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CONTENTS

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From the Editor

Nivedini is back in circulation after a lapse of two years. It was suspended for many reasons. We wanted more planning, a new criterion and more participation in the process of its production to achieve new standards.

We now have a new image, an extended vision and it has also taken new vistas with content and form. We have contacted many feminist scholars, we have discussed and the results are rewarding.

We decided to have an editorial collective to cooperate and coordinate all activities related to the publication of the Journal. We also enlisted the services of international scholars to become members of a Review Committee. The Review Committee decides on the standard of the quality of the papers submitted for publications. We have to now increase the patronage and the circulation of the New Nivedini. We would like to enlist the support of the subscribers to introduce Nivedini to scholars and academic institutions.

A few words about this issue: We have papers on varied subjects related to gender discourse and multi-focal in its character. Security of all sorts is a fashionable theme of late. We have two papers on it. Ameena Moshin and Imtiaz Ahmed have both explored the much-debated concept of security from a woman's point of view. Often we are tempted to ask when one speaks of security whose security are we having in view? Ameena asks, where are the women, when security is conceptualised and Imtiaz Ahmed tries to grapple with the question of how to secure women's security in South Asia. Conflict resolution, peace and constitution making is argued out in two papers as how to in co-operate a gendered vision both in the planning and executing in substantive manner and in holistic patterns.

Violence against women is a continuing academic and advocacy issue. This subject is multifaceted with its implications on culture, law, family, ethnicity, class, caste and nation. In the paper *Beyond Tears and Anger: Representations of Violence Against Women,* Melanie Budianta takes up many case studies to illustrate the representation of violence against women from various countries.

Women in armed conflict has also been a subject of contemporary interest for feminist scholars: Women both as protagonists of war and as victims of violence are treated as an intriguing subject for many reasons. Conventionally constructed women are anointed with concepts such as passivity, peace, tolerance and forgiveness, while men in war fatigues wage war and kill the enemies in the armed struggles. These models have changed. We have now female combatants. During times of peace in Sri Lanka, scholars have found a space to reach out to both the victims and combatants of the war to arrive at tentative conclusions about the female tigers of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam who have been waging a war on the Sri Lankan state for nearly two decades.

Miranda Alison is among the few scholars to undertake field research into the LTTE territory and on LTTE female combatants. – That LTTE has a feminist vision within its overall ideology and National Liberation is a somewhat established fact. Alison dwells on two pertinent themes. One, why would women, who are socially associated with peace, join the war to fight and kill? Two, have the experiences of the women have been a catalyst for developing a feminist consciousness ?

Indai Sajor's paper deals with another issue, women as victims in warm and armed conflict. She sees a "common ground" amidst a number of war crimes against women committed at different times in different countries. Madhu Sarkar argues that much of the research on Indian women is focussed on Hindu women and Muslim women and do not find a place in the historiography of India. When, they do appear, they are depicted negatively as bad words and oppressed. She tries to understand this phenomenon – and correct this vision of absence and backwardness by going into history and questioning the hegemonic constructions of Hindutva.

While introducing the New Nivedini, which as you can see has taken a new look in the format, cover and size, we want to inform the reader, that we want to include Book Reviews, Reports, News and information about conferences and seminars in the Nivedini. We would welcome the contributions of the subscribers on these. We also want to reiterate that we are acutely aware of the fact that the success of the Journal depends on the quality of the subscribers and their continuous support.

Selvy Thiruchandran.

1

BEYOND TEARS AND ANGER; REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A Reflection

Melani Budianta*

In a poem entitled "After any Wreck", Sally Purcell (1977) aptly captures the 'day-after' emotional experience of witnessing or surviving a catastrophe. Watching the silent, peaceful natural landscape that seems oblivious to what has recently occurred, one can "hear only how a cry from the despairing sea is broken on the wind." If a natural catastrophe could evoke such sorrow, what despairing cry would pierce the sky when the perpetrator of a person's suffering is another human being? What tragedy lurks in the situation, where the speaker of "Beasts in Darkness" (C.G., 1981) finds herself say: "Oh, the dark night/frightens me not/but the sight of man/makes me shrink/".

Presented at the workshop of "Gender and the Transmission of Values and Cultural Heritage(s) in South and Southeast Asia" at the Belle Van Zuylen Institute, May 23-24, 2000.

In the immediate aftermath of the rows of violence in Indonesia in the last decade of the 20th century, many poets, artists and writers felt they have been stunned to silence.[2] No words or image can give form to the shock, sorrow, anger, confusion or disbelief at the scale of atrocity that human beings could do to one another. The shocking brutality of the murder of Marsinah, a female factory worker in East Java, the disclosure of the "mass-rapes" against more than one hundred Ethnic Chinese women in Jakarta and other cities in mid May 1998, and the similar horrid violations against dozens of women in Aceh, Irian and East Timor haunt the imagination of many Indonesian artists and writers, men and women alike. The painting of Rahmayani called "Stone Statue and a Burning Country" best captures the feeling of helplessness in witnessing such violence. She draws a black figure that stood rigid like a "stone statue", watching the fire and a naked prostrate body of a woman. "I am still nailed/on this faithfully revolving earth/I can't say a word/or even spell it. ..." says the speaker of Rahmayani's poem that accompanies the painting (Johan: 1998).

"A woman's life has been lost – one of many such lives – and nothing has been done about it. How long are we going to remain unconcerned spectators to such brutal treatment?" asked Urvashi Buthalia of the witnesses and survivors of the Dowry system in India (in Davies, 1983: 203). Similar questions must have wrecked the conscience of many in the wake of the body counts throughout the turbulent years in Indonesia. Carla Bianpoen observes (1998) that the reality of violence in Indonesia in the late 90s did change some artists' artistic orientation and perspective, a change that is most apparent in women artists. Ratmini Sudjatmoko's symbolical uses of wayang mythology in her painting become more referential to social and political events; Wiranti Tedjakusuma who used to paint "pretty and peaceful' subjects now depicts subjects torn by injustice and cruelty in striking colors and forms; Reni Anggraeni who had learned to "keep unpleasant things in her heart" now dares to express her feelings on

canvas (Cemara 6, 1998). The painting exhibition of 18 artists in "Making a Stance towards Violence Against Women" reflects this rising political awareness and engagement among artists.

The works of these artists and writers who confront the issue of violence attest to the problems of not only philosophically and artistically dealing with such subjects, but also the consequences of their choices. This paper will raise some theoretical issues concerning visual and verbal representations of violence against women in the mass media, in the activist campaign, in victim's stories, and in particular, in paintings and literary works.

Representation of Violence and the Violence of Representation

Violence against women is most striking and problematic because of the multiple objectifications of the human subjects. It involves calculated measures of physically turning into objects of violation the very human subjects, which have been culturally or socially perceived and treated as "possessions". More than one hundred ethnic-Chinese Women and dozens of women in Papua, Aceh and Timor Leste in the 1990s political upheaval in Indonesia were raped or sexually violated as means of terrorising to the group they belong to, a "common" battlefield strategy of morally and psychologically breaking down the enemy. Even naming these acts of violence, legally or "scientifically" to denote what is being done is murky: Are they mass rapes or gang rapes; are they rapes or sexual violation? The difficulty suggests that sexual act is secondary or probably insignificant as compared to the intended aggression and objectification of the human being.

