in *Selected Poetry and Prose,* pp. 83-84)

The essayist's own writing, however, is all along forthright, even where it is moving. Thus, see the following:

> By … her candid autobiography … [Tasleema Nasreen]… has splintered the myth of the silent woman. She has severed those coils that for ages have tightened around woman's existence and silenced her. This voice that seems to be that of rebellion in its impatience, is the voice of the emerging strength of *the real woman.*

The real woman, for the author, is the key for a fresh and sensible return to the archetypal view of the female. 'Without realizing the potential of the real [woman, we are told,] a fresh return to the archetypal may not be possible.'

This is, in fact, the focal point of the essay; and I think it makes sense. The *archetypal* Indian image of woman is a blend of power and mercy, of *śakti* and *kṛpa.* The *stereotyped* image is woman as a vehicle of orthodoxy, or as sheer subservience. The *real* woman of today is compassionate and caring on the one hand, and strongly resurgent and sensibly rebellious on the other. It is this patent evidence of fact that makes the archetypal view both credible and attainable anew.

The run of the essay, however, is not only logical. At every step it is buttressed and enlivened with apt references to the work of great men and women of modern India; and, above all, to Tasleema Nasreen's remarkable success in blending 'real life… [with] literary discourse', creatively and with telling effect.

Another paper, which reflects on the subject from the viewpoint of literary writing, is Dr. Anita Vashista's, "In-between: Locating Traditions and Modernity in the Works of Maitreyi Pushpa". The essay begins with a brief but balanced account of the state of Indian woman today. Tradition as it relates to her may not be a rationally defensible system of values, but it does 'provide [to her] some degree of solace and stability in a rapidly changing environment'. What is more, its grip is far-reaching. "The vast majority of… [village]… women … are for the most part [tradition-bound], caught up in a casteist male-dominated culture where their own destiny is not in their own hands'. On the other hand, 'a so-called [or spurious] progressive culture [prevails today which is] aided

[essentially] by the mass media, corrupt politicians and … profit-motive'.

If this mere semblance of modernity is allowed to straightaway insist on replacing tradition as it not only oppresses *but sustains* the woman of today, tradition is very likely to react by hardening its grip, and the cry for change will only prove 'counter-productive'. As things stand at present, the average Indian woman just cannot even *disturb,* much less 'dismantle [the] existing structures unless such alternatives' are provided as are able to persuade women in general to come together as a community and to agree to incur the changes proposed—through 'a careful *manufacturing* of consent'.

It is considerations such as these, which as the essayist argues, make four novels of Pushpa Maitreyi very relevant to the notice of the present-day feminists. This 'outstanding feminist writer', we are told, is able to 're-construct' [in her writings] feminist politics for [a] genuine social transformation… from … [a] point of view' which may be said to be women's own, and not merely prescribed for them. How does Maitreyi do this? By the truthful method, says the essayist, of such a vivid portrayal of the many unfairnesses that beset the fair sex today that woman as (visualized) is impelled 'to challenge the commodification of her body and [to] expose the abhorrent hypocrisies of a society that [only hovers] between tradition and modernity, [and, in practice, just goes on] using the exploitative potential of both concepts against her, as well as against other Dalit groups'.

The four novels that Dr. Anita focuses on are: *Edennmam, Chaak, Jhoola Nat,* and *Alma Kabootri.* The last of these is considered at length; but the other three also provide valuable support to the essayist's conclusion that:

> Maitrey Pushpa's novels always end at a crucial stage where an educated and culturally rich generation is challenging a degenerate, callous bureaucracy and retrieving old ties to move ahead with a mix of convention and change.

The essay, as it ends, strikes a note of unquestionable truth. 'Modernity… is just round the corner… but [is as yet] elusive'.

Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar's essay, *Androgyny in Search of Modernity: Fiction and Reality,* is a winning plea for sanity and balance in how we look at the subject of the Seminar. *Modernity,* it argues, is no monopoly of the present. It is essentially the dawn of progressive thought, and accordant conduct, today *or in the past.* What it is *not* is just as essential to see. It can neither be identified with progress in industry or technology, nor with 'pulling the veil off the face of the woman'. Improvement in ways of making things, transmitting messages or raising factories is surely not the same thing as refinement of being and behaviour. Above all, it is sheer perversity to think that we make a woman modern by just projecting 'her as a sexual object for an advertisement] in a predominantly consumerist society'. Nor is *tradition* a bag of mere humbug to be simply put aside. (It is *rudi,* not tradition or *paramparā* which shuts out progress.) What is more, *our* tradition comprises iconographical images and mythical narratives of great value. Instead of merely ignoring them we have to discover the deeper meanings that they embody. Take, for instance, the androgynic image of *Ardhanārīśvara,* a parallel of which is the *mandala* of *yang* and *yin* visualized by the Chinese Taoists. The former is not only aesthetically valuable, (I have here in mind our arts of sculpture and classical dance) but *epistemologically* significant. It has a *meaning* which our feminists of today would do well to take note of. Of the primal androgyne, *Ardhanārīśvara,* the right side is male, and the left side female. The two complement, instead of excluding each other. The consortship of Shiva and Parvati emphasizes this mutuality.

In our literature too, today, the point is often vivified. Thus, in his novel, *Ardhnarishvar,* the eminent Hindi writer, Vishnu Prabhakar, 'skillfully probes the possibility of installing the androgynous ideal in man-woman relationships'. And this has a clear message for us today. A healthy *feminism* need not *oppose* woman to man. Nor should it seek to merely replace the obvious feminine qualities with those that are commonly regarded as essentially male. What is needed is a judicious blend of the two kinds of qualities, and so also an emphasis, in feminist theory, on

male-female complementarity. If one does not quite exclude the other, the question of their confronting each other just does not arise. Rather, cooperation is the manifest need.

The essayist rightly cherishes the hope that 'the ideology of gender polarization can be deconstructed by exploring the primal reality of [the Ardhanārīśvar] myth, thus clearing the path for a reconstruction of gender identity'.

A strikingly original way of looking at the subject of the Seminar distinguishes the paper contributed by Dr. Ranjana Harish: *Pen and Needle: The Changing Metaphors of Self in Autobiographies by Women in Post-Independence India.* Autobiographical writing, it is obvious, is 'an effort to find the right *objective correlative* for a self', but the feminine self that is thus projected, if objectively, may either reveal the bearer of a needle-and-thread (or traditional) culture *or* of a pen (or renascent) culture. The paper, however, focuses on our native writing, though it opens with a thoughtful account of James Olney's theory of autobiography and of the metaphorizing process that this genre of literary writing involves.

The purpose of the paper is ably put by the essayist herself, in the following words:

> [It] explores Indian women's search for the right metaphors of self and records a socio-psycho-political journey of their collective subconscious expressed through [a] conscious selection of metaphors. It is a journey from needle to pen, from the margins to the mainstream, from the private to the public, and from the object position to the subject position,… from powerlessness to authority, [and] from tradition to modernity—in short, a journey towards empowerment of the feminine by adopting the metaphor of authority -namely, [the] pen.

It is in accordance with this basic thesis, and also by way of illustrating it, that the essayist then sets out to distinguish the different periods of women's autobiographical writing in India, that is: (a) from 1860 to 1946; (b) 1947-1957; (c) 1957-1967; (d) 1967-1977; and (e) 1985-1996. Of the (e) group biographies, we are told, the most striking features are, first,

> women's increasing awareness of their collective identity as the greater source of… [feminine, sisterly] strength; [second] their com-

> plete rejection of… [the needle] culture; [and thirdly] their unflinching faith in pen as the [main] signifier of authority and respectability.

The upshot of the entire paper is that the transition from the needle-and-thread culture to the culture of pen in autobiographical writing is a clear index of the passage of feminine consciousness from the state of abject helplessness to that of self-confident authoring, and so 'from tradition to modernity.' Literature, indeed, is no less a possible mirror of renascent consciousness than socio-political activity, though it does not speak in overt, strident tones.

In the essay *'Re-exploring Stereotypes: A Study of Erica Jong's Fear of Flying'* and Rajinder Singh Bedi's *'Lajwanti',* Dr. N. K. Ghosh seeks to explore 'how the philosophy of feminism confronts the issues relevant to the emancipation of woman in a society which inevitably places… her at the mercy of man in the power game, irrespective of social and cultural paradigms'. Quite a few interesting points made in this essay are noteworthy, and I think it essential to list them. 'A woman's life is conditioned by the obligations society imposes on her as half of a couple … so that there is no dignified way for a woman to live alone'. Yet, she can attain liberation not so much by freeing herself from 'the bonds of marriage' but by turning inward to realize 'her own authenticity as a human being'. At the same time, it is undeniable that 'Western feminism with its emphasis on extreme individualism, militates against the' truth of woman's irrepressible dependence on man, specially on the emotional plane. So it is safe to conclude that:

> … neither the path of open confrontation nor an uneasy truce, but the confidence to move in harmonious unison as co-partner in the power game, without compromising honour and dignity as an individual, ought to be the real goal of woman's emancipation.

Yet another literary work, which provides material for Rajul Bhargava's intriguingly titled essay: *'Infidel Heteroglossia? Post-modernist Configurations* in Githa Hariharan's: *The Art of Dying.* What is 'most central to the concerns of this paper' is the fact that both feminism and postmodernism 'have sought to develop paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinning. As for Hariharan's 'fencing texts',

they are, according to the author, an 'oblique' enquiry which may well be regarded as a 'theoretical counterpart of a broader… more complex and multi-layered feminist solidarity… for overcoming the oppression of women in its 'endless variety and monotonous similarity'.

Now, turning to the position of women in various religious texts and *Dharmaśāstras, a* virtual model of methodical, lucid, and analytical-and so easy-to-follow-piece of writing is provided by Dr. Arvind Sharma's essay, *How to Read the Manusmṛti.* It distinguishes five ways of reading the text in question, but its sole purpose is to see if the work 'has suffered the fate of many works which are reviled without being [properly] read'; and the conclusion it arrives at pleads for a careful reading of Manusmṛti as a whole, 'holistically … [and] on its own terms'- and not in a casual, piecemeal way.

The conclusion, we may note, is no abrupt deliverance. It rather emerges from careful attention to the text of the work, strictly in the 'ways' indicated by the author. So far, we are told, the tendency has been to judge Manusmṛti only on the basis of such 'selective quotations' as make us look at it 'with an air of excited horror'. 'Evidence to the contrary from the same text is [merely] withheld'. The author provides quite a few instances of such ill-balanced reading. A fairly piquant one of these has been put by him as follows:

> That the Manusmṛti inculcates respect for the Brahmans is widely accepted and documented. What has been ignored is its statement on how the Brahmans should respond to such respect when displayed. This is laid down in verse 162 of Ch.2: 'A priest should always be alarmed by adulation as by poison and always desire scorn as if it were ambrosia.'

This single instance, I believe, should suffice to whet the reader's appetite to read the whole essay patiently. I have found it rewarding to do so.

If from a somewhat limited point of view, the same emphasis on a fair and close study of Manusmṛti is at work in my own paper: 'Feminism, Tradition, and Modernity: An Essay in relation

to Manusmṛti". My argument runs as a series of references to relevant verses of the text in question. So its point will be clear only when the essay is read as a whole. I do not see any sense in reproducing these references, or the way I build my argument around them. I am also mindful that a good deal of space is required by the papers which follow mine in this book. So I may simply draw readers' attention to the following points of general theoretical value which I have tried to make:

> The fact of being regarded as a means is bad if this is the attitude *of someone else* towards me. But if I regard myself as essentially (not merely) a means to others' welfare, … it would only be commendable. What otherwise is the meaning of selfless service? Being set on the road to cultivation of right attitudes is as important a part of human education as book learning. The only kind of equality that is fair and workable is the equality of *discriminating consideration,* not equality regarded as mere sameness.

Finally, women's *freedom to* cooperate with men in ever more various ways is as important for social harmony as their *freedom from* male oppression.

After all this focusing of thought on just one traditional text, *Manusmṛti,* Dr. Sati Chatterjee's essay provides a welcome widening of view. Titled as *'Ontological Status of Women in the Dharma-śāstras: The Positive Perception and the Negative,'* it begins with a look at *Ṛg Veda* and the *Upaniśads,* rightly emphasizing the thought that, 'at the highest level of ontological speculation,' our ancient texts project 'the idea of equality'. At the other end, the essayist expresses the confident hope that we can 'derive lessons from the modernist and postmodernist movement, including the Feminist movement in the West'. Yet, in spite of the historical spread of what is covered, the essay is *delightfully brief, balanced, and articulate.*

It is not without reason that I use these predicates, more or less aesthetic. Brevity is obvious; the essay covers only a few pages. But this brevity is here the soul of wit regarded as the power of combining ideas with pointed effect. This effect arises, in part, from balance in assessment. All along, indeed, the author pays equal attention to both the perverse *and* the eminently sane and

salutary in what our ancient texts have to say on women; and, aided by a very helpful use of punctuation marks, this balancing here makes for an enjoyable articulateness in writing.

Taking a cue from the essayist, I think I too should be brief in my comments. But I cannot help citing the following words from the essay, because they do not only support my assessment, but have struck me specially:

> Parāśara declares that the victim of rape … bears no blame. Pronouncements in other Śāstras… move even further and rule that a child born of rape is no social outcast… [and] would be entitled to all the ten social rituals … scheduled for children of legitimate birth.… Where do we stand then, we, the women of today?… How liberal is our liberalism? Does our civilized society extend to the luckless women tortured, raped, gang-raped … anything like the protection assured in the Parāśara Śāstra?… It is time that we … felt sure of our identity. Neither the ancient Oriental tradition, nor our newly acquired acquaintance with the modern West need be a burden; we need not stagger under either load. Open-eyed, unbiased … [and] with determined effort we can combine the two… [and] develop a rhythm truly Indian and truly modern … ensuring a better future for our women.

From a purely semantic concern with our traditional texts to the need to focus on the spiritual potential of our being, this may strike us as a quite abrupt step. But I think it should be welcome; for, as argued by Manjula Bordia in her paper, *Spirituality as Panacea for Misplaced Feminism,* it does not make sense to believe that, for her emancipation, woman has to wait for a correction of male attitudes if and when it comes to pass. Women, like men, are not merely physical in being. What is more, they are eminently capable of selfless and steadfast service. So, why should they not take to the path of *ahimsa* and righteous living in general, and thereby gain in moral authority which will correct the attitudes of men without their feeling coerced? It is sad that the feminist movements of today utterly fail to realize the truth that the empowerment, of women, like all [abiding and benevolent] empowerment, can be achieved only through spiritual awakening.

I would like to buttress this view with a simple question. The stupendous amount of charitable work that Mother Teresa has been

able to do in our day, was it not accomplished mainly with the power of faith and utterly selfless service? It did not wait for cooperation from male members of society. Help came automatically, because of the utterly self-effacing—and so readily appealing—quality of her work arising from her intense spirituality. Moral authority is certainly superior to the power of aggressive agitation and propaganda.

A paper which begins with a close look at the subject as a whole, not by picking for attention any one of the three concepts it comprises; and, what is more, seeks to keep to this wholeness of concern nearly all along, is Dr. Pushpa Tiwari's: *Tradition and Modernity as Determinants of Women's Roles and Status: Romance and Reality.* At the same time, where she focuses on any one of the three concepts, her interpretation is fair and precise. Thus, see the following:

> Modernity is equated with 'Westernization' which in turn is equated with… progress… [taken] chiefly in terms of industrialization and economic prosperity.

Here the hidden suggestion, partly developed later in the essay, is that the feminist cry today does not pay any attention to how what the average Indian woman is doing at present—that is, house-keeping—could be made easier, and why efficiency in this field itself deserves acclaim, quite apart from the question of wage-earning skills. At places, the essayist's argument is not only fair, but also impassioned. Thus, see the following:

> We cannot equate tradition only with *stagnation* because there always was a *modern* phase in every tradition gradually changing the form and content of a given culture through its voice of dissent. [The trouble only is that though we freely say] that literature is a mirror of society [we never] try to isolate the voices that are the first to militate against prevailing trends … [Do we give due attention to Tulsidas as one who tried to replace the] 'prevailing erotic nature of literature on *Ritikavya'* [with] 'Bhakti ideology'?

It is further contended that, with all its vociferousness, feminism today does not pay any attention to "the role of women themselves in the perpetuation of gender asymmetry", say, to cases such as the following:

> . . . An educated working woman marries … brings with her whatever dowry, was settled … She conceives … goes to an ultrasonologist… without any hue and cry … [and finally] she *aborts the female foetus with the help of another liberated modern woman*—a practicing gynaecologist… [Interestingly enough] the desire to have a son … as a first born child [is] as much [there] in *developed* countries like the USA …

Such pungent remarks punctuate the essay throughout. Let me sharpen the point of some of them by turning them into questions:

> A woman of *substance?* Are we justified in leaving the word *substance* seemingly vague but in truth covertly 'associated with some forms of consumerism and market forces' determined, say, by those who deal in fashion designing and hair styling? Is modernity the *monopoly* of educated and working women? Cannot a simple, uneducated housewife claim to be modern, say, if she teaches her growing son to treat his wife as an equal when he gets married? Questions such as these should be enough to make us read the essay avidly.

The paper which *follows* the one I have just written about: *The Therigāthā: A Study in Tradition and Modernity* by Indra Kaul, is very different from Dr. Bordia's essay, not only because it covers many more pages, all packed with well researched material, but because whereas the latter only emphasizes the idea that women *should* and *can* tap their spiritual potential to their great advantage, the former provides very convincing evidence that this *has in fact been done* by a lot of our women in the past.

Mrs. Kaul begins by pointing out that "modernity… has produced consequences and set into motion processes … which … are particularly detrimental to the women's cause" … But soon the focus of her attention shifts to Indian theological systems and comes to rest at the state of women in monastic orders. Here she dwells, for almost the whole of the subsequent course of the essay, on *Therigāthā. Theris* are women renunciate, and *gāthā* means 'stories or accounts of the lives and spiritual achievements—of *theris'*.

> In all probability, the *Therigāthā* is a women's composition, and is an authentic expression of women's perspective on the life of renuncia-

> tion under Buddhism… providing the earliest record of the first ever self-determined women… [aiming at and attaining emancipation] … It becomes the 'liberation-manual' for all… women… looking for role models and alternative ways of life.… Above all, the *Therigatha* stands as a statement on a 'tradition' that declined to accept the 'woman question' as a social problem in the sense in which it is being projected in the contemporary discourse on women… Buddha taught *Dhamma* to both men *and women… A* new image of women came up for the first time under renunciatory orders like Buddhism.… Many ascetic women of distinction … irrespective of their backgrounds … attained *arhatship,* and a good many among them also showed the potential of being spiritual leaders in their own right.

The essay, I repeat, abounds in authentic historical information, and so deserves to be read from beginning to end. But what I have found most striking, even startling, is the following:

> The *theri* Subha Jivakambavanika stands out [as a renunciate] … On her way to the forest…, one day she was confronted by a rogue, threatening to violate her. She first tried to dissuade him through her arguments about the impermanence of the body… [But when they did not work] and [the rogue] located the source of [his] desire in her beautiful eyes, in one decisive gesture she tore out one of her eyes and gave it to him … [whereupon] the rogue's desire ceased instantly and [regaining his sanity] he sought her forgiveness.

There can be no surer index of an utter renunciation of what is probably the most oppressive attachment, namely, the one that ties us down to the body. And as for the essay itself, it bears eloquent testimony to spirituality as an unfailing way to the empowerment of women.

Now, turning to the fourth section of the book devoted to the sociological aspects of women's issues, in the paper entitled *Evolving Traditions Retreating Modernities—Women and the Gendered Social Reality,* Dr. Jasbir Jain makes quite a few sensible points which I may put as follows:

> a. We… [mistakenly] treat [modernity and tradition] as opposite categories primarily because modernity is perceived as a borrowing from the West and not as a natural [step in] evolution [that is] necessary for survival. [Further,] it is seen as related [only] to the body and

> the externals, and not as an engagement with new ideas … [what is worse], it is … often delinked from the process of individuation.

What is said in the above is, in my view, clearly true. Do we not freely commit the mistake of believing that being modern simply means aping the West in matters of dress and even in ways of welcoming and bidding farewell to friends, and not in what is far more essential to the modernist temper, namely, the free development of the individual in accordance with his or her aspirations and abilities?

> b. "The opposition between tradition and modernity, in the context of feminism really comes to this: the female need for choice and personal expression outside the roles [traditionally] defined for them".
> c. "Identity and self are not synonyms. *Identity* is constructed by external factors like status, job, class, caste, religion, appearance, while the self [develops] through experiential reality, freedom and [even through how one reacts to] failure.

This distinction is important, if only because it is freely ignored. However, it is the last few lines that provide a *climax, and no mere terminus to the essay.* Here they are:

> It is not feminism which [has to be] the centre of… debate; [rather] it is human dignity as opposed to inequality, human agency as opposed to victimhood … [only then] tradition and modernity … [will] meet and the claims of the evolutionary process be acknowledged.

Yet another paper which is likely to interest the generality of readers is Dr. Sudha Vasan's: *Ecofeminism—Patriarchy through the Backdoor.* Taken as a whole, the *title* may suggest that the essayist does not attach unconditional value to ecofeminism as it works today. But its *content* does provide quite a few such ideas and bits of information as should be welcome to one and all. Personally, as I hope to show a little later, it has even stimulated me to think of how a particular kind of reflection on nature may tend to temper gender discrimination. But first let me see how exactly the paper relates to the subject of the Seminar, *Feminism, Tradition, and Modernity.* Taken quite generally, *feminism* may be taken to concern itself with the interests, role and value of women

in society and its betterment. *Tradition* calls for a look at the past, not necessarily with a view to decry it; and of *modernity* a very clear mark is fairly concerted interest in environmental issues. *Ecofeminism* may be said to cover all the three key concepts just distinguished because, as Dr. Vasan rightly explains, it:

> refers to a whole range of women-nature linkages—*historical,* material, conceptual, literary, ethical, spiritual connections—on how women and the environment are treated in society.

I have purposely emphasized the word *historical,* just to suggest that concern with *tradition* is not left out by the extract just cited. As a sample of the interesting ideas that the essay in question provides, I may just cite the following:

> Ecofeminists … argue that women and nature are intimately related, and [that] their domination and liberation are similarly linked… [There are] affinities and perceived similarities between women and nature—such as *passivity and life-giving qualities.* On the one hand, these affinities make them both equally vulnerable to male domination. On the other, this association gives women a special stake in solving today's environmental problems." (Italics added)

Here, however, I am impelled to strike a different, but by no means discordant note. Why should we see the relation of nature *with the life of women alone.* As our saint-poet Surdas visualizes, even trees *can* (in principle) give life-giving messages *to both men and women,* irrespective of gender difference. Dropping fruits even for those who pelt them with pebbles,—is this not a vital message, if unspoken, from trees and *for every one of us?* The wise 'passivity' of which nature poets speak is no mere metaphor.

An eye for historical detail distinguishes Dr. Vidyut Bhagwat's essay, *Patriarchal Discourse—Construction and Subversion: A case study of the Nineteenth Century Maharashtra.* It seeks to answer two questions, in the main. First, how were the worlds of women shaped in Maharashtra of the nineteenth century? And, secondly, what modes of resistance did they resort to, in the process of this shaping?

The first part of the essay traces, if briefly, the linkages of women's world between pre-colonial and colonial periods. The

Mahanubhav (1194-1276) and Varkari Literatures (1275-1690) in Maharashtra provide us with ample and valuable information about the everyday life of Marathi women in the pre-colonial period. The arrival of Colonialism in Maharashtra in 1818 marks the beginning of a new epoch. Initially, from 1818 to 1850, a series of articles, pamphlets and books offering guidelines to women—both for their moral uplift and for their housewifely roles—appeared in print, one after the other. Some of this printed material has been reviewed in this part of the essay.

The second part is an attempt to understand the nature of confrontations between those who tried to handle the question of women's welfare within a patriarchal reformist framework, *and* those who, while outwardly agreeing with the general reformist programme, also sought to expose the double standards inherent in patriarchal reformist constructions. In this context, due attention has been paid, though in brief, to the writings of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Narayan Bapuji Kamitkar and Shivram Mahadev Gole *vis-a-vis* Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde and Anandibhai Joshi.

The essay is packed with well researched material, and is quite informative.

An essay of singular value, surely the only one of its kind in this whole volume, is provided by Dr. Alka Kumar's paper: *Feminist Issues—Action, Research and Women's Studies.* It suggests a working model of the ways in *which feminist* action can be… [better] integrated with feminist *research,* and how Women's Studies [WS] may be wholistically disseminated *through curriculum formulations too'.* After a fair amount of lucid treatment of the subject chosen, the essay ends with the assurance that,

> both feminism and WS together offer strategies by which one can be sensitive to the injustice that underpins such processes, as also the strength to resist and challenge them, so that the right to personhood may be equally distributed to all.

Another paper, which refuses to follow the beaten track, is Kumkum Yadav's discussion of *'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity in relation to the representation of Tribal Women in modern*

Indian writing'. The essay abounds in meaningful references to Indian writers of note, such as Mahasweta Devi, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Rahul Sankrityayan and Shaani. However, it is (according to the essayist) the short stories of Mahasweta Devi that provide 'a horrifying and bitter critique of the dominant cultural perceptions'. The essayist adds that three stories of Mahasweta in particular—namely, 'Behind the Bodice', 'Draupadi' and 'Daulati—as translated by Spivak from Bangla 'are uncringingly stark in their narratives of tribal women'. The reader of this well researched essay is bound to be struck by the piquant remark that 'the pleasures and pain, of being a tribal woman go beyond the depiction of gleaming anatomy, zinc anklets and an imaginary aura of innocence and sensuality'.

A welcome measure of additional variety is provided to this volume by Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta's interesting essay, *A contemporary Reading of Ancient Women's Vrata(s).* Its very opening gives us a clear idea of the essayist's aim, which is to show that,

> the performance of the *vrata* ... today seems to exemplify and demonstrate the multi-faceted oppressive features of the patriarchal system that have so conditioned women as to make her … [excessively] self-denying, open only to the demands of patriarchy".

Quite a few *vratas* are referred to in the article, such as the following: *Sankata Vrata, Karam Vrata, Ashwatapata Vrata, Tribhuvan Vrata,* and *Alankar Vrata.* Not all of them seem to have a direct bearing on the main purpose of the essay as put in the extract cited above. But the essayist does succeed in making the following additional point of obvious value:

> The philosopher of [the] quicker, farther and [the] more is… not encountered in the world of… *vrata*… Its determining principles relate instead to a natural rhythm in a very concrete sense, to a concept of solidarity and communion, of simplicity and restraint … [principles which are admittedly] among the most resilient foundations of social life… [because they prevent] the rich from exploiting the resources of the earth to the full … [and] save the poor from… destitution."

The closing essay, *Gandhi on Women and Liberty,* written by me in collaboration with Professor S.K. Saxena, develops as an attempt to answer three basic questions:

(a) What are a woman's capacities and essential functions as distinguished from those of a man?
(b) What can and may well be done to improve the present lot of women in India which has for long been lamentable?
(c) What and how exactly can women contribute to human welfare—and not only to their own good-if they come to see, and set out to realize—their innate ability to work in ways that nourish and heal?

By way of answering the above, some interesting points have been made, incidentally. I may put them thus, at places in the form of suggestive questions:

> Due attention to the fact that Gandhi's essential concern is with the *practice* of *ahimsa-and* not merely with an *understanding* of it as a concept—enables us to clear quite a few seeming oddities in his writing. Two such oddities are the views that impatience too is *himsa,* and that protection of the chastity of women is quite as important as caring for cows.

How does it make sense to regard the woman as usually the *major* culprit in an illicit sexual liaison and so *specially* censurable? And how are we justified in preventing a young widow from remarriage when a man is not merely allowed, but encouraged to think of remarriage, in the very precincts of the crematorium, even as the body of his… wife is being consumed to ashes on the pyre?

Finally, what a healthy feminism requires is not freedom of women from male injustices alone, *but from their own (typically feminine) whims.* One such whim is the belief that a woman's essential function is to be an object of sensuous (if not sensual) charm for men. Does it not at once make her subservient to man, and utterly ignore her moral and spiritual potential?

Section I

Obsession with the West: Retrieving the Indian

Hindu Women, Traditions and Modernity

KAPIL KAPOOR

Feminist critiques of Indian social reality are flawed in that they assume an absolute, universalist Hindu code. They are also asymmetrical with the given Indian reality in that they are derived from the reality of, for want of a better word, Western social system which, in its history of unbridled sexuality and in its progressive weakening of the institutions of family and marriage and a general ethical collapse, is foundationally different. Again the Feminist theory, like other western sociological, economic, political and biological theories, is open to interrogation for its evolutionary imperative that constructs 'modernity' as a 'higher stage of development'. What is more, the Feminist critique is insufficiently argued because it is carried out in total disjunction with the long tradition of sustained sociological thinking in India. We therefore argue that the question of Indian womanhood has to be discussed in the context of total knowledge of thought and practice, and that it must come down to the contemporary legal and factual situation of Hindu women, a very progressive legal condition with progressively reducing disabilities, a state which is in continuity with, and is in fact enabled by Indian sociological thought and practice as enshrined in the *Dharmaśāstras, Nibandhas* and the Customary Law.

I

While there is a long textual history[1] of discussion of women related issues in the Indian tradition, the contemporary urban-centered debate by English educated men and women originated

as a response to Western Feminist discourse and concerns. There are two important dimensions of this Western Feminist theory—first, originating in a concern for social and political inequality of women, which has developed into an aggressive arm and ally of minority politics by using the logic of 'constructedness' of female identity and roles devised for subjection of women, a logic that is claimed to be applicable to all the 'others'; secondly, the theory which, though ostensibly concerned with gender, is in fact, fundamentally rooted in sexuality and how the societal ethics has handled or handles sexuality in the West. It has therefore spawned, 1980's onwards, Gay and Lesbian criticism. In both these dimensions, Feminist theory was found to be of immense political use in the Indian context. As an articulation of minority politics, it has come in handy to subvert the mainstream Hindu traditions. Read all the papers and all the collections—the analyses are directed *only* at the Hindu society in what is a self-evident political act. And as a theory of the rights of sexuality, particularly of female sexuality, it enables a questioning of the two central institutions of family and marriage that are governed by the principles of restraint and norm (*sanyama* and *niyama*), whole Hindu ethics in fact.

II

As in other areas of knowledge, in women studies also, we have tried to fit the Indian reality to a borrowed Western framework. It is not that women in India have no problems—the issue is whether these can be rightly understood in an alien social framework without reference to our own history of social practice and ideas. In the process of applying every shifting framework, we unquestionably accept not only the constructs but also the assumptions that are always so definitely culture/history bound. The choice of the alien framework then constrains the discourse and the methodology; the analysts selectively choose and mine Indian social phenomena/practices and knowledge texts, specifically sociological texts (*dharmaśāstra*), mythology (*purāṇa*) and epics (*mahākāvyas*) to demonstrate the adequacy of the Western theory and to rubbish Indian life and traditions.

As the Indian reality and context are crucially different and as India has a strong tradition, continuous and cumulative, of sociological thinking that has always taken into account the internal multiplicity and diversity of Hindu social reality and thus has been sensitive to the intrinsic non-absoluteness of sociological constructs, it is not only advisable but also imperative to look into the whole question of construction and status of women by locating oneself in this Indian paradigm.

There is a further limitation. We often get trapped at a particular point, while Western thought, like dynamic thought generally, moves on. A case in point is the opposition of tradition and modernity—theme statement for this seminar—an opposition that assumes 'tradition' and 'modernity' as two stages in the evolution of culture. While some of us—'traditionalists', if you please—have always been questioning the validity of the basis of this opposition, voices have now begun to be heard from within the West. But the practitioners of Western theories have not yet woken up to the emerging critique of this whole thinking in general and of 'modernity' in particular. In the precincts of Western universities, the ethnocentric and evolutionary prejudices, embedded in structures such as 'modernity', have begun to be questioned; and the whole idea of progress is now seen as a myth, a myth rooted in 'biological Darwinism' that bred at one point of time enthusiastic optimism in all thinking, including that in the social sciences, about the future of humanity.

Pessimism has replaced this enthusiasm and concepts such as 'development' and 'growth' are now suspect as they have begun to be seen as simply loaded valuations of 'change'. 'Modernity', it is realised, is not an evolved state as it was made out to be but simply another culture, an alternative culture. Its assumption of Darwin's evolutionary view of time is once again being re-valued in relation to the non-Modern culture's cyclical concept of time. As Professor Jorge Armand, apart from his views on 'modernity' and Darwinism that we have reported above, puts it:

> It is much more scientific to think of modernity as a culture and not as a stage in the evolution of human race. There is also the unfounded

> supposition that 'progress' really exists, which is one of the principal myths of modernity.[2]

The same evolutionary prejudices, Professor Armand argues, are deeply embedded in the contemporary social theory, in the idea of social change and progress, a kind of 'social Darwinism'. The scholar goes on to note that the idea that human kind had passed from a condition that was in every way inferior (ethically, economically, socially, etc.) to a superior one (with greater human fulfillment, freedom, decency and happiness) today seems naive, considering the historical events of the twentieth century.[3]

In fact, there is a general disillusionment with what 'modernity' has actually achieved. A Chilean scholar is quoted as saying:

> A rural life style had been the norm until the eighteenth century. Western societies changed this and went for urban life, and now we have megalopolises, slums and all the problems of cities. Western societies went for industrialization and have achieved the alienation of man in a technocratic world run by computers. They went for hygiene and have ended up meddling with the natural biological order with all the unforeseen consequences that arise from this. But, above all, Western societies went for freedom as their essential goal and now face an excess of regulations, all kinds of pressures and consequently, a lack of freedom.[4]

What the world faces is a 'generalized crisis'—ecological disaster (hole in the ozone layer and global warming); population explosion; high consuming, much wasting of human being; unequal food distribution; appearance of 'pandemics' (AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome); reappearance of infectious diseases; return to tribalism and ethnic wars, and generalized dependency on drugs—'culturally acceptable drug dependence'.[5]

More serious than all this with reference to the western society, says Jorge Armand, there is "this lack of an ethical frame of reference as we approach the new millennium. *The values and basic social conventions that have existed since time immemorial, that determined human relations, especially the family and gender roles, and which had fundamental role of giving coherence to society have lost their authority and force.* No alternative set of

values has replaced them; quite the contrary. Traditional religious beliefs and socio-political ideologies that were valid until recently are continuously giving ground in the face of the silent advance of a shapeless and stultifying belief in economic power, money consciousness and status…"[6]

Two scenarios of the future of mankind, we are told, are being sketched—the apocalypse, a thermo-nuclear collapse of modern Western civilization and the dehumanized cybernetic-genetically engineered world, a final triumph of Logic and Science, where human beings would be robotic. Is there a third choice?

As the crisis deepens, it is said, "it cannot be overcome by simply putting filters in chimneys and water-treatment plants in factories … solutions … must come from a critical reappraisal of the modern world and the culture itself…"[7]

The solution, it is suggested lies in "(1) ending the historic dichotomy of Science and Religion; (2) acknowledging the intrinsic oneness of man and the universe, and as a corollary to that unity, a universal ethic; (3) the acceptance of the cognitive value of centers of human energy other than intellectual/rational, such as the corporeal/emotional, and the possibility of communicating knowledge by means other than the conventional written or numerical systems."[8] Making a distinction between "man's *innate* or *natural* needs [that are] common [to all human beings] and *induced* or *created* needs, which vary in nature and complexity from culture to culture", they also argue that "the two principal psychological needs are security and membership of a group. Furthermore, all human beings also need to feel that there is a significant purpose to their existence."[9] This is a summing up of what 'traditions', 'non-modern' societies have stood for.

III

Tradition, therefore, is being argued back, and pushed center-stage by real life experience as an alternative culture. Strong, resilient cultures like ours have in any case withstood challenges, retained their basic character and yet at the same time modified themselves and evolved in response to changed contexts and needs.

The *Dharmaśāstra* has always asserted that *dharma,* individual and social, has to be constantly renewed according to time, place, community, individual and extraordinary conditions (*desh, kāl, jāti, vyakti, apata*). But what is happening in the case of women related discourse in India is a sustained attack on those very time-tested traditional Hindu practices by the English educated spokesmen of modernity. These spokesmen are uninformed about the foundational Indian sociological thought, those who know that thought have not joined the argument.

But a real debate is possible between Indian tradition and modernity with reference to feminism. We should take a look at the validity, applicability and efficacy of the Feminist theory, and at what it would ultimately amount to in terms of Indian social structure and social goals. We should also examine the foundational sociological thinking, the *Dharmaśāstras,* to grasp the rationale of the existing social practices, and also evaluate this thought in the context of changing social reality. Finally, we should look at the contemporary legal and societal position of women.

IV

Western social condition has been and is very different from ours. Three facts stand out. First of all, the societal attitude to sexuality, both male and female, has been different. Both homosexuality and lesbianism have some kind of legitimacy ever since Plato (*Symposium*) and Sappho, the poetess of Lesbos. Add to this the old Testament narrative of the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and you have a picture of unbridled sexuality—a sexuality not governed by any societal institution or ethical framework. There is a sanction, in Genesis, in the roots of Western civilization, for self-indulgence and for the gratification of one's appetites and desires. No ethics of restraint governs these.

Secondly, as we have already noted, there is an ethical vacuum. There always was of a certain kind. The post-Renaissance collapse of ethics following the death of God, is a story in itself. In any case, there never was anything analogous to the Indian system of *sanyam* (restraint) and *niyama* (the right way). The closest you

come to it is in the Greek ideal of moderation. In this frame of unbridled sexuality women are more vulnerable and pay a higher price. We see this unbridled sexuality in the high incidence of teenage abortions and unwed mothers and the concomitant trauma.

This unbridled sexuality is more harmful where the institutions of family and marriage are weak. We see in our times all kinds of non-conventional modes of living together designed for transient pleasures and satisfactions. In line with the inbuilt obsolescence of modern technology, human relationships also come with inbuilt transience. They are also in tune with consumer economics, the use—and-discard—economy. Nothing endures about these relationships. And when the core family has dissolved, there is no question of any larger network of relationships or social roles. In this framework the woman loses her bio-social identity as a mother or as a wife and there is no question of any larger meaningful identities. Add to this the paradigm image of the unwed mother and the complete absence of the sister role, in the Western tradition, after the one and only Antigone, we can see the real problem of woman's identity in that society. What is the woman's identity? None. She ends up as 'Baby-doll' with the Marilyn Monroe image. Therefore, the denial of bio-social roles, intrinsic to womanhood, in contemporary Western history does not amount to much; for there is in fact no substance to these roles in the Western society. It is easy therefore to argue that these are just empty words—which is what the Feminist assertion of socialization through language amounts to.

V

It is easy to see how the Indian context is totally different. The Hindu family is recognized by sociologists the world over as a recognizably different and vibrant institution, recent changes nonetheless—sociology texts devote separate chapters to this institution. Depending on the intensity of Western influence, the Hindu family structure extends in varying degrees, to widening concentric circles of relationships. Both men and women therefore have complex identities in terms of these human relationships

besides the identity they may have or claim in terms of their profession or personal achievement. As much honour attaches to achievement of excellence in these bio-social roles as to professional roles; and there is individual, collective and psychiatric evidence to show that these bio-social roles, if, well performed, yield deep satisfaction, and are therefore important, perhaps even necessary, components of happiness. The whole structure or network is founded on the key concept of *duty* (as against *rights* in the Western society and in our West inspired constitution)—a parameter that places even discipline on both men and women.

And this family network is not a recent development; it is an ancient system and its survival over thousands of years is a proof of its value. Talking of the conceptual method of functional relationship or role definition, Yakṣa the ninth century BC semanticist gives the example of the same lady being identified as mother, daughter, wife, sister, *bhabhi, mausi, chachi, nanad, mami, bua,* and so on. The existence of innumerable kinship terms in the Hindu social system—and their absence in the West—tells its own story of *cultural density in the area of human relationships.* For an average adult Indian, there are quite a few different answers to the question "Who am I?" And this applies to both men and women. This *over-identification,* if one may use the term, has a deeply useful psycho-ethical effect of curbing one's *ahaṁkāra,* of taking the focus away from his (or her) own self, and enabling one to seek satisfaction by doing things for others.

So the bio-social roles are very real and substantial and are not just linguistic constructs. Their reality is ensured by the concomitant conduct, acts and expectations, and by the multiple sense of identity they provide.

Again, India has handled sexuality differently. Its reality and its power have been more explicitly recognized than in any other culture (no other culture has a whole *śāstra* devoted to it) and no other culture has honoured sexual union as our culture has done (witness its place in temple sculpture). But from the raw reality a basic urge to an honoured fact of disciplined life, there is an orderly upward passage in the form of a rigorous ethical framework, both

institutional and general. Sex is an appetite; and its gratification, like that of other appetites such as hunger, has to be regulated as is required by the general philosophy of self-imposed restraint and abstemiousness (*sanyama*). But, we may note, quite unlike other appetites, its gratification has social, beyond-the-individual consequences. Therefore, apart from the merely personal, there is the need for its social regulation. And the Indian sociological thought therefore restricts sex to marriage and procreation. 'I am also the sexual desire attended by a desire to procreate', says Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Such constructs are deep-rooted and immanent and provide the necessary strength and character to the institutions of marriage and family, in spite of occasional deviations.

Consider, again, the language and the paradigm images. *Suddha Brahman* is gender-free; its expression in language appears in all the three genders—*bhagvati/citti; atma/puruṣa; brāhmaṇ/jñāna.* Both *duhkḥa,* suffering and *mokṣa,* freedom from suffering, are gender-neutral. Modern Indian languages (Punjabi, for example) are in fact woman-friendly. Consider, for instance, the grammatical gender of clothes; it is both male and female.

VI

We have to therefore examine the whole question of woman's identity and place in our society in the total context of knowledge that is available to us.

The feminist movement took shape in India in the 70's. Rather than being the cause or instrument of a new look and changed conditions of the life of urban and educated/working women, *it in fact became possible because of the change that had already occurred due to the increasing education of women.* Its own contribution to amelioration of the lot of our women is difficult to assess; for, the three major women's movements that we saw in the last two decades in India—namely, the chipko movement and the two anti-drinking movements in Haryana and Andhra Pradesh—were all native movements inspired by traditional thought. Admittedly their success did not abide; but the noteworthy point is that they had

nothing to do with the urban, academic Feminist discourse which, in term of activism, rarely proceeds beyond slogan-shouting, in a posh or politically important place, with media in attendance.

In fact, there is a clear divide between the speakers and audiences of such academic discourse and the mass of women struggling to change their own life-conditions. Take, for example, the case of dowry. While the urban educated elite would like it to be eliminated, the rural woman, on account of the need to prevent fragmentation of land, would prefer to restore the strict concept of streedhan—the daughter's share *in the form of gold and silver* (and not *consumer* items such as computer, fridge, television, etc.) over which she once had complete control by law. Theory must address reality; and at the same time, accommodate change.

Therefore, as we have said, uncritical acceptance and application of a Western theory would always be problematic. Consider, for example, the elements of Hindu society that have come in for criticism at the hands of the Feminists, elements that have a bearing on the status and treatment of women in Hindu society. We can examine these in four sets: (a) issues; (b) customs; (c) paradigmatic instances; (d) images and representations in mythology and thought.

(a) The following *issues* have been raised:
  1. Is fidelity (monogamy) only for women?
  2. What rights of divorce and re-marriage obtain for them?
  3. Do they have equal right to education?
  4. Do they have equal right to parental property?
  5. Can women/daughters perform rites, particularly death rites and rituals?
  6. Do /did women have access to knowledge texts?
  7. Are they subject to father, husband and son in the three stages of their lives?
  8. Why is *kanyā-dāna* at all necessary?

(b) *Questionable customs and practices:*
  1. sati
  2. dowry (*dahej*)
  3. infanticide (aborting girl child)

4. bride-burning
5. taking on *husband's* family name
6. not being knowable by the mother's name

(*c*) *The paradigmatic instances are:*

1. Sita's *agni-parīkṣā*
2. Renunciation of Sita by Sri Rama
3. Draupadi's disrobing

(*d*) *Images and representations that are questioned are:*

1. of goddesses representing powers and functions
2. icon of ardha-narishwara
3. philosophic opposition of Purusa-Prakrti (*samkhya*), and of
4. *rati-prāṇa* (*prāsṇopaniṣad*)

A thorough exposition of the facts and issues involved in all these is something that will need independent and extensive space. But even before we give a brief account of the matter, we may admit that though we are told about all these, much is also left out. So this amounts to a half-truth and half-truth is a form of falsehood. We are not told that there is a balance of *śiva-śakti* that holds the cosmos and everything in the cosmos in place. We are not told of the 51 *śakti-peetha.* Nor are we told that no family ritual or ceremony is complete or possible without the wife, or that in our psychology, all the riches of the spirit (*daivi sampadā*) that are conducive to liberation from suffering are feminine (both in gender and in context) while the demonic properties (*asuri*) are masculine. Further, we are not told of the eight learned women (*ṛsikanyayen*) named and honoured in the Vedas (Saci, Gargi, Mamta, Visvavara, Apala, Ghosa, Surya, Vak), or that Saraswati is the goddess of all Vedic learning. We are not told that some of the most beautiful images are female, such as *hansavāhini Saraswati* and *makarvāhini Ganga.* For those who have not fully assimilated the import of these images or lived with them, so to say, it is easy to dismiss these as mere 'deification' designed to cover up truth. But, they are as real as, and are certainly to be preferred to, images of demonization.

We are *not* told that a wide variety of concepts and practices, often contradictory, are subsumed under the designation *Hindu,*

and that we cannot make general statements such as 'Hindus practice *sati'*, for that just is not true across the spectrum. We are also not told that there is a history to the Hindu social practices, that they have been dropped, added to, changed and have evolved over time in response to real life situations and needs.

VII

Above all, we *are* not told about what the ancient intellectual texts have to say about the ideal of life. Upaniṣads speak neither of man nor of woman separately but of human beings. They speak of problems and their solutions in respect of humanity in general. The solutions are based on a tremendous principle, the principle which envisages us all evolving towards mukti, or spiritual freedom. It is a movement from the physical to the spiritual, from the mundane to the divine, an effort at realising oneself improvingly: "I am the body and the mind. But more than that I am the spiritual principle." This is the basic message of the *Upaniṣads.* Both men and women may realize themselves with this principle. Nearer our times, Swami Vivekanandaji stressed the same powerful idea of the freedom of self for both men and women alike. Our psychology also says that both men and women are basically spiritual; the body and the mind are instruments; and it is the *atman,* the self, which is the *tattva,* the *kartā* which is seeking *mokṣa.* This is captured in that image in the *Ṛgveda* which visualizes—the body as the chariot, the mind as reins, and the *atman* as the driver.

The problem remains the same, wherever the person is born and whether as a man or as a woman. The difference lies in the method. If one identifies oneself with the body, the problem is physical; if with mind, it is intellectual, and if with spirit, it is spiritual.

There was thus absolute equality in *Upaniṣadic* times; *dharma* was the same for both men and women. It was only during the epic period that the demarcation began between men and women. Krishna and Rama seek *mokṣa,* liberation, in ways that are different from those of Draupadi and Sita. Or, is it the same say, the performance of one's *niyat karma,* duty?

Why was the difference introduced in the first place? This merits research. And the fact that, inspite of the difference in question, there have been extraordinary women -intellectuals, sages, rulers, and warriors-in the long Indian history right down to Ahalya Bai Holkar of Indore and Indira Gandhi in our times has also to be accounted for.

VIII

The elements of Hindu society that come in for criticism and have been listed in Section VI can be looked at not only from the viewpoint of contemporary Hindu law and practices, but from that of the *Dharmśāstras*. For example, there are mistaken notions about what the texts say about such questions as fidelity and the right of divorce, right to property, right to remarriage and the right to perform rites and rituals and in fact all the issues that we have listed under 'A' above. It needs to be stated quite categorically that in the *dharmśāstras* fidelity is mutual—as much a man's duty as a woman's. Similarly, we should note that some *dharmśāstras* explicitly grant women the right of divorce, as also the right to remarriage under certain conditions. We may also note that certain restrictions about ceremonies or rites applied only to the *grhastha* women and not to the class known as Brahmavadini, women who devoted themselves to realization of Brahma, the ultimate impersonal Reality. Again, there are discussions in these texts about the right of woman to perform ceremonies and rituals; Yakṣa, for example, describes this in his *Nirukta.* Again, no one is debarred from *study* of sacred texts; what is restricted is only the right to recite those texts, an activity that needs years of training and is required to be performed with great precision. Given the socio-familial life of a married woman, this activity was not considered fit for them as they could not be expected to give so many years to the training needed. However, as we are all aware now in the changed conditions, women have formed sorts of consortiums to perform rites and rituals; and if the Pune experience is a pointer then this fact is obviously welcomed by society at large. The question of right to parental property is a tricky question. In the

Dharma texts this has been debated and discussed at great length. That the girls have a right to their father's property is not denied by any one. The point at issue is only the form that this girl's share should take. This is important for an agricultural society, such as India's, where fragmentation of land leads to unproductive holdings, a matter which has been agitating the Jat peasantry of Punjab and Haryana even in recent times. The traditional solution to this problem was in the form of streedhan—a share in the form of gold and silver. It is not surprising that giving the girl her due share in some form or the other is still the most widespread practice and has often taken odious forms. It has taken today the form of consumer goods—fridge, television, microwave oven, and a Maruti car. In a discussion on the television, the experienced rural women expressed themselves against *this* form of streedhan or 'dowry', because the consumer items are used and expended by the in-laws, and at the end of it all the woman is left with no security against adverse circumstances. These ladies argued that streedhan should only be in the form of gold and silver. This is one case where the progressive legislation (prohibition of dowry and woman's right to property Act) have proved not only ineffective, but sometimes socially fissiparous, a case of law not in tune with social reality.

If we look into the customs and practices that are obviously irrational—practices such as *sati,* bride burning, aborting the girl child, taking on the husband's family name, and not being able to be known by one's mother—we find that there are misconceptions about what the *dharmas* lay down about these matters and also that there are competing practices and points of view. No text prescribes sati as a desirable practice; and the first *sati,* according to Purāṇas, took place when the husband was in fact alive. There is no question of arguing for such a practice and no *dharma* lays it down as a social duty. Even when it was practiced—during middle ages particularly—it was not a pan-Indian phenomenon, restricted as it was to certain upper castes and classes in Rajasthan and Bengal. Today, not only the law but even the community looks askance at this. It is quite another matter that when such a thing takes place, it becomes an object of curiosity mixed with

reverence; such occasional reaction is no confirmation of a social practice, but only an expression of a sense of awe at such a supreme tyaga, sacrifice, as it is assumed to be. Practices like bride burning or infanticide and its current form of aborting the girl child are legally and socially rejected and condemned as criminal acts. Both the law and community are unforgiving towards a family in which bride burning or infanticide take place. The point not only is that these are criminal acts but that these are regarded as such by Hindu society. The very fact that they are performed in secret shows that the perpetrators know that they are committing a wrong. We have to judge society by its general attitude to such acts and not by their occasional incidence.

In the other two questionable matters, again, there is not much substance. There are ancient tales, such as the one we have mentioned in the beginning of Satyakāma Jabali, which show that even in ancient India one could be known by one's mother. The contemporary practice takes care of this; indeed, now we are required to mention the father's name and the mother's name, and girls are now free and often do, in fact, retain their maiden names even after getting married. So, these are now non-issues. But then, what about why *kanyā-dāna*? Why not *putra-dāna* as well? Here, an answer is possible. In a culture that puts greatest premium on renouncing, the giving away of the dearest, most precious object is regarded as the highest sacrifice. A daughter is generally very tendered regarded by her parents; hence, as a kind of renunciation, *Kanya-dāna* is given special important. But, we may note, there have been cases of *putra-dāna* too; consider the story in *Kathopaniṣad.*

As for the paradigmatic instances—Sita's fire-ordeal, renunciation of Sita by Sri Rama, Draupadi's disrobing—suffice it to say that these are matters of interpretation because they figure in kavya texts where the meaning is constituted by several factors such as the composer's intention, the context, coherence between various parts of the text, the literary mode of communication and the theories of meaning. Just as 'acid test' in English is not literally an acid test, in the same way agni pariksha is not literally an ordeal by fire. As for the renunciation of Sita, it is a very complex

act in the ethical domain and would require much space to discuss. However, one *can* point out two things here—one, that after the renunciation in question Sri Rama himself lived the life of an ascetic; and second, that thereafter Sri Rama, had also to renounce his most beloved and devoted brother, Lakshman. Both these acts of renunciation had disastrous consequences. So the renunciation of Sita is not a simple matter of a woman being ill treated. As for Draupadi's disrobing, apart from the ambiguity about what this disrobing had actually meant in effect, it may be pointed out that this act was the turning point in the history of our civilization; and that for this single act of dishonouring a woman publicly, the country and the community waged a cataclysmic war with devastating consequences. Therefore to treat this simply as an insult meted out to a single woman is to reduce the episode to the level of the absurd. As for images and representations of women as goddesses and the objection to them as 'deification' that is designed to hide the truth, one may respond in a number of ways. In all creation Hindu mythology distributes primal energy between the male and the female evenly; Hindu philosophy sees them as a unity and not as two opposing principles; Hindu iconography captures the philosophical assumptions as well as the attributes of all those elemental forces that are given 'forms', be they male or female. A political reading of this rich texture of thought can only be subordinate to the philosophic, aesthetic and physical readings. Above all, 'demonization' can be as much motivated as 'deification'; and I am sure that, psychologically, demonization is worse than deification.

To sum up, in a discussion of matters such as these there are three domains—private, public and conceptual. Sociological criticism will be inadequate if it restricts itself only to the public domain, or to the level of particular phenomenon, without going into its conceptual foundations. Such superficial criticism, unrelated to the community and careful thinking, is not likely to have any socially significant effect. Most of the elements of Hindu society that have come in for criticism are now archaic and they have become archaic because the Hindu society is a very dynamic, self-reforming society, with its reforming spirit deeply embedded

in an introspective, self-reflective process of intellection which is manifest in a long tradition of texts, eminent figures and commentators.

IX

(a) Hindu woman is very vital today. As Sadhvi Vivekaprajna of the Ramakrishna Order observed in her 1994 discourse:

> the only field in which some of Swamiji's [Swami Vivekananda] vitality is visible is in the field of women. Women, modern Indian women, Hindu women, are very vital today. They have tremendous problems. I would rather call them challenges. All around, these challenges abound and women accept them and try their best to come to terms with them.[10]

Their success story is self-evident. There is no domain now which is an exclusively male domain. And whichever field they choose to work in, they distinguish themselves. They are getting educated at a fast rate; the rate of growth of school-going girls is twice that of boys. Today, parents take pride in educating their daughters and the daughters react with gratitude. There is now a high level of public acceptance of women leaving the precincts of their homes and entering the public sphere.

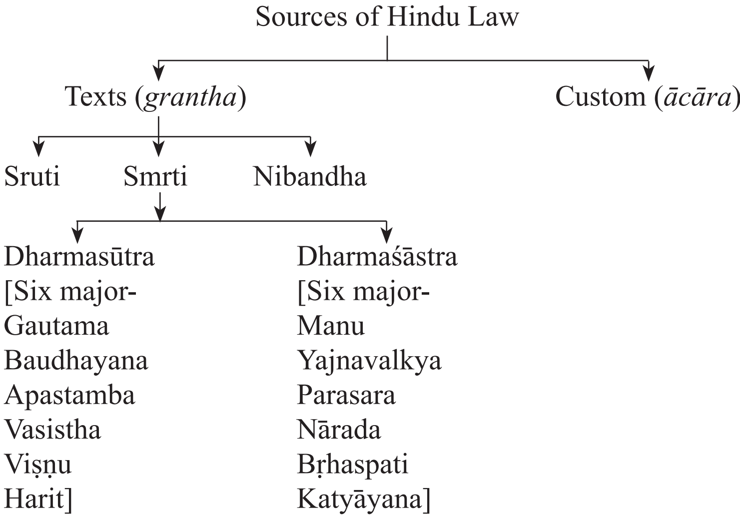
And governed as she is by modern Hindu law, woman today suffers from no legal disability. Codified Hindu Law is the contemporary *Dharmaśāstra;* and there is also the Article 15 (1-3) of our Constitution which, after excluding all disability on grounds of sex, goes on to say that:

3. Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

This progressive Hindu law did not arise in a vacuum. It is rooted in history and tradition, in customary law which is itself rooted in the compretiensive body of sociological thinking enshrined in the *Dharmaśāstras* and the *Nibandhas.* Its eclecticism, its acceptance of diversity and its dynamic spirit that provides room for change and reform are products of a whole tradition. It is therefore worthwhile to look at the traditional sociological thinking in relation to women.

X

There are two sources of modern Hindu law—texts and custom (ācāra). There are three kinds of texts—*śrutis, smṛtis* and *nibandha.* Smrtis are of two kinds—*dharmasūtra* and *dharmaśāstra;* and they span the period roughly from 800 BC to 600 AD. The *Nibandhas*, digests and commentaries are glosses on important Dharmaśāstras and span the period roughly from seventh century AD. to the end of the eighteenth century. These were written in different parts of India, in local languages, and served as law in their area. If a custom is to become an authentic basis for norms, it should be ancient, continuous, definite, not unreasonable, not immoral, nor opposed to public policy and given laws. The structure of texts looks like this:



The Dharmaśāstras are not just prescriptive texts; they are also a record of widely varying practices and customs. So they differ from each other on crucial issues, thus attesting an acceptance of plurality and the principle of non-absoluteness in social practices. The important point is that in almost all important matters, there is not just one right way. In this sense, the social code is not rigid.

Here, some examples may be cited. The Baudhayana and Apastamba sūtras differ on several points. Unlike Apastamba Baudhayana approves of *Niyoga* and *eight forms of marriage*[11] from the strictly śāstraic to downright abduction. *Harita dharmasūtra* also recognizes eight forms of marriage, but two of these are different from the Baudhayana, thus adding up to ten kinds of marriages in vogue in different parts of the country. *Harita sūtra* also recognizes two classes of women—*Sadyovadhu* (newly married) and *brahmavādini* (devoted to knowledge). The second category is allowed *upanayana,* like men, and study of the, Vedas (prime scriptural texts). The Vasisthasūtra allows re-marriage of widows. *Sānkha* and *Likhita sūtras* allow even widows to have a child by *niyoga. Viṣṇudharmasūtra* allows inter-caste marriages. Kautilya not only allows widow re-marriage, and re-marriages of women the whereabouts of whose husbands are not known, but desertion by a wife of her husband if he is of bad character or a traitor or impotent. He also allows divorce on grounds of mutual hatred. The *Katyāyana smṛti* deals specifically with rights of women—the streedhana.

Such catholic views are a recognition of plurality of practices. At any given time, in a vast society such as ours, all practices may coexist at a given time. Can there be a fixed norm in the face of such variety? What the smṛtikaras do is to establish, so to say, a cline of acceptability, a valence among the competing practices. Then, guided by a wider world-view and philosophy, a *niyama,* the preferred mode, is propounded. *Niyama* is just one of the many ways of doing something, the preferred way no doubt but not a rigid norm, far it will vary from place to place, from time to time and from one community to another. This is the closest approximation to the concept of something being quite correct ethically. Here, a decision is not always easy. Confronted with contradictory practices or views, and the problem of individual and collective welfare, any decision has to be taken with the help of a set of meta-rules. Thus, that is to be preferred which:

(i) is in consonance with equity, justice and reason,
(ii) has wide acceptance among people,

(iii) is applicable in the new age,
(iv) is in accord with *ācāra,* common practice,
(v) is not against the spirit of the age, if not in accord with *śāstra.*

There is a line of authority to decide the above:

(i) *śruti* (vedic texts), and where śruti is silent,
(ii) *smṛti* (philosophic/sociological texts), *śāstras,*
(iii) *śila,*[12] where even the smṛti is silent,
(iv) by *ācāra,* the commonly accepted line of conduct, where there is no model,
(v) by *śiṣ*tavyavahara, the conduct of the cultured, where common conduct is not available, and
(vi) by one's own conscience, if no other guiding principle is available.

So dhanna, as enjoined duty or as right conduct, is not something absolutely given, but something to be determined.

We have used the word dharma in the sense of 'the enjoined duty'. Thus regarded, Dharma sense has the following characteristics, it is:

(i) what is approved by the conscience of the virtuous (Manu),
(ii) duty (*Medhatithi*),
(iii) what obtains widely and also what ought to prevail,
(iv) a consolidated scheme in which widely divergent practices, none really obnoxious, are accepted (Manu 1.108-10),
(v) practices restricted to peoples and places, time and emergency (Manu 1.118).

Therefore, in so far as *dhama* is admittedly—and with due reason—relative and variable, social criticism that assumes an absolute, universalist Hindu code is fundamentally flawed.

But there is another, larger sense *of Dharma,* an overriding ethical principle or righteousness which finally determines the desirability of even the enjoined duty. *Dharma* in this second sense, as an overarching parameter that decides desirability or righteousness of a course of action, has *niyama* or discipline as

its basic function. In the absence of such a determining parameter, society will descend into anarchy. As has been said:

There is hardly any activity of man which is not prompted by desire (*kāma*) but to act solely on desire is not praiseworthy; so to enable him to act with propriety, *dharma* is promulgated. (Manu 1.5)

Dharma controls *artha* (material pursuits) and *kāma* (worldly desires) and acts that are the results of that control are also *dharma.* It is not exclusive; there is a lower dharma in which a thing is permitted and a higher dharma in which refraining from it is considered more meritorious. It involves truth (*satya*) and nonviolence (*ahimsā*)*;* what it sanctions must not cause trouble to any being, must not hurt people (M: IV. 238), and so must not end up unhappily and be derided by the people (M: IV. 176). The ethical correlates of dharma are: truth, non-violence, non-stealing, purity and control of one's senses. *Mahābhārata* gives the widely quoted definition:

Dharma is that which is attended by the welfare of the world and by non-injury to beings." (XII. 109.10.15).

Dharmaśāstras thus, are texts that go into the details of human life and seek to lay down rules of conduct that are governed by an overarching ethical principle, namely the welfare of all. *The whole structure is centered on what we owe to others and is in sharp opposition to the self-oriented philosophy grounded in rights.* This code of niyama governs all aspects of life. Patanjali in *Mahabhasya* explains this Mimamsa construct—*niyama:* if there is more than one way of doing something, one of them is to be preferred over the rest. "The lawgivers and the Mimamsakas knew only too well that their laws had been changed or modified from time to time according to the needs of an expanding society, but the content of Dharma in all its essential parts remains the same. Just as a person may grow and shed particles of his body, and yet retain unchanged his individual identity, so does this body of Hindu *dharma* retains its unity and individuality across the ages from the time anterior to the *Ṛgveda.* Its *sanatana* (time-less) character is not destroyed but maintained by its adaptability and

adaptations. The institutions of today are founded on ideas that were active and alive in the Ṛgvedic and pre-Ṛgvedic times."

XI

This universal human ethics of *dharma* (*samanya dharma*) is the overall framework *applicable to all* both men and women. Within this global framework, there is specific *dharma* (*visista dharma*) for each constituent of the social order.

The specific *dharmas* are laid down with reference to the Hindu family; Thus, there are dharmas relating the husband/father; the wife/mother; the son/brother; the daughter/sister. And what is more, the *dharma* of each is progressively enjoined in relation to the immediate family, the larger family, the society and the whole country. Be it noted that here the thinking is not governed by a consideration of the welfare or 'identity' of the individual, by the prospect of his happiness which is attainable only through the happiness of others. As for woman, a commonly cited text says—'wife is the (real) home', a statement of the woman's centrality in the family. The *śāstras,* therefore, lay down many injunctions as to how she is to be regarded/treated:

> 'everyone should honour her if they want to prosper' (M. 111.55)
> 'where they (women) are not honoured, all good acts become futile' (M. 111.56)
> 'where she is dishonoured, the family perishes' (M. III.58)
> 'where both husband and wife are happy, auspiciousness and general welfare resides'. (M. III.60)

It is also noted that no rite can be performed without the wife and that, as mother, she takes precedence over the father and the teacher in receiving respect. It is also said that "she should always be married to a worthy man—better she remains a spinster than marrying a worthless man." (M. IX. 89).

Marriage is regarded as a sacred, indissoluble bond and the marriage hymns stress the mutuality of both husband and wife. Thus, see the following:

> "May we have divine protection; may we live together, with all our differences; may we not hate each other; may what we acquire in the way of knowledge be strongly efficient in its results."
> "I hold your hand for *saubhagya* (good luck) that you may grow old with me". (Manu).

While the *dharma* is tough for both the man and woman, it is harder for woman. The *śāstras* themselves recognize this:

> *yaga: para: purnso dharma*
> *tapa pradhana nari.*

Woman's life or role is seen as a *tapa*—a rigorous life,—though it is no doubt dedicated to a worthy cause—here the welfare of the family. This emanates partly from her being the mother and partly from the social structure at the time. It is important to note that the modern successful, and happy Hindu women do not move away from this definition.

We must reiterate here the meta-rule for all *dharma,* it is subject to change and modification with change in time, place and community, and also with changes in the general conditions of life. Thus, while most of the injunctions listed above remain alive in current social practice—sometimes in form alone and quite often in spirit as well-changes in the economic pattern of life have created pressures on the social pattern as well—the most important of these pressures is the need for a woman to contribute to the family income. Added to this is the other important factor, namely the example of western society with its ideals of freedom and identity, its individualism and its relaxed sexual mores. How has the Hindu society responded to these challenges?

XII

The Hindu society has been keeping pace with changes in its life conditions. Even a cursory examination of the recent history of Hindu law makes it amply clear that Hindu society is completely amenable to reform by law; there is non-resistance to reform by law. The *dharma* of woman has been constantly being redefined.

Beginning with the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, of 1856, there have been a series of legislations that have in effect altered the social and individual condition of Hindu[13] women. These legislation are: Special Marriages Act (1954) Child Marriage Act ( ), Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Hindu Marriage (Amendment) Act (1976), Hindu Succession Act (1956), Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956) and the Hindu Widows Property Act (1997). Besides these and other enactments, there have been, about 2000 judicial decisions in suits concerning women's rights.

The effect has been tremendous. The Hindu women today are the most vibrant section of the Hindu society. Whichever field they enter and, none is barred to them, they excel men. The Hindu parents pride and pleasure in the education of their daughters. Studies have shown that the rate of growth in the number of girls going to schools is twice that of the boys. Of course the effect is uneven. The pattern of life of *rural* women remains broadly what it was, but it is changing fast with rural girls going to schools in increasing numbers. The poor women and the women of other castes still suffer most of the disabilities. But thus, again, is not always or uniformly so.

In many respects women working as a part of labour force live a less constrained and socially more equal life which is not very different from that of their men folk. The point is that the reform is definite though uneven; and that the pace of reform is increasing. This reform is matched by changes in the community attitudes and manners that are hard to define. Hindu society is evidently resettling into modes that are required by the changed conditions. There is an interesting example. Till 1976 a husband could go to the court and force a working wife to give up the job in another town and return to restore his 'conjugal rights'; but after the 1976 Marriages Law Amendment Act, a woman can not be forced to give up a job for this reason.

A purely legalistic view of things is insufficient in the context of our society. The law shows the direction of change; and, on the other hand, the way the customs are modified or new customs come

into being show how the society is assimilating a new injunction. With its traditional wisdom, the Hindu society ultimately decides the value of everything by estimating how it contributes to, or detracts from individual and collective happiness. This wisdom is also a part of the individual psyche. Only this can explain why even in this increasingly materialistic environment, the Indians (both men and women) continue to attach so much importance to human relationships. Only this can explain why a successful professional Indian young woman seeks to combine her familial duties with her professional ones, bearing in the process enormous strain and challenge. It is evident that in the process the Indian males are also going to change—they are going to share more and more of those domestic responsibilities that were earlier considered to be exclusive duties of woman alone.

XIII

Again and again in this essay we have been talking of texts and the practices. As is only to be expected, there is and there has always been a dialectical relationship between the two. In fact, a large number of successive *dharmaśāstras, nibandhas* show that thinkers were constantly revising their systems in response to changing needs and conditions. Also the number of conflicting practices incorporated in a given text show that just as there are divergent injunctions, there are also divergent practices coexisting at a given time in a populous society inhabiting a vast geographic area.

Therefore, a simplistic view is excluded for the reason that such a view would not achieve much. There can be no discussion on any one unit's rights or duties without a discussion of the different principles or contexts. Also a wife's rights or duties, or for that matter of a husband, cannot be discussed in isolation from the rights and duties of the respective partners, the parents, the parents-in-law and the children. Also, we cannot discuss practice in isolation from *śāstra,* just as we cannot evaluate *śāstra* in isolation from practice. A holistic view is necessary if the discussion is to have some practical value.

However, while practice may diverge from the injunction, it is important to take note of the fact that practice and injunction also converge in another instance in the same society, at the same time, and in the same context. The contemporary research attitude of focusing on deviations, on exceptions, on error and on difference, makes sense only in the current ethnographic mode of thought. No doubt ethnography and empiricism have gone hand in hand for a long time now in modern research, but this does not negate the fact that there is an alternative point of view, that of the synthesis of norms, and of commonness and unity. It is an interesting fact of intellectual history that monistic, Hebraic systems tend to take to ethnography and empiricism, while the pluralistic, pagan systems (Indian/Greek) tend towards models of synthesis and convergence. Had it not been so in our intellectual history as well, India would not have survived as a cultural/intellectual identity.

A shift in the perspective would thus lead to a very different kind of investigation and results even in woman's studies.

XIV

We come finally to the wider philosophical dimension. As we said earlier, we all live at three levels—physical, mental and the spiritual. Depending on which level we are focusing on, the problem will take that particular hue. It has been a belief in India, a belief as old as the Upanishads, that this universe is a vast pulsating entity. There is an element of life immanent in everything. Manifestation of this life is not all alike or of one grade. It is said that this life "sleeps in metal; is awake in plants; moves and grows in animals; knows, and knows that it knows in man". Self-awareness is the attribute of being human. It is because of this self-awareness that human being is always striving to transcend his little self and approximate godhead. We all want to become more than ourselves, i.e., we want to grow beyond our physical self. It is clear that progress beyond being a man i.e. being a human, is not in the physical domain. It is in the domain of mind and spirit—*adhyatmik.* It is in the realm of the culture and spirit that we become more or less free of our body and its limitations, its *dukha.* Free of the body, we

cease to be a man or a woman, and regard the goal of our endeavour as identical—*mokṣa*—which has been defined in *Samkhya* as liberation from suffering here and now. In the Indian tradition the *puruṣarthas*—dharma, artha, kāma, *mokṣa*—are common ends for man and woman alike, the ultimate being mokṣa. It is not a coincidence that the three key categories, brahma, dukha, mokṣa are gender-neutral. Sri Krishna, Rukmani and Radha all achieved *mokṣa* though their paths, instrumentality, differed.

XV

CONCLUSION

We conclude by saying that it is necessary to relocate ourselves in our rich intellectual tradition to be able to analyze the specificities of the Indian woman's situation. Of course, we have to take into account the other traditions and also contemporary thought. We also have to the living and competing practices, and juxtapose them with theory. Such holistic inquiry must be carried out in a spirit free of both self adulation and self-flagellation. What one has to log on to is the overriding fact that Hindu society is not a static society, certainly not in the sphere of women, and that it is amenable to reform by law. It is a society that is visibly different today from what it was, say, even two decades ago. It is desirable, therefore, in the interest of total understanding, to put this dynamism at the centre of every debate about women's condition in India; and, further, to look for the roots of this change, and amenability to change, not just in contemporary western thought but also, and more adequately, in the attested, long tradition of reformative, highly differential, dynamic sociological thought of India.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] 'Upaniṣads have stories/narratives that constitute and resolve women-related problems, the story for example of Jabala in Chandogya Upaniṣad. Yakṣa (9th c. BC) discussed questions such as a daughter's

right to property, her eligibility for performing death-rituals of her parents, and the participation of a woman in a complex social network that gives her a multiple identity.

[2] Jorge Armand, *Beyond Modernity* (2000), Merida, Veneuels, Universidad de Los Andes, p. 8. Mimeo. It reached me courtesy Prof. Asis datta, Vice-Chancellor, JNU.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Luciano Tomassini, in "EL into del desarrollo", Attali Castoriadis, Demonach, et. Al. Ed. Kairos, Barcelona, 1987, p. 73, quoted by Prof. Jorge Armand in the tract cited above.

[5]Eli Lily and Co. put Prozac on the market in 1988. According to Newsweek "…worldwide sales of this anti-depressant are currently at more than 1 billion dollars a year. Doctors, the majority of whom are not psychiatrists, are issuing 1 million prescriptions each month, mostly for healthy people who just want to feel "happy" (Feb. 7, 1994). Cited by Professor Jorge Armand.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] Ibid., p. 7.

[8] Ibid., p. 30.

[9] Ibid., p. 21.

[10] This is a close reproduction of what Sadhviji said in her discourse.

[11] Brahma, Devata, Arsa, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Pisaca.

[12] The conduct of the virtuous who are free of heart or inordinate affection'.

[13] Constitutionally, Hindu law applies to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains.

Constructing an Indian Theory of Feminism: Problems and Possibilities

AVADHESH KUMAR SINGH

> "Those who eat (food grains), eat with my *Śakti* (power / energy); those who see, see with my *śakti;* those who breathe, hear whatever is said, do with my help only. Those who do not know me in this form, attain the low status because of their ignorance."
>
> —'*Śakti Sookt*'

> "Am I a woman, am I a widow, that you are asking me about the problems of women?"
>
> —Swami Vivekananda

> "… men should take feminism seriously, but they should not appropriate it, women may welcome men to feminism but they need to remain cautious both about motives and possible consequences".
>
> —Mary Eagleton

These epigraphical excerpts serve different purposes for me. They celebrate the power of woman as *śakti;* provide *a* recognition of the fact that she knows it; voice the dilemma of a male participant in feminist discourse; and resolve the dilemma with the words of caution for men and women both. All these statements notwithstanding, the fact is that I for sure do not know if my present endeavour will fall in the category of defection or encroachment. Between the two i.e. my limitations and uncertainty, rests the fate of my endeavour.

I must borrow a little honesty and sincerity from Swami Vivekananda and pay heed to the words of Mary Eagleton and take feminism seriously, for along with the *dalit* discourse, it is the most resilient of our obtaining discourses, and so unignorable for a student of literature like me. I can, however, shake off the burden

of anxiety by considering the entire discourse in the categories of (i) feminist consciousness, that is a consequence of experiences as a woman, leading to feminist discursive practice out of the experience; and (ii) feminist discourse, a larger category including all discursive practices by men and women but with sincere concern for women. I rest content with the second, and do my bit with my 'intervention', a word that was so dear to the Marxist critics, in the present feminist discourse, for one can love it or loathe it, but cannot be indifferent to it.

Since I am a student of literature, I, for my purpose, will rely heavily on literary works, in languages of Indian origin, for Indian creativity in languages of Indian origin is more authentic than say, Indian English Writings because its scope and depth of experience of the addresser, his / her addressivity, and the class of the addressee are limited, though so very visible that the children of writers writing in Indian languages ask their parents, as to why do they not write in English.

Let me begin with a not so impersonal note. As a student of literature, I found the world of literature infested with different categories and subcategories. The next moment, after the word *literature* was pronounced, saw the world being divided as poetry, drama, fiction, non-fiction, followed by their further division, for instance, of poetry as 'classical', 'romantic', 'modern' and 'post-modern'. None of them disturbed any one. However, a category like 'feminist literature' disturbed most of us at the very mention of it. For these disturbed souls, literature was literature; it could not be feminist or menist or feminist, without acknowledging the fact that it has always been menist, excepting a few pleasant patches of feminist discourse here and there. The question that used to be over-sighted in the process was that if literature can be 'modern' or 'post-modern', high or low, then why couldn't it be feminist.

Whether one is disturbed by feminist consciousness and its articulation or not, the fact is that it exists as a category. However, much of our feminist discourse takes Western formulations or paradigms as its model. In the process, it leads to an uncritical acceptance of the Western agenda of feminism as our own, and in

the end to a complete disjunction with our own tradition. As an ironical consequence, those who advocate feminism and invest their resources in establishing its acceptance, become uneasy even at the prospect of discussing, leave aside the question of proposing and constructing an *Indian* theory of feminism.

On the surface, the skepticism against the proposition of such a theory would convince all. One would say that theory is a theory; it cannot be Indian, non-Indian or a-Indian. Further, if there is or can be an Indian theory of feminism, then will I accept the proposition of Pakistani theory of feminism?

These questions demand their critical assessment whose want leads to mis /under estimation and further erosion of confidence in our traditions, and culture. If there can be an English, American or French school of feminism, or Black feminism, why can there not be an Indian School of feminism? There is a rich corpus of literary and sociological writing in our languages—classical and modern as well that can be put in the category of feminist consciousness or discourse and considered for constructing such a theory, though theory need not necessarily bank on this corpus, for in one sense theory is speculation as against practice.

Further, the need for an Indian theory emanates from the fact that the Indian situation and Indian ways of looking at the world are different from others. The Indian society differs from others, particularly the Western society in the sense that it is a service-oriented society, or as Professor Kapil Kapoor puts it as duty-oriented, not a right-oriented society. The duty-oriented society manages itself not by fighting for rights but by excelling in performing duties i.e. *dharma* (righteous way of doing) for a given individual in given situations. This is one of the reasons that persuades me to suggest that instead of, NHRC (National Human Rights Commission), we should have instituted National Human Duties Commission). If fathers, sons, brothers and husbands perform their duties—and mothers, daughters, sisters and wives follow suit—the question of oppression of women will just not arise. Ananda Coomaraswamy had seen this duty-orientedness of Indian society in terms of service, and had rightly pointed out with an implicit warning:

> Indian women do not deform their bodies in the interest of fashion: they are more concerned about service than rights: they consider barrenness the greatest possible misfortune, after widowhood. In a word, it has never happened in India that women have been judged or have accepted purely male standards. What possible service then, except in a few externals, can the Western world render to Eastern women? Though it may be able to teach us much of the means of life, it has everything yet to relearn about life itself. And what we still remember there, we would not forget before we must". (139)

However, it should not be construed that I intend to suggest that women in India suffer from no suppression, and that the ideal of service-orientedness or duty-orientedness takes care that all is well with them. True it is that I am an Indian, and proud to be so; but I am not such a chauvinist as would consciously gloss over whatever ugly or disgusting the Indian picture may have in it. However, neither my modesty nor self-effacement prevents me from stating that the uniqueness of Indian situation, experience and viewpoint demands specific attentions. Even originally, in its Greek form as *theorein* or *theasthai*, the word 'theory' means 'viewing' or 'seeing', respectively.

Theory is seeing; theorizing is an act of seeing, through a state of impasse created by a thick wall of words replete with multiple layers of meanings in a work whose different counterparts form a piece of of literature. The act of seeing demands totality of perception, or at least of perspective, something more easily said than done as in the case of Indian woman and situation. The obtaining feminist discourse in India offers a situation in which Western paradigms dominate, and they use the Indian situation as their data. Since the process of (what may be called) 'epidermalization', in which the slave behaves with the fellow beings the way his master used to behave with him/her, operates more in societies and minds that are haunted with colonial hangover, the Western theory-fed/ intoxicated miniscule minority of English educated upper class *Femina*- or *Society*- reading Western theory wielding Indian women may hijack the feminist agenda and discourse. A small minority of about 3 per cent well placed women, ensconed in secure luxuries of life, speaks for the rest of their oppressed and

dispossessed counterparts whose emancipation should in fact be the core of the feminist agenda. However, the minority excludes the majority. An Indian feminist theory cannot afford to be exclusive. As an attitude, exclusiveness is un-Indian. In accordance with the Indian situation it has to be pluralistic, un-homogenizing and inclusive of position and problems of women of all regions, religions, castes, classes and communities, be they bureaucrats or workers, scientists or social workers, farmworkers or factory-workers, and particularly the *dalit* women.

The case of *dalit* women offers a complex situation. Women and *dalits* share a common fate; it is worse in the case of *dalit* women, for they are stigmatized for no fault of theirs the moment their sex or caste is discovered at the time of their birth. (Singh 124-6) The similarity of their fate brings them together. Women in India are about 50 per cent of the total population, and the *dalits* (or Bahujan Samaj, to use a more politically correct and comprehensive term) form about half of the Indian population. Hence, at least one fourth of the total Indian population offers itself for a far more complex feminist consideration than the other one fourth; for this class of women carries the burden of their oppressed men. With no intent of dividing the feminist discourse, it has to be admitted that the case of *dalit* women deserves separate and special consideration within feminist discourse. They offer a rich site for feminist discourse and its theory, for they have been associated with labour, and hence are a happening space. In fact they enjoyed greater freedom in their familial affairs because of their participation in the labor, and were never confined to the four walls of their house, like their upper caste counterparts. Here, if I am allowed to speculate, the *dalit* feminism or feminist discourse has greater vibrancy and possibilities of studies than that of the upper class or city or metro based discourse, for if feminism has anything to do with empowerment of women, it is this class that needs it the most. And a true indigenous Indian version of feminism will have to bring them into the core of the discussion. Sunny Singh, the Indian English novelist, reflects on this point, though not necessarily in relation to the problem of the *dalit* women:

> … 1 feel that there is a need for empowering women in India to reach the same levels as the role models from history. Unfortunately, the leaders of the women's movement in the country (politically, ideologically, socially) have simply tried to use Western feminism in Indian situation. What we really need is a homegrown version of feminism—call it *Kali-ism* if you wish to be radical and extremist, or simply nari-ism. But it must take into account our conditions, ideas, historical developments. (134)

For my purpose, even at the risk of appearing to be too fond of quoting let me cite Sunny Singh again to transcend my individual limitations and attain authenticity in the process. Addressing the issue of the indigenous theory of feminism she states:

> The homegrown version should address our issues, in our context. This means realizing that a rural farm worker in India has very different concerns than a woman in a similar profession in the US or Africa. There are some basic commonalities of experience within the different socio-cultural, economic layers in India. So an educated middle class woman in a major metro still has concerns in common with an illiterate dairy cooperative member in Gujarat. The point is to find a common platform to air these concerns and do something practical about them. We need to empower women in our own cultural context. Without an essentially Indian component, feminism will make no impact in the streets or in a village in the country. And like other things in India, this brand of feminism must be inclusive of ideologies and practices, even to the point of being mutually contradictory. That is the essence of India, after all. (134-5)

These words lend support to my insistence upon an Indian theory of feminism, and chart out the path as well. An Indian theory of feminism has to be inclusive, even though it becomes contradictory in the process. The problem, however, is that when one thinks of being inclusive in the case of Indian situation and women, then one finds even at the end of a sincere endeavour that what is excluded is more than what is included. For a better view I can at least clean my lenses, if not the entire scene.

Let me therefore turn to the point pertaining to theory and theorizing. To theorize is to speculate. In relation to speculation, theory is an instrument, speculum—of bringing into view what

remains otherwise hidden. This speculation is a multi-dimensional activity. In it, one speculates on some phenomenon, and others see this speculation, which is simultaneously being seen by the first speculator. In other words, 'I see. My act of seeing is seen by you. And I see my seeing being seen by you.' It is a multidimensional, at least three-faceted activity. In its loose sense, everyone, including a creative writer, is a theorist, for she/he is nothing but a seer, a speculator or a theorist. Hence, this seeing is a construct, and like all constructs, it is not a politically innocent activity. I, on my part, need not be apologetic, if this endeavor of theorizing has some political connotations in it. The quantum of political connotations would, however, depend on, and be determined by the position and participation of the community of seers. The community of seers/speculations minimizes and controls the political connotations by not allowing them to get established as the final statements on truths, though this community cannot stop them from being speculated on. With all its political connotations and limits (the latter I need not discuss here, for that would throw a spanner in my present purpose), theorizing, the act of seeing, viewing or speculating is by its very nature a positive act, for it enriches all those who are involved in the process either as constructors or as speculators of these constructs by making them aware of the very process by which theories about them were constructed, and the way we (women) received different formulations about ourselves (themselves). It makes us aware of others' positions and situations, and more so of our positions and situations. Hence, societies like ours should participate vigorously in it. Here, let me state that the terms and phrases like the end or limits of theory are misnomers. They are traps laid for us by those who think that we shall naively walk into them, stop thinking in terms of theories, and give in to discussion of their politics and economics and also their construction, while they busy themselves with constructing, processing, fine tuning and packaging and selling theories to the rest of the world for consumption.

To a good extent the West is successful in its project, as it skilfully uses the *shāstra* of theory as *shāstra* and successfully persuades or compels us to be either their buyers or victims.

Theorizing is the need of the time for us, though it is fascinatingly fatal, and wise scholars in person advise against it, for those who attempt it find it a risky act of eye-searing drudgery, and those who have to read it find it extremely boring[1]. However, it is a risk worth taking because if the west can take this risk and reap the harvest in the process, why should we not save our crop? As regards the question if there can be a Pakistani or Sri Lankan theory of feminism, one may say, *why not*, provided those who press for such theories—namely, the scholars of Sri Lanka and Pakistan—can really produce a theory of feminism, which is distinctively relevant to their individual condition and which is not so far there. Let the skeptics among us know that Gresham's Law does not operate for long in literary criticism. In the end, only, good critical pieces survive, though bad ones may drive out the good ones out of circulation initially. An Indian or Afghanistani theory of feminism will survive only if it has some substance in it, and if it would offer a new way of looking at different phenomena pertaining to Indian, and Afghanistani women and possibly to women all over.