Violence against women is problematic to artistic and literary imagination also because of this very multiple objectification of women. How does one give an artistic form to such abominable crime, to artistically represent violence without necessarily repeating similar

acts of violence in the artistic or literary plane? To complicate the matter, women have from the beginning become the objects of esthetic gaze.[3] As symbol of beauty as well as mystery, women inspire the creation of literature, paintings, sculpture, films, and songs. The naturalisation of women as the object of the artistic gaze has reached to such a degree that a women painter finds it against odds to paint "men". What is at stake in that particular case is not only an artistic convention but also an ideology that masks the subjugation of women through cultural, religious, social and artistic norms.

One may then raise a question about the similarity and difference between the position of women in "high" arts and literature and those in billboards, tabloids, commercials, and other mass cultural products. Such a comparison has been problematisd by the works of many cultural studies' scholars who consider the boundary to be arbitrary, sociological, culturally bound, and relative to taste and the dynamics of the existing aesthetic power relations. Without resorting to the binary opposition of high and low culture, I would like to examine a number of visual representations of the May rape case to illustrate the problematic of such representation.

Picture 1 and 2 below are cover pages of booklets that collect clippings of news, articles, interviews and photographs related to the May riots and rapes of Ethnic Chinese women. Both booklets in their introductions condemn the crimes, appeal for justice and truth and proclaim their empathy towards the victims. The second booklet shows its stand more explicitly by entitling the booklet "Puncak Kebiadaban Bangsa" (The

Culmination of our Nation's Savagery). The stance of the first booklet is more "neutral" (or ambivalent) by including the statements of those who do not believe in the incidents and by discussing the ways the reportage of the incidents had been 'dramatised". Not dismissing the good intentions stated in the introductions, one could easily see other more mundane motives underlying the publication of these booklets. By clipping and recycling the "hottest" information, these booklets cash in on the incidents. The "sensational" cover pages fulfill this marketing end by enticing buyers as these booklets are sold from car to car at Jakarta busy traffic-light intersections.

Such kind of visual representation of rape victims that underlines the victimisation of women and exposed the nakedness of a woman body in such a way that renders it a sexual object is common in tabloids and journalistic reportage of the violence against women that occurred in Indonesia throughout the turbulent years of the 1990s. With the May case in particular certain ethnicisation or racialisation is evident by underlining the stereotype of Chineseness in the victim's physical features. Some go further by using a typical nickname of Chinese woman in the headlines, such as "The Rape of Amoy".

Women activists who rally against violence against women protested against such kind of representation.[4] Realising the position of the ethnic-Chinese minority as a cultural, political and historical scapegoat, the women that marched in the 1998 Jakarta women's peace rallies hoisted banners that says: "These are not the Rapes of Amoy, These are Rapes of Women!" This banner also attempts to divert the attention from the controversy against the May rapes to the larger problem of the systematic violence against women in many places in the country. The Division of Violence Against Women of the Volunteers of Humanity, a volunteer organisation that disclosed the rapes, had clear-cut guidelines of how advocacy to stop violence against women should be visually designed. Besides avoiding

equalisation and racialisation of the victim, they prefer messages that would empower rather than stress the suffering of the victim.

In the wake of the disclosure of the May rapes, the Division received many earnest offers from Advertisement agencies that would contribute free service to create public campaign for the rape victims. It was however difficult to come with messages which the media experts consider as appealing and activists consider as "political Correct". Many proposals that came from the advertising agencies, for example, by crying against the crime inadvertently supports the sacralisation of virginity, and thus underlines the victims' feeling of worthlessness and abjectness in losing theirs. Others draw too much attention to the victim's sexuality, losing sight of the political "uses" of rape as a means of terror.

Contrasted to voyeuristic journalism, the "genre" of women's and human rights campaign is usually in the forefront of presenting women as subjects that can change their lives rather than helpless victimised objects. Yet even in the activist genre, the question persists as to how to represent violence without reduplicating violence and thus perpetuating the culture of violence. In December 1998 the Indonesian Women's Congress cancelled its plan to put up among its exhibition a photograph of an old woman hitting the picture of a military official with her fist. The woman had lost a son, who disappeared after being abducted by the Indonesian military. An article published later criticised the decision that was based on the belief that "Women should not show violence or repay violence with violence". "Maybe Karlina [a human rights activist who is thought to make the decision] should have experienced how it feels to have one's child abducted. Can she still be nice and polite in that condition?" (*Tugas*,04/II/April 2000).

How does one respond to violence without being consumed by it? How does one present the experience of violence without necessarily

reduplicating it? The problem presented by May Rapes booklets reminds me of Maria Rosa Henson's autobiographical (visual and verbal) account of her painful experience as a Japanese comfort woman in the Philippines. Different from the bitter angry woman that shook her fist, Henson's narration is not wrought by anger or vengeance. It was rather a candid and brave act of remembering and acknowledging a painful past that has been long and safely buried. The Book, *Comfort Woman, Slave of Destiny* tells of Henson's childhood and family, the rapes by Japanese soldiers when she was barely fourteen, her abduction and her 9 months enslavement as Japanese comfort woman, the abuses she got during her married life and her old age as a grandmother of two, living on a small pension of a factory sweeper. The book was based on her handwritten manuscript, and the illustrations were done by Henson's own hands. Henson's autobiography, written in her 60s, is presented in a matter of fact tone, with the voice and perspective of a naive and innocent thirteen year old village girl, which contrasted tragically with the horrid violence and hard life that she is describing in painful detail. Her illustration also retains this matter-of-fact, naive, graphic and realistic detail.

There has been no information on readers' response in the Philippines, as well as in Japan where the book in Japanese translation is also launched. A number of Indonesian female readers felt thoroughly moved by the account but was taken aback by the illustration, wondering whether or not they should have been kept as Henson's own personal diary. One male reader acknowledged confusion and guilt for being appalled at the crimes and at the same time aroused by the verbal and graphic visualisation. But Henson's own naive self-portrayal is surely different from the exploitative gaze of the mass media? What was and what should be the roles of women's and human rights' activists and Henson's publishers in reshaping this kind of intimate personal history to the precarious realm of the public?

On May 15,2000 an NGO called Damar, or the Institution for the Advocacy of Women Against Violence, circulated in many activist mailing lists "The Chronology of Juaenah", a 16 year old village girl from Lampung, South Sumatra, who was raped by two policemen on May 4 the same year. Soon many responses came, that not merely expressed sympathy but concern over the detailed accounts of the rape. I will quote one letter in full as it touches the basic issues that I have raised before:

> "I imagine if I were the rape victim. Not only I was raped, but also afterwards, my name was exposed in mailing lists with the detailed process of the rape. Suddenly I felt raped again, now in a mass rape (because now not only two person are involved).
>
> My questions are, (maybe somebody could comment on these):
>
> 1. Is there among us a rape trauma counselor who could give his or her view about such detailed account like that?
> 2. What is the use of the details? For the awareness of the issue/advocacy? To incite the readers' anger?
> 3. In case of a rape survivor, with such reportage, what kinds of trauma will she experience and what kind of "healing" must she go through?
> 4. What must be done so that the survivors don't feel raped again and again (during the incident of rape, when she reported to the police, in the trial, during the doctor's examination, when the rape is reported by the media)
> 5. Can we deal with the subject with an approach that gives emphasis to the victim's interest and needs?

> Oh, My God, I hope I would be spared from experiencing this in my whole life. I am sad and concerned with Junaenah's suffering. [5]
>
> Regards,
> Sita Supomo

In the poem "My Lay" quoted below Keith Bosley is also confronting ethical issues in the representation of violence – in particular by the mass media — with slightly different angles. But while she, like Sita, is disturbed by what she saw in the newspaper, her own poem grapples with similar problem:

My Lay
By Keith Bosley

Among the twisted, still shapes in that ditch
a swollen female belly and a pair
of naked tights, the knees high in the air
and parted wide: hands meet and fingers clutch

the place between. This is the pose in which
Western technology had fastened her.
All odorless, thanks to the newspaper:
The flies may move us, but they do not touch.

Here is their Lord: "he does not own a gun
or keep a fishing rod round a house."
Who wrote those words is also dangerous

Without our help, that woman would have given
her child an ugly name to ward off evil
spirits. It is our gods who are too small.

Bosley is representing for us verbally what she has seen visually in the newspaper, a shocking photograph of the May Lay victim, a woman naked in a horrid pose. Bosley blames Western technology which produces both military ammunition and the camera for "fastening" the women in that pose, and for desensitising the shocking image (from the smell, the flies), rendering it a pitiful object that loses its power "to touch."

Bosley's graphic re-presentation of the newspaper image, however, strikes me with the same question: By such faithful rendering of the violent image doesn't the poem fall into the very trap of fastening the victim in that abject pose? And just like the photograph, the poem had also removed all the odors that will repel our senses. How does Bosley's representation then differ from that of the newspaper?

After copying the scene of violence, Bosley ushers us towards a different direction, by questioning the representation of the culprit – possibly one of the US high-ranking generals — as a harmless, nature-loving person. The speaker in Bosley's poem imagines what life would have been to the woman without "our help" (Western technology and ammunition, and probably the intervention of verbal and visual representation as well?).

In warning that "who wrote those words is also dangerous" Bosley points to the consequences of any act of representation, because of the ideological messages that it imparts and the possible acts of misrepresenting. This is a warning that can be directed against her own arts and all other arts for that matter. The poem points to the fact that the field of representation can serve as ideological and political battlefield. What is our stake in the act of representation and what consequences would arise from such act? Like the questions posed by Sita, we wonder for whose sake are the stories we tell? In the wake of the May rape, the Internet and the "underground" information network were flooded with images of the alleged crimes. The

dissemination of such images, while helping to convince that the rapes did occur, many activists warned, could also be the means of multiplying fear and terrors.

Bosley's last stanza, however, makes us rethink the problem and value of representation in a different direction. "Without our help", what would the woman's fate have been? Without the war and the cruel military (mis)strategy, the woman might have given birth safely to the child she was carrying, and would have given the child the name to ward off evil spirit, as the speaker of the poem imagined. But with or without the newspaper representation, the woman's body would still rot, although it would have escaped the fate from being exposed so uncivilly in front of thousands of readers. However, we could argue that the newspaper representation– in spite of its flaws —could change the fate, not of that particular woman but other women's by alerting people about the tragedy. Bosley's poem, in turn, by verbally representing the newspaper image, opens up a new perspective for looking at the representation of violence.

Should we then just abandon the issue of violence of representation as moral or intellectual prudishness, which some intellectuals fear would lead to the censorious climate of political correctness? I myself have no easy and clear-cut answer to this.

I agree that there are multiple ways to deal with the issue of violence against women and the diversity of creative means help to raise consciousness and send the message across to a wide spectrum of audience. As intellectual/activist who are engaged in the very act of representation, however, I do believe it is important to be aware of the many problems and implications of our actions. By rigorously confronting the issue of representation of violence/violence of representation, hopefully we would avoid falling into the cyclical trap of the history of violence.

Framing Violence and Resistance to Violence

Literary works have dealt with different kinds of violence that can and have – in all ages and places — occurred to women, those done by the State and its apparatuses, by the culture and society, and by individuals. One among them, Margaret Atwood's' novel *The Handmaid's Tale,* creates an imaginary world where the State, Religion and Science work hand in hand in reducing women into objects of power game, enslaving them and exploiting their bodies. The fiction imagines a frightening world where the nation-State (the Republic of Gilead) misuses the bible and the churches, science and medicine to justify the reduction of women into reproductive machine, or illicitly, to sexual machine. The novel sees violence against women as the manifestation of a bigger, overall structural discrimination against women in the society. This structural violence is underwritten hand by hand by the ideologies and practices of the nation-states, religion, culture and science. I will use Atwood's fictional perspective as a starting point to talk a bout the various frameworks (nationalism, science and identity politics), which are often used in representing violence against women, and the implications that these frameworks entail.

The call to give one's body and soul to one's country, nationalism, is in fact, a popular justification for violence against women. Pandir Kelana's *Kadarwati, Wanita dengan Lima Nama* (Kadarwati, A Woman with Five Name) is an Indonesian novel about a young Javanese girl who aspired to be a doctor, but was tricked by the Japanese and was made into Iu Gun Ian Fu to satisfy the sexual needs of Japanese officers in their Big-Asia war. The girl later turned her anger and hatred into a patriotic spirit, by agreeing to work as the Indonesian military spy, using her body in order to entice information about Japanese military strategy. The young woman obtained her freedom after Japan lost the war to the Axes forces, an event that she celebrated by literally burning the Japanese officers who had abused her before she ran

away. Later in her mature years, the woman (who has changed her names five times in the course of the story) was again "called by her nation", now voluntarily, to offer her body to Dutch military officers for the same purpose of obtaining strategic information. At the end of the story, the nation got her freedom, and the woman received her price: to spend her old days together with her crippled, comatose soldier-lover, awaiting their peaceful deaths. Throughout the story, the woman changed her status from object to subject without changing her subjectification – voluntary or involuntarily – to sexual violence. The violence here is both denounced as cruel and sanctioned as patriotic depending on its relations to the national or patriotic interests.

Same attitudes can be seen in the discussions of migrant women workers in the Southeast Asian countries. Developmentalism has sanctioned the exporting of women workers from developing countries, an effort that was often hailed as advantageous to the national interest. In macro level it increases GNP and reduces unemployment and in the micro level, it supposedly increases the welfare of poor families. Unskilled and uneducated, many Indonesian migrant women are used as domestic servants. Not equipped with a tongue to speak for herself in a foreign language and without knowledge and support of any legal protection in countries where sexism is rampant, the women often became victims of sexual violence. Many were sentenced to death for trying to defend themselves against rape, or literally packaged home as corpses to their family in the villages. These horrifying accounts in the newspapers and the media never changed the national policy against the practice. Yet the same nationalistic spirit is called when, in one or two cases of diplomatic battle between the exporting and importing countries, a woman's life is suddenly seen as standing for one's country's honor. The case of Sarah Balagbahan, a domestic servant from the Philippines who was sentenced to death in Singapore is an typical of a case, where a domestic servant is seen as a national hero.

But when national pride is not so precariously confronted, the exploitation of the women's bodies are sanctioned, regardless of the costs to the women.

Both the novels discussed above illustrate the uses of different frameworks – national, religious, scientific – in justifying violence against women. The controversy over the May rapes in Indonesia, on the other hand, shows the consequences of one's choice of framework in representing and looking at the violence against women[6].

The May rapes of ethnic-Chinese women were among the cases of violence against women in Indonesia that stirred much public controversy. When the May rapes were disclosed a few weeks after the incidents (13 – 15 May 1998) by human rights activists many people were shocked and horrified, but a greater number of people refused to believe that such incidents really took place.