As stated earlier, the proposition of constructing an Indian theory of feminism, is fraught with multiple problems and limitations. The limitations, however, are solely mine.

Since I am a student of literature, literary texts will be my sole source of collecting and processing data pertaining to women in India, though our tradition does not sanction the use of literary texts for determining or commenting on social situations, for this task is better served by sociological texts or *dharmaśāstras.* My problem is further aggravated by my limited exposure to a few texts from a few Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati and English. Further, the Indian situation is extremely diverse. In the vast Indian landscape women of diverse castes, classes and backgrounds live and flourish in their individual ways. They live in modern, medieval and ancient periods simultaneously. Further, their roles and network of relationships are multiple, yet relatively stable in comparison to relationships in the West, and so varied and complex that they may baffle anyone unexposed to them. On the other hand, in the West the relations are few, and among them the

only stable one is that of the mother, because of instability of the marital relation and frequency of divorce. India offers a vast range of relationships with a definite name to each one of them. Every relationship is named and thereby known, for naming is necessarily some knowing. Every relationship is a unique world with its *dharma*, making our society a vibrant one,–a bouquet of sub-cultures making one Indian culture in which different sub-cultures contribute to its conception and enrichment. This very strength of the Indian situation, however, heightens my limitations.

Further, against this complex and varied situation, a problem that hinders the attempt to construct an Indian theory of feminism is the unfortunate tendency in Indian academia to ignore the Indian tradition, situation and the roles that Indian women play, to misrepresent Indian texts, and to pick from them only a few lines and *ślokas* for attention. We, in our attempt to be called 'modern' participate consciously or unconsciously in India bashing. Let me strive to substantiate these points.

The Indian treatment of women is confined to the *Smṛtis*, particularly to the *Manusmṛti* and *Pārāsara smṛti* among others. The generalized allegations include the protest that these are all Brahmanical texts. This emphasis, inturn antargonizes all non-Brahmins who become allergic to the word *Brahmin*, little realizing that, in its original sense, the word does not mean one who is born in a Brahmin family, but one who knows Brahma ('*Brahmam jānati yah sah iti Brāhmanah*'); and that such a person may be born in any family. Further, it is argued that the *Manusmṛti* lionizes women in the *śloka:*

> '*Yatra nāryastu pujyante ramante tatra devatah*
> *Yatre staknapoojyante sarahstraafalad kriya.*
>
> *Manusmṛti* (Chap. III, 56)

but condemns women in other ślokas. This is an instance of gross injustice to the text and to our whole tradition, for the text is subjected to vituperative condemnation without reading it as a whole. Whatever is discriminatory in the text, should of course be condemned, resisted and rejected, but only after reading it carefully, and preferably in the historical context. I feel tempted to

add here, 'Burn it if you wish but only after reading it.' In fact, the worse part of the whole story is that even our scholars contribute to this process in many ways. They read the Western feminist texts from Mary Wollstonecraft to Naomi Woolf, but they do not read Indian texts, though they revile them and thereby the entire Indian tradition, for it is these texts which make the tradition.[2] The *Parāśarsmṛti* is another text subjected to this condemnation without being read with due care. The remarks which smack of discrimination against women may well be criticized but those that valorize the position and role of women should also be acknowledged. For instance:

> *Vyālgrahi yathā vyālam balādudharate bilāt,*
> *Evam strī patimudhratya tenaiv sah modate.*
>
> (*Parāśarsmṛti*, Chap. IV, 33)

> (As a snake catcher pulls out a snake from its hole, similarly a pious woman redeems her husband lying in a low state).

Here a wife is a redeemer of her husband, not his mere subordinate, nor an object of his exploitation and oppression. Further, the *Smṛti* allows a woman her right to remarry in five conditions, a fact which takes the sting out of if the oft repeated allegation that women had no right to remarry in the *Smṛti* period:

> *Nashte mrute pravrajite kleeve cha patile patau,*
> *Panchswapatsu narinan patiranyo widheyate.*
>
> (Chap. IV, 30).

> (A wife, whose husband's whereabouts are not known (e.g., he is lost in a foreign land), if he is dead, has become ascetic or has fallen, can have another husband).

Much of what is speculated regarding the ill-treatment of women particularly in the *post-samhita* period may well be true yet it is undeniable that in the Vedic *Samhita* period women's position was better than what is often painted to be, though the society may have been patriarchal in that period. The word '*nāri*' was connected to its root '*nar*', rather combined with it, like '*Vāgartha*' in which meaning is merged with a word or speech[3]. A woman

(*nāri*) was *ardhangini* (one half of the being of man) but is in no way subordinate to man. She was Sahadharmini (co-traveller on the path of *dharma*), fully capable of taking her own decisions. Of different women mentioned in the Vedic *samhita* texts, Maitreyī is a symbol of freedom of expression. When Maharishi Yājñāvalkya wants to embrace *sanyasa* (the fourth stage of life as a wandering ascetic after renunciation of the world), he says to his wife Maitreyī, 'Maitreyī' I want to embrace the life of a wondering ascetic. *I seek your permission* and that I want to divide whatever I have between Katyayini (Yājñāvalkya 's second wife) and you. (Emphasis mine). Here Yājñāvalkya is obviously not an arrogant man who decides to renounce the world without caring for the sentiments of his wife. He does not sneak into ascetic's world of renunciation like Buddha who perhaps did not have confidence in either himself or in his wife. Yājñāvalkya knows his wife, and her answer befits the confidence of her husband in her strength, as we know that she asked for knowledge, the imperishable wealth rather than her rightful share in her husband's (perishable) property. Vedic women had rights for education and knowledge, as exemplified in Maitreyī's case. Moreover, her case was not an isolated case. Along with Maitreyī, there were a host of such women like Rshika Ghosha, who had earned this name for proclaiming the importance of the Vedas everywhere; Dakshina who had underlined the significance of *dan* (gift, offering or endowment). Romsha, Lopamudra, Vagabhurana who had excelled herself in comments on *sṛṣti* (creation), Juhu who was known for her sharp intellect. These women of the *samhita* period enriched the Vedic discourse and in the process earned various honours for their counterparts.

The *samhita* discourse refers to women as Kulpa (family fosterer) Dhruva (steadfast), Purandhrih (framework or platform of the society), Prataran (the rudder of life), *Shiva* and *Kalyani* among others. In society of this period the family was paramount and its foundation was the institution of marriage. Soorya blessed the bride with "*Samragyi bhava*" after solemnizing the Vedic marriage. At the time of marriage the would-be bride, after hearing "*Saptapadi bhava*", tells her prospective husband: 'If you promise

to consider me as an associate (*Sahyogi*) in Yagna, *dān* (offering) business and other social obligations, and respect my opinion, then I am willing to be your *Vāmangi* (a wife or one who sits at her husband's left). Then the man would respond "*Grahanami te Saubhāgatwyē* (I accept thee for my good fortune). Romasha tells Raja Bhavyavya, 'O King! Accept my advice and act on it. Never consider any work as trivial. Like the sheep of the Gandhar region, each pore of my body is full of hair. I am endowed with a mature mind. The Vedas and *vedanga* (works auxiliary to the Veda) are like hair in the pores of my body. That is why I am Romasha.'

Continuing with this elongated diversion, it may be re-stated that the Indian situation resists generalization, and thereby further problematizes the issue of theorizing, for theories and theorizing cannot do without generalization. For instance, the general impression that the position of Indian women worsened at the pan-Indian level after the advent of the Muslims demands re-examination. The Muslim advent in India can be traced to eighth century. However it was only in the eleventh to thirteenth century that the Muslims made their advent and presence felt through their acts of vandalism felt in and subsequent domination of the major parts of the country, particularly the north and northwestern part of the country,by the thirteenth century. With the establishment, terms like '*Pardā*', *Diwanē Khairat*' and '*Harem*' became social institutions. Not restricted to the Muslim families, they became an integral part of the upper Hindu society as well. The *Pardā*, with its Persian origin, was an ornament but also an armour against invasion, and the *Harem* was a prohibited, safe, exclusive place, though the King, the centre of power, could encroach upon this space. The *Diwanē Khairat* was instituted by Firoz Shah Tuglaq to alleviate the problems of poor parents of girls. With this began a period of intense darkness for Indian women; as practices like *Purdah* were introduced in India. Female voices of dissent, like that of Mirabai, were isolated and rare. Yet it cannot be said that in the whole of India women did not participate in expressing disagreement during the period. In certain parts of the country, women were conscious of their state, and articulated their thoughts at a larger scale. If we take the case of Karnataka, there

were a number of Virasaiva women writing the *Vacanas*. These Virasaiva women writers played their pivotal role in the socio-religious revolution in the twelfth century Karnataka. Of the 14 authorized volumes of *vacanas* (each volume containing about 1300 to 1400 *vacanas*),one is exclusively by 33 women writers, and it speaks volumes about the freedom that the twelfth century Kannada women enjoyed in social, religious, cultural and literary fields, when the west did not allow its women to write. Though these women wrote under the influence of their male counterparts, yet their works bear the stamp of individuality, as they raise their voice against the double exploitation, like the untouchables, besides exhibiting typically feminine sensibility in the expression of intense feelings with lyrical gaiety. An example may be taken to illustrate the point. The high caste Brahmins regarded woman us essentially impure, an embodiment of excretion. But the Virasaiva women writers openly questioned the prevalent notions of purity and impurity. They argued in their *vacanas* that impurity was a matter of mind and not of the body. They suggested the remedy.

> 'If the impurity of the mind is mitigated,
> Will there be room for the impurity of body?
> (Akkāmahadevi, *Samagra Vacana Samputa*, Vol. 5, V, 349).

They vented their ire against those scriptural texts which had branded them impure:

> Vedas, Shastras, Agama and Purāṇas
> All are broken rice and chaff of pounded paddy.
> Why pound them, again?
> Why thrash them, again?
> If the head of the mercuric mind is chopped off
> It is all sheer void,
> Cernamallikarjuna!
> (Akkāmahadevi, *SVS*, Vol. 5, V, 305).

With the co-operation of their male counterparts and maintaining importance of righteousness in words and actions by attaching importance to the present, as in *vacanas* of Akkamma and Kalavve, these Virsaiva women strove to remove the slur of inability

and impurity from womankind and in the process strove to prove that women are as strong, and pure as a men, and equally efficient in all fields.

The case of the Virsaiva women writers underscores the fact that the position of women, their endeavours to resist repression and to articulate their grievances varied from region to region and period to period in India, making it difficult for one to either generalize or theorize.

Equally important to mention here is that Indian society, even today, views things in an integrative and holistic way. Hence the changes that take place in society do not appear as radical and revolutionary as may appear in an unintegrated or disintegrated society. The units of society, such as relations, communities and even castes among others, absorb the shock of misfortune through sheer togetherness. The negative aspect of this collective endurance is that it does not allow community members to develop individual resilience. Its positive aspect is that the individuals, women in this case, run a lesser risk of becoming neurotic, as against what happens in the West. This accounts for scarcity of neurotic characters in Indian literature as against their profusion in the Western literature.

Further, societies like ours, with a complex web of familial and social relationships and a long tradition of inclusive, cumulative, integrative, and holistic thought patterns, tend to develop and even operate not in ponds of thought, so to say, as streams of thought—flowing like a river, meandering through the forest of growth, with many tributaries joining it and distributive streams going out of it. This is the reason behind the continuous engagement of Indian mind with the problems of women in one form or the other in different periods, though the treatment meted out to them may not have always been either even or positive, for even here men authored these discourses. That is why India or Indian writers have not, in general, proved a very fertile ground for feminist activism. Sunny Singh has rightly remarked in this regard:

> When I lived in the West, I could not fully understand their feminist ideas and aspirations. Women I knew at home were far too empowered to need liberation. And there were always female role models

> from history and mythology for every field of life. Indian women had been conquerors, military leaders, artists, poets, rebels. The Western concerns therefore made very little impact. (134)

Even today not many Indian women intellectuals and writers—be it Madhu Kishwar, Shashi Deshpande or Mridula Garg among others—relish the label of feminism. If some of them do associate themselves with it, (and if they do not, then critics try to bracket them), they redefine the category. As late as 2001, for Kishwar's and Deshpande's may be an old story, Sunny Singh, an Indian English novelist, and Mridula Garg, a bi-lingual Indian writer in Hindi and English, spoke of their discomfort with the tag of feminism. In an interview with Anastasia Guha, Mridula Garg speaks of her uneasiness with the label:

> Feminism needs to be redefined if we want to apply the term to literature. A work of fiction is complex and evocative of human foibles, it cannot follow given ideology or toe a politically correct line all the time. If feminism means that I speak for everyone with equal honesty, then I am a feminism writer.

On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande, seems ambivalent in her attitude towards feminism, though she rightly accepts the fact of oppression of women, she says:

> Women have been quite suppressed, quite oppressed. We, the middle class people with education, are quite lucky. But a large section of Indian women are suffering even today. We have women going about with the *ghunghat* on their faces. And women who have no chance even to decide about having children. We have many people who still advocate *sati*, who consider dowry a necessity, who count it a loss when a girl is born and profit when a boy is born. It is this abysmal difference that I want to do away with, as a feminist… You have to take the history of women into consideration when you judge women's writing as a whole. When you deal with just my work, then take me as an individual writer and deal accordingly. Do not call it women's writing or feminist writing.… Today we have women writing about women [and] for women. These works are being published by women, curtsied by women, read by women, and studied in the Women's Studies Departments and so on. I had this 'women lib' separating women's writing. It is just self-defeating (254-55).

Earlier she lamented the prevalence of 'terrible misconceptions about feminism, by people here' (248). She considers feminism not a matter of theory, and finds it difficult to apply the Western theories to the reality of our daily lives in India. She redefines feminism as "translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength." (249) In this sense she feels that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it (249).

Shashi Deshpande's engagement with women's concerns in her fictional works and interviews, if viewed in totality, can help us in forming an idea about her notion of feminism. Her positions marks the following stages: consciousness of the suppression and oppression of women, its articulation with full consciousness of the limiting impact of this choice of the subject-matter; and recognition of the possibility of extravagance and exaggeration in the articulation, leading to rejection of negative attitude of her women characters towards either society or their strength. Her rejection of the tag of feminism in the western sense and thereafter its redefinition by stressing the 'positive' aspect stems from her cognizance of the Indian reality and Indian women as they are, though her canvas i.e. the middle and upper middle class, in her novels is quite limited.

Moving a step further towards an Indian theory of feminism, *reaction* is the first stage of every movement preceded a paralleled or even succeeded by the *speculation* of the ideal, to be followed by their *realization.* These three stages are difficult to skip in a movement. Indian feminist theoretical formulations have also to concern themselves with these stages and also with the question: What after emancipation or empowerment? After all, Indian women have to think of themselves as beings with not merely belly and womb, but with intellect or *pragna.* This faculty should make them think of their reaction against empowerment, emancipation from oppression or suppression, rejection of the givens and then realization of their fullest potentialities. As human beings, they are not to be content with mere reaction by slamming the door but have to contribute to their environs wherever they are. This is the reason why most of the works in Indian languages in different periods, even the contemporary ones like *Mujhe Chand*

Chahiyc and *Sat Pagala Akash Main* offer a more positive model of feminism.

Further, Indian theory of feminism has to receive and respond to theoretical positions very carefully. Let us take, for instance, the case of the much abused slogan, the 'death of the author'. The subscription to this seductive formulation leads to the negation of the role of patriarchal inscribers which is a hopeless proposition. Moreover, it persuades women not to participate in the act of authoring or rewriting. Even at the risk of stating a commonplace I must state that both reading and writing are political acts, and are subject to manipulation. Indian women must accept the true nature of these acts, and participate vigorously in the acts of reading and writing, which would include examination of the given discourses, and constructing new ones as well.

Further, it is to be admitted that the language, tone and tenor of women's writings are different because they are by women. Further, women are not merely women but a class having their own identity, and located in some definite time and space. They belong to a class, community, race, religion and region. Hence, their articulation demands, if not separate all the time, 'competent' or 'responsible' discussion i.e. with care and sensitivity. However, a creative work cannot choose its readers. Its virtuosity lies in its ability to earn readership from all genders, classes, ages and regions. The comparing and contrasting of responses would decide as to which response(s) is/are competent.

Moreover, the construction of an Indian theory of feminism is a means of knowing others, and thereby oneself. It is one of the ways of resisting oppression and suppression, of emancipation and empowerment. However, the real concern before a theory of feminism, particularly Indian, is to be aware of the neo-colonial and neo-capitalist forces in the contemporary world, for the weaker class or sex suffers more than the rest at the hands of these forces. The invisible neo-colonial forces and neo-capitalists that thrive on consumerism by stimulating desire and thereafter obliterating the notion of propriety, use women to further their interests. Consequently, women are at the receiving end of these forces and their agencies. Their discourses and even their bodies

are used to sell off cosmetics and even things like truck-tyres that have nothing directly to do with them. A theory that does not help women in becoming aware of these phenomena, and sustaining them against the suppressive patriarchal or cruel seductive market forces that does not empower the weaker ones, or does not allow them to grow and realize their potentialities, and be true women in harmony with themselves and also with others in the society, is not worth its name; for it would 'see' or 'speculate' but partially. An Indian theory of feminism has to be inclusive (of all traditions—folk and elite, oral and written, regions, religions, castes and classes), positive, proactive, provisional (that is why 'an' not 'the' Indian theory of feminism); and, above all, constructive with central space for women. If allowed to choose from many terms in usage for feminism, I would go for '*nārīvad*' for it has '*nar*' in its fold, and it allows women to look beyond the prevalent, merely reactionary forms of feminism—victim feminism, victimizer feminism or power feminism.

I have for my purpose chosen two works, from my brief exposure to Indian literature, to support the paradigms for an Indian theory of feminism. The choice excludes so many. I have not chosen any from Indian English writing in general and the novelists like Anita Desai or Shashi Deshpande in particular primarily because their principal female characters come from educated middle, upper middle class, and their reaction does not go beyond verbal or non-verbal forms. They cannot act, as they are to some extent used to some comforts attendant to the middle class comforts. Some of them I have discussed in my paper "Self and Motherhood: Is that the Question?" (118-132). Here I choose *Mūjhe Chānd Chāhiye* of Surendra Verma from Hindi because it offers a different male perspective and has positive connotations as against quite a few novels by men and women novelists like *Rukogī Nahin Radhikā*, *Chhinnamastā* or *Iddanamam* among others. I choose *Sāt Pagalā Akāsh Main* for slightly different reasons, as it is by a woman novelist in Gujarati, committed to feminism, and above all is positive and proactive in its outlook. I am aware of the fact that my choice may anger many.

Surendra Verma's *Mūjhe Chānd Chāhiye* shows a discernible feminist pattern in the transformation of Silbil into Varsha Vashistha. At the very outset, this young daughter of a school teacher of Shahjahanpur is concerned with a few stinging existential questions, "Why is she born? What is the purpose of her life? Will she have to exist the way her mother, brother and elder sister do?" (4) Her initiation begins with rejection of her name and surname like "Yashoda" and "Sharma" respectively. She not only rejects the name given to her but herself chooses her name and becomes "Varsha Vashistha". Her father, who swears by Kavi Kulguru Kalidas at every pretext, does not allow her to participate in a school play, for he considers, ironically, these performances as '*Nautanki*'. The typical middle class mentality prevents her father to accept her proposal to contribute to financial resources of the family by doing tuitions arranged by a lady teacher, though even he is incapable of managing fee for her. She questions her father's rigid middle class mentality and her sister's narrow understanding of *streedharma* that asks daughters to get married, as and when the family arranges it and then breed children. Against these familial prohibitions, she does tuitions, participates in the play, goes through admission test of N.S.D., becomes an established theatre personality, and a successful commercial film actress. All through she remains utterly honest in her relationships. She tells truth to her father, even about her personal life. She supports her younger brother's education, and the family on all occasions. She remains honest in her relationship with her boy friend whose child she mothers but whom she could not marry for he died prematurely.

Silbil longs for the 'moon', and to good measure succeeds in getting it. For this, she questions the given, rejects whatever hinders her journey, carves her own path, and contributes in her own way to the growth of all around her. In a certain sense, she is extremely fortunate. Her path to stardom is not strewn with thorns. She acieves without suffering much in comparison to other characters in the novel. However, her success does not obfuscate her sense of duty, if not service. Moreover, she does not reject her body, but does not embrace perversion. Her '*nārivād*', more pro-

nounced in the first half of the novel, is not merely reactionist or rejectionist, but proactivist. She slams no door, burns no clothes, small or big, but keeps returning to her old address in the crucial moments when her family needs her support. She does not disturb or destroy any family, but rather builds families. By the end of the novel, she comes to know the realities of life (what is real?), and she is sure about her destination (Ideals/goals), achieves them (Realization of her goals).

On the other hand, the author of *Sāt Pagalā Akāsh Main* (*Seven Steps in the Sky*), written almost a decade before *Mūjhe Chānd Chāhiye* spells her views in her preface to the novel. She considers women's emancipation necessary for men's growth. If women are not emancipated, then even men will remain fastened. It is in our interest that our companion grows fully. (42) But in her project, women will have to play an active role. According to her, the exploiters never bring about revolution. Only exploited people have to strive for it. It is not a destructive, blood-smeared revolution, but one of values. (39) Vasudha, a beautiful sensitive woman, does not meander through different cities and metros like Varsha Vashistha of Surendra Verma. "She leads her married life in Mumbai before leaving for Anandgram, and therefore finally for the Himalayas." As an ideal housewife she has fulfilled almost all familial and social obligations. Vyomesh, her husband, is a typical patriarchal mindset. He has inherited the obtaining economic, social and cultural order that he worships blindly. Vasudha would have continued to be in the usual manner amidst patriarchal social order, had she not, in a given moment, decided to be a 'true woman', a proposition that no one in her family understands. For the family members, particularly her husband, a woman can be a *sati*, or warrior, scholar but not a true woman. That moment is a party hosted by Vyomesh to celebrate the marriage of a young officer of his company. He gets a telegram informing him of the death of his Faiba who had ruled Vasudha like a mother-in-law, though for Vyomesh she has been a mother. He keeps the telegram in his pocket and continues with the party, something that disturbs Vasudha.

By the age of 25 she mothers three sons. At the time of the birth of her second son she was in a critical condition. When she was out of danger, Vyomesh felt relieved. With the doctor's permission he meets Vasudha for a while. This incident gives another jolt to her.

"Vyomesh went in hurriedly.

Vasudha… Vasudha… his voice was choked," Thank God. Are you alright now? I was so disturbed!" He took Vasudha's hand in his, and caressed: "With God's grace you are out of danger. If something had happened to you… then what would have happened to me? How could I have taken care of the children?"

A faint smile flashed in Vasudha's pale face. She pulled her hand out of the hands of Vyomesh. Lying half asleep in the state of anaesthesia, a line of question spread in her consciousness. "Was there no problem, if there were no children? Is it so?" (81).

She further feels discriminated and even humiliated when her husband does not give her Rs. 500 that she wants to give to Ranjanben so that she could help a young lady who committed suicide afterwards. Vyomesh's insensitivity and indifference disturbs Vasudha so much that she begins to re-examine her existence and role in the family.

Her life takes a turn at age of 50. The layers of experience marked with the scars of suppression and oppression ultimately take effect. The turn in a life is in the race of women as such. She can now resist the oppression with a fearless and healthy state of mind. She thinks that her husband's behaviour towards her may be because of his ignorance. Since her children are properly settled in different fields, she decides to leave home. However, she does not run away from life. She leaves her home which is neither an act of escapism nor that of a negative, destructive soul. She leaves her family but gains a larger family in Anandgram where she will serve other women and society at large. She wants to realise her independent personality. Even the notice of divorce served by Vyomesh does not unsettle her. She played the role of an activist fighting for the cause of women suffering at the hands of different patriarchal institutions like politics and police. She finds an alternative world in the form of *Anandgram.* That is her acceptance

of new responsibilities for all women. Now she does not fight for herself but for her entire sex. Her transcendence of individual self marks her positive transformation.

There comes a moment in the novel when Vasudha begins to think in terms of her awareness of these little acts of suppression of women. She thinks of confronting, and waging a struggle against agencies of oppression. This fire of her struggle becomes sight on her path of emancipation. Whenever an exploited or suppressed class struggles against exploitation, it has to pass through these stages. The novel's protagonist goes through the three stages, as discussed earlier, namely, of reality, ideal, and realization.

The novel questions women's oppression, considers various options for their emancipation, and even puts to rest a few doubts that may arise in our minds. In the words of the novelist:

> Women's equality means rejection of the dominance of man, not of man as such. The relationship between men and women, and women and men is the fountainhead of the bliss of love. With their relationship of love both of them attain a lot, and they can come out of narrow boundaries of their egocentricism. The project of women's emancipation does not envisage life insulated from men. It is a concept of life being enriched by mutual dialogue. But such a relationship can come in existence only on the foundation of equality. (39)

Nārivād, an Indian theory of feminism, proposes proactive, inclusive, constructive speculation based on the principle of equality and harmony. The two novels from two different Indian languages, in their different ways, share similarity of positive feminism. Kapadiya's commitment to feminism flows from her pain, and feelings for her counterparts. She continues in the same vein in her positive-titled introduction "*Sat Pagala Sathe Chalavano Anand*" (The Pleasure of the Seven Steps) to Meera Bhatt's *Sat Pagala Sathe* ("With the Seven Steps"), suitably subtitled '*Ek Chintan Katha*' ('An Ideational Novel'):

> When she is born, you get angry.
> When she goes for work, you oppose her.
> When she is at home, you call her idle.
> When she gets married, you burn her.

But can you live without her?
Your mother? Wife? Sister? (iii)

The novel explores the questions pertaining to married life, that is, the crucible of human and civilization and culture. Those who have mastered the art of leading and celebrating life will do justice to it. It adds sincerity to positive and constructive Indian narivad, and in the process takes Kapadia's *nārivād* a step further, though some people surmised that Bhatt's novel was a rejoinder to Kapadia's, on the basis of similarity in the titles of both the novels.

Let me conclude with a poem "*Meri Bahne*" (My sisters) by Nirmala Garg:

"My sisters remain concerned for me
I for that matter do not worship or read holy texts
About God I am of the opinion that
He is not a living object like us
He is not like a sparrow
Or like grass
He cannot think
He does not know what's justice
What is injustice and whom it is concerned with
He has no eyes
He cannot distinguish between a tyrant and an innocent
He cannot go from one place to the next
He cannot purchase grocery
Knows no price or rates of market
What is the smell of perspiration
He does not know.
The smell arising out of *roti*
does not make him joyous.
He has never heard songs of cloud
humming of the earth
He does not know what is heaving?
He is in fact made of our weaknesses
Our ignorance
Our endless temptations
Our getting frightened at every pretext
All these have boasted his morale
My sisters kneel before him

and pray
May God forgive them
For they do not know what do they say"

The God in the poem I have translated as 'He'. It could have been 'She' on even 'It', keeping the attributes, described in the poem, in view. The God of the poem may be an idea, a tyrannical patriarch or in our context negative, rejectionist feminism of the western sort. The way out is suggested by Varshas and Vashudhas to choose and practice *nārivād*, Indian version of feminism or womanism, suitable for our times.

NOTES

[1] Please see Rene Girard, 'Theory and Its Terrors", *The Limits of Theory* edited, with an Introduction, by Thomas M. Kavanagh. California: Stanford University Press, 1989, pp. 225-254.

[2] Here I am reminded of the words of Kanta, the alter ego of Kant, a Gujarati poet and writer, in a letter to Kant. "The truth is that you are blinded partly because of your affection for me and partly because of your English education… I can say with confidence that you are neglecting a philosophy without understanding it. Can you really believe that a philosophy upheld for millions of years by millions of eminent scholars can be as dry as you make it out to be?…. You know the other country more than your own and think there is not a single thing worth knowing in your own country. All this because the foreigners have taught you so. You know Christ, but you don't know Kabir; you study Kant, but not Shankara… You all can fulfill the hopes of this country, if you wish, and without mistaking old superstitions for truth, do not mistake old truths for superstitions". (*Sidhdhant Sainu Avalokan*, Mumbai, K. J. Cheetaliya, Hind Servak Samaj, 1920, 92-3).

[3] The Indian concept of ardhanariswar with *nāri* (woman) and *nar* (man), Shiva or Śakti, or Purush and Prakriti merged in one is unique in itself, as it serves as an ideal for *nārism.* In it *nāri* is life force, and *nar* is latent. The former i.e. Shiva is a *shava* (a corpse) with out *Śakti* i.e. the Life Force. In *nārism*, the *nāri* plays an active energizing role, leave aside the question of being sub-ordinate to man.

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Section II

Journey Through Literature

Literary Feminism in India: In Search of Theory

MALASHRI LAL

I

It remains a point of curiosity—and some anxiety—that our eminent Indian English women writers have consistently refused to be named in the category of "women writers". Particular mention may be made of Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Ruth Jhabvala. If we were to look at the output of the young generation too, Arundhati Roy in her polemical phase following *The God of Small Things* has spoken eloquently against the Bomb and against the ravaging Narmada dam, but not in a gendered voice. Developmental scientists have adequately proven that displacement of families during natural or human-made calamities effect women and men differently beyond the common lot of deprivations. None of this appears as an emphasis in Roy's pronouncements. Deshpande and Desai have stayed within more literary reasons. Apparently, the category of "woman writer" is seen to be restrictive, limited, and exclusivist. There is a further implication that the subject matter expected of a "woman writer" is female oriented, and that the tone expected is "feminist," meaning radical and shrill. For such a cultural misreading of "feminist," Madhu Kishwar's essay in *Manushi*, "Why I am not a Feminist" or Kamla Das's recantation of her early, bold "autobiography" gives sufficient example. So while these eminent writers do not at all disguise their identity as women, they prefer, it seems, to subscribe to a universalist view of literary construction.

Consequent upon this choice is the further assumption that the hypothetical reader of their works is also gender neutral. Shashi

Deshpande's influential essay, "Dear Reader" says "every reader has the right to decide what books are the ones that appeal to her/ him," and then proceeds with a nineteenth century address, "Reader, make your own lists, choose your own books, make your own judgement." Given this scenario from one of our best read novelists, a view supported by others, a feminist literary theory can barely emerge in India from such a universalist base.

Let me follow this up with a second point. Do we need an India-specific literary theory analogous to French, African-American or Anglo-American as the academic categories go? To my mind, the answer is "yes". Not because others have evolved their parameters but because the disciplined class room study of women and literature requires methodological tools for understanding and analysis; and because the Woolfian "common reader" is different from the professional critic. Unless we evolve tools particular to our cultural context, we will be borrowing and cutting our groundwork with tools created by others. The paradox of contemporary feminist theory is partially this: Western theoretical models—sophisticated, seductive, intellectually stimulating—are imposed upon Indian texts, and a pattern is stretched to an uncomfortable tight-fit, rather like the buttons which burst open in Pegotty's dress in a Dicken's classic. We therefore find reams of thesis paper on Kamla Das or Kamala Markandaya or a host of others, analysed according to Elaine Showalter or Luce Irigaray's models.

A question to myself at this point is, am I being an Indian chauvinist? Peril lies in any direct answer. But first I would ask whether the local and global should be conflated for lack of indigenous alternatives. One of the favourite tropes for literary comment has been the "mad woman in the attic". After Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason is the best known name in our English classrooms. Any portrayal of madness, or it cognates—silence, resistance, anger, eruptive violence—appearing in any Indian English text is loaded with Gubar and Gilbert's terminology. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's admirable "Introduction" to *Women Writing in India*, while reviewing the expansive scope of western feminist theory, nevertheless raised a valid enquiry about its uses in India, "We must also explore why it is that if we simply apply the theories of

women's writing that have been developed over the last decade or so to women's writing in India, we will not merely reproduce its confusions… [but] compound them" (p. 31).

This brings me to a third point. Where can we locate the foundations for a theoretical study of literary feminism in India? The multilingual, multicultural base makes an answer almost impossible. Sourced from several debates in academia it would seem to me that postcoloniality, caste, myth, legend and regionalism are some areas for useful emphasis. Here we would need to think of Indian Literature as inclusive of English and all *bhāsha* languages, and we might need to adopt an "English Studies in India" perspective which implies training a critical eye upon literary material from the location of our standpoint in India.

Interestingly again, one comes upon a situation where critics of the eminence of Gayatri Spivak (*In Other Worlds*) or Gauri Viswanathan (*Masks of Conquest*) have made politically astute observations on, and given innovative leads into our postcolonial condition and its consequences to education; but a gender perspective has not been highlighted. Caste, as depicted and examined critically with reference to Dalit writing is male oriented, or at best, oblivious to gender difference. If we look at texts about Dalit experience, an old one such as Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable*, or a new one such as Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the oppressive state apparatus is given prominence and the violation to female subjectivity becomes only a secondary reference.

I could, in this discussion, turn my attention to translated texts, to those available in English so far. Here the assumptions of literary feminism collide with two other theoretical parameters, those of translation theory and those of postcolonialism. In the key works of a popularly read writer such as Mahasweta Devi, the subjects of motherhood, violence, power structures, social and political forms become inextricably linked. A short story such as *Bayen* would perhaps lend itself to a focused feminist analysis more than *Draupadi* or *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Ma.* With the fictional works of Krishna Sobti or C.S. Lakshmi, similar choices would need to be made if one were to prioritize the discourse of feminism and deliberately underplay other issues. One may recall

books such as Sherry Simon's *Gender in Translation* wherein this matter has been addressed but differently, as to how the *translator's* gender bias often determines the word and tone of the end product. It would seem, rightly, that the translator, far from being a faceless medium, is a powerful determinant of the message of a text. Hence the original emphasis of the text could be altered substantially in the version read by those who access the translation.

Let me conclude this first part of the paper by asking who is in urgent need of theoretical parameters—the reader, the writer or the teacher/researcher? Most people would believe it is the last category.

But we as teachers, far from being embarrassed by this, should demonstrate how a well-grounded feminist theory could actually promote a body of writing on the basis of a useful ideological viewpoint. We might then see Indian literature with distinctive features and as having a vital regard for socio-cultural analysis as has happened with subaltern studies in India or post-colonialism in Africa. So far, with a nascent feminist theorizing in India, we are living in the half light of shadow play, or the secondary world of mimicry.

The diversities and fragmentations I have addressed so far yield a complicated and shifting pattern, more akin to frames in film, than the fixed pages of a book. The enquiry into the possibility of an indigenous theoretical discourse is nevertheless worthwhile. Diversity should not be equated to difficulty or dismay. Several academic forums have recognized the difficulty of dealing with India's many faces in literature and have often turned away from attempting to evolve a pedagogical pattern. This to my mind is a mistake which has led to two unfortunate consequences, one that western models are imposed and then contested; and second, that Indian texts are studied as discrete entities to be grouped only by language or issue, but not by a feminist ideology.

II

After mapping this territory of enquiry, I wish to suggest at least one aspect of Indian feminism that may lead to profitable research.

This is the re-invention of secular mythology which, while drawing upon a continuous history of story-telling, nevertheless adapts cleverly—and critically—to the milieu and the moment. Being secular, rather than religious, they permeate the textual fabric to give it additional value without changing the essential pattern. The metaphor of a saturated fabric is deliberate because the examples I have selected will show how tradition and modernity lend weight to the original texture.

The first example I take is the legend of Mira bai. In Sujit Mukherjee's useful summmary in the *Dictionary of Indian Literature* "Mira or Miran (c 1498-1546): woman saint-poet of Rajasthan, popularly known as Mirabai; renowned singer and devotee of Girdhar (Shri Krishna). Born in Medta and daughter of Rao Ratansingh, she was married off to Bhojraj, son of Rana Sanga of Mewar; disclaimed this marriage on the plea that she was already wedded to Krishna, widowed seven years after the marriage, she had to face persistent criticism and hostility from her in-laws, ultimately left for Brindavan, from where she went to Dwarka."[1] Essentially, it is a tale of rebellion and transgression—the reason why it continues to capture the imagination of literary men and women. Some re-writings may be considered here alongwith the important observation that feminist re-inventions are not the prerogative of women.

Sunny Singh's novel *Nani's Book of Suicides*—published in 2000 to great acclaim—uses the trope of a grandmother as storyteller to explode inherited mythologies. Mira, to put it briefly, turns diasporic in being an imagined double of Sammie, "the coke snuffing international wanderer who moves from a small town childhood in Varanasi to Mexico".[2] "Over time", says Sammie, "I learn to recognise the different voices. And one of the voices I grew to respect and love, was Meera, who spoke to me as one rebel to another, as one poet to another, and most recently, as one discontented lover to another."[3]

The emphatic secularization of the myth allows for this conflating of identities over time and history. Sunny Singh's purpose is indeed to demystify tradition so as to make it an operational apparatus for the new age Indians who cannot accept old deifications. The

methodology calls for a few comments. The original Mira's aloneness, her willful choice of her "lover" and subsequent rejection of socially compelled "marriage," her insistence upon mingling with common people—the devotees of Krishna—irrespective of caste and creed, her resistance of authority, devising strategies for self survival, her departure from "family" and "society" are key points that make her a useable reference for contemporary women.

Sunny Singh enters the terrain with confidence. Another twist to the legend becomes feasible if we turn attention to Krishna and read him as a postcolonial image. His attractive darkness, his apparently humble playmates, the rustic charm of the flute and pastoral love engage with nativist ideology quite directly. A figure on the margins yet exercising immense hidden power, Mira's Krishna could well become the icon for protests against establishment politics. To what extent Singh is conscious about this transfer from mythology to market place I cannot be sure, but she writes a paean to "a person of colour" (to use an updated, politically correct term) "She (Mira) would recollect the dark idol dressed in rich saffron silks, the jaunty red turban with a peacock feather… she would see his shiny dark skin, the darker, shadow curve of his jawline."[4] So, if Sammie, while cavorting with a white, abusive lover, dreams of Mira's dark redeemer, the postcolonial encounter is surely built into the text. Specifically, it is highlighted in the words, "David is British, the firangi, callous and careless."[5]

Fortunately, such reconstruction of legend does not aspire to produce exact parallels. Deliberately changing the original, Singh's "Meera" dies in triumphant laughter while drinking poison, and it is she, not Krishna, who could "devour the entire world and yet not be satiated."[6] (an allusion to the "Virat" image of Krishna in the *Gita?*)

I had said earlier that rewritings depend upon the secularization of legend, and I have given an example of feminist politics built into such a text. Here, the new translations of Mira's poetry yield a curious paradox. Introducing Shama Futehally's *Songs of Meera: In the Heart of the Dark*, feminist critic Suguna Ramanathan astutely observes, "Mira is challenging discourses confining her to a particular position in answer to something else. The nature of

that something else—the faith experience—will be taken up later" which Ramanathan then elaborates in terms of Lacan's theory of Desire, Sudhir Kakar's psychoanalysis and Charles Taylor's views in *The Sources of the Self.* Showing up the problematic "link between the devotee (faith) and the world in which she lives (discourse)," Ramanathan claims a transcendent location for Mira's devotional voice. "The love we speak of here passes through but beyond all finite creatures, to use Lacan's phrase again, is forever rooted in the field of the other. This other, in the context of this volume, is God."[7] I believe that such separation of the secular from the religious is not suited to contemporary renderings of Mira's verse, nor is it sanctioned by Indian *bhakti* tradition. The prevalence of the legend depends upon its accessibility to the common learner. Mira remains a household name even in our sceptical age because her struggle against authority is a timeless emblem wherein the gendered condition of her oppression as also her strategies of silence and song feature a particularly feminine mode of retaliation. Indian traditions within which Mira's story is cast obliterate the boundaries of 'I' and the "other" permitting sporadic transitions. That is why Lacan and Edward Said are not necessarily the best tools.

Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita speak more relevantly about the melting of social barriers that mark Mira's refrains, "The *dāsi* that Meera is, the Lord's sweeper girl, *is free*,—the *dāsyabhāva* here is appropriate because of the connotations of constant proximity, intimacy, and surrender of will. She so gives herself in self-abandoning desire that control and authority vanish and she becomes that which she loves. The one she loves is a non-appropriating, one."[8]

Song 21. (p. 103) (*māne chākar rākho jī*)

Take me in your employ.
I'll plant a tender patch,
Wake at first light
Catch sight of you
And in Brindavan's leafy lanes
I'll sing of all you do.

My wage will be remembrance
For largesse I'll have your look;
As a king might bestow a lordly estate
Will you grant a heart that loves..

If Mira images an ordinary gardener here, in other songs there is comparable recognition of God as a Dhobi (Song 28, page 123, "*Harijan dhobia ve/mael mana di dhoye*") and God as the saviour of a low caste Bhil woman who chews *ber* and offers these in adoration (Song 29, page 125, "*Achhe meete chakh chakh/Ber layi Bhilni.*") In these instances, intertextuality with episodes in *Rāmāyaṇa* is worth pursuing.

Mira has too long been seen merely as a victim figure subjected to the ire of royal, masculine power. Feminist criticism might resurrect another Mira—a woman who exercised the choice to lead a self-determined life, who actually created a personal God with her image making capability. In such relationship, *Prabhu* and *dāsi* are inextricably linked.

The itinerant Mira, the serving Saint, the creative madness surfaces curiously in Anita Desai's novels *The Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting Feasting. Mira-māsi* is perhaps the only "character" to appear in two of Desai's novels which are not structurally connected in any other way. Why "Mira-māsi"? The name is too resonant to be inducted innocently. The spinster aunt saddled with household and child rearing, then her nervous breakdown into alcoholism and madness may seem a far cry from the legendary saint of her name. But examine the possibility of contemporizing the story in terms of oppressive social structures that place severe restraints upon a "Mira" and we get a statement on creative possibilities being curbed by familial duties. Aunt Mira seeks escape—in the liqour bottle which she cradles as a baby; then inebriated, she becomes an elemental creature, mad with an unstated passion. Mira-māsi is confined to her room, tied to her bed. She dreams of a bride-like cow that drowned in the well—she claws at her fetters, her clothes, her few possessions. A brief liberation: "a door slid open—audaciously, dangerously—and out darted a naked white figure, screeching and prancing, streaked through the

room, out into the verandah and then fled pell-mell down the steps into the sun."[9]

Anita Desai's selective handling of original Mira stories serves her purpose adequately. If history recorded the hegemonic structures and the saintly Mira departed her royal home as decorously as possible, her modern counterpart inhabits another world of violence—of the Partition, of divided families, of fear and trembling. Aunt Mira's mental slippage is unheroic in an unheroic world but just as tragic. Vocabulary details suggest that the name link is not arbitrary for in her death, we are told of her "blue-tinged skin, too antique, too crushed to move." This parodic representation of Mirabai remains Desai's gesture of recognition of an enduring legend by interrogating its premise.

The figure, reappears, incarnated differently in the Anita Desai's multicultural novel *Fasting*, *Feasting. A* compulsive cook Mira-māsi's usefulness to any family she visits is in the aromatic meals she stirs up for them. Single woman, pilgrim, forever a wanderer, she is in search of "her lord, her lost Lord". Guided by a dream in a temple in the Himalayas, she finally chances upon the idol in a brassware shop in Banares." 'Not for sale. Go away, please it is not for sale,' (the shopkeeper) begged her, thinking her mad—mad widows were not uncommon in the streets of Benares—but Mira-māsi raised such an unearthly row in the narrow lane of the crowded bazaar, people stopped to stare and flocked around curious to see what it was all about. She acted out her journey, her dream, the discovery, she laughed and wept. The poor shopkeeper… parted with the idol."[10]

Strangely one chances upon yet another Mira in Desai's fiction, but with a veiled obliquity. The Mother figure in *Journey to Ithaca* is partially based on Sri Aurobindo's "Ma" of Pondicherry whose original name was, of course," Mirra." In Desai's novel she is called Laila, a gifted dancer whose "skin tingled with the recognition of Krishna's love".[11] The word "Laila" is a variation of "leela," the mystical play of the Lord. Secularized as a somewhat exploitative relationship between the teacher and the taught—Krishna and Laila—the story nevertheless holds out its share of mysticism, power politics and ambiguous love.

This pattern of name-giving is too visible to be arbitrary. Desai's parody of "Mira" is just as much an acknowledgement of a living legend as Fatehally or Kishwar's effort to render "faithful" translations. The point I raise is one of ideological choice. The above examples from literature show the viability of feminist discourse encoded within some prime motifs of Indian lore. If our theoretical principles were to interpret patriarchal structures inherent in feudal systems, caste and creed discriminations *and bring the gendered subjectivity of Meera and such others to the forefront* new territories for research may open up.

Would a man work upon Mira's legend differently? Is there a masculinist version? Kiran Nagarkar's *Cuckold*, winner of the last Sahitya Akademi Award, attempts precisely this. History is rather silent about Mira's husband. As a creative correction, the author adopts the viewpoint of the man whose wife is passionately in love with another. Krishna is his rival, the cause of the ridicule wrought upon a husband whose wife is unfaithful. She sings, she dances, she submits to every passion for this blue, flute playing lad. Nagarkar humanizes Krishna, trivialises Mira's grand eloquence. Comedy and exaggeration are his best narrative ploys—and if one is not committed to the saintly Mira as a sacrosanct image, *Cuckold*, with its explicit title, puts the story on the fringes of modernity by alluding to the fickleness of relationships and the fragility of mortals. Here is an example from the novel capturing the irate husband's resentments:

> She was lying. Trust her to come up with someone as absurd and incredible as Shri Krishna for a paramour. A simple straightforward man was not good for her. Only a god, one of the most powerful, important and beloved of gods would do. You couldn't fault her for underreaching, lack of imagination of low self-image. It was so far-fetched, so utterly beyond the probable and possible, some credulous fool might just give credence. Shri Krishna. Ha make it a ha, ha. (*Cuckold*, 91)

III

My comments on *Shakuntala*, the other legend with enduring significance will not be quite so detailed but only indicative of

directions that feminist theorizing might take. Unlike the story of Mira—the pilgrim woman in search of salvation and transcendence—the story of Shakuntala privileges son preference, motherhood and familial affiliations. As Romila Thapar has meticulously documented, two plot lines are available, the first derived from the Mahābhārata, the other from Kalidasa's play. Women being important in a lineage based society, Shakuntala of the epic exercises choice on several occasions, most significantly in making her marriage conditional and later insisting on Dushyanta's acceptance of being father to Bharata. "In the dialogue with Duhshyanta, Sakuntala seems to be the more assertive, as her appeal is to the truth of her claim; she does not stoop to abusing him."[12] A celestial voice establishes the status of Bharat. The son's identity and right to lineage being assured, Shakuntla returns to her dwelling in the forest. Kalidasa's play introduces the subplots involving the curse and the signet ring, and portrays a shy, retiring, dreamy Shakuntala who is acted upon by destiny. "The ring highlights the centrality of memory" as Thapar points out[13] and Dushyanta's lapse is attributed to the extraneous element of a curse. This device which detracts from the possibility of any condemnation of Dushyanta, places the woman's dilemma outside the pale of social discourse. The strong, rational woman of the *Mahābhārata* turns into a bewildered and supplicating woman. When the ring brings back "memory", Shakuntala seems to gratefully to accept the recognition of her wifehood. Thapar summarizes, "In the transition from the epic story to the play there is a decline in the empowerment of women".[14]

Of the many rewritings of Shakuntala's tale, the influence of Kalidasa's dramatic romance seems to have dominated so much that one can hardly consider the story without the ring factor. Contemporary rewritings have however attempted to recover the confident and decisive Shakuntala of the epic. The crux of the matter seems to dwell upon feminist ideas of the maternal giving priority to the mother-child diadic unity to which the biological father is an unimportant detail. By such strategem, Shakuntala may be read as the primal single mother, abandoned by the husband/sexual partner.

An interesting telling of such a plot is available in Anjana Appachana's novel *Listening Now.* Padma, moving with a middle-class neighbourhood, allows the community to believe she is a widow bringing up her teenage daughter, Mallika. Framed photos of the "father" and a sheaf of ready-made tales fill up the gaps raised by the curiosity of a growing child and are passed on to the gossipy "aunties" who are sympathetic yet watchful of the single mother's personal conduct.… The jigsaw pieces retrieved from the silences of Padma's memory contradict much of what she publically articulates in speech. From the narrative voice, we learn the following:

Once there was a college romance at Delhi University. It flourished among the library stacks; then moved to bookstores in Connaught Place. Life and literature strongly mingled, so did intellect and desire. Karan and Padma intended to marry but Karan never returned from his visit to his ancestral home. Meanwhile Padma gave birth to Mallika and the story of a dead father was concocted. Thirteen years pass. Karan finally tracks Padma. Tearful and repentant, he feels specially guilty about the child he did not know about. Wishing to restore the lost years he confesses to his continued love for Padma, but she in turn gently spurns his attempts at this late atonement "Everything that we ever felt for each other has become…twisted and misshapen," she whispered.[15]

If "biology is destiny" it is not always a weakening one as such rewriting shows. Even more than in fiction, film and TV productions are depicting the single mother as a measure of changing social norms—and she is no longer the snivelling dependant.

I'm grateful to Sukrita Kumar for giving me a recently published Hindi short story by Archana Verma which provides a fascinating update to Kalidasa's *Abhijñāna- shakuntalam.* While keeping to the mythical mode, the author cleverly weaves in a contemporary political scenario. Two villagers have the responsibility of escorting the young Shakuntala to Dushyant's court. They are bewildered by the strange language said to be spoken in the city. To the reader this princely tongue is presented, hilariously, in colloquial, everyday English. Dushyant interrogates Shakuntala,

"Lady, do I know you?"[16] Shakuntala, the commoner, understands enough to come out with a filmi line:
''मै तुम्हारे होने वाले बच्चे की माँ बनने वाली हूँ।''

Dushyant furiously defends himself to his suspicious and frigid queen "She is lying, I tell you, she is lying. I don't know her. I swear I've never even seen her." The signet ring of identification had been stolen from the villagers as soon as they had arrived in the big-bad city. An elaborate political nexus of spies, politicians and ministers keep Dushyant's kingdom in order. Ridiculed and rejected, the hapless, weepy Shakuntala returns to the forest.

Many, many years later, a conscience striken Dushyant seeks her out, but meets a startling transformation—Shakuntala has become a khaki clad, rifle swinging Phoolan Devi, and proudly speaks of her son Bharat Singh as ''सात राज्यों के बीच सबसे बड़ा डाकू।''

It is Dushyant's turn to snivel. Archana Verma's story is not a one dimensional text about female empowerment. In modernizing Shakuntala, the author satirizes women's organizations, Beijing and other seminar circuits and women leaders just as much as she pokes fun at inflated male egos.

IV

In arriving at tentative conclusions, may I return to some questions raised at the outset. Can there be an Indian theoretical frame for feminism? Not in absolute terms. To a pointed focus on selected cultural tropes, I would reply in the affirmative, "Yes." Unlike many other countries, India has a continued tradition of practiced mythologies, both scripted and oral. They offer—to use a cliché—a mirror to society. But clichés are also truth tales which hold myriad possibilities. In the magic of those tales and their adaptability to time-place syndromes lies at least one major potential for our own feminist orientations. I have caught merely the surface of such enterprise.

NOTES

[1] Sujit Mukherjee, *A Dictionary of Indian Literature*, *One*, *Beginnings-1800.* Hyderabad: Orient Longmans, 1998. Pp. 234-235.

[2] Sunny Singh, *Nani's Book of Suicides*, New Delhi: Harper-Collins, 2000. Quotation from book jacket.

[3] Ibid., p. 55.

[4] Ibid., p. 57.

[5] Ibid., p. 48.

[6] Ibid., p. 60.

[7] Shama Futehally, *In the Heart of the Dark: Songs of Meera.* New Delhi: Indus, 1996. 1-12 passim. See also *Women Bhakta Poets*, *Manushi*, January-June 1989.

[8] Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, London etc.: Penguin Books, 1980, p. 96.

[9] Anita Desai, *Fasting*, *Feasting*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1999, p. 139.

[10] Anita Desai, *Journey to Ithaca.* London: Heinemann, 1995, p. 227.

[11] Romila Thapar, *Sakuntala: Texts*, *Readings*, *Histories*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999, p. 38.

[12] Ibid., p. 55.

[13] Ibid., p. 73.

[14] Anjana Appachana, *Listening Now*, New Delhi: IndiaInk, p. 58.

[15] Archana Verma, "Nepathya", *Hans*, March 2001, pp. 60-67.

Exploring the Icons: Sita and Radha

KAVITA A. SHARMA

Sita and Radha are the two most popular icons of the Hindu. Sita is the ideal wife and Radha the symbol of unconditional love. Both have no existence except in relation to their men and each in her own way surrenders her entire self to love or duty or both towards them. Radha and Sita would on a superficial reading appear to be the very antithesis of feminism, being the embodiments of tradition. But, what is feminism? Its simple dictionary meaning is advocacy or extended recognition of the claims of women. And what is tradition? It is an opinion or belief or custom handed down from the past. Is then tradition opposed to modernity? If so, should Sita and Radha be discarded as irrelevant in today's context?

Modernity

Vidya Niwas Mishra has pointed out that the word *modernity* is a very misused and abused term.[1] To be modern implies that every new fad or strange idea in vogue is to be followed. This inevitably leads to disillusionment because it creates a sense of meaninglessness. But modernity is really consciousness of a particular time without being circumscribed by it. To be modern is to be aware of our times and milieu and our relationship to them. Awareness is an ever-present process of cognition and that is why time and place may change but awareness does not disappear. To live in the present is not necessarily to be modern because then modernity becomes a fetish. The present can be so disturbing that one can escape it by talking about it as if it was already past, or make it

more tolerable by seeking another 'present'. This is what happens with fads, which replace each other in quick succession.

Modernity, then, is continuous awareness or consciousness of one's milieu and society, the direction that it is taking and of one's own capacity to deal with it. The medieval saints were not less modern in their own times. They uprooted old values and challenged established hierarchies, but they did not advocate fragmentation. Rather they attempted to establish new harmonies. Often modernity is construed to simply imply loss of values, but true modernity only recognizes that an accepted 'value' has become 'valueless', and wishes to free itself from it. This is not to be bereft of values. To be modern is to reexamine something in the context of one's time and place. In the process, the thing being examined may be destroyed; or some part of it may be integrated with a new need; or it can be discarded or accepted *in toto.* However, such a re-examination has to be done by each individual himself, according to his own particular circumstances while simultaneously keeping society in mind.

Ideas concerning modernity came to us from the West and got opposed to tradition. The pain of modernity in India is due to the alienation caused by industrialization and urbanization. To bathe in the Ganges or go to Brindavan is not necessarily to be traditional. To be Westernized is also not necessarily to be modern. Since modernity in the West was associated with rationalism, it does not mean that the historicity of Krishna or Radha has to be proved before believing in them otherwise one would be accused of blind faith or irrationality. The more significant question is whether they are living in the consciousness of the individual or society. Both the yokel and the educated man have their own world-view, but both have to also comprehend each other. Brindavan cannot provide an escape from the stresses of modern society, but can certainly aid in an attempt to understand one's own self and society.[2]

It is possible to simultaneously see the pollution of Yamuna, the destruction of the forests on its banks, rapacious tourism, *and* also be enchanted by the eternal love play of Radha and Krishna. Being alike valid, both must infuse one's consciousness. The

unlettered man—who sees in Brindavan nothing but the eternal boy cowherd, Krishna, playing his flute on the sandy banks of Yamuna—has to be made aware of the lettered man's perception of Brindavan as a polluted backward city. At the same time, the lettered man must acquire the eyes of the unlettered and see the magic and romance of Brindavan. The inability to find a commonalty of ground between them is the pain of modernity in India.[3]

Similarly, Rama and Sita live in the consciousness of every Hindu. Every village in India sings and recites the story of Rama and Sita. Strains of their song float even from the labour colonies of Indians wherever in the world they may be, whether in Singapore or in Bangkok. Even those who went as indentured labour to Fiji, Mauritius and the Caribbeans clung to *Ramacharita Manas* as a badge of their identity. It gave them solace through all their hardships, discriminatory disabilities, loneliness and isolation. Thus the Hindu psyche is suffused with Rama and Sita. Every bride is exhorted to be a Sita and every mother sees Rama in her son.[4]

What is the significance of Sita and Radha? Can women today relate to them in any way? Being part of both individual and societal psyches, attempts are made to interpret them again and again to become the dynamic voices of every new age giving tongue to contemporary concerns, evolving, modifying and sanctifying values as they adapt to different time and place. It is, therefore, necessary to examine whether they are relevant for women in contemporary society, and also whether the values they embody have any significance for society as a whole.

Modernity and Feminism

The ideas of modernity arose in the West because of forces unleashed by Reformation and Counter Reformation. They generated an absolute confidence in the power of reason to discover the truth of life and in the power of technology to alter social and cultural patterns. Simultaneously, Renaissance gave impetus to a humanist movement that too reinforced a belief in reason. Anything that could not be scientifically tested or verified was to

be rejected. The aim was emancipatory and an attempt to liberate human beings from all arbitrary beliefs. It was felt that once human problems could be rationally analyzed, objective solutions could also be found. In such a world view, the past became the dark ages in which religion and faith had unleashed frightening primitive emotions and uncritical superstitions.[5]

Feminism became part of the progressive modernist agenda. Forces unleashed by Reformation, Renaissance, Humanism and then Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enthroned reason as the chief power by which man could understand the universe and improve his own condition. From Enlightenment arose Liberalism in which the central concern was equality under an artificial sovereign authority, whose power derived from the consent of the governed and an equal treatment of all citizens under law. The central political concern of the liberal tradition in dealing with the oppressed, whether it be the poor or women or any other underprivileged class, was equal access. It was thought that social justice could be provided to such groups through education and adjustments in the existing laws and institutions. Therefore, *liberalism* emphasized democracy, equality under law and equality of opportunity in education and employment. This implied faith in the ability of institutions to provide this equality of opportunity and access; and that is why, in spite of phases of often very violent protest, it is a reform rather than a revolutionary movement.

Both modernity and feminism clearly recognized that women had been traditionally oppressed. However, as long as the cottage industry and the family farm were the centre of economic life of people, women could not be ignored in spite of their subservient position and social and legal inferiority as they played a vital economic role. Enlightenment paved the way for the establishment of capitalism, and democracy that led to far reaching economic changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that left middle class women with no clear roles in society except the ones determined by men—that is, the roles of mothers, and wives. Therefore, an important liberal feminist agenda became

how middle class women, who were well educated and capable, could put meaning into their lives. One way was to treat men and women equally as there was no essential difference between them.

The liberal feminists achieved much—the right to vote, constitutional legal access to education and the professions, equality before law and greater economic parity in many areas. Although there is still a long way to go, several things that we take for granted today are because of the struggles of the liberal feminists.

The modernist position did not touch the thorny issues of gender differences. These emerged in the radical feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s whose fundamental premise was that men imposed gender roles on women and manipulated them for their own purposes—economic, emotional and sexual. Family, according to them, was the site that reinforced gender differentiation and perpetuated women's subservient position; hence, it had to be abolished. They advocated compulsory homosexuality, artificial modes of reproduction and transferring the responsibility of raising children to the state. Such solutions are not acceptable to most women themselves and can only create a perpetual battlefield for men and women detrimental to human society itself.[6]

In recent years there has been growing awareness among women that although huge strides have been taken in ameliorating their position, some fundamental assumptions of these reform and revolutionary movements may be inaccurate because women are essentially different from men. They are not just biologically different but their basic natures are different as well and therefore so are their needs. Besides, the rationalist, modernist, postmodernist, feminist and radical feminist positions are all spiritually empty, leaving a hunger that craves fulfillment. As Ramakant Rath's Radha Says of Krishna:

> I knew there would be a day
> When you would stop speaking,
> stop smiling
> stop recognizing us
> stop finding your way about
> towns and villages

> you had lived in for years,
> stop remembering
> our fearless transgressions of history[7] (65)

But would it really make "the road to death less infested with terror"

> after a little rebellion
> a little reordering of the world
> a little spilling of blood (65)

If not, can spirituality provide an answer both to women and to society? Or, do women hold the key to a new age, which demands a feminization of thought, the enthronement of 'woman-values' if there is to be peace and harmony on earth. After all for the Sufis, God is a woman; and for the Hindus, the underlying creative principle and energy sustaining the universe is a feminine one of the Devi or the Shakti.

Women, then, have to first try and understand themselves as women, whether through feminist therapy, education or spirituality that brings them in touch with the idea of the Great Goddess or by any other method. There is also a feminist position that since women are different from men in vital respects, the pursuit of equal rights for them has in some important ways become a male agenda. Revival of interest in spirituality has given rise to another opinion that feminism has failed to extinguish spiritual aspirations and longings in spite of its radical advocacy for rationalism, raising the question of how spiritual rebirth can be channeled into social and political action which will ease the continuing oppression of women in many traditional areas.[8]

The Great Goddess

Here a question may be put. What is the status of women in societies where there is goddess worship? In the Western religious traditions, the male imaged deity reflects a patriarchal or male dominated society; but this does not mean that the status of women is very high or that women are dominant in societies where god-

desses figure prominently in religion. Rather, they can be and have been conveniently exploited in the name of religion and spiritualism. There is no positive relationship between a goddess-centered and female controlled religion on the one hand and a high status for women or sexual egalitarianism on the other. Hindu society, for example, is overwhelmingly patriarchal. Its defining structures relate males to males and women find their place in society by their associations with the men.[9] In the realm of religion, however, women as devi Shakti is dominant. The Hindu trinity consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh or Shiva, of whom the most prominent are Vishnu and Shiva. Their worshippers are known as Vaishnavites and Shaivites. Some have removed Brahma from the trinity and replaced him with Devi. However, the Goddess or Devi, cannot really be substituted in the Trinity as she is Shakti, the energy without whom the gods cannot function. She reigns as no male can, because she is the overarching force that connects and communicates. She is the warp to the woof, the soul of relation. She makes the world organism live, speak and love. Without her the ciphers in dharma's complex equation would remain inert. She gives them life by connecting them. She mediates and consorts.[10]

Sita and Radha

The Devi takes many forms. As Sri, she is the consort of Vishnu and manifests on earth as Sita and Radha, the wife and beloved respectively of Rama and Krishna—both *avatārs* of Vishnu in the Treta and Dwapar yugas. Sita has always been worshipped as the ideal wife of Rama, but Radha was only established in the twelfth century by Jaideva in *Gita Govinda* and then became a cult figure in the Vaishnavite movement in Bengal. Radha's origins, unlike the royal origins of Sita, are humble.[11] Since Radha and Sita form an integral part of societal psyche in India, they serve as complex inexhaustible symbols raising issues and providing insights for each new generation. Unlike independent goddesses like Santoshi Mata, they can only be discussed in relation to the men they are

associated with; hence each generation reads into them questions pertaining to man-woman relations, societal norms and their impact on individuals.

K. Srinivas Iyengar's Sita, and others like Ahilya and Lopamudra, voice concern about men's behaviour towards women and their position in society and family. Bitter about Indra's treachery and the injustice of her own consequent suffering, Ahilya sees the degradation of man-woman relationship, women enslaved and female children cast out as unwanted. From Shakti and Grace woman becomes an object and possession.

> Past the long milleniums of chequered
> terrestrial history,
> I see the degraded, demoralized
> toy, sport, game, fun, footstool, slave:
>
> a consumerist piece of merchandise
> to be bought, got, bartered, sold,
> used, misused, abused, or left long unused
>
> woman, woman, placed on a pedestal
> one moment, then ignobly
> herded with a hundred other victims
> in the gilded gynaeceum![12]
>
> (Sitayana: Ahalya's Outburst 112-114)

Lopamudra sees men and women riven apart, and women socialized into being concerned with mere trivialities like jewellery and adornment. Raised with do's and don'ts, their only destiny is to "marry at the proper time, bear children" and "don't presume to question". From the very birth a boy gets privileged treatment and is trained to be a warrior while the women are trained for home "entrapped in the male's net/of pride, passion and lust".

Valmiki's Sita, held up as the ideal Hindu wife, however, has a more profound significance. In Vedic literature she is a fertility goddess of the fields worshipped by the farmers. She is also Rama's shakti, the energy that inspires him into action, the source of his power as King. She is born from a fresh furrow while Janak is ploughing the field, emphasizing the role of the king as a provider. The word 'Sita' literally means a 'furrow' as in a ploughed

field, just as her birth is unusual, so is her death. At the end of the epic, she does not actually die but reenters the earth borne upon a throne sent up by her mother, Madhavi Dharani, "Earth, the Upholder".[13]

K. Srinivasa Iyengar takes both these features in his retelling of Rāmāyaṇa as Sitayana or the story of Sita; but he also gives her a special education and upbringing in keeping with the extraordinary special mission that she has come to fulfil on earth. She embodies in herself Grace, Compassion, Peace, Purity and Endurance, the values required for the redemption of the earth from strife and hatred. In the Dandaka forest when Rama and Lakshmana undertake to rid it of the Rakshasas to enable the Rishis to pray in peace, she cautions them that launching a crusade against those who have done no injury to them, would amount to causeless violence that would degrade the soul resulting in the loss of inner poise and enlightenment. The unnatural austerities practised in some *ashramas* are repulsive to her because it is only passion, pride or perversity that drives these fanatic ascetics and not the love of God. It is nothing but ascetic exhibitionism and is really a rejection of Divine blessings rather than a grateful acceptance of them. Even the war between Rama and Ravana, which would deliver her from Lanka, revolts her in its cruelty

> And yet this passion, this spite, this hatred
> And the million million deaths:
> Her woman's heart of compassion rebelled
> Against the ethos of war (Sitayana: Alternating Fortunes, 377)

In the face of victory, too Sita is concerned about "the tens of thousands/of mothers, sisters, daughters, and most of all, the wretched wives now left to stew in their misery."(War and Peace, 5). Also, she questions the very basis of war. Is it fair, she asks, that "the sins of fathers should be/visited on their children, and of Kings/on the blameless citizens?" (War and Peace, 19) She prevents Hanumana from killing the ogresses who had tortured her by saying

> … even evil isn't to be met
> by evil,—only by good;

as for these guilty ones, is there any
who has never done a wrong? (Sitayana: Rejection of Sita, 102)

Srinivas Iyengar portrays Rama as churlish and contemptible in his rejection of Sita. Sita, too, does not submit as the docile, hapless, weeping wife. Rather she upbraids Rama by telling him -

You are famed as the heroic hero,
yet you deploy the crudeness
of speech of one of the commonest kind
to a female of this sort (Sitayana: Sita's Fire-Baptism, 156)

Rama cannot "condemn all womankind/just because a few are flawed". (Sitayana: Sita's Fire—Baptism, 157) She points out that she can hardly be blamed if a villain seized' her "by force." (Sitayana: Sita's Fire—Baptism, 158) It is nothing but Rama's "green eye" because of which he will be remembered,

Not as the Archer who split Shiva's Bow
and won Vaidehi for wife
but as the yokel that cast out a pearl
you'll now live in history. (Sita's Fire Baptism, 162)

She warns him that for his this one aberration, he "will be held up to opprobrium/for all ages to come" obscuring "all his countless acts of valor and incoming righteousness". (Sitayana: Sita's Fire -Baptism 169-170) Not only that, his act of rejecting his "lawful loyal wife"

will in all future time set the pattern
of vulgar, selfish, prideful,
one-sided, pitiless desecration
of supportless womankind. (Sitayana: Sita's Fire -Baptism,171)

She reminds him that she is Janaka's daughter and that her "immaculate advent was the gift/of the hallowed Earth-Mother". (Sita's Fire Baptism, 166) Also that she has been schooled and trained by the Rishipatnis.

Proudly Sita takes the test of fire to come out unscathed. But what is chastity? Tara, who is now living with her husband's killer,

raises the question of why a man should be left untainted while a woman is punished.

> should the male of the species
> having already gored the Unfallen,
> still defame the crucified? (Sitayana: A Round of Visits 494)

Male-female relationships have to be governed by "a shifting, elastic/evolutionary ethic, changing/with the changing times and mores". Often the body cannot be protected but the "quintessential mark" is the "purity of mind and heart and soul" (Sitayana: A Round of visits 490-491) How can a woman be punished because of the lechery of a man.

> Because a lecher is unscrupulous-
> albeit a king or a god!-
> and seizes or forces a hapless one,
> shall we consign her to hell" (Sitayana: A Round of visits, 492)

Similarly, Mandodari who had tried her best to dissuade Ravana from the path of war, points to the destructiveness of man's "pride, ambition, self-righteousness" while

> woman's love-a mother's, or sister's
> a daughter's, any woman's-
> by its own law fosters and sustains life,
> But the Male always assails (Sitayana: Air journey to Ayodhya 217)

Sita, as the embodiment of purity, love, peace and compassion has come to earth to fulfil a mission. Her sanctifying power exceeds even that of Ganga. She has "come to humankind as a power,/a penance and a promise". (Sityana: Apprenticeship in Kingcraft, 168)

> Sita, Sita, my tired old eyes yet see
> you framed in infinity:
> you've come to humankind as a power,
> a penance and a promise.

as on earth, "Knowledge/hastens, but wisdom lingers/hence the endless need for humility/ and the reliance on Grace". (Sitayana: Apprenticeship in Kingcraft, 167)

Sita herself gathers the strength to face her ordeal in the Simsupa grove by realizing that she has come to earth to establish peace. She had left "her sphere of Peace in response/ to the human cry, and taken the plunge/into manifestation". Tara points out that Rama may be "our Saviour—spirit" but "the greater role" is Sita's "as Rama's conscience and soul". (A Round of Visits 503-504). Even Kausalya tells Sita that

Not Rama's prowess,
nor his bowmanship either,
but the fire of your purity and pain
destroyed the Rakshasa King

(Sitayana: Mothers and Sisters 387)

Sita has brought about a harmony between the animal, the Raksasa and the *mānava* spheres through her female virtues of peace, harmony and love. If Sita has no identity without Rama, Rama too cannot sustain "his mystic redeemer role/when divorced from the soul of his being,/the immaculate Sita".

Similarly Radha is Krishna's *hlādini* Shakti, the energy of joy itself and that which causes joy in others. If Sita is the embodiment of duty and chastity, Radha is love that permeates the entire creation and without which no life is possible. It is the substratum that sustains all life. If Krishna is the creator of the entire universe then creation is nothing but the enternal love play of Radha and Krishna. As Dharmvir Bharti's Kanupriya tells Krishna:

और यह प्रवाह में बहती हुई
तुम्हारी असंख्य सृष्टियों का क्रम
महज हमारे गहरे प्यार
प्रगाढ़ विलास
और अतृप्त क्रीडा की अनन्त पुनरावृतियां हैं–
ओ मेरे स्रष्टा
तुम्हारे सम्पूर्ण अस्तित्व का अर्थ है
मात्र तुम्हारी सृष्टि का अर्थ है
मात्र तुम्हारी इच्छा
और तुम्हारी सम्पूर्ण इच्छा का अर्थ है

केवल मैं !
केवल मैं !!
केवल मैं !!![14]

Love, on the phenomenal plane implies duality, a relationship between the lover and the beloved. Radha's name consists of two syllables—Ra Dha—when reversed it becomes—Dha Ra—or the stream that connects the human and the divine in a single liquid medium submerging them in a world of Lila or divine play.

Love, at its best, is bhakti or devotion. There can be no relationship between the lover and the beloved unless the two approach each other. A similar relationship exists between the devotee and the object of devotion. A devotee cannot experience the bliss of Krishna unless Krishna descends to reveal himself and become accessible. There must be, simultaneously, an upward movement on the part of the devotee through sincere longing and aspiration.[15]

Human love takes many forms but its most intense expression is in the love of man and woman. It provides a more complete union than found in other modes as between two friends, or between parent and child, or master and servant. True, amorous love joins the two at the same level of intense mutual satisfaction; but being finite and of this world, it cannot lead to infinite and eternal bliss towards which human quest tends.

When devotion or bhakti blossoms into the highest state of love, there is further intensification of feeling. It may seem strange that Radha's love for Krishna, which is the peak of both love and devotion, should be presented in terms that are not acceptable in the secular realm ethics; that is, it is love outside marriage. In fact, Radha is married to someone else, but energies of love cannot be constrained by socio-ethical norms. Besides, love acquires greater intensity when one's all has to be staked on it.[16]

Ramakant Rath's Radha is acutely aware that all social impediments have to give way once Krishna calls

You pulled down,
with lightning and with earthquake,
all my carefully constructed conditions,

> and asked me to give up all fear and become
> what I have always longed to be (16)

Radha tried to ignore the call of love and seek refuge behind the mundane routines of life because she knew that once Krishna touched her she would "consent" and "cease speaking". She is fully aware of the consequences of her illicit love

> I know, as soon as day breaks, I will suffer very great
> calumny. Relations, with grim faces and clenched teeth
> would have assembled at the front and rear doors. (49)

When her husband came to know the truth, he "dragged" her "by the hair/and knocked" her "her head against the wall." For her, however, "the immorality" "they imagine" is a petty issue. Confident of the truth of her love Krishna, she is filled with a quiet determination and courage. She will wait an eternity to unite with him. She proudly proclaims:

> The day people said
> I was an unfaithful wife I became
> Radha, the first and the best
> among women in love.(51)

Radha not only distinguishes herself from a wife but rejects that role and asserts the supremacy of her position. Krishna once slipped a ring on her finger. She took it out at once and returned it saying

> "So you think I am a wife?"
>
> He said nothing
> He closed his eyes and buried his face
> in my bosom
> His sigh, I knew,
> made my whole lifetime
> beautiful (62)

Radha considers her love superior because it has no element of seeking anything for herself from it as a wife's love does. It is love absolute and eternal beyond the exigencies of time and space or

the life and death of the physical body. That is why after Krishna's death she declares

> Don't count me
> among your widows,
> or among those who carry your body
> in procession. (103)

His body is far away but she is his eternal bride. The vermillion in the parting of her hair "glows brighter than ever" She wears "the bride's heavy silk/and gold". Krishna is now wholly hers, no longer "anyone's father, son, husband" but "the pure naughtiness" of their "last night together". (103)

Poem after poem shows Radha in such complete surrender and union that she becomes Krishnamaya:

> I saw nothing else,
> not even the river, not even the boat
> The sky became invisible, and I didn't know
> if the sun, the moon and the stars existed.
>
> Him alone I saw
> Wherever I turned I saw him and nothing else
> Unknown to me, the whole succession
> of my births and deaths had dissolved (28)

Or,

> I thought there would be a night
> at the end of several nights when
> the sky as usual would be filled with stars
> but I would have disappeared (31)

But if Radha is nothing without Krishna, there is no Krishna without Radha. "Let's be clear about this," says Radha that if everything is an illusion,

> Why then do you rush into my arms
> try to pull away my clothes,
> and join your lips to mine? (39)

he seems to slip away from her, claimed by the world of war and power but not quite. He returns again and again to her leaving

his battlefields and throne quietly, “in the night,/as though I have held back for you/something that is yours.” Finally their union is complete:

> I did not know who—you or I—wore peacock feathers
> on the head or played on the flute. In the consciousness
> of oneness, neither you nor I existed.(48)

Avatārs

The question arises why do Sita and Radha, both manifestations of Sri, appear as wife and beloved of Rama and Krishna respectively, both of whom are considered the *avatārs* of Vishnu. An *avatāra*, according to Sri Aurobindo, comes when “a special work is to be done and in crises of evolution”. He is “one who is conscious of the presence and the power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action”.[17] Rama belongs to the Tretayuga that comes after Satyuga. It was called the silver age and vice was introduced at this time. Krishna belongs to the Dwaparyuga; or rather he marks the end of it and the beginning of Kaliyuga. Rama’s purpose, Sri Aurobindo explains, was to establish Ramrajya, or to provide a model for the future of an order proper to the sattwic civilized human being who governs his life by reason, the finer emotions, morality and moral ideals such as truth, obedience, co-operation and harmony, the sense of domestic and public order—all so necessary for mending the ways of a world which is still occupied by the anarchic forces, the vanaras and the rakshasas, the animal mind, and the turbulence that ensues when satisfaction of the lower passions becomes the aim of life.[18] He was not perfect, but represented the sattwic man—a faithful husband, a loving and obedient son, a tender and perfect brother, father, friend. His purpose was to establish things on which the social idea and its stability depend—truth and honour, the sense of Dharma, public spirit and sense of social order. To this he sacrificed his personal rights as the king elect and spent fourteen of the best years of his life in the forest. To his public spirit and sense of his public order he sacrificed his own happiness and domestic life and that of Sita as well.[19]

Krishna, on the other hand, opened the possibility of overmind with its two sides of realization—static and dynamic. He led by the normal course of evolution. The next normal step after Rama is not a featureless absolute but the movement towards the Supermind. The descent of Krishna would mean that of the overmind or the Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, through the descent of the supermind and *ānanda.* The overmind, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the intermediary between Ignorance and the Supermind consciousness. It is "a protective double, a screen of dissimilar similarity through which Supermind can act indirectly on an Ignorance whose darkness could not bear or receive the direct impact of a supreme Light". The overmind derives from the Supermind. It knows the essential truth but uses the self-determinations without being limited by them. Thus, the world becomes many while retaining an essential underlying unity, both being a part of the One Reality.[21] Krishna is *Ānandmaya.* He supports evolution through the overmind leading towards *Ānanda.* His life demonstrates that all morality is a convention. Man cannot live without conventions, mental and moral; otherwise he feels himself lost in the rolling sea of anarchic forces of the vital nature. Only by rising above the mind can we really get beyond conventions. Krishna was able to do it because he was not amental human being but an overmental godhead acting freely out of a greater consciousness than man's. Rama was not that. He was the *avatāra* of the sattwic mind—mental, emotional moral—and he followed the Dharma of the age and race[22]

Krishna consciousness is the experience of the union of the soul with god. To experience Krishna as a friend, lover, guide, teacher, master or still more is to have one's whole consciousness changed by the contact.

Since Rama came to establish a *sāttwic* moral order in the tretāyuga and Krishna to go beyond conventional morality in the dwaparyuga, Sri comes as Sita the dutiful wife in the case of Rama and Radha the eternal beloved in the case of Krishna. They are the shaktis without whom no creation is possible. This concept is embodied in that of Ardhanarishwara, the Lord whose right half is male and the left female. Since the Ardhanarishwara

is a complete form of both male and female in perfect balance, no creation is possible as there is no desire. Hence for creation it has to divide itself to become God and Goddess, Shiva and Shakti, Rama and Sita, Krishna and Radha[23].

Ardhanariswara itself does not engage in procreation of mortals but is an expression of the non-dual, the primordial union beyond categories of form and gender, the bliss of samadhi in which no difference is made between one thing or another and from which all existence flows. Ardhanariswara is both sensuous and passive, hinting at resolution, harmony and balance. The Absolute is by nature blissful, but enjoyment implies both subjective and objective poles, the enjoyer and that which is to be enjoyed. Without this duality there can be no joy. A single non-dual being, effulgent with absolute bliss, cannot enjoy itself just as sugar cannot taste its own sweetness. Hence, the absolutely blissful one, for the manifestation of its eternal enjoyment, must necessarily polarize its singularity into 'he' and 'she.' Non-dual in essence, it has to become dual in function.[24]

Some Pointers

A study of Sita and Radha points to certain characteristics that women have as women. A woman's path is the path of devotion, love and endurance. This does not mean that men cannot go on that path, but that when a man wants to do so, his emotional state has to be that of a beloved's as was that of Chaitanya's or of Rama Krishna Paramhansa.

To become feminine has a spiritual meaning; it is to become receptive. A male is aggressive. A woman is the receiver, the acceptor. She is the womb that receives, accepts and absorbs. She does not attack. The path of devotion is one of acceptance, it is feminine. It is to receive and accept god within, with devotion and unconditional surrender. It is to become a womb for god. This is a state of mind in which the plupical gender becomes irrelevant. To be a devotee is to have the emotions of a beloved. That is why all religions emphasize virtues that are characteristically and traditionally feminine. Mahavir would say Ahimsa, Buddha, com-

passion, Christ love. These male and female characteristics can be explained scientifically.

To be a woman is to be stable and calm. This does not mean that all men are aggressive and that all women are calm, but we are talking of the ultimate significance of being a man and a woman. However, feminists are fighting a battle for the same rights as men. Therefore, they have to use the tools of men—aggressiveness, restlessness, noisiness, belligerence—and hence they acquire the 'male' characteristics. It is a psychological truth that we become similar to what we fight for. Two adversaries become alike and dependent on each other's existence. These are not value judgements as both restlessness and calm have their own repercussions.

The characteristics of men are useful from the worldly point of view. They drive men to war, inventions, travels, new discoveries. Women often appear to lag behind in the outer world because their strength is inner life, self containment and contentment. But men pay the price of their disturbance, restlessness, and obsession. Woman remain at peace. So, if achievements are to be made in the outside world, the male virtues are needed, but for the exploration of the world within, the feminine virtues are required. If a man has to undertake the inward journey, he has to develop the woman within.

Scientific Evidence

Being is one, the world is many and between the two is the divided mind, the dual mind. It is just like a big tree with an ancient trunk. The trunk is one and the tree divides into two main branches. From these two main branches, many subsidiary branches arise. The being is like the trunk of the tree—one, non dual. The mind is the first bifurcation where the tree divides into two—becomes dual, dialectical; thesis and antithesis, man and woman, yin and yang, day and night. So all the dualities in the world lie basically in the duality of the mind. Below the duality there is the oneness of being, call it what you will, God, nirvana, Salvation or mokṣa. Since the mind is dual, whatever is seen through it becomes two. The brain is divided into two spheres: the right and the left. The

right is joined with the left hand, the left with the right hand. The right hemisphere is inventive, illogical, irrational, poetic, imaginative, romantic, mythical, religious. The left is logical, rational, mathematical, scientific, calculative. These two hemispheres are in constant conflict. The basic politics of the world, therefore, is within.

The society belongs to the right handers—that is, the left hemisphere, the rationalists. Only 10 per cent children are left handed, that is those whose right hemisphere is more developed. They are basically irrational, intuitive, non-mathematical. Society tries to force them to become right-handed. This is not only a question of hands, but of politics. The primitive societies are more intuitive than the developed ones. The intuitive cannot compete with the world of reason in society.[25]

Hence men have ruled over women for centuries, although they have paid the price of lack of ease resulting in stresses and tensions. However, women cannot remain always subservient, hence they are now rebelling. But their tools are necessarily similar to men's—argumentativeness, aggressiveness, obsessiveness. This aggressiveness is evident in women's liberation movements all over the world. In the process, faculties of intuition and grace are lost. They may succeed in overthrowing the male rule but the feminine qualities will not replace the male characteristics because it is finally the male characteristics that will have brought success. Women will use the same male characteristics that have brought them to power, to remain in power. You become, in the final analysis, similar to your enemy. Thus, superficial changes take place, but the underlying conflicts remains the same. Hence the politics between the two parts of the mind must be resolved first. They have to become one, the meeting of the male and female, of the yin and yang, of the logic and the illogic has to take place. As long as there is imbalance between the left and the rights parts of the brain, there will be conflict between men and women. They will enter into relationships again and again as natural attraction will prevent them from remaining apart, but they will not be able to unite. Since the inner fight has not been resolved, it leads to a

great paradox. The most beautiful thing on earth is love and yet nothing can create a greater hell

While the dominant left hemisphere leads to a successful worldly life, and a dominant right hemisphere to a greater interest in inner peace, blissfulness rather than material things, it is also important to remember that all great discoveries come from the right hemisphere, the intuitive hemisphere. It is a common experience that when the rational exhausts itself in trying to stove a problem and gives up, an answer emerges and it is usually in the form of a gut feeling, a hunch. It is the intuitive mind, the right hemisphere at work.

The drama of Creation and the different characteristics of men and women can also be explained through genetics. It is startlingly at variance with the Christian mythology according to which the male produces the seed that is incubated by the female, making her merely a weak and empty vesel until the male bestows his fertility upon her. Biblically, the male as Adam was supposed to be the original form that was created and then the female, Eve, the Creator's afterthought to enable Adam to beget children and be his companion. The scientific evidence is exactly the opposite. The female is the first form of life and the only form likely to survive. Hindu mythology is in consonance with this. The sexual form of an individual is determined by sex chromosomes. For mammals, two X chromosomes are present in females and one X in males. Originally, there were only X chromosomes and the Y chromosome was added by the evolutionary process millions of years ago to create a male form distinct from a female one. When the XY chromosome foetus is in the womb, it undergoes two surges of hormonal activity that result in a fully formed XY individual. These chemical fluxes do not occur in the development of the female, the XX individual. The first set of hormones stops the full formation of female sexual characteristics that otherwise would develop because of the X chromosome on the Y chromosome. The male never loses the female structures and characteristics that he starts out with and the male reproductive organs are only the modifications and adaptation of the female ones.

The Y chromosome is subsidiary to the X chromosome because human embryos with a single sex chromosome can develop if there is an X chromosome. If a fertilized cell has no X chromosome and only has a Y chromosome, the embryo will self-destruct. Thus, the Y chromosome does not have resources for human development, male or female; only the X does. This is because only the X chromosome and not the Y is loaded with important genes that are required for muscle development, blood clotting, color vision and even the gene that makes a boy respond to the macho hormone testosterone.

Every woman has two X chromosomes, one each from the father and mother. Any mismatch between X and Y chromosomes in males causes problems especially if the X chromosome has a defective gene on it. Also, a defective gene on the Y chromosome too cannot be countered by the X chromosome. Hence more men suffer from genetic disorders that women since the Y chromosome cannot counter the defective gene either on X or on itself.

The Y chromosome is comically small compared to the X chromosome. It has only about 35 million base pairs of DNA compared to about 200 million on X. It also has only one gene of significance that which activates the male development. Hence, while the Y chromosome is essential for the formation of the male, it is by itself not sufficient for the development of a human embryo.

The question arises as to why the Y chromosome is so puny as compared to the X chromosome. According to widely accepted theories, the X and Y chromosomes started out nearly identical as they are even today in some fish, differing only at the point where the key sex-determining enes are located. Once the Y chromosome got associated only with the male sex by evolutionary process, the X and Y chromosomes became more different over time.

Usually two chromosomes are lined up in parallel pairs during meiosis before separating. At this time they undergo recombination swapping genetics information. This ensures that new genetic combinations take place and the damaged gene can become gradually recessive. Hence, there are fewer malformations in the females who have only X chromosomes. However, in males, as X

and Y have become very different, recombination of genes is not possible, one damaged gene on the Y cannot be repaired. Since the Y chromosome passes down from the father to the son, the genetic disorders get inherited in the males alone from generation to generation.

Unable to combine, the genes on the Y chromosome will gradually be damaged by mutation and their functions will be taken over by genes on other chromosomes. Eventually whole segments of Y chromosome filled with damaged and inactive genes will be lost resulting in smaller and smaller chromosome finally left with nothing but the sex determining gene. Taken to its ultimate conclusion, the Y chromosome can be lost altogether and the male will be XO, O signifying the absence of a second chromosome. The female will remain XX. This was tested by the Bill Rice on thirty-five generations of mice and found to be correct.[26] Further, it has also been proved that the male transfers half of the DNA necessary for the full functioning of the nuclear DNA of the cells that will become a new individual of its species. That is the only contribution that the male makes to the physical conception of this new life. It is a vital contribution; but that of the female is far greater. She not only provides the remaining half of the nuclear DNA. But also builds into the egg several structures, processes and chemicals which it is impossible for the male parent to do. The mother’s cell provides mitochondria, ribosomes and their associated RNA’s, disease fighting chemicals and immune globulins. The most important of these are the mitochondria because they contain DNA that provide the efficiency for other chemical reactions. Only the mitochondria can produce more mitochondria because they contain DNA that provides the efficiency for other chemical reactions, and mitochondria are essential for ever human cell. Hence it is the material from the mother’s cell that provides protection from disease, allows the embryo to grow and reproduce the disease-fighting structure in all the other cells of the human which it is impossible for the male nuclear material transferred at the time of conception to do. Hence the only mitochondria a human being will ever have come from the mother.[27]

Conclusion

Therefore, it would be valid to conclude that the basis and origin of human life is female and it is from the female that nourishment and nurturing come. Also, the female is sturdier than the male and also embodies in herself characteristics necessary for peace and harmony in the world. The whole art, then, is how to function from the feminine part of the mind because the feminine is joined to the whole. The male is aggressive, constantly in struggle. The feminine is constantly in surrender, in deep trust. Hence the feminine body is so beautiful, so round. There is a deep trust and a deep harmony with nature. A woman lives in deep surrender; a man is constantly fighting, trying to reach somewhere. A woman is happy, not trying to reach anywhere. Hence a change is required, but a change more and more towards the right hemisphere; to become more and more feminine, more and more loving, surrendering, trusting, more and more close to the whole. God himself would have to be 'feminized' as Radha says to Krishna: "You, I have no doubt, are God but your reign will begin millennium after your death, after the kingship of the present God expires; after the sun, whose hands and legs are in bondage and who rises everyday over a smiling world, sets for the last time; after the stars, rejecting the supplication of swords and daggers, come down to the flowers whose separation they found unbearable; and after water lilies destroyed long ago, begin to bloom, You would then stand, having the whole world, near a lake in moonlight. (79)

Or, Sita's Grace will never fail"
"this impassioned yet suffering Earth"
(Sitayana: Her Grace Abiding, 929)
because,
The Earth never tires or stales or despairs,
For the pulses of Sita's
Heart of compassion sustain and foster
Our evolving Life Divine.
(Sitayana: Her Grace Abiding, 940).

NOTES

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[3] Ibid., pp. 21-23.

[4] Vidya Niwas Mishra, ''रामकथाः मेरे लिये'', संचारिणी, p. 25-26.

[5] J.M.Domingues, "Dialectics and Modernity, Autonomy and Solidarity" *Sociological Research Online*, 1997, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 1-2. http:// www.*socresonline.org.uk/2/41.html.*

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[15] Sri Aurobindo, *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1955, opt. 1998, p. 291.

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[17] Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, part I, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1995, pp.401; 406. See also G.de Purucker, "On Avataras," pp. 1-7, http.//www. Theosophy-mw. Org./theosnow/teachers/te-gdp p.htm.

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[21] Jyoti and Prem Sobel, *The Hierarchy of Minds:* The Mind Levels, A Compilation from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1984, pp. 136-137.

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Imaging of Woman in Literature: The Archetype, the Stereotype and the Real

ANURADHA BANERJEE

The use of the terms like 'archetype', 'stereotype' and 'real' in the context of exploring the identity of woman evince certain important attitudes. Three broad categories of women correlate with these. These broad categories can be stated thus: the first stands for the source-image the ideal-original-image of woman and corresponds to the notion of the archetype; the second stands for the dumb, silent and suffering image of woman created under the normative pressure of the traditional society; the third stands for the image of woman breaking away from the stereotype. It is articulate and assertive against exploitation.

In this paper an effort has been made to explore the interrelationship running through these three stages of woman's image and also tries to discern whether the 'real' can be a gateway to a fresh beginning to reach the concept of the archetypal. For this reason the concept of the archetype must be elucidated at the outset. The archetype which is basically a theological construct, on the one hand preserves the fire of energy and strength, and restrains evil: it is *Shakti* incarnate. On the other hand this archetype is the embodiment of mercy and generates a sense of overwhelming protection: it sustains as it creates. In Ṛgveda this aspect of mercy i.e *Krpa* is evident in the mantra:

> *Yam kamaye tarn tatnugram karomi tam brahmanam tam rsim tam swnedham* (*Ṛgveda* 5/125(9-10)
> (Whomever I want to make, I make that person *Brahma*, *Rsi* or extraordinarily brilliant.)

as *Shakti* the aspect of self assertion is compelling:

> *Aham rudraya dhanuratanomi brahmadvishe sharavc hantava u*
> (I bestow upon *Rudra* the bow to kill *Brahmadrohi*)
>
> (*Ṛgveda* 6/125(9-10)

In *Markandeya Purāṇa* one comes across a significant expression visualizing *shakti* "*chittc kṛpa samara nishthurata*" i.e. (she is) an embodiment of mercy and fierceness,which too suggests that the archetypal image of the feminine identity touched a height which bore immense compassion in the heart while at the same time was ruthlessly cruel as one happens to be in a fierce battle.

But the record of our later history says a different story. Leaving aside some such early phase of our civilization, this acceptance of the image of archetypal woman did not last long. The society was ready to highlight the protective and merciful aspect but the one of strength and self-sufficiency came to be eventually dismissed. "*Later, as society began to settle into the ruts of tradition, stricter rules were advocated under the umbrella of Dharma ... to sustain order and maintain a strong social structure. The burden of maintaining order within the family, and thus within society as a whole, fell on women.*" [1] And here started the process of eliminating the element of strength from woman's identity of archetypal image which sustained her with a robust dynamism. "*Instead of embodying positions of decision-making power and defining order, women became vehicles of orthodoxy.*"[2]

With the emergence of a truncated image of woman the archetype was lost and the image of stereotyped woman came to be perpetuated. Much has been done to establish this false image of women by the lawgivers who regulated the bases of women's status roles, rights and duties. "*It seems that by about the fifth or sixth century B.C.E. women's position began to slide into one of subservience, as evident from a thorough examination of Smṛti texts with these commentaries, they record the shrinking social space of women and offer proof of their eroded social and intellectual activity from about eighth century C.E.*"[3]

The more the humiliating process has carved out the diminishing identity of a stereotyped female far removed from the

archetypal woman, the more poignant has been the reaction to fracture the stereotyped identity and assert the real which without being indifferent to its power of creativity and compassion wants to be articulate and assertive against a set of norms perpetrated by the patriarchal society. Without realizing the potential of the real a fresh return to the archetypal may not be possible. In fact this real potential of the female is the gateway to the archetypal.

An intense effort to break away from a stereotyped identity in our times has been made by a woman of this subcontinent with utmost sincerity, whose real life and literary discourse have merged into one single identity making the fearless real establish itself with an undisputable authenticity. 1999 B.C., the fag end of a millennium saw the publication of an autobiography which has created tremors of shock for the ethico-moral value structure of the patrifocal society. A woman's voice stuns the traditional readers by being vehemently truthful in her admissions and confession, by tearing off the restrictions of taboos clamped so fiercely on the feminine psyche. Tasleema Nasreen's recent autobiography *Amar Meyebela* (My Girlhood) in Bangla has raised sharp reactions. The response of the readers is cleaved into two distinct categories: on the one hand she stands outrightly condemned by a large reading public because she has challenged certain social norms and on the other there is a hype of raving appreciation only because she has fractured the stereotype. We are well aware of the fact that Tasleems's strong socio-political and religious views variously expressed in her other creative works have incurred deportation for her. Threat of death dogs her footsteps and yet in this autobiography she again squarely looks into the face of the social, political and religious establishments and relentlessly questions certain major pillars of faith which have made the exploitation of woman so easy in the context of the patriarchal society. The writer draws our attention to the horror of secretly administered domestic violence especially to the girl child. The memory of the experiences of molestation hibernate in her existence and she remembers the stings of terrible aloneness and helplessness as she underwent such an experience. She talks about the taboo zone of homosexual experience in an unwavering manner. She has relin-

quished the "*labels such as docile, gentle or nurturing.*"[4] She has broken the stereotyped woman's image by being thus ruthlessly unwomanly to some but to the deep satisfaction of many she has rescued the voice of the real woman.

Her controversial book, which is rooted in her most personal experiences, tries to re-evaluate the concept of right, space and identity of women in a totally male dominated society. As she does this, she traverses through the perennial experiences of subjugation, marginalization and violence quite alone and yet becomes the paradigm of an entire world where the female foetus grows in fear and trembling and survives endless bullying by her sheer will to survive with dignity.

Tasleema's book is an eventual outcome of a process which has simmered in this sub-continent down the centuries in the silent protest of the female mind against her victimization. There is a central experience in the book which instantly reveals the jeopardy of two women: the mother and the daughter. The patriarchal society functions exactly the same way whether it is the case of a mother or that of a daughter. Tasleema writes:

"*Instantly mother felt the sting in her heart. Were all these endearments to make mother look after Aman Uncle—was it the reason? People sometime gave away this or that to the servants to appease them so that the servant looked after them properly and remained loyal to the master. Mother did not deem herself to be more than a maid in the household. Father did not care to know about things which made mother happy or unhappy.*"[5] It is the twilight area of her girlhood when the author experienced the horror of molestation by an uncle. She is haunted by fear. The snake metaphor and experience of fear coalesce here to create a paradigm of obsessive fear:

"*I still felt fear. The snake charmer had left yet my fear didn't leave me. I feared to step on the courtyard, on the field, as if a hooded snake would spring up instantly. At night lying on the bed I felt that a snake was lying cuddled under my bed, that snakes were creeping up the bed, going under the pillow, crawling over the body. At night while asleep I dreamt of hundreds of hooded snakes surrounding me, I was alone, left alone some where, at*

the railway track or on the middle of the highway, or at some bathing pond, under any tree or behind some closed door. I could not remember well. There was no sound around except the hissing note of the snakes. I kept on calling maa, maa, maa was not around … I got up and listened to my thumping heart. Till then the fear of snakes and human beings had turned me into a worm…I couldn't tell mother that Sharaf Uncle had undressed me"[6] Fear silence and a desire to die become the key experiences for the girl child. This turning into a worm is a powerful symbol, which explains the distancing of woman from the archetype and her merger into the stereotype. The one who has once been the combination of strength and love has come to be divested of strength and confidence, to live low and limp. But despite the experience of jeopardy the I of the author has survived. She has succeeded to explode the myth of the stereotype. As a girl child she confronts the horror of male sexuality many times. With silence and fear she turns into a worm. But when she starts asserting herself and the real woman emerges with vehemence," *Why didn't I let others of my family know of the two events like those. I often think of that till today. Was it that I didn't want others slandering my uncles! Did anyone endorse me with the responsibility of protecting their honour.* [7] By writing her candid autobiography she has splintered the myth of the silent woman. She has severed those coils that for ages have tightened around woman's existence and silenced her. This voice that seems to be that of rebellion in its impatience, is the voice of the emerging strength of the real woman. Tasleema is the loudest voice of that chain of protests which has had its sporadic beginnings in the stiff resistance offered by women like Mirabai to the patriarchal world to become stronger during the days of British subjugation itself. History took a more positive turn then. The nineteenth century renaissance generated a sustained effort to retrieve women and the masses from their trampled position. The great social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar created an indelible and irreversible history. Sati was abolished and the remarriage of a widow received a legal sanction. Ancient scriptures were analyzed and reinterpreted by the humanists of the new era. The impact of all such events helped

the impoverished stereotyped woman without financial independence, deprived even of her right to live when the husband died, without a social or a political identity started getting attention as the impact of renaissance was giving space to the neglected groups like women and the masses. By the early twentieth century cracks became evident on the monolithic structure of the traditional society. Women too were gradually learning to say 'no' to the coercive situations. Resistance was building up as the need for it was existential.

Rabindranath Tagore (1862) and Sarojini Naidu (1879) have participated in the process of reformation which addressed the question of woman's rights, space and emancipation. They have tried to break the stereotyped image of woman but despite sharing the same social milieu the image of woman which Tagore creates is far too different from the image of woman created by Sarojini Naidu. The female protagonist of Tagore is more articulate and dynamic in her final choice because she is the creation of a 'poet outsider' who has witnessed the suffering of the stereotyped woman standing outside the threshold of her experience. He is not the product of that experience. Sarojini's female protagonist on the other hand while flinging the inherent sarcasm of a stereotyped situation at the social conscience seems to bear the burden of these almost unbreakable coils which she suggestively rejects by re-enacting the moments of fear. The tone of her articulation remains persuasive and needless to say suggestive. Such a protagonist is the creation of a 'poet insider' who has absorbed both consciously and unconsciously the precarious experiences of woman's life as a part of the experience itself.

Tagore's emphasis is awesome. Though I have chosen his long narrative poem *Nishkriti* (The Riddance) 1917, which is rather saturated with criticism of the social sloth and male chauvinism, and holds a final demolition of the same evil yet equally are provoking and stimulating his short poems *Sabala* (The Competent Woman) and *Sadharan Meye* (The Ordinary Girl) and a short story entitled *Streer Patra.* (A wife's Letter). In this striking short story Mrinal's letter to her husband throws a challenge to the entire patriarchal society. It shows her courage to say 'no' with a

peerless vehemence in the face of being turned into a worm. An intelligent, sensitive, creative Mrinal suddenly becomes aware of the fool's paradise she has inhabited so long. Her meeting Bindu, a marginalized character in every way has created this cataclysmic impact on the stereotyped pattern of her life. At one level Bindu operates as the other self, obliquely standing as an extension of Mrinal's character and a secret sharer too. Such juxtaposition helps Mrinal realize the fake and futile existence she herself is leading and it is an irony that Mrinal's state is no better than that of Bindu whom she thinks to be socially challanged. In the discourse Mrinal becomes an agent who repeatedly tries to retrieve Bindu bearing the brunt and heartless criticism. This is what she writes to her husband, "*Bindu came to me with great trepidation.… In her father's house her cousins did not want to spare even that corner space for her where a redundant object might* lie."[8] Mrinal's enlightenment showed her as she writes, "*But it was quite clear that in this world it is most difficult to shelter an insignificant person…*"[9] and despite Mrinal's interventions Bindu is forcibly married to a raving lunatic. Bindu finally burns herself. People around are annoyed at this and their verdict of dismissal is:

> "*For women it's a fashion these days to die by torching their clothes.*"[10]

Mrinal understands the futility of women's life—its lack of dignity enrages her. She is not ready to capitulate, she is not to be turned into a worm. She writes the few final sentences to her husband thus,

"You had kept me covered with the miasma of your habits. Bindu came for a short spell and saw me through the rent of that cover. That girl alone has torn that cover entirely with her death… Now I have died.

… You think I am going to die—don't be shocked, I won't repeat such a stereotyped joke for you. Meerabai too was a woman like me—her shackles too were not less heavy. She didn't have to die to live.… I too shall live."[11]

Another short poem the Strong Woman (*Sabala*, 1928) has these lines:

O ye the law givers
why won't ye give woman the right to conquer her destiny
O ye the law givers
do not let me live as a dumb being[12]

The Ordinary Girl (*Sadharan Meye*, 1933) basically breathes a similar sentiment. She wants to be re-evalued on the basis of her potential. The intense yearning for wishfulfilment creates a dreamlike experience in which she is able to command honour and appreciation. She refuses to be kept at the mercy of her male mentors. The magic word of the writer alone has the power to make her succeed.

I beg of your Sarat Babu do write a story of an ordinary girl.
...I know I'm ruined
I'm defeated
But the one of whom you'll write
Make her victorious on my behalf.[13]

It is a representative outcry of an entire generation of women thoroughly marginalized—the eventual outcome of a systematic eradication of that 'assertive' element which is the inseparable part of the archetype.

Nishkriti or The Riddance is a multi-dimensional discourse which addresses and exposes the various repressive measures used by the traditional society to control and discipline woman.

The texture of the poem is woven around the obstinate high-handedness of a patriarch whose act of getting his young daughter married to an old Kuleen Brahmin brings about a total disaster to the life of the girl. The mother's repeated entreaties to get the daughter married to a young educated boy remains unheard because *Stree Buddhi* is not to be trusted. The little girl becomes a widow and the mother pleads with her husband to get her remarried. Here too Tagore juxtaposes two jeopardized women stuck in the web of their stereotype but the hapless silence is also the breeding ground for the voice of resistance which makes itself audible in the restlessness of the mother.

The father declares that her penance is like that of sages and he underlines the need of will-power. He says:

hard are the ways of religion
had I been a soft soul I would have melted of crying alone.[14]

The mother says:

Whom to explain
in your household
amid the pleasures
behind a shut door
that little girl alone
shall dry up in thirst.[15]

To this the father says:

Woman
a balloon
Carrying sentimental vapour alone.[16]

The mother dies in agony. She cannot bear the injustice inflicted on her daughter. The girl learns to deny herself every comfort. She leads a machine like existence and shies away from getting remarried even though the person she secretly loves proposes to her. She is bearing the responsibility of maintaining the moral health of the society, a fate which has been stalled by Tasleema's protagonist at the end of this century. The girl's rejection of the proposal of the doctor whom her mother so wistfully had chosen for her and all this practice of self-deprivation bring her social applause. The father is happy, he says:

It's no futile pride
Remember she is my daughter
It's nothing but celebacy
She has learnt from me
Otherwise it would have been a different case
These days without the strict discipline of self-control
The society goes lawless
Girls have taken to the path of pleasure.[17]

The father decides to remarry. The meek protest of the daughter is brushed aside. The memory of his wife is easily wiped out. In support of his action the patriarch quotes scriptures:

It's too hard an act for me to remarry
but the griha dharma
without wife remains unfulfilled
From Manu to Mahābhārata
All the scriptures stress this
It is hard to tread the path of dharma
it is not at all shedding tears
over the grief of heart
one who winced away to give or receive pain
Why such a coward on earth at all be born.[18]

Tagore's perception is that of a rebel. He breaks the socio-ethical impasse by enabling the daughter protagonist to escape with the doctor to get remarried. This way out envisaged in deserting the traditional hearth is close to the one, which Mrinal chose. One may suspect that Tagore hands out fairy tale solutions to acute nightmarish experiences of woman and that it is possible for him because he is an outsider to the woman's world of experience. He is able to suggest such escape routes which could be chosen by women only after prolonged deliberations in the context of a tradition of endless strictures. But for a male writer like him enlightened to the core, who had realized fully the need of women's emancipation, this do or die type of solution alone was effective into shattering the age old stigma on women. He wanted to tip the scales the other way. However such solutions evinced the growing cracks on the body of the stereotype. One is hopeful as Tagore makes a departure by enabling his girl protagonist leave her so called secure hearth because he wanted to see the women folk take revolutionary decisions.

Sarojini Naidu started writing in English when not many women had adopted English as a mode of their expression. At the beginning of the last century it was not an easy job for a woman writer to raise a questioning finger to the monolithic structure of the patrifocal society. She could operate on one level only—that of an insider. Here she could share the deepest misgivings and fears of a woman's world generated by the power wielding value system. Her female psyche knew the extent of deprivation which created the stereotyped woman. Within the stereotyped ambit live

her *Purdah Nashin* and the benumbed experiences of a village girl in *Village Songs*. The oppression has been far too long and the eventual result boils down to a passive death wish. The poem reads thus:

Full are my pitchers and far to carry,
One is the way and long,
Why, *O why was I tempted to tarry*
Lured by the boatmen'*s song?*
Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,
Hear, *O hear*, *is the white crane calling*,
Is it the wild owl'*s cry?*
There are no tender moonbeams to light me,
If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,
Ram re Ram! I shall die.

My brother will murmur, "*Why doth she linger?* "
My mother will wait and weep,
Saying, "*O safe may the great gods bring her*,
The Jamuna'*s waters are deep*,"*...*
O! if the storm breaks, *what will betide me?*
Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?
Unless Thou succour my footsteps and guide me,
Ram re Ram! I shall die.[19]

It is a short lyric with a rural scenic texture and can be read as the record of a girl child's misgivings being left alone with her heavy pitcher on her way home at sundown. She has been kept back by the boatmen's song, which tempted her to while away the time. Now the shadows of evening terrify her. She is apprehensive of her brother's displeasure and mother's silent worries. The gushing water of Jamuna and the impending storm as well scare her. In her simple faith she prays to Ram to be her succour. But the same discourse holds a very disturbing layer of perception. Looking at the poem from a feminine perspective one understands the sentiments the woman poet wants to impart on the level of reality. The protagonist a young girl is held answerable for her deviant action. She is aware that she should not 'Tarry' to hear the boatman's song. Despite the fact that she toils hard meeting the demands

of the family—carries the heavy pitchers of water daily—yet she is not expected to enjoy any space or any aesthetic respite going beyond her sanctioned schedule. The dream world created by the song's melody is now replaced by a world of nightmare infested with the "wild owl's cry". The social strictures float up in the shape of engulfing "darkness", "serpent" and "evil spirit". The fear psychosis lies deep in the feminine mind. At every step superstitions await to frighten her strength of mind. The "brother" is the patriarchal figure. His "murmer" has something more to suggest. There is an unspoken displeasure/disapproval at/of the delay of his sister. Has she turned wayward? Her delay is equivalent to an act of moral aberration.

Here Sarojini's poem projects the image of a mother who is as defenceless as the daughter is. She is also poised precariously on the brink of her fragile hearth. She too communicates with the language of silence, which underlines nothing but fear. She wails and weeps—the most common and familiar way out for a woman. The natural calamity about to break out in the shape of storm and lightning makes the girl frantically think of a shelter to hide her. The terror of the lines is obvious. Here the natural calamity is the paradigm of social censure, which awaits the girl. When the value judgements are made expartee when the real human beings and the real world have proved to be terribly heartless and indifferent, the succour is to be sought in a supernatural world of faith. "*Ram re Ram!I shall die*" carves out the stereotyped feminine response rendered lonely without any family support. The mythical images of Sita and Radha seem to lurk around with their lonely forbearance.

Another poem *Pardah Nashin* may seem to be a comment on the institution the physical "*pardah*". But the poem basically is a commentary on the tale of woman—sequestered, stereotyped and so alone. Time only can grant her release from the ritualistic imprisonment. She writes:

Time lifts the curtain unawares
And sorrow looks into the face…
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?[20]

Sarojini, the insider of the female world, has not dealt with the perils of woman's existence in her poems as Tagore has done in many of his poetic works. She has addressed the cause of woman more effectively in her speeches stepping out of the niche of creative writing. "*Women's Education and the Unity of India*", "*Indian Women and the Franchise*" are some such glaring examples which establish her not only as a political activist but also a staunch supporter of the woman's cause speaking in a more articulate way than was done by her in her poetry. She could not be a rebel writer as she kept to the normative system of the closed society, but in her speeches she was outspoken, she called a spade a spade to bring about social change. As an insider she addressed the male oriented society which was undecided and apprehensive to grant women the power of franchise. "*I do not think that any male need have apprehension that to extend the horizon of woman's labours is to break all her power in the home. I do not think that there need be any apprehension that in granting franchise to Indian womanhood Indian womanhood will wrench the power belonging to man.*"[21] She cajoled and coaxed the male mind (throughout 1918-1919 she worked for women's franchise) unlike Tagore, who could be blighting and sarcastic and critical of the male chauvinism. She was persuasive. She had to explain when she fought for women's claim to franchise that it was necessary basically to strengthen the national movement and the progress of the country and not to make women wayward. She said, "*Gentlemen, will you not show your chivalry which is justice, your nobility which is gratitude by saying to them. 'You, who within the shelter of our homes are Goddesses, high priestesses, the inspirers of our faith,… O! mothers, O! sisters, O! wives, we have our feet set upon the path of freedom, we have our own vision ... light the torch ... and then accompany to that distant goal to be the inspiration of progress ….*"[22] She was outrightly assertive when she spoke about the education of women in *Women's Education and the Unity of India:*

"*What then are the features of this renaissance, this awakening on which we have built our hopes? Briefly and essentially I think it consists of two main factors, the education of Indian woman and*

the union of the Indian races"[23] In the same speech she further said, "*What I plead for is the chance of a full and perfect self-realization which is the inviolable right of every human being and therefore of every Indian woman*".[24]

The two factors on which the great thinker Swami Vivekananda's assertion fell during the early hours of Indian renaissance also happened to be the upliftment of women and the masses. He had rigorously pleaded that a nation could not make satisfactory progress if these factors remained ignored. Given the proper opportunity to come out of her stereotyped identity a woman could prove her merit. As a real woman Sarojini proved her strength by rising high up the political ladder. In *The Presidential Address at the 40th Indian National Congress* she said "*I am fully aware that you have bestowed upon me the richest gift in your possession.. An generous tribute to Indian womanhood.... You have only reverted to an old tradition and restored to Indian Woman the classic position she once held in a happier epoch of our country's story: Symbol and Guardian alike of the hearth-fires, the altar-fires and the beacon-fires of her land.* "[25]

Though she could not break the stereotype in the world of poetry—yet her total engagement with the cause of woman, her struggle to work for the rights of woman and her positive participation in the struggle for freedom show the real strong woman in her who had set aside the *Purdah* of the stereotyped woman and who herself had become the paradigm of emancipation. However a real evaluation of her real merit both in the world of creativity and politics is yet to be made. The zeal and fire of her life have not received the proper appreciation.* Her poetry has been panned by the modernists only because it breathes of intense romanticism and her dedication to her political engagement and her stature of a woman political activist in the national movement is yet to be appropriately analyzed.

The slow emergence of the *real* in the early twentieth century takes recourse to a kind of inverted fantasy as we have seen in the case of Tagore. Sarojini remained a split personality that is she bore two identities rather simultaneously: one of the submissive stereotype and the other of the exposed freedom fighter struggling

not only to get the freedom of India in the company of Gandhi, Gokhale and others but also fighting to shatter the stereotype for a whole generation of women.

The dichotomy is lost in Tasleema in whom the author and the discourse become one. In Tasleema a cycle seems to have been completed. The dilemma of a woman writer lacking the courage to be a real female identity made Sarojini fight for *the real* from a socio-political forum. But Tasleema's choice and authenticity of expression do not waver between any kind of split. This *real* is the beginning of that process which shall regenerate the roots of the archetype however slowly and challenged by thousands of oppositions. Creative writing is finally a social construct. It has always reflected with utmost sincerity the silent social upheavals. The emerging voice of the subaltern consciousness, therefore, will occupy the central arena more and more, and *the real* shall prevail.

*In 1906, speaks at the annual session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta. And also addresses the Indian Social Conference in Calcutta on "The Education of Indian Women".

In 1917, leads a Delegation of Women to Lord Chelmsford & E.S. Montague asking for educational, social and political rights for women.

In 1918-1919, works for Women's franchise through various forums.

In 1925, succeeds as President of the Indian National Congress: the first Indian Woman to occupy the high office.

In 1927, helps in founding of the All India Women's Conference

In 1928, The A.I.W.C. delegate to the Pan-Pacific Women's Conference at Honolulu.

In 1933, Plays an important role in the founding of the Lady Irwin College, N.D. by the *A.I.W.C.*

Notes

[1] *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient*, *Medieval and Modern India*,(ed.) Mandakranta Bose, "*Visions of Virtue*", Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 3

[2] Ibid., "*Visions of Virtue*", p. 4.

[3] Ibid., "*Visions of Virtue*", p. 4.

[4] See, Ibid., "*Preface*", p. xi

[5] *Amar Meyebela*, Tasleema Nasreen, Calcutta: People's Book Society, 2000, p. 68, (translation mine).

[6] Ibid., p. 73, (translation mine).

[7] Ibid., p. *77*, (translation mine).

[8] See *Rabindra Rachanavali*, *Galpa Guchha*, Vol. 12, Cal.: Vishwabharati, p. 332, (translation mine).

[9] Ibid., p. 332, (translation mine).

[10] Ibid., p. 337, (translation mine).

[11] Ibid., p. 338, (translation mine).

[12] *Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. 8, p. 34, (translation mine).

[13] Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 281, (translation mine).

[14] *Rabindra Rachwnavali*, Vol. 7, p. 21, (translation mine).

[15] Ibid., p. 23, (translation mine).

[16] Ibid., p. 24, (translation mine).

[17] Ibid., p. 26, (translation mine).

[18] Ibid., p. 27, (translation mine).

[19] Sarojini Naidu, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, (ed.) Makrand Paranjape, New Delhi: Indus, paperback edition, 2995, pp. 83-84.

[20] Ibid., p. 70.

[21] Ibid., *Indian Women and the Franchise*, p. 161.

[22] Ibid., p. 161.

[23] Ibid., *Women's Education and the Unity of lndia*, *p.* 137.

[24] Ibid., p. 137.

[25] Ibid., *Presidential Address*, p. 179.

In-between: Locating Tradition and Modernity in the Works of Maitreyī Pushpa

ANITA VASHISHTA

I. PARAMETERS

"Tradition" and "Modernity", this main theme is especially important to the Indian woman's consciousness, who straddles two worlds, as it were. She is on one hand, the repository of custom and ritual, the personal and the domestic, while on the other she struggles with a faceless, impersonal modernity that recognizes little more than the profit-motive and the increasing commodification of all institutions and relationships. Importantly then, woman in India is the carrier of tradition and a nodal point for change and transformation. She becomes the very site for struggle evolving precariously and compulsively into a victim-survivor, who is both subversive and servile by turns and will probably continue to be so till she achieves the optimum bliss she deserves and looks for.

I would like to emphasize and show that ontologically speaking, little has changed for woman in Indian society She is still the means of achieving the *puruṣarthas* namely, *Dharnia*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, and even *Mokṣa*. However, she herself is often seen as aspiring to nothing more than the well being associated with the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary.[1] There is, of course, a very small population of women who appear to have broken free of all constraints and responsibilities in order to pursue their own liberation, freedom or realization of Self. But this group is not representative of the vast majority of women who live in the villages, and who are for the most part, caught up in a casteist

male-dominated culture where their own destiny is not in their own hands.

Today, I focus on four novels that write the lives of rural women between the 1960s to the 90s, capturing the images of change in the midst of age-old beliefs, superstitions and social taboos. Remarkably, these novels raise socio-legal issues and fundamental questions of class, caste, gender and sexuality, revealing thereby that a powerful cultural and sexual politics can sometimes emerge from interrogations and negotiations carried on within static hierarchies and enclosed spaces.

By "tradition" I primarily refer to a set of values and customs derived from everyday social practices and oral renditions of philosophical and religious texts, myths and narratives. Hence the set of beliefs that constitute "tradition" in my definition could prove to be lacking both theoretical rigour as well as rationality if reconstructed as a system of values. However, the significance of such concepts is that they provide some degree of solace and stability in a rapidly changing environment where market forces, political corruption and consumerism along with a particularly disintegrated and impoverished plan of progress begins to unfold. These "traditional" values constitute a strong cultural pattern within which the personal sphere is constantly in conflict with the explicitly political and the local is sometimes seen to be inimical to the national. Further, within such a tradition, family, kinship and caste constitute an oppositional pole that constantly resists processes of radical change and renewal. "Modernity" in this scheme would be understood as undesirable from the point of view of the collectivities and enclaves that struggle continuously to rescue local culture from the assimilative tendencies of a so-called progressive culture aided by the mass-media, corrupt politicians and the primacy of the profit-motive.

In all the novels under consideration here, cultural configurations are in the midst of colossal re-interpretation and re-evaluation, as changes in the value system and the pressures of survival compel questioning of existing paradigms. Within this circle of change, resistance and transgression, the place of women becomes the index of change and renewal. However, the emanci-

pation of women in rural communities is an excruciatingly slow process and can be effected only through a discreet feminist politics which re-constructs socio-cultural norms even as it shatters patriarchal practices and paradigms. The Indian woman cannot, even in passing, disturb and dismantle existing structures without providing meaningful substitutes and alternatives. Moreover, she can forge new social identities only through a community of women, and only through a careful manufacturing of consent which must cut through the very complex relations she seeks to change. As amply illustrated and discussed by several scholars (Appudarai; G.N. Devy etc.) it would also be useful to remember that in the ultimate analysis, it is counterproductive to think of "tradition" and "modernity" as mutually exclusive categories in the Indian context.[2]

II. COFIGURATIONS

Maitreyī Pushpa, in the above context, is an outstanding feminist writer whose work amply illustrates the peculiar position of the Indian rural woman. From the point of view of women's writing in Hindi, she is an important novelist as she extends and enriches a strand of women's' writing that moves beyond the genteel tradition of urban lives, and of overtly Westernized, alienated women. Her ancestry is probably traced through Ismat Chugtai, Amrita Pritam, Krishna Sobti and Manu Bhandari. She also continues the tradition of the rural novel in Hindi in a manner reminiscent of Premchand and Renu; of *Godan* and *Maila Annchal.* Maitreyī Pushpa steps in at a crucial moment today to re-construct feminist politics for genuine social transformation from women's point of view. She succeeds in pushing the limits of feminist struggle to the point where woman wants to challenge the commodification of her body and expose the abhorrent hypocrisies of a society that lives between tradition and modernity, using the exploitative potential of both concepts against her, as well as against other Dalit groups.

Ideologically speaking, Maitreyī Pushpa extends the limits of the Hindi novel in two significant ways. First, she extends the woman's struggle for self-determination by meaningfully

connecting her domestic conflicts with the world outside her corridors. This means that she symbolically and materially negotiates the actual path of liberation and freedom through the class-caste-power conglomerate and through political and bureaucratic highhandedness back to the precincts of the home, thereby illustrating that personal self-completion is always and every time tied up with social struggle and reform. Secondly, she connects feminism and women's power with common Dalit women and with today's silent, mute sufferers, because it is precisely these victims who will be tomorrow's rebels and survivors.

I begin with a detailed account of Maitreyī's latest novel *Alma Kabootri* (2000) and then fill in the gaps by referring shortly to three other novels of the same author, namely *Edennmum* (1994), *Chaak* (1997), and *Jhoola Nat* (1999). *Alma Kabootri* is an authentic account of a tribe in the midst of change from a predominantly traditional existence based on myths of a heroic past and an idealisation of the tribe's ancestral ties with Rana Pratap, Rani Jhansi and the Rajputs. Like her other novels, it is set in the Bundelkhand area, and takes as its time-frame a period from the 1940s to the 90s, when India celebrates the Golden Jubilee of her independence. As a sort of preface to the book the novelist quotes Nehru's position on the question of the so-called criminal tribes of India declared as such by the British administrators of pre-Independent India. Nehru had in 1936, expressed his objection to the declaration of such tribes and communities as criminal and felt that this was against the principles of justice in a civil, democratic society. However, prejudices once fostered die hard and the novel shows how the police and the public torture and humiliate these communities, using them as scapegoats for political inefficiency and a deteriorating public morality.

The novel is actually the story of three generations of women who are caught up in situations they want to remedy and change. The first generation is represented by Bhuri, who is already dead when the novel opens, but is, in a sense, a living presence, because Alma, her grand daughter and the central character of the novel exists only to bring to fruition Bhuri's incomplete revolution. The narrative however begins with the second generation represented

by Kadambai, a passionate beauty who is married to Jangliya and is initiated into the *dera* or *basti*, which is established on the fringes of the village of Madora Khurd, encompassing about two acres of agricultural land belonging to Mansaram, a landlord and farmer. The Kabootras who in the past were wandering tribes have settled and even have voting rights. Mansaram resents these squatters but also keeps good relations with them as they are a potential vote bank. Moreover, from them he gets a respect and importance that he craves for. Mansaram taking advantage of the Kabootra codes of personal honesty towards friend and employer, manages to exploit Jangliya by using his skills to steal, rob and financially destroy the *Pradhan*, Laluraja. At the height of such rivalry he creates a crisis in the *Pradhan*'*s* home by getting his age-old family idol stolen from his house through Kadambai's husband, Jangliya. Thereafter, the journey of deceit, cunning and violation takes tortuous routes as Laluraja though fully aware of Mansaram's complicity in the crime, ignores him and instead involves his own uncle as a prime suspect in the case. Feudal rivalries turn and twist the agencies of law as the uncle is beaten up by the police and dies leaving behind his property for a triumphant Laluraja.

When Mansaram finally loses his hold on the *pradhan*'*s* post he arranges a rapprochement with his arch enemy and returns his gold Hanuman idol. But this is not enough. He even informs the *Pradhan* that he is free to do as he likes with Jangliya. As he puts it, "Who is he to me? Hang the rascal if you wish. The idol represents not merely your family heritage but is the repository of a collective past; it is our dharma".[3] Jangliya, abandoned by Mansaram in order to save his own skin, is tortured by the police and dies a brutal death. Called to the police station to identify the severely mutilated body, his wife Kadambai has to swallow her grief and disown him in order to protect herself from further vendetta and bloodshed. She can neither mourn him nor give him a proper burial but carries within her a life-long grudge against Mansaram, the Kajja (modern; civilised) responsible for his death.

Though this incident takes place early in the novel it is a turning point in the lives of the main characters, that is Mansaram, the young widow Kadambai, as well as the family of the land-

lord. As Jangliya had once said, the values of his community are radically different from that of the Kajjas (modern, civilized folk). The Kajjas are, according to the Kabootras, habitual Judases and constantly cheat their own people. They carry on an unfair battle for supremacy through plots and stratagems, treachery and cowardice. This raises basic questions that recur throughout the major episodes of the book, and indeed through the underlying assumptions of all social interactions in the novel.[4] Though the Kabootras are considered as outlaws, their personal codes of duty are vastly different from those of the dominant community of the novel. The Kabootras exercise the principle of sharing of resources and a division of labour, which two principles in turn, work on the principle of survival, not necessarily for self, but for the perpetuation and well-being of the community, of kith and kin.

In the eyes of mainstream society however, the Kabootras are a threat, and the Kabootri woman in particular, is seen as subversive and immoral, and in the eyes of the police is nothing more than a prostitute who is appropriated at will without any regard tor her basic human rights and dignity. In delineating the daily lives of these women the novelist uses nakedness as a powerful symbol of their deprivation. While the men spend their lives hiding from the police, the women are attacked, raped and beaten by the upholders of the law. In the social structure of the village this community stands even lower than the *shudra* in the hierarchy of caste but is despised even more out of a fear of reprisal.

Thus, when Kadambai's son Rana decides to go to school instead of pursuing his traditional profession of robbing and stealing, the entire village is up against him. He might, it is feared, question and protest more effectively in the future with his tool of knowledge and awareness. The schoolmaster does not allow him to be admitted into the school in the first instance and even when he finally concedes the boy's right to do so, he prevents him from using the school hand-pump to drink water and humiliates him repeatedly. Similarly, Mansaram's wife trains her dog on the boy when she learns that he is actually her husband's son and that the boy is being educated and cared for. If these Dalits are prevented from enjoying the fruits of development and egalitarian policies,

they in turn, are acutely aware that they have nothing but their own community to fall back on. Kadambai, uneducated and uninformed, is yet perceptive enough to grasp the situation for what it is. As she counsels her shattered son she also articulates the meaning of that transformation towards which her young son aspires:

> These age-old swindlers—Rana, in their company you will forget the honesty of your own profession. You should not imagine that by mixing with them you will become one of them. Even as we adapt to their culture and language we continue to be different; Their bread and our morsels may be the same, but the cost of our thirst and hunger is certainly different from theirs (translation mine).[5]

This is a severe indictment of the attitudes and prejudices of Indian rural existence, its stasis and intolerance. In different ways, both the Kabootras and the Kajjas (civilized) resist the forces of modernity. For the Kabootras, survival depends on a perpetuation of a primitive life-style, as efforts to change their occupations are frustrated by the aggressiveness of the higher classes. Since the main principles of life for the Kabootras are sharing of resources and survival, the community has to train and socialize its young into the heroic tradition of self-sacrifice for the community and an over-emphasis on the courage, resilience and hardiness of the human spirit. Thus, sorrow at human bereavement, any kind of loss, or pain, has to be inhumanly hidden from the public view, while exploitation and torture are to be accepted as a way of life. Rana, Kadambai's son, fails in his fight against injustice as he has neither understood nor internalized the significance of these values. While he takes pride in his own historical past (he is named after Rana Pratap) and is eager to probe his roots in Indian history, he is not fully initiated into the harsh, almost primitive beliefs of his community. Perhaps, this is the reason why he becomes mentally and emotionally upset at the turn of events in his life and is neither a successful Kabootra nor suited to accept the corrupt, expedient world of the Kajja.

While the Kabootra community remains a homogenous group in spite of migrations to other places, yet the quest for justice and education necessitates a snapping of bonds temporarily. However,

the struggle to educate themselves sets apart those like Alma or Ramsingh and furthers the life-narrative of these people. When Rana cannot continue his education in his hostile environment, he is sent to a relative's house in Gauramachia, a few miles from his own village, where he lives with Ramsingh and his young daughter Alma, and is taught by Ramsingh himself. The story of Ramsingh is also instructive, as it is part of the woman-narrative of this book. He has been educated by his mother Bhuri who carried a dream in her head and heart, as she had wanted her son to know the law and to defend his community against the police and corrupt officials.

The story of Bhuri, Ramsingh's mother, is linked to that of Kadambai and thereafter to Alma the educated daughter of Ramsingh. Thus education, a means of empowerment, unifies the plot of this novel, shifting the scene from Rana to Ramsigh and thereafter to Alma, the daughter of Ramsingh. The change-agent in each of the major initiatives of the novel is the woman. Thus, while Ramsingh a schoolmaster is involved in a false case and is finally destroyed by the police, Alma, his daughter is shown to be politically astute and mature enough to handle the nexus of corruption, police high-handedness and criminal abuse of the rule of law. The tortuous path of Alma's rise to power notwithstanding, the novel comes through as a tribute to the vision of three women, that is Bhuri, Kadambai and Alma. Bhuri, the Grandmother of Alma only nurtures a dream. She moves away from her village to educate her son but dies before she can see her dream shattered. It is difficult for her to realize that the change she desires involves exchange of power positions and a negotiation of hierarchies, and is therefore tortuously slow in arriving. Any kind of victory over the exploitative agencies of the law eludes Ramsingh, because in spite of his migration to a new place, in spite of his adopting of a new profession and new lifestyle, society still names him a Kabootra and refuses to recognize his right to employment and an honest living. Unlike Bhuri, Kadambai returns, as it were, into the fold of the community but is drawn back into a struggle with the forces of change as her son chooses to read and write rather than steal and rob. However, Kadambai strikes a balance between home and the

outside world, between tradition and change. She slowly makes forays into another world when she strikes an expedient business partnership with her violator Mansaram and agrees to supply him liquor from the Kabootra camp. Kadambai succeeds where Bhuri had failed and Alma pushes even further into positions of compromise in favour of power. Maitreyī Pushpa's protagonists are slow but steady seekers after power, a power that only helps them to further consolidate their positions within their home ground.

Kadambai's attempts to educate Rana receive a setback when her son returns home from Alma's house disillusioned by the father Ramsingh's life as a police informer, a man compelled to play with human lives in order to maintain his own. Rana returns into the fold of the community, disillusioned and unable to negotiate that difficult half-way route that Kadambai, and after her Alma are able to adopt, When Rana turns insane in his sorrow, it is Alma who remains to carry on the battle to the finish and when the novel ends she is actually moving towards that political power which will enable her to liberate her self and her community from fear and injustice.

While these struggles move on, what matters is the role of the woman as provider of home and comfort, and as upholder of the communities' traditions and aspirations. In the midst of poverty, injustice and loss of self-esteem, she appears as an agency of restoration, healing and resurrection. Festivals, religious rituals and dedication to the creature comforts of the men and children create that niche for her from where she fights her battles and privileges herself as the life-force of the family and community. As mother, she provides strength to battered psyches, and in Maitreyī Pushpa's feminist politics she obtains her most powerful *avatar* as provider and as mother. Kadambai nurtures her son and supports him even when the community pronounces him unfit to be a Kabootra, She also liberates Mansaram who can experience a sense of release and freedom within her domestic interiors.[6] Even Alma is, first and foremost, a woman who can manage and control those around her with her empathy and affection. Thus Maitreyī Pushpa combines the traditional figure of mother with the sexuality of woman to negotiate that moment of transformation when the

Indian woman can re-construct her destiny into newer roles and newer responsibilities.

Alma, towards the end of the novel, has already accepted the impossibility of marrying Rana with whom she has spent the best moments of her life, and whom her father had intended as her husband, and protector. She now appears publicly, as official wife and widow at the funeral of the minister for social welfare, who had forcefully kept her in his house after rescuing her from the clutches of Surajbhan a wheeler-dealer, small-time politician who supplies women to officials in the local circuit house. Surajbhan has in order to secure Alma's slavery etched her name "Alma Kabootri" on her arm so that he may at will prove her birth-guilt to the police. He does this also because he is afraid of her deep strength and resiliency of spirit. He keeps her tied in ropes as the wound festers because he is maimed by her desire to live and struggle. When she finally manages to escape, the entire establishment of *goondas*, henchmen and bureaucrats begin to look like worms grovelling in the darkness. At the minister's funeral Alma appears as the perfect, demure widow struck by sorrow and remorse but elegantly dressed nevertheless, in a white *sari* complete with black glares and the gleam of confidence upon her personality. Named as his successor in the constituency, she moves into an area of power politics and precarious existence. Is Maitreyī Pushpa suggesting that Alma is the final product of a struggle waged from within closed interiors? Probably the metamorphosis may appear unrealistic and implausible. But it is useful to remember that this final reckoning in an atmosphere replete with the trappings of modernity—the media, hype, public consumerism and power-play—takes two generations and more to materialize. This fact only re-enforces the idea that tradition and the vulnerability of living solely by tradition is not easily transformed into modernity and its advantages. There is a slow tortuous ferment before modernity can be truly internalized and used to advantage. Alma, needless to say, represents scores of women in small towns and villages who are, while tied to home and hearth slowly but surely beginning small journeys that lead them to positions of responsibility as organisers, social workers, *panchas* and even full blown heavy weights in local politics.

What happens in *Alma Kabootri*, is a pattern that is repeated with less drama and greater emphasis in *Edennmum* (This is Not For Me) and *Chaak* (Potter's Wheel). The meaning of *Edennmum* is evident through the three generations represented by Bau, Prem, her daughter-in-law, and Manda the granddaughter. While Bau the mother-in law and grandmother laments the annihilation of tradition and *dharma* by Prem, her daughter in law, Manda the grandchild caught between Bau and Prem her mother, is full of questioning as well as understanding in favour of change and renewal. The young and beautiful mother has re-married soon after her husband's death, inviting severe criticism from Bau who escapes from Sonapura with her ten-year old grandchild Manda, so that she may prevent the stepfather from taking custody of her. The stepfather, a politician, is interested in acquiring property, the sole owner of which is the young heir Manda. Displacements, property disputes, family feuds and political power-games are woven into a dense fabric within which a young generation is growing into semi-educated or professionally educated adults. In order to place in perspective the internal dynamics of this rural imbroglio, it is important to see that a precariously balanced community beset by the ill-effects of an all-pervasive and specifically modern acquisitive instinct, is tenuously bound together through the interactive routine of religious festivals, rituals and occasional celebrations that ease the stress and strain of these larger currents. Manda, for example, returns to her village to bring solace to exploited, uneducated farmers and unemployed farmhands by reciting from the Mahābhārata and the *Rāmāyaṇa.*[7] She nurtures her mother and grandmother by understanding and touching both lives in different ways, As grandchild she carries on the dreams of her dead father who had wanted to build a hospital in the village and as daughter she heals her mother's wounds by restoring her right to motherhood which society had snatched from her. Manda also re-enforces traditional ties between the village elders and the various classes of people by joining hands against the quarry contractors who represent the forces of exploitation and unscrupulous market forces. The police and bureaucracy are here symbols of oppression[8] as in all other novels of Maitreyī Pushpa, and when

the novel ends, Manda the conservative revolutionary is boarding a bus to reach the police station in defence of an old woman who has been falsely accused in the suicide of her own daughter Sugna. The local police inspector has vowed to teach Manda a lesson, and fear looms large in the village.

Overcoming fear, is also the main theme of *Chaak. A* landmark novel, it strongly raises issues of women's rights, and accepts the inevitability of change and modernization. While it foresees the violent break-up of the village community on caste and class lines, it also re-instates the dignity of agrarian labour.[9] The protagonist of the novel Sarang, like Manda, is educated and seeped in the cultural norms of the village and she actively participates in the rituals and ceremonies that foster and promote well-being through community interaction. However, she suddenly breaks down when her widowed sister Resham is murdered by her dead husband's brother in broad daylight and then mourned by the murderers as a case of suicide. Sarang views the murder as the death of woman's archetypal desire for love and motherhood. Sarang is suddenly reminded of all the "suicides" in the village and wonders how many women will have to die before the elders of the village finally take note of such gross injustice. Sarang also reminisces her own deprived childhood in a charitable boarding school where she is sent after the death of her mother. Old wounds are touched again as she remembers the humiliation and consequent suicide of a fellow student for her involvement with a male teacher of the school. Nothing can now give solace to Sarang, who persuades her husband Ranjit to join her in her compulsive fight against Doriya the murderer and his family. Ranjit argues and counsels her against the idea of sticking out her neck for a sister who was after all too bold, too uncompromising and completely wrong in her resolve to bear an illegitimate child. Sarang, however, cannot overcome her sense of distress and violation and has Doriya arrested by the police. Like other Maitreyī Pushpa protagonists, Sarang is that other woman who we all imagine is unnecessarily throwing herself deeper and deeper into the mire. However, it is essential to realize that Sarang, Alma or Manda, are women who

have empathy for others because of their own deprived pasts and family histories.[10]

When Doriya manages to get himself acquitted through bribery, Sarang becomes the scapegoat for her husband who had considered the legal battle unnecessary in the first place. When Chandan their son stands threatened by the miscreant and his family, he has to be sent away from his home to the city to live with his uncle, an unscrupulous police officer. Sarang loses everything when she is separated from her child, losing the will to move on or to protest against the several wrongs of the village. During her fight for justice, Sarang begins to understand the true meaning of home, of motherhood and of the place of the Elder in the Household. In the hour of her crisis it is Gajdhar her father-in-law who stands by her and it is he alone who maintains the integrity, the dignity and the fearlessness which she associates with her community. As Sarang probes deeper into her own consciousness, she also discovers that she is attracted to the village schoolmaster Shridhar, who makes her aware that she has more right on her son than her husband because she has borne him and nurtured him and defined her own fundamental existence through him.

The idea that the child is more hers than anybody else's gives Sarang the strength to the bring the little boy back to the village so that he may learn his own traditions, and legitimately inherit his agrarian roots and environment. Stung and bitten by Sarang's act of independence and disturbed by her friendship with the low-caste schoolmaster, her husband Ranjit beats her, and threatens to throw her out of his home. But her father-in-law steps in to protect her rights and to remind his son that a *Jat* woman is always independent, and free to do as she pleases because the entire *Jat* community are broadminded, courageous and liberated in comparison with other castes. The parochialism notwithstanding, Gajdhar Singh steadily performs his role as Elder and his firm belief in the woman as the *Griha Lakshmi* compels him to advise his son to honour Sarang's rights and respect her aspirations. When Sarang is persuaded to fight the village elections, large numbers of women turn out apparently to support her election rally but in

reality they gather to articulate their grief at the death of Gulkundi a low class girl who is burned to death for her *Gandharva vivah*[11] to a boy outside her caste. Solidarity builds up as Sarang begins to espouse the cause not merely of Resham and Gukundi but that of an entire community of women. Though Sarang is supported and persuaded by her father-in-law, her husband's cousin Bhanver and the village schoolmaster to fight the *Panchayat* Election, she is full of fear, doubt and apprehension at the thought of moving towards a course she cannot retrace. She is afraid of de-moralizing her husband, of neglecting her domestic duties and of moving into an uncharted, unknown future. Sarang is a woman who creates a sisterhood, fights injustice and steps discreetly into the political arena. She can certainly be described as a feminist but what stands out in our minds is not merely her search for self, but her desire for social integration, her resolve to keep together her family, and to strengthen her foothold within the community before her reluctant but remarkable attempt to widen her horizon.

III

CONCLUSION: ISSUES, THEMES and IMAGES

Maitrey Pushpa's novels always end at a crucial stage where an educated and culturally rich generation is challenging a degenerate, callous bureaucracy and retrieving old ties to move ahead with a mix of convention and change. Alma is moving ahead towards power but dreams constantly of the day when she can take her official white ambassador car into the Kabootra locality and distribute all the money she has to the hungry children. She also thinks of Kadambai and Rana though marriage with Rana appears a remote possibility. Similarly, Manda caught up in her negotiations with the local M.L.A, and dividing her time between Bau and other villagers, thinks of marriage in the near future and appears to be fully reconciled to leading her many lives as best she can. There is uncertainty and trepidation but no alienation or withdrawal from home, community or responsibility. Cooking meals, cleaning, washing, procuring and storing food working in

the fields or in the cowshed are as much on Sarang's and Manda's minds as are election rallies and legal battles. Thus, the mundane, daily grind cannot be given up in order to pursue larger social activities. Sarang is filled with anxiety and trepidation at the thought of reaching home late from the village school where she is organizing a play. When she goes out of her house for the first time to file her election papers she is terrified of meeting her husband there, or of being taunted by him for neglecting her household duties. Alma happily provides meals and runs a homely kitchen even for her guards when she is imprisoned by Surajbhan. She binds these poor but honest men into a sort of family circle so that they are obliged to help her escape though they personally pay a heavy price for their camaraderie. Sheelo, the protagonist of the novella *Jhoola Nat* thrives by taking on the mantle of the householder and worms her way into the hearts of the mother-in-law and brother-in-law through her attention to domestic chores and religious rituals. Thus, tied to her traditional sphere, the woman in these novels, moves beyond the portals and touches many more lives before she comes home to roost and she gains ground bit by bit, always staying in between two portals, the domestic and the political.

In terms of man-woman relationships the ground traversed here is unexpectedly complex yet hidden from public view and socially unacknowledged. Woman, as the old bard in *Chaak* narrates, always comes to grief if she reveals her hidden passions, her independence in matters of the heart, or her inability to comply with forced decisions. But in spite of ample images of distraught women and unfulfilled relationships, there are Sheelos, Sarangs, Mandas and Reshams who dare to choose their own destinies in matters of the heart. In all these novels village communities appear to be quite unprepared for marriage outside the caste, and adultery or refusal on the part of the women to comply with normative models of the ideal Hindu woman, can invite insidious death, ignominy or a severe curtailment of freedom. Resham, the young widow of *Chaak*, is trapped in a dilapidated store house and killed along with the child growing within her womb because she has refused to adopt her *devar*, or husband's younger brother as

her protector after her husband's death. She has steadily refused to reveal the name of the father of her child, and has refused either to abort the child or move into her parents home as suggested by her mother in law. Legally, her father's property is no longer hers, but she does have a share in her dead husband's property and decides that she will stay there by right. The dead man had been impotent and the younger brother who is being forced on her is also so, the novel suggests. *Niyoga*, or remarriage with the younger brother had been recommended by Manu in the *Smriti*[12] as a suitable arrangement for the widow and is indeed practised even today within some landed agricultural communities to retain property within the family. In Maitreyī Pushpa's rural narratives, widow remarriage or rehabilitation of the abandoned wife becomes a real issue precisely because property inheritance is involved and like Prem (*Edennmun*), Reshma (Chaak), or Sheelo (*Jhoola Nat*) Maitreyī's women characters refuse to accept partnerships merely for convenience. Resham (*Chaak*) who had loved and lived happily with her impotent husband, refuses to accept his younger brother, an uneducated corrupt wrestler as her husband though the family repeatedly press her to do so. She dares to fulfil her desire for motherhood or even a physical relationship while she strenuously guards her rights to property inheritance.[13]

But even more interesting is the case of Sheelo, protagonist of Maitreyī's novella, *Jhoola Nat. A* complex and tricky situation arises when a newly wedded bride, Sheelo, is abandoned by her husband who lives and works in the city, while she continues to live in the village house with her mother-in-law and brother-in-law. When after a full year of penance and prayer the errant husband (a police constable) does not return, The mother-in-law decides to allow Sheelo to legally live with the younger son Balkishan. Sheelo, as described by Maitreyī Pushpa, is uneducated, as soft as a cow, and aware neither about social science nor psychology. She has no awareness of feminist agendas and certainly no plans of turning into a rebel; on the contrary, she is politically very correct within the household as she cooks, prays or pampers her brother-in-law. Finally, she wins him over by her natural sensuousness and domesticity. Sheelo is neither beautiful nor seductive

but instinctively and astutely aware of her position and situation. She has been rejected but knows she must survive, as returning to her maternal home could create a crisis. She is acutely aware of her deprivation as a wife and knows the meaning of being a woman without marital fulfillment. She succeeds however, in having her cake and eating it too when she begins to live with Balkishan, the younger brother who idealizes her, worshipping her as both *devi* and wife. On her part, she responds but steadily refuses to publicly accept him as her husband, by refusing to go through with the *Bachiya* ceremony of feeding the villagers in order to receive public sanction for her relationship.[14] The mother buckles under pressure from the community but can do little to remedy the situation as Sheelo refuses to give up her stand. Thereafter, the elder son returns home one day to retrieve his place and is promptly accepted by Sheelo as her legal husband, without qualms of conscience or conflict. Balkishan is unceremoniously dropped as Sheelo takes Sumer, her legally wedded husband, into her special care and affection.

The manipulatively powerful role that Sheelo plays nearly dwarfs the community as well as the family who are slowly and unobtrusively led by her as she expertly plays out her *nari-leela.* The unlettered Sheelo's sexual politics is instructive and reminds us of the jouissance of Julia Kristeva who asks women to write the body and celebrate it too. Sheelo performs an instinctive power-play that forces the novelist to perceive her in mythical dimensions, even though she is totally down to earth in her daily existence as housewife and rural woman.

In all her novels Maitreyī Pushpa presupposes the reader's acquaintance with Hindu mythology, ancient *Dharmaśāstras* and the entire idea of *Parampara*[15] as it is handed down from woman to woman. In *Jhoola Nat*, for instance, Sheelo we are told has a sixth finger and the novelist conjectures tongue in cheek that this is the probable reason for her mysterious woman-power. This source of *desi* humour refers back to the *Manusmṛti*[16] where men are advised not to marry a woman who has extra fingers or toes or one who has too much hair or even too little. *Kama* is Sheelo's special attribute though she is not acquainted with the Shastras and

she demands gifts and praise from Balkishan, her unmarried lover though she is not even remotely aware of Manu. She is moreover, described by Maitreyī as a Draupadi who sits pretty between two men who compete for her attention. In the end Sheelo has driven the young innocent Balakrishan to madness while she is secure in getting the property share of both brothers into her hands. This dawns on the family late in the day and in any case it is a penalty that the mother has to pay for sheltering an unruly son.

In *Chaak* too, the novelist gives meaning to a vast body of myths and *kathas* that form the repertoire of classical Hinduism conceived as a *sanskriti*, a sort of *weltanschuung.* For example, Sarang the protagonist of *Chaak*, is compared to Gargi who is eager to gain knowledge of some deeper truth to alleviate her misery. Having read and learnt Hindu texts, both classical and modern, she is now at a stage when she wants to meditate on them and interpret them without prejudice. Sarang is acutely concerned and aware of her duty or *dharma* as a *griha laksmi* and is deeply immured in her *grhasthi* through her role as wife and mother. She is keen to perform rituals for good luck, for peace and for prosperity believing in them as much as anyone else in the village. Thus, Manda, interpreting the Bhagwat Gita for the villagers, or Sarang writing a play on the story of Eklavya, or the old *Khairatan* official bard of the village singing of women's woes with tears in her eyes—are all images of women who continue to be nurtured by quasi-philosophical myths or religious texts. These together make up their consciousness, their awareness of Self and even their departures from tradition. Modernity here, is just round the corner—true, but elusive nevertheless.

NOTES

[1] The *Purusarthas* are values prescribed for human pursuit. There is a finite range prescribed to the pursuit of the first three values to be explicitly vouchsafed for at the time of marriage by reciting the phrase "*naticharami*" three times. These constitute social values as compared to "*mokṣa*"/ liberation / freedom which is a personal value and has no finite range. Though it may be argued that all Indians are aware of the theoreti-

cal intricacies of the *mokṣa*, *shastra* or *sūtra* nor able to understand these except at the grossly popular level, yet it is not wrong to believe that this is always a dormant desire or inner urge deep within which manifests itself in the Indian psyche at sometime or the other. Sometimes social values try to occupy the place of m*okṣa*, the unique *puruṣartha* that has for long remained the guiding spirit of Indian society.

[2] See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) and G.N. Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992), pp. 17-19.

[3] It is significant to note that Mansaram's loyalties are neither to caste nor to religion. He is motivated only by the changing market forces which later determine his business association with Kadambai, the wife of his victim.

[4] This novel depicts a symbolic, social and political conflict between the "traditional" and the "modern". Rana, the illegitimate son of the *Kajja* (modern) and *Kabutra* (traditional) turns insane; while Alma also of the same generation is able to withstand exploitation and misery to turn into a hard headed social climber.

[5] *Alma Kabutri*, p. 37.

[6] The novelist proclaims that it is Kadambai who teaches Mansaram the true meaning of *Artha* and *Kama.*

[7] It is significant that Manda's interpretations of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa are appealing to the masses as she constantly locates these stories linking them to the socio-economic change and ferment around her.

[8] The state, the bureaucracy and all icons of authority are usually suspect in the novels of Maitreyī Pushpa. The local, the private and the domestic spheres are crucial in the radical shifts that take place in her plots. Importantly, local-knowledge traditions are paramount in bridging gaps between the social and the political spheres of her fiction.

[9] Sarang, the protagonist of *Chaak* and Ranjit, her husband are both educated and both demonstrate a strong commitment to their rural existence. Sarang like Alma or Manda, the heroine of *Eddennmum* is a unique blend of the rebel and the traditionalist, the spiritual and the sensual. She is totally integrated in the village environment and desires no other life.

[10] In Maitreyī Pushpa's sexual politics, oppression and exploitation are deep resources in women's history leading inevitably to resistance and change.

[11] The *Gandharva-vivah* or love-marriage is one of eight forms of marriage recognized by the *Smṛtis.* The others include *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Prajapatya* and *Arsha.* See A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1959).

[12] *Manusmṛti* (Hindi) ed. Dr. Ramchandra Varma Shastri (Delhi: Vidhya Vihar, 1997), Chaps 3 and 9.

[13] Feuds and litigation for the acquisition of landed property are recurrent problems that Maitreyī Pushpa's female characters constantly encounter.

[14] Local rituals and tradition are both used and misused by Sheelo. She is an amazing amalgam of aggressive and manipulative stances which she uses to gain her rightful place in the home and to protect her conjugal rights.

[15] The traditional sense of *paramparā* is described by G.N. Devy as containing "two essential components: *Marga*—the metropolitian or mainstream tradition and *Desi*—regional and sub-cultural tradition.… Thus, the modern Indian sense of tradition should be described as a tripartite relationship involving *Desi-parampara*, *marga-parampara* and Western tradition, each of which conflicts and collaborates with the remaining two in a variety of ways". See G.N. Devy, *After Amnesia*, pp. 18-20.

[16] See n. 12.

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Androgyny in Search of Modernity: Fiction and Reality

SUKRITA PAUL KUMAR

Patriarchy has vested interests in sustaining gender polarities and maintaining masculinity and femininity as distinct and separate. It is perhaps for this reason that while looking for a reference to "androgyny" in an encyclopaedia, I could locate it only in *The Woman's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets*. I quote the explanation of "androgyny" from it: "Many Indo-European religions tried to combine male and female in the Primal Androgyne, both sexes in one body, often with two heads and four arms … Shiva and Shakti-Kali appeared as the androgyne *Ardhanārīśvara*, the right side male, the left side female. Rudra, the older form of Shiva, was known as 'the Lord who is Half Woman'… Chinese Taoists held the *mandala* of Yang and Yin to represent the androgyne. Western myths also assigned androgyny to the elder gods or the first human beings. The Orphic creation of the first born deity was a double-sexed Phanes or Eros, whose female half was psyche, the soul… "[1] and so on.

We must remember that myths are not just simple tales; they modify, re-contextualize, evolve different meanings in different ages and reveal more and more dimensions of human consciousness over time. The symbiotic duality between the male and the female that is captured in the iconographical image of "*ardhanārīśvara*" evokes a sense of both awe and wonder, and calls for a participation in the mystery of being. The image is a concrete manifestation of a philosophical imagination, a rendering of a mythopoeic vision rather than a historical reality. To go back to the mythical narratives suggested by this beautiful icon would

really mean discovering newer and wider meanings embedded in it. Its appeal is aesthetically valuable and epistemologically significant.

There are many culture-specific stories recollected and recorded about *androgyny* and *Ardhanāriśvara*, many highlighting the differences between the two. But I would choose to go by Barbara Walker's understanding of these two mythic symbols, suggesting an interchangeability of the two terms, both denoting the coming together of the male and the female. In that it is a oneness that does not dissolve the duality but embraces it. The ongoing debate and the controversy about the definition of the word "androgyny" has been arousing the interest of many a scholar. Some have led androgyny to acquire a relationship with words and concepts such as hermaphrodite, transgender or even trans-sexual. Others take it as a neutral or transcendental category through which the sexual differences are homogenized.

Evelyn J. Hinz enumerates various responses to *androgyny* and points out how "whereas some critics see androgyny as a mode of resistance to established sexual norms and a positive and liberating concept, for others it is a nefarious anodyne and a "myth" that must be resisted".[2] In the early days of feminism the well-known British writer Virginia Woolf championed androgyny as a strategy to combat unequal status of men and women emerging out of an aggressive imposition of gender differences. The chains of gender restrictions have led to a stifling of both the sexes making them live pre-determined and socially scripted roles generated by patriarchal notions.

It is in such a context that I invoke the concept of Ardhanāriśvara, one of the major images in the Indian pantheon. The consortship of Shiva and Parvati becomes the realization of the resolution of duality in Ardhanāriśvara. The two aspects of consciousness are so distinct and yet as undivided as the sabda (word) from its artha (meaning). It is known that the myth of the biunity of Shiva, an anthropomorphic symbol of the unbounded consciousness and Parvati, a yogini and Shakti in her own rights is pregnant with many socio-psychological insights and ramifications. The ideology of gender polarization can be deconstructed by exploring the

primal reality of this myth, thus eventually clearing the path for a reconstruction of gender identity.

Sexual essentialism upheld by many a feminist theory in modern times has in effect unwittingly and ironically supported gender stereotyping in its creation of the rhetoric of compulsory masculinity in a man and femininity in a woman. Inevitably this maintains the imbalance of the sexual order nurtured through centuries of male domination. What we are talking about is the socio-psychological orientations inculcated both in men and women to grow up as clearly defined male or female identities. Indeed, the hierarchical power relations between the sexes remains status quo.

In his novel, *Ardhanāriśvar* (1992),[3] the eminent writer in Hindi skillfully probes the possibility of installing the androgynous ideal in man-woman relationships and the evolving of the same within an individual gender identity. He explores this at different levels through an intensive research of the individual as well as social consciousness on the one hand and on the other, he also provides a peep into the subconscious terrain of his characters in a section called "Anterman" where he narrates their dreams. When one of the most sensible characters of the novel, Ajit, articulates his ambition in the following dialogue, he is actually helping Sumita, his wife to define Ardhanāriśvara: "I will give Sumita her freedom from being my slave. And I will free myself from her slavery. Only then, can we truly become man and wife."[4] Ardhanāriśvara is repeatedly described as a positive and liberating concept in this novel. And women characters in *Ardhanāriśvara* are constantly found questioning the socially cherished gender assumptions. They seek to come out of the "suicidal" *chakravyūh* of morality and notions of honour constructed by the biases of the male dominated society.

The novel begins with the memory of rape that oppresses Sumita's life, rape which is the worst form of expression of male prowess proving woman to be a mere sexual object stripped of all human dignity. Sumita, her husband Ajit and Vibha his sister, all three of them are gripped in the horror of the event when Sumita offers herself to the rapists to save Vibha. The author deftly indicates the psychological and the socio-economic complexities in

which such a tragic event is grounded. In fact the rapist's words "I've to take revenge on these white-collared people", immediately take one's mind to woman who becomes an easy prey of, both, the unbridled male sexuality as well as capitalism. Sumita has to retrieve her own individual dignity and the dignity of womanhood in general. She attempts this through extensive research and reflection and wants to understand her own individual experience and responses as also such experiences of other rape victims. She perceives how the binary opposition churned by socio-psychic orientations is at its farthest extreme when the potent male afflicts his manhood brutally on the helpless female target. Any lack or inadequacy created in the male psychosis may find a convenient let-out through the act of rape.

In one of her letters, Sumita says "I have not just been the victim of the rapist's desire, but also a victim of his vengefulness against the upper class".[5] She is shaken out of all taken-for-granted beliefs on human sexuality and relationships and commits herself at the existential plane to redefine sexuality and freedom. In effect, the author actually uses what has come to be known as gender dialectics. Sumita grapples with the rather arbitrary confusion of the prevalent gender concepts and wishes to move towards reconstructing fresh perspectives to the idea of being a woman or a man and their relationship.

This process implies exploring the dynamics of gender and gender-roles operating within the socio-cultural arena as also the context of the individual being. It is pertinent to the argument to quote the well known scholar Harsha Dehejia's words from his essay on "Parvati: Goddess of Love": "…when Shiva identifies himself with Parvati as if saying *aham idam* i.e. "I am this"… Shiva and Parvati are now engrossed in each other, even reside in each other, like the two halves of Ardhanāriśvara … "[6] Sumita's dialogues with Ajit capture moments of authentic engagement that man and woman can have as two complimentary beings. On one occasion she says to him "… That's what I am … and that's what'll remain … what was imagined in Shankar in the image of Ardhanāriśvara."[7] Sumita has succeeded in moving beyond the confines of her self as "feminine" woman. Virginia Woolf's

character Orlando goes through similar experiences. Discussing *Orlando* the novel, George Piggford concludes: "The character Orlando who gains insights into both maleness and femaleness throughout his extended life provides an example of…a great mind which is androgynous."[8] It is precisely such an idea that Vishnu Prabhakar too seems to establish in his novel, *Ardhanāriśvara.*

The novel predominantly meanders through various levels of consciousness of a number of its women characters. For a male writer to come to grips with all those diverse streams of female complexities is in itself a feat of androgynous awakening. The creative mind demolishes dichotomies and identifies harmoniously with sexual binaries. Another writer who vouches for such a position, both theoretically and in practice, is Krishna Sobti. While writing *Hum Hushmat*, she deliberately uses the male voice, specifically when she writes personal essays. This is to transcend the constraints of mere female insights. In her essay, "*Mulaquaat Hushmat se Sobti ki*" (A Meeting between Hushmat and Sobti) she brings her male and female selves together into an androgynous whole revealing the writer in herself: "Only me. Me, me an experience, an apparel. Just one entrance through which only my shadow comes in, just mine . .. and then it goes out. The morning begins with me. So does the evening."[9]

It is this sense of totality or completion that the symbol of ardhanarisvara represents. But then in her essay "*Daawat mai Shirkat*" Krishna Sobti writes: "If only Hushmat were not to be a creative writer but were to be running some small factory or business, at least then he could have decorated his Begum's beautiful, fine nose with a diamond ring!"[10] Indeed conforming with the mainstream is convenient and attractive because it is easily accepted but then, an authentic life demands stoicism, courage, persistence and an ability to demolish the smoke-screen of pretension. Just as Sumita, in Vishnu Prabhakar's novel, agonizes over sexual inequality and the imbalance of power between man and woman in modern times, Vibha too is compelled to salvage humanity by committing herself to searching for a new code for gender relations. Vibha, for whose sake Sumita had offered herself to the rapists, goes through a niggling suspicion initially:

"Did Sumita wish to be raped?" Sumita examines and analyzes her own mind too. She does not let this lurking doubt be swept aside. When Vibha shares her suspicions with her husband Anitya, his response is insightful and dispassionate: "The guilt is not that of any Vibha's or Nisha's. The whole of humanity stands in the witness box … man as well as woman."[11] This corroborates what Sumita says: it is the society that has made her the sinner, not the rapist. What saves Sumita and later Vibha is the feminist self-awareness that protects them from getting stuck in that earlier mentioned *chakravyūh* of an unfair sense of honour and morality so oppressive for women.

The privileging of the male is possible only when there is a rigidly exclusive sexual categorisation conforming to the gendered norms of behaviour. The culturally coded trap of the masculine/feminine binary imposes notions of unisexual ideals of "the strong virile man" and "the beautiful chaste woman". While virginity is sacrosanct in the case of a woman, for a man to lose it, in the words of Tolstoy in his story "The Kreutzer Sonata", is looked upon as a natural form of amusement. I quote from the confessional narration of the protagonist, Pozdnyshev: "True, the ten commandments tell us it is wrong, but the only reason we have to know the ten commandments is so that we can give the correct answer to the priest when we take our examinations in the Bible study."[12] A little later, he says, " I was wallowing in the muck of fornication;… I sinned because of the society in which I lived;… people around me looked upon my sin as a proper means for insuring my health."[13]

As if endorsing the above perception, while talking to Shahida and arousing her subconscious, Sumita comments: "Man can buy over ten women and remain morally upright. Have you even considered this: if we women buy ten men, we'd be abused as prostitutes."[14] What Tolstoy portrayed more than a century ago, holds good even today despite the world-wide spread *of* the feminist movements. A plethora of women characters in Vishnu Prabhakar's novel *Ardhanārīśvara* are rape victims who confront their gruesome experiences squarely without any hypocrisy. It is in such a backdrop that Vibha proposes to produce a new "Smriti"

for man-woman relationship to destablize the well-entrenched patriarchy and revolutionize the social scenerio. The writer is able to whip up an urgency for this by merely telling the truth, as it were, of all those women victimized by rape. He narrates the case studies of women like Shalini who was raped when she was seven by a seventy-year-old man, or Rajkali who is raped by the custodians of justice themselves—the police, or Shyamala, Kiran or indeed Sumita herself.

These women belong to different strata of society and each one of them has a wounded psyche. As targets of male violence and desire, they transcend all class, religious or caste differences and unite in their anguish. The horror of their lives as women stares in the eye of the reader blatantly. Each one strives to rehabilitate herself, struggling to repair her own psyche and redefining her life. Rajkali for instance manages to find someone like William to marry: William, an adivasi who tells Sumita, "Our language does not have such a word as 'rape'. The word after all, comes to be born later, first, there's the meaning. And, as we know, meaning is culture itself. My culture does not even conceive, leave aside accept, the idea of rape. So there's no question of this word existing in our language."[15]

This is a pointer to the fact that the resolution lies in routing out the very basis of male-female relationship by revisioning of gender identity. To overcome dualism and develop ways of creating a paradigm shift in this direction, some feminists in the West have been discussing an effective use of gender dialectics by acknowledging the many interacting factors and connections between the male and the female. The social and cultural orientation of gender polarization needs to be dissolved first and foremost. Many symbols, myths and allegories come to us from the distant past indicating the points of identification between the two sexes.

Commenting on a Bengalese relief representing Shiva with his consort, Joseph Campbell notices how the "two countenances, rigid and mask-like, regard each other with intense emotion:… Gazing with a deep and ever-lasting rapture, they are imbued with the secret knowledge that, seemingly two, they are fundamentally one."[16] Such is the gaze that realizes the androgynous ideal bring-

ing the male and the female on the same plane and dissolving the idea of the Other. There is no room for any hierarchical positioning of the sexes, nor is there any scope for exclusionary categories to emerge in such an experience of unity. Similarly the image of ardhanarisvara illustrates "the penultimate stage of perfect cognition, the dynamic harmony"[17] of the self and the other, the male and the female. The epistemic amnesia of this experience accentuated by the deeply internalized perspectives on male-female dichotomies has been one of the major failings of the modern feminist traditions.

In fact, the radical feminists who have furthered the cause of binary oppositions have actually resulted more in male backlash than a constructive feminist awareness. Vishnu Prabhakar's novel, *Ardhanāriśvara* demonstrates how intense conceptual rethinking helped bring Sumita and Ajit into their individually autonomous position as well as, ultimately, closer to each other. Their togetherness builds on mutual respect, individual freedom and an unmasked sharing of thoughts and emotions. They do not wish to possess each other, in fact they realize they need to be free of each other to come together meaningfully. In that they know they have to first free themselves from their own selves as products of fixed ideas.

In her speech at a Mahila Kalyan Samiti gathering, Vibha offers her critique of the position of women in the contemporary society. Attacking the norms of double morality, she spells out the need to clear the path for the free woman both at home and outside, in the mind as much as in action. For a healthy social order, she echoes Sumita when she recommends the androgynous ideal of *Ardhanāriśvara:* "But I also wish to give a warning to my sisters … the independent identity of a woman has no relation with her sex-image, which means that in building a healthy society both man and woman must participate on an equal footing, with equal rights and equal accountability. The symbol of *Ardhanāriśvara*, she concludes, "is a concrete representation of this very imaginative concept."[18] Man and woman, not indifferent or opposed to each other, each independent of each other and yet united in spirit. She emphasizes, the woman's goal is to realize herself as a woman

not as a sexual object, to just focus on becoming attractive for the male hunter.

Vishnu Prabhakar's intellectually provocative and well-researched novel provides the reader with well-worked arguments for a radical change in viewing gender. Knitted into the narrative of the novel are long letters, articles, speeches and exhaustive discussions interspersed with incidents and episodes. The novel becomes a sociological treatise in which the hypothesis is supported by extensive research evidence. It makes an impressive case for the liberation of the self from the self! The veneer of social conditioning built steadily over centuries of patriarchy needs to be cracked to recognize primal realities; familiar modes of perception and the unnatural strictures require to be erased.

When cultural imperatives become so oppressive, then women of conviction, such as Sumita, Vibha or Vartika, have to come forward to steer feminism, into the track of rethinking womanhood. These are women who possess the so-called masculine features; they are proactive, protective, cross gender and have an existential self-awareness. They are capable of taking decisions as well as implementing them into action. In that they have no scruples in overthrowing the prevalent gender assumptions of their culture. And till they become significant voices through sheer persistence and defiance, they are looked at with disdain and rejection by their society.

Vishnu Prabhakar's approach to the concept of Ardhanāriśvara conforms to the Jungian psychology of the unconscious within which, Jung theorizes, individuals possess inner personalities that are the opposite of their conscious gendered ego: *anima*, the female component within males, and *animus*, the male element within the females. According to Jung, the ideal self is neither masculine nor feminine but an androgyne blurring gender distinctions.[19] The self seeks to achieve wholeness by uniting with the Other. In the novel *Ardhanāriśvara*, Vibha's unconscious surfaces in the section "Anterman" in which she gets a glimpse of that dream-world in which she is projected as a total and complete persona: when she exclaims: "But that's our God Ardhanāriśvara", the guard tells her " You people make a God out of everything and

by doing that, you escape trying to become what in actuality he or she represents."[20] Vibha is in dialogue with her unconscious and she declares that her search will continue to find that something which will complete her.

The authoritarian gender fixities are deliberately confused and even erased to resist the socially constructed, mechanical moulds. We need to remember that the most terrifying aspect of Shakti is represented in the mythical story of Kali slaughtering demons and eventually Shiva intervening to stop the killing. Such a powerful vision of the feminine merger with the masculine image of power and strength evokes a shift in sexual identities. Interestingly, the following saying from *Svatantryadarpanah* in a way explains this phenomenon: "Shakti is the Shivahood of Shiva and Shiva alone is the Shaktihood of Shakti."[21] Shiva and Shakti realize themselves in each other and their androgynous coming together reflects a state of an awakened consciousness in which all polarities dissolve. As Dehejia puts it, "it is a oneness that embraces duality and yet feels the oneness."[22]

The novel *Ardhanāriśvara*, interestingly, ends with a note of sympathy for man who too is a slave, of his own desire and therefore of woman. To pursue the ideal of *Ardhanāriśvara* or androgyny, for self-fulfillment and release from the tension of pretension, both man and woman have to first of all realize their own individual autonomy. To enable feminism to deflate the fully blown-up patriarchal formulations of gender polarities, androgyny/ ardhanarasvara could serve as a very useful and liberating conceptual intervention.

For one, this would immediately involve both man and woman in its progressive project for the whole of humanity. The mythical narratives around this concept demand more scholarly attention for a deeper understanding of their philosophic essence. Only then can it become a truly liberating experience.

If perceived with a linear perspective, modernity as progress becomes a myth. More so when one notices the rampant commodification of woman and constant politicization of gender relations in today's world. Both the oppressor and the oppressed are actually victims of a degenerate humanity. Exploitation is an

inevitable consequence of imbalance of power. To salvage the dignity of being human, it is imperative that we examine the insights lying in the treasure-house of mythology and not dismiss it as fantasy or fanciful thinking.

Modernity, I believe, is a moment of realization and revelation of progressive thought experienced as much in the past as it may be in the present. In one sense modernity captures the dynamism of tradition whether through rejection or acceptance. But the notion of modernity cannot merely be restricted to viewing industrial progress or feats in technology. Nor does modernity mean pulling the veil off the face of the woman merely to project her as a sexual object for an ad in a predominantly consumerist society. The veil has to be pulled off the psyche of both man and woman. The icon of *Ardhanāriśvara* captures such moments of cognition and revelation… the bliss of togetherness and integrality for individual nirvana.

NOTES

[1] Barbara G. Walker, *The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets*, Harper Collins, 1983.

[2] Evelyn J. Hinz, "Introduction: 'All That Glitters'." *Mozaic*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1997.

[3] Vishnu Prabhakar, *Ardhanāriśvara*, Shabdkar, Delhi, 1992.

[4] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 92.

[5] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 146.

[6] Harsha V. Dehejia, *Parvati: Goddess of Love*, Mapin Pub. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1999.

[7] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 390.

[8] George Piggford, " 'Who's That Girl?': Annie Lennox, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Female Camp Androgyny", *Mozaic*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1997, p. 48.

[8] Krishna Sobti, *Hum Hushmat.* Rajkāmal Prakashan, New Delhi, p. 254.

[9] *Hum Hushmat*, p. 105.

[10] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 129.

[11] Lev Tolstoy, "The Kreutzer Sonata", *Short Stories*, Progress Pub., Moscow, p. 180.

[12] "The Kreutzer Sonata", p. 181.

[13] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 337.

[14] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 172.

[15] Joseph Campbell, ed., *Myths and Symbolism in Indian Art*, Bollingen Series, Pantheon Books, 1946, p. 137.

[16] Harsha V. Dehejia, *Parvatidarpana*, Motilal Banarsidas Pub. Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1997, p. 52.

[17] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 321.

[18] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Integration of the Personality*, Trans. Stanley Dell, London: Routledge, 1950.

[19] *Ardhanāriśvara*, p. 419.

[20] *Svatantryadarpanah*, The Mirror of Self Supremacy, Trans. B.N. Pandit, Munshi Manoharlal, Delhi, 1993, p. 32.

[21] *Parvatidarpana*, p. 91.

Pen and Needle: The Changing Metaphors of Self in Autobiographies by Women in Post-Independence India

RANJANA HARISH

> Since then woman has sat erect with needle and thread like the sun and the moon in heaven … With her needle she tells tales that through the years have belonged to woman only in a low murmuring voice that but the heart of woman understands. Woman is good at repairs … That began from Nu Guo, the goddess that patched up the sky. With that state of mind of hers she is able to sew up the whole universe.
>
> 'Needle, Thread and Woman, A prose poem'
> By Li Xiayu*

> The practice at one time was for people to place jar full of water and vessels of silver and gold by the side of a body. I have no faith in such a thing … I would like Imroz to let my pen go with me.… My last wish is that the pen that stood by me all the way through should be with me even after my journey has come to end.
>
> *The Revenue Stamp* An Autobiography
> By Amrita Pritam

This paper stands at the meeting-point of three contemporary developments in post-independence scholarship in India: the recent interest of literary scholars in autobiography, the exploration of gynocentric criticism and the long-awaited maturation of women's writing in India.