The controversy shows the use of the three different frameworks – scientific, nationalist and religious — to understand or to dismiss the violence. When the Volunteer Team for Humanity mentioned detailed number of victims (151) in their earliest report of the rapes, they had inadvertently laid the ground open for counter arguments that use scientific explanation to disqualify their claim of truth. Medical and biological explanations were called upon to show how such incidents could not have taken place. When scrutinised under different definitions of what constitutes as the act of rape, the number falls apart. When the team refused to satisfy popular demand with evidences on the grounds for protecting the victim, they were further accused of making up the stories of the rapes. The experience of the team shows the consequences and implication of using scientific framework in the representation of violence.

Another framework used to dismiss the existence of violence is nationalistic-patriotic framework. Such incidents could never have

occurred in a nation that holds "the belief of God" as the first foundational principle. Humanitarian and women's activists who disclosed the rapes were accused of being traitors to the nation who betrayed their own country, especially when they spoke about the incidents in international forum.

A third framework that works most effectively in diverting the public attention from the issue of violence against women in the May rape was the politics of identity. By suggesting that the incidents were made up as an attack against one religion by another, those who use this religious framework managed to replace the issue of violence against women with a completely different issue that calls for religious fanaticism. (The report mentions that rapists cried "Allahu Akbar", an Islamic prayer before doing their crime; the head of the Volunteer Team for Humanity was a Jesuit priest). Similarly strong reactions that came from overseas Chinese in the world in the aftermath of the May rape that stresses the racial aspect of the rape complicate the situation faced by Indonesian women activists that campaign for solidarity. The activists well know how such racialisation could fuel more inter-ethnic or racial hatred and prejudice.

Like Atwood's novel, many women's groups counter these attacks by consciousness raising campaign that show how the rapes occur within the overall patriarchal structure that allows many forms of violence against women. Such campaign refuses to isolate the May rape cases by comparing them with similar incidents in other places in the country and abroad. Similar patterns are traced to show how the states, military and warring groups used the bodies of women as the means for terror. Artists such as Astari Rasyid show other forms of structural violence such as cultural values that imprison women albeit putting them on the pedestal.

Margaret Atwood's novel shows how an alternative world could exist within the cruel Patriarchy of the Gilead Republic, where women are

appreciated not for their bodies (reproductive capacity, sexuality) but for its brain and personality. But this alternative world remains illicit and weak, and the real resistance is underground. Indonesian women may not live in Gilead, but feminist framework occupies a similarly marginalised position. Patriarchal structure, justified by religious dogmas, is generally deep rooted in the heterogeneous societies that make Indonesia. Moreover, feminist framework has a dubious place in the mass media. While the word "feminism" is still considered tainted with radicalism and Western influence, "women's issues" are considered trivial. Reportage on women's activism throughout the Reformasi shows this tendency. Newspapers would put the photo of a women's rally in the front-page as an eye-catching device, but put aside a short verbal coverage in the back pages.

Thanks to the relentless effort of many women during the Reformasi years (1998-1999), a national body to handle the issue of violence against women was established in Indonesia (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan). The national committee has a lot of work in hand. While documentation of violence against women keeps piling up, the trivialisation of women's issues makes the task of battling violence against women extraordinarily challenging.

Drawing/Writing as Healing: The Re-Membering

In Toni Morison's award winning novel *Beloved,* the act of confronting the past by remembering (in the case of the novel – slavery) is not only the means for coming to terms with unpleasant things that had happened in one's life, but also for rediscovering one's lost identity. The loss of identity and self respect, is a result of cruel objectification of the body, a painful state of mind which the protagonist of the novel, Sethe, an ex slave, likens to the feeling of "being dirtied":

> ... That anybody [white] could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself any more. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. (251)

To remember is to reassemble one's body that has been torn to pieces by the claws of the past. Under the auspices of slavery, like sexual slavery in Atwood's novel or rapes and sexual violence, human beings are deprived of everything, even their selves. Their desires their bodies and their identities. Sethe remembers how one day her body was drawn by one of her white masters called the "school teacher" symbolising the role of education and science in supporting the rule of the Capital and Patriarchy over women's body. Sethe's body was analysed and written down, all parts are measured and defined – especially in terms of financial worth. It is no wonder that at the end of the novel, Sethe feels that her body is torn apart. It is in order to reassemble the torn self that the act of remembering the past is most needed.

Unfortunately, however, memory dispite pacifying minds and soothing souls, could get out of hand and for ever lock the reminiscing persons in the past. The repetition of the past could also be full of vengeance, like the secret songs of prisoner slaves in Morison's novel, who "killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time." (BLVD: 109).

Morison's novel does not completely clarify this psychological problem of remembering the past. Sethe is too possessed by the past symbolised by Beloved, an unknown young girl that Sethe takes as the reincarnation of the ghost of her dead baby. But in the end, Sethe, who is symbolically locked up in the past in her individual psychological battle, is finally embraced by the community. Together they help to chase off the demons of the past. The end of the novel suggests the need for solidarity and common effort in redeeming the past.

What we learn from Morison is the relation between the individual and society in facing the problem of violence against humanity. In Sethe's personal agony we see black people's cultural memory of their enslaved past. On the other hand, we could also see Sethe as one victim of a social institution called slavery, a black page in the U.S. history. What is occurring in the nation is not only recorded in our memory but also affects the individual. Individual suffering is thus never isolated from the ills of the overall power structure of the society. Ethel Adnan, a Lebanese feminist writer, puts this relation of the self and the nation in the following words:

> I tell myself that we are terrorists, not terrorists in the political and ordinary sense of the word, but because we carry inside of our bodies – like explosives – all the deep troubles that befall our countries ... We are the scribes of a scattered self, living in fragments, as if the parts of the self were writing down the bits and ends of a perception never complete ... (Adnan,1993: 54-55)

By writing these bits and ends of a perception never complete, however, a writer – like Sethe – helps to reassemble the cultural memory, construction social identities lost in the past, swallowed by the histories of violence. The protagonist of Javant Biarujia's award winning play entitled *Comfort,* indirectly points to the function of literature in giving history a life-felt experience to otherwise impartial hard facts and numbers:

> What war are we up to now? Bonaparte, Alexander, Stalin, Idi Amin...Pol Pot – washed clean of their sins and stench of death, and I suspect it will be like that for Hitler in time to come. And Hirohito. Just another name. Another name like Matahari. And the actual living through it, the horror of it all, will become so much typeface and ink on the pages of history books, flattened out – every bit of blood pressed out (Biarujia, 1996:7).

Works such as Biarujia's play does make the reader/audience feel the "horror of it all" as we enter into the eyes and feelings of an innocent young Indo girl that is suddenly ripped apart by the violence of being turned into a Japanese comfort woman. The monologue is supposedly told by the victim, now growing old, to her maturing daughter, living a peaceful and snug life, who has for thus long been sheltered from the reality of her mother's past life. The play thus functions as the passing on of history to another generation, in an intimate, personal way that makes them really feel the horror of the past.