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* taken from *The World's 39 First-rate Women Poets Writing in Chinese*, published by the Government of China to commemorate The World's Fourth Conference at Beijing: 1995.

Based on my books *Indian Women's Autobiographies* (Arnold 1993) and *The Female Footprints* (Sterling 1996) the paper explores Indian women's search for the right metaphors of self and records a socio-psycho-political journey of their collective subconscious expressed through their conscious selection of metaphors. It is a journey from needle to pen, from the margins to the mainstream, from the private to the public, from the object position to the subject position, and from powerlessness to authority, from tradition to modernity—in short, a journey towards empowerment of the feminine by adopting the metaphor of authority—namely pen.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part I discusses James Olney's Canon forming theory of autobiography as a metaphor of self and metaphorizing process as described by him. It accepts the basic premise that every autobiography is a metaphor of self, "an attempt to capture the unknown through the known", an effort to find the right 'objective correlative' for a self, but refutes the patriarchal exclusiveness of Olney's pre-conditions for metaphorizing and asserts a rightful space for the marginalized in the process of metaphorizing. Part II focuses on the universally employed metaphors of needle and pen in women's life-writings which express their collective experience, (pl. see the Chinese poem quoted in the beginning) and explores the use of these metaphors in post-independence autobiographies by Indian women. Part III is conclusions.

I

"An autobiography" wrote James Olney in his epoch-making book *Metaphors of Self* "is a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition". Its objective is to build "a metaphoric bridge from subjective self-consciousness to objective-reality". (36) Olney argues that if all selves are unique and if they are constantly evolving and transforming then it would be difficult to define such a self and even more difficult to give a sense of it to anyone else. The only way to communicate such a self to others is to do so by discover-

ing or creating some similitude for the experience that can reflect or evoke the same experience in others. The psychological basis of the metaphorizing process, according to him is to grasp the unknown through the known or to "let the known stand for the unknown and thereby fit that into an organized, patterned body of experimental knowledge". (31)

In the same book Olney discusses several male authored self-narratives to illustrate how each one of them invents a unique, exclusive and fresh metaphor to express the self. Jung, Montaigne, Mill, Newman, Darwin or Gandhi—each of these men invents a special objective co-relative to reach his reader. Upto this point Olney's theorizing is fine; however as he proceeds his theorizing acquires a patriarchal tone. In an imperative tone he prescribes preconditions for the metaphorizing view point and says that such a viewpoint "must be" (1) unitary (2), Specially human, (3); and personally unique. This part of his theory excludes the minorities from the metaphorizing process. Like his master Georges Gusdorf, who advanced the "individualistic paradigm of centrally located isolate autobiographical self" (Gusdorf: 29) and thus kept out the marginals like blacks and women from the purview of autobiographical writings/studies, Olney too overlooks the marginal identity here. He thus confirms his affinity with the school of critical thinking which looked upon minorities either as misfit to be autobiographical subjects because of their lack of isolate individual self or maintained silence over their attempts at autobiography-writing and thus shut them out of the canonical discourse. But these patriarchal theorists, says a feminist theorist Susan Stanford Friedman, missed a very important point, namely, "self-creation and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities and non-Westerners" (*Private Self:* 35). She further argues that Gusdorf's theory does not take into consideration the importance of the culturedly imposed group identity for the minorities, including women. If "separate selfhood is the very motive of creation [autobiography]" and if autobiography is "a mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (Gusdorf: 33) then this mirror does not reflect back a unique image to woman. "It projects an image of WOMAN, a category that is

supposed to define the living woman's identity" says Benstock. As a result "an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category woman [dictates] the patterns of woman's individual destiny" (Private Self: 31, 41). The post 1980 feminist theorists like Estelle Jelinek, Shari Benstock, Sheila Rowbowtham, Nancy Chodorow, Susan Friedman, Maison and others expose the inapplicability of Gusdorfian theory to the autobiographies by the minorities and assert the need for a separate poetics for the autobiographies by the minorities which will take into consideration the socio-cultural attributes of their personality.

Before accepting Olney's theory of autobiography as a metaphor of self as the premise of my paper, I too raise objection against the patriarchal exclusiveness of this theory. The three preconditions for the metaphorizing self (mentioned earlier) which to my mind are luxuries of the privileged cannot be met with by the minority group autobiographers like women.

Logically, metaphorizing of the minorities, or say the deprived, would be different from the privileged. These metaphors, I guess, like their personalities, would be collective instead of individual and repetitive instead of unique and fresh.

Thus to conclude this theoretical discussion, I would say I accept James Olney's theory that every autobiography is a metaphor of self but refute the later part of it which pronounces three preconditions for such a self. On the ground of foregoing argument I assert a space for women and minorities in the theory of metaphorizing and a respectful acknowledgement of such an act by the canon. I reiterate that "instead of dismissing female authored autobiographies on the basis of gender genre [which are both male constructs] incompatibility [again a male view] it's the responsibility of the serious scholars of the genre to explore the specificities of women's self-writing from gynocentric view". (*The Literary Criterion:* 25).

II

Before we get into the actual autobiographies by Indian women in post-independence era let's have a quick look at women's life-

writing in India. The earliest autobiography by an Indian woman was written in 1700 in Marathi language. The writer was a Marathi saint poet Bahinabai. However, autobiography as a regular genre of self-expression among women establishes itself only by 1860 to 1921, when the first autobiography in English was published by Maharani Sunity Devee of Cooch Behar, we have several autobiographies in regional languages like Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, etc. Interestingly enough, the theme of many of these is claustrophobia and longing for freedom with the help of education. Malvika Karlekar, a known scholar of Bengali Women's self-narratives, highlights the repeated metaphor of pen as the signifier of authority and liberation in Bengali women's life writings. As early as in 1868 we have Rasa Sundari Devi publishing her autobiography *Amar Jivan* (my life) in two parts. Going against the society's prescription for femininity her only dream was to educate herself. The only prayer that she used to offer was "'Oh Parameshwar' [God] please teach me how to read and write. Once I have learnt, I will read religious 'poonthies' [manuscripts]" (Karlekar: 116). Incidentally, she is the same woman who observed 'parda' (veil) even from her husband's horse!! As records Karlekar, Rasa Sundari's autobiography also uses the metaphor of a caged bird and free bird flying high in the sky very aptly.

From 1921 to 1996 we have twenty nine autobiographies written/ published in English. Including the ones translated into English from regional languages of India, and the 'dalit' (oppressed) oral narratives, the number goes to forty. Though the cut off line is the year 1921 it should be noted that majority of them are published after 1947 but are penned by the women born in British India. Hence the colonial experience, national struggle, influence of Gandhi and celebration of Independence become common themes in these autobiographies.

In short, the autobiographers being discussed in this paper are not the daughters of independent India and hence they are often depicting colonized Victorian version of femininity expressed by the metaphor of needle.

Six women who published their autobiographies during the first decade of independence, i.e. 1957, are—Ishvani Pseud (1947)

Savitri Devi Nanda (1950) Lakshmibai Tilak (1950), Brinda, the Maharani of Kapurthala (1953), Nayantara Sahgal (1954) and Shoilabala Das (1956). All these first decade autobiographers hail from the families with typical 'Zanana' (feminine) culture for their women folks, enforcing such a culture on them against their will. And each one of them takes to the metaphor of pen as soon as she gets out of the tight hold of the patriarchal prescription of the feminine culture represented by the metaphor of 'needle'. They take to the traditional male sphere of education, social-work, public life, or writing.

The first post-independence autobiography entitled *Girl in Bombay* (1947) by Ishvani evokes a typical feminine culture in Khoja community—a culture where "girls were repeatedly told how to behave. Good girls were not to move alone, not to keep their heads uncovered, not to speak loudly, not to show their appetite in public, not to challenge their elders' view" (91). Though the girls were sent to an English medium school, at home they were initiated into the needle culture by the 'mountain-like huge grand old lady", their nani (maternal grandmother), a rich doctor's aristocrat wife. She insisted on the girls learning needle work and supervised their stitches personally. While supervising the granddaughter's embroidery she constantly used to weave intricate patterns of feminine strategies for a successful future like in these young girls' mind against their and their parents' liking. Strategies like sniffing at pepper powder from the folds of the handkerchief while listening to a religious discourse than to be a "dry-eyed nonbeliever". They had all to submit to it as Ishvani's family used to live in the ground floor of the huge bungalow built by her grandfather in Malabar Hills of Bombay. However, such a training could not curb Ishvani's seething defiance against, the 'needle culture'; nor could it stop her from taking the decision of going abroad for further studies after divorcing her 'Oxford educated' patriarchal husband Rashchid who would 'command' her to "behave like a good Muslim wife" and embrace Agakhani faith. Her autobiography makes an apt use of both the metaphors—needle and pen. Her journey of self-discovery and self-definition is a journey from needle to pen.

Savitridevi, the author of *The City of Two Gateways* (1950), also has an equally fiery soul. Her autobiography opens with a note of discontent against God thus: “Panditji [teacher], if God is just—as you say He is—then why did he become a God himself and not make (…) me a God? See how I suffer?” (185). A little later she adds, “how I longed to be a boy, even the poorest, ugliest and the dirtiest!” (195). She has “a turbulent soul, ever rebellious against authority”. (6)

Savitri Devi’s desire to break away from the feminine culture of her parental joint family, which she depicts most vividly, is so deep rooted in her subconscious that even when she dreams, the desire to reach the land of learning dominates her dreams. She records a repeated dream that she used to have for many years prior to her getting into a medical school abroad, she would ‘see’ in the dream a grand, old man with a white, flowing beard; in a temple situated in a desert; and raising his hands, as if calling people for prayer, though no living soul seemed to be around. “After much probing I took it [the dream] for a call to knowledge and wisdom”, says she (136-37). Rasa Sundari Devi, discussed earlier, too used to dream thus. Her dreams used to turn around her only desire—the desire to make herself literate.

Brinda, a girl hailing from the Rajput community (warrior community or India, known for being as good as its word) and the Rajput feminine tradition of self-sacrifice lives up to the ideal of a Rajput woman who sacrifices her free, happy life among the *Parisian* royal circles to get married to a good-for-nothing Prince of Kapurthala to whom she was engaged as a child. However, her inability to give a male heir to the State of Kapurthala teachers her harsh lessons of life and she liberates herself from the prescribed role-model of a veiled, submissive Rajput queen by coming out to public life of social work. Her life style too changes, Getting separated from her husband she returns to her former life style during her years in Paris.

The bird in cage gets the whole sky to her wings.

Brinda’s autobiography ends with this advice to her youngest daughter Urmila who chooses to be a career woman instead of getting married into some royal family: “You see my child we

must, all, fulfil our destinies. You couldn't fight your ambition and intelligence. You had to break away and rebel in your own way. You cannot ask why all the birds don't fly at the same altitude. They don't't". (245)

The last two autobiographers of this decade are Nayantara Sahgal and Lakshmibai Tilak. Both are creative writers and public women taking to pen in the literal sense. Unlike Savitri Devi or Ishvani for whom pen as a metaphor of self, becomes a signifier of education/career/employment/authority, for these two Nayantara and Lakshmibai it is the second name for their being. Yet the remarkable fact is that the process of their becoming originates from the 'feminine' culture represented broadly by the metaphor of needle which they come to discard finally, in favour of the 'pen-culture'.

The next decade from 1957 to 1967 brings nine autobiographies including those of outstanding political women like Muthu Lakshmi Reddy (1964), Gayatri Devi, the Maharani of Jaipur (1976), and Dhanvanti Rama Rao (1977). It also includes two outstanding contemporary creative witers Kamala Das (19976) and Amrita Pritam (1977).

If, in accordance with Lacanian binary opposites, we look upon the metaphor of needle as the signifier of passivity, submission, powerlessness, and of the metaphor of pen as signifying active action, assertion and authority, then the autobiographies of this decade are the ones which record Indian women's journey in the direction of power-centre. Each one of these women is a powerful, assertive individual, capable of using her political power, social status, and education, with equal authority. With these it seems as if autobiography would leave behind the sphere of the 'feminine' world for good. But no. Each one of them makes positive efforts to preserve her feminine self by adhering to the finer aspects of their femininity, even after entering the male sphere of public life, of politics or of publication. They take care to see that the woman within them does not get crushed under the burden of male roles that they take over, Amrita Pritam acknowledges this issue and analyses it with honesty thus:

> In the totality of myself as a writer, the woman in me has had only a secondary role to play. So often I nudged myself into an awareness of the woman in me. The writer's role is obvious. But the existence of that being have is increasingly discovered through my creative work… This secondary role as a woman, however, rakes up no quarrels with my main being as a writer. Rather, the woman in me has in a disciplined manner learnt to accept that secondary role (23).

In Kamala Das's case, the pen remains no mere metaphor; it becomes the signifier of her very existence. But for the pen she would not have survived the atrocities of patriarchy, she tells us. Just one incident from her life will suffice to prove this. After her confrontation with the stark reality of her marriage with a gay man, she made up her mind to leave him. She left his house. While riding a local train, suddenly it dawned on her that she couldn't leave him like this, as she was neither educated or skilled for any employment nor gifted with beauty which might help her if she took to prostitution. And so she returned somewhat defeated. Much later, only with the discovery of her writing skill, she discovered her identity, and gained in money, status and authority.

It is no wonder that such creative writers find in their pen the dearest and most loyal companion. The quotation given at the beginning of the paper is the best imaginable tribute of an author to her pen. Amrita in that quotation makes her final will to bury her pen along with her body. It must accompany her even in death as it has done in life.

Complete rejection of the needle as a metaphor of self is a striking feature of the autobiographers writing during the last two decades. It is, in a way, indicative of the socio-economic and politico-cultural change in the status of woman in Indian society. The changing socio-economic structure of Indian society, along with women's own increased self-awareness regarding self-work, brings about changes in gender-roles too. Turning away from the object-position, women now assume the subject-position. Autobiographers like Vijaya Raje Scindia (1985). Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay (1986), Edila Gaitonde (1987), Tara Ali Baig (1988), Prema Naidu (1990), Indira Goswami (1990). Sharan-

jeet Shan (1991), Savitri Bajaj (1991), Raj Thaper (1991), Mina Alexander (1992) and Vimla Patil (1996) record Indian women's faith in pen as the metaphor of their collective as well as individual aspirations. They look upon education and employment as the only means to create a rightful female space in the society.

Three very striking features of the autobiographies of these decades are: 1. Women's increasing awareness of their collective identity as the greatest source of strength and hence their involvement in creating sisterhood. 2. Their complete rejection of feminine culture broadly covered under the metaphor of needle in the earlier autobiographies. 3. Their unflinching faith in pen as the signifier of assertiveness authority and respectability.

The only obvious exception to the above is bandit queen Phoolan Devi's controversial autobiography / *Phoolan Devi* (1996). She has remained a controversial figure on the Indian *political* scene ever since she surrendered herself and got into the Parliament as an M.P. On the Indian *literary* scene too she is no less controversial. Questions are being raised by academics and critics as to whether her autobiography deserves to be placed among the autobiographies by women like Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Vijaya Lakshmi pandit—women with high social status, respectability and literary worth. However, so far as this paper goes, we are concerned with the metaphor of self that she uses for herself. Unlike Indian women's collective metaphors of self, namely 'needle' and 'pen', she creates the metaphor of sword or rifle for her autobiographical self. In my view, though very dissimilar, both the metaphors—the pen and the sword—are male metaphors signifying power and authority through violent/non-violent aggression. Women autobiographers discussed in the foregoing pages take to pen as their weapon to fight the patriarchy. Phoolan Devi replaces sword for the pen; but her sword remains a signifier only of her desire, and the actual metaphor *in her autobiography* is really that of the pen. What we find here is the fight of a multiply oppressed woman—a *dalit*, untouchable and poor. In addition to all these disadvantages, her lack of formal education also plays an important part in the choice of her weapon to fight the capitalist patriarchy. She had no choice, no choice at all in the

matter of weapon. The only weapon she could imagine to have was a sword; and this is unusual, because the pen is generally said to be mightier than the sword.

III

From the foregoing discussion about the metaphor of self in autobiography in general, and Indian women's autobiographies in particular, certain conclusions begin to emerge. I have in mind such conclusions as these:

1. Every autobiography is a metaphor of self.
2. However, it is not necessary for every such metaphor to be original, unique and fresh—women's and marginals' are not so; men's are. I refute Olney's theory in asserting this.
3. On the contrary, the metaphors of self invented by 'marginals' like the 'dalit', the black and women are all rooted in their collective consciousness and shared experience.
4. Their metaphors speak of their aspirations and efforts.
5. Logically, women's autobiographies in India create shared, collective metaphors of self, namely, pen and/or needle, broadly signifying the feminine and the masculine spheres under patriarchy in India.
6. There is not a single autobiography among the ones discussed here adhering to the "needle-culture exclusively.
7. However, there are many adhering exclusively to the 'pen-culture'.
8. A pattern of journey can be traced over the period of five decades of independence in these autobiographies—a journey from the metaphor of needle to that of pen, i.e. from 'feminine' helplessness to 'female' authority, from tradition to modernity.

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Re-exploring Stereotypes: A Study of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* and Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti*

N.K. GHOSH

The story of man's discrimination against woman can be traced to the *Genesis* which shows the Lord God creating Eve out of the rib of Adam. On account of the derivative nature of her existence, it became a woman's lot to be assigned a derivative role and to be 'ruled' by man. Even in the democratic Athens of Socrates and Plato, man's prerogative was seen in 'commanding' and a woman's duty lay in obeying. Likewise in the medieval period the role of woman remained circumscribed by domestic trivialities, periodically interrupted by the birth of children.

The first sign of protest against such stereotyped attitudes was seen in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Wollstonecraft's clarion call challenging the self-proclaimed authority of the male world supplied the feminist movement in England and America in the nineteenth century with an effective manifesto which advocated the substitution of "rational fellowship" by "slavish obedience". For the cause of the emancipation of woman received a shot in the arm with Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* wherein she pointed out how specific reforms were secondary to the basic need for a change in attitude towards women, since women needed self-trust, self-reliance, and self-respect in order to assert their individual identity and existence. John Stuart Mill provided the theoretical base for equality between the sexes in his monumental work titled *The Subjection of Women* which pointed out that as long as

women remained economically and morally dependent on men, the position of women would be analogous to that of a slave.
The Women's Liberation Movement received an active stimulus from literary activists like Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter and many others who challenged Freud's assumption of 'Anatomy is Destiny' and affirmed that inequality of the sexes is neither a biological nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construct devised by a male-dominated society.
It is precisely against these perspectives of the western Feminist movement that I intend to study and explore the function of cultural stereotypes in Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* and Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story *Lajwanti* to see how the philosophy of feminism confronts the issues relevant to the emancipation of women which inevitably places the woman at the mercy of man in the power game, irrespective of social and cultural paradigms. From the fictional constructs at two divergent viewpoints—one, American, female; the other, Indian, male—it would be interesting to the interests of women converge.

Fear of Flying

Erica Jong made her debut in the world of the American novel with *Fear of Flying* (1973), the novel that attempts to embrace almost every denomination of the Feminist Movement. The success of the novel made her an instant celebrity, for the novel came to be identified with the story of a woman's discovery of her selfhood through the acceptance of her responsibility in defining herself as a woman. The novel's protagonist, Isadora Wing, offers a new perspective by projecting the portrait of a 'real' woman in all her womanliness with regard to her relation with man, love, sex, marriage and art. Existing cultural stereotypes are discarded in favour of the woman's real desires, instincts and feelings.

When the novel begins, Isadora is aboard a Pan Am 747 flight to Vienna with a group of psychoanalysts which includes her second husband Bennett. She is petrified with fear at the take-off, and suffers from mounting terror as the plane gains height. Thirteen years

of psychoanalysis under several analysts have done nothing to mitigate her "fear of flying". Metaphorically, the plane represents her life; her fear of flying high is her fear to rise up out of herself, and the analysts, the men who enter her life for differing durations of time, only increase this fear, till she finally discovers through her own self-analysis the secret of flying high without fear. Isadora is on the brink of frustration in her five-year-old marriage with Bennett. She feels that at the end of five years she had reached that "crucial time" when she had to decide whether to "live with each other's lunacy ever after… or else give up the ghost of the marriage and start playing musical beds all over again" (FOF 8). Their lives together had been running parallel like railroad tracks. She longs for total "mutuality", "companionship", and "equality", but what her marriage offers her is a life reduced to a mere ritual of monotonous existence. Isadora is not against marriage since she knows the security that comes from having one best friend in a hostile world, but what makes her apprehensive is the staleness that can come to characterize a relationship with the passage of years: "Even if you loved your husband, their came that inevitable year when fucking him turned as bland as Velveeta cheese: filling, fattening even, but no thrill to the taste buds, no bittersweet edge, no danger" (FOF 9). It is not only the longings for adventure that make her detest the trappings of marriage but also the frustration arising out of her unfulfilled instincts and desires which are stifled by the dictates of a man's world, where growing up female is a liability.. Isadora is made to believe that being a woman meant "being split into two irreconcilable halves" (FOF 172). According to her, the quest for togetherness and companionship in marriage is illusory in a world where "men have always defined femininity as a means of keeping women in line" (FOF 20). No philosophy of marriage is available which could help the woman survive in a stifled environment:

> It is heresy in America to embrace any way of life, except as half of a couple. Solitude is un-American. It may be condoned in a man—especially if he is a glamorous bachelor. But a woman is always presumed to be alone as a result of abandonment, not choice. There is no dignified way for a woman to live alone. Oh, she can get along financially

> perhaps but emotionally she is never left in peace. Her friends, her family, her fellow workers never let her forget that her husbandlessness, her childlessness—her selfishness, in short is a reproach to the American way of life (FOF 11).

The above passage shows how a woman's life is conditioned by the obligations society imposes upon her as half of a couple, instead of allowing her the freedom to exist on her own. What is ironical is the double standards implicit in society where the actions of man and woman are viewed on a different scale. Society insists that a woman depend upon some male for emotional security, for autonomy is a bane in a society that cannot easily accept a woman who enjoys being childless or husbandless. Erica Jong does not subscribe to the idea of marriage being the union of two minds. She knows that most women accept marriage simply to escape being held in low esteem even by her fellow-workers. She feels that "the virtues of marriage were mostly negative virtues. Being unmarried in a man's world was such a hassle that anything had to be better.… Damned clever how men had made life so intolerable for single women that most would gladly embrace bad marriages instead" (FOF 86-87). The secondary status granted to the married woman by her husband is hardly a cause for fulfilment. So the women finds herself in the Catch-22 situation with no way out. Isadora feels that "good" marriages are mostly "second marriages" where there is greater scope for mutual understanding between the husband and the wife since "both people have outgrown the bullshit of me-Tarzan, you-Jane and are just trying to get through their days by helping each other, being good to each other, doing the chores as they come up and not worrying too much about who does what" (FOF 87). For Isadora, however, her second marriage offers her no solace for she constantly suffers from night terror and attacks of panic at being alone. All her fantasies revolve around her need upon a male for emotional security: "No sooner did I imagine myself running away from one man than I envisioned myself tying up with another… I simply couldn't imagine myself without a man. Without one I felt lost as a dog without a master, rootless, faceless, undefined" (FOF 86). Isadora's dependence upon one male or the other for

both emotional and sexual fulfilment urges her to embark upon an erratic odyssey across Europe with her lover, Adrian. In the course of her journey is unravelled her relationship with other men who had exploited her constant need for dependence without assuaging her loneliness. To combat her loneliness without falling prey to men who wanted to exploit her, Isadora evolves her "fantasy of the Zipless Fuck" which was "a platonic ideal". The Zipless Fuck involved no personal attachment between the partners. The motivation for sexual fulfilment was provided solely by passion. It was uninhibited since it had no place for "remorse and guilt… no rationalizing; because there is no talk at all… free of ulterior motives. There is no power game. No one is trying to prove anything or get anything out of anyone"(FOF 14). Jong's idea of the 'Zipless Fuck" may be likened to D.H. Lawrence's "religion of the blood", a religion which sanctions unrestrained passion to be the governing force in a man-woman relationship.

Isadora is literally caught in the web of contradictions. At times she is defiant and feels that she has every right to be happy and hedonistic without caring for moral codes and conventional modes of behaviour. She longs for freedom from the bondage of social and emotional restrictions, the freedom which she thought lay in her mobility from one man to another. But the freedom from such dynamic means was also a problem for she realizes that "you go through life looking for a teacher and when you find him, you become so dependent on him that you grow to hate him. Or else you wait for him to show his weaknesses and then you despise him for being human"(FOF 93-4). Hence in order to be free, one needed both economic and emotional autonomy. But autonomy could be had only at the cost of stability. Isadora constantly vacillates between her desire for adventure and change and her need for security and stability. The only way in which this ambivalence can be resolved is by being an "exceptional person". Only by rising above her ordinariness could a woman reconcile the divergence between exuberance and stability. Being ordinary made one subservient to authority and dominance. She candidly confesses: "I had been a feminist all my life; but the big problem was how to make your feminism jibe with your unappeasable hunger for male

bodies"(FOF 97). It is only by being exceptional that a woman could afford the luxury of mocking at systems that tend to circumscribe her liberty as an individual.

Isadora's experiences teach her that 'liberation' does not mean freeing oneself from the bonds of marriage; it does not also mean achieving success in art or running after the satiety of fleeting desire, which is nothing but desperation and depression masquerading as freedom. She ultimately discovers that freedom can be attained only when she turns inward to attain her own authenticity as a human being. *Her solution is of utmost significance since it is only through stillness and not aimless mobility that restlessness and instability can be conquered.* Seduced and abandoned by Adrian in the end, Isadora realizes that she has finally arrived at the comprehension of her own true self: "You did not have to apologize for wanting to own your own soul… Your soul belonged to you—for better or for worse," (FOF 314). The awareness of the existence of her own soul allows Isadora to control her fear of flying, the fear which had hitherto controlled her. Isadora has learnt to reject the alternatives acceptable to those in profound despair—suicide or martyrdom. She reflects: "It was easy to kill yourself in a fit of despair. It was easy enough to play the martyr. It was harder to do nothing. To endure your life. To wait" (FOF 315), an attitude reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's "Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still," that becomes for Isadora, a means of surviving in a world she never made.

In sitting 'still' Isadora has won a victory over that part of herself which and trapped itself in bondage. In the process, she has learnt that what she needed was to discover a man who would give her not a sense of completeness but an awareness of herself as an individual that would make her a complete being:

"People don't complete us. We complete ourselves. If we haven't the power to complete ourselves, the search for love becomes a search for self-annihilation; and then we try to convince ourselves that self-annihilation is love" (FOF 328). She refuses to accept the traditional role of the ideal woman who would give her all for love. Without pretensions she admits gladly: "I hadn't the taste for total self-annihilation. I would never be a romantic

heroine, but I would stay alive… I wanted to lose myself in a man, to cease to be me, to be transported to heaven on borrowed wings. Isodara Icarus, I ought to call myself. And the borrowed wings never stayed on when I needed them most. Maybe I really needed to grow my own" (FOF 329).

With the revelation of the potential of her newly-discovered strength, Isadora realizes that her lonely body, her life, complete in itself, is her very own. Having found completeness in her own self, Isadora finally attains her status as an individual. Fearless and reassured with complete faith in her own being, she knows she will survive, no matter how enormous the odds.

Lajwanti

Set against the carnage of Partition, Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti* is the story of a woman who is abducted and finally restored to her husband, Babu Sunderlal. Babu Sunderlal is one among those thousands who had joined hands in the programme for the rehabilitation of women who had been abducted and raped. Their slogan was "Honour them. Give them a place in your hearts" (SAP 55). As Secretary of the Programme for Rehabilitation, he performed his duties with great zeal and commitment since his own wife had been abducted. While zealously involved in his crusade, he would recollect sadly how often he had mistreated Lajwanti and thrashed her because of one trivial reason or the other. Although she was delicate, she could "bear a lot of suffering, and even tolerate the beatings he gave her"(SAP 56). The theme song of the Rehabilitation Committee is "Do not touch Lajwanti/For she will curl up/ and die" runs like a refrain throughout the story. The song evokes agony in the mind of Sunderlal and he swears to himself: "If I ever find her again … I shall honour her and give her a place in my heart… A society which refuses to accept them back, which does not rehabilitate them is a rotten society which should be destroyed" (SAP 57). The zeal with which he pursues his mission brings Sunderlal into conflict with those orthodox and selfish males who felt that the abducted women should have killed themselves to save their chastity, rather than return to bring disgrace to their families.

The story brings to mind the terrible anguish of those abducted women whose husbands, parents, brothers and sisters refused to recognize them and deemed them as “cowards clinging to life”. Ironically, the most intolerant among those who refused to treat the abducted women with sympathy and understanding after they were restored to their families, were those “women who had come safely across from Pakistan and were now as complacent as cauliflowers” SAP 57). No one seemed to realize the extent of the courage and awesome strength with which these unfortunate victims of the calamity of Partition had “chosen to carry on living in such a world in which even their own husbands refused to acknowledge them” SAP 58).

Rajinder Singh Bedi describes vividly the attitude of a patriarchal society towards womenfolk under the calamitous conditions of the Partition wherein even the exchange of abducted women between the two countries shows the degradation and degeneration of human values which seemed to have touched the lowest ebb. The victims of the carnage are treated as ‘goods’ rather than as women with heart and soul: “They treated women like cows in a cattle-fair. At least, the slave-traders in the past had some conventions and courtesies, and they settled their terms of sale in private. Now the buyers and the sellers had given up the formalities of the old slave-traders. They bargained for the women in the open marketplace” (SAP 63).

How mythological fables are brought into play to justify injustice and oppression is evidenced in the story in terms of the conflict generated between Babu Sunderlal and Narain Baba, the priest who is a strong advocate of the male-dominated society. Narain Baba, in indicting the role of the Rehabilitation committee, calls into evidence the narrative from the Rāmāyaṇa where a washerman, having thrown his wife out of his house, had said that he wasn’t Raja Ramchandra, who would take Sita back, even after she had lived with Ravana for years, a remark which urged Ramchandra to order Sita, “who was virtuous and faithful, out of his palace, even though she was pregnant at that time” (SAP 60). Sunderlal reproaches Narain Baba for extolling the virtues of the ‘Ram Rajya’ where even the word of a washerman was respected

by stating: "Tell me, Baba, was it just that Ram accepted the word of a washerman as the truth, and doubted the word of his great and honourable Queen" (SAP 60).

The turning point in the story comes when Babu Sunderlal is informed that his wife Lajwanti had been seen at the exchange of abducted women at the Wagah border. Full of expectation blended with a strange kind of apprehension, Babu Sunderlal reaches Chauki Kalan and sees Lajwanti standing before him. The meeting is described very poignantly by Bedi:

Suddenly Lajo was standing in front of him and was trembling with fear. She alone knew Sunderlal as no one else knew him. He had always mistreated her, and now that she had lived with another man, she dared not imagine what he would do to her…

> Sunderlal was shocked. Lajo looked healthier than before, her complexion looked clearer and brighter and she had put on weight.…She looked different from what he had imagined. He had thought that suffering and sorrow would have reduced her to a mere skeleton … It was clear that he had failed to read the signs of pain and humiliation in her face (SAP 63- 64).

Although Sunderlal is disturbed by the thought of confronting his wife, who had been abducted and raped, he does not flinch from reconciling his precept with practice and courageously takes Lajo by the hand back towards his home: "The scene was a renactment of the old story of Ramchandra leading Sita back to Ayodhya after years of exile. He fulfilled his pledge both by word and deed. He enshrined Lajo like a golden idol in the temple of his heart and guarded her like a jealous devotee… Sunderlal no longer called her Lajo. He addressed her as 'Devi'" (SAP 64-65). What is noteworthy is that Sunderlal's concern and gentle regard for the victims of Partition, whom the others refuse to acknowledge, is not hypocritical. But just as his earlier violence had denied Lajwanti the right to a life of kindness, his new solicitude fails to satisfy her desire for genuine affection.

It is true that Sunderlal had given her the honour due to a goddess, but this was something which was not what Lajwanti had earnestly desired. She wanted to share the agony and the pain of

her suffering after being separated from her husband, but he was reluctant to hear anything pertaining to her traumatic experience. He tells Lajwanti: "Let us forget the past! You didn't do anything sinful, did you? Our society is guilty because it refuses to honour women like you as goddesses" (SAP 65). Bedi describes with lyrical intensity the pain and the agony Lajwanti encounters in being treated like a goddess instead of a normal human being for having undergone a trauma which was not of her own making:

> Lajwanti's sorrow had remained locked up in her breast. Helplessly, she had gazed at her body and had realized that, since the Partition, it was no longer her own body, but the body of a goddess … Slowly happiness was replaced by suspicion … because he continued to treat her with excessive kindness. Lajo didn't expect him to be so gentle… Sunderlal made her feel as if she was something precious and fragile like glass, that she would shatter at the slightest touch… She had returned home, but she had lost everything. Sunderlal had neither the eyes to see her tears nor the ears to hear her sobs… He went out every morning with the procession singing: Do not touch Lajwanti/For she will curl up/and die (SAP 65-66).

In brass contrast to the pining of Lajwanti after she returns to her home, it is quite interesting to see in retrospect how Bedi describes the relationship as it existed before the trauma of Partition. Even after the severest of beatings, writes Bedi, Lajwanti would begin to laugh happily if she saw a faint smile on the face of Sunderlal. It appears that only through violence the male could assert his hold over his female counterpart and give her the assurance of being truly under his subjection, a fact confirmed by the willing acceptance of the womenfolk: "Like the other girls of the village, she knew that all husbands beat their wives. Indeed, if some men let their wives show independence and spirit, the women themselves would turn up their noses in contempt and say, 'what kind of man is he? He can't even control a woman… The fact that husbands were expected to beat their wives was a part of their folk songs" (SAP 56). The legitimacy of male domination of the woman through the use of violence seems to be a characteristic trait of Bedi's thought which is reflected very forcefully in Bedi's magnum opus *Ek Chaadar Maili Si.*

The two works taken together—*Fear of Flying* and *Lajwanti*—offer a kaleidoscopic range of the social and cultural paradigms which inevitably place the woman at the mercy of man in the power game whose rules are framed in order to keep the woman in perpetual subjection. A common point that emerges from the above account is the fact of the intricate nature of the man-woman relationship. It brings to the forefront the idea that sex is the only instance in which representatives of the unequal groups live in more intimate association with each other than with members of their own group. Both Isadora Wing and Lajwanti testify to this excessive dependence of woman on man, especially on the emotional plane. The concept of Western Feminism with its emphasis on extreme individualism essentially militates against this idea. Survival requires either self-annihilation in terms of excessive dependence or the emergence of the exceptional woman who can live on her own terms by rejecting the stereotyped image of the 'truly virtuous woman' who is ever willing to conform to the standards set by a male-dominated society.

The radical brand of Feminism is so particularly a product of Western social and intellectual history, its moral order constructed so explicitly in terms of equality, individual rights and personal choice, that it is bound to clash with a woman's innate desire to be recognized as an individual along with her need for dependence on the male for emotional security and support. While *Fear of Flying* embodies the woman's impulse to break out of the stultifying conventions that so severely limit the roles women can play, *Lajwanti* demonstrates how even calamities and historical crises do not deter men from circumscribing the woman either as a 'devi', endowed with the fragility of glass, or a wife who shows a kind of glee in living with violence. Erica Jong's protagonist Isadora seems to have explored all the stereotypes of radical feminism and has emerged stronger as an individual in the sense that she desires to "have it all": work and love; children and career, laughter and lust; fortune and fame. She epitomizes the need to deal with change in gender relations. She may not have ceased to be fearful, but she has ceased to let fear control her. Likewise, Lajwanti has learnt through her personal trauma how difficult it is

for a woman to nurture the desire for being treated as a real human being rather than like the fragile Lajwanti flower that withers at the slightest touch.

One basic issue highlighted by Erica Jong which has immense relevance in the Indian context is the concern shown for the predicament of the woman who is alone either by choice or by abandonment. For the Indian woman being 'childless' or 'husband-less' is a bane of a much more alarming proportion, for such a woman is bound to be treated either with suspicion or with contempt even by fellow-women. Again, in the Indian context, it can be easily inferred that a woman, despite all her innate longing to be treated on equal terms as an individual, does attach a lot of importance to the family structure; oftentimes, it is these family roles which provide her with the deepest sense of who she is as a person. Yet another area of common concern for both Jong and Bedi is *the negative role of women* themselves when it comes to taking up the cause of women in distress.

It is thus evident from the above discussion that exploration of stereotypes in *Fear of Flying* and *Lajwanti* reveals how Feminism has to come out of its narrow and constricted grooves of ideologies to include in its 'womanist' agenda a strategy not only to combat the strength of the male in the power game but also to visualize that special space where a woman can be relatively free from the fear of being treated as an 'outcast' or a 'devi'. *Every feminist worth the name must learn to acknowledge what she has in common with others of her sex who are all similarly shackled by conventional notions of her existence.* Neither the path of open confrontation nor an uneasy truce, but the confidence to move in harmonious unison as co-partner in the power game, without compromising honour and dignity as an individual, ought to be the real goal of woman's emancipation.

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*Note. The above texts have been abbreviated as FOF and SAP respectively and all reference from the respective editions have been indicated in parenthesis with corresponding page number.

Infidel Heteroglossia? Postmodernist Feminist Configurations in Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying*

RAJUL BHARGAVA

Githa Hariharan in her short story collection, *The Art of Dying* (1993) has unostentatiously intertwined the postmodernist and feminist perspectives by stressing the different strategies women adopt to assert themselves. She has subtly encapsulated the effects of the strong winds of change that have brought about far-reaching upheavals in women's lives in India. Hariharan has urged that the many disruptions of civil society have created opportunities as well as hazards which have simultaneously enabled and constrained Indian women. Even at the lower levels of privilege, some sense of personal rights has percolated into their consciousness, so that the stereotype of the Indian woman as a submissive, mindless object of pity finds no concrete example. This stereotype exists only for many distanced onlookers and underlines the politics of representation.

As Hariharan ably demonstrates through these stories, an enormous weight of tradition still continues to bear down on us—'though not so much an albatross' (Bose: 2000), as a source of silence and inner ferment. There are still pressures of cultural politics in the form of the dominance of gender ideology in the literary marketplace, which forces women writers to conform to traditional female roles instead of achieving the liberation of the spirit that is the imaginative writer's right. Yet, however bound, the women writer still manipulates stances that critique domination and thus lays bare the multivocal worlds of different societies and different cultures. What these stories go on to prove is the

postmodern feminist theory's hypothesis that such a theory should be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods, and to different groups within societies and periods. (Fraser & Nicholson: 1994)

This brings us to feminist theory. That feminism needs a theory goes without saying (Scott: 1994). What is not always clear is what that theory will do, although there are certain common assumptions we can find in a wide range of feminist writings. We need theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations—ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective—accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold of those long traditions of Western philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly constructed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice.

In order to achieve the goals of such a theory feminist critics have exerted their energies to deconstruct the past, reconstruct a more meaningful present and thus auger a healthier future. They have: (i) unravelled the thick tapestries of male hegemony and unknotted networks of conscious assumptions and unconscious presumptions about women; and (ii) analyzed the reasons for the persistent reproduction of such patterns and their acute ability to sustain themselves. Further, they have knitted up a woman's tradition, created gynocritics and sought another voice; and (iii) made an extensive study of sexual difference of what is 'male' and what is 'female'; and of the causes and inscriptions of difference, whether fiat or graffiti.

It is in this context that postmodernist inquiry becomes meaningful with its exploration of the pluralistic implications of a universal culture. Such an exploration has been forced by the mid twentieth century revolts against monovocal structures of modern

patriarchal possessive individualism: the post-colonial movements of self-determination; the various expressions of antiracist and multiculturalist movements within the metropolitan or, more broadly, 'developed societies'; and contemporary feminism. All these movements have disrupted the dichotomous structure of modern patriarchal individualism by disestablishing the 'other' as a permissible term. Postmodernism enjoins a new and qualitatively distinct stage of democratization. It is this implication of postmodernism that feminist 'theories' of the 1980's began to discover and celebrate.

Both feminism and postmodernism have emerged as the two most important political-cultural currents in the last decade. So far, however, they had kept an uneasy distance, a mutual wariness which only a few had endeavoured to bridge (Flax 1986; Harding 1986; Haraway 1983; Jardine 1985; Lyotard 1978; Owens, 1983).

Initial reticence aside, there have been good reasons for exploring the relation between feminism and postmodernism. Both have offered deep and far-reaching criticisms of the 'institution of philosophy'. Both have elaborated critical perspectives on the relation of philosophy and the larger culture. And, most central to the concerns of this paper, both have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinning. Other differences notwithstanding, one can say that, during the last decade, though feminists and postmodernists have worked independently on a *common* nexus of problems, yet the two tendencies have proceeded from *opposite* directions. Postmodernists have focused primarily on the philosophy side of the problem and for the feminists the question of philosophy has always been subordinate to an interest in social criticism. Postmodernists offer sophisticated and persuasive criticisms of foundationalism and essentialism; feminists, on the other hand, offer robust conceptions of social criticism, though they tend, at times, to lapse into essentialism.

Thus each of the two perspectives suggests some important criticisms of the other. A postmodernist reflection on feminist theory reveals disabling vestiges of essentialism, while a feminist reflection on postmodernism reveals androcentrism and political

naivete. However, it follows that an encounter between the two will initially be a trading off of criticism, but gradually the one can learn a lot from the other, for each is in possession of valuable resources, which can help remedy the deficiencies of the other.

The emerging scenario in feminism can be summed up thus:

After the initial strident and assertive rebelliousness against patriarchal hegemony, the dominant and dominating misrepresentations of women and all its sequent reactions in trying to forge a new identity and create a room of their own, even hard core activists championing the cause of the feminist movement, come to resort to more subtle (feminine) strategies of (re) naming and (re) affirming their identities. What the nearly two centuries long gestation and a century-long struggle period has taught them is to believe in themselves as potentially powerful agencies of change. So women came to devise their own means of guiding the legitimacy, accuracy and cogency of their representations / misrepresentations by: (i) *exposing* the mechanisms of their misrepresentation (ii) *restoring* their past (iii) *generating* accurate representations for the present, replacing, "male" lies with women's truth and (iv) *projecting* their equivocal future (Stimpson: 1998:180).

Women came to believe that what was needed was the articulation of the awareness of their positions of disadvantage and discrimination so very repeatedly and in so many different ways that each attempt would erase the 'dark' past and help to reformulate a 'lighter' future of comparative equality. Women would now want to replace what Gilbert & Gubar (1971) called "her cave shaped anatomy" being "her destiny' where she loses herself and her identity, with the analogy of a tunnel where it is not easy to lose one's way despite the surrounding darkness and where in the noisey isolation it is quite possible to put together the disremembered and disintegrated pieces of herself and see the light at the end.

The need, say the feminists, is not to acquire a patina and gloss over the wounds of all the yesterdays, but to lay bare the afflictions, to keep them green, but yet not let them putrify or petrify. It is important to reiterate in ever so many ways that a woman is as

much a part of a cultural fabric as a man is; that she is a cohesive coordinate in a syntagm; that she is the subject of the sentence of life and that the whole grammar of a cultural construct would become illogical and meaningless with her subversion. The earlier modernist feminist stance of women being delicate, wholly at danger, or incapable of resistance and strength is evidently fallacious. Such a concept has been generated by the pessimistic narratives of the west which have unearthed subordination of women and the dominion of men. These narratives are more or less historic, descriptive and unilinear and their conception of womanhood is fragmented. Toril Moi (1985) believes that a woman is an 'integrated humanistic individual' who is the 'essence of all creativity' and that parallel to the wholeness of any narrative/text must be the wholeness of the woman's self.

As an ideology and critical tool, postmodernism opposes that dangerous fictiveness of the naturalized and the essentialized; it embraces a skepticism regarding the generalizable and the universal; it cultivates a suspicion toward any coherent theory; it distrusts the hierarchical and the authoritatian codes that race, class, gender impose upon behaviour; it responds to ironies, ambiguities, open ends and multiple perspectives. Contemporary feminist theory is coming to terms with its affinity with postmodernism, and it is, therefore, confronted with issues of how to situate its own value commitments in relation to the relativistic implications of a postmodern pluralism, an acceptance of the other. Postmodern feminism then is an epistemology that justifies knowledge claims only insofar as they arise from a violation of the universalist and the homogenized assumptions about women. It recognizes the 'permanent partiality' of women and dwells on the politics of 'difference.' It is because of such postmodernist interventions that feminists have come to recognize the amazing maze of differences among women and of the endless diversity of women's experiences as historical agents and as signifiers.

Thus there is no single and singular 'femaleness.' Woman is Women. Forced by moral and strategic necessities women have come to believe in an 'infidel heteroglossia'. Postmodernism warns us of both a monolithic and dualist thinking; of too great

a trust in the article 'the' and conjuctions 'either' and 'or'. Heterogeneous thinking prefers the article 'a' and conjuctions 'both/and'. So, given its multiplicity of appositional voices, we have to develop an ethics of correction, an ethics that delights in the charity of response, clarity of speech and self-consciousness about principles and practices. The postmodernists are no longer concerned with the difference between 'male' and 'female' (de Beauvoir's sexual politics), between masculine and feminine (Gilbert & Gubar's gender politics), but with various interpretations of 'her' (Toril Moi's cultural politics). Obviously, postmodern writing urgently asks for sophisticated new ways of thinking about the subject and her society, as obviously it breaks open spaces within cultures, including feminist cultures. The winds that blow through these spaces dash at conformity; at repetitions of outworn ideas; at jejune, if seemingly satisfactory, assumptions about the value of monolithic generalizations about the female; and at assumptions that "feminism" is a stronger word than "feminism's."

During the last decade, feminism and women's studies have been forced to acknowledge the diversities of women's experiences as well as the patriarchal oppression they share. An emphasis on difference has shattered the illusion of the homogeneity of, and sisterhood between women which previously characterized white, middle-class, Westernized feminist politics and analysis. With this has come an awareness that although women may be oppressed by men within patriarchal relationships, there are other areas of oppression in their lives, which they experience in a gendered way. Although 'difference' has become a catch-all phrase within postmodern feminism and is now a term to be found widely in literature, less attention has been paid to specific analyses of its implications in concrete settings.

This concern for difference, by and large, divides into three broad schools of thought. There are those writers—for example, Helene Cixous (1981) and Luce Irigary (1985)—who focus on sexual differences in language, and there are those,—for example, Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nancy Chodorow (1978)—who describe sexual differences in gender identily. In addition the women centred perspectives of the late 1970's and 1980's, for

example, those of Adrienne Rich (1985) and Mary Daly (1982), define differences in terms of sexual preferences, not simply in terms of gender difference. Feminists believe that differences between men and women are products of our gender identities rather than products of our biologies and many of these critics consider that art and literature offer important evidence of the ways in which differences of thought are structured. (Hence this paper.) Not only do women diverge in terms of how race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability effect their experience, other factors such as historical context and geographical location also need to be part of the framework of feminist analysis.

Postmodernism too is about difference in a number of senses: (i) in the Derridean (1978) sense of disjuncture between objects of perception and the meanings these have as symbols of representation; (ii) in the Lyotardian (1984) sense that it can refer to the multiplicity of voices, meanings and configurations which need to be considered when trying to understand the social world and which, supposedly, negate the possibility of any particular authoritative account; and (iii) in the Walbyan (1992) sense that postmodernism can also relate to the multitude of different subject positions which constitute the individual.

In the 1990's feminism has become more complex in its traditions, accepting all the constructions of difference that postmodernism provides. In Indian writing by women we see a multilayering of these postmodern-feminist differences. These feminist narratives are not preoccupied with the theme of the struggle for equal rights, but rather with the conflicts and tensions of implementing these rights in a society which still operates according to traditional patterns. What these feminist stories bring out is that, though subjected to a multitude of forces, often contradictory, the women in India—not unlike women elsewhere—have begun to move towards self-perception, self-expression and self-determination, slowly indeed and not entirely against tradition, within the family bindings. The Western concepts of equality, individual rights and personal choice would challenge and dismantle the Indian family structure, which is based on sharing and accommodation. Indian feminism largely adheres to Carol

Gillingan's (1982) model of interdependence and caring. Hariharan's stories dwell on this 'difference' of postmodern feminism.

Indian women writers, texts are 'fencing texts' where not only does the narrator want to sit on a fence that demarcates fields of perception, but more importantly from where she likes to fence—to be clad with gauntlets and masks, equivalents of irony and subtexts, and flick out at the opponent with fast, deft, disguised strength and precise grace. The fencer should love the choreography of the game (the technique) but her foil must hit the target. 'Anger' is a necessary foil in Indian women's narratives—the middle passage between suffering and healing, between passivity and activity, between fear and forgiveness. Rage inspires movements, silence announces death, but anger keeps one alive and thus the question of a 'self trying to find itself is kept alive in our writings.

Narrating is never an innocent act and the narratives that frame a situation allow writers to dramatize the results of the telling. And this no doubt gives a signal to the reader that the tale told can and should react on his/her own life—that literature is not inconsequential. Just as narration is not innocent so too is the form of narration. Women's short fiction is a mode of resisting and renegotiating the ideologies of gender inequalities. The short story replicates the partial and the incomplete constructs of the women writers. Just like women, it is an intense, concentrated and a complex interweave of the peripheral or the palimpsest. One is reminded here of Vidya Rao's intriguing glimpse of an alternative model of the self, based on a morphology of the specifically female body in her 1990 article 'Thumri as Feminine Voice'. Thumri is a small intimate form of singing (erotic, romantic). It is constructed in the male gaze and articulates female desire as patriarchally constructed. Rao argues that it contains a subversive edge, to be found in its structure and form. The space within the form appears to conform with traditionally feminine allocations of space in society. So also with the short story, which works on a small canvas, with a limited repertoire, a smaller number of scales and in an enclosed space. And yet the short story, like the 'thumri' can expand the space available to it, not linearly but laterally, not

outwards but inwards, relentlessly questioning the established and accepted structures.

All this requires great manipulative skills. The surface smoothness of the short narrative is a balancing act like that of the tight-rope walkers who do seem to glide ever so smoothly and with ease but whose each muscle aches on the inside and each sinew grows taut. The balancing act is between the 'said' and the 'unsaid', the narrator believing that it is better to say 'not enough' (the short story) than to say 'too much'. Hemingway (1931) had advised:

> If a writer knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows, and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of the movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighths of its being above water.

This 'not enough' 'tip of the iceberg' strategy surfaces to the most advantage for women is short stories; for the stories, like their writers, are slim and lean in form but nurture a density of design and contrive meaning by juxtaposing these through sparse date within thin narrative frames. The genre has the capacity to encapsulate all the felt turbulence into apparently insignificant events and trivial episodes. Just as the genre does, the women writers too can defy codes of convention and revolt against the all-encompassing (patriarchal) orientations by positing the supposed by the partial, the incomplete and the marginalized into positions of prominence. The short story affords the potential to contain exclusionist (feminist) attitudes within inclusive (patriarchal) enclosures.

Beginning as a frivolous infatuation in between larger enterprises, women writers in India have come to recognize not only that small is beautiful but that it is powerful as well; it can disturb, assault, wrench and disrupt like a pinprick. Shashi Despande, Dina Metha, Shyamala Das, Anita Desai, Bharti Mukerjee, are some of the novelists who have used this genre to sketch out the inner workings of their gendered protagonists who are enmeshed in the

lateral mappings and relationships which reveal the cartography of power and social control. There are a group of more recent women short story writers like Sunita Jain, Raji Narasimhan, Lashmi Kanan, Veera Sharma, Bulbul Sharma, Prema Shastri, Shailaja Ganguli, Meera Subramaniam and others who are concerned about the 'women's question'; who are committed to the feminist ideal, and who use the short story as a means of consciousness—raising tool to project the predicament of the 'other' half by disturbing the readers' complacency and heightening their awareness about what has soured the life of women.

Geetha Hariharan in her short story collection, *The Art of Dying*, has projected the postmodernist ethos of difference with perfection. The main text seems to run smoothly well within the orthodox order as if upholding the traditional power equations, but very subtly she lets us feel the simmering ferment just below the surface. The muted subtext, the 'unsaid' seven-eighth's of the story speaks louder than the voiced narrative. The title story, 'The Art of Dying' talks about the accepted tenor of a woman's life—'wifing', childbearing'… 'bleed, dry up, expand with life, contract with completion'. To the male eye it is a 'peaceful, gentle existence' but to the woman it is a 'contraption' which moves only in one direction—negation of the self, leading to a 'yawning emptiness'. It is in such an undulating current that men like to believe they have securely anchored their women's lives who in their turn survive on 'stray bits of flotsam', their legacy of 'stubborn dregs of memory' when they had thought life to be different for them. In their seemingly unconditional surrender they yearn for change, even pain—'good excrutiating sharp pain' whose 'shooting clarity' would help them to define themselves. Though living apparently full lives 'dedicated to the housekeeping of the body', their minds and hearts demand much more. They are tired of 'smoothing a great deal off their faces', 'sniggers of contempt', 'snorts of disbelief, even 'genuine amazement or outrage', which have been effaced by the 'mundanities' of womanly etiquette. They want to break away from the trauma of being framed as one-dimensional figures for posterity, the 'do-gooders' holding merely 'listening posts'. Women, reads the subtext of the story, do not live straight

clear lives as men are wont to believe; they too have an untidy nest of unacknowledged needs, impulses, drives and instincts that lie hidden deep down within, which they have a right to give vent to. One cannot tie them up with the 'worn out seat belts' forever—all the pent up emotions are bound to pelt out. Even an extinct volcano should not be taken for a dead one.

In another story 'The Untitled Poem', the narrator is a man, a retired salesman, an aspiring creative writer. He and his wife Sarala have now moved into a new house built on his life-savings. This abode, for the first time, affords her the satisfaction of a real, though only a small garden. All her life she had to content herself with 'minute, self-contained gardens in pots.' In her 'pretend-gardens' on the seventh floor balcony she could not plant anything that could 'dig its roots deep into the soil'. This little thought is enough to stir up Sarala's discontent. All her life she has not been able to establish roots, a feeling of belongingness. There had been times when the two had thought 'marriage meant doing things together'; but nothing being in common, there is nothing to share. There are even no children who could help to strengthen bonds between the two who lead disparate lives—he, bent over sheet of paper; she, busy with her garden. This garden is the only enduring thing in her life. Her ferns are luminous green, her pale pink anthuriums luxurious, everything hardy 'that thrives despite changes in weather', unlike human relationships. Being devoid of natural companionship, she transfers her urge for confidence to her old gardener. They make a good team. 'She is the navigator, he the oarsman'. But as ill lick would have it, or call it woman's destiny, a rodent creeps into her Eden to destroy her paradise. He picks on the most lush, the most fecund of her plants, he uproots them, tears them up in shreds, all stalks and leaves. 'He does not eat any of it. It is a song of pure destruction' a very apt suggestion of what every woman has to suffer—being torn apart, uprooted, shredded and stalked, but yet asked to live on. Says Hariharan, do not think that she is weak, for at the right moment she can strike her enemy dead when rubbed too far—woman is Kali, the destroyer of evil. This is the writer's post-feminist belief that though a woman might live a non-existent life—not be a beautiful

lotus, only a 'thick-skinned yam'-yet she has the power to strike most effectively when the time is ripe.

Nor can a woman's desires be curbed too long, for there is a limit to suffering repression. Hariharan brings this out very subtly in 'The Remains of the Feast' a story about a ninety year old dying grandmother. Her long tenure with suffering had taught her to accept the death of her children with equanimity, and she had learnt to laugh at life's grotesque ways. Yet strange are the desires that have not been allowed to be fulfilled—they erupt in peculiar forms at odd times. This old woman, now living the last days of her life, the body licked away by a cancerous goitre, hands puctured by needles and tied to the I.V. pole, legs outstretched on a raised bed, could not resist the temptations of the heart, the yearnings of the mind and the craving of the tongue—the three precious organs that have to be muted in the name of domestic harmony and familial peace. A week before she died she even broke through the shackles of being a brahmin widow. She conspired with her granddaughter to smuggle her cakes and ice creams, biscuits and samosas made by non-brahmin hands. She had in the short span tasted lemon tarts, garlic, three types of aerated drinks, fruit cakes laced with brandy, bhelpuri from the fly-infested bazaar, peanuts with chilli-power deep-fried in oil. Next she wanted to be draped in a red silk sari with a big wide border of gold. All her life she had wished for these trivialities and had not been able to air her desires. She had imprisoned her natural longings so long that now they had taken terrifying shapes. This is one distinct awareness of woman's destiny that Hariharan is able to articulate in her short stories.

What lives women are fated to lead is again expressed in 'Forefathers'. Here a daughter waits for her father's death. He has been paralyzed in the body but his mind still demands domination. He cannot forget that he is the lord of all he surveys and that his daughters mere automated menials who can be summoned and dismissed at the ring of his bell. This one daughter asks the crow, her oracle, to tell her how long the 'cunning tyrant' of a father would continue to make her play the nursemaid. She flings a stone and if it hits him, father would die next week; a second

attempt means a delay of a month; but if the bird flies away it would mean another six months of helplessness, one hundred and eighty nights of sleeplessness, an eternity of watchfulness lest the paralyzed arm wield its terrifying power. She of course, like her mother, will have to suffer it all and survive as women are wont to 'like a pastel-shaded, grimy, badly-daubed wall-hanging, absorbing the dust of years.' The narrator bemoans the lack of privacy in the confines of the circumference of her father's kingdom. There is not a corner in the two-roomed flat that they could call their own. Yet the three sisters are obsessed with the world. They have learnt the art of slyly dressing in public. They put on some of their clothes in the narrow, wet bathroom—a fine balancing act—and then rush to the kitchen to finish dressing behind the open doors of the steel cupboards'. Even sleeping is a communal activity. Hariharan describes how women have to suffer at all costs and yet cloak their pain with a mask of humbleness, dutifulness that 'absorbs the sharpest sarcasm and hides the angriest of tears'.

In 'The Closed Room' once again we meet a woman who, like a true wife, is a faithful helper who helps man in his act of creation. Women have the potential to help in creation but cannot be given the role of a creator—that is a male prerogative.

Women have to learn to be unobtrusive, and to remain in the background. As in 'The Reprieve' Nagraj prides himself on being the provider, on enjoying the more obvious authority, power of hierarchy, without being concerned at all about who actually ran the machinery of thirty member household, oiling its creaky joints, and not letting him feel the turbulence at all. Mangla, his wife, who had so painstakingly and unquestioningly taken care of the children, the cousins, the widowed aunt, the bachelor granduncles and retired nephews, loses her purpose in life when everyone leaves or dies and she is left alone. She dies as she had lived, nothing ugly or sudden, just a 'slow, lingering inconspicuous bundle of well-disguised pain, the flesh slowly but not offensively disintegrating'. Late one night the end comes like a gracious blessing when Nagraj and the servants were asleep. He of course felt grief appropriate to a new widower, but his conscious demanding thoughts had to do with his retirement. All his life he had but thought about himself,

his comforts and discomforts. He did not even remember what he and his wife had talked about, how she had slept and where and what actually she had looked like, for she was so distant and always wore the restrained look she had been tutored to assume as the mistress of the house. Hariharan points out that in handling the many problems of the household she very quickly forgets her own joys and blurs her dreams. It is only in the seclusion which sleep affords that her girl's smile sometimes stretches across her pinched wrinkled face. Despite all this, Mangala quickly comes to Nagraj, her face full of tender concern, her hands outstretched promising dark safety. It is the woman to whom men come for solace, peace and completion.

Thus, like most postmodernist writers, Hariharan's texts are ironical, ambiguous, open-ended and have multiple perspectives. They seem to focus on some underlying truth that is not always described or even referred to in the story. There are always so many empty spaces that the reader has a fair chance to infer from; they actually project how women can be misrepresented, but one has to read the subtext for corrections. Hariharan often gives us a realistic account of what seems a trivial matter or event. Although the final version resembles external reality, the method of presentation suggests that there is more to the story than the mere externally narrated details. In most stories, on first reading, there seems to be some internal disconnectedness, some disjointedness, the ending appears as much a beginning as the first line; but there is always an internal design, some oblique reference which combines into a rich texture of trope—exposing a pattern of feminist meaning within the symbolic traditional structure.

Her short stories are but shells of a story, fragile containers of composed meaning, metonymic structures of understatement that help in overstating the suppression that women have to suffer. In her stories Hariharan chooses to describe what are perhaps everyday happenings, things taken for granted about a woman's life, her living and behaving ways; her stories contain a nothing-is-happening event, but there is in them a figurative pattern which signifies the universality of woman's condition and capacity. These stories create a one-to-one correspondence between the singular and the

universal, the part and the whole, the trival and the significant; and what appears to be a trifle is potently important. Many a time these stories seem to be but a moment excerpted from an implied longer story. In the syntax of their figurative design they stand in the way of synecdoche for a whole experience, and metaphorically for some universal knowledge in essence. Though the fabric of her stories may be short, they support a sound knowledge of what it means to be a 'woman' in the Indian context.

Postmodernist feminist theory is non-universalist. When its focus becomes cross-cultural or transepochal, its mode of attention becomes comparative rather than universalizing, attuned to changes and contrasts instead of 'covering laws'. Since a postmodern feminist theory replaces unitary notions with plural and complexly constructed conceptions, the restless women in Hariharan's fiction can be taken as one in a paradigm. And since postmodern feminist theory is pragmatic and forsakes the metaphysical comfort of a single 'feminist method', Hariharan's fencing texts can be one of the threads in a tapestry of diverse colours. Even though oblique, her enquiry is a theoretical counterpart of a broader, richer, more complex and multilayered feminist solidarity, the sort of solidarity which is essential for overcoming the oppression of women in its 'endless variety and monotonous similarity'.

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SECTION III

Dharmaśāstras: Fetters or Freedom

How to Read the Manusmṛti

ARVIND SHARMA

The title of the paper—How to Read the *Manusmṛti*—implies some dissatisfaction with the way it is being read. This raises the question: is such an assumption justified?

Permit me to settle this point by offering you two brief statements and asking you which of the two you actually associate, or are likely to associate, with the *Manusmṛti.* The first is "a woman is not fit to be independent" (na stri svatantryamarhati) and the second is "equality for all" (samata caiva sarvasmin). In all likelihood the auditor or reader will associate the first of the two statements with the *Manusmṛti* and the second with any text *except* the *Manusmṛti*, perhaps with the *Bhagavadgītā* or the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, for example.

The fact of the matter is that both the statements are found in the *Manusmṛti*—the first in verse 3 of Chapter IX and the second in verse 44 of Chapter VI. If most auditors or readers failed to locate *both* the verses in *the Manusmṛti* then something is obviously amiss with the way the *Manusmṛti* is being read and room is created for me to proceed. One wonders whether it has suffered the fate of many works which are reviled without being read.

I

I would now like to present what I have to say in three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end or with an introduction, a discussion and a conclusion—hopefully in that order. As soon as the introduction is over, I shall identify five ways of reading the *Manusmṛti* (or Manu for short) which will yield three conclusions, but let me begin with the introduction before I proceed any further.

Some years ago I had the opportunity of reading the *Manusmṛti* from cover to cover for the first time, in the course of preparing a presentation on it. Reading it as a whole, as distinguished from reading it in selected citations, began to produce in me an understanding of the text somewhat at variance from the prevailing one and I will now share these altered understandings with you to see where they might lead or point to.

So, how to read Manu? Different people could make different suggestions; different people could also make the same suggestion or the same person could make different suggestions. My present effort belongs to the last category.

II

Let me begin by classifying the manner in which these fresh understandings were generated, as they provide the natural channels along which the discussion might proceed. You may, if you will, call it a five-point plan for reading Manu.

(1) I found it necessary to understand Manu in the tradition as a law-giver, as distinguished from the author of the law-book which bears his name. Let me share with you the examples which led me in this direction:

(i) Manu has a very bad press in relation to what he says about women. It therefore came as a great surprise to me, and may surprise you too, that in his famous eulogy of women in the *Bṛhat-Saṁhitā*, Varāhamihira (sixth century) cites Manu in support while lauding women. Lest this be considered a misreading on my part I cite the following remarks of P.V. Kane in extenso:

> Varāhamihira (sixth century AD) in his Bṛhat-Saṁhitā chap. 74 (ed. By Kern) makes a spirited defence of women and eulogises them highly. He first says that on women depend *dharma* and *artlta* and from them man derives the pleasures of sense and the blessing of sons, that they are the Laksmi (goddess of Prosperity) of the house and should be always given honour and wealth. He then condemns those who following the path of asceticism and other-worldliness proclaim the demerits of women and are silent about their virtues and pertinently asks 'tell me truly, what faults attributed to women have

> not been also practiced by men? Men in their audacity treat women with contempt, but they really possess more virtues (than men).' He then cited the dicta of Manu in support (verses 7-10). "One's mother or one's wife is a woman; men owe their birth to women; O ungrateful wretches, how can happiness be your lot when you condemn them?"[1]

I consider it a point of some importance that Manu, who is regularly cited as offering a *negative* estimate of women and their rights on the basis of the *Manusmṛti*, should be cited in the self-understanding of the tradition itself, as holding a *positive* view about them.

(ii) It is widely believed that women do not possess the right to inherit according to the *Manusmṛti* and, moreover, that women did not have the right to inherit in Ṛg Vedic period.[2] It seems, however, that "there was a school of jurists representing a small minority, which favoured the recognition of the right of inheritance of the daughter along with the son as early as c. 500 B.C".[3] One of the authorities it relied upon is a passage in the *Nirukta* (III.4), a passage which is attributed by Yaṣka to Manu: "This verse does not, however, occur in the present Manusmṛti and it contradicts its views on this point".[4] So we now experience yet another moment of "cognitive dissonance". First we found Manu, denounced for his *negative* portrayal of women, being cited in the tradition for his positive portrayal of the same women. Now we find Manu, branded as the denier of rights to women, being cited within the tradition as an upholder of the daughter's right to inherit.

(iii) The *Manusmṛti* is regularly cited as the classical proof text of the Hindu caste-system. This same caste-system is the subject of discussion between Nahusa (in the form of a snake) and Yudhiṣṭhira in the Mahābhārata. I cite a summary of the dialogue below:

> When Yudhiṣṭhira, the incarnation of Righteousness, is asked by the snake, to define a Brāhmaṇa, he answers, "He is considered a Brāhmaṇa in whom one can see truth, liberality, forgiveness, character, non-violence, self-control and pity-"*Satyaṁ dānaṁkṣamāsilam ānṛśaṁsyaṁ damo ghṛṇa Dṛṣyante yatra nāgendra sa brāhmaṇa iti smrtaḥ.* At this, the snake logically points out that these qualities may be found in a Śūdra. Yudhiṣṭhira then goes on to declare, "In

> that case the Śūdra is not a Śūdra, nor the Brāhmaṇa a Brāhmaṇa, where this conduct can be discerned, he is a Brāhmaṇa, where it is not found that one is to be indicated a Śūdra." In that case, the snake argues, jati would be quite meaningless. Yudhiṣṭhira replies by saying that jati is impossible to discern since all men constitute a single species. Hence, according to Yudhiṣṭhira, Manu rightly stated that all are Śūdra by birth till they are spiritually regenerated. It is conduct, therefore, that really distinguishes the *varṇās.* Otherwise, their confusion is unavoidable.[5]

It is worth noting that the view, that all are *śūdras* by birth, is attributed by Yudhiṣṭhira to Manu-a view highly subversive of the caste system. G.C. Pande notes that "The view attributed to Manu does not occur in the present *Manusmṛti* but may be traced in other *dharma-śāstra* authors".[6]

Here then is a third example to ponder in which the modern understanding of Manu diverges almost diametrically with the traditional understanding of his position as articulated in the Mahābhārata.

(iv) The *Manusmṛti* is also associated with extravagant claims made on behalf of the Brahmins. Thus when A.L. Basham describes the "Brāhmaṇ as a great divinity in human form",[7] he is paraphrasing *Manusmṛti* (IX.317). And these claims are based on *birth* as a Brahmin.

Such claims of the Brahminhood on the basis of birth are contested both in the *Vajrasūci*[8] attributed to Aśvaghoṣa, as well as in the *Vajrasūcikopaniṣad.*[9] Both the texts take the view that Brahminhood is *not* based on birth (*tasmān na jātir brāhmaṇa iti*).[10] In the *Vajrasūcī* the statement takes the following form: *tasmāt jātir na kāraṇam.*[11]

What is striking is that this statement is introduced in *Vajrasūcī* as a citation from the *Manusmṛti* (*iha hi mānavadharme bhihitaṃ*).[12] The verse cited, however, is "not found in the extant *Manusmṛti.*"[13]

(v) In present-day perception, Manu is perceived as a Hindu law-giver par excellence. This is at variance with the fact that the "Burmese are governed in modern times by the *Dhammathat*, which are based on Manu". The *Buddhist* appropriation of Manu

in Burma and Indo-China has been amply documented by R. Lingat.[14]

(2) When one places the Manusmṛti, or the precepts of Manu, alongside what other smṛti texts attributed to Manu, one undergoes another cycle of cognitive dissonance. Three illustrations must suffice.

(i) A verse which permits the right to divorce to the wife in traditional Hindu law is found in *Parāśrasmṛti* and *Naradasmṛti.*[15] It states that "another husband is ordained for women in five calamities viz. When the husband is lost (unheard of), is dead, has become a samnyasin, is impotent or is a *patita.*"[16]

Although the text of the *Manusmṛti* is said to regard marriage as indissoluble, this verse permitting divorce is attributed to Manu in the *Smṛticandrikā.*[1]

(ii) Two other versions in which the *Manusmṛti* is found are referred to as *Vṛddha-Manu* and *Bṛhan-Manu* or the later or older Manu and the larger Manu. The exact relationship of these, whose existence is known only from citations, to the *Manusmṛti* as we know it is a matter of conjecture.[18] What is significant for us is the fact that these citations diverge from the existing text. "For example, our Manu is silent about the widow's right to inherit to (sic) her husband, but Vṛddha-Manu recognizes the right of a chaste widow to take over the entire wealth of her husband".[19]

(3) Another differential understanding of Manu was also generated when the key concepts of the culture were read only in terms of the text of Manu itself and when they were read *after* the *Manusmṛti* had itself been placed in the broader context of the tradition. The concept of *varṇa* provides an interesting illustration of this point.

The *Manusmṛti* is a text avowedly organized on the template of the fourfold varṇa system. The second verse of the text informs us that Manu was requested by the sages as follows:

> Deign, divine one, to declare to us precisely and in due order the sacred laws of each of the (four chief) (*varṇas*) and of the intermediate ones (*antaraprabhava*)[20]

Thus the text really is a *varṇa-dharmasāstra* by explicit request. The *varṇa* division of society is taken as given. This template virtually governs the entire text.

As against this the following consideration must be kept in mind: that the scheme of the four *varṇas* is therein subject to a higher justification. This point is important inasmuch as the text alludes twice clearly to the *puruṣa sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda* while explaining the origin of the *varṇa* system. Thus it is squarely within the tradition. However, before alluding to the account, it attaches a rider on both the occasions it refers to that account: in I.31and 1.87. The first allusion is prefaced by the remark: *For the sake of the prosperity of the worlds* (*lokānāṁ tu vivṛddyarthaṁ*) and the second is prefaced by the remark: *But in order to protect the universe* (*sarvasyāsya tu sargasya guptyarthaṁ*).[21] That is to say: the four *varṇas* were created and separate duties assigned to them not in some random or purely natural fashion but with a definite purpose in mind: to secure the protection of creation and the prosperity of the worlds.

What happens then if the world does not prosper? Is one still to cling to the system or is one supposed to change or even abandon it?

The answer is provided by Manu in the Fourth Chapter. Verse 176 of this chapter states:

Let him avoid (the acquisition of) wealth and (the gratification of his) desires, if they were opposed to the sacred law, and even lawful acts which may cause pain in the future or are offensive to men.[22]

The translation barely conveys the force of the verse, which may well be one of the reasons why its significance has been overlooked. The Sanskrit text runs as follows: *parityajedartha-kāmau yau syātaṁ dharmavarjitau*, *dharmaṁ cāpyasukhodarkaṁ lakavikrusṭameva ca.*

Thus *dharma* which is reviled by the people and is not conducive to welfare may be abandoned. Does this not apply to *varṇadharma?* The Vedas are said to be the root of *dharma* (*vedo skhilo dharmamūlaṁ*) and from that root the *varṇa* scheme is derived. And Manu explicitly states that such *dharma* may be

given up under two circumstances. (1) when it is going to result in unhappiness and (2) and when it is denounced by the people. One may wish to note that it was precisely for the benefit of the people that the *varṇa* was set up in the first place. *Lokānām tu vivṛdhyartham.*

These three differential perspectives may be described as para-textual in nature, they dealt with the text of the *Manusmṛti* by placing it within a larger context.

The next two differential perspectives have to do with the text itself.

(4) Concepts in the *Manusmṛti* take on a different complexion when read only in one part of it, as compared to when read as embedded in the text as a whole. An interesting example of this shift in perspective is provided by the term *yuga*, when it is read first as only occurring in Chapter I and then as also occurring in Chapter IX. As a matter of fact the theory of the four *yugas* provides further illustration of the basic theme of the paper—that one should look at all the relevant evidence before firm conclusions about what the *Manusmṛti* ways might be drawn. The references to the *yugas* occur often in the *Manusmṛti.* Their celestial chronology is spelled out in 1.60-71, as follows:

> They declare that the Kṛta age (consists of) four thousand years (of the Gods); the twilight preceding it consists of as many hundreds, and twilight following it of the same number.
>
> In the other three ages with their twilights preceding and following, the thousands and hundreds are diminished by one (in each).
>
> These twelve thousand (years) which thus have just been mentioned as the total of four (human ages), are called one age of the Gods.[23]
>
> Its implications for the state *of dharma* are spelled out in L.81-86:
>
> In the Kṛta Age *dharma* is four-footed and entire, and (so is) Truth; nor does any gain accrue to men by unrighteousness.
>
> In the other (three ages), by reason of (unjust) gains (āgama), *Dharma* is deprived successively of one foot, and through (the prevalence of) theft, falsehood, and fraud the merit (gained by men) is diminished by one fourth (in each).

> (Men are) free from disease, accomplish all their aims, and live four hundred years in the Kṛta Age, but in the Tretā and (in each of) the succeeding (Ages) their life is lessened by one quarter.
>
> The life of mortals, mentioned in the Veda, the desired results of sacrificial rites and the (supernatural) power of embodied (spirits) are fruits proportioned among men according to (the character of) the Age.
>
> One set of duties (is prescribed) for men in the Kṛta Age, different ones in the Tretā and in the Dvāpara, and (again) another (set) in the Kali, in proportion as (those) Ages decrease in length.
>
> In the Kṛta Age the chief (virtue) is declared to be (the performance of) austerities, in the Tretā (divine) knowledge, in the Dvāpara (the performance of) sacrifices, in the Kali liberality alone.[24]

In another section of the *Manusmṛti*, however, *this chronological scheme is transformed into a conceptual one.* The Ages are associated with the diligence with which the king pursues his royal duties (1X.301-302):

> The various ways in which a king behaves (resemble) the Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali Ages; hence the king is identified with the Ages (of the world). Sleeping he represents Kali (or Iron Age), waking the Dvāpara (or Brazen) Age, ready to act the Tretā (or Silver Age), but moving (actively) the Kṛta (or Golden Age).[25]

(5) Our current understanding of Manu is also altered when the verses are topically correlated instead of being read independently on their own. Again three examples must suffice.

(i) Consider, for instance, verses which attribute an extravagant status to the Brahmin. Read by themselves they seem self-laudatory, as texts like the *Manusmṛti* were "Written by Brahmans and from the Brahmanic point of view, and represent conditions as the Brahmans would have liked them to be".[26] Let us however now examine the point more closely. The role of the Brahmin in relation to other *varṇas* possesses a twofold dimension; (1) how should they be respected by the other *varṇas* and (2) what should *their* own attitude be towards such respect shown to them. That the *Manusmṛti* inculcates respect for the Brāhmaṇas should respond to such respect when displayed. This is laid down in verse 162 of

Chapter 2: " A priest should always be alarmed by adulation as by poison and always desire scorn as if it were ambrosia".[27]

(ii) Manu's statement that a woman is not fit for independence has been legally construed to mean that she has no legal right to possession. Such right belongs only to the father, husband or son (Manu. IX.3). In the same *Manusmṛti*, however, the wife's right to *strīdhana* is unequivocally upheld.

(iii) It has often been alleged that manu held the life of a *śūdra* of little account, largely on the basis of XI.132, which prescribes the same penance for killing small animals such as a dog, etc. as "for the murder of a śūdra".[28] By the logic of the same level of penance, however, it can be argued that a Śūdra gets away scot free by killing women, and even other Śūdras, Vaiśyas, Kṣatriyas, because such offences cause the *same* loss of caste (XI.67)[29] and a Śūdra cannot commit an offence causing loss of caste (X.126).[30] If the life of a Śūdra were held in such contempt as it is claimed, would Manu permit one to even commit perjury to save the life of a Śūdra? See Manu VIII. 104:

> *Whenever the death of a Śūdra*, of a Vaiśya, of a Kṣatriya, of a Brāhmaṇa would be (caused) by the declaration of a truth, a falsehood may be spoken; for such (falsehood) is preferable to the truth.[31]

On the basis of this text the life of a *Śūdra is worth than of a Brāhmaṇa!* The order of enumeration of the *varṇas* is also worth remarking. The usual order is reversed, with the Śūdra being enumerated first. According to the logic of enumeration, then, the Śūdra's life is even worth more than that of any other *varṇa*, including the Brāhmaṇa.

These then are the five ways in which one could supplement our current habit of reading the *Manusmṛti* piecemeal.

III

What do all these accretions of detail lead to? Ideally they should lead to a finely shaded conclusion. Let us see what we can do.

The Manuvada presentation of Manu is for me an illustration of how information without context can lead to, or at least contri-

butes to, alienation. It provides scope for ideologies to provide the context, or scope for speculation or worse to provide the context. Information in context, by contrast, promotes analysis.

I draw the following three conclusions from the foregoing analysis.

(1) When read holistically on its own terms, the *Manusmṛti* is not as formidable an obstacle to social reconstruction as it has been made out to be. Individual verses can be used to draw toxic conclusions; generate synthetic outrage and magnify it into a generalized fear about the future. When judged by selective quotations, one tends to look upon the *Manusmṛti* with an air of excited horror, while evidence to the contrary from the same text is tactfully, or perhaps I should say tactlessly, withheld. Read as a whole the text helps us break out of circumscribingly limited hermeneutical circles, in which people have been going in circles for two centuries now.

I am not saying that it is not an obstacle. What I am saying is that it is not that formidable an obstacle. Its negative features are lessened when the text is read as a whole but they are not erased; much in it still remains obnoxious to the evidence of daily life. The yearning for justice and equality is present but it is a complicated yearning and the egalitarian and just impulses within it have remained an underutilized option.

(2) When, in the light of points two and three of the previous section, one lifts one's sights beyond the *Manusmṛti* and reads it in the light of other law books, and in the light of the key concepts of the tradition, one can offer a bolder conclusion. Take the caste system, for instance. Some have argued that to be a Hindu one must belong to a caste—so closely is Hinduism tied to it. To dissolve caste, they say, would be to dissolve Hinduism. They remind one of the following comment of Chesterton: "Do not free the camel from the burden of the hump; you may be freeing him from being a camel". To me *Manusmṛti* seems to be saying—in the second and third ways of reading it—that caste is not the hump of the camel, it is the saddle.

Read this way the Manu of the *Manusmṛti* is not so much of an impediment as a stimulus; not so much an obstacle as a step-

ping stone, on which one may confidently place one's foot to step beyond.

(3) Manu, read in the light of the first way of reading the *Manusmṛti*, emerges as an icon: an ideal law-giver. And with Manu as a symbol of and therefore in the role of an ideal law-giver one is in a position to offer an even more challenging suggestion. Those whose sympathies for Manu extend further may wish to claim that Manu does not even represent a bar on the high pole of social idealism we have to vault over, it is the very pole which will help us leap over the bar. In our ignorance we mistook the vertical pole for a horizontal bar.

If we read Manu in the five ways I have outlined, there is still a controversy then about Manu's role in the social destiny of India, only it is now transformed into a controversy of a nobler kind, than that to which we are accustomed, once Manu is allowed to rise from the procrustean bed of Manuvāda.

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[1] P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1974) Vol. II, Part I, p. 579. See note 1353 (ibid.) for the Sanskrit text.

[2] A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (Delhi: Motilal Banardidass, 1962) p.239.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 240.

[5] G.C. Pande, *Dimensions of Ancient Indian Social History* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 984) p. 162.

[6] Ibid., p. 174, note 172.

[7] A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988) p. 138.

[8] P.V. Kane, op. cit., vol. I, p. 330, note 350.

[9] S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Principal Upaniṣads* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996) pp. 935-938.

[10] Ibid., p. 936.

[11] P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. I. P. 330, note 350.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid. The verse runs: *araṇīgarbhasaṁbhūto kaṭho nāma mahānuniḥ. Tapasā Brāhmaṇo jātastasmātat jātina kāraṇam.*

[14] Ibid., p. 346

[15] Ibid., Vol. II, Part I, p. 610.

[16] Ibid., p. 611.

[17] J.L. Shastri, ed., *Manusmṛti* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983) appendix p. 9.

[18] P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. I, Part I, p. 345, 349.

[19] Ibid.

[20] G. Buhler, tr., *The Laws of Manu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 1.

[21] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[22] Ibid., p. 156.

[23] Ibid., p. 20.

[24] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[25] Ibid., p. 396.

[26] A.L. Basham, op. cit, p. 138.

[27] Wendy Doniger (with Brian K. Smith), *The Laws of Manu* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) p. 34. The Sanskrit text is worth citing: *sammānād brāhmaṇo nityam udvijeta viṣādiva amṛtasyeva cakānkṣed avamānasya sarvadā.*

[28] G. Buhler, tr., *op. cit.*, p. 457.

[29] Ibid., pp. 443-41.

[30] Ibid., p. 429. By resorting to such logic it can also be argued that Manu accords the same status to a slave as to a son, because he equates them in a verse (VIII. 299).

[31] Ibid., p. 272 (emphasis added).

Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in Relation to *Manusmṛti*

CHANDRAKALA PADIA

In the contemporary cry of feminist theory for modernity in thought, we often tend to dismiss our major traditional texts in one categorical sweep. This is hardly fair. To argue for my protest, I propose to confine myself to just one of such texts, namely, *Manusmṛti.* My attempt will be simply to show that whereas there surely are some parts of this text which appear odd and even unacceptable to the modern mind,[1] there are, on the other hand, quite a few such emphases too as are of unquestionable value to us even today, and which therefore make it imperative for us to take *a balanced and objective view of the text in question*, *as a whole.* What makes me say so is criticisms like the following one:

> The basic rules for women's behaviour … expressed in the … passages from *Laws of Manu* [IX, 3,4,5]… stress the need to control women because of the evils of the female character . . .[2]

But the substance of these verses, 1 rejoin, does not warrant this criticism. I may summarize the content of these verses thus, following Pandit Ganganath Jha's multi-volume *Manusmṛti* (Motilal Banarasidass, 2nd edition, 1999, Vol. 7, pp. 3-5):

> At every stage of her life—that is, as a virgin, as a wife and as a widow—woman has to be guarded by her close male relatives. Her marriage, its consummation, and her old age—all have to be taken care of, respectively, by her father, husband and son; otherwise they would be censurable. Special care is to be taken to save her from those attachments because of which whole families are likely to come to grief.

Quite a few Indian critics too (of the text) are just as off the right track. Consider, for instance, the following remark by Dr. Kumkum Roy, a remark which (as she claims), arises from reflection on some specific verses in *Manusmṛti*, namely, nos. 33 and 94 of Ch. IX; nos. 4 and 13 of Ch. III; and no. 5 of Ch. II. Here is the remark which I propose to focus on:

> What emerges then [as a result of reflection on the verses referred to] is that in … *Manusmṛti*, the relationship between men and women was structured in terms of inequality".[3]

For the sake of brevity, let me weigh this conclusion against just one of the verses in question, namely, verse no. 33 of Ch. IX. This is what it says:

> Woman may be taken as a field and man as a seed. All living beings arise from the union of field and seed.[4]

Now, even a casual look at this statement shows that there is here not the slightest hint of the categorical view that woman is inferior to man. How, indeed, can we decide as to which of the two is of greater value—the seed or the field? The seed remains merely itself until it impregnates the field, so to say; and the field is a mere stretch or receptacle until it is fertilized by the seed. What is more, the very next verse (number 34 of *Manusmṛti*) makes it clear that, according to Manu, the seed or the male person is more important in some contexts; and the field (or woman) in quite a few others. This is indeed (a part of) what the 34lh verse says. The additional idea there is that where the seed and the field alike contribute to the act of begetting or production, the maternity involved is commendable.

However, there is yet another protest made against *Manusmṛti* by the same critic. It runs thus:

> [In this work] an attempt was made to systematize … [the educatory] situation … [in such a way that] women were denied access to the *upanayana* or initiation which marked the beginning of access to sacred learning.[5]

Here, the critic's explicit reference is to verse no. 67 of Chapter II; and this is what she here says:

> [For women], marriage was portrayed as equivalent to the initiation (or *upanayana*) of the male; serving the husband was equated with the period of studentship; and the performance of household duties was identified with the worship of the sacred fire.[6]

Here, I admit, it may well be contended that the verse referred to regards a wife as a mere means to the welfare of husband and the family. But, to this I would rejoin by making a distinction which is often overlooked. The fact of being regarded as a means is bad, if this is the attitude of *someone else* towards me. But if I regard myself as *essentially* a means not merely to the promotion of others' welfare, I think it would only be commendable. What otherwise is the meaning of selfless service? Be it noted that the cultivation of selflessness is no easy matter. It issues from a good deal of steadfast and watchful effort. This is why a selfless person does not feel weak; and this is why a mother, who is (as a rule) selfless, can hold a whole big family as one, using the magic threads of love. As for the protest that Manu denies to women the all-important initiation into the process of learning, I would like to make the following point:

Initiation into the process of education (taken in a comprehensive sense) can mean two things: first, acquisition of knowledge embodied in books; and, second, the beginning of cultivation of the right attitudes, of which helpfulness is perhaps the most important, for, as Tulsidas would have it, compassion—because of which one becomes helpful quite easily—is the prime source of religiousness or dharma which sustains the whole social edifice.

I may point out further that whereas in the verse we have just been discussing, Manu speaks of woman as wife (and mother), and so has to emphasize the attitude of service, in the immediately preceding verse, to *girls taken generally*, *all the samskaras* are openly granted, nay, even advocated. Here is a literal translation of what that verse says: 'All those samskaras which involve the body should be performed also in respect of women, if without the recitation of mantras, according to the time and order as indicated earlier (that is, in the preceding verses)'[7].

What is, however, more important to note is Manu's glorification of the status of mother, a very clear index of which runs as follows:

> In respect of exaltation of status, one Acharya [that is, a mentor who is exemplary also in respect of conduct] surpasses ten ordinary teachers; one father [who, I may add, is not only expected to set an example of good conduct for his children, but also to provide care and comfort to them] surpasses one hundred Acharyas; and, above all, a mother surpasses a thousand fathers.[8]

Equally noteworthy is the following asservation of Manu:

> That family is blessed by its specific deity in which women are revered; and those families in which women are not similarly respected are not able to make their actions bear fruit.[9]

I fail to understand how those who accuse Manu of underrating the value of women could fail to take note of such explicit emphases on the value of women in Indian society. Yet there are quite a few modern writers, for example, Uma Chakraborty,[10] and Pandita Rama Bai[11] who have roundly accused Manu of denigrating women. I would like to tell them, in all humility, that there are quite a few such verses in *Manusmṛti* which give equal importance to the happiness of husband and wife in the family. See, for instance, verse no. 60 of Chapter III which runs thus:

> That family's welfare (कल्याण) is for ever assured in which the husband feels satisfied with his wife and *the wife remains satisfied with the husband.*[12]

What is more, the following verse of *Manusmṛti* emphasizes that:

> Procreation, religious rites, caring, sexual bliss, rites relating to [obeisance to] ancestors, and conduct that makes for ascent to heaven, - all this is importantly determined by the co-operation of one's wife[13].

What, however, makes me sad, and not merely surprised, is the fact that some eminent scholars have based their criticisms on such a casual interpretation of some verses (of *Manusmṛti*) as is not at all warranted by the actual text. For instance,

Kumkum Roy contends that in *Manusmṛti* some material benefits are allowed only to men and not to women, and [that] women were restricted to receiving gifts from their kinsfolk, This protest, the critic claims, is based on verse 115 of Chapter X and verse 194 of Chapter IX. Now, a careful look at the first one of these shows that it only lists the seven sources of legitimate income. The second one, similarly, only speaks of the legitimate sources and agents of gifts and riches for a wife. In neither of these verses any preference has been shown to men, as against women, in respect of the sources or means of enrichment or benefit.

Yet another criticism of *Manusmṛti* has been made by the same critic. I may put this protest simply, as follows:

> One statement of *Manusmṛti* which is often quoted in defence of women, because it appears to exalt their worship as a means of pleasing the gods, appears in the 56th verse of Chapter III of *Manusmṛti.* But this so-called worship only comprises the giving of ornaments, food and clothes to women on festive occasions as outlined in verse 59. In worship so regarded, it is obvious, there is nothing really divine. Rather, it only implies that women can want nothing more than material gifts. This suggestion, we are told, is supported by what is said in the 61st verse of Chapter III of *Manusmṛti.* What is said in that verse simply is that no children are born if the woman is not attractive to her husband. So, the critic concludes, the much acclaimed worship of woman in *Manusmṛti* boils down to the unacceptable suggestion that a woman only needs clothes and ornaments, and that she has only to serve as a means to procreation by appearing attractive to the husband.[14]

Now, whether this criticism is fair or not can be decided only after a close and direct look at the verses referred to, that is, verses 57, 59 and 61 of *Manusmṛti.* So let us see what these verses actually say:

In the 56th verse, what is said only is that all such efforts for betterment fail as are made by a family where women are not worshipped, and this verse is immediately followed by the 57th one which declares that that family soon comes to an end in which ladies keep grieving or are unhappy.[15] (I hardly need add that occasional material gifts alone are not enough.to keep a sensible

woman happy.) As for 59th verse, it surely recommends to those men who wish to flourish, the giving of good food and material gifts to women. But such giving is only said to be a special way of showing regard to women.[16] It is noteworthy that in The subsequent verse (no. 60) what is pleaded for is clearly the state of a wife's remaining *generally satisfied* with her husband.[17]

Such pervasive satisfaction, I repeat, depends not merely on the receipt of occasional gifts, but on the generally affectionate and respectful attitude of the husband. Lastly, as we turn to the 61st verse of the same chapter,[18] what we find, quite objectively, is only the thought that on the specific occasion of sexual union, care is to be taken to lend extra charm to the act of mating, by making the husband happy through heightened embellishment of the wife. I, therefore, conclude that verses on which the criticism in question is based only suggest that what is basically important is the general everyday happiness of the wife and that this happiness may be heightened on the special occasion of sexual union. Such a view is obviously sensible. To take a simple example, it is the obvious duty of a mother to be generally careful about the needs and comfort of her children. But on a special occasion, say, when one of her children falls ill or wins a prize, will it not be her clear duty also to take *special* care of the ailing child or to celebrate the prize winning in a *special* way?

One particular verse in Chapter IX of *Manusmṛti*—I mean no. 3—has been freely objected to. What this verse actually says may be put thus, in brief:

> The father guards a woman during virginity; the husband, during her youth; and the sons, in her old age. So the woman *is never fit to be independent.*

Here, the words commonly objected to are: is *never fit to be independent.* Is it not outrageous, one may ask, to deny independence to woman categorically? Is there any inherent defect in her character or abilities?

My answer to such skeptical questions arises straight from attention to the very words of the verse. Everything here depends on how exactly we interpret the *words: fit to be independent.* What is more, the meaning that we put on these words has to accord

with the other (preceding) words of the verse. We have also to remember that even the most comprehensive book on woman cannot be adequate to the individual character, abilities and capacities *of each and every woman.* One has to confine oneself to the generality of woman; and, of women taken generally, one clear feature is that, in respect of sheer physical strength and stamina, they are inferior to men. Just as clear is the fact that, because of the heightened sense of self-importance, which goes with the feeling of being physically stronger, man is easily liable to oppress woman.

Now, let us turn to the text of the verse. *Not fit to be independent; these* words I take to mean: not *physically* fit to be independent, or to be left alone—unprotected. Those who regard a woman as integral to their life and emptional well-being—namely, the father, husband, or her sons—*they* have to look after her. Her ability and character are not doubted here in any way. Alternatively, it would make little sense to say that because of some inherent defect in abilities, a woman needs the physical protection of those who are immediately close to her. A non-physical disability does not need physical protection. On the other hand, because of relative physical weakness, most of our women need physical protection *even today.*

Manu, I conclude, is here perfectly in tune with the evidence of fact.

I would like to close this paper with two other positive remarks: one of personal relevance, and the other of wide and quite general significance.

First, with a view to reassure myself that in taking the line of argument that I have followed in my paper, I am not in bad company, let me cite a remark from an essay by a celebrated scholar:

> When judged by selective quotations, one tends to look upon the *Manusmṛti* with an air of excited horror, while evidence to the contrary from the same text is tactfully, or perhaps I should say tactlessly withheld… [by quite a few critics].[19]

Second, and finally, I would like to make a distinction of general theoretical value. The freedom for women for which the feminists of today cry is taken to mean *equality regarded as mere sameness.* The *same* opportunities for work to women as for men—this

is the battle-cry today. But let us pause for a while and consider whether such a view of equality is workable. Would it make sense if two persons of unequal keenness of appetite and digestive powers are expected to eat the same kind and quantity of food? No one would here say, yes. Equality that is proper and workable is really *equality of discriminating consideration.* What I mean is simply this. Pay equal attention to the *different* needs and capacities of men and women, and then give them appropriate opportunities for work. How many of our male participants present here would welcome being assigned the task of assuaging crying babes in the absence of their mothers? Here, it is obvious, the mothers have to lend a helping hand.

Indeed, in spite of their dissimilar needs and capacities, men and women have to work in a spirit of mutual cooperation. The ideal of *freedom from* undue domination by men is all right; but it has to be supplemented with the ideal of *freedom* to cooperate with men variously, so as to make for social harmony without any loss of individual dignity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] See, for instance, Verse no. 94 of Chapter IX

[2] Susan Wadley, 'Women and the Hindu Tradition' in *Women in Indian Society*, edited by Rehana Ghadially, New Delhi / London, , Sage Publications, 1988, p. 30.

[3] Kumkum Roy's essay: 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman' in *Woman and the Hindu Right*, edited by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1995, p. 18.

[4] This is almost my own verbatim English translation of the Hindi version of the verse in question as given by Hargovind Shastri in *Manusmṛti*, Varanasi, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, p. 464.

[5] Kumkum Roy's essay, p. 14.

[6] Ibid., The verse referred to is: वैवाहिको विधिः स्त्रीणां संस्कारो वैदिक स्मृतः।
पतिसेवा गुरौ वासे गहार्थोऽग्निपरिक्रिया AACh. II, 67

[7] *Manusmṛti*, Ch. II. 66
अमन्त्रिका तु कार्येयं स्त्रीगणामावृदशेषतः
संस्कारार्थे शरीरस्ययथाकालं यथाक्रमम! ।।

[8] Ibid, 145
उपाध्ययान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता।
सहस्त्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते।।
The translation I have given above is my doing. It sure differs from, but it does not recalcitrate the translation provided by Dr. Bhagvan Das which runs thus: "The teacher of the higher knowledge exceedeth ten teachers of the lower knowledge in the title to respect; the father exceedeth him, a hundred times; but the mother exceedeth the father a thousand times, in the weighty virtue of educator… and the right to reverence. Dr. Bhagvan Das: *The Science of Social Organisation* or *The Laws of Manu.* The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Vol. II, Second Edition, 1935

[9] Ibid, Ch. III, 56

[10] See, Uma Chakraborty, *Rewriting History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998, pp. 18-19, 26

[11] Pandita Ramabai has made a sharp critique of the Brahmanical texts including Manu in her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, Philadelphia, published by Pandita Ramabai, 1888

[12] *Manusmṛti*, Ch.III, 60
संतुष्टो भार्यया भर्ता भर्त्र भार्या तथैव च।
यस्मित्रेव कुले नित्यं कल्याणं तत्र वै ध्रुवम्।।

[13] *Manusmṛti IX, 28. Translation mine*
अपत्यं धर्मकार्याणि शुश्रूषा रतिरूत्तमा।
दाराधीनस्तथा स्वर्गः पितृणामात्मनश्च ह।।

[14] See, Kumkum Roy's essay, op.cit., p.21

[15] *Manusmṛti*, Ch. III, 57
शोचन्ति जामयो यत्र विनश्यत्याशु तत्कुलम्।
न शोचन्ति तु यत्रैता वर्धते तद्धि सर्वदा।।

[16] III, 59
तस्मादेताः सदा पूज्या भूषणाचछादनाशनैः।
भूतिकामैर्नरैर्नित्यं सत्कारेषूत्सवेशू च।।

[17] III, 60
संतुष्टो भार्यया भर्ता भार्या तथैव च।
सस्मिन्नेव कुले नित्यं कल्याणं तत्र वै धुवम्।।

[18] III, 61
यदि हि स्त्री न रोचेत पुमांसं न प्रमोदयेत्।
अप्रमोदात्पुनः पुंसः प्रजनं न प्रवर्तते।।

[19] Arvind Sharma's paper: 'How to read the *Manusmṛti*', submitted to the National Seminar on Contemporary Relevance of Smṛtis (Jan. 19-21, 2001), organised by Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Allahabad Museum, Allahabad.

Ontological Status of Women in the Dharmaśāstras: The Positive Perception and the Negative

SATI CHATTERJEE

"Ontology is the science of being or essence; it is the branch of metaphysics which relates to the being or essence of things', the Oxford English Dictionary tells us. 'The ontological status of women' thus would imply the essential, or the basic idea of the position of women in the scheme of things. And this should take us to the early phases of metaphysical speculation in India.

The Ṛg Veda, accepted as the earliest available text of Indian thought, reflects the anthropomorphic imagination of Man facing the elemental power of nature; yet, in the midst of polytheistic pluralism, it acknowledges a common source from which the diversities must have originated. The *nāsadiya sukta* (Mandala 10, Rk 129)[1] glance back to the state before Creation, before the emergence of light or shade or form, and attempts to visualize the process through which One Will manifested itself in many forms -including the male and the female.

The idea of One Will proliferating in the many eschews all inequality. All that evolves, assumes form, originates from the same source and is of equal status. The monistic perspective in the Upaniṣads at the next stage, we know, projects the idea of equality at the highest level of ontological speculation. The *śloka* in the *Katha Upaniṣad* (II, ii, 15)[2] so frequently chanted by Swami Vivekananda[3] tells us that in the beginning, before Creation began, there was nothing, neither light nor darkness, neither day nor night, no sky, no stars, no earth—nothing; only as the Will—crystallizing in the form of the golden cosmic egg, the *hiraṇyagharbham*—did

it split itself into all this. So back again to the One and common essence, or being, and hence, equal importance—or unimportance—of all that prevails on earth.

This perception had hardened into axioms by the time the Dharma Śāstras were composed; and the Creation myth is cited in the early Ślokas in the Manu Smṛti, accepted as the earliest Dharma Śāstra text. The sage Manu, approached by a group of seekers of the night path, begins to speak and, following the traditional way, Manu glance back to the pre-Creation state, the state of deep sleep in which nothing was to be discerned. Then he recollects the story of the One Will vesting itself into the *hiraṇyagharbham*, the golden egg, and splitting into forms and shapes many and varied (*Manu*, I, 13-39). The process of self-division includes gender differentiation: the One splits oneself into two halves, assumes male form with one half and female form with the other (I, 32). At the ontological level, then, we have gender-differentiation, but no gender discrimination. In terms of Vedantic monism discrimination is an untenable position, a logical absurdity.

Yet in the Dharma Śāstras, side by side with the liberal view and the recognition of equality, we hear a discriminatory tone in the worst authoritarian accent. How do we relate, how do we reconcile the two sides of the matter?

2

Of course, in the very beginning, we have to note two things, both related to the enormous time gap between one phase and another and our lack of knowledge of all that happened in between. The unaccounted lapse of centuries between the age of the Vedas and Upaniṣads and that of the Dharma Śāstras (a gap of 1300-1600 years in one scheme of speculation and of 2300-2400 years in another)[4] must have brought about basic changes in tone and accent. The Vedas and Upaniṣads present conceptual formulation whereas the Dharma Śāstras, a condensed form of the Dharma Sutras of earlier times[5], are concerned with the do's and the dont's the detailed codes of conduct in the daily life of the community. The impersonal absorption in abstruse ideas is replaced by the

practical concerns of the custodian of social propriety and the urgency behind the formulation of edicts required to ensure the stability of the social structure. Attitudinal shifts may have their explanations buried under the yet unexplored stages in the sociological development in the subcontinent.

Again, centuries intervene between the composition of a Dharma Śāstra and its compilation. Manu Smṛti was composed either between 200 BC & 200 AD, or between 400 & 320 BC, whereas the earliest compiler, Medhatithi of Kashmir, lived and worked in the ninth century AD. The gap here is of 700 years, or 1300 years. During the intervening time the suktas, or edicts, were all preserved in memory (*smṛti*) by those who preached and practised. Their voice, reflecting the social priorities of their own time, might have found its way into the text, even as the compiler, on his arrival at a still later point of time, might have added a touch or two, keeping in mind the special needs in his own context. Mādhavcārya, we know, had been asked to compile the Pāraśāra Smṛti by the Bukkā kings of Vijaynagar in the fourteenth century AD, specifically to resist moral decay in the contemporary society. Absence of recorded evidence and inadequate effort at archaeological research at different levels make it difficult to trace the footfalls of rolling centuries. No wonder we face wide discrepancies and contradictions hard to resolve.

Twenty Dharma Śāstras are mentioned in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (I, 4-5).[6] Pāraśāra Smṛti aligns them in a chronological order: the Manu Dharma Śāstra is for the Kṛta/Satya yuga, Gautama Śāstra for the Tretā, Śāstras by Saṃkha and Likhita for the Dwāpara and Pāraśāra Smṛti is for the Kali yuga (Ācāra Kānda, II, 24). In the absence of external evidence the present Paper accepts this sequence on internal evidence.

Manu Smṛti, we noted, assigns equal ontological status to Man and Woman in Ślokas recollecting the creation of the universe. Subsequent Chapters too include Ślokas that project a positive perception of the position of women. We might glance at some of these.

1) Ślokas 225-32 in Chapter II mention the three figures to be held in highest esteem in life and these are the Preceptor, the

Father and the Mother. The Preceptor represents Brahman, Father represents Brahmā, the Creator, and Mother represents the Earth.[7] Mother shares the same floor as the other two.

2) Ślokas 179-80 in Chapter IV advise relations of respect and affection with the Preceptor, the Performer of yajñas, the Priest, the father, mother, sister, daughter-in-law, son, wife, daughters and brothers. No gender discrimination here.

3) Śloka 55-59 in Chapther III enjoin respectful treatment of women in the family and pronounce the relatively familiar dictum that a house in which women are held in respect (are worshipped) delight the gods and it prospers, even as a family in which women languish in neglect is sure to be ruined.[8]

4) Particular attention may be drawn to a cluster of Ślokas (238-40, Ch II)[9] which offers the advice that a women like a gem should be taken from the lower strata. Permissiveness on this issue, within the enclosure of purist rigidity is a natural target of ridicule. The ślokas, however, do not belong exclusively to the context of women. The group of Ślokas tells us what is acceptable from whom, and we are told that learning or knowledge is to be respectfully received even from lower castes, valuable religious advice is to be accepted from a Candala—social outcast though he be—, a gem-like woman is to be accepted even from a family of lower status, good counsel should be accepted even from a little boy, *amṛta* is to be collected even from a mixture with poison. Woman, gems, knowledge, religious values, purity, good counsel and the numerous fine arts -all these, we are assured, any one may accept from any one. Taken in its true context, the Ślokas yield a positive perception—women are equated with the highest values.

But, there is the other perception. Woman is viewed as a negative force in the society, a liability. The most authoritarian attitude to women—most unacceptable today—is reflected in Ślokas mentioned below.

1) Ślokas 147—9, Chapter II, proclaim that women must never be given independence; in childhood they should be under the control of the father; in youth the husband and in old age the son should be their guardians.

Ślokas 2-3 in Chapter IX[10] reiterates the same principle, while the next Ślokas (4-11) firmly assign obligatory responsibilities to the male guardians—father, husband, son; they must take good care of the women.

Again, surprisingly enough, Śloka 12, the very next one,[11] makes a remarkable comment: women, temperamentally inclined to move astray, can be protected by no guardian, even as women truly virtuous need no protection from others. So, it all depends on the woman herself. And the sage admits this! This is the paradox of co-eval, co-existence of antithetical views.

2) Sexual vulnerability is a major nightmare in these Śāstras. Ślokas 213-5 in Chapter II declare that it is the nature of women to tempt men and to lure them away. Hence men must beware of women—even in the role of mothers, sisters, daughters Outrageous. However, the mistrust is on the menfolk; śloka 214 says that irrespective of status, whether erudite or illiterate, men would easily succumb to sexual impulse. Hence the caution—ruthless, merciless, distasteful.

How do we reconcile the image of this female figure condemned to lifelong sub-ordination to male authority and dreaded as a threat to moral integrity, with figures of Gārgī declaring Ṛṣi Yājñavalkya the best Brahmavid in the debate session arranged by Janaka, or with Maitreyī posing the question: what does one do with material wealth which does not lead one to immortality?

The angle of vision, of value perception, has obviously shifted from 'ontology' to pragmatic ethics in a society afflicted with deep sense of insecurity. One half views the other half as a danger potential, feels threatened by it and takes resources to repressive measures. How far had the society degenerated, and under what political conditions? When would we get an answer? After how long a wait?

Dharma Śāstras after Manu present a similar negative perception of woman and formulate prohibitive rules along the same lines. Yājñavalkya Smṛti repeats the Manu edict that women must never be independent (*Vīvāha Prakaraṇam*, 85), Vasistha lays down the same rule. Gautama Smṛti repeats it and adds that women must not excel their husband even in the performance of

religious rites, theirs is to trait behind (Ch 18). Viṣṇu Saṁhitā adds that service to the husband is the only religious rite for the wife, and she must not perform any other rite so long as the husband is alive (Ch. XXY, 15-16).

Like Manu Smṛti these Dharma Śāstra texts too reflect in flashes a positive perception of the female phenomenon. Rights of women are ungrudgingly recognized in certain spheres. Desertion of a blameless wife is a sin—all the Śāstras agree; and even in case of the desertion of a wife living with another man, or turned alcoholic, subsistence allowance has to be arranged. The system of male domination leaves pockets of liberal consideration:

a) Following Manu, these Śāstrakaras too mention the rights of a 'putrika'.[12]

b) Yājñavalkya Smṛti assigns to the mother share of the father's property equal with the sons (*Vyavahāra*, 115,123).

c) Daughters have a claim to part of the father's property.

d) Sons of unmarried daughters, known as '*kaneena putra*', too have property rights (*Vyavahāra*, 124,129).

Texts on man-woman relationship occasionally reflect remarkable understanding and wisdom. A few instances may be cited from the Yājñavalkya Saṁhitā.

a) The section on marriage, *Vivāha Prakaraṇam*, enumerates features of an ideal bride as well as of an ideal groom, and the Ślokas reflect open-eyed recognition of ground realities, not excluding sexual potency in the case of the groom (55 & the Mitāksharā commentary).

b) In a situation where no male guardians are available formally to give away the bride in marriage, the bride herself, the sage assures, can marry the chosen person (Ācāra Adhyāya, 63-64).

c) Formulating rules to be observed in order to maintain good marital relation Yājñavalkya says that physical union of the husband and wife is best when desired by the wife; a good husband should respect and protect the wife in every way (81).[13] This, in a starting flash, forbids what is mentioned as 'rape in wedlock' in Feminist parlance of our time.

d) These ancient texts formulate a principle of '*streedhana*', wealth to which women have an exclusive right. The husband can-

not use it except in cases of big crisis like famines etc. Sons do not inherit it. The line of inheritance extends to daughters and grand-daughters. Male chauvinists as they are, the ancient Śāstrakāras could, and did anticipate extrems in the exploitative working of the social mechanism and left a small corner of proprietary rights exclusively for women,—also providing for a female bonding thereby.

These profound insights and subtle observations that one can read between the more widely cited and practised sāstra *vacanas*, form a significant sub-text, as it were.

3

The Dharma Śāstra by Pāraśāra projects an interesting profile. Father of Vyāsa, Pāraśāra belongs to the age of the Mahābhārata, and, we noted, he is the Sāstrakar for the Kali yuga. A figure at the end of Dwapara yuga, the end of the Vedic era, Pāraśāra presents a remarkable sense of history. He perceives a shrinkage, a diminishing, in every sphere and knows that this must be accepted as a natural consequence of the passage of time. This historical perspectively lends a larger, more accommodative reach to his deliberations.

We may glance over some of the Pāraśāra *vacanas* on the issue of women.

1) He defines situations, five in number, in which a woman can remarry[14]: if the husband is lost, i.e., untraced, if the husband is dead, if he has taken *sanyasa* and left home, if he is impotent, if he is condemned, or convicted, for misdeeds, the women should take a second husband. We know, Isvar Chandra Vidysagar used this as supportive sanction for widow marriage in our ancient tradition and these are valid grounds for divorce in our times too.

2) Interesting to note that next couple of Ślokas (*Prāyasccitta Kānda*, IV, 29-30)[15] reiterate the earlier view that the wife who practises *Brachmacarya* after the death of her husband is sure to attain bliss, and she who opts to share death with the husband would attain bliss infinite. The sage is cautious not to move too far and too fast.

3) Yet the very next śloka (31)[16] startles us with the use of an unusual analogy. We are told that just as a snake-charmer forcibly drags a snake out of its hole, a virtuous women too elevates her husband by virtue of her own goodness and competently leads him to heaven. The initiative, the authority and the lead, unambiguously shifts from the husband to the wife.

4) Murder of an innocent wife is equated with *Brahmahatyā*, the most serious and the most heinous sin (*Pr.*K.XII, 33). A good warning to husband and in-laws in present times, times of bride burning, dowry death and other forms of violence against women.

5) Śloka 22 in Chapter 10 (*Pr.K*,)[17] assures us that no hard penance need ever be presecribed for women; the purity of women, like the purity of the earth, is inviolable.

6) In the next śloka Pāraśāra declares that the victim of rape, a woman forcibly subjected to sexual intercourse, bears no blame.

Pronouncements in other Śāstras, cited by Mādhawācārya as elucidatory comment, move even further and rule that a child born of rape is no social outcast. Such a child would be entitled to all the ten social rituals, *sanskāras*, including *upanayana*, scheduled for children of legitimate birth.

Where do we stand then, we, the women of today? How modern is our modernity? How liberal is our liberalism? Does our civilized democratic society extend to the luckless women tortured, raped, gang-raped, at any hour, at any place in our country anything like the protection assured in the Pāraśāra Śāstra?

Or, would a child born in the red light area of our civilised cities grow into a Ṛṣi Jāvāla?

Do we move ahead? Do we draw back?

4

In our study of the ancient Śāstras we hear discordant voices, notice divergent attitudes. This makes our task all the easier—the task of identifying the positive and the negative, or selecting and rejecting. This is the task, Ṛṣi Bankim Chandra assigned to the educated modern Indians more than a hundred years ago.

The past is both a proud privilege and a severe back drag. An ancient tradition stretching back into several millenia incorporates elements that enrich and elements that retard. The history of human civilization presents such spectacles in every culture. Plato and Aristotle, we know, supported slave system on the logic that those who think need leisure. Their thoughts remain the germinating point in the Western culture—all later systems of philosophy are considered but footnotes to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle -although the West struggled hard to free itself of the sin of enslaving human beings. T.S. Eliot, both a Traditionalist and a Modernist, tells us that the modern mind works not in isolation, not in the void, it is impregnated by the tradition; we carry the past with us and never truly leave it behind. This live continuity makes modernity rooted in the firm soil of an ancient tradition and that constitutes a special strength—strength native and natural to a culture. The search for 'roots' in the modern world is a search for kinship; research in comparative mythology is a search for common roots, common ancestral voices, shared human perception of all time every where on the planet. Must we sever out ties? Would that be gainful? Do we make true progress disowning the positive potential in our own tradition, and looking elsewhere for inspiration, support and leadership?

True, in our present state language is a barrier. We have forgotten our Sanskrit. But revival of interest is a matter of determined will. If we have that will, if we cultivate it, we can claim our heritage and benefit from the wisdom of our ancestors—the ancient wisdom born of several thousand years of human experience and human experimentation with life.

Our exposure to the Western history and culture, again, need not pose a hurdle, it need not make us averse to our own past. Instead it can, and it should, operate as a major advantage in favour of our return to our own source. We are, indeed, in a position to derive lessons from the modernist and post-modernist movements, including the Feminist Movement, in the West and try to build up our own movement orientated to our own priorities. Merciless elimination of all deadwood, all that is negative and

irrelevant today—as was recommended by Bankim Chandra long back—would lead to a discovery of our own heritage. Open-eyed, unbiased and critical study of the ancient texts should enable us to avoid the excess in orthodox conservatism on one hand, and in what passes as the 'progressive' stance on the other. Blind allegiance and ignorant rejection—both prove self-defeating. One leads to fundamentalism, the other encourages rootless drifting and benighted arrogance. A truly historical perspective is what we need. More than half a century after Independence, it is time we know our own position, felt sure of our identity. Neither the ancient Oriental tradition, nor our newly acquired acquaintance with the modern West need be a burden; we need not stagger under either load. With determined effort we can combine the two, we can develop a rhythm truly Indian and truly modern. With a sense of direction, we can move toward a better future—ensuring a better future for our women.

NOTES

[1] Also Mandala 3, Rk 55,

[2] न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं, नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुताअयमग्निः।
त्मेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्व, तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति।।१५।।

[3] Also *Br. A.*, I, iv, 3,

[4] The two sets of assumption are: Ṛg Veda was composed (a) between 1500 & 1400 BC, (b) in 400 BC; Manu Śāstra was composed (a) between 200 BC & 200 AD, (b) 400 & 320 BC.

[5] Scholars believe that lapse of time distanced the community from life in the Vedic age; Vedic Sanskrit also bad gone out of use. It become necessary to collect the basic principles in earlier texts and to present them in a condensed form in Sanskrit then in use. Thus were composed the Sutras; and further condensation in later times produced the Śāstras/Saṁhitās. The Dharma Śāstras are condensed forms of Dharma Sutras (See, P.V. Kane, *History of Dharma Śāstra*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Poona, 1972, Vol. I, p. 299). Bankimchandra gives an account of the stages in his *Pracar* articles (vide *Racanavali*, II, pp. 805-17).

[6] Manu, Atri, Viṣṇu, Harit, Yājñavalkya, Ushana, Angira, Yama, Apastamba, Sambarta, Katyāyana, Bṛhaspati, Pāraśāra, Vyasa, Samkha, Likhita, Daksha, Gautama, Satalapa, Vasistha.

[7] आचार्यो ब्रह्मणो मूर्तिः पिता मूर्तिः प्रजापते।
माता पृथिव्या मूर्तिस्तु भ्राता स्वो मेर्तिरात्मनः।।२२६।।
आचार्या वेदान्तोदितस्य ब्रह्मणः परमात्मनो मूर्तिः पिता हिरण्यमर्भस्य, माता च धारणात्पृथिवीमूर्ति, भ्राता च
स्वः सगर्भ क्षेत्रज्ञस्य। तस्मादेवतारूपा एता नावमन्तव्या।।२२६।।
यं मातापितरौ क्लों सहेते संभवे नृणाम्।
न तस्य निष्कृतिः शक्या कर्तु वर्षशतैरपि।।२२७।।
नृणामसपत्यानं संभवे गर्भाधने सति अनन्तरंयं क्लेश मातापितरो सहेते तस्य वर्षशतैरप्यनेकैरपि जन्मनिरानूण्यं
कर्तुमशक्यम्। मातुस्तावत्कृक्षौ धारणदुःखं, प्रसव ।।२२७।।
[8]यत्र नाग्रस्तु पूत्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्रफलाः कियाः।।५६।।
यत्र कुले पित्रदिभिः स्रियः पूज्यन्ते तत्र देवताः प्रसीदन्ति।यत्र पुनरेता न पूज्यन्ते तत्र देवताप्रसादाभावद्यागादिक्रियाः सर्वा निष्फला भवन्तीति निन्दार्थवादः ।।५६।।
शोचन्ति जामयो यत्रविनश्यत्याशु तत्कुलम।
न शोचन्ति तु यत्रैता वर्धते तद्धि सर्वदा।।५७।।
''जामिः स्वसृकुलस्त्रियोः'' दत्याभिधानिकाः (अमरेकोशे नानाथःश्लो १४२) यस्मिन् कुले भगिनीगृहपतिस्वंधनीयसत्रिहितसपिण्डस्त्रियश्च पन्तीदुहितृस्नुषाद्याः परितापादिना दुःखिन्यो भवन्ति तत्कुला शीध्रं निर्धर्नाभवति दैवराजादिना च पंडयते। यत्रैता न शोचन्ति तद्धनादिना नित्यं वृद्धिमेति। मेघातिथि– गोविन्दराजौ तु ''नवोढादुहितृस्नुषाद्या जामयः'' इत्याहतुः।।५७।।
[9] श्रद्धधानः शुभां विद्यामाददीतावरादपि।
अन्त्यादपि परं धर्म स्त्रीरत्नं दुष्कुलादपि।।२३८।।
विषादप्यमृतं ग्राह्मं बालादपि सुभाषितम्।
अमित्रादपि सद्धृत्तममेध्यादपि काञ्चनम्।।२३६।।
[10] अस्तवन्त्राः स्त्रियःकार्याः पुरुषैः स्वैर्दिवानिशम्।
विषयेषु च सज्जन्त्यः संस्थाप्या आत्मनो वशे।।२।।
पिता रक्षति कौमरि भर्ता रक्षातियौवने।
रक्षन्ति साविरे पुत्र न स्त्री स्वातन्त्रयमर्हति।।३।।
[11] अरक्षिता गृहे रुद्धाः पुरुषैराप्तकारिभिः।
आत्मानमात्मना यास्तु रक्षेयुस्ताः सुरक्षितः।।२।।
[12] A daughter formally acting as a son (Manu, IX, 127-33; 139-40).
[13]यथाकामी भवेछापि स्त्रीणां वदमनुस्मतव।
खदारनिरवश्चैव स्त्रियो रक्षया यनः स्मृताः।
[14] नष्टे मृते प्रवृजिते क्लीवे च पतिते पतौ।
पञ्चस्वापत्सु नारीणां पतिरन्धोविधीयते।।२८।।
[15] मृते भर्त्तरि या नारी ब्रह्माचर्य्यव्रते स्थिता।
सा मृता लभते स्वर्गयथा ते ब्रह्माचारिणः।।२६।।
तिस्त्रः कोव्योऽर्डकोटि च यानि रोमाणि मानुषे।
तात्वकालं वसेत् स्वर्गे भर्त्तारं याऽनुगच्छति।।३०।।

व्यालग्राहीयथा व्यालं बलादुडरते विलात्।
एवं स्त्री पतिमुच्च्य तनैव सह मोदते।।३१।।
[17] चातुव्रर्ण्यस्य नारीनां कृच्दं चान्द्रायणं स्मृतम्।
यथाभूमिस्तथा नारी तस्मात्तां न दु दुषयेत्।।२२।। इति

Spirituality as Panacea for Misplaced Feminism (God has no Gender)

MANJULA BORDIA

The Submission

It is my submission that the empowerment of women, like all forms of true empowerment, can only be achieved through spiritual awakening. The God has no gender, the soul has no sex and salvation is not partial to any one. So woman should aim at reality in her true nature as a spiritual being, whereupon she will become fearless and able to stand every threat to her honour and dignity.

The Status

More than five decades ago when we made that famous "*tryst with destiny*" the better half of the Indian population thought and were rather convinced that they have put their best foot forward. The wise men and women who wrote the constitution were thoughtful. Women were given equal rights and privileges in every sphere of life. They just cannot be faulted on a single count. But in the everyday life this equality in law was hardly implemented and the women remained as they were—unimportant and exploited.

After a lapse of few decades a lot of retrospection was initiated by the law-makers, spiritual leaders, politicians, social theorists, activists and innumerable women's groups on the abysmally poor condition of women, the outcome of this intensive deliberation was baffling; no two groups could agree on a single point. Various crutches were considered to put a staggerung womanhood on her firm feet in the world. It was felt that economic independence, freedom to make choices, abrasive modernism, forays into new

areas like space aviation etc., had not made a lasting impact; and that, what is worse, a feminism borrowed from the West was not only costly and merely cosmetic, but a threat to our spiritual values that we have not yet ceased to cherish.

The Experience—England/America

In 1971 Germaine Greer wrote *The Female Eunuch* which raised an intellectual storm in the Western world. She argued that women had to change their set way of thinking about themselves; and that their bodily interests needed a fairer sanction from their moral sense. She emphasized that feminism will have to fight not only wrong images it created of the value of the female form. The movement initiated by Greer has certainly been successful, if only in a measure. In quite a few ways, women live better today. They can walk out of unhappy marriages more easily now, and no one can compel them to have children any more. But, three dacades later, the same Germaine Greer came out with another book *The Whole Woman* where she says: "As more and more women work outside the home, as more and more walk out of the oppressive marriages, we might expect the female malaise to diminish … [but] the evidence seems to be, it is getting worse". Greer identifies the forces that explain for this deviation of the liberating women. She realizes that it is again the renewed and malevolent measures of patriarchy which have done the trick, and which she highlight in *The Whole Women.* Today multinational corporations are not only selling beauty products, but also telling women that their bodily appearance admits of improvement, and that they can hide the fleshly blemishes with ingenious cosmetic products.

The second force which has diminished the goal of the feminist movement is that of the liberation movement, which has incidentally come from a section of the feminists themselves who have exchanged the goal of liberation for equality. The trend in feminism over the past few years, spearheaded by Natasha Walter's new feminism, has been to say that relationships and sexuality are not the issues of great importance to feminists now. All that matters is equal pay, equal opportunities and good child care. Ger-

maine Greer and the feminists of the older school decry this as simple-minded equality with men which is diluting the meaning of the movement.

The experience—India

The shadow of Western feminism loomed large over the Indian subcontinent. By seventies a formidable middle class had emerged on the national scene whose women were educated and acutely conscious of the plight of their less privileged sisters. The educated women of independent India did not fare that badly compared to their counterparts in the West. Universal suffrage, equal pay for equal work, maternity benefits were all guaranteed to them in the constitution without wars as the women in Europe and America waged in the later part of nineteenth and the early part of twentieth century. Nor were they compelled to act and behave as glamour dolls, getting inane secretarial and receptionists jobs and being discriminated against for serious decisive work.

In spite of these constitutional guarantees, condition of women remained as oppressive as ever. The oppression is manifested in conditions like widespread malnutrition, poor shelters, ill health, degrading labour, sex exploitation, caste repression, communal violence and gross mistreatment at home.

When the Indian women woke up to the feminist storm raised by the Western sisters they committed the grave folly of following those glamorous leaders without giving enough thought to its relevance to their own culture and the problems which are of a very different nature.

The substance

The ball which Raja Rammohan Roy set rolling for women's welfare is still in motion with innumerable reformers and activists after it. But in spite of concerted measures to stall child marriages, sustained measures to spread literacy among women, declaring dowry illegal, mother and child care drives, legislation against misbehaviour at work place, stringent punishment for dowry

deaths and harassment at home, the deprived Indian womanhood still stares at us. So what is the alternative?

As I had stated in my opening paragraph the alternative to the grave situation is to seek help and guidance from our own cultural heritage which is embedded on the strong bedrock of spirituality. We have witnessed various spiritual revolutions to restore society back to its moral grounds. The Jain and Buddhist philosophers attempted it against the oppression of Brahaminism. Kabir and Nanak tried to free religion from the rituals and superstitions. In the present times a reform movement, headed by *swadhayay* Group of Pandurang Shastri Atawale in the coastal regions of Gujarat and Saurashtra against social evil, has also done good work. These are some examples to show that, in India, if any power can change the hearts of men and women in general, it is only a spiritual revival by well-meaning spiritual leaders. I submit that we should start thinking in this direction with concentration, commitment and a strong will. Our women have to realize that they will get empowerment by the spiritual awakening only as it is the spirituality that strengthens the inner self. The constitutitonal provisions are external to the self and fail to give inner strength or real empowerment.

The Vedas and Upaniṣads clearly state that, on the spritual level, men and women are alike; or that, in their essential being, they all embody Truth, Pure Consciousness, and Bliss. The difference, we are told, is only external, or that of the body which is simply a corporeal substance, a product of Maya. As soon as women become aware of this spiritual aspect of their being, and regulate their lives accordingly, they will become empowered automatically. Activity is the essence of a conscious substance. It does not require an external force to bestir it. So if women (like men) are also conscious beings, why should they need an external power to uplift or guide them? They have their own luminous, inner spiritual strength to guide them. The day they come to realize this, they will be set on the path of emancipation from all the shackles of the society and its oppressive traditions. No feudal power could hold Meera back once she realized her true self:

''मेरा कोई नही रोकन हार, मगन मीरा चली''

And if we, as the community of women, desire this strengthening of inner self through spiritual awakening, we have a good many scriptures and spiritual leaders in our own culture to show us the way. The main source of the message of the intrinsic, invincible strength of womanhood is *Sri Ramkarishna Paramhansa*, who paid the highest honour to women in general and whom he regarded as the manifestation of Divine Mother. He even visualized the 'Godhead', "in the form of motherhood". All his teachings are in tune with his personal conduct; both alike are an open book for the world to read and to be guided by. He exhorted women to find and build up their inner strength by becoming aware of their spiritual self.

With the example of the Holy Mother (मां शारदा) a new era dominated by motherhood has been ushered in. She demonstrated through her own life the power and love of the divine motherhood in a human body. Motherhood is women's unparallelled strength. On the strength of her motherhood and her power of caring woman is invincible. She is (in principle) infallible because earning may fail but selfless love never fails. Through her power of love Ma Sarda emerged as the mother of all saints and sinners, high and low, poor and rich. It is not a merely verbal claim when she says: मैं अमजद की भी मां हूँ, शरद की भी मां हूँ, छोटे की भी मां हूँ, बड़े की भी मां हूँ।

Swami Vivekananda was the most illustrious disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He too preached in the same vein as his guru, but with a distinct contemporary voice so as to appeal to the intellectual segment. He travelled the length and breadth of the country exhorting his followers to dispel our ignorance of the real potential of women. To women he will ever remain a powerful guardian of their rights and interests. He was of the firm belief that only through concerted efforts towards the upliftment of women, the nation could again make strides towards spiritual and material progress.

Paramhansa laid special emphasis on women's education with a positive stress on its spiritual side. He was also incisive

in his advocacy of equal opportunities for women in education, at par with men, going to the extent of asserting that women may become ascetics for pursuing greater spiritual goals. He was the first monk in recorded history to affirm and defend, without reservation, the rights and liberties of women, and to try to spiritually uplift women in order to manifest the *Brahmana* within them. He established the Sardamath (for women) parallel to Ram Krishna Math (for men) so as to give women equal spiritual rights like men. He was of the firm conviction that our duty is only to educate them, and to leave them alone thereafter to solve their own problems. "Who are you to solve women's problem? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems."

"By their spiritual awakening if even one amongst the women became a knower of *Brahman*, then by the radiance of her personality thousands of women would be inspired and awakened to the truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensue". Later, he said to his disciples "in the highest reality of *Parbrahma* there is no distinction of sex. We notice this only on relative plane. And the more the mind becomes introspective, the more that idea of differences vanishes. Ultimately, when the mind is wholly merged in the homogenous and undifferentiated Brahman such ideas that this is a man or that is a woman do not remain at all."

We have seen this actually in the life of Sri Rama Krishna. Therefore I make bold to say that, though outwardly there is a difference between men and women, in their real nature there is none. If a man can be a knower of Brahma, why cannot a woman attain the same? All that is required is to establish *maths* to give them spiritual rights back which were withdrawn from them by Smṛtis which bound them with oppressive rules. The men have turned women into manufacturing machines. If you do not raise the lot of women, who are the living embodiment of the divine mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise. So, to empower women, Swamiji established "*Sarda Math*" and gave

them equal spiritual rights which had been withdrawn from them in orthodox Hinduism.

Vinoba Bhave took Swami Vivekananda's challenge to its logical conclusion by suggesting that the need of the hour was for women to emerge as a thinking, creative force in a garb of a Sankaracharya. On the basis of his unflattering faith in the underlying female strength, he established an institution (at Pawnar) called *Brahmavadini Ashram* to empower women to cultivate inner spiritual strength, attain liberation in woman form and to rise up to the status of *Brahmvadini.* This right was not given to women in Hinduism. He inspired *mumukshu* women to achieve this inner emancipation from their own power and feminine sensitivity.

Acharya Bhave had an entirely unique hypothesis to propogate in this regard. He endorsed the need to strengthen the spiritual powers of women for a sustained struggle to root out the evils besetting their lives. Apart from legislative measures, vociferous reform movements and judicial support, women need the fountainhead of an everflowing spiritual strength to make a difference to their lives and to what they merely endure. Vinoba Bhave hold that women wrongly look to the scriptures written by men—and with a clear underlined masculine slant—for spiritual guidance. The perception of learned men might be sympathetic to the female position but a complete identification with their dilemma is missing. To fill this void some of the ascetic women have to meditate, think, analyze, discuss and evolve a set of scriptures to infuse the faltering womanhood with a refreshing and vibrant strength. A woman Shankaracharya with an indepth learning, a sympathetic perception and an unprejudiced alignment with the weaker half of the humanity could deliver the goods. A mere spiritual enlightenment and an unhindered ascetic existence of Meera and Mukta won't do. Nothing short of an innovative set of scriptures conceived and created by women Brahmavadinies will change their plight. Before concluding I would like to stress that women need a woman Shankaracharya, a woman Vivekananda, a woman Gandhi and a woman Vinoba Bhave to empower them.

The First Step

When I was being raised by my parents they did not educate me in the concept of renunciation as practised by Sri Rama Krishna, nor in that of an all-encompassing motherly love as it worked in the life of Ma Sarda. The path of enlightenment through knowledge and education as shown by Vivekananda was also not shown to me. But my parents did emphasize the irresistible power of spirituality as it works through truth, love, peace, righteousness and non-violence—virtues and principles that do not show any gender bias. My parents left it to me whether I wished to have a mere intellectual knowledge of God or a direct experience of God; but they sure made it clear that God has no gender. And that was my first step towards empowerment, and my first insight into an infallible way to empower women in general.

Tradition and Modernity as Determinants of Women's Roles and Status: Romance and Reality

PUSHPA TIWARI

In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the role played by tradition and modernity in determining the roles and status of women. To understand the many worlds of women, particularly, her struggle with tradition on the one hand and on the other her gradual disenchantment with modernity based on the contrasts in her familial and societal roles in the modern world, it becomes necessary to look afresh at both tradition and modernity, keeping in mind the historical and cultural background to put feminism into proper perspective.

'Tradition' and 'Modernity' both are constructs of sociological studies which have been widely used to understand/ explain society/ culture. Terms like 'order', 'system' and 'Structure' have been used to analyze the structural or static and functional or dynamic aspects of society. Society and culture are interrelated in the sense that culture is a complex whole that includes in it knowledge, art, technology, law, beliefs, customs, practices, traditions, and other abilities acquired by man as a member of society. The impact of concepts related to biological/natural sciences on sociological studies resulted in the classification of culture under two categories: (1) objective and concrete category or physical or material category having three aspects (a) biological (b) ecological (c) social; (2) abstract, non-physical and non-material category which includes ideas, knowledge, tradition, belief, customs and value system. Change, development, and functions of culture are explained on the models of theories known as evolutionist,

functionalist, and expansionist. This categorization of culture into physical and non-physical categories suggests that tradition also has two levels of reference i.e. physical and non-physical. In this sense tradition becomes the integral and essential part of any society irrespective of its time frame i.e. ancient, medieval or modern or in other words, tradition in the sense of concrete and abstract social behaviour is as much an integral part of modern society as it was in medieval and ancient times.

But the theme of this paper 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity' suggests or, at least, what I think it to suggest is that tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive. The word tradition in English means the body of customs, thought, practices belonging to a particular country, people, family or institution (physical structures of society/culture) which has been handed down from generation to generation without much change over a relatively long period of time. Here the sense of continuity and changelessness is implied. Traditionalism also stands for a system of philosophy in which all knowledge is thought to originate in divine revelation and to be perpetuated by tradition i.e. transmission of the same from generation to generation. It is in this sense that scholars generally use the term tradition in sociological studies. Modernity i.e. the state of being modern, then, logically becomes the opposite of tradition, and tradition and modernity taken together constitute a set of binary opposites like asura/deva, vidya/avidya etc. Literal meaning of modern in contemporary or a recent/present times. In historical sense it means belonging or relating to the period in history from the end of the Middle Ages to the present. The modern period in history is related to industrial revolution, which brought forth socio-economic changes on unprecedented scale. It was accompanied by new philosophical and ideational discourses as well as political revolutions. In Asian countries, the modern period is associated with imperialistic colonialism and their struggle against it. Sociologists and historians are of the view that "Westernization" with its allied forces like industrialization, urbanization, new ideas and mode of life in Asian context is a colonial legacy which is responsible for socio-political changes. Here, modernity of modernism become synonymous with West-

ernization which in turn has been defined by sociologists in terms of change in Indian society. It is an accepted fact that the Western impact has brought about "a new great tradition of modernization" which is manifested in present day politics, law, education, technology, dress, food etc. Their manifestation in present form is defined as "cultural modernization". My intention of going into this discussion is only to suggest that 'Modernity' is equated with 'Westernization' which in turn is equated with change, evolution, development and progress that is understood chiefly in terms of industrialization and economic prosperity—all other dimensions merely being corollaries. It is in this sense that the modern world has been divided into two broad categories of nations: (1) developed (2) developing.

Sociologists speak about social dynamics and social statics inherent in every society as a means of social change and social continuity and stability. These processes of change and control go on simultaneously in society. Had it not been the case there would have been no change perceptible even in those institutions that by nature are defined as static like Jati and Varna. But when we treat tradition and modernity as a set of binary opposites standing for continuity and change respectively then it distorts the historical perspective. This is more relevant in context of 'feminism' which in restricted sense means a doctrine or movement that advocates equal rights for woman and broadly speaking means any effort or exercise which tries to interpret/study/correct/ analyze and focus on the problems, status and role of women in a given society. The subjection/subordination of women is almost always associated with tradition because of its association with stagnation and continuity. But this nation has paved the way for simple generalization of the definition of tradition which ignores the voice of dissent and spirit of change (Yugadharma) very much inherent in any tradition which are responsible for the changing contours of tradition itself, otherwise the roles and status of women in any given tradition would have remained the same throughout the course of its development. Historically Vedic women and her medieval counterparts are poles apart, though both carry the legacies of tradition. Therefore when we talk about tradition vis-a-vis femi-

nism we have to be cautious and historically aware to avoid any simplistic one-sided interpretation. We cannot equate tradition only with stagnation because there always was a modern phase in every tradition gradually changing the form and content of a given culture through its voice of dissent. This is not a mere speculation rather a historical fact stated in various texts. For example in Malvikagnirnitram Kalidasa gives expression to this idea through Sutradhara (stage director) in the following way:

These lines clearly suggest the historical process of adjustment within the tradition, which were necessary to accommodate the new/modern trends. These adjustments were made so as to avoid the tension and confrontation between established tradition and new emerging ideology. Transition and transformation seems to be so subtle and apparently smooth that one almost tends to ignore them as symptoms of change. Therefore, when we say that literature is a mirror of society we ignore the voice of dissent and spirit of change through generalization. It is true that literature mirrors the physical/non-physical content of society, but do we try to isolate that text or person/author who first voices something radically new and different which militates against the prevailing trends/traits/traditions? When Tulsidas justifies himself/his writings to be as 'svantah sukhaya' he does not mean that he is writing merely to please himself rather to please his voice of dissent which comes out in the form of Bhakti ideology and style as opposed to prevailing erotic nature of literature i.e. Ritikavya. Thus, if we take tradition, modernity and feminism as three different categories being mutually exclusive, then not only we distort the perception but also limit the scope of any fruitful discussion and debate. They are not only linguistic constructs but belong to a realm of historical realities. Social change is a multifactorial process that is initiated and governed by several interrelated and complex causes and sub-causes. Concept of change is viewed as an upward movement in a straight line. This linear perception of change and time is synonymous of progress and development and responsible for the generalization of the definitions of tradition and modernity. Modernity has its own traditions and belief whereas history tells us that every tradition has experienced the phases of modernity

at any two different points of time in the course of its evolution. Tradition and modernity both overlap and cross each other making it difficult to map the area in between. Only historically it is possible to map the area in context of anything perceived in linear movement.

Tradition and modernity both have determined the status and role of women through their definition of femininity or gender roles and identities. How they differ from each other, how they have contributed to the many worlds of women are some of the areas of enquiry that have to be properly explored to put feminism into proper perspective, and also to rescue it from numerous myths perpetuated by both tradition and modernity. I will be speaking not as a scholar or a 'feminist' but as a female member of a society which has the privilege of being one of the few representatives of a living tradition and culture still going through the trails and tribulations of change and modernity. My claim is not to that of an insider's experiences but to be better equipped to narrate the experiences of continuity and change in so far as they confront me in my daily life as a female human being forcing me to see the romance and reality of both tradition and modernity. To be more specific, the first thing that I perceive is the fact that women are not just female human beings. Like men their (women's) identities are entwined with other social identities such as religion, caste, class and ethnicity. If discriminatory social practices and caste are the legacies of tradition which a modern Indian woman has to carry perforce, then the whole meaning of "Modernity and Feminism" in India acquires somewhat different dimension. What is the relevance of modernity and its related forces—education, industrialization, economic growth, democracy etc., if it is unable to break the chains of bondage and itself becomes the tool of perpetuating that bondage in different ways—Consumerist culture and its impact on dowry and bride-burning cases, female foeticide and infanticide with the aid of modern technology to cite some of its forms of torture. All these evils are prevalent in urban educated and hence modern classes more than in rural groups. To see them merely as the continuity of tradition and evils of patriarchy makes no sense when education and economic independence of

the women (both victims/and agency of victimization) are taken into account. When the feminism started its journey, it set gender equity/equality as its aim and acquiring socio-political powers in the form of equal opportunities to be educated and to be economically independent as its tools and methods to achieve that. Sociologists and feminist scholars have suggested types of "life options" that affect the freedom and measure the relative status of women and men in all known societies. They are political expression, work and mobility, family formation, duration and size, education, health and sexual control, freedom of movement, de facto share of household power and cultural expression.[1]

These are some common standards by which women's status can be measured across societies despite vast differences in government, economy and family. It is only recently that feminist thinkers have awakened to the fact that for any meaningful impact of feminism on society they have to have the multiperspectival vision of female world to deal with the problems of females belonging to different castes, class and ethnic groups which fractures their already gendered identity and comes in the way of mass female activism to fight sexism and oppression. For example in defining the roles and status of women in a given society is it more relevant to cite the freedom and achievements of an elite woman or the conditions that the common woman must endure? Does one mark progress for women by the percentage of women who have been co-opted to high level management and /or political leadership roles or by the quality of life available to the common woman? There is no doubt that upper and middle class women play a critical role as pioneers to break down barriers. Nevertheless it does not seem representative of the overall situation within a society to concentrate exclusively on the problems and achievements of elite women as they struggle to gain greater equality with men. "The disparities in the life—style among women in the same society raise the fundamental need of reducing inequalities among women so that all women can benefit from new opportunities. Otherwise efforts to improve the status of women will ameliorate the conditions of only a small group".[2] This has already happened in

Indian society where the benefits of modernization have accrued disproportionately to the elite at the expense of the masses.

It is in this background that I wish to raise the question of relevance of many symbols and images related to modernity. In the very beginning I have suggested that as a construct modernity also tries to determine the role and status of a woman by imposing certain beliefs and pattern. Modernity has emphasized more upon structural changes than attitudinal ones. At structural level it has created some scope and avenues of job opportunities and other options. At attitudinal level modernity has failed miserably as it never focused to address the problems of gender roles and gender identities as value system or the system of prestige and power with attached values. Modernity has perpetuated the myth that a formally educated and working woman is a modern woman as opposed to an un-educated woman or a simple housewife because she participates in socio-economic and socio-political matters more actively and positively. This value system undermines the roles of non-working women. 'Woman of substance' becomes the definition of a modern woman where substance is purposely left vague and undefined but intimately associated with some form of consumerism and market forces. Education, economic freedom, and political power are important tools to address the problem of gender asymmetry and discrimination. There is no doubt in it. But what happens when they fail to break the mind-set responsible for gender discrimination? An educated woman working as a professional, for example, is considered epitome of modernity. Structurally, the change signifies liberation and progress. But if statistical data is to be believed then it becomes clear that these outward appearances of progress are nothing but the adaptations of old mind set to new circumstances. Let me explain it with an example. 'A' is an educated working woman. She marries and brings with her whatever dowry was settled between the two respective families. She conceives. Goes to an ultrasonologist willingly or unwillingly without any hue and cry. She aborts the female foetus with the help of another liberated modern woman—a practicing gynecologist who is well aware of the intention of the

would be mother and consequences of her act. It is also interesting to know that the desire to have a son particularly as a first born child as much exists in developed countries like the USA as in Asian and African countries.[3] In the Indian context 'A' is a symbol of modernity perpetuating the myth of a liberated woman or woman of substance. Here modernity becomes a defining factor of women's status and role as a working woman or working mother, forcing her to share the burden of dual responsibilities in a system where on the one hand neither her or her husband's attitudes have changed much regarding gender discrimination and on the other the concept of equality translated into equal rules and regulations deprives her of the privileges which even tradition grants her.

Modernity as an ideology fails to address the problem of gender identities deeply rooted in male female psyche and substitutes this by the false notion of equality only in terms of socio-economic and socio-political powers gained through outward structural changes. Feminist scholars, thinkers and activists fail to distinguish and identify these deep rooted biases entrenched in male female psyche and fall in the trap of either seeing them only as the evils of patriarchy or blaming the inherent shortcomings of the structural changes and demanding more protective laws. We cannot deny the fact that women now are more aware and conscious about their roles and status vis-a-vis men, but despite their modernity they still follow gender based discriminatory practises. Feminism, at least, in context of those social classes which has acquired modernity in the form of education, economic independence, political rights, awareness, is well past the stage to blame patriarchy and male dominance for every evil confronting them. In context of such affluent and modern classes, now is the proper time to ask some fundamental questions regarding the role of women themselves in the perpetuation of gender asymmetry. This question has already been discussed by various feminist scholars and sociologists.[4] According to them 'female patriarchs' are powerful tools of patriarchy to maintain the social order who by internalising the voices of men behave like patriarchs themselves.

The fact that women appropriate the roles of men does not necessarily signal a reversal of the hierarchy or power base. It merely

reflects women's participation in the societal status quo. But who are these female patriarchs? If they are the matriarchs of a joint family, or matriarchs of a family of a rural background—uneducated and economically dependent, then, the argument holds ground and provides a glimpse of female psyche.

But the dilemma is how to define an educated working woman of urban upper/middle class family merely as 'female patriarch' perpetuating gender discrimination despite her modernity. If traditional patriarchy's sins are legion then failings of modernity are no less. What is the meaning and relevance of modernity and its allied forces—education and economic independence, if, female has to behave and act like a 'female patriarch' the way a traditional woman does? The centrality of family[5] and religion in Indian society is often held responsible for this female psyche despite modernity. If it is so, then what is the alternative provided by modernity? If the direction in which feminism is moving in developed societies like the USA where the most recent census figures suggest that more than half of births recorded were out of wedlock, is indicative of the trends to come in India and other developing countries through modernity, then, it becomes more important to analyze the role played by the centrality of family or lack of it in modern world in determining the role and status of women. Allahabad High Court is proving to be a trend setter in gender sensitive decisions. A ruling given in May 2001 by this Court stating that it is perfectly legal for a man and woman to live together without marriage has evoked mixed response as it may have direct bearing on the role and status of family in Indian society which is still passing through the pains of change brought by globalization and information technology. This judgement has been welcomed by many feminist thinkers and scholars not just as part of a continuing trend in judicial activism, but also as a major gain for a woman's right—to choose her partner, her lifestyle and her right over her body. But there are some scholars and thinkers and amazingly, some youngsters who are heavily against the ruling. Their argument is that Indian society has not attained that kind of maturity where one can look upon this court judgement as a bid to restore equity in gender relation. Chances rather are that

it will pave the way for irresponsible freedom. In other words it will be treated as a license for sexual freedom. The statistical data from western countries proves that women and children always remain at the receiving end even in this so-called system of live-in arrangement, unless they are legally recognized for the purposes of maintenance and inheritance as in Scandinavian countries. In the USA women are more liberated than their Asian counterparts. Family and marriage as Social institutions have undergone lots of change and transformation in developed countries. But has the status of women increased because of it? Are they free from the stereotyped mind set? Various reports and studies show that violence against women in the USA is staggering. Incidents of wife beating/battering, sexual assaults and rape have been constantly rising in American society. It suggests that women's formal economic rights do not necessarily mean equality vis-a-vis men unless discriminatory value-structure/ mindset are replaced by attitudinal changes. Another question arises that if family has not to be the central point of society, then what is the need of liberation and modernity? To undermine the value of family to liberate women is like throwing the baby along with the bath water. My point is only to suggest that women themselves have to reinvent the cause and meaning of feminism by defining the term equality. The world of females is not a monolithic homogenous structure. No single theory, ideology, or practice is powerful enough to address the problems of many worlds of women. There are so many reports which suggest that modern pattern of liberating a woman in general and equality in particular is based on the model of male pattern of achievements which keep in mind the realities of urban educated class only. It is not surprising that rural woman is unable to identify herself with the spirit of feminism. In a hierarchical set up if 'A' is superior to 'B' then to become equal 'B' has to move upward. This model is harmful in the sense that it still maintains the superiority of 'A' than 'B' by way of making it the symbol of higher status. True equality pre-supposes the concept of interchangeability. Modernity and feminism have failed to upgrade traditional women's jobs or encourage men to enter them. Modernity has created the symbol of a liberated woman on

her career's identity i.e. on her economic worth only which has harmed her already fractured identity based on gender, caste and class by treating women as 'men in petticoats'[6] a term used in nineteenth century, debate on women's equality in context of John Stuart Mill.

Modernity through its structural changes and feminism through its focused multiperspectival vision should address not only the male-female divide but also or more the divide among females as wife/mother and daughter/sister syndrome in the Indian context. The hundred million 'missing women' of India, as Amartya Sen has termed them go missing as daughters and sisters not as widows or wives. When we talk about women empowerment then we forget this divide among females where wife/mother enjoys higher value than daughter/sister. There is a need of analyzing gender roles and identities in context of this prestige and power system that assigns different values to different roles within same gender. Prestige and dominance are operative and intertwined in all cultures. There are both negative and positive values attached to gender roles and identities, but these values change in different contexts. Comparing the value of a daughter with that of wife/mother in the systems of prestige and power, one can draw the conclusion that gender values are fluid and the ascription of positive or negative values such as daughter being a '*Paraya Dhana*' therefore a burden and the same gender in the form of a wife/mother treated as '*Grahalaksmi*' is mainly responsible for gender discrimination and asymmetry. It should also be kept in mind that there is no single female status in any culture, more so, in Indian society where women are ranked not only according to their caste but also according to their sexual maturity, reproductive capacity and marital status. Foeticide and infanticide are not sanctioned either by religion, tradition or laws encoded in various texts. Bride burning because of dowry is not sanctioned by tradition. They are social practices committed in this system of prestige and power where values shift according to various contexts. The dichotomy of a modern Indian woman finds expression in a situation where an educated working mother rejects her unborn daughter through abortion while asking for reservation in Parliament/Government

for herself. A feminism and modernity favouring adult women over unborn daughters in the face of their dwindling demography at birth is a contradiction in terms. In modern India the primary crime against women begins in the womb itself. Any agenda of empowerment of women must, therefore, logically begin with the girl child and not with her mother. We cannot simply conclude that because males are more valued than females in Indian society therefore men dominate women or that women are totally disempowered within that culture. Power itself has various forms and in different contexts it assumes different meaning. This is true in context of female power also, which has various dimensions. The power of 'female patriarch' or wife/mother over daughter/sister is one of them that subverts and dilutes the feminist discourse despite modernity. The dichotomy of female power expressed in mother/wife and daughter/sister syndrome is also responsible for perpetuating gender discriminatory practices where a mother though economically liberated not only treats her daughter as an outsider and burden but also excludes her from inheriting property from her side preferring son/daughter-in-law over her daughter despite modern laws of equality and her participation in it as wife and mother. Female activists and forums never confront the parents of a burned bride who wait till she is murdered and only after her death they demand punishment. More than in-laws parents are responsible for bride burning by marrying their daughters to such monsters only to gain the punya of 'Kanyadana' and getting rid of 'Parayadhana'. I have never come across any report of women forums opposing these rituals that are powerful tools of perpetuating gender discrimination. Likewise the generalistic notion of male dominance being responsible for every social practice is also not correct. While men can have greater prestige or higher status than women in the traditional view, this does not necessarily mean that men dominate women or that women have no prestige, value or power ascribed to them. There is a strong need to treat 'home' as the site of empowerment. Logically, the real home is the one where one is born. I find it very surprising why feminist thinkers and scholars do not demand the empowerment of girl child/woman

in her parental house, while demanding more protective laws for married woman vis-a-vis in-laws? Another point that emerges for consideration is what do one means by 'society' and 'patriarchy'? When we search the root cause of gender discrimination in social practices and customs—then do we mean a society where men alone framed all these customs? No proper research has been carried out so far which tries to analyse the role played by women themselves in gender discrimination and asymmetry by being the consenting party to the evil practices of patriarchy on the one hand and on the other by inventing various beliefs and practices in the form of rituals for which there is no textual/cannonical evidence. These rituals are treated as tools of women empowerment within patriarchy and modern researches tend to glorify them as tools of empowerment, but it becomes necessary then to analyze these rituals as tools of gender asymmetry practiced by women themselves. Often patriarchy is described as a crime or sin. How far woman themselves were responsible for this sin? It demands sociological and historical interpretations otherwise one-sided meaning of patriarchy will distort the whole perspective.

Several feminist scholars have deconstructed religious texts, myths and other sources of traditional beliefs to justify feminism by juxtaposing it with traditional patriarchal society. Present day political parties use the term 'Manuvadi' in a derogatory sense. From Ṛigveda to Manu every text has been analyzed to show that females were subservient to men. Their biological inferiority and the male's desire to control her has been held responsible for this subjugation. Linguistic discourses[7] have another dimension, which reveal male-dominance. Academically, they enrich feminism. They have psychological relevance as well. But in a patriarchal system and gendered language 'generic man' (Purusa) is archetype of ultimate reality. This gendered dimension and dynamics of culture does not necessarily mean the domination of one over the other in every context. Contextualization of male-female divide is an essential part of understanding them in their proper perspective. In context of power as Ksatriya Varna was more valued than Brahmin Varna whose value lies more in con-

text of prestige likewise dimensions of male-female relationship and values of gender roles and status change depending on their contexts.

Therefore when we isolate and contrast the 'female' from the generic 'man' (Purusa) in order to understand the gendered dimensions of culture, we have to pay equal attention to separate the 'male' from the generic 'Man' or 'Purusa'. As the cult of Devi or Kali/Durga does not necessarily mean women empowerment because they give expression to contextual female power rather than signify the altered role of women, in the same way, the interpretation of *Vac* as grammatically and semantically gendered[8] does not necessarily convey the ideology of brahmanical male elite group, to control women, by keeping them pure and alienated from the others, as has been construed by some Indologists, writing on gender issue. Primates and many other animals believe and practice patriarchy though neither they are Brahmans nor do they speak Sanskrit. Deconstruction has its own limitations. Religious texts and Smritis were not written to advocate patriarchy or male—dominance as opposed to feminism. They merely reflect the conditions of their time and it is not their fault that modern concepts or contexts were unknown to them. Manu speaks about the prestige and power of women of his time that varies in different contexts. In the realm of political and economic powers their share was nil according to the dictate of his time. He gives us rules regarding division of property and inheritance, and while doing so, comments on the position of daughter, wife and mother. It is interesting to note how Manu advocates about the equality of daughter by expressing his personal views that there is no difference between a son and daughter:

यथैवात्मा तथा पुत्रः पुत्रेण दूहिता समा।
त्स्यात्पनि तिष्ठन्त्यां कथमन्यो धनं हरेत् ।। 9-130

while condemning Manu for denying freedom to women by taking his statement out of context, one never gives him due credit for his personal opinions which he expresses while commenting on contemporary social practices. One should try to isolate these personal opinions that mainly represent him as an individual while study-

ing Manusmṛti. Understanding the what and why of this, requires the understanding of his time, where education, liberation and job were not the domains of women. (This is true in context of an elite family only because Arthsāstra and other sources tell us about women employed in different jobs.) When he speaks in context of the system of prestige highest position is given to women for their roles as mother and wife.[9] When he says 'Yatra Naryastupujyante'[10] he does not distinguish them according to their marital status. Nari here denotes the meaning of a female irrespective of her role and status. Modernity has failed to upgrade the status of women as housekeeper but Manu speaks explicitly about their positive contribution in the maintenance of the primary unit of society that is a household." I find it very strange when these religious texts and codes are interpreted to understand modern concepts of equality and feminism. Often tradition is considered as to dehumanize a female by transforming her into a Devi or through deification. It is true that female is stereotyped either as a devi or demoness, i.e. as epitome of virtues feminine qualities or evils which deprive her of her due share of humanity, but modernity also does it, in a different way. First, it tries to negate her femininity by making her equal to men not by upgrading her female role and status but by forcing her to approximate male pattern of achievement and then it dehumanizes her through 'commodification' or as an agency of market forces. When I see the modern images of a liberated women in the form of 'women of substance ' or 'beauty with brains' as defined through various market forces, I am reminded of so many parallels expressed in Indian art and literature. If these images and symbols of free career women projected by modernity are to be taken as representing progress and liberation, then, tradition in historical sense was far ahead of its time. Vatsyayana describes Nayikas or courtesans as independent women. According to him all twice born men married or not were 'independent', while only women who were un-married (Kanya)—courtesans (Vesya/Ganika), maidens or widows (Punarbhu) were considered independent.[12] I would like to quote from the book titled 'When God is a customer': "The courtesan enjoyed a freedom usually reserved for men; not only did she not suffer from many of the

restrictions imposed on women but she was given the same honour as was shown to poets in a royal court… By this time then the world of women was clearly divided into two opposed parts, that of the courtesan and that of the family woman and neither of the two wished to be mistaken for the other. Chastity, modesty, innocence, dependency, the responsibility to bear male children to continue the line and bringing of prosperity to the family by proper ritual behavior—these were the roles and values assigned to the housewife. These very qualities would be considered defects in a courtesan, whose virtues were beauty, boldness in sex and its cultivation and a talent for dancing and singing in public. A courtesan could be independent, own property, earn, and handle her own money; cunning and coquetry were part of her repertoire. She had no responsibility to bear children, but if she did have a child, a female was preferred to male".[13] Should one quote this type of independency prevalent in urban elite court in ancient India as an example of female empowerment? The proliferation of female voices in early medieval/literature is often read as a reaction or resistance to the earlier brahmanical patriarchy of dharmasāstras in the form of bhakti movement. But if it is treated in isolation from other dimensions and the dimension of power is separated from the dimension of prestige, then these female voices or feminine voices may represent resistance to patriarchal power. Tantric cults, cults of 64 Yoginis,[14] Ardhanāriśvara all give prominence to feminine aspect of God, but this aspect was firmly tied to the question of Lordship. Therefore, it can also be construed that the emergence of female voices in early medieval discourses actually represents the transformation of patriarchal power from one mode of being to another. Ardhanāriśvara is a symbol of male completeness because Siva is conceived as half female rather than as a female deity imagined as half male.[15] Femininity per se was never devalued or.degraded. Male bhaktas aspire to acquire feminine qualities.[16] In religion and philosophy men are allowed to display and empower the feminine within them. Male and female elements are treated as complementary to each other. The element of hostility is almost non-existent. Therefore the glorification or devaluation of feminine aspect has to be seen in their proper con-

text. There never was and never will be a single female status. All textual references need proper contextualization. Manu is not against the freedom of women theoretically.

He is stating the ideal situation of his time when free movement of a woman was unthinkable. But the context is that of a female belonging to *grahastha Āshram* and it is the duty of a *grahastha* to protect the females of his household. Interestingly those feminist scholars and thinkers who declare Manu as misogynist for his statement in the third verse of chapter nine in *Manusmṛti* either are ignorant of the whole content of this chapter or prejudiced enough not to mention Manu' s personal opinion on the safety and status of wife. For example he clearly condemns the use of physical confinement and violent methods in the name of wife's security:

> न कश्चिद्योषितः शक्तः प्रसहय परिरक्षितुम्
> एतैरूपाययोगैस्तु शक्यास्ताः परिरक्षितुम।।
> अर्थस्य संग्रहै चैनां व्यये चैवं नियोजयेत्।
> शौचे धर्मऽन्नपकत्यां च परिणाह्य स्यवेक्षणे।।
> अरक्षिता गृहेरूद्धाः पुरूषैराप्तकारिभिः।।
> आत्मानमात्मना यास्तु रक्षेयुस्ताः सुरक्षिताः।। 9.10-12

He clearly suggests that no one can protect women by keeping them in a locked room or resorting to physical violence. Only that woman is protected who herself is capable of protecting her dignity, therefore a man should try to satisfy his wife by making her the sole authority in household affairs—not only in matters of domestic work but also in economic affairs. Earlier in chapter three, verse 60 Manu says that only that house becomes prosperous and peaceful where wife is satisfied with the husband and vice versa. All these references suggest that Manu was far ahead of his times. He speaks about the economic empowerment of wife by making her responsible for the economic management of her husband's earned money.Tradition provides many symbols, which seem to be modern in essence. Parvati is the first and probably only daughter/wife who confronts her father for his misdeeds and gives befitting reply to her wandering husband. Feminists and activists have to learn a lot from her.

She is independent to the extent of producing her own son, having her own vehicle and own set of followers thus enjoying the realm of power and prestige both. Radha is a problem child of India. She is the one and only example of a married woman having extra marital relationship, yet being elevated to the heights of devihood. There are other examples of extra-marital relationships of Gods and Goddesses in Puranic narratives, but always they have to perform *prayaschita* for their sin. The element of Sin is amiss in the lores of Krisna—Radha. I am citing these examples only to prove that voices of dissent and change were already present in female discourses of ancient/medieval India. They are powerful symbols of femininity and independence, yet, they cannot be construed as reflecting the historical realities. Varahamihira probably was the first protagonist of feminism[17] when out of context in his Brahatsamhita he has devoted one whole chapter in praise of females—*Striprasamsaadhyaya*. For example like a feminist thinker and activists he defends the superiority of woman by saying:

ये ड प्यंगनानां प्रवदन्ति दोषान् वैराग्यमार्गण गुणान्विहाय।
ते दुर्जना मे मनसो वितर्कः सद्भाववाक्यानि न तानि तेषाम्।। 74.5

These lines betray the negative aspect of heterodox religions —Buddhism/Jainism/Ascetism who were more vocal on the inferior status of woman and femininity per se as a source of evil. Varahamihira tries to correct this by calling these people as evil or Durjan who try to hide their weaknesses and sexual conducts by putting the blame on women. Indian religions generally describe menstruation as result of sin and guilt and ritualistic purification was a must for every woman. Varahamihir states that woman are always pure and their menstruation never makes them impure:

स्त्रियः पवित्रमतुलं नैता दुष्यन्ति कर्हिचित्। 74.9

Earlier he declares them to be pure in each and every part of their body:

. . . स्त्रियो मेध्यास्तु सर्वतः। 74.8

Varahamihira seems to be the first feminist not only of India but also of the world. Does it make any difference to the historical realities present in other contemporary sources? All these symbols may be treated as resistance to or despite patriarchy. Prestige and value attached to female aspect in traditional sources was unable to transform the socio—economic dimensions of female or female power. In the same way modernity despite its emphasis on the pattern of equal share of economic and political powers to male and female has doubly failed by not according equal value and prestige to traditional roles of women on the one hand and on the other treating females only as males thus denying them their distinct identity and negating the innate femininity. Gender roles and gender identities are two different things[18] and their rigidity or fluidity creates the types of masculinity and femininity which provide the basis for societal behaviour of a man and woman. In this sense, man can also be a victim of stereotyped models of behavior. There might be better cooks, housekeepers, and child nurtures among males than females. But they are unable to express it positively because they are rebuked not only by their male relatives and friends but more by women who value the 'macho' images associated with males rather than their effeminate character.

More a society becomes modern, more it emphasizes upon the 'macho' image of the male through various symbols. Therefore, feminism has to take both external and internal aspects of male-female divide to evolve a mechanism powerful enough to deal with the questions of dominance and equality in their proper perspective. Do we desire equality in the form of 'men in petticoats' or 'female patriarchs' or an equality which takes humanity as the common point of reference but never looses the sight of innate difference of a male and female? Gender sensitivity is the first pre-requisite of equality. We, the modern women of India should not forget that patriarchy and male dominance may be the culprit but it is a woman who, actually, is responsible for female foeticide/infanticide first, as a mother never resisting it despite education and economic independence and second as a female gynecologist who actually performs the cold—blooded murder without any remorse or thought. It is here that modernity has failed miserably.

Thus, taking tradition and modernity as two signposts of women's long journey of self search one can say that there are numerous myths perpetuated by both, which ought to be properly explored and rescued from misinterpretation to chart the course of prolonged self search. And while doing so, we will have to take into account our situation vis-a-vis our fellow male human beings by accepting the fact that women alone are not the victims of tradition and modernity. Men are also the victims because 'society' through its interpretation of what it means to be female or male and through its established patterns of appropriate behaviour for fixed gender roles transforms biological differences into social reality. The recent changes appear to encourage women to embrace a male pattern of achievement more than to elevate or improve traditional women's jobs or encourage men to accept them which defeats the very purpose of equality and interchangeability. It also takes away the option to choose freely. Feminism should be all about giving a choice to remain a housewife and valued as such and not only in terms of economic and political power. Only through men's sharing the time—consuming and encumbering demands of house keeping and child rearing can women be freed to take full advantage of new opportunities. It requires attitudinal changes along with the structural ones. At the same time we have to be aware that the concept of 'equality' at the cost of femininity is a double-edged weapon which might do more harm than good to women in the journey of self search because at the end of the journey, by adopting a male pattern of achievement, there will be no 'self' left to be rescued or put on the pedestal of equality. Therefore, while discussing feminism vis-a-vis equality our attention should be more on the definition of equality vis-a-vis feminism rather than equality in literal sense. Androgyny or Ardhānariśvara should be taken as the model of equality or as role sharing perspective.

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[1] Giele, J.Z. and Smock, A.C. (eds.), *Women-Roles and Status*, 1977, p. 4.

[2] Op. cit., p. 410.

[3] Gupta, Krishna, *Woman, Law and Public Opinion*, 2001, P. 178 N.D.

[4] Chanana, Karuna (Ed.), *Socialization, education and women: explorations in gender identity*, N.D., Orient Longman, 1988.

[5] Mill, J. Stuart, *The Subjection of Women*, M.I.T. Press, 1970, p. 44-45. Mill has agrued that 'The Family is a school of despotism' and Institutions including Family go on preaching about the old values and practices in new surroundings. What he means is that social institutions, if badly organized, become the breeding ground of evil and nursery of righteousness if properly constituted. Centrality of family was never doubted by Mill. Only its role in determining social behaviour and practices was central in his debate.

[6] Op.cit., p. XX—This term was used in *Edinburgh Revie*w altogether rejecting Mill's argument that women are not different in any sense from men in so far as the Question of mental/intellectual abilities are concerned, and as if they are men in petticoats. The term used to deride Mill's idea of equal status of women though initially used reflecting Victorian morality seems relevant in present context in so far it relates to the problem of reinventing 'faminine' as distinct identity and rejecting the blurring of boundaries in name of equality.

[7] Spender, Dale, *Man made language*, Lon, 1980; Besley and Moore (Eds.), *The feminist reader: essays in gender and the politics of literary criticism*, Cambridge, 1989.

[8] Leslie, J. & McGee, M. (Eds.), *Invented identities*, Oxford, 2000.

[9] उपाध्यायान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता!
स्हस्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते!! Manusmṛti 2.145.

The system of prestige assigns highest value to a mother in the process of shifting values and their relative contexts. Ten Upadhyayas are equal to one Acharya and hundred Acharyas are equal to a father and thousand fathers are equal to a mother in honour and glory. Whether it is prescriptive or statement of the fact, even is there was gap between precepts and practice it is a proof that women were not neglected in the discourse of contemporary sāstras as was the case in Greeko-Roman world.

[10] यत्र नार्यस्तु पूजयन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता।
यैत्रतास्तु न पूजयन्ते सर्वास्तात्रफलाः क्रियायन्ते Manu, 3.56

The importance of this reference lies in the fact that it speaks of the value of women without categorization. It also suggests that women should be respected as fellow human beings irrespective of their role and status in the system of prestige and power. Modern dilemma is that

it emphasizes on a value system based on economic and political power on the one hand and on the other fails to treat women equally despite it.

[11] प्रजननार्थं महाभागाः पूजार्हा गृहदीप्तयः।
स्त्रियः श्रियश्च गेहेषु न विशेषोऽस्ति कश्चन।।
उत्पादनमपत्यस्य जातस्य परिपालनम।
प्रत्यहं लोकयात्रायाः प्रत्यक्षं स्त्रीनिबन्धनम।। Manu 9.26-27.

There is no doubt that according to the rules of his time Manu here assigns household chores to women. Some of the chores like giving birth to a child and nourish him/her are biologically determined even in modern world. The importance of this reference is that at least Manu does not take the value of these duties for granted. He points out the importance of women's contribution and society's indebtedness to it. This value also includes the economic worth of a housewife's labour when he compares them with Laksmi. Indian tradition, like any other contemporary ones often equates housewife with that of a dasi but differs from the rest that it assigns her prestige and power within the household. Home as a site or women empowerment in whatever form, it was, whether ritualistic, economic and other such categories should be analysed in historical contexts and should be given preference over parliament/political institutions in modern feminist discourse to benefit women in every walk of life.

[12] Kama Sutra—1.5.29. It is noteworthy that Bharya or wife is excluded from the category of Nayika (dramatis personae/lovers as social category) which corresponds to the modern psychology also where wife is restricted to move freely in notorious clubs and parties except in upper elite groups of lower classes. Perverted tendencies like wife swapping or exploiting her to gain contracts and promotions reported in magazines and other media is worth noticing in this context.

[13] Ramanujam, A.K. and others (Eds., Trs.), *When God is a customer. Telegu counrtesan songs by Ksetrayya and others*, Berkley, 1994, pp. 27-28.

[14] Dehejia, Vidya, *Yogini Cult and Temples A Tantric Tradition*, N.D., 1986.

[15] Banerjea, J.N., *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 552-4, N.D. 1974.

[16] In bhakti tradition it is stressed that a devotee is a female in relation to God. It is at par-Hindu/Indian belief.

[17] Brhatsamhita (tr. A.N. Jha), Varanasi—Chap. 74, pp. 459-462, why feminist scholars writing on gender issues have not noticed it. It speaks volumes about their fixation on certain ideals and models reflected in later Smṛtis and texts. I have called him the first protagonist of feminism

in modern sense of the word because he seems to defend women as an activist –

प्रब्रूत सत्यं दोषोऽस्तियो नाचरितो मनुष्यैः !

घाटयेन पुम्भि प्रभदा निरस्ता गुणाधिकास्ता मनुनात्र चोक्तम !!

[18] Nandy Ashis, "Woman and Womanliness in India: An Essay in Social and Political Psychology', in Rehana Gadially (ed.), *Woman in Indian Society: A Reader*, N.D. 1988, pp. 69-80.

The *Therigāthā: A* Study in Tradition and Modernity*

INDRA KAUL

"Modernity moves East, leaving post-modernity in its wake; religious revival, ethnic renaissance, roots and nationalism are resurgent as modernist identity becomes increasingly futile in the West."—Underlying this Friedman (1991:360) quote is an unmistakable sense of disillusionment with modernity and its failure to recognize heterogeneity of religions, races and cultures. But more significantly, these lines are a loud acknowledgement of the fact that modernity has indeed, disappeared from the place of its origin – the West. Feminists in this part of the globe however continue to hold that it was in the spaces of modernity that women found their conspicuous visibility. According to them, "modernity" is being wrongly indicted "for producing *anomie*, aggression and reactive orthodoxy in men, "feelings" which are then (inevitably) directed as violence against women", leaving no room for ascribing other reasons for such violence (Rajan 2000: 8). While such a critique of male violence, ranged against the 'modernist' women, might be more than justified, it necessarily is no justification for eulogizing modernity, which from the many contexts one knows, has produced consequences and set into motion processes, which while being detrimental to an entire system of existence, are particularly detrimental to the women's cause and their right to individual choice and freedom. Today, it is being increasingly felt that what

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was perceived as a 'secular theory of salvation' has failed 'to live up to its promise to expand human freedoms' (Nandy, cited in Banuri 1990:30), which more than any other includes women's freedom. To take a different view of the concept, modernization implied a 'whole package', a package, which as a modernization theorist Eisenstadt puts it, expected an entire culture to opt for Westernization as a standard of progress. But for us Westernization as a package involved something much more fundamental from the gender point of view. Since inherent in the Western claim of progress is a sense of the superior, the rational and the 'scientific' vis-a-vis knowledge systems, it inevitably renders obsolete the more traditional systems of knowledge as inferior and 'non-scientific'. In the process it leads to the construction of a whole range of binary oppositions such as "rationality/irrationality, subject/object, health/illness, mind /body, life/death, nature/ culture…" etc., wherein women are categorically classed as devalued halves of these dualities. That gender bias in fact is one of the very characteristics of modernism, is most tellingly brought home to us in Lorna Duffin's *The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid* (1978). Duffin demonstrates how 'modern' medicine and its definitions of health and illness rendered the perfect lady in the upper-class Victorian England, a perpetual invalid. Through, what may be termed as a 'power-knowledge nexus', she further elaborates how, under the 'modernization project', medical profession (read knowledge), and the State (read power) collaborated to determine, classify and categorize various kinds of illness, and how in these new classifications women's health problems were perpetually perceived as some kind of insanity and women treated as perpetual invalids. While effecting a total control over the woman's body, the new knowledge system treated even her normal female functions like puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, labour, lactation and menopause as pathological problems, rendering her incapable of any kind of mental and physical labour (ibid.; cited in Nandy: 157). A construction such as this obviously ensured that she was kept outside the possible employment opportunities offered by the Industrial Revolution.