It is a kind of telling that does not invoke anger, but compassion and wisdom. What is appealing in Biarujia's play is that the innocent and tender heart of that young girl stays intact in the voice of the play, a heart that stays pure amidst vile crimes. There were a mixture of love and sadness in the tone, a nostalgic longing of the old woman for the places of her birth and her peaceful childhood and the people whom she loves and then the horror. But there was no anger and bitterness. Such a tender voice comes clear from Jan Ruff- O' Herne's memoir, *Fifty Years of Silence*, another testimony of an Indo girl who was forced to be a Japanese comfort woman in Semarang, West Java. The story is similarly colored with nostalgia for the colonial past. There was a middle passage, though, short, as if reluctantly told, of the Japanese comfort woman's experience. The horrors in its starkness, however, were made bearable by the framework of the cross. The narrator, in a way, was telling her way of the cross. This is a religious framework by which suffering leads to forgiveness and peace.

Different from these two Iu Gun Ian Fu stories, the voice of Morison's novel is hoarse with anger, dried tears and despair. In spite of these, however, it does not end with a cry of vengeance or hatred. It is not a black and white world of binary oppositions. Not all of the white masters are evil, some are even kind and goodhearted, but are all trapped inside this structural iron cage of slavery. On the other hand,

the violence nurtured by the system of slavery affects the victims in many different ways. You can lose your mind, like Sethe's husband, be completely beaten and timid, or resist fiercely like Sethe. In her death-daring resistance against slavery and her overflowing love for her children she chose to kill her children, one by one, in order to spare them of such fate. Violence has bred a violence, a cycle tragically completed. By killing, she literally rendered the bodies of her children and herself "worthless" as a financial object, a drastic response to the exploitative and "capitalistic" nature of the slavery system that considers human bodies as commodities. But at the same time the novel shows how such a "dis-membering" act lead to a deadlock fight with the past, which could only be healed with a proper act of re-membering, reassembling one's self with the help of a compassionate and supportive community.

The three texts above show how representation of violence can function as a means for healing. Victims come to terms with their difficult past through writing their memoirs (Henson, Ruff-O'Herne); writers and artists, as suggested by Adnan, reconstruct the history of the nation, addressing its wounds and reassembling the torn pieces. The representations of violence could function as a healing of the cultural and national memory. They become, in other words, cultural or national monuments to reflect on the black pages of the nation's history and to remember in order not to repeat or multiply such violence. But the framework we chose, the voice and the ways we represent the violence – as discussed earlier (in the mass media, campaign etc), significantly determine what message we are disseminating.

In Indonesia we can find ample monuments that remind people of the history of violence, such as the Lubang Buaya monuments, and the Satria Mandala museum of war. The cruelty of the enemy is emphasised to instill nationalist and patriotic feeling. Besides "foreign"

colonial forces most of the enemies depicted in such monuments are the internal scapegoats, the forces within: those with different ideological or political stand. And the modes of presentation are militaristic. Unlike the controversial Vietnam War memorial in Washington or the Japanese memorial for the atomic bomb, what was missing in such monuments is the space for healing and forgiving, is alternative modes of peace and tolerance, one mode that is very much in need in the conflict and violence ridden country such as Indonesia.

End Notes

1 As Mulvey (1975) theorizes it in the case of the cinema

2 I give a more elaborate account of the discursive strategies of women activism during the Reformasi Years is in "The Blessed Tragedy: Women's activism during the Reformasi Years" forthcoming (anticipated 2003), in A. Heryanto and S.K. Mandal, *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, London: RoutledgeCarzon.

3 Translated from an email correspondence in perempuan@egroups.com on May 16,2000.

4 I am indebted to Kamala Chandrakirana from the National Commission for Violence Against Women, who shared her ideas about this issue.

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2

MINORITIES, WOMEN AND PEACE: A SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

Ekhaney tumi shonkhaloghu
Okhaney tumi jomjomaat
Ekhnaney tumi bostibashi
Okhaney chosho raasta-ghat

–kothai jeno manush kNadey
Kothai jeno kNadchey hai
Manush boro bhoi peyechey
Manush boronishwahai

Here you are the minority
There you are dominant
Here you dwell in slums
There you reign the highways
–But somewhere humanity cries
Somewhere you can feel the pain
People have become fearful
People are feeling helpless.
(Moushumi Bhowmik: singer, composer, lyricist)

Meghna Guha Thakurta*

Introduction

The problem of minorities in South Asia has had its root in the history of the region. According to many scholars, the two nation theory had created fissures between the two dominant religious communities in the subcontinent, Hindus and Muslims. The partition of 1947 had formalised this divide in the form of two distinct nation-states where one religious community dominates the other i.e. the Hindus in India and Muslims in Pakistan. The partition of

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the subcontinent along religious lines with accompanying communal violence produced a politics that gave rise to situations described in the songlines above.

However, it was not only colonial policy, which was responsible for the communalisation of the subcontinent but also the nature of nationalist movements in the region. The anti-colonial national movements in Asia have been mostly of an integrative type i.e. they embraced at least in theory all of the indigenous population subject to a single colonial state, regardless of ethnic differences. The notion of ethnicity was therefore suppressed in most discourses of nation building.

Even in the post-independent period of nation building, the newly independent modern nation-states of Asia, carved out of former colonial territories, adopted policies, which suppressed, used, or merely accommodated ethnic and cultural differences. This had left the problem of ethnic minorities un-resolved in contemporary statecraft as is to be noticed in the north-east of India or in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The formalisation of the new nation-states of South Asia was also accompanied by two other characteristics (a) unitary constitutions (with the exception of India, which technically was constituted as a federation) and (b) centralised state policies. Both these characteristics together and independently helped to marginalize sections of the population, which historically have been removed from the centers of power on the basis of language (e.g. the Bengalis within Pakistan) religion, (Muslims in India and Hindus in Bangladesh or Christians in Pakistan) and ethnicity (the Chakmas in Bangladesh or the Tamils in Sri Lanka).

Last but not least, all the states in South Asia are inherently patriarchal, a fact, which often goes unnoticed in the mainstream political discourse. Male hegemony is apparent in any dominant power

relations personal, local, national or regional. It works to deprive and marginalise women from centers of power regardless of class, caste or ethnicity. However, oppression of vulnerable groups such as religious or ethnic minorities in recent years have specifically victimised minority women in a way that defies rationale and logic and compels one to understand the underlying patriarchal nature and the workings of our nation- states. It is from this perspective that I wish to look at the issue of minorities, women and peace. I will draw on experiences from Bangladesh since they are the ones closest to me, but the lessons learnt could no doubt contribute towards the understanding of similar phenomena within the South Asian context.

In order to understand the linkages between minorities, women and the prospect for peace-building in South Asia, one has first of all to understand the nature of the state from a feminist perspective. I first outline the nature of the Bangladesh state as a site where women contest the increasing influence of religious fundamentalists. I then look at the dynamics of a gendered power base, which victimises minorities (and specifically minority women) almost as a systematic method of state induced terror. I conclude with some suggestions for a women's agenda for peace.

The challenge of fundamentalism in Bangladesh

Fundamentalism has been on the rise in Bangladesh ever since the Bangladesh state veered away from the post-independent ideology of socialism and secularism and underwent an Islamicisation process (Kabeer,1991). But it is quite ironical that though fundamentalist forces have been systematically rehabilitated and encouraged through the two military governments it is through their participation in the pro-democratic movement and the support which they gave to a democratically elected government of 1991, that they emerged stronger than before. In fact, all would have gone well for the

fundamentalists if it had not been for the massive mobilisation process generated by the Gono Adalat (the Peoples Tribunal) led by Jahanara Imam.[1] This brought back to the political forefront the demand to try leaders of Jamaat e Islam, (a party which gave all other orthodox religious parties a national support by virtue of being represented in Parliament) for committing war crimes during 1971 in collaboration with Pakistan. In the fight, which ensued between the people on the one hand and the establishment on the other, the establishment set itself the role to 'maintain law and order.'

This line fitted in well with the fundamentalists who spoke of control and maintaining a predominantly male-dominant status quo- a strategy similar to the one usually taken towards women in general! Religion came to be used as one of the primary means by which male-dominant values and existing gender-oppressive ideology were imposed and perpetuated. It created a division between the private and the public; separated the personal from the political. It thus became a weapon in the hands of the establishment to use time and again to demonstrate a semblance of order, stability and control in the face of growing unrest and dissatisfaction with the Government.

The current economic situation of Bangladesh also brought the woman question to the forefront. With donors emphasising the incorporation of a Women in Development (WID) strategy in developmental thinking, and Non-governmental organisations (NGO)s and garment factories drawing out women in ever increasing numbers into the work force, the growing visibility of women became an added threat to fundamentalist ideologies.

It was advantageous therefore for the fundamentalists to take women who step outside the bounds of social norms as their next target since they represented a potential threat to the male-dominant status quo. Their target has ranged from well-known public figures such as Jahanara Imam, women's rights activist Sufia Kamal, writer Taslima

Nasrin to NGO workers or vulnerable village women. Recently of course this target has been enlarged to include progressive minded journalists who write to raise the consciousness of the people against these forces.

Responses of the Women's Movement in Bangladesh

The slogan that the personal is political may have been coined by women rights activists in the West, but it certainly became relevant for women in any society, where various repressive measures were followed in order to keep the personal from being political. In Bengal too, women had confronted the private/public divide from time immemorial. Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) a forerunner of the women's rights movement for Muslim women had time and again reiterated that orthodox religious leaders had played a retrogressive role for women. Men had used religion whenever women had tried to break the shackles of society. Such awareness has historically led women to challenge and confront what they perceived to be an oppressive hierarchical order. Little of this is acknowledged among those in the women's movement, who subscribe to a more development outlook on the women's issue. Such an outlook therefore tends to bypass both micro-level resistance and challenge thrown by women at the grassroots as well as the more macro-level demands of the Women's movement e.g. legal reforms. However, grassroots pressure and the vulnerability of women in relation to social, legal and paralegal institutions have more recently created the need for legal literacy, leadership training and empowerment programmes, albeit within the conventional framework of development.

But the development discourse has not only avoided resistance on gender specific issues, it has also failed to take into account the various resistance movements at the national level. As such developmental interventions have remained not only apolitical but also

a historical. This has accounted for much of the confusion as to what constitutes the culture of Bangladesh. Much of the 'outsiders' view about this has been framed by a globalised discourse of a homogenous Muslim society. The fact that social and linguistic traditions play just an important role and had played the crucial role during the independence movement of the country seems to be largely ignored.

But this outlook has a much more serious repercussion on women's issues and how one deals with fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Whereas in the global framework, many Islamic movements in the Middle East have historically played an anti-imperialist role and have voiced protest over colonial oppression, the retrograde role played by the Jamaat e Islami as collaborators of war crimes in the Liberation War is acknowledged by Bengalis in general. But to many in the establishment, the politics of Liberation with its connotations of a linguistic cultural heritage and golden goals of self sufficiency strikes a discordant note in today's world of free-market enterprise and labour migration. Such alternatives are thus not encouraged by any of the pro-establishment coterie: the donors (who seek a stable world order), the Government (who wishes to remain in power and hence sustain the existing power structure) or the fundamentalists (whose existence depends on the perpetration of a male-dominant patriarchal order)! Therefore any form of resistance or challenge to the status quo, particularly if it comes from women is trivialised side-stepped or quelled as the case maybe.

Kinship and Power Structure

Kinship as an integral element of the power relations has been well researched in the context of Bangladesh village studies in the early seventies. What has not been so closely researched however has been the link of kinship to the more elitist power configurations at the

core of national politics in Bangladesh. Since most of the political leadership in Bangladesh emerges from the expanding middle-class, it is not uncommon to find blood relatives among political personalities belonging to diverse ideological camps. Thus although, on the one hand, competition at party level can become very violent and intolerant, the kinship factor provides a buffer zone where extreme views or positions are often negotiated. This has been a clever entry point used by Islamist parties who wanted to gain credibility in society. For example, in Rajshahi University, members of Jamat i Islami have been encouraged to marry into families in university administration so as to enhance their status within the campus. This is also the reason why even though there be political intransigence at the party level, members of rival parties are quite commonly seen together at social events and may at times purport to have common business interests. It is this feature in Bangladesh politics, which often enables one to bypass or even subvert political positions on the right or left or political issues such as the trial of war criminals of 1971.

The kinship factor also brings into play a particular pattern of gendered politics, which is often invisibilised at the level of a political system. Since family and kinship ties are important in power configurations, women have become the means through which dominant power configurations may be made manifest. Hence abductions, forced marriages, rape of women belonging to marginalised groups, such as minorities or opposition party cadres are often resorted to in the politics of domination and vendetta. A less violent but nevertheless effective method of inscripting women into the politics of class hegemony is through encouraging 'political marriages' where an MP or better still a Minister as a father-in-law can help smooth out processes of obtaining licenses, securing jobs or ordering transfers of lucrative government posts. It is also this kinship factor, which serves to exclude to a large extent religious and ethnic minorities from the centres of power. Technically speaking there is nothing to prevent

minorities from participating in mainstream politics in Bangladesh and hence bring in their own kinship structures into play. However, the foregrounding of a majoritarianism inscribing Bengali as a state language and Islam as a state religion automatically marginalises religious and ethnic minorities from attaining a central role in determining class hegemony.

Post-election violence against minorities in Bangladesh

The post-election violence in Bangladesh (2001) specifically targetted the Hindu minority population though in a broader frame it also encompassed Awami League supporters and other progressive forces in the rural areas. The violence has largely been known to be initiated by supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters in various localities. The backlash after the elections was systematic and severe. Bangladeshi press has reported that attackers have entered Hindu homes, beaten family members and looted their property and rape and abduction of women too were reported.

Among the atrocities committed were charging into households, attacking men, women and children with sharp knives and weapons, in certain cases threatening with guns, terrorising women and children by beating and chasing them and in certain cases raping and attempting rape. Looting of Hindu households and sometimes Muslim households which sheltered Hindus took place throughout the night and in waves since most householders had fled in terror and their houses were left unguarded. No distinction was made between rich and poor households. Houses were left almost bare. As some of the victims said even babies' clothes were stolen.

Although men were terrorised as well, it was women and children who had to bear the brunt of the attack. Once they saw the attackers the women came out and begged for mercy or to have their husbands spared. The attackers then turned on the women, sometimes asking

one woman to fetch another one by name, ('bring so and so to me') or else attempting to drag the women at hand. When a twelve year old girl refused to call her mother to the attackers she was raped herself.