Duffin apart, we have an extremely moving personal account of Charlotte Perkins Gilman—an outstanding American feminist—about the so-called 'rest cure' invented by a certain male doctor (Silasweir Mitchell) to corroborate Duffin's descriptions. Having shown symptoms of 'neurasthemia', (a nineteenth-century classification of one kind of mental illness in women, with characteristics like loss of weight, anxiety, and depression), she was prescribed the so termed 'rest cure' and sent home. But the advice the doctor gave her before the discharge is revealing. In his own words, she was to "live as domestic a life as far as possible", to "have but two hours' intellectual life a day," and "never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again" as long as she lived (Gilman 1913:19-20).

Gilman was ultimately able to write about her condition in her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Gilman 1892:17-19), which apart from her story also became a moving metaphor for the seclusion and imprisonment of all women that at times led to their actual insanity. But as Nandy (1990) points out, this feminist critique of medicine notwithstanding, feminism, in a fundamental way, left unchallenged the official and the so-called 'modern' medical discourse, despite its obvious gender politics and the devaluation of women it sets into motion.

It is against this backdrop of essentialist, universalist, and logocentrically determined knowledge systems of modernism on the one hand, and the feminists' failure to perceive it as such on the other, that one would like to take a view of the Indian tradition, its knowledge systems and perception of gender. And in so doing, also record what kind of alternatives it offers against these fractured, dichotomous visions of modernism and modernity.

Deriving from ways of thinking which are self-determining, inclusive (of the shades of the other) and where there is no one hegemonic system of knowledge rendering itself oppressive over other systems, the tradition's understanding of gender seems to follow from, what may be termed as, a 'non-logocentric' mode of thought. While the modernists discourse on medicine and its binary opposition of health versus illness, undermine woman's selfhood in ways discussed above, in the Hindu traditional view

on the other hand illness is not an absolute category; it is an imbalance which cannot be totally negativised but restored to balance. In this tradition, illness and health are necessary parts of the same cyclical process, where the illness becomes a source of regeneration, a new health and life (Marglin 1990). No illness therefore is seen as potent enough as to render a person totally imbecile. Significant to mention here is also the fact that illness and health in this traditional worldview are both represented by the same goddess *Sitala*, as evident from her icongraphical representations. Holding, in one hand, a sieve full of seeds and in the other one, a broom, she is projected as one who gives you the disease and also the one who cures you of it. Against the logocentric methods of the modern medicine, therefore, "the language of *Sitala* is a non-logocentric language" that dissolves all binary oppositions"(ibid.: 116).

Sitala, the goddess, however, draws our attention to yet another domain of gender, viz. women's spirituality.

The eclipsing of woman achieved by the modern systems of knowledge—though, for once, not necessarily its attendant gender politics, is also reflected in West-oriented notions of female spirituality. As long as feminist theologians continue to be occupied with the west-oriented ways of thought, they will also continue to be in a lock-horn relationship with the western androcentric notions of religion, as if it represented the universal norm. In the process, every other alternative model of religious traditions would continue to be pushed out of reckoning. For instance, engaged in fighting the Cartesian dualisms, such as those of mind and body, spirit and matter, these 'modern' women are fighting the cause, at best, of only a certain section of female believers to whose religious system these dualisms are so basic. But in traditions like ours, where a different, a fluidic understanding of human selves pervades, such dichotomies are totally alien. Taking stock of the structuring principles of one's own thought and women's role in it, a whole new understanding of femaleness and gender relations is revealed to us, as discussed in section that follows.

Women and Indian Theological Systems

In a pioneering and path-breaking study on the presence of independent feminine cosmogonies, Thadani (1996) points to the homosexual identity of the earliest female divinities who, according to her, were "plural, autoerotic and self-generating (ibid.:10). Quoting a wealth of textual, archaeological, and iconical sources, she, very convincingly, substantiates her thesis. To present an example, the abstract conception of darkness and light expressed in *Ṛg Veda* is perceived by her as expressing the motive of dual sisters inhabiting the same *yoni* space and representing an entire social and kinship formation (ibid.:20). This dual cosmogony, according to her, represents "a holistic feminine union, whereby the feminine twins can be seen as lovers, mothers, sisters, etc. In these early feminine cosmogonies one does not find consorted deities in a heterosexual arrangement, but dual deities of the same sex, referred to often as twins (*jami*). The union that is symbolic is neither static nor a complete merger but instead a coming together, a meeting out of movement". New feminine chains, constellations and patterns are generated out of this meeting together (ibid. 21).

While this extreme primordial ideal of all pervasive feminine divinity may not be very apparently present in the succeeding epistemologies, but the potency and power of the 'Divine Feminine' has been recognized in all religious epochs, throughout the tradition. In literary traditions too, 'Women and the Sacred' (Hart 1999) has been a perennial theme as evidenced in Tamil literature. Celebrating the merging of the divine in the feminine, the Tamil *Sangam* literature holds the sacredness of woman in great awe. In this woman's body focussed literature, woman's breasts in particular are considered the seat of her sacred power. In a *Puram* poem (278), we have a mother threatening to cut off her breasts, the seat of her power, if her son is a coward and in another one (*Puram:291*), seeing the valour of her dead son, a mother's breasts begin to milk again. *Sangam* poetry also celebrates women's sacredness as a literary convention in which her presence transforms a wasteland into a paradise (even if only in a metaphoric sense).

At the level of ritual, too, we have women and women's body as central to the temple ceremonies. From Sanskrit literature, we know these ritual women as *devadasi*, *vesya*, *ganika*, etc. who perform the evening *puja* ritual[1] of waving the fly-whisk in temples. In South Indian temples their role is viewed as not only indispensable, but one that involves multiple specializations. Their significance in the *Jagannatha* temple of Puri and in its annual *rath yatra*, in which they accompany the deity as guards against the 'evil eye', has inspired volumes[2] of research writings. Their divine status draws from the fact that, as representations of the divine, they are not only 'ever-auspicious'[3] women but also beyond all associations of the pure and the impure.

In pluralistic Indian religious systems, where we have known the 'behaviour of the right' (*dakshinachara*) practiced in many Hindu rituals, we also have its counter-system, 'behaviour of the left' (*vamachara*[4]) practiced in *Tantric* cults. In these sectarian cults, woman is worshipped as divinity itself. The popularity and power of these women-centered cults was recognised so widely that even an atheistic religion like Buddhism finds its ultimate culmination in *Tantra.*[5] More recently scholars have tried to point to a possible presence of a *Tantric* development in *Jainism*[6] as well.

While details such as these overturn the notions of male religiosity as normative and universally representative, scholars are, all the same, of the view that "the religious history[7] of the Indian woman has just begun to be told" and that there are yet many more autonomous realms of women's religious presence, which remain to be unfolded. One such realm is that of women as renunciates.

Women in Monastic Orders

The history of women in monastic orders, in a way, begins with the history of monastic orders[8] themselves. Though India has known hermits, thinkers, and philosophical speculation from earliest times, the intellectual movement before the rise of Buddhism, as it has come down to us, was largely a lay movement, and not a priestly one (Rhys Davids 1970:69). It is, however, only from the period in which Buddhism arose, that we have the appearance of,

the ascetic types, such as, *Paribbajaks* or the *Samana* (Chakravarti 1987:36). Known to move about and around in a state of homelessness, these early wanderers are identified as founders of a tradition and the 'seed-bed' of subsequent groups of renunciates[9] irrespective of their sects, denominations and ideals, which incidentally were very large. It was also only around this time that asceticism was hailed as a positive ideal. In Hinduism and its literature (*Dharamsāstras*, *Epics* etc.) too the renouncer is treated as a towering personality but primarily it is the materialistic-domestic ideal and the householder's state that are eulogised. In this tradition renunciation is treated as a highly idealised state and the values expressed through it are seen as so 'all encompassing' as to be a threat to the householder's[1]" state. Cumulatively, therefore, one observes among Hindu householders, an element of hostility towards renouncers, combined paradoxically with reverence for them.

As against this, the Buddhist hold an altogether different view of renunciation as a clearly preferred state to that of the householder's which they consider an obstacle in one's way to enlightenment. Hence in Buddhism the renunciatory life is held out as an ideal one, and its institutionalisation achieved with the launching of the life of the *Sanghas.* Though in the beginning this life was open only to the male adherents of the faith, but later on it was also thrown open to its female devotees.

Buddhists, however, were not the first to start women's monastic orders. By the time Buddhist monasteries began to form, Jainism already had similar organizations for both its male and female followers. Since, the women renunciates' life is of significance to this study one would like to take a brief view of what their life in these orders implied.

Despite the early difficulties that seem to have marked women's entry into the renunciatory orders, and despite the overall stringent[11] attitude of the monastic system towards women, the renunciatory path overall seems to have given an altogether new directions to women's lives. In both the Jaina and Buddhist systems, women are perceived as capable of achieving the highest in spiritual knowledge and life. The Jaina texts very much acknowl-

edge that women can become "Omniscient" and the Buddhists that they can attain *Arhanship* (Skt. *Arhantship*). Indeed all the seventy-three *bhikkunies* of the *Therigāthā* attain *Arhant*ship. One of the *theris*, Khema, earns the distinction of being a *mahapanna*, an ascetic of great insight. Others like Dhammadina and Sukka came to earn their reputation as *dhamma Kathikas*, great preachers. And Patācāra, apart from being a charismatic person, was known to be extremely well-versed in *Vinaya*, and one who inspired her own following among women. In the *Therigāthā* two verses stand out as being ascribed to two groups of her followers only. Thus the renunciatory path opened up opportunities for women to realise their full potential and be very useful members of the Order.

Jainism with its emphasis on *karma* even seems to suggest that irrespective of one's gender identity one can attain the status of even a deity, on the basis of one's good actions. This concept is expressed through the cult of Yaksis celebrated in one of the regional genres of the Jaina literature as great divinities (see Zydenbose: 1994). Among these Yaksis, two by the name of Jwalamalini and Kusmandini, are shown to have been humans in their previous births and another one, Parvati, a snake (ibid: 142). The significance attributed to the female Yaksi in this literature is also evident from the importance they are given vis-a-vis the Yaksa*s*, who with the sole exception of the Brahma are treated as nothing more than background characters. In fact, in the north-east where Jainism originated we have a number of *yaksi* shrines, termed as *yaksasthanas*, which have a highly important place in Jaina devotionalism. It is their significance in Jainism and their association with the *Tirthankaras* that leads scholars to believe that even in Jainism there was a Tantric[12] development, as referred above. While these female deities offer further boost to the image of the female divinity, the human models for the potential and power of female asceticism is provided, in a way, by one of the protagonists of the Tamil Jaina text *Cillipadikaram.* In this epic Kanagi is not an ascetic *per se;* she is a housewife, but one whose marriage is never consummated. Her state of celibacy, with all bodily energies in place, therefore, creates an ascetic state in her.

And when these sealed powers[13] move upwards she is transformed into an all powerful divinity, who, to avenge the wrong done to her innocent husband, destroys an entire kingdom by the missile like powers of her breasts, which she tears off from herself and shoots at a cruel city.

Both the Jaina and the Buddhist systems seem to have opened their doors to women of all class, castes and backgrounds. In both the sects while a woman may be debarred from entering the respective *Mathas* and *Sanghas* for any number of physical or mental disabilities, but never was she debarred on the grounds of her background (see Talim 1972: 204-5; Horner 1975). Even slave women could enter the Order after seeking permission from their masters.

While the view held about the traditional Indian society is that women had to live in subservience to father, husband or son, in the Buddhist literature we have numerous references to self-supporting women who were engaged in a trade or a profession. In the *Jataka*, for example, we have instance of a certain woman who was the keeper of a paddy field; and she did the entire work of gathering and parching the heads of rice herself. Another is described as watching the cotton-fields and at the same time spinning fine thread from the clean cotton. In at least two Buddhist texts (*Theragāthā Cmy.* on cxxxvi; *Dhp.Cmy.* on verses 7-8) we have reference made to the same woman, Kali, who appears to have been the keeper of the burning grounds. Although no mention is made of the wages she might have received, but her concern and consideration for those who came to meditate in the charnel-field is evident from the fact that she provided them with objects suitable for the contemplation of impermanence. An interesting account of a woman acrobat who earned her livelihood by her skills and artistry is also present (cf. *Dhp. Cmy.* on verse 348). Horner (1975) even suggests that probably the five hundred tumblers with whom she was and whose annual performances before the King in Rajagaha earned them "much gold and money" were also women (ibid. 83-84).

A most important and worth mentioning feature of the monastic orders was that they observed none of the so-called "sexual

division of labour". In the Buddhist community, in particular, every member, male or female, was directed to perform all his/her chores himself/herself. Women, in particular, were prevented from performing any of the activities traditionally associated with them, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, weaving. Since most of the time the food came from the houses of the lay devotees, the woman recluse very rarely cooked and that too only for herself. Cooking for others was a *paccitya* offence. Similarly weaving and washing robes for others were also listed as *paccitya* offences (Talim 1972: 27-41). The men recluses were particularly instructed to wash their robes themselves. Failing which they would also be deemed to have committed a *paccitya* offence. These rules and strictures are not only indicators of the difference of status between a housewife and a nun, but they also point to the fact that in renunciatory religions like Buddhism equal care was taken to create circumstances where men and women ascetics could devote the utmost part of their time in their spiritual pursuits which lured them to the monastic orders in the first place.

Scholars have tried to work out some very fundamental and subtler reasons behind people's attraction towards renunciatory life. Romilla Thapar (1982), for instance, tries to suggest that opting for a life of renunciation at a deeper level expressed the common people's basic desire to go back to a tribal order which, simple as it was, was also liberating. She sees in the early renouncers of the family life, not the sorcerers or the magic men of the earliest pastoralist nomad societies but common householders, who dissociated themselves from the beliefs, rituals and social obligations of a settled complex society. For the women, this going back to the tribal order had even greater attraction, because it took them back to a society where they enjoyed greater authority[14] as generators and controllers of economic resources of the community.

This theory seems to fall in place given the evidence that both the Jaina and the Buddhist monastic orders to a large extent depended on their women lay devotees for their sustenance. Horner (1975) offers vivid details of these women supporters, who took care of the monasteries' all basic needs like food, clothing, shelter and medicines. Prominently in this context are mentioned women

like Visaka, Mallika, Khema, Anantpindika, Suppavasa who are known in the Pali canon for their relentless material support of the monastic communities. The lay devotee Visaka, in particular, appears throughout the Buddhist literature as the patroness of the *sanghas.* At her place two thousand recluses would eat meals everyday. From robes and medicines to such small details of everyday life such as face towels, 'earthenware foot-scrappers',[15] 'small jars', 'brooms', 'fans' etc., she would take thorough care of (ibid.: 351-2). No wonder in the Buddhist canon she is treated as the most prominent devotee of the Buddha on whom he conferred eight boons.[16]

This pre-eminent status which women generally seem to have earned under Buddhism, explains the presence of an unusual, number of women donors in Sanchi inscriptions of second century BC to first century AD Upinder Singh (1996) offers us an interesting data in this context. Of the total number of donations made, 380 were made by men, and 344 by women. By a nominal margin men seem to have outnumbered women as donors, but that still makes women unusually 'visible' as donors during this period. An important point about these women donors is that though a good number of them came from the royalty, a substantial number of them came from monastic and lay backgrounds of commonality. In one of the depictions in Sanci sculptures, Sujata, a lay woman, is making offerings to the meditating Gautama. Singh further records the countless images of women prostrating themselves or making offerings before trees associated with the various Buddhas, *bodhi* trees, and *stupas.* We also know Amrapalli from the *Therigāthā* to have made an offering of a groove to the Buddha.

However, that women's participation in monastic religions was of a far higher degree than endorsed by their respective textual traditions, is further confirmed by the kind of patronage women extended to temple architecture. According to Harinder Singh (1999) women, royal as well as common, not only patronized the construction of Buddhist edifices but influenced their consorts and relatives in this task. For instance, the Iksvakoo kings of third-fourth century AD, who patronised Brahminism and performed vedic sacrifices, were by-passed by their queens and other ladies

of the realm who as followers of Buddhism had monasteries and temples erected for the Buddhists. In Nagarjunkonda alone, the total ratio of women's donations outnumbers those of men by an amazing 90 per cent made by them. In an example from the kingdom of Gahadavalas of Kanauj (AD 114-54), we have the queen Kumara-devi of Sama king erect a *vihar* at Sarnath—an extensive building streching more than seventy thousand feet from east to west.

Incidentally, an even greater amount of women's architectural patronage seems to have been conferred on Jaina structures. Prominently in this context names stand out like the Calukyan (from AD 615—33) queen Mahadevi, Atimabe, a lay women (the wife of a military commander) from Calukyan times (eleventh-twelfth century AD), queen Santaladevi of the Hoysalas kingdom, Madevi from the Pallava times (847—72 AD) etc. (ibid.: 286-96).

What one deduces from these charitable acts of women towards monastic orders is that for the first time women found themselves face to face with opportunity to earn merit. These charitable acts entitled them not only to attend religious discourses of the respective orders, and be converted through them but also to enhance their religious lives by reaching the highest in spiritual advancement. From the Buddhist texts at least we have evidence of non-ascetic[17]women actually attaining such spiritual heights. One of the examples could be of Sujata from the *Therigāthā* who "because her intelligence was fully ripe … attained *Arahan*ship."

While the Buddhist ideology affected the religious aspirations of lay women in this manner, they in turn contributed to it by joining their recluse counterparts as missionaries to the Buddhist cause. One such missionary is identified from the canon as Culla Subhadara, who is supposed to have been instrumental in converting her mother-in-law. Other examples are that of queens Samavati and Mallika, who converted their husbands, King Udena and King Pasenadi, respectively. Significantly, Queen Samavati was converted by her female slave,[18] Khujuttara. As a lay follower queen Mallika is also seen in the role of a Buddhist idealogue when she has her king-husband Pasenadi decree a ban on the practice of animal sacrifice. She also shows humanity and tolerance of the

highest kind by patronizing and entertaining wanderers belonging to other sects as well (ibid.: 372). Through all these acts she proves that as a woman interested in serving the order, she is its true representative and the order in turn honours her with the pride of place in its literary canon as demonstrated.

Alongside these lay devotees, the canon offers recognition to all those other women too who perform similar duties as insiders in the Order. This would be taken up in the next section.

Women in the Foot Steps of the Buddha: The Therigāthā

The existing body of scholarship on Buddhism offers two extremes of very positive early characterizations of Buddhism as liberative for women and extremely bleak contemporary characterizations of Buddhism as androcentric and oppressive to women. Early Buddhist scholars like Foley, Rhys Davids and Horner belong to the early group of Buddhist scholarship, who hold that Buddhism was liberative for women because "it allowed them to lead their domestically subordinated, feminine social roles as wives and mothers" and join with men in a spiritual path that rendered gender largely insignificant. According to Foley (1893), the Buddha offered women gender-free refuge whereby a woman could become "an asexual, rational being walking with wise men in recognised intellectual equality on higher levels of thoughts". And to Rhys Davids (1932) in Buddhist order, the only thing manifest was a common humanity. This ideal of an asexual humanity is also manifest, at a different level, in Horner's (1975) notion of the Buddhist order offering freedom both in the usual "phenomenal" sense and the wider, more "transcendental" sense to the women.

A dilution of this position on Buddhism is marked with critics like Diana Paul (1979), whose *Women in Buddhism* offers a typology of texts wherein a whole range of positive and affirmative images of the feminine are placed alongside the most negative ones suggesting, however, that it was the later Mahayana Buddhism which generated more positive images of women. And in a total *volte-face* to the early positive view of Buddhism as egalitarian and gender-neutral we have scholars like Lang (1986) who

argues that Buddhist literature mostly privileged the androcentric perspective of the male renouncer and subordinated women to the extent of "villainizing" them (as potential seducers). She asserts that most of the text included in the early Buddhist canon which were virtually written and compiled by the monks, "reflect their ambivalent attitude towards women. Women were considered physically and spiritually weaker, less intellectual and more sensual than men. The community of monks feared women as potential seducers" (ibid.: 64).

A similar position is held by the more contemporary critics like Wilson and Blackstone etc., who also argue that far from "walking with wise men in recognized intellectual equality on higher levels of thought", the Buddhist nuns were "mostly useful in the life of the *sangha* when they gendered themselves as feminine and then deconstructed their feminine charms as specious dissimulators" (Wilson 1996:179). Ultimately in her view a broad cross-section of Buddhist literature "encourages men to see women (and women to see themselves) through the gendered "I" of the subject position that is clearly marked as masculine"[19] (ibid.: 193). This is a view attested also by Blackstone (1998) who on the basis of her comparative study of the two *gāthās* ascribed to the *theris* and the *theras* respectively draws the conclusion that, "while both texts disapprove of physical attraction and while both discuss the artificial nature of beauty, the texts differ in their degree of self-identification portrayed by the ascribed authors (ibid.: 72)… where the *theris* personalize doctrinal conceptions of the body as impure and impermanent, the *theras* abstract their conceptions, projecting them on to others", and most often this 'other' happens to be a woman (ibid.: 78).

To the extent these crtiques try to problematize the picture of an egalitarian Buddhism, (with its emphasis on non-androcentricism and non-misogynae), posited by a certain section of Buddhist scholarship, they do certainly succeed. In fact, the kind of textual evidence they bring to bear upon their arguments more then drive home the view they support. However, somewhere in between, there emerge gaps in these arguments which unwarrant gross generalizations of the kind articulated therein. There are moments in,

for example Wilson's (1996) analysis where she makes exceptions of her declared position on the subject. For instance she concedes that there are points in Buddhist history—the post Ashokan period for example—which give strong evidence for the emergence of gender egalitarianism in Buddhism (ibid.: 193) and that there are also, what she terms as a 'handful of Mahayana scriptures' which point to a similar development. These kinds of contradictions apart, these critics also tend to overlook the implications of the fact that most of the information in the textual sources they refer to, represents mostly the orthodox monastic elite and not the common traditions of lay Buddhist practitioners. Another significant limit-ation of this contemporary scholarship is that the historical period which became the basis of early positive assessment of Buddhism, and which concerns us here, is entirely left out by them. Hence these critiques not only produce incomplete histories but in sidelining these models of liberation, they also allow their entire feminist project to go awry.

Alongside this, something very basic to the understanding of the world-view and the mindset of a collective entity, namely its myths of origin, is also something these critiques do not much draw on. Invariably these myths have far-reaching and very profound implications for the status of women within a particular context. Towards garnering those implications, the present discussion therefore begins with the 'invocation' of the Buddhist myth of origin itself. As described in *Aganna Suttana*, a text in the Pali canon (cited and summed up in Paul 1979: xx-xxi), "There was a Golden Age in which asexual, self-luminated, and non-corporeal beings dwelled blissfully in the heavens, existing without need for food. One day one of them tasted the earth with one finger, and the others followed. As a result, these beings lost their luminous natures, and the sun, moon, stars appeared. These beings continued to eat and gradually became corporeal and heavier in form. Those who ate little were beautiful, where as those who were gluttonous were ugly. Pride in one's beauty caused the devolution of the cosmos: the physical appearance of the beings became even grosser in form, and divergence in beauty became greater. The sexes then emerged and, with them, passion and sexual intercourse. Sexual-

ity became immoral and violent, a degeneration from the previous state of perfection. Gradually, sexual intercourse became sanctioned under prescribed situations. With continual devolution, property resulted, and crimes were committed until the best one among the human race, a male, was elected king."

Evidently, this Buddhist myth assumes a possible state of perfection, which is asexual, non-corporeal and beyond notions of good and evil. In this golden time there were no sexual distinctions, nor any other oppositions. Nor were there any passions (for food, property, or sex). For more importantly in this myth both men and women are equally responsible for their fallen state. It directly follows from here, that whosoever—be it man or woman—follows the Buddhist path works his way to evolution by reversing the process of sexuality and all that belongs to the world of senses—in one word, the devolutionary way of life (ibid.).

With no traces of androcentricism, this Buddhist myth of origin, not only offers a non-dualistic, integrative ideal underlying the concepts and categories of the male and the female, in the process, it also points to flaws, at a basic level in most such discussions on Buddhism which totally bypass such a view and such a construction of gender.

Positing an alternative hypothesis, then, this section would like to focus on Buddhism's achievements as a progressive, democratic order, which unequivocally holds that the notions of sexuality are in no way incompatible with the notions of the spiritual or the sacred. While the available diversity of historical narratives on Buddhism are perceived as either exaggerating or undermining its contribution towards women, nothing can authenticate its real position in the context, as those first Buddhist women, the contemporaries of the Buddha Himself, who give us a first hand and lasting account of themselves and "of things as they appeared to them" in the order. Singing of freedom and liberty, the utterances of these early women recluses form a collection of five hundred and twenty two verses compiled in seventy-three psalms, entitled as *Therigāthā.* These poems are also accompanied by commentator's explanations or biographical stories on persons to whom these verses are attributed. Supposed to have been composed over

a three hundred year period[20] (Norman 1971: xxxi) from the late sixth to the end of the third centuries, the exact dating, authorship and other related aspects of the *Therigāthā* are as challenging a task as that of any other Pali text. However for us the cognate question, as to whether the *theris* to whom the poems are attributed were actual historical personages, or for that matter, the psalms actually be attributed to women at all, has been well answered by Rhys Davids (1932). According to her, of these 'sisters', the one's of whom we hear elsewhere in the Pali canon; must have actually existed. However, she clarifies that, it does not necessarily imply that the "majority of sisters named as authors *of gāthās* but of whom nothing else is elsewhere recorded, never existed" (ibid.: xvii). In her view the identity of the authors of the *Therigāthā* had, for its preservers, "something of a Shakespearean or Homeric indefiniteness",[21] but that indefiniteness cannot take away from this text, its claim of female authorship. Dismissing assumptions that the 'Sister's' psalms might also have been composed by the 'Brothers', she points out interesting differences in idiom, sentiment and tone between the two sets of psalms'. She also points out the differences in the 'common stock' of refrains (a couple of exceptions notwithstanding) used in the two texts. Attributing Sisters' verses to Brothers in her view therefore amounts to carrying the truth too far: 'He that hath, to him shall be given, and she that hath not, from her shall be taken even which she hath!' (ibid: xxiii).

That the *Therigāthā* in all probability originated in the *bhikkuni-sangha*, is also confirmed by studies on gender-differences in story telling. John Stratton Hawley (cited in Blackstone 1998:116) in his study on the sixteenth century devotional poetry attributed to Meerabai and Surdas has well illustrated the difficulty men have in presenting women's religiosity. In his view, Surdas' poetry exhibits signs of strain in his impersonation of the female *gopis* and unlike Mira, he compares their spirituality to masculine than to feminine models. And also, while Mira's poetry represents a union between the sacred and the secular, Sur's poetry keeps the boundary between them clear (ibid.: 116).

A study like this amply reveals that men are invariably not able to present the subtleties of women's religious experiences and their impersonations of women are usually not very successful. One may safely assume, therefore, that, in all probability, the *Therigāthā* is women's composition, and is an authentic expression of women's perspective on the life of renunciation under Buddhism.

As a text the *Therigāthā* has many dimensions. As part of the Buddhist canon, it represents the women-penned versions on the Buddhist Doctrine; as the earliest record of the first-ever self-determined women, it becomes the 'liberation-manual' for all such women and women's movements, looking for role models and alternative ways of life; and as a transcript of the women's monastic lives, it becomes a historical document of infinite value. But above all, the *Therigāthā* stands as a statement on a 'tradition' that declined to accept "woman question" as a social problem in the sense in which it is being projected in the contemporary discourses on women. For Gautama Buddha, a great rationalist as he was, all human situations were natural results of cause and effect. Hence, women's position was also one of those matters of social life which had to be adjusted by men and women themselves. To put it differently, the Buddha, was no social reformer in the limited sense of the term, but an Enlightened Man of the times who wanted an end to the problems of entire mankind and women constituted at least one half of this mankind. For him, while knowledge put an end to the problems of life, nescience perpetuated it. He taught *Dhamma* to both men and women, and as a critic observes, it must have been impossible for the men, steeped as they were in the Buddhist teaching, not to be aware of women as equal to them in many ways and as being a constructive force in the society of the day. There is no doubt that the rules for the *bhikkuni-sangha*[22]—the main target of feminist criticism, were rather strict and narrow from women's point of view. But these strictures need to be treated with the degree of realism, with which Mahapajapati Gautami treated them. And instead we should focus on how a new image of women came up for the first time under

renunciatory religions like Buddhism, and how, on the whole, it proved to be an empowering experience for women.

Since Buddhism (like Jainism), was the religion which made a *sanyas* in woman possible for the first time, it in the process changed the entire paradigms of a woman's earlier life. Not only does the Buddhist recluse woman or nun emerge as a transgressive, subversive entity against the logocentric system of the Hindu householder, but by snapping ties with the worldly life she also evolves as one who rejects, at the basic level, an institution (marriage i.e.), which is primarily responsible for, which the *Nikayas* term as, "the five chief woes of woman": (i) going at a tender age to the husband's family, leaving behind one's kin (ii) pregnancy, (iii) bringing forth a child (iv) menstruation and (v) waiting upon a man. Having snapped ties with her earlier life, she also snaps ties with all aspects of her earlier identity.

That they have entered upon a new life is nowhere so evident as in their new dress code, which they are to observe as being different from the 'women of the world'. Dressed in loose robes, with tonsured heads, they not only appear in total contrast to their earlier contoured selves, but also totally indistinguishable from their male counters. This new persona gives them a new mobility and they feel free to dive in the deep woods, or climb aloft. It is not without significance that invariably we find the *theris* in the *Therigāthā* either meditating under a tree or perched atop a rock celebrating their new-found liberty: "so sit 1 here / upon the rock. And over my spirit sweeps / The breath of liberty" (xxiv).

This all pervasive and overwhelming sense of liberty and freedom also marks the *theris*' newly won spiritual enlightenment, expressed in a large number of liberation refrains. Following from the Buddha's attainment of *nibbana*, which is the culminating event of all his biographies, *nibbana* constitutes the central quest of all these *theris.* Marking their moments of epiphany, these refrains, though only a bunch of Buddhist stock phrases—desire overcome, rebirth ended, fetters cut; knowledge obtained, asvas destroyed, teaching done; pain gone, darkness torn, triple knowledge obtained; conquest achieved, rest obtained, far shore

reached; freedom and *nibbana*—are for these *theris*, the markers of their *Arhan*ship, the highest goal of early Buddhism.

That Buddhism addressed the issues of gender and class more than any other sect or faith prior to it, is evident from the fact that women from all castes, classes and backgrounds came to be a part of it. Hence among the authors of the seventy-three, *psalms* we have twenty-three coming from royal backgrounds; thirteen from the families of prominent merchants; seven from eminent Brahmin families; nine from lesser Brahmin families; two from poor Brahmin households; and four from the so called lower castes. Of the remainder, eleven are those whose caste is not indicated, and four belong to the class of the courtesans (Homer: 1975: 167-8). The remarkable feature about most of these Buddhist women is that after joining the order they emerged more in defiance of their inherited caste characteristics rather than in line with them. Hence, we have royal ladies like Mahapajapati (lv), Kissa Gotami (lxiii), and Khema (Ii), in the role and reputation of being unusually ascetic, though having known comfort and luxury all their lives. Similarly, Dhamadina (xii), Sukka (xxxiv), and Patācāra (xxxvii) who came from the merchant families, won for themselves the reputation of being great preachers. Horner terms them as "Saviours of no less persuasiveness than Gotama himself". Among the entrants from the Brahmin families Bhadda (xxxvii), Nandutara (xlvi) and Sakula (xliv) became known for their lack of dogma and their intellectual inquisitiveness. Among themselves they came to be known for their memories of former lives and learning, impressive oratory, and the gift of higher vision respectively. And from among those whose caste is not mentioned Sona (xlv) was "placed first for her capacity of effot *{aradhaviriya*)" (ibid: 171).

The remarkable point about all these ascetic women of distinction is that irrespective of their backgrounds they attained *Arahan*ship and a good many among them also showed the potential of being spiritual leaders in their own right, as indicated above. In this role notable from the *Therigāthā* are, apart from Mahappajapati, Patācāra (xivii), Dhamadina (xii), Sukka (xxxiv), Jinadatta (mentioned in lxxii), Vasitthi (cmy.on lxix), and Khema

(cmy. on lii) all of whom are known to have made substantial additions to the Buddhist fold.

While all the *theris* (running into some hundreds), in the *Therigāthā* attain *Arahan*ship, it did not imply for them a dead stop with their memories of the earlier lives. In fact, as nuns it was almost obligatory upon them time and again to keep comparing their present lives with their earlier ones. "The struggle", as Horner (1975: 187) puts it, "was not pitched in the effort to forget, but in the effort to develop and advance from a lower to a higher state." That this is the right way to struggle one's passage through to the top is testified in verses of those *theris* who had to put up with the struggle of the senses even after they had adopted the life of the recluses. Mutta (xi), Abhi Rupa Nanda (xix), Sama (xxviii), Vaddhesi (xxxviii), Sunadari Nanda (xli), Mita Kali (xliii) and Gutta (lvi) are some of these who went through this struggle but because of their persistent perseverence succeeded in reaching their highest selves.

The regular comparison with the past also helped them to compare its shallowness and meaninglessness with their present status as women and the subsequent joy it gave them. Thus we find Mutta (xi) celebrating her freedom "From quern, from mortar and from my crook-backed Lord" and Sumangala's mother (xxi) "from kitchen drudgery" and the stains and squalor among the less than the sunshades he sits and weaves away". Similarly Gutta (lvi), the affluent Brahmin girl, expresses her disdain for peoples' "lure of wealth" which led her to the fold of nuns. And Subba (lxx), the goldsmith's daughter, "owner of a no mean state", remembers her fear of the responsibilities of wealth, which so put her off that she ended in a *Sangha.* Anopama (liv), rich, beautiful and much sought after by eligible suitors, entered the fold finding the worldly life of no value: " profit to me in the life of the house there is none". And Isidasi (lxxii) joined because having thrice failed in marriage, she was sick and tired of her role as a housewife. But the two, who stand out in this context, are Bhadda Kuntalkesa (xlvi) and Nandutara (xlii), who came to the Buddhist *Sangha* in search of their intellectual quests. Both had led a varied religious career

and as ex-Jains, had gathered a lot of knowledge, but after a point realized that they had nothing more to learn from them. Bhadda even outwitted them in a debate. Similarly the rational mind of Nanduttara, though a brahmin by birth, was too critical of their rites and rituals and for an alternative way, first joined the Jains. As an extremely proficient orator, she toured from place to place, till one day she met the Buddhist Maha-Moggalla and convinced by his arguments, entered the Bhikkuni *Sangha.*

While the psalms of most of these *theris* summarize the gist of the Buddha's teachings on the foulness of the body and folly of lust, the *theri* Subha Jivakambavanika (xiv) stands out as one who uses her body as an "iconic teaching device" to drive this message home. On her way to the forest to meditate, one day she was confronted by a rogue, threatening to violate her. Appalled at his audacity, she first tried to dissuade him through her arguments about the impermanence of her body and its being ultimately nothing more than a putrefying corpse. But when he refused to see her point and instead located the source of her desire in her beautiful eyes, she in a decisive move tore out one of her eyes and gave it to him. The rogue's desires ceased instantly and he sought her forgiveness.

What Subba's story tries to indicate, gets its most eloquent confirmation in Soma's verse (xxxvi) where it is not an individual but an entire collectivity which is represented as having grown above and away from even the remotest intimations of the sexual. The desexualization process that had begun with their desexualized attires, comes full circle with the desexualization of their very selves. Hence in this new vision Soma can think of herself and of her fellow *theris* not as women but as persons who have truly attained the asexual ideal of the Buddhist *Dhamma:* "What should the woman-nature count for us,/in her who with mind set, and knowledge advancing, has right insight into *Dhamma?*/To one for whom the question arises, Am I a woman in these matters, /or am I a man, or, what then am I?/Such as are you, you evil one, are fit to talk." These words of Soma, apart from indicating the arrival of the complete recluse woman, also indicate the presence of the women of substance in Buddhism, because of whom, time

and again, it is pointed out that whether evident from the outside or not, but inside women had a lot of influence in shaping and moulding the contents of Buddhism, and determining the hues of its essential thought.

This documentation of the recluse women's spiritual life apart, the *Therigāthā* also stands as a precious source of information on general status of woman as daughter, wife and mother. Though in most patriarchal societies the desire for the male child is very strong but in Hindu society the significance of the male offspring was manifold more, because of his importance in the funeral rites of the father. It is a belief among Hindus that, "through a son he conquers the world, through a son's son he obtains immortality". However, in Buddhism, the earning of merit does not depend on the funeral rites of a person but on the actions of the deceased. And in another departure from Hinduism, the rites ceremony itself is a very simple affair, which could be performed by a daughter, a widowed wife or anyone at the spot. There is as such no ceremonial need for a son. Therefore in Buddhism the birth of a daughter is not necessarily the cause for lamentation nor is a sonless wife a matter of disdain. It is well known that when King Pasenadi of Kosala came to the Buddha, grieving that his Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter, the former is supposed to have admonished him with the words: "A female offspring, O King, may prove even nobler than a male one." Such attitude of the Buddha towards the girl child did not remain an abstract ideal but, in course of time, it had a percolating effect for an entire society. The birth of a child became important and not his sex. In Pali literature we have the instance of a rich householder Maha-Suvanna (Great Wealth), who had no children. Following the custom of the times, he decked up a big tree with flags and banners and made the vow that, "should I be granted a son or daughter, I will pay you great honour." In *Jataka* too, we have names like Brahmadatta, Kasiraja and the instance of a Brahmin woman put up prayers for either a son or a daughter. Prince Bodhi in one of the Buddhist texts attempts to wrest the secret from the future about his prospective parenthood, thinking that the sign would be the same whether he were destined to get a son or a daughter. This treating of the son

and the daughter at par apart, Buddhism also brought in the innovation of an adopted daughter. In the *Dhammapada Commentary*, we have the orphaned Samavati adopted by the householder Mitta and another one by the name of Kana "made … as his own oldest daughter" by a certain king. All these instances from the Buddhist literature illustrate that there was a stupendous change from the old way of thinking where a daughter was considered a curse and that the rational attitude of Buddhism towards women had already begun to influence people at large (Horner:1975:ch.ii).

It is evident from the *Therigāthā*, that under the Buddhist influence matrimony was not held before women as the ultimate aim of their existence, and nor were they treated with disdain if they did not marry. In *Therigāthā* we have as many as thirty-two unmarried *theris.* And if on the other hand, they were willing to get married, they were not hastened off to an early child-marriage, nor bound to accept the match decided by the parents for them. The women of princely and affluent backgrounds even had a definite say in the matters of their matrimony. Thus in clear violation of her parent's wishes, Sumedha (lxxiii: 464,465,472, 479) refuses to accept the royal suitor her parents chose for her, asserting: "my duty lies not in the life of the house". As a paragon of independent will and character the extent of her defiance can be gauged from the culminating act of her cutting-off of her tresses, and cutting off all her familial and worldly ties. Through this act of de-sexualizing herself, she also makes the final statement on her resolve to enter nunhood. That she comes out triumphant in this, is evident from the fact that moved by the eloquence of her arguments, and because she was "learned in the system of our Lord and well trained", ultimately, not only her parents, but her suitor and his entire retinue are converted to Buddhism.

In matters of marriage daughters had a lot of autonomy. While marriage of the daughters was performed with the consent of the parents there are good number of instances in the *Therigāthā* where young girls like Patachara (xlvii) and Bhadda Kuntalakesa (lxxii) choose their own mates though not with happy consequences. And there are at least another two instances, those of Anopama (cmy.

on liv) and Upallavana (cmy. on lxiv), in whose case the prospective suitors came or sent for the daughter's hand in marriage. On the practice of giving dowry to the daughters, from the *Therigāthā* it is evident that it was a practice. And that the daughters actually held that property, is evident from the instance of Bhada Kapilini (cmy. on xxxvii), who although married appears to have been the sole owner of the property; for it is said that when she renounced the world "she handed over her great wealth to her kinfolk". However, the evidence also points to the reverse practice of parents charging bride-price in lieu of their daughters. The much married Isidasi (lxxii: 420) records the practice in these words: "Then my father gave me for second time as bride / content with half my husband's sire had paid". Isidasi's example, however, also points to the presence of the options of divorce and remarriage of women who were not widows. She was thrice married and thrice deserted. It seems that since marriage was performed as a civil rather than as a religious rite, divorce was easy to settle with mutual consent. Another remarkable aspect of the Buddhist history as handed down from the *Therigāthā*, is the total absence of any instance of the practice or the cult of *Sati.* And also the space it gave a widow to go about unabused, free from any suspicion of ill-omen, and without having to be excluded from the domestic festivities.

In the *Therigāthā* there is at least one instance of Kisa Gotami (cmy. on lxiii) who was reproachfully treated by the neighbours until she bore a son. But as Horner (1975: 4-5) points out, this is a unique record in Buddhist literature where motherhood is paid such homage as against the mere wife. Otherwise there is much evidence pointing to the greater respect commanded by women in every capacity and motherhood as only an aspect of that improved position. Buddhism surely did not encourage the cult of the mother and motherhood was no longer the only reason for treating women with deference. Wife, in her own right, earned enough respect. There are instances, where the wife is spoken of in glowing terms. Referring to a monk who left the Order and went back to the family life, the Buddha is supposed to have commented: "In bygone days he lost a jewel of a wife, just as now he has lost the jewel

of a faith." Of the seven types of wives mentioned in *Anguttara Nikayn*, is also included the friend-type of wife in "acknowledgement of her comradeship".

Of the many categories of women in the Buddhist literature, not necessarily located within the domestic spaces, the category of the courtesan is one that has a strong presence in the *Therigāthā.* Given the fact, that she provided erotic services to the community, in certain (read colonial) discourses[23] on her, she is compared with the Western prostitute and juxtaposed against the 'chaste' housewife and viewed from within the framework of morality as 'unchaste' and 'immoral'. But the Indian courtesan is an altogether different phenomenon from that of a Western prostitute. There is a load of cultural meanings associated with the person of and the concept of her that it is impossible to appreciate her significance in a certain context without the knowledge of the socio-cultural contexts in which she operated. To start with, and as pointed out in an earlier section, Indian tradition suffers from no Western-Victorian sense of morality wherein everything involving the body belongs to the realm of the profane. No doubt, in Indian literature and treatises like *the Arthasāstra*, for instance, the courtesan is treated at par with the trading class and subjected to the same rules of taxation as the rest of the traders' community. But placed in its proper context, this is more a marker of her autonomy and independence than of her degeneracy.[24] In fact she does share an equation with the merchant class and this is supported even etymologically. For instance, the Sanskrit term for the merchant community is *Veisya*, and one of the Sanskrit terms for the courtesan is *vesya.* Similar evidences are found in the terminology of other languages too. In Kannada, for instance, the term *vanajya* for a courtesan bears phonetic similarity to the term *vanijya*, which in both Kannada and Sanskrit languages denotes commerce. Again, in the literary as well as the archaeological maps of the cities,[25] the courtesans' quarters are shown as part of the market place, *bazaar*, which in turn explains the use of the term *bazaaru* (one who lives the culture of the market place) in relation to a woman of the courtesan class. Though in the course of time and as an off-shoot of certain

discourses (e.g. the colonial discourse, reffered to above) the term acquires a derogatory connotation but in reality it only suggests and carries further the analogy between the courtesan and the merchant in terms of their respective vocations. While the merchant trades in his merchandise, the courtesan trades in her body. And this is an empowering situation for her[26] and not one of exploitation. Nevertheless, the main source of her power lies in her being adept in all the sixty-four arts, and the bodily knowledge systems associated therewith. Because she embodies this knowledge, she on the one hand is seen as an impediment for the renouncer[27] as a distroyer of his penance, and on the other as one who becomes instrumental in a seeker's progress on the 'Path' (as a tantra guru, for instance). This access to the twin zones of the erotic and the ascetic respectively makes her an interface[28] category in control of both the spaces.

However, the power for this ambiguous female category flows from yet another space, namely, the temple, where her counterpart, the *devadasi* is in an indomitable position of being an auspicious[29] ritualist, beyond all the associations of the pure and the impure. And once again it is her body which is the locus of power and which in the overall body-centered culture of the temple renders her very significant. To put it differently, and to locate the discussion in our present context, within the space of the temple the *devadasi* is an embodiment[30] of *dharma* and holds a central significance in the pervasive body-centred *bhoga*[31] culture that characterizes the large sequence of rituals carried out for the deity in the temple[32]. To put it in yet another way, the elaborate range of rituals associated with the deity in the temple, point to the essentially *rajasic*[33] character of the Hindu religion, of which the courtesan is but an indispensable component. The presence of the *rajasic* within the religious, is also signified by the term *raja-rsi* used for a certain class of the sage in Hinduism. As an important component of the *rajasic* temple, therefore, the courtesan's embodying the nun as a Buddhist convert implies transgression not only of the *rajasic* domain and of her earlier *dharma* but also of her earlier body. The point, this discussion is trying to drive home is that it is in an alto-

gether new reincarnation as a *sattvic*[34] person that the courtesan enters the folds of the Buddhist *sanayasa* and becomes part of yet another autonomous space.

The *Therigāthā*, however, lends a new problematic to the category of the courtesan by documenting, one, that Abhaya's mother (xxvi) became a courtesan due to the merit acquired in a former life by giving alms to a former Buddha; and two, which goes contrary to the logic offered in one, that Addhikasi (xxii) and Ambapali (Ixvi) became prostitutes for the sin of calling an Arhant's sister and an Arhant *theri* prostitutes respectively. However, this problematic does not quite fit in with our present context, and needs to be taken up separately.
Among the courtesans appearing in the *Therigāthā* Ambapali (Ixvi) of Vaisali was a woman of exquisite beauty and grace. An extremely gifted person, she was well versed in dancing, singing, and lute playing, and it was primarily thorough her that Vaisali became such a flourishing kingdom of the times. As a *nagarvadhu*, she charged fifty *kahapanas* for one night. King Bimbisara of Magadha visited with her at Vaisali for seven days and she bore him a child, later known as Abhaya. Yet inspite of her prosperous position she fully realized the transitoriness of every phenomenon of the universe and adopted a religious life under the Buddha. The poem attributed to her well illustrates her vision. The decayed condition of her aged body is juxtaposed in a point to point contrast with the excellence of her earlier youthful body.

Padmavati (xxvi) a courtesan of Ujjain was again a woman of exquisite beauty with whom King Bimbisara spent a night and she had a son by him. It was through the teaching of her son Abbhya, that she became "expunged (of) all the fever of desire" experience as she did the "cool, calm … *Nibbana*'*s* peace".

In the poem (xxxix) attributed to a former courtesan Vimala, her transformation from her former temptress' self to her new self of a *theri* is traced in telling details. Recalling her earlier self she says: "Intoxicated by my (good) complexion, my figure, beauty and fame, haughty because of my youth, despised other women.

Having decorated this body … I stood at the brothel door, like a hunter having spread out a snare…”. And reflecting on her present gainful state she exults: “Purged are the *Asavas* that drugged my heart/ calm and content I know *Nibbana*’*s* peace.”

Addhakasi (xxii), an extremely flourishing courtesan of Kasi herself spells out the dimensions of her bodily and economic wealth that she, as a courtesan possessed: “My wages (of prostitution) were as large as the (revenue of the) country of Kasi; having fixed that price the townspeople made me priceless in price.” But having encountered the New Gospel, she longed to terminate the round of becomings and joined the Buddhist *Dhamma.* The verses of these four women show as Horner (1975: 185) rightly points out, that “the spark to light the vision of higher things was within their grasp. It needed but their effort and determination and choice, their will to kindle it, in its burning to consume what had been.”

Curiously, the category of the courtesans did not only survive as *theris*, but with the span of time as the nun’s community ceased to be a vital force in the Buddhist tradition, more than anyone else, it is these courtesans we hear of both in the Mahayana literature and the Buddhist *Tantra.* While there is evidence that some of these *theris* survived as *Boddhisattva* (cf. the nun by the name of the Lion-Yawn) in the Mahayana texts, a substantial Mahayana literature is devoted to one Vasumitra, a prostitute. In this literature she is mentioned as a good friend and a good teacher who teaches the *Dhamma* “through a glance, an embrace, a kiss.” Known for her immense range of knowledge, she as a *Boddhisattva* is immortalized in the canon as Bhagwati Vasumitra. Similarly, in the world of “Tantric inversions”, where a male seeker’s religious progress is dependent on his ability to see woman as divine, and recognize her body as the most important vehicle towards enlightenment, the courtesan becomes the natural guru and teacher. Thus we hear of even such advanced seekers like Tilopa (one of the founders’ of the bka’- brgyud school of Buddhist Tantra[35]), finding their ultimate guru in a courtesan named Barima – a distinguished *Boddhisattva.* Others like Darika and Ghantapa also find their enlightenment through courtesans. And finally, the celebrated

dakinis of the Buddhist iconography suggest the certain presence of a dancer/courtesan in their passionate, ecstatic faces and bodies curved in sinuous dance poses.

No wonder then that scholarship on Indian tradition at times treat courtesans and nuns interchangeably.

After these Buddhist *sattvas*, the next we hear of females with religious aspirations is some 1,500 to 2,000 years later in *Bhakti* women saints, and saint-poetesses whose overwhelming feminine spirituality sets into motion a new and yet another unique and vibrant feminised tradition. In this new tradition we hear of the transvestite male *bhaktas*, a menstruating Ramakrishna, or a fainting (like a heroine in *viraha*) Chaitanya; and against these we have the *un-pativrata* and *pratiloma*[36] women saints like Andal, Akkāmahadevi, Mira, Lalla and the rest, whose sacrilegious and subversive acts and lifestyles could have an informing role for the entire project of feminism itself.

NOTES

[1] e.g. in Kalidasa's play *Meghduta*(*The Cloud Messenger*), *vesya-s* perform this ritual in the temple of *Siva* at Ujjain.

[2]On the multivalent characteristics of these ritual women see, Marglin 1985 and Kersenboom 1998.

[3]These temple women ritualists (*devadasi-s*, *ganika-s*, *vesya-s*) offer a counter system to the housewife. The ritual impurities of birth, menstruation and death restricting a housewife, do not apply to these non-householder women.

[4]As a multi-level counter sructure to *dakshinācāra*, *vamācāra* is viewed as radically placing women at centre stage. In *Tantric* cults, it is the male member who seeks the favour of the female counterpart. Within this system the male companion will always stay to the left of his female counterpart, circumbulate her counter-clockwise, make offerings and feed her with his left hand, and embrace her with his left arm etc. In a word *vamācāra* frees her of all the associations of the pure and impure underlying the other system.

[5] On Buddhist Tantra, see Shaw 1994.

[6] See Zydenbose 1994, for related discussion on the subject.

[7]According to Shaw (1994:6), scholars have begun to document the existence of religious traditions in India in which women are the custodians of treasures of cultural knowledge, ritual and meditative arts, and oral and local tradtions.

[8] The term *sramana* (or monk) occurs only once in the early *Upaniṣads* (Rhys Davids 1978:62) and even though the term could not have emerged all of a sudden in this text, it is nevertheless difficult to date the institutions precise origins.

[9] Both the Buddhists and the Jainas record the presence of an unusually large number of such groups. The *Digha Nikaya* reveals the existence of sixty-two heresies and wandering communities and the Jaina texts mention as many as three hundred and sixty three schools of thought and their followers. (For more details see Talim 1972:ch.l.)

[10] In fact, for a householder there is a simultaneous presence of a *yogi* and a *bhogi*. The *yogi-s* presence is marked by the "knock on his back door of the *sanyasi*, who literary stands there asking for alms and suggests a future (even instant) possibility, and the knock of the *bhogi* (enjoyer, sensualist) on his back door, as it were, who invites him to a life of unbridled pleasure." Hence, the householder may live in the shadow of the renouncer, be guided by him, but he need not seek to merge in him. See Madan 1987: Introduction.

[11] The number of *paccita* rules listed for women are much larger. Talim 1972: Chapterl.

[12] The *yaksa-yaksi* cult in a *Tantric* relationship are also associated with the Sri Lankan Buddhist dance form *Yakshanritya* or the *Yakshagana*, the folk performances in Karnataka and the *Yakshagana Prabandhas* of Tyagaraja—The *Tantra* associations with ritual music and dance being well-known. Satyanath 1997: 7.

[13] Normally in Indian lore and literature for a balance of power the fluids in woman's body should keep flowing (Details, O' Flaherty 1980: ch.II). The upward movement of bodily fluids both in case of men and women in this tradition, are perceived to produce states, extraordinary, almost divine. In men the upward flow of sexual fluid creates *soma*, the elixir of immortality and in that of women an extremely powerful state capable of infinite destruction. As *Mahisasurmardini*, the goddess *Kali* represents such state and so does Kanagi in the context under discussion.

[14]The matrilineal advantages of the tribal society have been proved almost conclusively by scholars.

[15] These, however, were returned by Gautama.

[16] Though such an important event in her life, what she asks as boons are: "Eight are the boons, Lord that 1 beg … I desire, Lord, my life long to bestow robes for the rainy season upon the sangha, and food for the incoming almsmen, and food for the sick, and food for those that wait upon the sick, and medicine for the sick, and a constant supply of congey, and the bathing robes for the almswomen" (Homer 1975). This insatiable desire of the lay women to serve the *Sangha* is a significant pointer to and an acknowledgement of the way Buddhism seems to have enhanced their lives.

[17] From among non-ascetic men Yasa, a clansman's son is qouted in Pali canon to have earned *Arhan*ship without abandoning his secular life (Homer 1975: 367).

[18] This incidentally becomes an illustration of how Buddhism became instrumental in flattening the stratified systems in the society.

[19] Adapting the insights of feminist film theory into how female spectators adopt the "male gaze" she argues that Buddhist hagiographies showcase female subjects who have learned to imitate male conventions of looking. Such women internalize the male gaze through the instruction of male teachers, learning to see themselves as objects (ibid.: 5)

[20] In the *Therigāthā* though we have *theris* who are supposed to be the contemporaries of Gotama but there is also evidence which suggests that some of them go up to as late as the Ashokan period.

[21] For, in seventeen of the poems, *Tlherigāthā* assigns one author's name, and the *Apadana* another.

[22] For these rules see Horner (1975) pp.118-161.

[23] For different views of such discourse, refer Tharu and Lalita 1991: Ch. *Introduction.*

[24] Supposed to have been modelled on the heavenly *apsaras*, their comparisons go beyond their being providers of erotic services. Just as *apsara* is known for her intelligence, autonomy and power, so is a courtesan.

[25] For an archaeological as well as literary description of the city, refer Rangarajan 1992; and for more discussion on the subject, refer Satyanath 2001.

[26] On empowering aspects of the courtesan's body, see Ramanujan et,al. 1994. *When God is a Customer.*

[27]Cf. the Rishyasringa episode in the Mahābhārata.

[28] For a fascinating discussion on the subject, see Sayyanath 1999.

[29] Cf. footnote 3.

[30] Cf. "Body is the first instrument of *dharma*"—Kalidasa: *Kumara-sambhava.*

[31]For the centrality of *bhoga* in many other cultural contexts, see Rao et al.(1992) and Satyanath (2001).

[32]Such as washing, bathing, cleaning, clothing, feeding, entertaining, putting to sleep etc.

[33]*Rajasic* implies being endowed with or relating to the quality of *rajas*, the second of the three primary propensities of nature (*sattva*, *tamas*, being the other two). Supposed to be the source of motion or energy in creation, as attribute of *prakriti* (nature, matter) *rajas* is found in all objects; dust, earth particles; particles of sun ray, ploughed field; menstruation; child in the womb (Kapoor 1998: 169). It is in this sense of creative energy that *rajasic* is used in the context. The King being (as the etymology of the words *Raja* or *Maharaja* indicate), one of the primary sources of such creative energy, lends this attribute to the deity when in the course of time they merge into a single unity.

[34] Given the Buddhist emphasis on the austere and the celibate, which are some of the many characteristics of *sattva*, the courtesan on entering its folds becomes a natural embodiment of these attributes.

[35] On Tantric Buddhism, see, Shawl994.

[36] They reject even their own beloved gods when they come as human suitors.

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Section IV

Braving the Challenges

Evolving Traditions, Retreating Modernities: Women and the Gendered Social Reality

JASBIR JAIN

The theme statement of the seminar points to the need of critiquing the categorization of tradition and modernity as self-contained opposites; it also indicates the kinds of forces which have shaped this discourse at different points of history. The critiquing in this context apparently is in relation to the woman question.

Each of the categories identified by the seminar evokes multiple responses and histories. Tradition is neither static nor singular. At any one point of time there are many traditions defined by class, caste, gender, religion and language.[1] There are literary, scripture-based traditions, and the accumulative oral traditions. Rituals, customs and practices are both the manifestations of the scriptural tradition as well as an expression of the experiential reality. They also express, at one point, a disjunction between the initial act of logic which has led to its formulation and the practice which is now based on blind faith and superstition.[2] Similarly, modernity is not homogeneous; it too is rooted in the categories of class, caste, gender and religion. Further, the norm against which it is measured is the norm of an existing tradition. Finally, it is as much of the mind as of the body.[3]

Yet we ignore these truths and treat them as opposite categories primarily because *modernity* is perceived as a borrowing from the West and not as a natural evolution necessary for survival. It is seen as related to the body and the externals, and not as an engagement with new ideas. It is also, often, delinked from the process of individuation. This opposition between tradition and modernity is accentuated when it is applied to the woman question because

Indian social reality is heavily gendered: space, attitudes, morality, education, roles and institutional control, all are gendered.

The whole idea of masculinity is based on a passive, docile, conventional femininity. Tradition is defined through an exercise based on selective indicators, and it projects purity, asceticism, sacrifice and hierarchical structures as the eternal norms. These concepts, paradoxically enough, deny the individual while feeding the ego.

Epics and myths, history and reality are subject to various interpretations. We are all aware how reality is contextual and plural. Every generation and every category has looked to the past to validate its approach. There have been many rewritings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and interpretations of the *Mahābhārata.* Iravati Karve in her essays included in Yuganta[4] does a reinterpretation of the roles of the women—Kunti, Gāndhari, Subhadra, and the rest. Pratibha Ray in her novel *Yagyaseni* opens out the whole approach to polyandry and the imposition it places on the woman's mind and body.

Folktales also present a similar multiplicity. Indira Parikh and Pulin Garg in their book *Indian Women: An Inner Dialogue* (1989), have worked on the five dominant patterns of identity-construction reflected in folk tales which define women's roles. These five patterns are:

(i) the princess who is disposed off by an uncaring parent through an unequal marriage and takes it upon herself to redeem her husband through devotion, determination and sacrifice;

(ii) the woman who aspires to personal accomplishment in order to attract a suitable husband but feels cheated by the trickster who has been able to bluff her;

(iii) there is then the protected woman who is exploited because of her innocence as she is unequipped and untrained to protect herself. She passively surrenders herself to her circumstances (this is the story of many an Indian woman);

(iv) a fourth pattern is of the woman who over-romanticizes and indulges in a dream-like surrender to the 'superior' image of the male;

(v) and the fifth is the Cordelia-Lear story where the right-thinking daughter, discarded by her parents, is proved right in the end and parents turn to her for help.[5]

In all these role-definitions neglect, disposal and existential loneliness are recurring features. Women are disposed of, discarded, rejected and subordinated. They are able to redeem themselves mainly through devotion, sacrifice and sublimation. And even when placed within family situation, there is a deep realization that they are alone, that they don't belong, feel perpetually uprooted and on trial. They are also constantly exposed to male exploitation. In both kinds of accounts—the folk and the mythical—women's lives are defined by male control, thus depriving them of the element of choice. The opposition between tradition and modernity, in the context of feminism, comes to rest on this: the female need for choice and personal expression outside the roles defined for them.

For the purposes of my present analysis, I propose to examine Tagore's *chare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, *1916*), M.K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* (1976) and Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' written in the 80s (the English translation first appeared in 1987). It is the interplay of tradition and modernity which fascinates me in these writings—and each one of them has a woman character who either generates the narrative, thwarts it, or shapes it.

The Home and the World (1916) is largely read as a critique of modernity, where Nikhil's desire to educate Bimala leads to her overstepping the bounds and destroying the family. Ashis Nandy has additionally read in it a critiquing of nationalism which leads to violence and destruction. The pursuit of such a nationalism in Nandy's view "has enormous hidden costs", a nationalism which has an attractive face, a fiery rhetoric and which unhesitatingly employs violence to achieve its goals and is loaded with fascist possibilities. *Ghare-Baire* is a "bitter criticism of sectarian Hindu nationalism, which at the time was a powerful component of Indian anti-imperialism" (19).[6]

The novel has other dimensions, besides these, dimensions which have not been as fully explored as they warrant. Besides

being a mid-point in the national discourse from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anand Math* (1882) to Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Pathar Dabi* (1936),[7] it is also a powerful comment on the woman question. What destroys Bimala is not the English education but the self-projection into the role of the goddess Kali, a projection which frees her from the limits of the familial space, and bestows her with a power and a confidence which her familial role had not done.

Bimala is more the product of tradition than of modernity. She is one of the narrators and the novel opens with her dialogue with her dead mother—a mother who was dark, but "had the radiance of holiness". Bimala had resented being dark like her mother, and had on that account held herself to be inferior. In reparation she had prayed to God to 'grow up to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem' (9). After marriage the dark complexion of her husband, while reducing her own sense of inferiority, also leads to a certain disenchantment with the romantic idea of the prince of the fairy story. In response to this dissatisfaction with the appearance of her husband she turns to 'devotion' towards him which she perceives as inner beauty and transcends all debates, doubts or calculations. She has so internalized this tradition that she has turned this relationship into a self-satisfaction rather than a mutuality. She also fails to see the result of the traditional male role as played out by the other men of the family, the men who had drunk themselves to death in adherence to their norms of masculinity (10-11).

A related question is the kind of masculinity which traditional value structures produce or encourage. Even if class and upbringing be significant inputs, the socialization process encourages the male to be aggressive, self-centred, desirous of power and of control over others. For Bimala, it is her husband who is the discordant element in her fantasy life of married happiness. Trained as she is to give, she does not know how to receive, or to grow. He fails to fill the image of the aggressive male and while his world is outwordly directed, she is still caught up in her private fantasies.

Bimala's first narrative stands by itself as a preface to the rest of the novel which has three narrators—Bimala, her husband Nikhil

and her husband's friend Sandip. Bimala narrates ten sections, her husband eight and Sandip five.

The husband-wife ralationship is the site where the conflict between tradition and modernity actually takes place primarily because each defines his conduct to the other along those lines. Bimala has internalized the power exercised by devotion early in life and is obsessed with it throughout—the power over the household, over Sandip, over Amulya. The whole process of socialization has led her towards this and when it comes to modernity she picks up only on the externals and is unable to reach the real meaning.

Bimala describes the culture of her marital home as one of mixed influences the 'manners of the Moguls and pathans … customs of Manu and Parasha' (11). She loves the 'cage' in which she is placed and is reluctant to go out of 'purdah' into the outside world where the real challenge lies, and where Nikhil feels they need to recognize each other (18). What pushes her into the outside world is not the gentle persuasion of her husband but Sandip's rhetoric about the Swadeshi movement. Visualizing her self as the new Kali, Bimala writes "My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires became *red* with the passion of this new age" (emphasis mine). And later the fiery speech of Sandip inspires her to consider herself the 'sole representative of Bengal's womanhood' (28), and *Shakti* incarnate (36). In fact there are numerous references to the Kali image. At one point Bimala says:

> I am covetous . . . I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults.… I would make my country a person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga, for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. (39)

All the while her husband offers her freedom of choice, an equal relationship, the possibility of moving outside conventionally defined roles and towards personhood, but she is blind to this opening; for it clashes with her role of the ideal woman. Nikhil is not afraid of the unknown, he does not suffer from the fear of emasculation. He is a counterpoint to the masculine images

presented by his dead brother and the living Sandip who are both exercized by sado-masochistic impulses. Nikhil has placed himself outside the desire for irrational power and control over another human being and has allowed the qualities of compassion and understanding to emerge. If he fails to come into Bimala's expectations of ideal love, he is willing to face the consequences -he must see what he does not want to see, and acknowledge his failures if he must. He is not satisfied with the Bimala who lives a role, "who is the produce of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties," and the love which "may merely be like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam-engine of society?" (43).

The conflict is not between tradition and modernity but between equality and inequality, between truth and power, and between the individual self and the type. Bimala fails to realize a self, lost as she is in the claims of identity. Identity and self are not synonyms. Identity is constructed by external factors like status, job, class, caste, religion, appearance, while the self represents a discovery of the individual self through experiential reality, freedom and failure.[8]

M.K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* is a true-life biographical narrative about a child widow who happened to be the grand-aunt of the writer and whose life-story has been passed down through matrilineal discourse. Men are placed on the margins. The narrative problemalizes the concept of inherited tradition as it flows through the power exercised by priests, society and customs and the manner in which this tradition imposes upon a woman's body right from birth to death. This power is exercized through matrimonial alliances, excommunication, caste customs and by placing menstruation and adherence to the concept of 'madi' within public discourse. (Ironically enough, while a woman belongs to the 'private' world, the home, her life is made public; and a man who is of the world, his sexual life is private.)

Widowed at nine, Phani is forbidden from all the pleasures of childhood and pushed into a world of deprivation and exploitation under the threat of excommunication of the family. At thirteen when she reaches puberty, her head is shaven off and she enters

the life of a 'madi'. And all this for a man she has never known (45). From then onwards, she realized that until her death she would have "to eat one meal a day and live with a shaven head" (49). Later on in the novel, one realizes the exploitative aspect of this custom. These widows serve as domestic labour. If there are no 'madi' woman who is going to do all the cooking, chopping, pounding and grinding? (106-107). The rationality behind such customs is to starve the body into compliance and obedience (107).

Over the years she gets accustomed to be called upon for help and constantly seeks to reduce her needs. As a widow she abstains from certain kinds of food, later she gives up preparing a snack in the evenings, still later gives up the one meal she was accustomed to (73)[9] and finally learns to survive on a couple of bananas. Till the age of nearly eighty, she has never known the mystery of birth (85), is unaware of her own sexuality and develops an aversion to it when it is openly displayed before her by others. She is equally shocked by the double code of morality, as it is implemented by society:

> "What peculiar customs we have", she thought. "If a man touches an outcaste woman, all he needs to do is to change his sacred thread, and he's pure again. If a woman even looks at another man, she's whore… How many blind traditions we have! Like the banyan tree father planted that everyone hanged himself from. No one ever thinks of changing anything. "(96)

The changes she wants are based on compassion, an understanding of human emotions and desires, and the desire to think of men and women as persons not confined merely to their gendered roles. She has always been a widow in her adult life, and has never experienced wifehood or motherhood. She has neglected the body and completely mastered it. The change she wants is not based on any egoistic pursuit of power, and is not rooted in any Western ideology. Phaniyamma has no faith in horoscopes. Her own has been proved false. Therefore she reasons "Isn't it enough to make sure the *gotra* is all right? What's the use of horoscopes. Isn't it enough if boy and girl agree to marry one another?" (103, Also

see 117). She wants people to acknowledge the flow of time and the corresponding fact that change is the law of nature. She asks "So what if a woman has hair or her head? Does all the impurity rest there? What punishment do you want for a child who has just begun to open her eyes? I'm deeply grieved by this, that's all." (109)

All her life she has obeyed the dictates of custom, and at the end of it all, she begins to express the injustice she has felt all along but never voiced. It is in this voicing that one is able to see the transition from tradition to modernity. Rebellion, defiance, resistance—like questioning itself—are related to individual action and individual thought. Phaniyamma asks, "What kind of happiness did the great mother Sita experience, having wedded the Lord Rama himself? A life of trouble she had. And did her husband give her joy? He made her jump in the fire, and sent off a pregnant woman to the forest. And Draupadi, did she not suffer?… Some good-for-nothings write the *Purāṇas*, and we useless ones believe them. That's all there is to that." (119) The questioning is not of tradition but of the static quality it has begun to represent.

While *The Home and the World* is about the conflict of traditional value structures and the modern sensibility within man-woman relationships, and *Phaniyamma* about the social and religious impositions upon a woman's body, impositions which exclude and deprive her of a full existence, Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is about the socio-economic exploitation of women and the power of a myth to retaliate. It also goes to establish the vitality of tradition while simultaneously extending its application. The location of this exploitative relationship is placed outside marriage and within a political power-structure where both imposition and defiance are vested in the woman's body. Mahasweta Devi has been working actively with the tribal people and has written extensively about them. She takes cognizance of the oral tradition which tribal culture represents and which, though condemned to reservation areas by the Criminal Tribes and Castes Act, 1971, has by and large escaped the impact of the west-oriented modernity. The tribal people are the victims of the indigenous exploitative system. Tradition and superstition are often employed as means to

that exploitative end. This is borne out by another of Mahasweta Devi's stories "The Witch" where the dumb daughter of the tribal priest is raped and abandoned, who now pregnant is projected as a "daini"[10] as much as by Shivram Karanth's *Chomuna Dudi* (1938).[11]

In the "Author's Preface" to *Bashai Tudu* (which includes "Draupadi"), Mahasweta Devi writes: "I believe that it should be the object of every kind of politics to fulfil man's craving to live with his rights intact. I do not believe that any politics confined to promoting a party's interest can replace the social system" (xx). Thus the writer's social responsibility includes writing about the dispossessed and the disinherited.

Draupadi's very name expresses a gap between the mainstream and tribal society. 'Draupadi' is the title of the story, but the woman who bears it, is known as 'Dopdi' Mejhen. It is not a name native to the adivasis. Surju Sahu's wife had given her the name. The novel thus carries within it a double discourse based upon class differences. Power is represented here by the police, the army and by men who rape women.

Draupadi is part of a Naxalite group. Her husband has already been killed in an encounter and as she moves from one area to another carrying messages for her group, price is fixed on her head. The Naxalite groups are a constant threat to the "money-lenders, landlords, grainbrokers, anonymous brothel keepers" and the whole lot of powerbrokers. Later when Dopdi is apprehended, she is gang raped in order to make her betray her comrades. Contrasted with her night of torture is the Senanayak's regulated life, his dinner at nine in the evening and his leisurely breakfast in the morning before he is finally ready to have her brought before him. Draupadi refuses to cover herself and walks towards him naked, with her head held high. Covered with blood, she stands before him and laughs at him. She "shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky-splitting and sharp as her ululation, What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (161)

Through this challenge to her rapists to prove themselves men, she simultaneously transcends all societal limits imposed on women where shame, honour and bodily control are concerned and reverses the story of the Mahābhārata where Draupadi is saved from the *cheerharan*. One has defied men through the fact of remaining covered, the other through her nakedness. Power has its limits, just as tradition has its boundaries. New situations require new solutions. In Gayatri Spivak's view Mahasweta's story questions the 'singularity' of the Mahābhārat Draupadi and she rewrites the episode in order to prove her point that 'this is the place where male leadership stops' (xiii).[12]

Tradition and modernity need not necessarily be a gender question, but they have forcibly become one because of the premium society places on the concepts of purity and *pativrata*, concepts which divide society along gender lines, Phani (in *Phaniyamma*) had often wondered about the meaning of *pativrata*, "even when she heard tales of goods wives from the *Purāṇas* and the fables. Renuka had been beheaded for looking at the reflection of the *sanyasi* who sat on the opposite bank of the river … But men who slept with a hundred women were still as pure as fire" (Phaniyamma 93-94). The attitudes which prevail with regard to the woman's body also prevail in the social sphere say, in the privileging of power, the hegemonic control of the other sideline, the discourses of poverty, and in social justice. In Mahasweta's work both the social discourse and the gender discourse get interwoven. Her work also seeks to define tradition and modernity differently even as it critiques both. Moving outside the mainstream dominant tradition, she includes oral tradition, and the cultures of the marginalized in her narratives, narratives which are about poverty and exploitation and which make us reflect on the limits of religion. In this connection I would also like to draw attention to Kancha Ilaiah's work, *Why I am Not a Hindu*, *A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy*, *Culture and Political Economy*, which juxtaposes the rituals and traditions of the other India with the mainstream Sanskritic tradition,[13] and provides another perspective on the question of tradition. Mahasweta is critical of the development agenda which rides roughshod over the individual and is incon-

siderate to human needs, working as it does on the principles of profit and through corruption and falsification. But the roots of this psychology of exploitation are present in both tradition and modernity. She is critical of unthinking power. The discourse of modernity, becomes, in her work, a need for equality, dignity and space. Dopdi's retaliation through her naked body transforms victimhood into an agency. When the individual acquires an agency, perhaps modernity is achieved.

The opposition perceived between tradition and modernity is unnatural and limited. When the debate is focussed on these, concepts like counter-modernity and anti-modernity come to the fore. Robert Young has referred to the Gandhian ideology as counter-modernity.[14] But the Gandhian view as spelt out in *Hind Swaraj* and practised in life is another, an alternative definition of modernity, not simply a 'counter' modernity which still draws its sustenance from modernity. It is a concerted attempt to transform the individual from victim to agent, to be in a condition of preparedness from his own resources for his encounter with the outside world.[15]

Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* has built his whole thesis on the Gandhian privileging of feminine virtues.[16] These qualities are also perceptible in Nikhil, Bimala's husband in *The Home and the World.* Nikhil does not rest his masculinity on the "passivity" of the female. Both Bimala and Sandip consider him to be weak and impotent,[17] the emasculated male of Sudhir Kakar's description. The possibility of equality threatens the male—hence traditional tales of female as seducer dominate cultural narratives and also it is the courtesan, who is a free woman and outside domesticity whose sexuality is privileged. Body and mind are delinked in these discourses. The woman to be a free agent is compelled to adopt the role of a Devi or a goddess as Bimala does in *The Home and the World.*[18]

In Bimala, the structural patterns of identity—construction identified by Indira Parikh and Pulin Garg are also manifested. She corresponds to the romantic woman who indulges in a dream-like surrender to the superior male as well as to the image of the protected woman who is exploited by her lover. Bimala has never

been able to realize herself, she moves directly from a feeling of inferiority to the goddess image. Nowhere does she think of herself as a person.

While Bimala's transformation is within traditional structures, and Dopdi's a move into reversal of power (which is also in some measure rooted in traditional myth and the naked goddess image with the blood all around her), Phaniyamma's position is a questioning of the validity of tradition. She points to the gap which exists between traditional beliefs, practices and the reality of the human condition and desire. There comes a point when women like Dakshayni (in *Phaniyamma*) are no longer willing to be cowed down by the threat of excommunication. She retaliates, threatens to disclose the sexual exploits of the men and to turn out her in-laws and occupy the house by force. The last signifies an important image for a sense of belonging and relatedness. It is a 'modern' image. She is no longer willing to be tossed about from one house to the other but claims this 'specific' space as her own. Even men begin to appreciate her point. Traditions must change with the passage of time. Kittappa says, "things will change even more in future" (115).

Thus it is not feminism which need be the centre of the debate; it is human dignity as opposed to inequality, human agency as opposed to victimhood that need to be negotiated if tradition and modernity are to meet and the claims of the evolutionary process be acknowledged.[19]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Romila Thapar in her work *Cultural Transaction in Early India* takes up both the definition as well as the formulation of tradition. Culture, she emphasizes is not a "one-time event which has survived untampered with from the past to the present." There is a historical process at work. Whatever is handed down from one generation to another undergoes a change. A tradition therefore has to be seen in its various phases." Even the concept of *parampara*, which at one level appears to be frozen knowledge, reveals, on investigation, variations and change. Traditions which we today believe have long pedigrees may, on an invention of yesterday may well turn out to be our contemporary requirements fashioned

by the way we wish to interpret the past" (Dallmayr and Devy 266-67).

Mahasweta Devi time and again in her written work, interviews and public speeches has drawn attention to the oral tradition. In February, 2001 while delivering the Inaugural address at the Sahitya Akademi seminar on *Women's Writing at the Turn of the Century* she once again drew attention to this and to the gender construction in rhymes and riddles.

[2] Rituals are often followed without understanding their significance. The element of fear is always there in the background. The *vrat-kathas*, Satyanarayan Katha and other related Kathas spell out the various punishments which are meted out in case of violation, neglect or forgetfulness. Individual impulse is discouraged. The role of the media in reinforcing or questioning stereotypical models is significant. Ordinarily modern women are painted as anti-family, anti-marriage and as 'foreign-returned', possessed by disruptive tendencies and traditional women as nurturer, docile and obedient, who through their devotion bring back a wayward husband.

[3] If technology is treated as modern, it should be acknowledged that many a sadhu or ascetic is familiar with it and uses a car, a computer, a digital diary or a scooter. And highly 'modern' people may not have any receptivity to new ideas. Thus no one is totally one or the other.

[4] Refer Iravati Karve's *Yuganta*, the Marathi original of which was published in 1967. The first English translation appeared in 1969. The edition used is an edition published by Disha, 1991. Iravati Karve analyzes from the point of view injustice, the injustice done both to men and women—the three princesses whom Bhisma brought for his brothers, the injustice done to Gāndhari who was not even told about the fact of her husband being blind, Kunti who is cheated by Madri and Pandu out of wifehood. Karve writes "The making of some lives is entirely in the hands of others. That was the case of women in the times of the Mahābhārata. Their happiness, their sorrows were decreed by men to whom they belonged. Men acted, men directed and women suffered" (43).

[5] Parikh and Garg have used five stories which have the following titles: (i) the Apple and the Stigma, (ii) The Accomplished and the Trickster, (iii) The Innocent and the Seducer, (iv) The Lost and the Unfulfilled, (v) The Realist and the Exiled, which correspond to the five identity patterns. They go to point out that women feel no legitimacy in their existence. Trapped in bio-social roles they "mortgage themselves at various thresholds and rarely cross them to encounter the space beyond".

[6] Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press (1994), 1996. Nikhil is viewed as a liberal humanist who wants to introduce his wife to the outer world. Nandy also considers Bimala a highly intelligent and sensitive woman, while the widowed sister-in-laws are self-willed (11-12). One may be willing to accept some of these views but the role of the sister-in-law in the English version is like the voice of conscience and convention. Bimala gets carried away by her own sense of importance and allows herself to be emotionally seduced by Sandip's books on poetry and sex, almost about to cross the threshold into wrongdoing. She falls into the pattern of "The Innocent and the Seducer" story of Parikh and Garg.

[7] *Anand Math* (1882). Bankim projected the idea of freedom for the mother country. "Bande Mataram", was the war-cry of the santans. Tagore goes ahead and critiques this Hindvi nationalism, while, Sarat Chandra in '*Pathar Dabi*' (1936) legitimizes a humanistic revolution through the character of Sabyasaachi and secularism through the character of Bharati.

[8] Failure in itself produces the existential realization. See Beckett's play. In *The Home and the World*, Nikhil's lack of desire for power falls into a similar category (see 43 and 110). Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* is also a novel about the need to fail, specially for Nirode.

[9] Phaniyama goes on reducing her needs—when she stops getting her hair shaved by the barber (64) when she stops making a snack for herself (65) when the mid-day meal is no longer regularly taken (71), and when she gives up even eating that meal (73).

[10] Mahasweta Devi "The Witch" *Bitter Soil*: Stories by Mahasweta Devi translated by Ipsita Chanda. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998.

[11] Shivram Karanth *Chomuna Dudi* (1938) translated into English as *Choma*'*s* Drum where the landless Choma cherishes a dream of owning land. His kind-hearted master is willing to give him a small piece but as caste-rules don't permit this he is unable to do so as long as his mother is alive. This is an example of tradition being oppressive.

[12] Spivak's "Translator's Foreword" to her translation of "Draupadi" first published in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, London and New York: Methuen, 1987. A short extract is also quoted by Samik Bandyopadhayay in his Introduction to *Bashai Tudu* (xiii).

[13] An extract from this book is included in Susie Tharu's *Subject to Change*, Hyderabad: Orient Longmans, 1998 under the title "Why I am not a Hindu".

[14] Robert Young 'delivered a pleanary lecture at the IACLALS Annual conference at Jaipur (4-6 January, 2001) titled 'Gandhi's Counter Modernity'.

[15] See Gandhi *Hind Swaraj or The Indian Home Rule* (1909) Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, 1938, Gandhi is critical of machinery (for which he has been criticized and stand which later he modified), the railways (for they become instrumental in reinforcing control and power), but to these he opposed soul force, the search for truth and the concept of satyagraha.

[16] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988. Nandy is of the view that Gandhi projected a counter-image to the imperialistic aggressiveness by privileging femininity and recognizing the strength of the feminine principle.

[17] There are several examples where Nikhil's compassion is misunderstood to be a weakness. See 19, 22, 26, 49 and 54. There are many more similar examples. Sandip at one point refers to the non-aggressive men as lotus-eaters, the 'pale creatures' of idealism (54).

[18] Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality* (1989) New Delhi. Penguin 1990,133-139. Kakar writes, "Earlier, I advanced the thesis that myths of Devi, the great goddess, constitute a hegemonic narrative of Hindu culture". And the mother-son relationship is also located within this discourse. Taking up the popular lore about Skanda and Ganesha, Kakar describes the first as the son of many mothers, and the second as the creation of his mother alone, created "out of the dirt and sweat of her body mixed with unguents," thus while one—Skanda—represents a restlessness, the other—Ganesha—embodies the essence of the mother (135-136).

[19] What is happening in today's India is very different. And at present, once again the female body is the centre of controversy with beauty pageants being banned in some States and codes of dress being implemented in some institutions. To criticize these is not to argue for the violation of the norms of decorum but to plead for a gender-neutral code of public behaviour which would qualify as 'civil', so that the supposed confrontation is dissolved.

Ecofeminism: Patriarchy through the Backdoor

SUDHA VASAN

Introduction: Women and Ecology—Multiple Paradigms

The last three decades can be broadly termed the era of environmentalism. The multiple environmental crises in the world have awakened society to the need to pay attention to the earth we live in. Various forms of environmentalism have caught the imagination of societies, and raised a consciousness of the urgent need to deal with this survival issue. In this renewed awareness, it has emerged that it is practically impossible to talk of environmental issues without reference to women. Women through different ages and in different societies have been actively involved in the use and management of natural resources. The current crises in the depletion and poisoning of these resources directly affects women who are often responsible in most societies for basic livelihood tasks. Thus addressing environmental issues has meant addressing women, and women's issues. This has led scholars and activists to intensively study, hypothesize and explain the linkages between women and the environment. Women's movements and gender studies have begun incorporating environmental issues, and environmentalists are drawing from the rich theoretical and practical experiences of "feminists" of all kinds. As would be expected, different scholars have addressed this issue of the link between women's concerns and environmental concerns in disparate ways. Ecological feminism refers to a whole range of women-nature linkages—historical, conceptual, literary, ethical, spiritual connections—on how women and the environment are treated in

society. Within this broad objective, different authors and activists have taken diverse positions on the basis of this linkage, its nature and its implications. These differences are significant both for theory and for practice. Hence I begin this paper with a brief description of some of the most influential schools of scholarship and activism on feminist environmental issues (adapted from Rocheleau et al. 1996):

1. *Ecofeminism* has been one of the most influential paradigms establishing a connection between gender theories and environ mental thinking. Ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva (1988) argue that women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation similarly linked. The women's and ecology movements are therefore one, and are primarily counter-trends to a patriarchal maldevelopment. While there are several trends within this paradigm, most ecofeminists claim that: a) there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, b) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, c) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective, and d) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective (Warren 1987).

2. *Feminist environmentalism:* Feminist environmentalists such as Bina Agarwal (1991), Seager (1993) and Hynes (1989) emphasize a gendered interest in particular resources or ecological processes on the basis of materially distinct daily work and responsibilities of women. The emphasis of distinction here is on the material basis of gendered interest rather than an inherent connection between women and ecology. In particular these authors reject notions of "natural" connections often highlighted in ecofeminism. Within feminist environmentalism there have been several distinct traditions such as that of socialist feminists. This group is distinguished by its very specific drawing of ideological linkages with socialism. Gender is firmly incorporated into political economy, using concepts of production and reproduction. Environment is not central to their theoretical scheme, but enters the analysis as natural resources that are crucial for production and

reproduction. Authors working in this tradition include Deera and De Leon (1987), Sen and Grown, (1987), Jackson (1993).

3. *Feminist political ecology:* This school treats gender as a critical variable in shaping resource access and control. The primary focus is on resource access and control and gender is taken as an independent variable that affects political ecology. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996) provide an edited collection of articles that follow this tradition of research. Authors focus on the decision-making processes and social, political, and economic contexts that shape environmental policies and practices.