A Case Study of a village in Bhola

That night everyone had to hide in the rice fields fending off water-leeches from their hands and legs and that of their babies and children. Some women also had to climb trees in order to rescue themselves. But the fear of more attack prompted many to stay away from their own houses for more than a week sometimes two weeks. In the second village we visited a mother claimed that for 15 days her sons were forced to live in the betel nut orchards (Supari Bagan). Sometimes she would try to take food down to them, but the son's would hardly be able to eat at all due to sheer terror. In many houses, which could afford to do so, individual couples rented apartments in the nearest town for several months before returning to their homes, daughter in laws were also sent away to their natal home districts if that area was more safer. In the villages it was poor women who were hit most hard, since they earned their living through labouring in the land and they could no longer do that due to physical insecurity. Often they had to send away their daughters to the homes of rich town people to be educated and kept safe. Among the Hindu community there were a few female - headed household where the men were working in India. Their security was especially endangered. One such woman who lived with relatives found security by cooking for the emergency police force, which was stationed there after the incident. People who had some land but was looted of all their belongings, began to cut down trees in their homestead and orchards to provide emergency funding. No local NGOs had come to their rescue with programmes of relief. Only those organisations from Dhaka who had visited these villages to investigate the situation proved to be their only hope for salvation and relief.

There were some cases of exodus into India, but only for those households who already had someone living there. But in many cases the victims expressed that they were too poor to take that option. They did not have the minimum resources to make the move. In other cases where families came from the landed class they still had too much at stake here to flee without preparation. Their exact words were what shall we eat in India? We have to resort to begging.

The Aftermath

Although some steps were taken by the administration to arrest some of the more obvious culprits in one of the worst hit places and an emergency police force was stationed in the vicinity of Annoda Prosad village, the systematic denial of these incidents nationwide had prevented sterner measures to be taken by local administration. The villagers of Annoda Prosad felt somewhat relieved by the stationing of an emergency police camp in the vicinity. It is true but they also felt intimidated by the fact that some of the culprits were still roaming free and that those who had been arrested were being released on bail. Many culprits were reported as saying, 'so what if they had to go to prison, it was temporary, almost like going to your ' in laws' place for dinner. They also intimidated the villagers mention their names to the police or administration and that they would take it out on them if they do inform the administration. In the village of Fatemabad this threat was actualised when one Hindu boy was charged for being accessory to a so-called abduction of a Muslim girl. The incident was in fact one of an élopement, and some of the culprits of 2nd October incident turned around the case to point the accusing finger to a Hindu boy and had him arrested. This was a way of showing their vengeance. The family of the boy was distraught. As it was, they had lost all their belongings and on top of it did not have the financial or moral strength to fight the legal proceedings. This was indeed a case for legal aid.

The Role of the Administration

The role of the administration from local to district level was at best hedgey about the incidents. Apart from the setting up of the police camp in the vicinity of Annoda Proshad there was little indication that the administration was taking positive steps to file charges or find and bring the culprits to justice. The people in Char Kumari complained that the police had not filled in specific charge sheets for weeks after the incident. A few days had gone by even before they had come on the scene to investigate. There were also reports of attempting to cover up complaints, which have been made. For example in the village of Annoda Proshad a woman had wanted to file a case regarding her husband who was missing. But the local level leaders had tried to coax her into believing that he had gone to India and had even produced a letter which was read out to her since she was illiterate. But the odd thing was that the Officer in Charge (OC) when asked about this incident repeated this story and he too gave the same excuse as to why a case cannot be lodged regarding this 'disappearance'. The District Commissioner on the other hand seemed more sympathetic and was keen to maintain peace but also would not want to take any action that would displease local elites.

Locally it was only the media, which had reported faithfully the incidents and followed it up regularly. The role of the politicians however has been wanting. Local MPs have either reportedly been inciting the attackers or indirectly supporting them by protecting the culprits from law enforcing agencies. The Minister for Religious Affairs elected from this area was sympathetic but was too far away in the capital to be able to monitor the day to day events.

Things to be done

From the above it is clear that some steps need to be taken to cope with such incidents in the future. What is most important of course is

the political will of the government to acknowledge the damage and to take measures to prevent further incidents like these. But non-government organisations also have a role to play, which was virtually absent during the 2nd October 2001 incident. Bhola has traditionally been a natural disaster zone and local NGOs have effectively developed disaster management programmes over the years. But what needs to be acknowledged is that these incidents too are disasters, which leave people destitute and lost. Immediate relief even shelters in some cases are needed. Health care for those injured or raped are among some of the most immediate needs. The villagers told stories of the double trauma they faced when local hospitals declined to take rape cases or injury that legally should be handled by the police. But for most households it was the medium and long-term needs that claimed attention. Many households, which were affected had candidates for the School Certificate Examinations which were looming and since they were robbed of all their belongings did not have the funds to buy books or enroll their children for the coming exams. This was something that should have been looked into seriously by both government and non-government authorities. Monitoring cells could also be set up in such riot -prone area, which could help speedily take care of relief, medical and legal aid action in the aftermath of such events. Such cells could also be part of an early-warning system for anticipating future riots.

Future Landscapes: a regional problem

The villagers also feared future reprisals against the Hindu community especially in response to violence regarding the Ayodha issue in India. They all expected a reprisal on the Hindu community around 15th March when the Hindu extremists had a plan to build a Hindu temple on the location of Babri Mosque, in UP, India. Rumours about possible attack were ripe in both villages. Memories of the attack following the Babri Masjid incident in 1992 was still live in their minds. This is a

feature, which has been common in Bangladesh politics since the early nineties. The establishment of an independent Bangladesh on the basis of secular ideals had offered to the polity a sense of citizenship as opposed to that of religious sectarianism. Even though the word secularism had been omitted from the 1975 constitution, a non-sectarian concept of citizenship was something quite acceptable in the Bangladesh polity. As regional and global politics became more and more influenced by religious fundamentalism, sectarian identities of Hindu and Muslim re-emerged in the arena of politics. That by itself would not have unleashed the violence one saw on 2nd October 2001. Rather the incident was the result of machinations of a vested group of people who saw it to their advantage both politically and economically to foreground sectarianism as political vendetta against the Awami League.

The participation of religious minorities in mainstream politics has been largely marginalised with the establishment of a pro-Islamic ideology. Even so because of the specific historical connection of the Awami League with the secularist notion they have been identified as a substantive vote bank of Awami League. However, the existence of many structural discriminatory practices as well as the Vested Property Act, which for over three decades until it was repealed by the previous Awami League government, had been responsible for a systematic and pervasive eviction of Hindus from their homesteads and a resultant exodus into India. Land being a scarce commodity in overpopulated Bangladesh was good enough a reason for local vested interests to be interested in the communalisation of Bangladesh's politics. The nature of the party structure and leadership has contributed towards both the criminalisation and communalisation of this politics.

The centralization of power within the party structure has been paralleled by a geographic centralisation in the capital. Thus a large

number of MPs who win seats in parliament are occasional visitors in their constituencies and normally reside only within the limits of the capital city. Hence much of their political control over their constituencies is handed over to their local henchmen, who in turn exercise control over local administration as well (not unlike absentee landlordism of past eras). When the time comes to distribute the booties of an electoral victory, there are obviously more candidates to satisfy than there are resources and hence leaders often turn a blind eye to consequent processes of extortion, which goes on in the localities. One of the characteristics of the recent assault is that most of them have taken place in rural areas. And in a politics characterised by techniques of "char dokhol" or "chandabaji", it is easier to justify extortion to their political leaders if the victims happen to be political opponents or their die-hard supporters or in other words those outside the purview of state power. Indeed one may even stand the chance of being offered the post of a minister or state minister as a reward for it!