4. *Feminist poststructuralists* include those working in the post-structuralist tradition that celebrates diversity, and emphasizes multiple dimensions of identity. The focus is on knowledges that are shaped by multiple dimensions of identity including gender, race, class, etc. Thus these scholars explain the gendered experience of environment as a manifestation of situated knowledges that are shaped by these multiple dimensions. Authors in this school such as Haraway (1991), Harding (1986), Mohanty (1991) are heavily influenced by feminist critiques of science and post-structuralist critiques of development (Escobar 1995, Sachs 1992).

5. *Environmentalist:* The general environmentalist framework is primarily concerned with environmental issues and has included gender as an addendum to traditional analysis. It treats gender within a liberal feminist framework, and women are seen as one of the participants and partners in environmental protection and conservation programs. Women in development (WID) programmes are an example of this kind of inclusion of women in environmental issues.

Within these schools of thought, ecofeminism is a paradigm that has gained much popularity both in India and in other parts of the world. It is attractive in its simplicity of conceptual ideas and appealing in its suggestion that reform is required mainly in thinking. It has emerged as an influential school of thought and has significant implications for practice. I will next focus on this particular school of thought and its understanding of the relation between women and ecology.

Ecofeminism: Theory and Practice

Francoise d'Eaubonne first used the term "ecofeminism" in 1974 in her radically titled work *Femminism ou La Mort* (Feminism or Death), to describe women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution. Since then this term has been used in a variety of ways by different authors (Plumwood 1986, Shiva 1988, Diamond and Orenstein 1990, Warren 1990, Mies and Shiva 1994). It has become a popular framework that highlights the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. Ecofeminists argue that there is a "parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit nature, on the one hand and the use they make of women, on the other" (Ariel 1989). The affinities and perceived similarities between women and nature—such as passivity and life-giving nurturing qualities—are highlighted. On the one hand these affinities make them both equally vulnerable to male domination. On the other, this association gives women a special stake in solving today's environmental problems. This understanding of the system of twin domination is then used to construct an ecofeminist philosophy and worldview. Solutions for solving the environmental crises of our times as well as gender inequality are then based on this new philosophy. While there are individual differences in the work of ecofeminist authors I focus here on the similarities that define these authors together as ecofeminists.

I. Firstly, ecofeminists see ecofeminism as more feminist than feminism itself.

Birkeland (1993) argues that ecofeminism is feminism taken to its logical conclusion. It strikes deeper into the core of patriarchal reason. Thus Val Plumwood, a prominent ecofeminist reproaches Simone de Beauvoir for restricting her vision of women's freedom to the boundaries of the male sphere. She says:

> for Simone de Bouvoir woman is to become fully human in the same way as man, by joining him in distancing from and in transcending and controlling nature. She opposes male transcendence and conquering of nature to woman's immanence, being identified with and passively immersed in nature and the body. The "full humanity" to be achieved

> by woman involves becoming part of the superior sphere of the spirit and dominating and transcending nature and physicality, the sphere of *freedom* and controllability, in contrast to being immersed in nature and in blind uncontrollability. Woman becomes "fully human" by being absorbed in a masculine sphere of freedom and transcendence conceptualized in human-chauvinist terms. (Plumwood, 1986:135)

Ecofeminists argue that such "emancipation" can only be a disappointment since it implies a simultaneous negation of femininity and of naturality in favour of a typically masculine model of freedom. However they emphasize that ecofeminism is committed to "the recognition and elimination of male-gender bias wherever and whenever it occurs, and to the development of practices, policies, and theories which are not male-gender biased." (Warren 1994).

II. The second commonality among ecofeminists is that they emphasize very unique types of linkages between women and nature. This close connection between women and nature is based on history of oppression by patriarchal institutions and dominant Western culture, as well as based on positive identification of women with nature. However, within this model, different authors present different primary connections—based on intrinsic biological attributes, psychological similarities, history of oppression, or mutual sympathies.

A dominant trend within ecofeminism is "nature feminism" which relies on intrinsic biological attributes to explain the linkages between women and nature. Female physiology is considered a source of uniquely natural experiences, as women's reproductive labor confirms women's unity with nature (O'Brien 1981). A biological linkage is seen between women and nature since female biology tends to be cyclical and seasonal just as natural processes follow seasonal and cyclical patterns. Psychological linkages between women and nature are present due to the similarities in the forms of oppression of both. Since both are oppressed by modern society and patriarchal systems, there is common identification and common sympathies that are generated. For instance, Shiva (1990: 193) states "The violence to nature as symptomized by the current ecological crisis, and the violence to women as

symptomized by women's subjugation and exploitation arise from the subjugation of the feminine principle. Some ecofeminists disagree with this biological reasoning and develop more conceptual linkages between women and nature. For instance, Val Plumwood states that it is not biology but the different experiences produced by different bodies and socialization that determine the formulation of genres of male and female. Thus male and female are not distinguished directly by biology, but by psychosociological characteristics that are related to biology. However, in practice, this distinction between direct and indirect biological connections becomes difficult to maintain.

III. Thirdly, theory in ecofeminism is structured around the idea of dualism that is characterized by a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms such as: mind/body, intellect/physicality, human/non-human, masculine/feminine, public /private, reason/emotion. An influential section within ecofeminism rejects entire western philosophy and western models of development and society on the basis of this perceived dualism. For instance Shiva (1990: 193) argues:

> The Western development model based on the neglect of nature's work has become a source of deprivation of basic needs. In practice, this reductionist, dualist perspective gives rise to the violation of the integrity and harmony between men and women. It ruptures the cooperative unity of the masculine and feminine, and puts men, deprived of the feminine principle, above and thus separated from nature and women.

Warren (1990) provides a deviation from this trend, where she argues that it is not simply this dualism, but the value hierarchies created within this dualism that actually leads to oppression. Thus she develops an argument for the logic of domination that she sees as the immanent in western thought. This logic uses the premise that there are morally significant differences between human beings and the rest of nature, along with the premise that these differences allow human beings to dominate non-humans. The same logic allows for sexist domination of women under patriarchy. Women are identified with nature and the realm of the

physical, and men are identified with the "human" and the realm of the mind and culture. And since nature is inferior to the human or mental realm, women are inferior to men. Therefore men are justified in subordinating women. Such domination has been directly associated with "hierarchical dualism" where in dominant patriarchal cultures reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on attributes associated with masculinity. Thus ecofeminists identify the dualism in patriarchal discourse but what is problematic to them is the value hierarchy that is created within this dualism.

IV. A fourth point of agreement between various ecofeminists is that androcentrism is at the root of this oppression, and they often imply or state that androcentrism is prior to anthropocentrism. Many ecofeminists claim that sexual oppression is a primordial model of oppression, and women oppression was historically prior to racism and classism. Thus sexist ideology is the basis of all forms of domination. The structures of patriarchal consciousness that destroy the harmony of nature are expressed symbolically and socially in the repression of women (Ruether 1975). Shiva (1988) calls androcentrism the oldest war of oppressions.

This androcentrism is identified by five primary characteristics. First, it is based on the polarization of masculine and feminine archetypes. Second, it has an instrumentalist tendency. That is, things are evaluated only to the extent that they are useful to man. Third, it establishes a false autonomy. It believes that man is autonomous or independent from both nature and community. Fourth, it universalizes male experiences and values as human values. Finally, andropocentrism emphasizes a need to express power over others.

This andropocentric view, according to ecofeminists, has resulted in the systematic devaluation of the "feminine principle" and has been the fundamental basis of domination. In Western patriarchal culture, "masculine" constructs and values have been internalized in our minds, embodied in our institutions, and played out in power-based social relations both in our daily lives and upon the world stage (Birkeland 1993).

V. Finally, given this understanding of the links between women and nature, ecofeminists emphasize the importance of centralizing women's voices and worldviews. This kind of epistemological stance is seen as necessary to the overall critique and revisioning of the concept of nature and the moral dimensions of human-nature relationships (Warren and Cheney 1991). Women are seen as having ontological superiority in dealing with ecological problems. Swimme (1990: 19) says:

> Women are beings who know from inside out what it is like to weave the earth into a new human being. Given that experience and congruent sensitivities seething within body and mind, it would be utterly shocking if ecofeminists did not bring forth meaning to scientific data that were hidden from scientists themselves.

Similarly, Kheel (1990: 137) argues that "it is out of women's unique, felt sense of connection to the natural world that an ecofeminist philosophy must be forged". Thus women by their essential nature are seen as the panacea for today's social problems. While some ecofeminists reject such a stance and critique these views as ecofeminine and not ecofeminist (Davion, 1994), in practice women have been seen as the natural ecofeminists.

Ecofeminism: Traditional Criticisms

Ecofeminism thrives on essentialist nations of both women and ecology. Women are seen as a unitary, universal species with essential characteristics such as caring, sympathy, spirituality and affinity to nature. Women are seen as the panacea for environmental problems precisely because of this affinity and the concern they show for nature. The empirical evidence for this view that women are universally close to nature is extremely limited (MacCormack 1980). A 1980 review of numerous samples of surveys on public environmental concern in the United States finds no evidence linking environmental concern to one's sex. Such concern was moderately associated with age, education levels and political orientation. Moreover, gender by its very definition includes both

men and women, and compartmentalized separate realities often do not exist for the two.

In India, images of women close to nature are substantiated by ecofeminists using case studies or examples of rural women of particular castes and classes who are socially bound to nature for their survival needs. This ignores a large majority of women who live and work in urban environments, often disconnected from nature. Ecofeminism purports to celebrate diversity, yet it ignores the diversity of experiences of women due to their diversity in class, caste, race, ethnicity and other factors.

Ecology or nature is also essentialized in this discourse, where it is seen as a universal biological fact. The historic and culturally specific perceptions, understandings, and creation of nature are neglected. A significant amount of literature that has shown nature as a social product is neglected in this zeal to create a prototype of benevolent nature. The violent aspects of natural forces that were threats to primitive societies, and still are a threat to the poorer sections of society, are conveniently ignored. Nature is not only life-giving and nurturing, it is also violent and destructive. Each of the adjectives used here is a culturally constructed mirror through which each society views nature. As Jackson (1994) puts it, the feminization of nature says more about the cultures and texts in which this dialogue appears than about any inherent and universal character of nature as female or any universal pre-industrial equality of women.

This type of essentialization fact results in ecomyths such as the particular eco-knowledge that all women possess and the social ontological privilege that women have in solving environmental problems. Socialization of women occurs under an oppressive patriarchal system that ecofeminists have also identified. So any "omen-knowledge" produced in this society is at least partly a result of this oppressive system. Thus since women are forced to collect fuel wood and fodder, they may have special knowledge of these forest species or their growth characteristics. Logically the only way to preserve this eco-knowledge would be to allow these structures of oppression to continue.

Ecomyths in practice thus have very negative consequences. Ecofeminists follow in the same tradition that creates women as the romantic "Other" different from existing social reality.

Another major criticism of ecofeminism is that it enters the treacherous area of *biological determinism* when it argues that there is a natural division of labour and that women are more ecologically conscious by virtue of being born female. Thus social roles of women defined under an oppressive patriarchal framework are deified and entrenched through ecofeminist arguments. Relating unequal division of labour to hereditary criteria has been a common tool of all oppressive systems such as racism and casteism. Women's rights movements all over the world for the last century have been premised on the basis that gender division of labor is primarily a social product and any inequality that arises on this basis must be fought on a social level through social legislation or social movements.

This argument of a natural sexual division of labor and gender based nature affinity is also *amaterial.* It neglects or denies the material basis (or the day to day actions required for production and reproduction in a given social system) of gender roles and hierarchy. Shiva talks about feminine principle rather than gender roles. Even where authors talk about gender roles, the material basis of these roles is neglected. For the most part ecofeminists ignore women working in factories or the vast majority who work for wages in urban environments. The socialization of these women does not necessarily provide them with any special ecological knowledge or eco-sensitivity. The ecofeminist presentation of a rosy picture of women close to the environment *covers women's* actual struggles in performing their socially defined roles and *alienation* from the production system.'

History is often neglected or distorted in ecofeminist discourse. When it appears, it appears as a linear description. Interestingly both Merchant describing Europe and Shiva describing India imagine a harmonious complementarity in women-environment relations, before the Industrial Revolution in Europe and before colonialism in India. Both views have been shown to be untenable by several authors. For instance Rao (1991) shows that the Sanskrit

texts that Shiva cites to establish such an ancient Indian harmony represent the views of rich, high-caste men. Bina Agrawal (1991) remarks that Shiva often conflates the Indian with the Hindu. Kelkar and Nathan (1991) show that "mainstream Indian civilization was set up by subjugating the forest dwellers and clearing the forests for settled cultivation". They also show how the absence of any seclusion of women in the tribal situation, the free mixing of adolescents of both sexes, the choice of women and men with regard to their marriage partners, the ease of divorce, the practice of widow remarriage—all come under severe attack in the period of formation of caste society. Given such studies, the claim of ecofeminists that there existed a harmonious past before colonialism, when women and the feminine principle were dominant is problematic.

Biehl (1991) notes that Shiva has uncategorically *equated patriarchy with Western* thinking and the feminine principle as traditional and Eastern. This follows from the separation of male and female spheres and attempts to create unreal categories. Patriarchy is a conceptual structure based on gender relations and relations of production and reproduction that develop in all societies, Western and Eastern. Another contradiction is that ecology, a favoured subject in ecofeminism, is in fact a western science. At a more practical level, this kind of ideology is dangerous since it can deny women the benefits of science such as basic health care and housing.

Ecofeminism is also opposed indirectly to women's rights since it proposes that self-interest and gender interests are oppositional. Thus women fighting for their fundamental rights or class interests would be opposed to ecofeminism. This introduces serious questions about whose interests are supported and enhanced by ecofeminism.

Conclusion: Patriarchy through the Backdoor

Ecofeminism begins with a feminist premise that patriarchy is primarily responsible for the exploitation of both women and nature. Ecofeminism defines itself as a philosophy that is radically

opposed to patriarchal structures. Much analysis in this paradigm focuses on describing patriarchal concepts that are oppressive to both women and nature. Just as in traditional feminism, the dualisms created in patriarchy are identified and analyzed by ecofeminists. The value-hierarchies of masculine being superior to feminine, of the public sphere as superior to the private sphere and so on are severely critiqued by authors in this tradition. However, after having established such an analysis, ecofeminists tend to get trapped in similar types of dualities.

For instance, ecofeminism critiques the ideology that equates masculinity with culture and femininity with nature and deems the former to be superior and therefore rightfully free to oppress the later. However, after this critique, ecofeminists glorify the same duality by relating masculine to Western, modern, rational, scientific and the feminine to Eastern, traditional, intuitive, and natural. The only difference they wish to establish is a reversal of hierarchies, where the natural and feminine is superior to the cultural and masculine. Thus the basic conceptual structure of patriarchal consciousness is reproduced in much ecofeminist thinking.

Similarly, value hierarchical thinking is denounced as the primary cause for violence and destruction in modern society. Ecofeminists in their critique of modernist male thinking provide a cogent argument for the need to do away with privileged positions. Diversity and relativism are celebrated and ecofeminism is squarely placed in a postmodern setting where differences are considered positive in themselves. Yet, in their own analysis they privilege the "feminine principle", and attempt to provide women with an ontological privilege over men. The traditional, the Eastern, the natural and the feminine are seen as THE panacea for a peaceful and sustainable society. While this attempt to provide women and disadvantaged ideas a position of privilege seems laudable, this argument for power is based on the exact conceptual structure that ecofeminists and feminists have shown to be so problematic. While ecofeminism provides a strong critique, it lacks the vision to envisage a progressive future.

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Patriarchal Discourse: Construction and Subversion – A Case Study of the Nineteenth Century Maharashtra*

VIDYUT BHAGWAT

Over the last two decades and more, feminist scholarship in India has engaged itself with women's writings; both of the colonial period and the contemporary. The project of 'Women Writing In India' (Tharu, Lalita: 1991) was engaged in tracing a lineage of women writers; as a regional editor, one was involved in tracing the lineage of women's writings in Maharashtra. Scholars engaged in this project were convinced that women's expressions were to be read as more than those of either purely "victims" or as "free agents". As Tharu and Lalita point out in the introduction, all the participants of our project soon learnt to "… read them not for the moments in which they collude with or reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation or empire, but for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them." (Tharu, Lalita: 1991; 35) Women's writings were documents that showed women's struggle for making the world habitable. A struggle at the margins of patriarchies that were being doubly enforced by the dominant colonialists and the emerging bourgeoisie in India. This paper is an attempt to further explore the themes in the patriarchal constructions and subversions in nineteenth century Maharashtra. How were women's worlds shaped in colonial Maharashtra? What were the strategies of subversion and modes of resistance against patriarchies?

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I

The Mahanubhav (c.1194-1276) and Varkari literatures (c.1275-1690) in Maharashtra provide us with ample and valuable information about every day life of Marathi women in pre-colonial period. We can begin with consulting the writings of the heretic Mahanubhav sect which emerged around the thirteenth century. A sucession of Mahanubhav women writers including Mahadamba, Kamalaisa, Hiraisa, Nagaisa have left for posterity a rich store of authentic protest literature. As G.B.Sardar has noted, "… It was the Mahanubhav and the Varkaris who first wrote in Marathi for the common people of Maharashtra. They reinforced the religious sentiment of shudras and of women with spiritual instruction. They created in the common people a desire for a different and higher level of life." (Sardar: 1969;59)

The Varkari movement produced a long line of women sants of all castes and regions in Maharashtra. Muktabai, Janabai, Soyrabai, Gonai, Rajai, Ladai, Kanhopatra, Bahinabai and many more have left a rich body of literature. It was a part of the larger bhakti movement, which arose first in the Tamil region around the sixth century and later spread from there to encompass Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and other linguistic areas. A.K. Ramanujan has made it clear that "… bhakti movements are also social movements. We should not forget that here all sorts of crucial human experiences are cast in religious idiom. In bhakti 'man is a man for all that' and women are very much a part of the scene. Feelings are more important than learning, status and privilege. In fact, status, panditry, even maleness and the pride that goes with such things are seen as obstacles to a true experience of God." (Ramanujan 1973: 10)

One can make some general observations about women's life in pre-colonial Maharashtra based on this history:

a. While women's literacy rate was much lower as compared with the present; they did possess a considerable degree of knowledge and skills.
b. Women's contribution to oral literature was noteworthy.

c. The joint family system though hierarchical in nature, did grant to women some spaces of their own.
d. Motherhood must have played an unusually big role. Mother-child relation seems crucial and intimate.
e. Guilt ridden notions of sexuality are relatively absent. For instance in the different texts coming from Varkari tradition, inhibitions in this respect were not so pervading and oppressive.

The arrival of colonialism in Maharashtra in 1818 and the end of the Brahmanical Peshwa dynasty marks the beginning of a new epoch. New configurations of power emerged in the strategic areas of social life.

The colonial rule ushered a period of decay and disintegration of national life as also, creation of room for departures of new kind. The twin processes of deindustrializations and deskilling led to a loss of productive employment for both men and women. Most of the brunt of this situation was borne by women. The contestations and collusions between the Colonial State and the Brahmanical ruling circles opened unforeseen opportunities for those sections of the society who had suffered from powerlessness in the earlier scheme of things. A demand for a new distribution of power soon appeared on the scene from the oppressed castes, classes and women as well. As Sumit Sarkar points out that in Maharashtra some signs of an inversion of a more fundamental kind were seen during this period. "In Maharashtra … in the wake of powerful lower caste movements, alternative versions of history were constructed—and [they] projected a counter-myth of Northern Brahmanical foreign conquest and tyranny over the indigenous 'bahujan samaj' of intermediate and lower castes" [Sarkar: 1998;33]

The colonial order also led to the breakdown of the earlier systems of knowledge set up by both the Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical ruling elites. The various modes of self understanding achieved by the diverse sections of the society in the previous contexts experienced shock and rupture. The search for new identities followed in their wake. English soon replaced Sanskrit as

the vehicle of the scholarly discourses. New cultural norms set up by the Colonial administrators generally with a utilitarian bend of mind or by the missionaries began to percolate and to influence all sections of the society. Culture inevitably emerged as the main battlefield. Colonialism, first and foremost, gave rise to a new class of English educated intellectuals.

The new intellectuals had to carry out as Lele puts it "… the task of justifying not only their own subaltern existence but also an alien regime, looked upon with suspicion both by the indigenous ruling class and the common people". (Lele: 1986; 14) The new intelligentsia began appropriating some of the ideas of the philosophical radicals to build new system of knowledge capable of sustaining its newly gained vision, norms and interests. The new middle class in Maharashtra drawn mostly from the Brahmans gained access to the Colonial lower administration through the English education. Imbibing the cultural models set up by the Colonialists it began to initiate reforms in order to overcome what they considered to be a gulf between the "advanced" West and the "backward " Indian society.

The colonial ideology, in particular, constantly advertised it's moral superiority in the areas of gender relations. As Uma Chakravarti points out "The 'higher' morality of imperial masters could be effectively established by highlighting the low status of women among the subject population as it was an issue by which the moral "inferiority" of the subject population could simultaneously be demonstrated. The women's question thus became a colonial tool in the colonial ideology". (Chakravarti:1989;34) The new regime glorified family based on the conjugal love and 'culture'—women's patient and supportive understanding sense of sacrifice. The Coloniser began to set up the traditions in tune with their interests and in line with their Victorian mindset. In general they desired to shape a new Indian Society on the values and programmes of possessive individualism.

In the face of the Coloniser's attempt to set up a new understanding of Indian history, the new middle class made equally determined endeavours to rediscover tradition. In the process certain texts, norms and ideal types were valorized by both the sides

at the cost of others. A series of articles, pamphlets and books offering guidelines to women both for their moral uplift and for their housewifely roles appeared in print one after the other. As a part of this project an interest in women's education emerged and focussed it's attention in particular on problems and miseries of women. As a result considerable literature concerning women produced by men is available in Marathi right from the inception of the colonial rule to the beginnings of Gandhi-led freedom movement since 1920.

The first major text was published by Gangadharshastri Phadke on *Widow Remarriage and Women's Education* in 1841. The text begins with four problems concerning the child widows: illegitimate sexual relations, abortions, infanticide and mixture of varna (Varna Sankara). All of them are termed as 'sinful acts'. The text argues that "if intelligent and balanced men do not have the capacity to control their senses (*indriyas*) how can women have that control? Since nature has treated men and women equally, it follows that men and women are endowed with similar kinds of passion and desire." The text quotes a story from *Shrimad Bhagvat* to attack prevailing notions which held education responsible for either causing women's moral downfall or early widowhood. The publication of Phadke's text was a part and parcel of the joint attempts made by Indian reformers under the leadership of Jagannath Shankarsheth and the top officials of the colonial regime to secure a law legitimizing the high-caste widow remarriage. As such it did not miss the opportunity to make a strong case for women's education. The whole case is argued in a low key, balanced and persuasive manner. Among other points Phadke interestingly argues that women now need to be educated "as in the company of the European women they appear as a goose in the presence of a swan". [Phadke: 1841: Preface: Ch. 3]

Another debate about the 'moral improvement' of women through education was going on almost side by side with the earlier one. The first generation of Bombay-based reformers had initiated a series of measures to encourage "female" education both for their secular and spiritual enrichment. A series of texts appeared making a case for women's education and offering a

new moral guide for women in tackling their worldly affairs. As early as in 1842 both *Dnyanoday* and *Dnyanadarsh*, representing respectively the missionary and the liberal Hindu world-views, were publishing articles arguing a case for education of women so as to make them capable bearers of the *Streedharma* defined in terms of service to parents, care and nurture of the children and observation of *Pativratya.* Govind Narayan Shenavi (Madgaonkar) published on behalf of the Deccan Vernacular Society a book related to this theme in 1850 carrying the title *Runanishedhak Bodh* [A precept on the Evils of Debt]. The text challenges the stereotype male arguments holding women responsible for the dissipation of wealth arising out of their alleged passion for display, pomp and ceremony; egoistic; self centredness and their general inclination towards deceit, misadventure and temptation. Far ahead of his times Madgaonkar argues that properly educated woman alone would be equipped not only to bring up well their children and take care of their spouses but more importantly to avoid non-productive and vain employment of wealth. Though, he still places the argument in the framework of strategies making women more amenable to educated men's needs and commands, his presentation represents an interesting combination of patriarchal interests and emancipating concerns. [Shenvi (Madgaonkar): 1850; Ch. 3, pp. 28-32]

Before we look into the debate about women's responsibility in dissipation of the domestic wealth, which occupied both the conservative and reformist camps for the next four decades, we must have some idea about its historical background. Much earlier than the rise of the famous drain theory of R. C. Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji and others explaining the problem of Indian poverty as developed by Bombay-based intellectuals like Bhaskar Tarkhad, Bhau Mahajan and Ramkrishna Vishwanath were taking a public position through out the period of 1840 to 1850 to declare that there was no such thing as a beneficial alien domination. They called the British Rule as a vile curse on India and pointed out that India's surplus was the base of England's prosperity. The destruction of indigenous manufacturers and high duty on indigenous textiles offered notable examples of political and economic

cruelty practiced by the British Rule. [Sunthankar: 1988; pp. 434-41] All the texts of the period dealing with the woman question therefore reflect the conditions of a disturbed family life resulting from this economic trauma. But unlike the above two texts, the new middle class patriarchal texts exploited this fact as one more handle to browbeat women for their so called “natural” inclination for wasteful expenditure of all sorts and to justify their traditional pre-colonial prejudice that women were by nature careless free spenders. They continued to be depicted in the contemporary male literature as illiterate—“adivasi”, animal like and gossiping, but in the context of the economic drain as also financially irresponsible and short sighted. It is this context that men like Madgaonkar and later women like Tarabai Shinde, however ridiculed this trail of thought and used the opportunity for pushing the cause of women’s education.

II

A good way of understanding the nature of conforntations between those who tried to handle the woman question within a patriarchal reformist framework on the one hand and those who, while in outward agreement with the general programme of reform, sought to expose the double standards inherent in patriarchal constructions would be to compare relevant texts produced by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar and Mahadev Shivram Gole and by Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai and Anandibai Joshi.

These confrontations are of great significance in understanding women’s subversive consciousness and activities in the first hundred years of colonial rule in western India. All these texts had achieved certain renown even at the time of their publications. More importantly, they also give us a good understanding of all the complexities and contradictions, which governed the actualities in the domain of gender relations. Interestingly, these texts also tell us about the elite character of these discourses if we note that with the exception of one [i.e. Tarabai Shinde] all other participants come from the urban Chittapavan Brahman caste that constituted the new colonial middle class, the administrative intel-

ligentsia. Tarabai Shinde, a top bracket Maratha, represents the Satyashodhak body of thought, which challenged the Brahamanical hegemony. But otherwise she too shared similar background in terms of educational upbringing, financial status and secular activities. These texts belonging to the two warring campus [the 'patriarchal reformist' vs the emancipatory] constituted the core public discourse in Maharashtra on the gender-related issues.

Tilak, Kanitkar, Gole produced the first set of texts under our consideration. Lokmanya Tilak needs no introduction. A leader of the nationalist movement in an epoch named after him, Tilak was a preeminent thinker, and possessed in *Kesari* and *Maratha* two outstanding instruments of communication to reach a large audience on matters of contemporary significance. As liberal as his rival reformers in terms of his own day to day life and personal conduct he quite self-consciously had undertaken the role of reconciling tradition with modernity in his single minded attack on all forms of imperialism. Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar came from a well-known affluent family with a high social prestige and was a true representative of the first generation of English educated graduates. His farcical writing, titled *Taruni Shikshan Natika* [A Satire on Educated Modern Young Women] published and staged in 1886 and thereafter had achieved a considerable degree of reputation and even notoriety. M. S. Gole was the principal of the famous Fergusson College in Pune founded among others by great liberals like G. G. Agarkar and later on developed by Gopalkrishna Gokhale. All the three authors and all the texts before us authored by them do not take an openly hostile stand against women or the reforms. In fact, all of them claim that they support the cause of enlightened reform to improve and enhance the status of women. Instead of a negative, reactionary and an outright statusquoist attitude, they adopt a forward looking, supportive and rather patronizing stance in the name of a realistic, practical orientation towards the problem of historical change. In other words, through their redefinitions of gender relations they reformulate patriarchies and do not intend a programme for their annihilation. They seek to pursue reforms in the domain of gender

relations not for subverting patriarchy but for securing it's readjustment in the face of changing social realities.

The fifth volume of *The Collected Works of Lokmanya Tilak* published by the Kesari Prakashan, Pune, brings together his writings on the public debate about the character and contents of 'the female education', the famous 'Rakhamabai Trial', 'the Age of Consent Bill' and the issue of 'Widow Remarriage'. This paper concerns itself mainly with Tilak's views on female education.

Series of articles which Tilak wrote on the syllabus adopted by the female high school in Pune provide us with further clues about the patriarchal appropriation of the woman question in the nineteenth century. As we expect Tilak notes that his position differs from the other camp not in terms of their institutionalization given the context of time and situation, stressing the crucial difference between the adventures and the realistic ways of tackling the problem of social change, Tilak questions the logic of the wholesale and mechanical application of the colonialist modernizing doctrine to the social reality of female education under the Indian conditions. Noting a further distinction between imitation and creative application he challenges the relevance of educating the Indian women as if they belonged to the same social structure, which supported the life style of the highly educated English ladies of the British middle classes. Tilak therefore challenges the idea of floating a separate female high school when already primary and secondary schools for girls on the one hand and the female training college for producing female instructors for female primary schools were in existence. He questions the need for floating institutes of higher education of alien character for the perusal of a fraction of high status women. Tilak declares that the genuine women's education would truly begin only if and when we would perceive the whole issue in terms of the bulk of our married women.

In his concluding remarks on the series of four essays which he devoted to the ritual of celebrating the arrival of menstruation [*nhanavali*], Tilak bluntly points out that he would always abide by the concern for truth and in no case would allow religious customs, conventions and traditions to overrun the quest for truth. He further asserts that any number of so called religious practices

have nothing to do with religion as such and that most of them are indeed in that context superficial and practically absurd. Tilak further states that while he would not go out of the way to antagonize popular opinion as the followers of Brahmo, Prarthana, Arya Samaj movements usually do, he would not hesitate to attack such so called norms, values and practices which are wasteful, vulgar and absurd which, worse still, would go by the name of religion [Tilak: 1976;38].

At the same time Tilak was always critical of taking a prudish, sanctimonious and elitist high moral stand on various kinds of social practices. He was in his personal life style and values almost a classic exempler of the Victorian code of 'simple living and high thinking' and yet was a realist enough to take objection to the fact that some high minded liberal social reformers refused to accept funds from a class of courtesans in the name of moral purity. Tilak argues that all courtesans must have rights like any common citizen, and he points out how many reformers who were claiming moral superiority were getting caught into alcoholism themselves. [Tilak: 1976; 180]

Tilak's position on the issue of women's education is defined by him in the third article which he wrote on the problem of curriculum for a female high school. He observes that:

> some women as in England admittedly entertain the goal of securing professional capabilities in their pursuit of higher education and later on they do work as either advocates or doctors or editors or as administrators. We do not want to say at all that women should not secure emancipation from male bondage, by pursuing various professions on equal terms with men. But so far as our women are concerned we foresee given our social reality a protracted educational process running perhaps into hundreds of years or even milleniums. We also note that the establishment of female colleges and women's access to male educational institutions are matters of very recent innovations even in Western societies where the adult marriage and conjugal relations based on consent or contract have come to stay …But our situation is such that it would take a long time for our women to set aside the household work in favour of public and professional work.… [It is therefore that] our middle class educated men desire to promote female education for acquiring skills in reading and writing neces-

> sary for a better discharge of their household work and for securing self-reliant moral upliftment through a perusal of various scriptures in their leisure time and for supporting the men folk in running a smooth domestic life. As in the case of artisans for whom vocational interests take the first place and liberal education necessarily the next one, so also for our women household activities come first and education as such a secondary one.… In-law's household is a perennial workshop for female education. We are all for the facilities for practical, applied and appropriate ['Swadharma' oriented] liberal education for women so long as it does not mean their withdrawal from the above workshop. [Tilak: 1976;219]

In a nutshell, Tilak's approach to the issue of female education is based on two positions. He insists that most or almost all our women find themselves in a marital status at a very young age and, therefore, the key to female education in India lies in developing and identifying appropriate syallbi and procedures to enhance the scope and quality of married women's education.

Tilak's overall worldview was of course anchored in his patriarchal understanding of the whole issue of the sexual division of labour. He is of the opinion that the truth of the matter consists in recognizing that in the given and appointed natural order of things women have been invested with the responsibility of managing a household and therefore, they must be given education appropriate to this scheme of things. [Tilak: 1976; 230] The heart of the matter, in his opinion is that so long as our marriages are not based on adult consent, our educational system will have to approximate this stark fact of social life. Tilak, in our opinion was certainly not what was then called a liberal reformer or not as it is termed now a progressive thinker. He was rather a conservative thinker in Burkien sense of the term. The difference, is underlined, when we consider ,the two texts by Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar and Principal M. S. Gole were certainly supporters of the orthodox order taking pride in its total patriarchal character.

N. B. Kanitkar came from an elite Brahman family in Pune. His position represents the uncertainties, ambiguities and tensions entertained by the new university graduates towards the new value system that was emerging in the wake of the colonial order. His

play *Taruni Shikshan Natika* [hence referred to as TSN] was a sensation in those days. The play received a popular acclaim and the book itself ran into a second edition within a period of four years. His book had a longish preface running into some 14 pages followed by 2 page quotations respectively from *Manusmruti* and Mahabharata. We are saved from a trouble of interpreting the text as the playwright's position is spelt out so carefully at the beginning. The preface as expected has long quotations from the contemporary British periodicals and book like John Bull's *Womankind* and the British daily *Spectator* to underline the point that the patriarchal norms and expectations held by the Indian men were no different from those entertained by their colonial counterparts. The patriarchal assertions made by the British men to legitimize the claims, the arguments, the excuses of the Indian men. In addition, Kanitkar also relies upon certain celebrated Indian public figures of his days viz. Bhagwant Singhji Thakursaheb, the chief of Gondol principality in Kathiawad and to boot even the famous Mr. Behramji Malbari. The quotations are first given in their original English and followed by Marathi translation to invest greater authority in the statement made. Kanitkar has also woven a secondary theme both as a matter of dramatic technique and more importantly, to have a look at another contemporary popular concern viz. the increasing social acceptability of drinking among the new university intelligentsia. The portrayal of the social reformist as drunkards no doubt helps the playwriter to poke fun and take pot shots against the overall reformist positions and perspectives. In fact the strategy of thus killing two birds in one throw enhanced the bite and the satire of this farce in terms of its popular appeal.

An idea of Kanitkar's views about women's education and the general issue of the emancipation of women can be gathered by the kind of quotations, which he has collected, from the European writing. Thus a French Historian is quoted to say that "England made all her great conquests at a time when her women were treated with about as much consideration as the inmates of an Eastern harem and it is to this masculine independence, this indifference towards women, that the success of the English may

partly be ascribed" (Kanitkar: 1889;8) The quotation from John Bull's *Womankind* runs as follows:

> Take care, friend John, you are on a downward and dangerous path. I see you presiding over meetings of blue-stockings and hear you adding your voice to theirs in their demand for women's rights. It seems to me that it is your future happiness that you stake. You will have a wife who will know the differential and integral calculus but will be all unskilled in the art of those nice puddings and pies you like so much. No more warm slippers awaiting you by the fender; instead of the song of kettle on the hob, that sweet household melody, you will hear the litany of the Rights of Women. (Kanitkar:1889;9) Kanitkar in fact is so enchanted by John Bull's *Womankind's* positing that he has cited a quotation on a frontis piece of the first edition of the play viz. "The Rights of women! What a fine phrase! What a pretty farce! What a sonorous platitude! (Kanitkar: 1889; 1)

He has not missed the opportunity to quote the well-known reformist leader Behramji Malbari who in his letter dated 14th March 1886 made the following statement in relation to the news of an elopement of two Parsi girls.

> The recent case of elopement which have caused such a flutter in the Parsee Community may be traced chiefly to want of honest occupation and spiritual decay, if we may use the phrase. With the spread of education, so called more ornamental than useful, there has sprung a sort of distaste for work at home, so essential to the happiness of domestic life. Parsee girls, not many of them we hope are becoming strangers to the dignity of labour and its saving grace" … "More than sixty percent of the children of well to do Parsis at Bombay are, we believe, nursed and tended by Goanese women and we should not at all be surprised if two of the three girls, who have run away with these Goanese boys, are found to be practically Goanese girls themeselves. This is the result of high living amid questionable associations. Leaders of the community will do well to see to this in time Indian spectators." (10, 11)

Kanitkar has invoked further the authority of *The Maratha* dated 28th March 1886 which maintains "Mr. Justice Scott's remark on the occasion of the distribution of prizes to the students of the Indo-British Institution at Bombay embody valuable criticism on

the sort of education given to girls in departmental schools. It is very fortunate that Lady Ray was present on the occasion. Hindu mothers have been heard complaining that the education their daughters receive in schools is worse than useless for it incapacitates the young girls to become good housewives. Since the new notorious case of the restitution of conjugal rights pending decision of the High Court was instituted they have begun pointing out to the unfortunate but civilized daughter of Dr Sakharam as a typical lady, they produce of female education. We trust Justice Scott's remarks will produce their desired effect and turn the tendency of female education from academial to practical training. " (Kanitkar: 1889; 12)

Kanitkar follows the familiar strategy of equating the cause of women's education and emancipation with Anglophil, loyalist, imitationist, opportunist, self centric, and alienated modernist world view of the 'upstart' new university educated intelligentsia. The play written in 1886 is placed in terms of its narrative setting at the end of the year 1895. It claims to be a projection of the future state of affairs following the introduction of an Anglicist and alien female education. The play in fact carries a subtitle "A prophecy concerning the modern education for girls and liberty for women". He wants to make it clear that he is not someone who hates women's education or the cause of women's liberty. In his opinion, his objection is to the kind of impractical, unrealistic and particularly ornamental syllabi which was being adopted and preached in the name of an appropriate education for a new Indian women. He fully supports the chief of Gondal State when the later asserts in his book regarding his travels in England that:

> Indian women should be educated in the old fashion. I am not in favour of sending grown up girls and young women to schools. In former times we had no girls schools or female colleges; but our women were none the less educated for all that. A woman used to receive the necessary education form her father, brother, mother, husband or some other relations and this education passed from mother to daughter as a sort of inheritance. A mother was the real mistress of her daughter. She taught her to read and write the vernacular and Sanskrit characters to make her pious, chaste and modest, taught her

> to sing hymns, gurbas and nuptial songs, taught her sewing, cooking, worshipping and managing the household affairs. Elementary arithmetic was also a part of her curriculum. An implicit obedience to the husband's order was the first duty impressed on her mind. This sort of female education is not yet defunct. It prevails even now in certain families. I should like to see this revived to a great extent. (Kanitkar: 1889; 1)

Kanitkar uses the setting of his play in a manner whereby the nouveau rich affluence gained by the educated reformists through the colonial patronage, and the consequential westernized style of living, glamour and etiquette is contrasted with the culture of poverty, apathy, tradition and overall lack of sense of style and grace of an impoverished lower middle class brahman shastri's household. Such a setting helps the playwright to project caricatures of Pandita Ramabai, Rakhmabai and two or three other equally well known educated women of his times. A neglect of considerations related to place, time and the context in relation to the cause of female education is shown to lead to such practices as women taking to ballroom dancing, social drinking with men that too including strangers; indulgence in reading cheap and populist Western literature such as Renaulds and Boccassio. And finally a pompous but ridiculous admixture of English slang with traditional Marathi idiom. In short, female education is made to stand for all kinds of imitative, licentious behaviour in terms of apperal, bodily gestures, other manners etc.

The play including the preface celebrates the following image of a woman who is a classic model of patriarchal mothering of the woman:

> The word "woman" denotes many qualities. Beauty, tenderness, courtesy, companionship, humility.… Imagine such a virtuous woman is yours, she has submitted all her self to you, it is only you who have to provide total protection to her, who will not feel blessed by this? The quality of generating pleasure and happiness is innate to women. It is therefore no accident that not only the Hindus but rest of all the human beings all over the world have set them as goddesses of the households and have accepted a position of dedicated divoties to them. Keeping in mind their delicate bodies and natural powerlessness

> men have allotted them light and congenial types of duties. They are our ornaments, they are our life givers, they are our welfare, pleasure, joy… keeping this place of women in mind, men have accepted all these burdensome works outside the households to save women from arduous labour… If men adopt such an attitude towards women and behave accordingly how strange it is that they are making a hue and cry about the emancipation from the male bondage? Your rights are superior to men. Men are always in your fists, they bend as you wish. They are bound to you by mystery, love, temptation and affection … they have sacrificed and will continue to sacrifice their estates, states, merits and standing in life but then why raise such hullabaloo? Women don't be envious of men. If you see men as enjoying more happiness then it is an absolute misconception (Kanitkar: 1889; 7)

Kanitkar then paints a rather lucid picture of what would happen to them if they buy the trap which reformist men were setting for them. He declares

> …once for all if you become equal to men, fearless and tough like them and start wandering like them on roads then men will not have any feelings for you. This will destroy all the pleasures, pride, and honour that you have. Indian men are not free as much as you are today. You must forever endeavor to gain such education as befitted Arya Woman … as was available to our ancients" (Kanitkar: 1889; 8)

The text published in 1898 by M. S. Gole, titled, as *Hindu Dharma ani Sudharana* [Hindu Religion and Reform] is different in many ways. It is as if written by one Mr. Vidhyadhar Pandit a fictitious character who travelled through the positions of "reformism" "conservation" to a complete, nuanced understanding of the contemporary Indian society. Hence, Gole suggests that the book should have been titled as "A Real Story of Soul Searching" [Gole: 1898; 8]

After taking an extensive review of reformist arguments and conservative arguments the text pleads mainly for gradual reforms [Gole: 1898; 331]. The text accepts that Indian society was going through a change but it argues that the change in the social conditions is always very slow. Some old habits, which hamper the steadiness and continuing of the changing society, are replaced by the new habits and the new codes of conduct or reforms. This

text sets three principles as the basis for deciding which reforms should be carried out are: Truth, happiness and beauty or in other words proper thinking, convenience and good taste. The reforms should cater to the needs of the whole society and not only to an elite section. Hence one has to take care that all the people in the society will accept those reforms which would help change their thinking, every day life practices, customs, etc. Gole's text written by the "Pandit" warns against immature reforms and worries about the ridicule that we may have to face from the foreigners. [Gole: 1898; 6]

The text is deeply worried about the permanence of the society. In this context, it gives women an agency in reality a burden and the responsibility of keeping the society's health and lineage intact. At this point the 'Pativrata' [dedicate wifely] role is treated as crucial. Hence there is a declaration that

> All those social projects which are against breaking the norms of 'Pativratya' (purity/chastity and dedication), are helpful to the society. Hence without bringing down the strength of those projects women must be granted freedom as much as possible. [Gole: 1898; 293]

In the context of widow remarriage the text starts arguing about the meaning of 'motherhood' itself and expresses a need for a broader meaning of motherhood. If men through their profession or through philanthropy can achieve dignity on par with their dignity achieved through fatherhood why women cannot do it? Here the text is talking to us almost in the modern framework of equality for women. In order to achieve greatness and eternal fame or reputations women should be encouraged to carry out their "specific" social duties in the best possible manner. The honour of motherhood should not be linked to biological reality and in fact, marriage was an extremely degraded path to achieve greatness of motherhood. [Gole: 1898; 326-27]

Widows can nurture their society by extending their immediate 'self' through the 'affection of their son' and achieve larger goals through 'Dharma'. The text juxtaposes the issues of 'conjugality' against the concept of an eternal love. It appears that any love in marriage in reality is based on childhood familiarity and

practical benefits. Women's education will entirely depend on the economic condition of every family. Hence Gole insists that the debates about education for women should pay attention to this reality.

The text now takes an important turn. The argument comes in the following words:

> Those who really wish to do something good for widows, they must direct them towards the path of knowledge, towards religious actions, towards altruism. Give widows an opportunity for travels, for visiting pilgrimages, seeing different places. Do spend as much as possible for such activities. Widows will gain knowledge in this process and this will help all women. Remarriage should be prescribed only for those widows who have no intelligence, no higher goals, no pure ambition—in short for those widows who only understand animal level instincts. [Gole: 1898; 328-29]

We can conclude this section with some observations. As many historians have observed this period was in fact one of 'traditionalization' and 'rigidification' of caste boundaries. Since caste, customs and family were treated as changeless and private and outside the normal purview of the State, increasingly political representation, access to education and other forms of privilege came to depend on the assertion of clear and bounded caste identities. Women as gate keepers of caste purity had to fit in the model of 'bhadra mahila'. As O'Hanlon (1991), Uma Chakravarti (1989), Lata Mani have observed this model was a fusion of older brahmanical *Pativrata* and Victorian enlightened mothers and companions to men in their own sphere of the home. Rigidification of caste boundaries had led towards increased control over women. All the texts introduced in this section are engaged in redefining *Pativratya* (chaste wife's devotion to husband). These texts, apparently seem to be discussing education and women's entry into the public domain. Yet a feminist reading of the same suggests that redefinitions of '*Pativrataya*' are employed in the milieu of intensifying public scrutiny of women's behaviour and in practice pushes them out of the public domain. It is therefore important to note the voices of subversion of women who had access to this much debated education.

III

1857 onwards we witness a spread of women's education at different levels in Maharashtra. According to one authority some 300 women produced creative literature during the years 1873 to 1920. They produced books, pamphlets, occasional papers, poems, short stories, novels and essays devoted to variety of topics. [Dandavate: 1921; 2-3]

The two major streams of thought and expression in this period are represented by the national awakening, led by dominant upper caste men and the the 'cultural revolt in Colonial Society' [Omvedt: 1976] staged by the non-brahman castes and the subaltern elements of the Indian social formation. This stream is associated primarily with the name of Jotirao Phule (182—1890) or the 'Satyashodhak Samaj', which he founded in 1873. Phule, deeply aware of the social history of Indian from the ancient times being a Shudra himself, appreciated some aspects of western influences that came in the wake of the British Rule. He tried to create a new life and a new society for all those also suffered under social slavery of the caste ridden Hindu society. Jotirao and Savitribai opened the first school for women as early as in 1848. He looked at education especially for the low caste women as a means towards emancipation. The two streams, it is apparent had different views on the education of women. This also seems to have had a differential impact on the strategies employed by women in the two streams. The following three subsections seek to reread the texts of three educated women hereby underlining their different strategies of subversion.

IIIA. TARABAI SHINDE

In 1882, Tarabai Shinde brought up in the milieu of Satyashodhak Samaj, offered in her *Stree-Purush Tulana* (*A* comparison between Women and Men) an acute analysis of women's issues from a perspective far ahead of her times. Tarabai was a daughter of Bapuji Hari Shinde, a founding member of Satyashodhak Samaj and lived in a small provincial town of Buldhana between

1850 to 1910. Born in a high caste Maratha family her radical father taught her to read and write not only Marathi but to some extent Sanskrit as well. Vijayalaxmi episode drove Tarabai to offer a critical between women and men. Widow Vijayalaxmi's trial involving infanticide took place in 1881 in Surat. The case became a centre of public debate. The Brahmanic, patriarchal perspectives shared with each other a common concern over women's so called immorality. Women's conduct was treated as the central and sensitive barometer of the moral health of Indian tradition. As O'Hanlon has remarked "In slightly different ways, both perspectives (orthodox and liberal reformist) created a position for women in public discourse at once of acute responsibility and of powerless-ness, confined within an essentialized nature and deprived of any recognised presence of power or agency on their own account" [O'Hanlon: 1991;92]

Tarabai Shinde offered the first fully worked out analysis of the ideological fabric of Hindu patriarchal society. Her writing could be taken as the first major feminist expression in the colonial Indian context. Her text is written on behalf of the whole humanity. Her narrative is thus the narrative of the community and persistently invokes the rhetoric of love and kinship. Her text is complex in its expression and deeply rooted in the social history of Maharashtra.Tarabai made a frontal attack on the patriarchal culture making use of Vijayalaxmi case. With a good deal of strategic cunning she identified two very widely read texts glorified by the mainstream canon to depict 'female stereotypes' set up by the patriarchal hegemony for subverting the patriarchal value system. Shridhar's work *Harivijay*, *Ramvijay*, *Pandavpratap* was read in every upper caste Marathi household. Bhartruhari was a classical author known all over in India. His three *shatakas Niti* (morality), *Shrungar* (Ero's) and *Vairagya* (Asceticism) were quite popular.

The texts in question read as follows:

> "Woman is only the axe that cuts down trees of virtue. Creatures through thousands of births know her to be the temptress and embodiment of pain in this world".
>
> "A whirlpool of changing whims, a house of vice, a city of shamelessness.

> A mine of faults, a region of deceit, a field of distrust obstacles at heaven's door, mouth of hell's city, well of evil magic.
>
> Who made this woman device, sweet poison and trap of all creatures?"

Tarabai Shinde rebels against this defamation. She makes it clear in the opening section of her essay that she wrote it to defend the honour of *all* her country women. She says "I pay no attention to particular jati or families in it. It is a comparison between men and women." The subtitle of her book namely "Who is adventurous—women or men?" sums up her problem in blunt terms. Tarabai presents her argument point by point in an extremely robust, down-to-earth, powerful and satirical manner. Her language is peculiarly 'feminine' revealing the subversive linguistic skills. She states:

> "If a woman is an axe why do you spend whole of your life in her control? Why do you slog in day to day life like a bull? Even a bull is better because being an animal bull lives for himself you can't even do that.
>
> If woman-device is so powerful why do you not use your strength of brain to overpower her?
>
> Women are suspicious but it is because they have no education and exposure to the outside world. Women's suspicion is limited but you men are confused by your complex ways of life have all kinds of treacherous plans in your minds. Not a single man is exception to this way of life.
>
> You say women are impudent—men are more and more impudent.
>
> Women are called as magapolis of inadvertent acts—men are known for cutting somebody's throat, immediately after winning their confidence.
>
> Women are accused as the treasure houses of transgressions but men are more fit for this description—Men do not like a bad, ugly, cruel, uneducated wife, full of vices, why women should like such a husband. But women do not run off with another man.
>
> Women are believed to be enveloped in a hundred guised of fraud and deceit. Men are incarnation of this—they have evil in their mind and like a crow they roam around looking for the weaknesses of others. Women never behave this way.

> A woman is a temptation incarnate. If even sanyasi men run after women how can you hold her responsible for it? Men do not have any inherent knowledge in them, they get a chance to roam around the world that they are able to get out of difficulties. Women's world is limited—"from stove to the door step".
>
> You call women destroyers of the path to heaven, the gate to Yama's city. The same women are your mothers, sisters, wife. If you give them such names then we will call you mother-haters, slanderers of your own mothers.
>
> Are we fitting vessels for all the sorts of deceit? It is you who kill each other every day over *jagirs*, *vatans*, deshmukhis, just over some scrap of a patil's office, even poison each other.

At the end of the essay Tarabai urges men that they should function like a strong tree-trunk and should take a vow to behave like Bhishma. Clarifying that she was not propagating unlimited freedom for women. She expects women to be as pure as Agni so as to put men to shame and to make them cast down their eyes.

Tarabai was quite aware of this context within which she was operating. British rule and its impact on Indian economy was quite evident. She points out in her introduction that

> … the fine circumstances we used to have in our country are all gone now. Those beautiful saris from Paithan which used to sell at five hundred rupees each they have all gone now. [Malshe: 1975; 26]

She mentions towns like Dhanwad, Nagpur as once prospering markets. She also declares that men in India will have to find out *Svadharma* once again. Within this framework Tarabai also exposes patriarchal values doled out by the popular literature like Muktamala, Manjughosha which flourished with the advent of the printing press. She has ridiculed the play *Manorama* which was published in Bombay in 1871. This play written by Chitale was introduced as a plea for the remarriage of widows but has sensational accounts of brothels, adultery, infanticision, and an ethos of Pativrata in danger. As Rosalind O'Hanlon has pointed out a virtual genre in itself of *Streecharitra* 'Lives of Women' were published from the 1850s onwards. The first text was by Ramjee Gunnojee which was titled in English as "Streecharitra

or Female Narration, comprising their course of Life, Behaviour and under-taking in four parts with moral reprimands checking Obscenity to secure Chastity" [O'Hanlon: 1994; 40]. Tarabai was not only aware but annoyed by these popular texts and its patriarchal ethos. Tarabai not only refuses to be homogenized as morally weak creatures but she mentions prostitutes and asks forthright questions like "who are these prostitutes? Are they made by some other god?" She holds men responsible for creating prostitutes through their double standards. Tarabai time and again exposes the patriarchal nature of Indian family and society. She is aware of the reality that the ban on widow remarriage ban was practiced not only by the Brahman castes but also by other high castes. She identifies some high caste Maratha families and declares "In these people's houses you can wait till the end of your life but they will never ever allow remarriage." [Malshe:1975; 25] Her argument about *pativrata-dharma* is very logical. If women are expected to become *pativrata*, men have to be like gods and here she even makes fun of Hindu gods who have complex life stories in this context. It would be worthwhile to follow her critique of *Sreedharma*. "By shaving heads and wiping off the kumkum you cannot save "*Streedharma*", she argues.

> Women's heart, mind and faculty of thinking cannot be wiped off this way. They will not accept partiality, which is implied by the terms *Pativrata dharma* or *Streedharama*. A man kicks, drinks, keeps prostitutes, squeezes people and then expects his wife to observe *Streedharma*. Woman have capacity to differentiate between good and evil how will she have faith in such ideals?

Tarabai locates her critique of patriarchy within a certain conception of the ideal relationship between men and women. Her project woven around the recognition of their mutuality and of the utter and ever-present need for maintaining the practical day to day equality of this relationship governs her critique. O'Hanlon's translation of 'Stree-Purash Tulana" has a longish introductory essay explaining what she understood by different themes used in this text and it's wider significance. Her suggestion that in the process of traditionalization of colonial society, gender relations

emerged as a powerful new means for the consolidation of social hierarchy and the expression of caste exclusively is evident in the texts that we reviewed in the earlier section. But her observation that Tarabai had ambivalence about women's proper rights and duties is more important. Tarabai while seeking answer to such a question that why and how women get blamed for every kind of evil and suffering in Indian society, bitterly denounces all men who were priests, religious leaders, reformers, politicians, journalists, writers. In fact because she is aware of the new form of patriarchy in colonial India monopolizing all rights and freedoms for men, she adopts negotiating strategies with the Hindu patriarchy. At one level Tarabai's text tells us about how the construction of a house-wife and a prostitute was interlinked. But being a high caste Hindu woman she has to use the language of complimentarity between men and women and women as essential *pativratas*. But she dares to analyze the powerlessness of women in these words – "… can't a woman have the power to speak even one word, or have a pinch of grain to call her own?". [Malshe:1975;16] This is how Tarabai points out structural powerlessness of women in colonial India. At one level she has challenged and subverted Hindu patriarchy's 'purity' and 'chastity' framework at another level she is asking men to become pure like fire for bringing in reality much needed sanctity in man-woman relationship.

IIIB. PANDITA RAMABAI

Ramabai belonged atleast until she was 13 years of age to a high status Citpavan family of good means and a strong tradition of learning. She also had an unusual exposure to social realities all over the country through her journeys over a long period of time; she moved in high Brahmo circles in Bengal and Assam and in Prarthana Samaj circles in Bombay and Pune.

Her father, Anantshastri Dongre, had decided to teach classical Sanskrit texts to the women members of his family. In her book *A Testimony of 1907*, Ramabai stated: "He (Anantshastri) could not see why women and people of Shudra caste should not learn to read and write the Sanskrit language and learn sacred literature

other than the Vedas" (Ramabai 1977:10-11). It is no wonder that in her testimony before the Hunter Education Commission she made clear her resolve to consider it her duty to the very end of her life to advocate women's education for achieving the proper position of women in her land.

Her lectures in Calcutta, delivered in Sanskrit, attracted considerable curiosity and recognition. She was given entry to the highest circles of Brahmo Samaj men and women. Her personality and achievements exactly suited the colonizers and the colonized in their search for a model of a new Hindu woman. She was acclaimed as Pandita Sarasvati both by the British administrators like Sir W. W. Hunter and by the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmos were busy pursuing the bourgeois nationalist project of rationality and reforming the 'traditional' culture of their people, and of achieving in this context both emancipation and self-emancipation of women. During her four years' stay in Bengal and Assam, from 1878 to 1882, Ramabai was exposed in turn to the Brahmo ideas and to missionary Christianity. At the same time, her nationalist pride in Sanskrit and in the ancient past ran equally strong, along with her doubts about the truth of Hinduism. She spent most of her time in Bengal delivering lectures on female emancipation. The tragic death of her husband, her consequent loneliness, her quest for medical education, and the sincere and urgent requests from the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj persuaded her to leave Bengal for Maharashtra.

Bombay, Pune, and the adjacent areas of western Maharashtra showered high praise on her. We also note, in her writings from this period, an undercurrent of anxiety about her future course of action. Her stay in Maharashtra from May 1882 to April 1883 was quite eventful, and various interests played a part in it. She moved among Prarthana Samaj reformers, Arya Samajists, and also the Anglican Church circles represented by the Cowley Fathers and the Wontage Sisters. Ramabai visited all parts of the Bombay Presidency, organizing branches for the Arya Mahila Samaj, the women's branch of the Arya Samaj. Finally, she took the important decision to pursue her higher education in England.

Throughout her life, Ramabai insisted on maintaining independence in financial matters, in order to protect the integrity of her ideas and projects. She therefore decided to raise the funds for her foreign journey by publishing a book in Marathi addressed to women in Maharashtra. Written when she was 24, the book was first published in June 1882 and ran into a second edition within six months. She also secured patronage from official quarters. On the strong recommendation of Dadoba Pandurang, the government of Bombay purchased 50 per cent of the first edition (Tilak 1960:115-16).

Stri-Dharma Niti is Ramabai's first book in Marathi. In the preface to the first edition of the book, Ramabai makes a reference to the distressing situation of women trapped in the fallen state of the society. She is hurt by the helpless and abject condition of women who were totally devoid of any kind of knowledge. She notes with gratitude the endeavours undertaken by the enlightened sections of society to promote education among women as a necessary condition for national regeneration. She laments that almost all the texts capable of transmitting moral knowledge and conduct on religion, ethics and philosophy were available only in abstruse and rare Sanskrit, and were thus simply out of the reach of illiterate women. She states that she could not identify even a single text in Marathi for conveying the essence of moral teaching.

Stri-Dharma Niti is divided into eight chapters. The construction of the text reveals a good deal of deliberation and narrative cunningness on Ramabai's part. In the first chapter, Ramabai identifies knowledge, self-reliance, self-advancement, and self-help as the basic resources for individual, social and national development. Drawing a careful distinction between the necessary interdependent relationship between human beings and a bonded dependence on others, Ramabai denies the common prejudice held by both men and women as to women's so-called natural and innate weakness and lack of interest in cultivation of the intellect. Making another crucial distinction between license and freedom, Ramabai urges that self-reliance, discipline and industry are the only trustworthy instruments for the welfare of womankind.

The next chapter, on knowledge, defines knowledge as the immortal wealth, authentic seeing—an inward eye—and the very core of human life. Drawing a distinction between knowledge and learning, and treating the first as the base of the second, Ramabai lays down a series of regulations to govern the cultivation of knowledge. Her set of regulations reveals both her minute observations of the learning process and her attachment to Brahmanical and Victorian values and methods. Emphasizing the need for moderation, punctuality, physical fitness, respect for teachers, a sense of modesty and character practice, Ramabai then offers a concrete programme. It stresses the need for learning grammar, history, the dharmasastras, physics, geography, economics, ethics, health, hygiene, culinary skills, tailoring, embroidery, music and some arithmetic.

The third chapter, on self-discipline, celebrates the virtues of self-restraint, a sense of proper limits, and modesty.

The fourth chapter is the culmination of Ramabai's overall approach to the whole problem of social and moral degeneration, inclusive of the sad state of women. She identifies religion as the most fundamental duty and also the sole foundation of all human ends and purposes. Ramabai treats religion as the fountainhead of sanctity, as a true path, guide, companion and friend in life.

Chapters five and six cover Ramabai's ideas of the duties and concerns of a wife. Demonstrating the injury caused by child marriages, she prescribes the age of 20 as the proper age for marriage for both men and women.

Ramabai then identifies the roots of discord between husband and wife leading to male violation of the sacred code abiding in the institution of marriage and points out the absence of any kind of political or social deterrent to control male license in such matters. She explains that some women react by deciding to spend a lonely but holy life, or by taking to suicide, or by resorting to adultery. We should not overlook the fact that, although Ramabai holds men primarily responsible for familial discord, she imposes the burden of maintaining a peaceful environment within the household almost totally on women.

Ramabai opens the seventh chapter with a frontal attack on the selfish, self-centered, and shortsighted behaviour of contemporary Indian men, who followed a double standard in denying women access to knowledge and thereby independence of mind and character along with the means for gaining sound health. She also denounces the dharmasastras for their partisan and opportunistic prescriptions against women, based on negative images of women as full of malice, misadventure (sahasi) and guile. In Ramabai's opinion, the denial of the right to education is at the root of the anaemic health of Indian women and the consequent degradation of childcare and children's health. Ramabai takes this opportunity to expose the empty rhetoric of the modernized, English-educated, so-called leaders of contemporary public opinion who mouth patriotic and high moral rhetoric imitative of their English masters, and yet lack the courage to put it into practice. She traces these leaders' moral failure to their weak constitution and character. She argues that ignorant mothers and lack of proper child care create this problem. The Pandita recommends a comprehensive and detailed plan of child care, and offers it in the name of the great and wise mothers of the ancient past: Sumitra, Vidula, Kunti and others.

The concluding chapter invokes the laws of eternal change and cyclical history to request women and men to maintain and develop a spirit of fortitude in the face of adversity. She defines the role of religion as the rock and the path, which offers an honourable resolution of the critical situation. She cites the examples of the sage Mandavya and Jesus Christ to demonstrate how great men of high moral character do not hold gold or religion responsible for the downturns in their life, but face adversity with a spirit of dedication, sacrifice and peace of mind.

In the text *Stri-Dharma Niti*, although Ramabai was looking critically at the Hindu fundamentals evoked by the "modernizing" Hindu elites, she herself participated in the same discourse. As a result, she not only frequently valorizes the Vedas and the Smṛtis as authoritative texts, but also sees Indian women as satis and sadhvis. Although Ramabai was increasingly uneasy about having no

religious consolation through the Sstras, she used their framework in writing *Stree Dharma Niti*. She wrote this book because, as a self-reliant person, she wanted to earn her fare to England. As Ram Bapat points out, *Stree Dharma Niti*, "… while aimed … at assisting women in all ranks of society to build the home called happiness on the firm foundation of knowledge, the typical atmosphere pervading is that of high caste, patrician households. It must have appealed … to modernizing elites and officials" (Bapat 1995:233).

We must note here that, in negotiating with the modernizing elites and officials, Ramabai, accepting at one level the deeper meaning of the interdependence between men and women, tells her women readers in clear and simple terms to avoid total surrender or subjection. She pleads for "unpolluted" self-reliance and urges women to take responsibility in the matters that concern their vital interests. Ramabai advises women to become industrious individuals who seek knowledge, and warns them against the patriarchal trap that tries, even with benevolent intentions, to capture women. Here she skillfully takes support from Vyasa Muni, the classical Hindu sage: "One who does not help you to dispel your ignorance, do not call him your father, mother, kin, teacher, husband or god" (Ramabai 1967:51).

The second major text relevant in this context, written by Ramabai, is in fact *The High Caste Hindu Women.* But as Kosambi has pointed out "… the major influence that shaped the evolution of Ramabai's feminist consciousness, as reflected in *The High Caste Hindu Woman* was her exposure to the more progressive and less asymmetrical gender relations that prevailed in England and America". [Kosambi:2000;18] Ramabai's travelogue of United States and especially her description of 'The condition of women' in it, published in 1889, provides us with a concrete proof of how she was seeing the linkages between women's education, knowledge and creation of an overall egalitarian progressive nation state. From March 1886 to end of November 1888, Ramabai travelled about 30,000 miles around the United States. She tells us why she wrote this book in these words:

> The joy that I felt in the United States in seeing the wonderful things there would be incomplete if I did not share some portion of it with my Indian brothers and sisters; and that is why I am publishing this small volume…

Her intention of writing this travel account was to create atleast "a little more love of hard work and good will in the service of our mother India in the hearts of her dear Indian fellow citizens". She accepted the invitation to go to America because she was inspired by the woman called Bodley who inspite of being a foreigner and non-Hindu had a compassion for Hindu women. Dr. Rachel Bodley was a Dean of the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. Ramabai also was keen on attending Anandibai Joshi's graduation. In her words, "Anandibai Joshi is the first instance of a Hindu woman studying a science as difficult as medicine and acquiring degree in it". We must note here that Ramabai in 1883 had expressed her opinions before the Education Commission on the changes and improvements needed in the system of women's education. She had recommended that women should be allowed to receive education in medicine. Ramabai tells us about how she was surprised to see some reformers who had claimed to wish for the progress of women were against offering medical education for women. Reformists like Keshab Chandra Sen, the Bengali leader of the Indian Brahmo Samaj had expressed his fear that University education would end up destroying women's femininity or women naturally were not fit for such studies. Ramabai notes:

> Women doctors are badly needed in India. Our shy Indian women feel great shame about letting men know their condition when they are suffering from many kinds of women's diseases and especially during child birth … But men continue to be obstinate no matter which country they belong to. Some oppose medical education for women out of ignorance, some out of jealousy, and some out of simple selfish interest". [Engblo & Gomen: Trans. Manuscript; 1-3]

Ramabai is keen on women's education not only because she was a woman who was benefitted by having an access to education but as a knowledge making citizen of India. While travelling

in the United States she was constantly comparing America with Britain, India and even China. She was impressed by the United States because of its democratic governance. She has argued in this context that America had not accepted the King's rule and also avoided the misrule or anarchy only by granting all human beings a status of a free, equal and creative being. [Ramabai: 1889; 41]

Ramabai's praise for the Statue of Liberty is noteworthy when she highlights that the lady of liberty stands with a torch in one hand to shed the light of freedom upon the whole world and a book in her other hand to eradicate the ignorance of humankind by giving it knowledge. Ramabai was aware of the possible criticism that she would invite of being blinded by the richness of the American life. Ramabai neither is judging critically nor appreciating blindly the world of United States. She is critical about their discrimination and bigotry in the context of racism but she is also critical about Indian system where all privileges and services were available only for a certain class. In America Ramabai saw ordinary people having access to the privileges and services. She was especially impressed by the facilities like free education for all children. She saw that one's social group was not the determining basis for acquiring certain position. An individual freely could attain excellence or inferiority. This was in a way Ramabai's utopia. She had seen Tilak declaring that the self-rule was his birthright. But was skeptical about bringing in reality the self-rule without giving away the sahib-orientedness. She had observed that in her own country common ordinary people did not receive the benefits of cleanliness and good health and the services that they should. Ramabai sarcastically points out that the more bellicose and socially conservative nationalists of her time were using the term 'Swarajya' without having thought about the real meaning of the equality principle. [Ramabai: 1889;949-95] She has also pointed out that Indian government was spending more money on martial army than on education. She tells us that self-governance, local governments, self-reliant families, self-respect, politeness all these qualities are there in the American society because they have a superior system of governance. Time and again Ramabai compares her own homeland and points out

how in Hindustan girls suffer because of child marriage. And how they are discriminated right from their birth as girls. Ramabai in her sixth chapter talks to us, about ‘the pursuit of learning’. She declares in these words—“Where there is learning there can no longer be any social discrimination”. She repeatedly underlines the importance of women’s education while comparing Europe and United States. She observes:

> …the very life of the monarchies of Europe resides in their armies, whereas the strength and life-breath of the democracy of the United States resides in education. This is only one nation in the entire world that spends more on its system of education than on its department of war and this is none other than this democratic nation. [Engblom & Gomez: Trans. Manuscript; 1-3]

Ramabai, obviously was aware of the spaces created by the colonial intervention especially for women. She saw while in the United States, women teachers, carrying their teaching profession creatively and standing against the practices such as cruel punishments to deviating students. In fact this was the time she must have come to a firm conclusion that combating women’s subjugation was possible through the higher education which would give them a status of ‘knowledge-makers’.

This is evident in the eighth chapter titled as “The Condition of Women”. Ramabai in this chapter has reviewed the progress made by the women in the United States and its impact on the larger society. This chapter begins with giving us an information about how Hariet Martineaue in 1840 had written about American Women’s plight and compared it with slavery, in her book *Society in America.* Ramabai tracing the progress of American women from slavery to becoming an independent individual points out that those who essentialize women as powerless are at a barbaric stage of development. In her opinion, one can judge the progress of any nation by examining women’s condition in it. Ramabai was aware of the fact that if women in England or America had any higher status it was not the credit of the prevalent Christian religion but the dynamism that was shown by many thinkers who were truly reforming the Christian religion in the context of slav-

ery and women's condition. Ramabai has argued here that women are made to work hard when they enter the public domain but are always denied a legitimate space in it. [Ramabai: 1889;220-221] She also points out that how women made spaces for themselves in the anti-slavery movement. This chapter has different sections like: (a) Education (b) Employment (c) Legal Rights (d) Collective Efforts and Nationalist Society (e) Women's Solidarity (f) Women's Crusade (g) Women's National Anti-Liquor Association. We will take brief review of some of these sections highlighting Ramabai's vision and insights about the possible direction that Indian women's education would adopt.

a. Education

In this section she declares that 'fundamental root of progress is 'Education'. By using the term 'Vidya' she suggests 'education' was another name of 'knowledge'. While giving us a brief history of Western Women's Education, from 1789 to 1809. She highlights the efforts of Mary Wollstonecraft (1789), More (1799) and Sidney Smith (1809) and calls this period as the 'Preface to the History of Western Women's Education'. Ramabai carefully notes that though the discussion about higher education for women began in the US in 1819 with the efforts of Ema Willard upto 1831 those who were supporting women's education were against their entry into the higher education. She also points out that Oberlin was the first College for Women and Boston city, which was known for its educational quality, especially well known Harvard University took 125 years to grant women's entry even at the primary level. Ramabai's argument time and again revolves around the point that women do not lose their femininity, break homes just because they have higher education.

b. Employment

In this section Ramabai enumerates different professions adopted by educated women in the US, such as teachers, professors, organisers of kindergarten, public schools, journalists, independent

editors of different journals, doctors, women medical doctors, writings about Women's health, lawyers, priests, stenography, scientists, sculpture, etc. What she was really trying to achieve was to highlight how creating spaces for women's development was the only answer for achieving progressive industrious society. Women who worked in the anti-liquor campaigns or who initiated campaigns for achieving political rights for women are the examples given by her. In the field of medical science she tells us that women's entry changed the male perception of human body and anatomy. The vulgarity of male medical practitioners was stopped by women entering into it. Ramabai like many feminists of our time has argued against women taking up marginal jobs. Primary teaching, serving, running boarding houses, domestic services, type setting, folding, stitching papers, unskilled work in factories—

> such spaces were open for women in the period when Harriet Martineau wrote her text (1840). But Ramabai's effort is towards women taking higher positions, they becoming decision makers, using their imagination. She demonstrates through Beethoven's sister's example or Caroline Herschell's – the sister of astronomer William Herschell – example how women's imagination was subsumed by the patriarchal structures. These brothers became famous forever but sisters and their contribution remained invisible. The inventions like underwater telescope, life jackets, rafts, steam making machine, improvements in the locomotive engines, reducing noise of the inner city trains, preventing standing crops due to flooding, were all women's contributions [Ramabai: 1889; 245-56]

In short, Ramabai's text is in a way rooted in the liberal philosophy which endorses human being's superiority over the rest of the animal kingdom and legitimizes existing forms of social order in Western capitalism. Ramabai like Wollstonecraft is into a framework, which can be put forth, as 'if man can transcend his animalistic, instinctual origins to create a world of reason, culture and social order the woman also can do the same'. Ramabai is pleading for the chance for women to fulfill their socially endowed functions with self-control. Her properly educated women will be able to curb men's unbridled and corrupt practices. She shares

with the nineteenth century liberals the conviction that it is the duty of women to be moral conscience of male sexuality.

In 1888 through *The High Caste Hindu Woman* Ramabai launched her devastating critique of Hindu patriarchy, she goes much beyond the first wave Western feminists like Wollstonecraft. As Gauri Vishwanath has pointed out Ramabai "… meticulously takes apart the various philosophical underpinnings of Hinduism and shows how they have succeeded in mainstreaming the low status of women in Indian Society". [Vishwanathan:1998;124] eg. Ramabai points out that the high caste women were threatened by the popular belief that their husbands would die if they should read or should hold a pen in their fingers.

It is necessary to avoid seeing gender oppression as a context free universal phenomenon. Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi were part of the collective challenges to structures of power. Ramabai in her writing has critically looked at Western modernity's claims as well as her own traditions' claims. Ramabai was a person who interrogated both Hinduism and Christianity. It seems she was different from Tilak when she rejects to seek answers from the 'community' framework and chooses to be an individual in the enlightenment framework. Her modernity gives her a strength to attack the hypocrisy of Brahmans and the irrationality of Brahmanism and to reject the hegemony of Varnashvamdharma. She also was puzzled, repelled and saddened by the sectarianism prevailing in the Christian world. Ramabai's refusal to let any authority taking decisions on her behalf and her declaration that "I have a conscience, and mind and a judgement of my own" [Vishwanathan:1998;126] is crucial in understanding her position as a woman—a marginalized category in the world.

III C. ANANDIBAI JOSHI (1865–89)

Anandibai Joshi is another remarkable woman who is noted as the first woman from western India to qualify as a medical doctor as early as in 1886. She had an extremely coercive childhood at the hands of her own mother. After her marriage at the age of nine, her husband in a typical colonial reformist fashion compelled her to

embark on a course of Western style education. In 1883, she went to the US for advanced medical studies and graduated in 1886 from the 'Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania' located in Philadelphia. In February 1889, very soon after her return from America, she died at the very young age of 24. Her correspondence with her husband from the US gives us a good idea of the tremendous insights she gained into the Hindu and the Christian patriarchal systems. From her letters it is clear that she saw through the strategies employed by the 'modern' 'progressive' Indian educated men in the period of anti-colonial nationalism to mould a 'new' Indian woman to suit their emerging bourgeois needs and tastes. She was able to set forth in clear objective terms the price which even men have to pay for enslaving women. Unlike Ramabai, whom she knew well, Anandi did not change her religion. In her sketch of her own preferences, Anandibai identified slavery and subjugation as the things in the world, which she most disliked.

In order to understand Anandi's views on women's education and an overall changing situation in Indian and world over we have to depend heavily on her personal correspondence and on some of her public speeches. After her death two biographies of Anandibai were published within two year's time. The first one was published in the US in 1888, written by Caroline H. Dall, an American journalist and feminist writer, titled as *The Life of Dr. Anandibai Joshee.* The second one was written by Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948), the first major novelist in Marathi, in 1889, titled as '*Kai. Sau. Anandibai Joshi Yanche Charitra*' (Late Mrs. Anandibai Joshi's biography). Both these biographies tell us about how Anandibai struggled hard for achieving educational excellence and how her brahmanical socialization, her physical tiredness made it ultimately impossible for her to make use of her medical science knowledge. Her life story also reveals to us the condition of her mother's generation, which neither had the protection and harmony of the traditional joint family nor an access to the opportunities opened up by the modernity, was caught up into the trap. Hence her mother, full of fears and anxieties about Anandi's possible transgression of patriarchal rules, took to beat-

ing her own daughter coercively. The institution of education came in Anandi's life not for gaining knowledge but for refraining her from playing and for engaging her in some activites.

Gopalrao Joshi, Anandi's husband is described by many scholars as an eccentric and a whimsical person, but keeping in view his time and his context, I see him as a norm and not as an exception but a typical male reformist of seventeenth century India. In his childhood he had witnessed his sister's sharp memory, her picking up of reading, writing skills. It seems that he was even jealous of her. Kanitkar's biography tells us that Gopalrao was convinced that "… women have a sharp intellectual capacity. If they get an opportunity for education, they can perform on par with men" [Kanitkar: 1889;19]. Gopalrao's letter written in 1878, from the local post of Kolhapur to Reverend Wilder of Princeton is pertinent in this context. He wrote "Ever since I began to think independently for myself, female education has been my favourite subject… to raise the nation to eminence among civilized countries. It is the source of happiness in a family". [Kirtane: 1997:435] Gopalrao taught Anandi to read and write both Modi and Balbodh script. He also made it sure to teach her good English. She was taught arithmetic upto decimal fractions and was taught to read the world map. She was also good in translations from Marathi into English. Gopalrao tells Rev. Wilder "I should like to see her follow any profession, namely medicine or education so that she may be of immense use to her country sisters" [Kirtane: 1997; 435]

It was Gopalrao, as a reformist who became first uneasy about the marital scene in the Indian families. He saw the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law as a power relation and in-law's home as a prison. His ambition was to set up an example before the world of a wise educated "Indian" woman. He was even ready to give education to a woman who was drawn into prostitution in those days [Kanitkar:1889;20]. Gopalrao was radical in his views about women's education. It seems he was annoyed by those fellow beings who supported women's education but were afraid of its consequences. The typical fear that women's education would empower them to

leave their husbands was answered by Gopalrao in a radical mode. He said:

> "it is good to free onself than accept lifetime imprisonment. Man can leave his wife anytime if she makes any mistakes. It doesn't harm him. If women themselves take this initiative and free themselves, it is so much better for them". [Kanitkar: 1889; 25]

Gopalrao after marriage changed the structure of his household and created a space for Anandi's education. Her grandmother formed a part of this new nuclearized home. He even fought with his father and got estranged from him on this issue of women's education "how far and how much".

Anandibai, thus trained by her husband, of course, goes much beyond him. Her letter to Mrs. Carpenter in 1880 is an eloquent proof of this, she wrote:

> We Hindu women are backwards in all respects. I want to learn from you a lot but I don't have much to give to you… We do not have a custom of calling our husbands by name. It is believed that by doing so we lessen their lives. *But I don't believe in such things.* My husband's name is …" Anandi in this letter also talks about her own ill health and relates it to the Indians' custom of a child marriage. Her perception of her caste framework is also revealing. In this letter, she sees Brahman caste as controlled and restricted by many dos and don'ts. [Kanitkar: 1889; 55-6] Her letters to Mrs. Carpenter are in a way a guide for the foreigners of how to understand the diversity in India especially the different languages, behavioural patterns and various rituals in every group. But Anandi was convinced about the modernity that came through education. She says in one of letters to Mrs. Carpenter "Women in India suffer immensely ever.… Western education would provide them with 'light'…'rescue'. Men and women must be made able to protect themselves, they should not depend on each other for survival as well as for any other thing… this would reduce the conflicts and slavery in our society". [Kanitkar: 1889; 59]

In 1883 Anandi spoke about her future visit to America and public inquiries regarding it. In this speech she posed six questions to herself and systematically answered every question. The questions were:

> Why I go to America?
> Are there no means to study in India?
> Why do I go alone?
> Shall I not be excommunicated when I return to India?
> What will I do if misfortune befall me?
> Why should I do what is not done by any of my sex?

Answers to these questions reveal complexity and multi-dimentionality of Anandibai's life. She was convinced that there was no other alternative for her than to visit the most civilized part of the world for achieving medical knowledge. She openly criticized the patriarchal practices of the Indian missionaries and the subordinate knowledge that was available for women. She declared openly that she would remain unchanged as far as customs, manners, food or dress were concerned. Was the observing of Hindu patriarchal rules to its extreme a strategy on her part? Or was this a reaction to the imitative, westernized middle class that she saw around her? One can conclude from her speech that Anandibai wanted to claim for herself a legitimate membership of human society. Her ideals were Manu, Shibi and even Jesus Christ. Her decision was to live for a wider cause at any cost.

One more text that is crucial for our purposes is her letter to her brother in law from New Jersey written on 2nd January, 1886. Gopalrao's brother was about to accept the clerical employment offered by the British government. This letter is full of Anandi's new personality which was benefitted by the exposure of different situations in the US and by the new skill that she had achieved through learning. She writes:

> … among three of us (me, my husband and you) I have experienced the world more … this may be the reason why I am not able to understand your decision… I do not think that I am superior to you by age or intelligence … but have you forgotten your own thinking? Where is your earlier heartfelt passion about independence? [Kanitkar: 1889; 75]

Anandi herself had rejected a clerical job in the post office when she had needed it badly. She was not ready to compete with her own people and sell her autonomy for the sake of a monthly

salary. Here she does not one-sidedly glorify her own decision but also reflexively says “But now I feel sad about that decision because if I had taken up that job I would have set an example for many other women who were in a similar situation. At least they would have got an entry into that world, but that did not happen”. She further notes in her letter that though she was a powerless backward woman, she chose to become doctor by avoiding to fall in the trap of competition set by the colonial rulers. “… That is how I was in search of a small profession, which would help my motherland, and its powerless women”. [Kanitkar: 1889;75] Anandi is in fact advising the young generation of India to take up modern professions. Her concern is about how education in India was becoming trivial, a symbol of hypocrisy and a means of heavy expenditure. She points out “. .. We must imitate what is good in westerners and must achieve knowledge and gain profit and then must show the rulers our real worth”. [Kanitkar: 1889;76]

In short, like all other nationalists of her time, Anandi was pained by the degeneration and decay of the Indian people. No doubt she nurtures the dream of bringing back ‘tradition’, but was also aware of the possiblities of modernity.

Anandi’s letters to Gopalrao though apparently written in the ‘Pativrata’ mode, adopt a subversive mode when she makes such statements as:

> “Quiescence is the best path that every Hindu husband must learn from his wife” [Kanitkar:1889;189] or “Every nation must learn pain-bearing capacity from the Indian women. They may have religious naivete or ignorance or wrong beliefs, but we cannot hold them responsible for it. This is because all laws, regulations, practices are congeneal to men… we must know for what, when, in what way men did protect our dignity or did release us from enemies or how they snatched rights from us instead of lamenting about the present day situation… we must concentrate upon how to get rid of ignorance.”

Anandi was against publishing her own writings and letters. She was against any kind of exhibitionism. She wanted to lead a responsible life, taking her decision and acting upon it accordingly. Her letter written in the year of 1884 tells us about her presentation on ‘child marriage’ before missionaries. Anandi who

had once accepted child marriage as hazardous to health in her letter to Mrs. Carpenter before visiting the US, defends it in the US before the gathering of missionaries. Does Anandi surrender to the conditionalities of female reformism by publicly defending it as suggested by Sangari and Chakravarty? [Sangari: 1999; xxiv] Or could we understand this in the light of her statements about her own perception of self as a 'cool' and 'decision-making' individual. Anandi defended child marriage when she was abroad and when she perceived herself as a representative of her nation and more so when she knew about the missionary politics. She subverted the hidden agenda of the missionary politics by giving positive points of child marriage. Anandi thus grew into a mature person. One can vouch this in her letters advising her husband in every realm, be it religion or domesticity, during this period. She writes to Gopalrao about how to behave with the domestic servant at home. She says,

> I want to request you to have compassion about the woman who cooks for us. You yourself say that she is good and is better than me in the upkeep of the house. Remember, she also has pain and pleasure like you. Hence for my sake, please try to adjust and do good to her as far as possible … [Kanitkar: 1889; 81]

Anandibai, like Tarabai Shinde and Ramabai, is very much aware of the male chauvinism that was prevalent in her time. She points out that the general ethos of women's victimization is aggravated by male deviance and women pay a very heavy price. But for men it is easier to be deviants. They

> "… Marry one woman, lure the other with promises, bring the third one … in the home and have a need for the fourth one" [Kanitkar: 1889; 82] Her conclusion in this matter can be summed up in these words—"men's irresponsible behaviour is painful. They have such a powerful lust that they cannot control it. Thus those trapped in the prison of desire are ignorant and silly men."

In November 1886 Anandi came back to India in February, 1887 she died in Pune. During her illness when she was sure of death she had asked her ashes to be sent to Aunt Theo. Her ashes

were later buried in the cemetery at Poghkeepsie, where she had spent very meaningful years of her life.

Anandi's untimely death, her fears and anxieties, her dreams and premonitions, her faith in good and bad omens, her belief in astrology, particularly at the end—her insistence of taking Ayurvedic medicine—all these need nuanced complex understanding. One can neither paint her as a total victim or as an individual who resisted, struggled and was victorious even when she died untimely.

Anandi's text of her thesis submitted in 1886 for the degree of Doctor of Medicine was rescued in 1963 and is now available in Kirtane's book on Anandi's life. This was titled as *Obstetrics Among the Aryan Hindoos* which was to introduce gynaecology as practiced in India. It seems that she had through this text made an effort to prove that the Indian obstetrics had its path of making knowledge. In explaining her objectives in writing this thesis, she has noted that

> As the importance of obstetrics can be measured only by the value of life and health, and both being of paramount consequence it is deserving of most careful study. When we realize how difficult and vast the subject is, it is not surprising to find so many great minds thoroughly absorbed in its magnitude, from the time immortal. Since our study naturally embraces the cause and effect, race, habits, climate, influences and means of assisting nature in her operations, we must not entirely overlook the history of past ages and consider the superior minds which laboured, with marked success, in the same field of investigation, under promptings of the same motives, as far back as fifteenth century BC. They may enable us to the better appreciation of the science and pay due respect to the discoveries, thesis and mode of application of remedies of minds of different nations at different times. I therefore need not apologise for choosing the subject. [Kirtane: 1997; 460]

One must analyze this text and raise many critical questions about its content. But for our purpose, this proves that Anandi was trying to represent India as she understood it while she was confronted by developed western world of the US and was also keen

to bring new knowledge to her world which was in her opinion decaying rapidly.

IV

This extensive review of the patriarchal discourse in the context of women's education through a case study of the nineteenth century Maharashtra brings out many important issues and underlines complexities involved around gender-politics.

We must, first of all note that Tilak, Kanitkar, Gole and Tarabai, Ramabai, Anandibai were not read here as binary opposites. They were contemporaries, and in fact shared many ideas. All of them were genuinely concerned about the degeneration of their society and were convinced about the modernity that came not only alongwith the colonial rule, but through the churning in their own society. As feminist researchers while challenging other disciplines and opening new ways of questions and interpretation of social life we must be context sensitive. Hence this case study especially is trying to understand what were the constructions of patriarchal discourse which were seeing women's education with suspicion and caution. At the same time the concern is to outline the ways in which these constructions were subverted through individual resistances.

Tilak's self conscious undertaking of the role of reconciling tradition with modernity and his single minded attack on imperialism in all its guises is the context within which he differentiates between common Indian women and professional English women. His insistence on women's education for enchancing the scope and the quality of married women's life became ultimately problematic. In other words, Tilak presents a case of the nineteenth century reformer who had recognized the potential of education for women but the compulsion of the 'political' or the 'nation' in a sense did not allow him to recognise the potential of women as knowledge makers, as nation builders. Obviously, history of feminism in India is very much a part of anti feminism. The real question we should ask is how in the face of open support to

women's education by political leader like Tilak, was constantly contested through the strategies of ridicule as in the case of Kanitkar and through the instrumental approach for building up Hindu religion and nation as in the case of Gole.

Women's education came to be framed by 'Nation' and 'Conjugality'. Even the resistance to patriarchy was circumscribed by concerns of 'nation'. There were no two polar opposite camps—one for women's education and the other against it. For women's education was intrinsically linked to tradition and the definitions of boundaries of castes and classes. But still the individual resistances of these three women studied here present to us some insightful modes of subversions. It would be limiting to have simplistic formulation of women's space, women's voices while attempting to theorize the historical transitions. Gender roles are not static and fully formed, there are discontinuities. Hence readings of the texts must go beyond the notion of gender as a dichotomous and as an exclusively hierarchically structured realm. The lives and works of the three women, are more than individual case histories. Tarabai, Ramabai and Anandibai are studied here because historically, women in India, like low caste, were denied an access to those texts which relegated them to subordinate positions. Women's resistances to their enforced destinies were almost absent in the written domain. All the three women studied here have broken this rule. Their life and their writing foreground the issues of justice, equality and human dignity. Their narratives are not at all a linear narration of victimization. All of them have challenged essentialised notion of complimentarily between men and women and at the same time they do not glorify the antagonism between them. Tarabai's critique of colonial rupture—deindustrialization, deskilling and its implications for women's lives or Ramabai's critique of Hindu-Brahmanic patriarchy and her faith in liberal democratic nation or Anandibai's critical understanding of the need of expanding Hindu patriarchal structures from within need nuanced, complex understanding than just 'women's voices' framework. A complex understanding of how education for women was tied to processes of caste and class formulations and distinctions and to nation making itself need to be under-

lined. These women's demand of full rights to higher education for women without challenging the 'better motherhood' or 'better home making' framework was in fact a crucial strategy. We must also note that Tarabai ended her life as a lonely widow, Ramabai though was active till the end in a way in her last days lived in an isolation in Kedgaon and Anandibai's life ended untimely. It would be erroneous to fit these women into preconstructed moulds of resisting heroines or as always and already victims or worse still, in a psychologized reading of feminine imbalance. This would be disrespectful towards the rich and complex developments of feminist historiography that have spanned the last 25 years. In this tradition of feminist research the present papers seeks to make comparisons, connections and distinctions between women who entered colonial education at different levels. It traces the hostility to education as well as underlines the gap between what their education was designed for and the way in which they used it. This paper therefore, works towards in the final analysis understanding the persistence of the structures of patriarchies in colonial India.

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Feminist Issues: Action, Research and Women's Studies

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The issues that this paper engages with are part of larger and ongoing research. They are also the ones that I currently interrogate, focusing as I do upon the comparative situations in Canadian and Indian universities. I hope to examine through a project that 1 am presently involved with, English Literature syllabi, particularly the gender input into them, as also the Women's Studies curriculum at two universities in Canada and India in order to explore and discuss the interface between issues in feminist activism as they manifest at different historical moments and in diverse cultural spaces, the ways in which these help to define and conceptualise theories of feminist discourse (literary representations are often in dialectical relationship with feminist theory) which in turn influence, or should influence the contents of Women's Studies courses. The aim of this study is to locate discussion in the interstices between feminist activist and research methodologies in order to show how they also intersect crucially with larger pedagogical practices (including the politics of publishing and other dissemination procedures which more often than not decide what gets written). Also, the larger research hopes to draw attention to what (and who) gets written into syllabi as also what is left out. The inherent power structures that go to determine these exclusions/inclusions are of crucial significance in the perspective of this study. Processes, then, of canonization with reference to literary studies both in India and in Canada need to be articulated and problematized. Thus the project aims to analyze both course content as well as revisions in syllabi over roughly the three decades since 1970 so as to study significant shifts, presences as

also absences, and see if it is possible to find connections, direct and indirect, with important socio-political debates, historico-cultural realities in both countries. All this is obviously too huge and multi-aspected to be the subject of one paper; thus only some questions that form the bedrock of this discussion will be raised in this essay.

This paper suggests that the second wave of feminism that began in many parts of the world around 1970, and the ways in which it targeted especially urban educated women located in academia, has crucial overlaps with the beginnings of Women's Studies as an important field of study. This is only logical as universities are sites for intellectual ferment and theoretical engagement and consequently do determine the processes by which radical debates translate into formulations of new and more progressive syllabi. The linkages between the issues that engaged feminists, say in the 70's and later in the 80's and 90's, and how these shaped the intellectual concerns of academic and literary feminists, thereby determining/structuring the theoretical parameters of literary feminism obviously raised important questions of canon-formations, decanonizations, nationalisms, gender identities etc. Theoretical engagements, socio-cultural debates, politico-historical materials among many other factors contribute towards canon-shifts. Gender issues interlock with and redefine issues of race, class, sex, ethnicity and other differentials. Besides, feminism is not and cannot be one homogenized theory, but one that manifests and reverberates differently in multiple cultural contexts, addressing gender inequities and relations between genders in divergent ways. Increasingly indeed, the 'differences' between 'feminisms' are the focus in feminist debates and critical theory rather than the 'similarities' upon which much of the earlier feminist literary theory was founded. However, as the paper will later reiterate through the parameters of Women's Studies presented in its last section, it is important to remember that both regional feminist movements, their specific situations and rationale of issues-based agendas and struggles, as well as the larger global paradigms (and the inter-connections between the two) are of equal and crucial

significance, and thus must be kept simultaneously in view if one is to sustain both authenticity and impartiality of perspective.

Although the structures of power work somewhat differently in varied cultural and historical contexts, the underlying structures of systemic subordinations that pervade sociological realities are easy to discern. It is traumatic to discover even today, through statistical data, that the struggle for basic rights like equal job opportunities and comparable wages for men and women, is still not a reality even in developed countries. Discrimination and double marginalization, on the other hand, often on account of gender and race/ or gender and class/ or gender and religion, make a sad and disturbing reality that women world over are forced to face. The following excerpt from an unpublished manuscript by Arun P. Mukherjee—Canadian literary theorist of international renown located as an academic at York University, Toronto—is a case in point. She calls it an agony narrative and indeed it is one. The essay is an account of the ways in which gender-race differentials work in Canadian universities, sometimes in subtle ways, often visibly too, despite the country's professed official policy of multiculturalism which promises basic equity structures to all racial and ethnic categories. Calling York the "least worst" of Canadian universities, she narrates the situations, both of students and faculty, of colour, expressing poignantly 'the pain of the helpless bystander' and the feeling of survivor's guilt.'[1] She writes,

> Ten years ago, when I began work as a university academic, I had a lot of hope. There was so much talk about employment equity and anti-racism and curriculum reform. Ten years later, after serving on all sorts of committees, and witnessing and participating in hiring processes, 1 have come to see how intractable ways of behaving are... I have worked at, and sought work at, a number of Canadian universities during my 29 years in Canada and it seems to me that they all function like old boys' club."

While it seems to me that a sizeable number of white women have been granted membership privileges in the last few years, I and other women of colour, have not got the especially marked

membership cards that will admit us to the inner sanctum where decisions are made about who will be hired, and what will be taught and how.

She continues:

> That message came to me strong and clear when in a space of less than a week a few days ago 1 was misrecognized twice, both times for two other South Asian women faculty. While I have been at York for fifteen years, these other two have been there over two decades. Such misrecognition conveys to me that all South Asian women are interchangeable. And, by the same token, expendable(13).

However, refusing to be subsumed by the system, Arun Mukherjee affirms the right to 'contest the millions of words spewed out by Canadian universities about their employment equity policies'. She gathers strength from Audrey Lorde who chooses speech over silence when silence seems safer: 'And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to be born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die'(13).

Despite little reminders in our everyday lives, both personal and public, that we live in a world designed and constructed primarily by men (and I refer here to the experience of highly privileged women who do not constitute the tip of that iceberg, the huge iceberg formed by disadvantaged categories like rural, tribal, dalit women, or any other less privileged groups), we need to remember that much has been achieved by women through struggle and solidarity. Do men realize, I often wonder, that an equal distribution of human rights may be ultimately beneficial to them too? That if a woman has equal rights she will share equal responsibilities too. Masculinity comes with its load of burdens, and is as gendered and sociologically constructed as is femininity. To give an instance, although the pressures that we, as parents, are forced to put upon both our young girls and boys in this increasingly competitive world are tremendous today – they are certainly heavier on the male of the species, as in many societies, including our own, careers for girls are still an option they may or may not select as against boys who do not enjoy this option. Thus,

where resources are limited, it is easy to understand why preference may be given to educating males rather than females. Also in our middle-class urban family structures, even where girls are as highly educated and earning as well as boys, the expectations from matrimonial arrangements remain fixed in the traditional paradigms wherein the man must be 'better settled' if levels of respect, still considered an important ingredient of a successful marriage, are to be maintained. Thus, it is important to consider that, although separatist theories had their uses in different historical times, they are ultimately alienating and thus defeatist in the project of bringing about transformative change to design a more fair world which is what feminism should really be about.

The second section of this paper consists of short excerpts from some literary texts that very usefully illustrate some of the issues raised so far, for instance, that segregated spaces are constructed and rigorously maintained by socialization processes, that there are overarching systems of power entrenched within these, and that one person's profit is often founded upon another's loss. I must emphasize at this juncture that it is extremely important for readers, students and teachers of literature to foreground the literary text in the project of Women's Studies, although the contributions made by cultural and social theorists have been invaluable, many of whom have been, and some still are, intellectually vibrant and engaged teachers from literature departments.[2] This foregrounding of literature by us is crucial for two reasons: one that we don't really have the training or the tools that feminist sociologists and historians have and thus can only contribute half measures; and two, that somewhere along the path of theoretical engagement, originally meant to enrich the text, the text has got lost. It is part of this attempt at retrieval that (in my larger project) I foreground the text by analyzing literature syllabi, although I rely heavily on the insights provided by cultural theory.

The following passages show, for instance, that the processes of growing up, of understanding sexuality and oneself as a sexual being—and of enjoying leisure too—are gendered for men and women. Even before members of different sexual categories are aware of biological differences that segregate them, they are

socialized to belong to their own discrete gendered spaces which are watertight and founded upon dualisms and polarities. Thus they are to have their own specific share of feminine and masculine qualities which can neither be shared nor interchanged.

Nursery rhymes and bedtime stories that children read at school relegate them to designated and mutually exclusive social spaces. Note the following verse:

> Mamma and Miss Ann
>
> *Mamma.* Go and buy a Toy, Ann.
> *Ann.* I can buy a gun.
> *Mamma. A* gun is not for you, Ann.
> *Ann.* Why is a gun not fit for me?
> *Mamma. A* gun is only fit for a boy.
> *Ann.* May I buy a top?
> *Mamma.* No, but you may buy a mop.[3]
>
> (Arnold, 1969:19)

It is of added significance that the above passage is targeted at boys; it is then easy to see how 'appropriate' gender behaviour/roles are signalled through such insidious representations and essentialised differences between genders established.

The next passage reiterates such neat categorizations, thereby reaffirming them.

Elaine, in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye,* faces a doorway to the different worlds of boys and girls:

> At the back are two grandiose entranceways with carvings around them and ornate insets above the doors, inscribed in curvy, solemn lettering: GIRLS and BOYS. When the teacher in the yard rings her brass handbell we have to line up in twos by classroom, girls in one line, boys in another, and file into our separate doors. The girls hold hands; the boys don't. If you go into the wrong door you get the strap, or so everyone says.

I am very curious about the BOYS door. How is going through a door different if you're a boy? What's in there that merits the strap, just for seeing it? My brother says there's nothing special about the stairs inside, they're plain ordinary stairs. The boys

don't have separate classroom, they're in with us. They go in the BOYS door and end up in the same place that we do. I can see the point of the boys' washroom, because they pee differently, and also the boys' yard, because of all the punching and kicking that goes on among them. But the door baffles me. I would like a look inside.(Atwood, 1989: 45-46)

It is important to see that in the above passage Elaine can understand segregations based on logic; but 'solemn' labellings not grounded in reason only create intriguing and mysterious divisive categories which are perhaps more rigid than rational ones.

The next passage demonstrates the ways in which such separate spaces can create gender bondings, thus becoming a source of liberatory and comforting kinds of mindsets. Although Elaine, the heroine of the novel mentioned above, and her brother, have had identical upbringing, both rarely attending school due to being located in wartime Canada, when the family moves to Toronto Elaine both longs for and dreads the prospect of having girlfriends at last:

> So I am left to the girls, real girls at last, in the flesh. But I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say. I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder ... I begin to want things I've never wanted before: braids, a dressing gown, a purse of my own.

Something is unfolding, being revealed to me. I see there's a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me and that 1 can be a part of it without making any effort at all. I don't have to keep up with anyone, run as fast, aim as well, make loud explosive noises, decode messages, die on cue. I don't have to think about whether I have done these things well, as well as a boy. All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton's catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I've done it badly. Partly this is a relief. (Atwood, 1989: 47,54)

Although literary representations of customs and rituals which are specific to different cultures may not be directly relevant to women whose cultural locations are dissimilar, they do indeed

raise larger and broader questions of interpretation. For one they help to connect toother practices in other cultures which maybe different, but equally 'uncivilized', 'barbaric', at the least oppressive. Such resonances can only lead to an enhanced understanding of systemic structures that ultimately strengthen belief in the need for solidarity between women. The following extract from Jung Chang's *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* is an account of footbinding rituals undergone by upper-class Chinese women until this century:

> My grandmother was a beauty... But her greatest assets were her bound feet, called in Chinese 'three-inch golden lilies.' This meant that she walked like 'a tender young willow shoot in a spring breeze' as connoisseurs of women traditionally put it. The sight of a woman teetering on bound feet was supposed to have an erotic effect on men, partly because her vulnerability induced a feeling of protectiveness in the onlooker. My grandmother's feet had been bound when she was two years old. Her mother, who herself had bound feet, first wound a piece of cloth about twenty feet long round her feet, bending all the toes except the big toe inward and under the sole. Then she placed a large stone on top to crush the arch. My grandmother screamed in agony and begged her to stop. Her mother had to stick a piece of cloth into her mouth to gag her. My grandmother passed out repeatedly from the pain. The process lasted several years. Even after the bones had been broken, the feet had to be bound day and night in thick cloth because the moment they were released they would try to recover. For years my grandmother lived in relentless, excruciating pain. When she pleaded with her mother to untie the bindings, her mother would weep and tell her that unbound feet would ruin her entire life, and that she was doing it for her own future happiness (Chang, 1991: 30-31).

The often gruesome ways in which women perpetuate such abhorrent and regressive practices in the name of cultural tradition demonstrate the insidious and pervasive nature of patriarchal structures. As women of colour, Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar point out:

> Women literally abolish themselves as women and take on a male persona in order to participate in the ritual … deeply rooted patriarchy perpetuates this violence by turning women into heroes for

> withstanding the terrible pain of mutilation.… The complexity of this web of denial and distancing demonstrates women's ability to embody, embrace and reinforce patriarchal power. Unfortunately the phenomenon of 'colonizing' and oppressing one's own kind is not new or unique, nor is it rare.[4]

It is indeed both strange and disquieting that near logical arguments are offered by liberal freethinking academicians to support appalling and backward practices like female circumsicion, as in the following extract.

Fuambai Ahmadu, a young African scholar, began her paper in Chicago in November 1999 at the American Anthropological Meeting in the following words:

> I also share with feminist scholars and activists campaigning against the practice (of female circumcision) a concern for women's physical, psychological and sexual well-being, as well as for the implications of these traditional rituals for women's status and power in society. Coming from an ethnic group [the Kono of Eastern Sierra Leone] in which female (and male) initiation and 'circumsicion' are institutionalized and are a central feature of culture and society and having myself undergone this traditional process of becoming a 'woman,' I find it increasingly challenging to reconcile my own experiences with prevailing global discourses on female 'circumsicion'.[5]

The critic who writes this essay tries to argue persuasively that female circumcision (FMG, i.e. Female Genital Mutilation) 'when and where it occurs in Africa, is much more a case of society treating boys and girls equally before the common law and inducting them into responsible adulthood in parallel ways' (221). He offers more reasons, for instance that the practice is 'almost always controlled, performed, and most strongly upheld by women' and that they perceive it as a 'test of courage', also that there is a sense of 'celebration' surrounding it (222). He offers statistics to show that, contrary to Western discourse in opposition to female circumsicion, there is no data to prove that such a practice is hazardous to women's health. Instead it is seen by the people (particularly women too), says he, who believe in it not as mutilation but as an aesthetic intervention that enhances beauty, civility and feminine

dignity. Although it is important to believe in and abide by cultural pluralism, one must remember that such arguments can be terribly dangerous and go towards perpetuating already rigid and entrenched oppressive systemic structures. Besides, their coercive nature certainly denies at least some women the right to speak out and express themselves against such views in a democratic manner. It is easy to see how woman in diverse societies, but in fairly similar ways, is both constructed and positioned as subject, so that she hardly perceives herself as being acted upon. The insidious ways in which this illusory agency is bestowed upon her by societal structures is often at the root of her exploitation. In India, for instance, women (not men, as they are indeed beings free to pursue pure ambition or amorous desire or both) are perceived both by others and by themselves as custodians of morality; thus their role in the sustenance of traditional values and integrity of the family is crucial. It is often this integral nurturing role in the family which is the source both of their identity-formation as well as their oppression. Similarly, maternity and motherhood as the only authentic and valued realities for all women preclude the possibilities for women to be other than mothers or to be even conflictual beings with other needs and aspirations. It is important to notice and then remember that sexual divisions of labour are located not in a woman's biological sex but rather in larger and overbearing power structures that go a long way in denying women access to higher education, specialized craft skills and thus opportunities for jobs with higher pay and more power. It is then also crucial to perceive that societal systems have a vested interest in maintaining both domestic and professional disparities between men and women.

The last section of this presentation focuses closely upon goals, issues and themes in Women's Studies. It is neither possible nor desirable to read Women's Studies as an isolated academic endeavour that produces research articles or books about the realities of women's oppression world over and suggests ways to redress imbalances. Rather, this discipline has to, indeed does, work closely with historical contingencies at the grassroot level, deal with political facts that produce such history and research

deeper in more sensitive, engaged and self-reflexive ways, at all times within more democratic and humanitarian paradigms. Indeed a great deal of extremely meaningful work is being done by NGOs and many women's organizations in this direction so that this dimension is perhaps the most important in India today where Women's Studies as an academic discipline is still in its infancy.

The paper suggests a working model of the ways in which feminist action can be more closely and meaningfully integrated with feminist research, and how Women's Studies may be wholistically disseminated through curriculum formulations too. The space of theory in this venture is crucial because it is only through well-integrated theoretical parameters that the individual can be meaningfully connected to the collective. Theory, sometimes perceived as elitist or/and alienating, needs to be freed of such prejudices and its value more sensitively articulated. It is possible, for instance, in fact easier through theory, to demonstrate even to the unlettered *dalit* woman that her oppression is part of a larger and systemic structure, and that once she understands this she will be better equipped to fight against it. The collective strength and solidarity without which such battles cannot be won needs to be iterated and the use of literary theory both in pedagogical and activist arenas can be truly rewarding.

It is important that feminist theory be integrated with 'feminisms' if it is to be used as resource/input into Women's Studies. The ways in which the Women's Movement manifests in the context of diverse historical junctures, which issues predominate when and where, and which others remain in the background (as also the factors that determine such historical and cultural realities) need to be articulated and analyzed. Thus action must go hand in hand with research and divergences and multiplicities within feminism problematised so that a networking can be established wherein each part has its place within the whole. Researchers are the activists in this arena as they share common goals and aims as Women's Studies resource people. Reconstructions of knowledge show that there are other versions and possibilities of knowledge. Retrieval and rewriting of history from women's perspective, dissemina-

tion of these new, more 'authentic' knowledges and histories are all part of the Women's Studies project of making women more visible. The growth of feminist presses all over the world, particularly since 1970, have contributed the necessary momentum to women in the processes of articulation by helping to publish more and more work by them. Although Woman speak/Women speaking for themselves is indeed laudable, and important, one must remember that there arc dangers in the creation of exclusivist categories and that they often lead to discrete spaces which are ultimately separatist and alienating. Just as it is crucial to make men perceive the rationale behind Women's Studies programmes and seek their active participation so too writing by women needs to truly belong to the mainstream if it is to lead on to the larger and more ongoing paradigms of women and development. Development is a tricky concept and needs to be balanced with women's actual needs and best interests. In the enthusiasm for providing more developmental parameters for women WS personnel must guard against using strategies that may not be in consonance with their everyday reality and thus detrimental to them.

It is important to observe and analyze carefully landmarks in the journey that WS has traversed since its inception in the 1970's, as such a discussion will also show how the agendas have changed according to shifting needs of the contemporary moment. To begin with, the category of gender was formulated so that WS could be meaningfully diffused through a variety of disciplines. It is worthwhile to examine the ways in which the focus changed in the 1980's and 1990's so that other issues dealing with women's empowerment and agency within larger paradigms of Women and Development and Women and Human Rights were foregrounded. Whatever the issues and agendas, above all else, the political implications of WS remain the most crucial. By fostering women's agency through challenging traditional views about power, WS aims at promoting change by empowering women collectively. Just as both individual and collective experiences are the resource for WS courses, so too whatever be their manifestation, the thematic thrusts clearly are personal autonomy, recognition of achievement, self-worth, contribution to knowledge and to larger

knowledge systems. Ultimately, the goal is for women to move towards self- affirmation that is celebratory. Although each historical, cultural and sociological location is specific I believe that it is extremely important that men all over the world believe and participate substantially in the WS project. This is more true in the particular case of India where, despite the changing profile of urban people and the relationships between them, norms and mores are still largely inclined towards the conservative and traditional attitudes and thought processes.

The sources for WS are many: biographical writings, sociological studies through interviews, historical records, creative writing, and others. We find in these sources that women's ideas, identities and actions are 'socially constructed', that women are located in complex social formations and that links can be traced and forged between individual and shared (collective) identity. Just as we realize that we begin to understand by *theorizing,* we also discover that both shared commonalities and diversities and specificities of *experience* are equally valuable. In the case of both regional and global feminisms, and it is important to keep both in a simultaneous perspective, diverse cultural contexts evoke and evolve their own specific responses; historical moments determine and generate varieties of feminisms; and multicultural societies and diasporic spaces construct feminisms (and identity) differently (i.e. intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, dislocations etc.). For instance, it helps to consider the following variables as these are some of many that determine and construct theories of patriarchy (which are many, they are also culturally, racially, etc., determined). Theories of mothering/motherhood, rural/urban, grassroots feminism/ academic feminism, the discipline and location of the thinker or theorist is often the bedrock of her/his philosophy. These are some suggestions and directions for further thinking and, as the paper has emphasized before, there is special need in the situation of WS to continuously rethink, review and revise the parameters within which we think and act, so that this important discipline retains both its crucial relevance and vitality.

In conclusion I only want to say that there are more reasons for hope than for despair, because both feminism and WS give

to the woman, and indeed should to the man too, the tools with which to understand the world, perceive that it is more often than not an unjust space, and articulate the cultural and societal conditions within which exploitations, oppressions, inequalities, and subordinations of people are rooted. Also, both feminism and WS together offer strategies by which one can be sensitive to the injustice that underpins such processes, as also the strength to resist and challenge them so that the right to personhood may be equally distributed to all.

NOTES

[1] Arun P. Mukherjee, "In But Not at Home: Women of Colour in the Academy." Soon to be published in RFR (Resources for Feminist Research) in Canada. The term 'least worst' is Patricia Monture Okanee's, cited by Mukherjee, from "Introduction - Surviving the Contradictions: Personal notes on Academia." Ed. The Chilly Collective. *Breaking Anonymity: The Chilly Climate for Women Faculty.* Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995, p. 19.

[2] I refer to the valuable contributions of Indian feminist scholars like Kumkum Sangari, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Susie Tharu, Tejaswini Niranjana, Meenakshi Mukherji, Sudesh Vaid, many others.

[3] Quotations from literary texts have been parenthetically documented. Further details have been given in the references.

[4] A. Walker and P. Parmar, *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation* and *the Sexual Binding of Women,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1993, p. 179. The use of the woman's body upon which the text of colonization has been inscribed has been variously discussed, and challenged, by feminist scholars. Female genital mutilation, footbinding, etc., then must be viewed as a manifestation of patriarchal power despite arguments offered by cultural pluralists in the name of respecting and maintaining cultural tradition.

[5] Richard A. Shweder, "What About Female Genital Mutilation?" in *Daedalus,* Fall 2000, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 211.

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"You and I belong to two different Worlds": Feminism, Tradition and Modernity in relation to the Representation of Tribal Women in Modern Indian Writing

KUMKUM YADAV

This paper will attempt to focus on some issues which present themselves in an inquiry into the implications of applying the concepts of Feminism, Tradition and Modernity vis-a-vis the factual and fictional representation of women in Indian tribes.

The subordination of tribal women operates at various and complex levels, the first among which lies in the very terms of most discourses which are decidedly mainstream. 'Traditional' notions related to women's roles, social position, responsibilities, privileges, economic, political and sexual rights are determined and judged from the dominant culture perspectives which clash and are opposed to the ideals of tribal traditions. The tribal woman's independence, for instance, is misread so very often as frivolity or even immorality; her resourceful handling of nature is seen as witchcraft; and her fearlessness is translated as a criminal bent of mind. Obliged to face the double "jeopardy" of being women and *also* tribal, the tribal women have to contend with images one of which presents them as "bright and comely" but "hopelessly immoral". Refering to the bias against the denotified tribes, Dilip D'Souza illustrates a sample from a book by a British officer MacMunn, which equates tribemen as the "Underworld" of India, "absolutely the scum … of no more regard then the beasts of the field". (D'Souza: *Manushi*: 22-26)

In an interview with Gayatri Spivak, Mahasweta Devi, writer and activist for tribal causes, observes that the mainstream and the tribal cultures run parallel, and do not have a meeting point. (Spivak: *Imaginary Maps:* 1995) She reiterates in her Preface to *Agnigarbh* (1978) that the tribal groups exist in a hostile "semi-colonial, semi-feudal" dominant cultural structures which carry on a continuous "shrewd and systematic assault on [the tribals'] social system… culture, identity and existence". Even in the plans and policies apparently launched for their benefit, there is very little that the tribals can relate to.

Women in tribal societes did not need movements of protest to assert their identity. If the need for this has registered itself within the tribal communities in the post-independence years, the onus for this rests on the forces of modernity as well as on the ideals of *mainstream* tradition. Whether it is the socially secure and independent image of the Aryan woman or the sheltered and protected image of the purdah-clad medieval woman, the traditional images of Indian womanhood do not include the grim realities, as well as the powers, that constitute the life of tribal women. Their participation in the national freedom struggle and the high percentage of the labour force they represent in the unorganized economic sector is rarely recorded. In a study on santhal women, Chaturbhuj Sahu offers a detailed account of the insufficient recognition that has been awarded to tribal women both in pre-independence and post-independence times in contrast to their immense contribution in so many areas. (Sahu: 1996:15-16)

Linked to this very basic form of subordination which lies in the various meta-perceptions and meta-definitions, is the injustice inherent in the motives and mind-set which go into the construction of the images of the tribal women. Factors such as distance, market considerations and little or no chances of retaliation or protest lead to a great deal of careless and reductive images. Dominant patterns of representation are "constructed on the basis of socially and structurally dominant values which are in turn produced and reproduced through the same set of dominant representations", states Henrietta Moore. But the links between

representation and the politics involved in interpretation form a deeper problem. (Moore: 1996: 196-198) Moore argues that the interpretation of representations can vary but the variations are theoretical and very limited in practice. Interpretations are strategic in that they are designed to achieve particular ends, they have "a past and a future, and can only be constructed in relation to the already existing spatial text" which also constrains it. The "favoured" readings are those imposed by the dominant groups and any alternate interpretation tends to be contained within them.

Urban, non-tribal, often male, perspectives rooted in the attractions for the apparently strange, exciting and vulnerable 'other' contribute to the debasement and commodification of the identity and roles of the tribal woman to a degree at which almost all other considerations are swept aside in order to highlight only a fantastic, unreal and reductive assessment of her physical self. While the images of non-tribal women too are often reductive and unreal, their tribal counterparts are worse-hit.

Whether it is the feminist protest against the narrowing down of women's status to her biological functions or the traditional perception of the body as only the temporal manifestation of the self as against its spritual dimensions, the physical self—even in the framework of modernity-continues to occupy a position lower than the opportunities, aspirations and possibilities it promises beyond itself. The scientific, rational mechanism of the human body might contain innumerable layers of knowledge, but the powers of the metaphoric and the kinetic continue to be equally, if not more engrossing. Even then, the bulk of popular and even some of the serious writings on tribal women continue to perceive them as being indistinguishable from their bodies. This also includes the concerns of feminisms which seek to place women in relation to the ecology and economics of their geographical habitats. The female body, observes Gayatri Spivak, is "essentialism's great text". The difficulty here is compounded because "Feminisms return to the problem of essentialism—despite their shared distaste for the mystification of woman—because it remains diffcult to engage in feminist analysis and politics if not "as a woman".

Spivak's suggestion is that this "risk of essentialism" could be met by its "strategic" use as against substantive or real essentialism. (Spivak: 1993: 20)

But for the popular media, literature, as well as traditional anthropological accounts, the female body remains a "text" indistinguishable from the subject, that is, woman. Readings in traditional anthropological works show how often women in tribes are taken into consideration only in relation to the family and kinship matters. (Bloch: 1989: 153) During anthropological field work women were ignored even during investigations into matters concerning their position and roles. Myths that the women were inaccessible, ill-informed, indifferent or ignorant of the more important socio-cultural aspects of their life were cited as reasons for the absence of direct interaction between them and the field worker. (Moore: 'Introduction': 1988) The fact that the identity of the field worker in terms of social and gender conditioning bears an unmistakable impact on the construction of the images of the 'subject' is illustrated in the varying and contradictory conclusions arrived at by the individual members of a group at the end of sociological studies.

An act of discrimination involves the degradation of a subject and also its presentation as something exotic. The process of romanticization and exploitation is a related one in that together they demean and commodify. Women in tribes continue to be the subject of sensationalization and judgements—unfavourable or condescending. The stereotype of the seductive but shy, brave but submissive, hardworking but sleek 'wild woman' appears and reappears in literary and non-literary accounts. The damage it causes is twofold; for the non-tribal it perpetuates and cements the myths existing already; it also leads to gradual, unacceptable changes even within the tribes.

The problem lies not so much in the degree of authenticity contained in the given details but in the framework and perspective in which they are presented. Helen Callaway writes, "A man-oriented default system has been programmed into our language and consciouness, the way we view the world, and the discourse we use in analysing our anthropological others." (Callaway: 1992:

29) Examples of considerably blatant bias can be seen in a novel like Manohar Malgonkar's *Shalimar*, based on a film produced under the same title. Presented as caricatures at the best, the so called tribals in the novel are half clad men and women sporting feathers and beads. They are seen either slaving or dancing for the benefit of their white, Western bosses. The particular 'novelization' of the film by Malgonkar who is a known writer in Indian English literature, is not his representative work and falls in the category of the commercially oriented popular art form. It is however an indication of how the tribal is used and reused as an exotic backdrop for mainstream interests.

In contrast to the commercial category of films and fiction, two books by Dr. S. S. Shashi, *The Night Life of Tribals* and *The Tribal Women of India* are placed in the academic and therefore more authentic category of anthropological writing. But as can be gauged by the very choice of the titles, the intention of the writer here too is basically commercial. Shashi tells us that the Oraon women "are black but charming and comely" and the "colourful Angami girls, the half naked Aos and the naked Konyaks attract the visitor at first sight". (Shashi:1978:37) The obsession with nudity continues further. Malinowski's rejection of visual documentation and photography in anthropology seems justified and appropriate here if only for the reason that Shashi has chosen to supplement the text of the tribal women in India with several pictures of partially "Nacked" (sic) tribal women captioned as a "beauty", a "belle" a "dancer" and even as the unceremonious and dismissively vague "attraction from Eastern India", Shashi's tribal women do not seem to have any other social or domestic role except of course as young mothers feeding their infants.

The silver lining about such horrendous representations is that it is easy to identify and be cautioned against them. A far more serious problem arises when apparently serious and sensitive works indulge in the essentialization process. Whether it is Prem Chand's *Godan*, the novels by Tarashankar Bandhopadhyaya or acclaimed films like *Aranyer Din Ratri* and *Agarnukt* by Satyajit Ray, the image of the tribal women, under the benign gaze of non-tribal value systems, definitions and priorities, is reduced to the

stereotype of an innocent, earthy, sensuous, dispensable item in the bigger, more important scheme of things.

Arun Joshi, winner of the Sahitya Akademi award for literature, describes a tribal girl Bilasia in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* only in terms of her anatomy and her magical, secret powers of seduction in contrast to the social, cerebral, philosophical, conjugal, even spritual dimensions awarded to the male protagonist's relationship with his wife and his affair with her friend.

The extraordinary sensitivity of Gopinath Mohanty for tribal men and women notwithstanding, Jili's role in *Paraja* is charted by Mohanty's observations which, at times, appear to be not only anti-woman but also, ironically, anti-tribal. Mohanty's Jili does not share her brothers' "simple rugged faith"; she does "not have the courage of men". (Mohanty: 115) Being a tribal does not make much difference "for a girl is a girl anywhere and sweets are sweets, whether they be chocolate candies or fried rice dipped in molasses". (249) Confectionaries and clothes are hard to resist, announces Jili's father in all earnestness, "Can you a find a girl who does'nt like clothes?" (150) The insistence on frivolity as being an integral part of womanhood continues, Jili "always had the time to dress her hair with flowers and drape her sari in such a way that it accentuated the roll of her hips when she walked." (166) " 'Just like a woman' is a phrase which tells nothing but says everything" writes Moore. (1996:177) There are instances in *Paraja* where the women of one tribe are compared unfavourably with another, and chastity or its loss becomes the subject of pride or shame for the family and for the entire community. (31)

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's *lyaruingam* and *Mrityunjay*, winners of the Sahitya Akademi award and the Bhartiya Jnanpith award respectively, are novels acclaimed for their insightful and passionate portrayal of tribal characters. But they too reveal quicksand areas when dealing with women's issues. Though Bhattacharya does present stark glimpses into instances of sexual exploitation of tribal women, at some point or the other in the narrative the rape victims cease to be individuals, they become the objects of pity, hatred, sarcasm or mercy. They are "rendered unmarriageable by the act of a rape" because "a good woman

would rather die than be raped", writes Pratiksha Baxi in an article which looks into the Lok Sabha debate on rape laws, raises serious questions about the 1983 amendments and touches upon the several deep rooted social prejudices against the wronged women. (Baxi: *EPW*, April 2000: 1196-99) In Bhattacharya's novels the raped women, though reviewed with much compassion, are presented as confronting similar prejudices. Women like Shareila in *Iyaruingam* and Subhadra in *Mrityunjay* must seek refuge in sprituality or in death. Questions, not always ironic, are raised with reference to the moral basis of their relationship with fellow tribesmen and also with their oppressors. Shareila wonders if her forced cohabitation with the Japanese soldier who abducts her could be seen as a "kind of marraige"; if there is "justification" in her inexplicable feeling of emotional attachment for him; and if she should have tried to kill herself in order to prove her purity. Gopinath Mohanty's Jili's relationship with the Sahukar is invested with similar queries. Jili's sense of power and pity for the man who ruins her and her family wavers dangerously between two hells. (*Paraja:* 301) Another important feature in the representation here is that the value structures, the ideals of chastity, the sheer discomfort with anything that does not toe the Diku definitions of ideal womanhood, all result in judgemental postures on issues which in the tribal context would lead to anything except pontification.

Similar trends are to be witnessed in apparently well informed and well meaning non-fictional documents like travelogues, autobiographies and memoirs by established names in anthropology.

Rahul Sankrityayan's travelogue *Kinnar Desh Mein* is a thoroughly researched and authentic account of tribal areas of Himalayan regions. Sankrityayan writes vociferously against the practice of forced marriages in some parts of the region, and he does regret the fact that the women do all the work in the hills while the men usually sit around and get drunk. But this does not deter him from commenting that women can be quite "useful" in farming and are born to be good cooks. "If women get involved in the work for which god has created them with his four hands, then cooking can become a magical process." (Sankrityayan:1990:

43,153) Such comments could be said to be made in simple good humour, but then humour, as one often realizes, also has its politics. Sankrityayan expresses, this time in no uncertain terms, his dissatisfaction with the facial features and the lack of beauty in the Kinnauries living in the higher ranges of the Himalayas. (94,97) Verrier Elwin in his *Autobiography* is more receptive to the different ideas of what constitutes beauty, but is only partially just in defending the innocence of a tribal boy given a jail sentence for killing his eighteen year old wife in a fit of rage because she had not served him his meal on time.

The well-known Hindi writer Shaani's undoubted concern for the Maria Gonds in *An Island of Sal* notwithstanding, his description of Kosi has the makings of an erotic poster, glossy and highly saleable: "She was then naked from head to navel, from ankles to three fourth of her thighs. Her brown skin gleamed in the transparent clear air as she glided past on the forest path, arms raised to support the pitcher, high convex breasts . . ." (Shaani: 1981: 55) Shaani admits that he is unable to avoid a "shiver of excitement" on hearing the very word *ghotul.* Although he understands that like every other word in tribal tradition, *ghotul* too "has a sanskar—a breeding of its own" but for him it "brings in its wake many an amatory image, some seen, some only heard of, and some entirely imaginary".

Representations of tribal women defined by and confined to the body and the senses deprive them of their totality. They also take the focus away from occasional flashes of the real possibly present in the same work. For instance, Mohanty's Jili in *Paraja* does experience the back-breaking life of a road construction worker; Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's Shareila in *lyaruingam* does regret her failure in being selected to be sent to the sewing school; and Shaani's Reko is the only bread winner in her family consisting of an old father and an ailing brother. But such portraits get sidelined in contrast to the sensational, the fantastic and the unreal. Sanichari in Mahasweta Devi's story "Rudali", caught in the sordid race for suvival, has no time for venting her personal grief. Her ultimate humiliation is that she has to put up her sorrow for sale, as an exhibit item for those who are responsible for it.

What is a traditional mourning ritual for the socially and economically secure classes becomes a profession forced upon her.

The fact that tribal words, values, priorities and perceptions relating to what is attractive or prosaic can be, and *are* quite different from mainstream metanarratives, is rarely given a serious consideration even in the more sensitive writings on tribals. The tendency to ignore the context, the particular *sanskar* within which tribal life flourishes contributes to errorenous beginnings and worse conclusions. Context is seen as anti-essentialism, writes Spivak, for "to contextualize is to expose the history of what might otherwise seem outside history, natural and thus universal". (1993: 2)

Verrier Elwin informs his readers that he readily accepted the compliment of being 'fat' and 'old' because in most tribes age is a sign of wisdom and bulk implies prosperity. Tribal cultures place value on attributes which have a relevance to life rather than to art alone. Consequently, fragility as a feature of the beautiful would have few takers in the tribal world in comparison to one which is defined in terms of sheer good health.

The desire to impose the expectations of the dominant non-tribal cultures is not always deliberate; it can be well meaning and unintended, although no less damaging. In *Aajkal* (August 11:1987) Mahasweta Devi writes that a scholar, learned and quite enthusiastic about attending a conference of tribals in Medinipur district, expressed his misgivings about meeting "synthetic" tribals who wear sophisticated clothes and attended conferences. Another delegate observed that the tribals at the conference were "urban and sophisticated to the point of being unreal". Mahasweta's reaction to this is whether it is realistic to expect that the tribals would wait patiently for ages foregoing education, wearing loin cloths or flowers to express their innocence, in their "unadulterated" and "unsophisticated" form, completely alienated from the world till "people like these would have the time and the inclination to go and meet them? (vide Ghatak: *Dust on the Road:* 1997) As a writer and an activist, Mahasweta's primary endeavour is to be of help to tribal groups. She avoids inflexible labels and positions which might harm the tribal interest. "I am off the

mainstream, also off the sidestream", she announces in an interview with Enakshi Chatterji; she would rather be considered as a "menace" in terms of the position taken by her against those who exploit the tribesmen and women. (Sharma: *Wordsmiths:* Katha)

Mahasweta's short stories make a horrifying and bitter critique of the dominant cultural perceptions. Three stories in particular—"Behind the Bodice", "Draupadi" and "Dauloti"—translated by Spivak from Bangla are uncringingly stark in their narratives of tribal women.

In the story "Behind the Bodice", the photographer who sells the photographs of the beautiful, nude Gangor, has no inkling of the consequences they would lead to. He is just one of the 'innocent' non-tribals who sell pictures of the nude and semi-nude tribal women to be printed on calenders, posters and expensive glossy magazines. Mahasweta's story is about the consequences of such 'harmless' exercises. Far from being entertainment or art, such images when repeated in the media deny women their dignity as humans and "places them at risk". (Sweetman: 1998: 56-59) Pornographic material and erotic art might not fall in the same category, but they can lead to similar effects in everyday life of the underprivileged. They humiliate, embarass, commodify and demoralize women at every newspaper stall.

The story, "Draupadi", demonstrates that sexual violence is the easiest weapon and revenge employed by powerful adversaries to demoralize women's efforts in political spheres. The tribal activist Draupadi, named so by her outgroup mistress, is subjected to the third degree in sexual violence in custody. However, the popular presumption that a woman is just a body and that her audacity in seeking political empowerment and justice could be effectively countered by sexual battering is proved wrong by Draupadi's moral strength. Her refusal to accept the manifestations of skin-deep respectability in the form of a *sari* in the morning after the mass rape and her insistence on facing the Senanayak in her frightening, disfigured nakedness is a statement against conventional, confining assumptions. The brutality against her body fails to crush her spirit. In such cases fear and shame are not experienced by the victim; they only denigrate the tyrants.

If "Draupadi" is about the political face of sexual violence, Mahasweta's story "Dauloti" is about the blatant economics of the same. Dauloti, the daughter of Crook Nagesia, a bonded labourer in Seora village of Palamu district, is forced into prostitution but with a difference. She is not just a street-whore but a *kamia* whore, a bonded labourer prostitute who has no right on her income. Whatever she earns goes as interest to the man who lent a small amount to her family years ago. Even after the death of Parmananda, who 'marries' girls only to make them *kamias*, the ordeal for the girls does not end. Parmananda's third son Baijnath *inherits* the *kamia* brothel while his brothers inherit the house, lands, cattle, etc. Women like Dauloti are the "land", the "factory", the "business" which passes from father to son in a society which is not only patriarchal but also capitalist. In "Rudali" a tribal woman's tears are purchased as commodity, in "Standayini" (The Breast Giver) foster-motherhood is put up for sale. (Spivak: 1993: 89-90) In the name of upholding rituals, ideals, traditions or art, the tribal woman is used as a commercial object. Old *kamia* women in the story "Dauloti" sing about their transformation into commercial commodities in songs horrifying in their simplicity: "The boss has made them into land/ He ploughs and ploughs their bodies and raises a crop . . ." Kishanchand, a man also involved in running brothels, tells the women, "Parmananda is boss, and this whore house is the factory. Rampiyari (the brothel madam) is Parmananda's overseer and you are all labour."

The traditional promise of social and domestic security is employed by the brahmin Parmananda to ensnare the fourteen year old Dauloti through marriage which in this context becomes just a form of "serial monogamy" for the hapless Dauloti. (Spivak: 1993: 87) The "naturally" naked Latiya is her first owner. When he discards her she is passed on to Singhji; and when he too has had enough of her, there are clients numbering ten on usual days and more when the fair is on. Mahasweta makes an ironic reference to the practice of adding insult—as the cliche goes—to injury. Dauloti is considered to be somehow responsible for attracting the attention of Parmananda. Mohanty's Jili and Bhattacharya's

Shariela are similarly accused of inviting trouble and unwanted attention.

Another demeaning and derogatory assumption is made when the exploited tribal women's sexuality is percieved as a statement of 'power'. At one point in *Paraja* Jili is depicted basking in the temporary power, the passing hold she has over the Sahukar who grovels at her feet in a drunken state. In Bhattacharya's *Iyaruingam* Shareila is detested and feared by others for her image as a seductress. The "bargaining" power of female sexuality latent in such a perception ignores the paradox that it exists in the context of the patriarchal and capitalist control on her person. (Moore: 1996: 187) It also dismisses and negates alternative expressions and manifestations of woman power which posit themselves in her intellect, speech, writings and sheer physical labour.

In their attempt at self-representation tribal women struggle at the level of gender discrimination and also at the level of powerful metanarratives of mainstream cultural traditions in asserting that life for them exist beyond the maginalized physical state. The pleasures and pains of being a tribal woman go beyond the depiction of gleaming anatomy, zinc anklets and an imaginary aura of innocence and sensuality. Sita Rathlam's autobiography *Beyond the Jungle* records the mental, cultural and emotional scars caused by out-groups. An Irula tribal by birth, Sita writes about life seen and felt from the tribal perspective. Taken to Conoor by her father for the treatment of her fractured leg, she meets people like Major Ganguli who introduces her to formal education, Miss De Vaz the head mistress who reminds her of her 'wild' origin in countless ways, and Dr. Krishna Rajan who treats her fractured leg but causes deeper scars in her psyche. Despite the progress, comforts and complexities of urban life, Sita Rathlam is unable to find in it a substitute for the completeness of her childhood in her tribal village. Sita Rathlam's book is in English, but there are women whose voices remain unheard because they speak and write in tribal languages. Tribal languages like Santhali have produced writers like Saradaprasad Kisku and Sadhu Ram Chand Murmu who prepared the script for Santhali besides writing poems, lyrics and plays. Reiterating the need for the official recognition of

tribal languages, Mahasweta Devi suggests the adoption of helpful measures such as declaring cash awards for tribal literature by bodies like Sahitya Akademi and financial assistance in the shape of advertisements to be given by the Information and Cultural Department for the promotion of journals by and about tribal groups.

Mahasweta's quarterly *Bartika* (The Torch) is one of the many journals, like *Budhan* published by the DNT- RAG (The Denotified and Nomadic Tribals Rights Action Group) which are trying to offer a platform to the members of marginalized social groups. Since 1980 *Bartika* which existed earlier, underwent a big change in its focus. Not funded by any source, it publishes alternative literature in Bangla. The only criteria for writing in *Bartika* is that the contribution be based on facts and figures. Maitriya Ghatak, in an introduction to Mahasweta's activist writings, observes that people who were till now invisible became visible in *Bartika.* Chuni Kotal, one of the contributors, was the intelligent, hard working graduate whose birth in the Lodha tribe (considered by some outgroups as a criminal tribe) was held against her. Her pursuit of higher education in anthropology from Vidyasagar University and search for suitable employment recieved shameful resistance and harassment leading to her tragic suicide. Mahasweta, paying tribute to the couragous Chuni, records her anger against the "head-hunters" who participated in this "new kind of hunt" with Chuni as the "quarry" (vide Ghatak: 1997: Devi: "The Story of Chuni Kotal", *Dust on the Road*) Women born in the so-called criminal tribes are compelled to face extremely discouraging response from both academic institutions and employers, which constitutes a violence of perhaps the worst kind.

Preconcieved notions about themselves are rejected by tribal women even when they exist within their own cultures. Chaturbhuj Sahu, in his study on Santhal women of Tarajori, informs that they question their own folklores when they describe women as "unfaithful, quarrelsome and stupid". (Sahu: 1996:156) A Santhali magazine *Hor Sambad* became a forum for the publication of Santhali literature as early as the 1940s. Sahu mentions Shanti Kisku who passed her I.S.C. and got her first article published in

Hor Sambad in July 1947. The other Santhal women writers listed in the study include Amula Murmu, Rupumuni, Sushila Kumari, Prem Lata, Phulmani Marandi, Parvati Soren, Karuna Baski and several others. The involvement of tribal women in writing about themselves, their difficulties and aspirations, is a major effort in breaking the stereotype images carelessly coined and circulated in literature, official and academic documents and the various forms of the media. Since tribal self-representation exists under the glare of dominant cultures and parametres there are road blocks, risks and pitfalls that come in the process. Discussing the position of Endo women, Henrietta Moore argues that when women articulate their own viewpoint, they are not providing an alternative model by reaffirming the position they occupy outside the male model. On the contrary, they are precisely attempting to locate themselves within culture, to recognize themselves in the contradictory representations which confront them. Women's models cannot be understood as independent of the dominant culture, for there is no neutral realm to which women could refer." (Moore: 1996: 179) Even a brilliant narrative like Mahasweta's "Dauloti", Spivak suggests, is placed, especially towards the end, "within a recognizable coding of sentiments"; at certain points it is situated "within rather than prior to an accepted code". (Spivak: 1993: 92-93) There are further dangers of placing undue focus on the subject of suffering and victimization leading to the formation of an aesthetics which could prove detrimental to the process of redefinition. But such occasional handicaps posed by conservative and dominant traditions and conventions, and also by other unexpected factors, fade away in the assurance of a collective struggle and the sharing of the awareness that isolation, suffering and misrepresentation are unnecessary and imposed.

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A Contemporary Reading of Ancient Women's *Vrata*

SUBHA CHAKRABORTY DASGUPTA

In my paper I will be dealing with a traditional body of women's practices in India, the performance of the *vrata*, that today seems to exemplify and demonstrate the multi-faceted oppressive features of the patriarchal system that have so conditioned women as to make her totally self-denying, open only to the demands of patriarchy. This is particularly true if one considers the fact that girls from a very tender age are required to perform a few *vratas*, especially those which would ensure a perfect husband for her in future. And yet going back to the origins of women's *vratas*, one comes across notions of matriarchy in an agriculture-based society within which the *vrata* received form and functionality. Emerging during the Bronze Age period of the Indus Valley, when the tribes came down towards the delta, and opened up to influences of various other groups of people, the history of the women's *vrata* is difficult to reconstruct—there are too many missing pieces and too few recordings of early *vrata.* The ones that do exist however, specially the *vrata-katha* or the stories accompanying the *vrata*, present such a rich panorama of details and themes, of motifs and styles, that they call for more than a cursory glance, although even a casual notice that is enough to suggest the difference in genre between the mass-produced pavement tracts going by the name of *vrata-katha* and the printed oral versions to be found moulding in some city library or the sing-song tales recited by an old lady in one of the secluded villages. It was an oral tradition, we realize, where words and the accompanying gestures wielded an enormous influence in directing social reality. And all this with the woman at the centre, for traditionally women's *vrata* were unac-

companied by Brahmin priests and it was much later that priests became a part of the performance. At the outset, however, I would like to clarify that in focussing attention on the ancient *vrata*, I am not trying to go back to a utopic timeless past, finding a safe 'home' with an abstract community of women in order to escape the problematic issues of modern times. The sub-texts embedded in *vrata-katha* may, in a very concrete manner, offer substantial interventions into the discourse of ethics in general, practised by women, albeit at an ancient period.

Vrata, says one of the renowned scholars in the area, originally a crude witch-craft, gradually developed into a system of worship through art.[1] The idea of sympathetic magic, according to which the symbolic digging of a pond and filling it with water, as in *Punyipukur vrata*, is supposed to lead to the filling up of ponds through rainfall, has long been associated with the *vrata.* Etymologically, the word *vrata* has been traced to restraint, to prayer and through the word *anyavrata*, to a group of people who follow other codes, in this case supposedly the non-Aryans as designated by the Aryans. The other connotation in the word is *vratya*, as in *vedavratachuta vratya*, that is, those who failed to abide by the codes while learning the Vedas or those who did not abide by the ten *samskaras.* As far as the discourse on *vrata* is concerned, the connotation of the 'other' even at this early stage is very prominent, suggesting a worldview different from that of the mainstream. In its practice *vrata* is a ritual that is joyous and rhythmic and undertaken for the fulfilment of a solemn purpose embedded in the life of the community—for rain, crops, safe return of the husband, father, son or brother gone to trade along waterways; for the general well being of family and community; and for greater fertility and so on. The ritual includes preparation involving the drawing or—as some scholars following Abanindranath Tagore[2] say—the writing of *alpana* or patterns with varied motifs from the delta culture as symbols; the construction of various clay models; arrangement of elements used in daily life on or around the *alpana* or the site of the ritual; sometimes the performance of certain symbolic acts; and the recital of rhymes or the singing of songs and group dances followed at the end by the narration of

the *vrata-katha.* The *katha* is the story of the origin of the *vrata* as narrated by an elderly lady in the community. Some *vrata* also take the form of dance-drama or dialogue bearing testimony to an interactive process that gives form to the ritual.

The women's *vrata* is a community based activity. It may cover several areas of activity in a traditional society, with the difference that members in this context do not operate within a hierarchical frame—each is an actor-performer, an agent of benevolence in a sphere where relations of dominance do not arise. There is in fact a kind of dialogic relationship among women performing the *vrata.* One requires other women for the completion of a *vrata.* At the end of the *Sankata vrata*, for instance, each woman asks the other, "*Sankate par hoi?*" (Can I cross the danger?) and the other replies, "*Hao*" (Do). In other *vratas*, like the Maghamandala, girls aged between 5 to 25 are seen to dance, holding each other's hands. Then there is the *katha* at the end, binding the women together. On another plane, the *katha* links the present with the past, to other stories narrating the original context of the *vrata*, suggesting Mircea Eliade's myth of the Eternal Return. However, I repeat, we are not thinking of the *vrata* in terms of a utopic activity. As far as the participants are concerned, there may be a certain degree of coercion, a somewhat necessary part of traditional vernacular societies where activities are organized to ensure social stability and cohesion. The *vrata* is not a constituent social feature of an ideal harmonic state, but rather a phenomenon in traditional society which, like most other phenomena in such societies, is double-edged a force for both stability and change, repression and liberation. However, the whole question of autonomy, central to feminist concerns, has to be rethought in the context of traditional societies. The need to perform a *vrata* may be a more authentic, concrete need than, for instance, the need to stay away from performing the *vrata* and thereby exercizing one's autonomy. However, this again is a particular instance, and it should not be taken to suggest a general theory devalorizing autonomy in traditional societies.

In the earlier section we spoke of interconnectedness on the level of human beings and of a mythical time connecting the

past with the present in *vrata.* Interconnectedness in *vrata*, however, has a wider dimension; it extends to all living things in the immediate environment besides forging links between the fragile everyday life of human beings and the larger and brighter cosmic sphere. On the concrete level, in the *katha* related to *vrata*, we find human beings undertaking journeys through forests and waterways where they encounter different trees, plants and animals with whom they interact. This is also the case in *roopkatha* or fairytales, but the interaction in the case of such tales is usually functional on the level of anecdote; the flora and fauna may help the good character to overcome obstacles, or the character may perform an act of kindness vis-a-vis the particular plant or animal, and get benefited in return. In this case the interaction may start on a functional level, prove ineffective on the plane of action, but contribute to the ideologic plane of the *vrata.* In the *Karam Vrata*, undertaken by women in the plateau lands of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, Karam, the younger brother, goes in search of Karam Gosain in order to be released from his sufferings; and in his arduous journey he encounters cows, horses, a fig tree and other animals, reptiles and human beings. He approaches cows for milk which may quench his thirst, but is, instead, goaded and mulled by the herd. When he cries out to Karam Gosain to save him, the cows stop abetting him and ask him to convey to Karam Gosain their sorrowful state, which is that of not having any cowherd. Similarly, the horses that he tries to ride deal with him quite savagely only to confess later that they live in a pitiable state because neither they have any owner nor any rider. Karam goes to a fig tree laden with fruit only to find that they are filled with worms, and the fig tree sorrowfully asks Karam to plead with Karam Gosain to show how it can get redemption from its present state. The supreme sorrow, the anecdotes seem to say, is a condition of being where one cannot perform one's proper function for which one is there on the earth. This function is conceived in terms of service to others, and hence there is a whole series of network linking the world of man with that of beasts and birds and plants and trees, each in its proper place and each having a role to fulfil. This in turn entails respect for each in its proper place, irrespec-

tive of subjective value judgements. The world-view is neither anthropocentric, nor biocentric; and each being is recognized as having an inherent worth. A princess is punished for being too proud of her wealth and showing disrespect to an ancient tree in the *katha* related to *Ashwathapata Vrata*, and is forgiven only after she realizes her mistake and begs forgiveness of the tree. What is obvious in these anecdotes is the absence of notions of superiority or inferiority, and hence of seats of power as the nexus of any kind of operation. It may be emphasized at this point that feminists with varied histories have emphasized the importance of both interconnectedness and dialogic practices. Further, it is clear to us today that a blindness to interconnectedness, stemming from individualistic competitive approaches to life, has very rapidly led to the destruction of the environment and to the injudicious build-up of the nuclear arsenal, taking the earth we inhabit to the brink of disaster. I also cannot help but point out here that a knowledge of ecological connectedness on the part of women led to political action in the Chipko movement where women united to end specific forms of exploitation and injustice.

Going further we once more find that in the different stages of the *vrata*, specially where the final wish is uttered, there is an all-pervasive concern for the world at large—for people around the performer of the *vrata*, for the community, for the universe as well—a concern that may be termed as the basis of an ethics of care. Within the parameters of feminist discourse, the ethics of care, as in the writings of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, have been contrasted with the male ethics of justice. The ethics of justice, such as that which is visualized by Kant for instance, tries to find universal laws of justice and then applies them to situations. The (female) care ethicist, on the other hand, would resist applying such universal rules; she would rather concentrate on facts, feelings of others and personal histories. Her moral judgement is "more contextual, more immersed in the details of relationships and narratives"[3] placing, as she does, great emphasis on listening. This approach to ethics again has been criticized by feminist scholars on varied grounds. Daryl Koehn, for instance, argues that

> care ethics in their present form have, at best, limited regulative force, in part because they require agents to do what may be impossible; care ethics overlooks various pathological forms of care that do not respect the individuality of other parties and fall prey themselves to the presumption that they can speak for others; and these ethics show insufficient concern for the human autonomy or self-definition that produces individuality.[4]

The notion of concern outlined in the final wishes of the *vrata* that we identified as a primary basis of an ethics of care is at once too amorphous and generalized to submit to a close scrutiny. Yet there are a few issues that may be taken up to begin with, and that may eventually be placed in the context of the entire *vrata*, including the rituals and the *katha* to locate the grounding of the ethics of care. The most prominent purpose emerging from the *vrata* as a whole is nurturance which is at the core of care ethics as well; only in this case nurturance is not associated with mothering—there is no unequal relationship fostered by such nurturance, as the relationship envisioned is primarily to a large extent with nature. And, here in the *vrata* scheme, the nurturer is at the receiving end. It is unlike the mother-child relationship where the relationship is not between equals, and hence leaves very little scope for pathological forms of care. There are also many facets of one's relationship with nature that emerge from the *vrata.* This, however, is a minor point; and what we feel is of greater importance is the refinement of teleology brought to the concept of care by associated themes and motifs that are recurrent in the world of the *vrata.* At the outset, the recurrence of similar themes and motifs indicates a consistency that is valuable in the realm of ethics not in a limited sense but in a fairly broad perspective. The consistency lies in the will to right action; tightness is usually limited to the physical or material condition of life and it consists in prioritizing the needs of others. The question of tightness is again broad-based, and it is practical and relatively free from conflicting situations, foreclosing questions of determining what constitutes right action. Even where possibilities of such conflicts arise, there is usually a very simple human-need based solution. Two sisters, for instance, are abandoned in the forest by their father, but when they perform

the *Itu Vrata*, among other things, they also ask for the prosperity of the father. The father thereafter is presented as a character full of self-importance in a rough kind of way, who is constantly thwarted in his plans and who consequently has to repeatedly take the help of the female characters in the household to save his face. Needs usually are also authentic and not spurious as in consumer societies; and prioritizing the needs of others involves a definition of the self in relational terms. However, in this concept of the relational self, the individual conceived in terms of mutuality is part of a network of relationships where he or she is not just a passive being, but an active participant in the network who also determines the relationship. The sisters performing the *Itu Vrata* could have chosen to renounce the father and simply ask for their own deliverance and prosperity, but they choose to be in relationship with their father as well. Hence, as we stated earlier, self-definition leading to individuality has to be seen in different terms in the context of the ethics of care. Going back to Daryl Koehn again, it is true that no limits are recognized where care is concerned, once more jeopardizing the role of the caregiver. This particular feature can perhaps be read in figurative terms, for the attenuating feature in this is the compensation, which is usually manifold, accompanying the sacrifice. The point of the metaphor is to make a strong plea for what has been called a principle of universal considerability. As Warren states,

> Not that we now know what would constitute the proper ethical relationship to everything, but that universal attentiveness to otherness, to difference, promotes the kind of experiential encounters which lead to the discovery of our obligations.[5]

The other point that is underlined is the fact that unjust demands are always a means of testing, and they come from erstwhile gods and goddesses, but not from human communities. Here again we have an ideal situation that may not bear the test of reality; but here the idea is perhaps implicit that there is injustice and oppression in a world where the self is non-relational, isolated. Beyond this there is a genuine acceptance of the other, even when the features of this other do not conform to the codes familiar

to the self. There is a typical *manasavrata* narrated and analyzed by Manosi Dasgupta that is very different from the traditional *Manasavrata* perpetuated by male poets and singers. In the *vrata* analyzed by Dasgupta, the young girl gets bedecked with ornaments by Manasa only when she is able to reconcile the two very different faces of Manasa, the generous and the terrifying, and to accept both as belonging to the same benign goddess that she is familiar with. Incidentally, as I have stated elsewhere as well,[6] Dasgupta quite vividly demonstrates the difference between the two versions of the Manasa story, one purportedly male and the other female—one where the story revolves round the thwarted ego of Manasa who seeks revenge, and the other based on certain values like acceptance and love. Manasa rewards the protagonist of the tale not when she indulges in an act of mercy by releasing the snakes she has unwittingly caught, but only when she stops being afraid of the reptiles all around her in the house of Manasa. It is fear that brings violence, comments Dasgupta. But the tale also emphasizes the value of accepting the other on its own terms, without prejudice and without fear.

Care in the context of *vrata* is situated within a world-view that incorporates certain other specific values thereby giving it a specific form. It is a world-view where the simple is the norm and where all kinds of excesses are questioned. In the story of the *Karam Vrata*, the elder brother returns from a journey laden with wealth and confidence. He acts upon a rumour, mistrusts his brother, and throws out the ingredients of the *vrata.* When he realizes his mistake he decides to follow his brother to appease Karam Gosain, but is told to stay at home and look after the household. It is the younger brother who has been leading a simple and faithful life, and so who above can solicit the return of the deity that has been insulted and thrown out. Karam, in fact, acts consistently all through the eventful story, and finally he encounters Karam Gosain sinking in a pool of excrement with worms crawling all over. Without hesitating for even a second, he jumps in and holds Karam Gosain in a tight embrace to lift him up out of the mire; the pool disappears and a smiling Karam Gosain speaks to Karam. To return to the value of the simple, the *vrata* is performed with

ingredients that are simple, such as blades of grass, twigs, flowers, clay pots, a handful of grains and so on. A particular *vrata* called the *Tribhuvan Vrata* illustrates the importance of the simple in the ideologic universe of the *vrata.* There are two sisters—one performs the *Alankar Vrata* (Ornamental *vrata*) with water that she brings from the seven seas and wealth from distant mountains, and the other the *Tribhuvan Vrata* (the vrata of the Three Worlds) using the chaff of grains, flower, water and tender green leaves. The former has married a prince, while the latter a shepherd boy. The household of the former is soon filled with ornaments and life comes to a standstill as everything in the kingdom turns to gold. There is mourning everywhere and finally the king, queen and all their men approach the younger sister, whose house is full of crops, birds, beasts and innumerable trees, for advice; and then perform the *Tribhuvan Vrata* with very simple ingredients. Soon shackles of ornaments are removed and the farmer begins to plough the field, the fisherman to cast his net into the river, the blacksmith works on his anvil and so on. As I have stated earlier in this essay, an excess of wealth is seen in terms of extreme bondage and a petrifaction of life-processes. The ingredients used in the *vrata* highlight some other aspects of care in traditional societ-ies, such as concern for preservation, and the keeping aside of necessities as safeguard against emergencies. The handful of rice that was used two months back is kept aside, and the lamps and earthen pots are similarly stored, suggesting a wisdom that would make the poor farmer more sure of his ground, more self-reliant and confident.

He would not be destroyed by a burden of loans. Nor will he think in terms of a technology that will allow him to introduce a "death" gene in the seed that will result in more crops but will not allow him to replant the seed from his harvest. *The philosophy of faster, farther and more is one that is not encountered in the world of the vrata.* Its determining principles relate instead to a natural rhythm in a very concrete sense, to a concept of solidarity and communion, of simplicity and restraint. These principles are, as stated by post- development thinkers, among the most resilient foundations of social life; they prevent the rich from exploiting

the resources of the earth to the full, save the poor from falling into destitution and also, the earth from incurring catastrophic situations.

There seems to be an interrelatedness here between the ethics of care and the ethics of justice. How or what one can make of this world-view in specific societies, how one can foreclose the still-remaining possibilities of repression and dominance, and how one can use the world-view for political action, are issues one would need to work on.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] See Ray, Sudhanshu Kumar. 1961. *The Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.

[2] Tagore, Abanindranath. 1943. *Banglar Brata*, Calcutta: Visva Bharati.

[3] This description of Carol Gilligan's position on moral judgement appears in Seyla Benhabib's "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory", *Praxis International* 5 (4), January 1986.32.

[4] Koehn, Daryl.1998. *Rethinking Feminist Ethics: Care, Trust and Empathy*, London and New York: Routledge. 28.

[5] Cheney, Jim. 1994. "Nature/Theory/Difference", *Ecological Feminism* ed. Karren J.Warren with the assistance of Barbara Wells-Howe, London and New York, Routledge. 165.

[6] The reference is to a forthcoming article of mine "Relevant Peripheries: The Context of the Brata" in the Proceedings of the Conference on Religions of People in India held at the Department of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, 1998.

Gandhi on Women and Liberty

CHANDRAKALA PADIA
S.K. SAXENA

There is no dearth of serious writing on Gandhi. Yet, clear and cogent accounts of his views on women and their liberty are so far very few. It is precisely this gap which makes our present effort relevant. We hope this essay will provide some answer to the following three basic questions, though not all along in the same order in which they are put below:

(a) What are a woman's capacities and essential functions as distinguished from those of a man?
(b) What can and may well be done to improve the present lot of women in India which has for long been rather oppressive?
(c) What and how exactly can women contribute to human welfare if they come to see, and set out to realize their innate ability to work in ways that nourish and heal?

It goes without saying that all these questions will be answered in the light of Gandhi's thought *and practice.* We add the words, *and practice*, advisedly. Though he is generally quick to protest against slipshod thinking and use of words, Gandhi was basically a man of practice, not a mere thinker. But, of course, he was not merely practical either, in the sense of being worldly-minded. The full truth is that he was a practical idealist. He never lost a chance to remind his countrymen of the noblest ideals and specimens of humanity, and of womanhood in particular. Nor was he chary of affirming his faith in such esoteric ideals as the fundamental oneness of all life.[1] But, on the other hand, where he spoke or

wrote on purely mundane matters, such as widow remarriage or restoration of our "fallen sisters" to a life of dignity, he took care to keep his eye focussed, all along, on details of fact and practical management. And as for the higher ideals of life, he made them appear feasible—and perhaps even winsome—by struggling to live up to them visibly, and surely not without an impressive measure of success. Those who miss this penchant of Gandhi-that is, for practising what is commonly acclaimed (if not practised) as a worthy principle run the risk of failing to see the real point of some such utterances of his as appear simply to lump together two quite distinct directions of right endeavour, such as protection of cows and of the chastity of women.[2] In dealing with such extensions of the principle of *ahimsa*, which literally means only non-injury, one has to bear in mind a basic difference between an intellectual who merely reflects and writes on values (and principles) and one who seeks to practise them watchfully in everyday life. Both are (in principle) earnest in their individual concerns. But whereas the former, the intellectual, is ever keen to interline meanings and ideas, the latter-that is, one who strives to be righteous in actual life-cannot help enlarging the ambit of a moral principle's relevance. Quite a few factors make such extension inevitable, if not effortless.[3]

Consider, for example, the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence) which is so dear to Gandhi. First, we may note, it is a *yama* or regulative principle of conduct all along, not just one simple act of abstaining from inflicting injury on a fellow-being. We need quite a few situations, and not mere strength of will to practise a moral principle; and life never runs out of them, and so provides ever more occasions for a diversified use of the principle. Secondly authentic moral practice is a commitment; and as the improving pursuit of the chosen norm of conduct begins to show results, at least in the form of growing inner peace and strength of uprightness, one comes to develop a positive sentiment for the principle in question, nay, a love which can be quite self-effacing. This explains why living ever more for the sake of an ideal is quite possible and never a joyless enterprise. Thirdly, because a man devoted to goodness is anxious to keep off deviations from

the chosen principle in real life, he is bound to look on the very conditions or attitudes that make for moral lapses as disapprovingly as on actual misconduct. This explains why Gandhi spoke of undue impatience too as *himsa* (or violence),[4] and the logic is traceable. Impatience is at once a felt tension; and the slightest delay in the advent of what a man craves for is therefore very likely to make him angry, and so inclined to violence. Hence, for a man of practice, impatience is as undesirable as *himsa.* Above all, we have to remember that in Gandhi's view the practice of *ahimsa* starts from, and is all along sustained by, faith in the truth that all life is one; that, therefore, injury, humiliation, and pain are as unwelcome to other living beings as to one's own self; and that hence it is only proper that the ambit of the practice of the principle in question may go on widening-of course, not without the agent's own mindfulness. What, then, is odd about the view that, for a votary of *ahimsa* "protection of the chastity of our women" is quite of a piece with looking after cows? Liberation of women from the threat of molestation is only demanded by the practice of *ahimsa.*

Another general remark may be made before we turn to determine the details of Gandhi's views on women and their freedom. Like every other facet of his thought, these views too are perfectly at one with his unremitting emphasis on both Truth and *Ahimsa* as the two main regulative principles of conduct. They, in fact, open the list of *yamas* as put by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*,[5] a work which has for long been a guide for righteous living in India. Celibacy (*brahmacharya*) is yet another value which Gandhi emphasized, again in accordance with Patanjali's view. But whereas India's traditional wisdom, as enshrined in the lives and works of its sages and saints, is (on the whole) sacrosanct to Gandhi, he is nowhere slow to condemn and fight against those traditional social customs and practices that run counter to Truth and/or *Ahimsa*.[6]

An important basic truth for Gandhi, we have seen, is the fundamental oneness of all life. Many would here be sceptical at once. But if the "truth" in question is tempered (as Gandhi himself did) with the observation that we are all tarred with the same brush-or

that some failings are common to us, we may all be expected to nod our approval. Who indeed can fairly claim to be quite above the influence of anger, pride, or lustful desire? But if we see and accept the truth which this question suggests, how does it make sense to regard the woman as usually the *major* culprit in an illicit sexual liaison and so *specially* censurable?[7] And how are we justified in preventing a young widow from remarriage when a man is not merely allowed, but encouraged to think of remarriage very soon after the death of his present wife? There is anguish in Gandhi's tone as he harangues the Indian male and pleads for the cause of women in the following words:

> My view about remarriage is that it would be proper for a man or woman not to marry again after the death of the partner.… Hinduism has attached … especial importance to … [self- control]. In such a religion, remarriage can only be an exception. These views of mine notwithstanding … so long as the practice of child marriage continues and so long as men are free to marry as often as they choose, we should not stop a girl, who has become a widow while yet a child, from remarrying, if she so desires.[8]
>
> The nobility of an Indian husband … does not last beyond the cremation ground [:] and, at times, in the very precincts of the crematorium, even as the body of his holy wife is being consumed to ashes on the pyre, his relatives do not hesitate to propose to him remarriage; and the widowed man feels no shame in lending his ear to such talk. It is essential that India saves herself from this pitiable plight.…I have seen, all over India, educated men of noble families entering into ill-matched unions or, on the death of their wife, remarrying immediately.… The foremost duty of women is to save themselves from the intentional or unintentional tyranny of men.…[9]

This is clearly an exhortation to Indian women to fight against injustices inflicted by their men folk-but, of course, non-violently. How such a fight can be non-violent is too big a question for this brief essay; and we may just make two points here. First, it is Gandhi's personal experience that when a wrongdoer is won over to see and do what is right non-violently, he does not experience any sense of humiliation. Nor does the corrector, in such cases, exult at the thought that he has vanquished an adversary. Quite

without any sense of victory or defeat, the changed situation is just a free and intimate dawn of sanity covering both sides in a kind of happy reunion.[10]

It is noteworthy that, as *ahimsa* demands, Gandhi does not want women to be unduly assertive or in any way unreasonable with men. He would be happy to see them sharing the burdens of life equally, if not in the same way. If he yet repeatedly emphasizes the essential equality *of women* with men, and wants them to live and work in the light of this truth, it is simply because in India they have for long been treated very unjustly by men, and because the inequity persists unabated. All this is borne out by some of Gandhi's own words:

> Strictly speaking, as between man and woman, neither should be regarded as [on the whole] superior or inferior. The place and functions of both are different, and God has defined both. But look at the barbarous custom…[of *purdah*, or veiling the head and face] Why should not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?[11]

However, not everything that Gandhi writes on women is as easy to follow as the extract cited above. This is due to the fact that what he writes about them issues not only from his power of reasoning, but from his steadfast faith in certain basic values, such as our essential dignity, potential, and equality as spiritual beings. Therefore, though what he wishes to say is mostly quite acceptable to reason, at times he appears only to assert his view instead of supporting it too with some clear-cut argument. Where we are faced with such writing, his words naturally call for a close, analytical look. Take, for example, his following clarion call to women:

> Refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies, and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourselves, don't go in for scents and lavender waters; if you want to give out the proper scent, it must come out of your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birthright. Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again.[12]

Let us now bring out what the extract really says:

Quite unlike the generality of feminist thinkers in the West today, what Gandhi here wants for women is *not freedom from male injustices alone*, *but from their own* (*typically feminine*) *whims*. One such whim is the wrong-headed notion that a woman's essential function is only to be an object of sensuous (if not sensual) charm for men. The view is outrageous, for it at once makes woman subservient to man, and utterly ignores her moral and spiritual potential, that is, what she can by nature do best, namely working for welfare of the family which is, after all, the basis of social cohesion, stability, and character. Here, Gandhi speaks with conviction and clarity:

> The [essential] function of women is … to be the queens of the household … running a home efficiently, caring for and educating children properly, steadily seeking to conceive and transmit new, proper, and higher ideals before they come under the influence of others of the opposite sex … all these things represent work of the highest, most important, and most difficult kind that can be performed in this world.[13]

Here, it is clear, Gandhi emphasizes the role of woman as wife and as mother. In the preceding extract too, where he points to the obvious fact than man is born of woman, his purpose is to make us think of woman's role as mother. On the other hand, where he recommends that women may care more for the scent that "comes out of … [their] heart" than from fragrant applications on their bodies, what he has in mind is clearly the irresistible charm of self-effacing love which just steals into us, and of which quite a few mothers and devoted wives in India are still pre-eminently capable. Is it not precisely this excellence which makes them adorable, and not merely lovable? Further, by refusing to become mere toys that titillate sense, women can save men from over-indulgence in sex and preserve their own chastity, for good measure, within the very embrace of married life, and without at all losing their hold on men-by virtue of their love, we repeat, which claims no return. In this way they may even be able to turn their husbands' minds to nobler ends, and so to activate the "humanity" in them, that is,

the power which distinguishes man from lower animals, or the capacity for self-restraint.

We hasten to add, however, that the way Gandhi distinguishes the role of woman as mother from that of man as father is bound to look a little suspect to us today, when woman is distinguishing herself in areas well beyond the family circle. See, for instance, the following remarks taken from one of his more important speeches on the proper role of women:

> …Nature has made men and women different. True they are equals in life [in so far as they have to face the problems of life unitedly]; but their functions differ. It is a woman's right to rule the home. Man is master outside it … [and] the earner ….; woman saves and spends … [Besides] looking after the feeding of the child … she is responsible for building its character … and hence, mother to the Nation. Man is not father [in this sense]. After a certain period, a father ceases to influence his son; the mother never abdicates her place. The son, even after attaining manhood, will play with the mother even as the child does. He cannot do this with his father. If this is the scheme of Nature, and it is just as it should be, *woman should not have to earn her living*.[14]

Here, it is the italicized words which are very likely to provoke some questions at once. If, as suggested, woman does not work as a wage-earner, will she not feel dependent on her husband throughout her life, and so necessarily develop a sense of inferiority? Further, should the husband's life be cut short abruptly, say, by a road accident, will it not become very difficult for her to keep going, just because she has not learnt how to make a living?

Now, Gandhi would like to answer the first question thus. To *be* dependent is one thing; to *feel* dependent, a little slavishly—and so unhappily—is quite another. A child depends on its parents for almost everything; but it does not feel unhappy, because of the love that generally holds them together. Similarly, if a woman and her man love each other, the feeling of being inferior (or superior) is not likely to arise. Conversely, if both are earners, but do not have any love for each other, conflicts will arise easily, especially if the couple choose to estimate their value for the family only

in terms of how much they contribute financially, rather than in the way *of love. Further*, *not only the Indian* husbands, but even their wives who may themselves tend to look on the breadwinner as their unquestionable superior, have to be reminded that taking care of a child's health and character are functions of the highest value. It is indeed noteworthy that the extracts we have cited from Gandhi's speeches on the value of mother are meant as much for the notice of India's women today as for their men folk. The quiet, even tenor of a mother's love rarely strikes us. But it does not require much effort to see that if the average Indian family is still able to hold under the pressures of rising prices and changing value-sense of the young who are gripped by consumerism today, it is essentially because of woman's natural capacity for love, forbearance, and service. Should it be contended, against the view that a wife need not become a wage-earner, that in these inflationary times even a small family cannot live only on the husband's earnings, our answers following Gandhi, could be put thus:

A measure of economic hardship is any day preferable to lack of maternal attention at home-a defect which can hardly be avoided if the mother too take up a regular job. To neglect the health and habits of children, and the shaping of their sense of values is at once to strike at the very foundation of social security and happiness.[15] As for relieving the pressure of a modest income, women may undertake to do quite a few household chores themselves, rather than with the help of paid servants. But this makes it essential that, well before marriage, our girls are "taught management of the home, the things they should or should not do during pregnancy, and the nursing and care of children."[16] They have to learn the use of "needle and the scissors, how to keep … [the] home tidy, … [and] use money [prudently][17]…and even spinning, weaving with their own hands.…This was formerly the practice all over India.… We cannot go without food, and so women should know cooking.… We cannot go without clothes and everyone should know weaving. This was the way Indian civilization was built."[18] If our women are trained in these skills, they should not find it too difficult to face widowhood, should it befall them. But, of course, life in this state—or even generally—cannot be easy for women

without a radical "change of attitude on the part of men and corresponding action."[19]

Be it noted, however, that with all his emphasis on the need for women to be trained in household chores, Gandhi does not want them to "merely toil on in a helpless condition like drudges"[20] as they do, even today, in many an Indian home. Nor does he think of them as inferior to men in respect of mental capacities required for work of other kinds.

> Woman is the companion of man [and is] gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. … [But unfortunately] by sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve … [21]

It is precisely this sickening evidence of fact which prompts Gandhi to speak thus:

> Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the female sex, to me the better half of humanity and not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, humility… .[22]

Further, Gandhi is convinced that woman can use her moral potential for gaining the freedom that she needs and deserves. We may here point to a clear lacuna in the bulk of feminist thinking today. Fighting for rights; opposing, vociferously, the tyranny of males and the customs that tend to perpetuate it; and resort to well-planned propaganda—all this is important. But why should we blind ourselves to the possibility that women may be able to elicit considerable male sympathy by just using their spiritual potential, say, by cultivating nobility of character, and resorting to non-violent, yet resolute opposition, without non-cooperating with their men folk in rightful endeavour? A noble character is at once a healthy influence; and there is no reason why, in our frenzied emphasis on manipulation of outer factors, we should wholly ignore what kind of an edifying person a woman can grow up into.

Gandhi, however, is too practical a man to rest content with mere generalities; and so he takes care to specify how exactly woman can meet the most grievous need of humanity today-that is, riddance from the growing cult of violence-once she comes to realize "what a tremendous advantage she [naturally] has over man."

… [Quite clearly at least in her role as mother] woman is the personification of self-sacrifice.… Non-violent war [or opposition to evil without any rancour for persons] calls into play suffering to the largest extent; and who can suffer more purely and nobly than women? [Let them, therefore,] forget that they belong to the weaker sex. I have no doubt that they can do infinitely more than men against war.… [Imagine what the] great soldiers and generals would do if their wives … daughters and mothers refused to countenance their participation in any shape or form in militarism.[23] I have hugged the hope that in … [the practice of *ahimsa*] woman will be the unquestioned leader; and having thus found her place in human evolution, will [automatically] shed her inferiority complex,[24] and so secure freedom from the prejudice that she is *abla*[25] or powerless.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Gandhi openly declares: "I am an Advaitist"; that is, a believer in non-duality. Vide Shriman Narayan, ed., *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Hereafter referred to as SW), (The Voice of Truth, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 4th Reprint, Popular edition, 1997), Vol. VI, p. 106.

What this affirmation means in simple words is put by Gandhi thus: "I believe in the essential unity of man and … of all that lives… [So]… if one man gains [in goodness] the whole world gains with him. " Ibid., p. 249.

[2] Our reference, here is to the following words of Gandhi: "…Self-purification … [demands] that we may not make women a prey to our lust. The law of the protection of the weak [implicit in the principle of *ahimsa*] applies here with peculiar force. To me the meaning of cow protection includes the protection of the chastity of our women. "See Pushpa Joshi: *Gandhi on Women*, published jointly by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, and Navajivan Trust,

Ahmedabad, 1988, p. 67. This book referred to as GOW from now on, is an admirable compilation of Gandhi's more important writings and speeches on women.

The point in question is put more clearly by Gandhi in one of his numberless letters:

"To me … cow protection means protection of the weak, the helpless, the dumb, and the deaf. Man becomes then not the lord … or all creation but… its servant. The cow to me is a sermon on pity." SW,Vol. V, p. 423.

[3] Here the qualifying words, *if not effortless*, are warranted by the following remark of Gandhi: "All these [regulative principles of conduct] can be derived from Truth. But life is complex. It is not possible to enunciate one grand principle and leave the rest to follow of itself. Even when we know a proposition, its corollaries *have to be worked out.*" SW., Vol. IV, p. 133.

[4] M.K. Gandhi, *Gita Bodh and Mangal Prabhat* (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1969), p. 75.

[5] A good English presentation of the content of this book is provided by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood's, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (London: George Allen and unwin, 1960).

[6] This, indeed, is so. Two of his many utterances that bear out this attitude run thus: (a) "It is good to swim in the water of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide." See *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India), Vol. 27, p. 308. (b) "My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired … I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality." See U.S. Mohan Rao: *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1970), pp. 39-40.

[7] This is the attitude today of many Indians of average moral sense.

[8] GOW, p. 21.

[9] What we say here has been an actual consequence of Gandhi's heroic fasts to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity anew. Indeed, "when differences are resolved through the leaven of [self-] suffering and renascent conscience, what is attained is …; [no mere compromise, but] a felt identity of being." See S.K. Saxena, *Ever Unto God: Essays on Gandhi and Religion* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1995, Re-issue, p. 183).

[10] GOW, p. 144.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 149. Italics added.

[12] GOW; the very opening words on the blurb of this book. Italics added.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 195. Italics added.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 14. Italics added.

[15] The truth of this emphasis of Gandhi is verified every day in the capital of India. If more and more young men from affluent families, where both parents do outdoor (paid) jobs, are taking to crime, one main reason is their neglect by mothers in early life.

[16] GOW, p. 15.

[17] GOW, p. 5.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 27.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 144.

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 19-20. Italics added.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 87.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 259.

[24] *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 71, p. 208.

[25] This is how women are generally characterized in India.

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