The issue of the assault on minorities is therefore enmeshed in a complex hub of power relation, which characterises the current nature of politics in Bangladesh. Many say it is a careful plan to reduce the number of Hindu voters and create a separate electorate for them so that they no longer become a vote bank for the Awami League. Others mention that this is due to the machinations of a powerful circle allied to the ruling party whose own petty interests often override the concerns of a national government.

The counter to such trends must be found in the reassertion of the principle of a secular democratic practice in the political and social context of Bangladesh. Unlike many regions, the people of Bangladesh have memories of secular resistance politics, which it can draw upon. The advent of a global Islam and regional fundamentalism has challenged these tendencies. The mere existence of formal democracy is not enough to stave off the advances made by these

forces. A reinvented and invigorated notion of a secular political culture, which is acceptable to the people of Bangladesh given their rich cultural heritages, is now the need of the hour. Can we meet this challenge?

End Notes

1. Jahanara Imam, author of *Ekatorrer Dinguli* (of Blood and Fire) and other books, mother of a martyred freedom fighter, gave courageous leadership to the movement against the fundamentalists and succeeded in mobilizing public opinion in favour of pro-Liberation forces at a critical juncture of Bangladesh's history. Suffering from cancer, she breathed her last on 26th June, 1994.

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3

'UNCOVERING THE GIRLS IN "THE BOYS": FEMALE COMBATANTS OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM'

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As I am assuming that most *Nivedini* readers will have a basic knowledge of the history of the Tamil nationalist struggle in Sri Lanka and the progression of the war, I will not repeat that here. My choice of title will also be self-explanatory for many; as Qadri Ismail has noted, the cadres of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been frequently referred to as 'the boys' or 'our boys' by many Sri Lankan Tamils (Ismail, 1992: 6). This gendered description is in itself interesting when reflected upon in light of the prominent role of women in the LTTE, particularly since the 1990s, and the lively debates on women's involvement that have been conducted both in academic circles and within the Tamil communities in the northeast. The purpose of this article, therefore, is both to add to the feminist

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debate on women's involvement in the LTTE, and to challenge the label 'the boys' by looking at some of 'the girls' in the movement. The work is based on a preliminary analysis of the results of my research conducted in the north and east of Sri Lanka in August and September 2002, where I interviewed 14 female LTTE combatants and ex-combatants, and over 20 non-LTTE Tamil and Muslim women. Owing to time and space limitations this article is unable to incorporate in more than an anecdotal way the results of the interviews with non-LTTE women; accordingly, it focuses on examining what the LTTE women I interviewed said about themselves and their movement.

The goal of the research was firstly to investigate the reasons why some women have chosen to join the LTTE, and secondly to attempt to examine how their experiences in the movement may have affected their views on women and men in society – in essence, to see whether or not their experiences have been a catalyst for developing a feminist consciousness. At this stage the article cannot be more than fairly tentative, drawing out some threads suggested by a first analysis of the research results. As a primarily qualitative piece of research relying heavily on in-depth semi-structured interviews, and due to the fact that the sensitive nature of the topic meant that using random sampling to select interviewees was naturally impossible, the work does not attempt to make any grand generalisations about women in the LTTE. Rather, it simply hopes to shed a little more light on the feminist debate about these women, and the broader global feminist debate about women's roles in nationalism, war and peace, by listening to the voices of some of the Tamil women who have chosen to take up arms – women about whom much has been written and said, but who have rarely had the opportunity to speak for themselves in this debate.

The current ages of the 14 women I interviewed ranged between 21 and 33. Their ages at the time they joined the LTTE ranged between

14 and 21, although the majority were in the younger end of this range; half of them were between 14 and 16 at the time. Significantly, half of the women joined in 1990, one of the worst years of the war and military oppression; the others were spread between 1991 and 1998. Of the 14 women, 13 had joined the LTTE voluntarily and one had been forcibly conscripted; accordingly she ('K'[1]) is not factored into the account of women's reasons for joining. Twelve of the women are still in the LTTE, while two have left (one of them being 'K'). My use of the terms 'combatant' and 'ex-combatant' is relatively flexible; I include all women who are or were in the LTTE and have had the weapons training (which effectively is all of them), whether or not they have fought in battle. Having said that, 12 of the 14 women *have* fought in battle, generally multiple times. All but two described their families as middle-class, although many have fallen on rather harder times due to displacement; the other two are both from an extremely impoverished border village in the northeast. All but one of the women are from Hindu backgrounds, although many do not practice since joining the LTTE; one is a Roman Catholic. Finally, it should be pointed out that all except two of my interviewees were necessarily selected by the LTTE, rather than through random sampling or even self-selection. This does not mean we should discount their stories, but it does mean we should have a wary eye out at the same time for the spaces – the stories not told and the women not seen.

Motivations of (Voluntary) Female Combatants

The existing literature on women in the LTTE suggests various reasons for them joining the movement, which I was interested to test against what the LTTE women I met said themselves. It is well known that the LTTE asks each Tamil family to contribute one member to the organisation (Trawick, 1999: 143). Notwithstanding this, and the persistent and substantiated allegations of forcible conscription, most recruits do seem to be voluntary. The initial 'pull factor' of the LTTE's

active recruitment of women does seem likely to be, as many have suggested, primarily a pragmatic response to the need for more fighters created by the loss of men through death, as refugees, and as emigrants, rather than stemming from an ideological commitment to equality and women's rights (Hoole et al., 1990: 326; de Silva, 1994: 28; Samarasinghe, 1996: 213). However, this does not account for the 'push factors' of the women combatants. The increasing loss of men from Tamil society is probably a 'push factor' for some women, left alone and unprotected in a community that emphasises women's dependency upon men, as well as being a 'pull factor'. However, there is a range of different and intersecting reasons why women have chosen to join the militants; some of these are likely to be common to both female and male combatants, while others are gender-specific to women.

Nationalist Sentiment

Sumantra Bose argues that LTTE women, like LTTE men, are primarily motivated by 'nationalist fervour.' She suggests that by the time of the mid-1980s drive for women to join the LTTE, 'Tamil nationalism, in its radical form, had been transformed into a mass phenomenon... and women of the younger generation of Tamils were as alienated from the state, and as inspired by the vision of a liberated Eelam, as their male counterparts' (Bose, 1994: 109 and 111). This was borne out by the results of my own research; six of the 13 women I interviewed who had voluntarily joined the LTTE referred to nationalist ideas of freedom for 'the [Tamil] nation', self-determination, land and rights for Tamils as part of or as the main reason for them joining the movement. For example, Krishna[2] (Women's Political Wing Leader for Trincomalee District) maintained that 'herein, there are three communities – Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims.... Either you must be parallel to the Sinhalese and live together in harmony with the same status; if not, the Tamils must be separated and live happily with their own self-determination'.

Thamilini (Women's Political Wing Leader for Tamil Eelam) said that 'after we get the land, our people will be free.' Thamilvily (Women's Political Wing Leader for Jaffna District) told me that 'we have witnessed the adverse effects of shelling and military action; we have seen people die and be injured. When we ask why, we see it is that we are not free and are at the mercy of the military.... So I joined the LTTE.' Finally, Barathy[3] (a soldier) asserted that the 'Sri Lankan Government did not respect our rights, they did not respect us, the Tamil people'. She felt that the Tamils must have freedom, by which she meant 'we have to have... a homeland for us, a separate homeland. We have... rights like Sinhalese and other Western countries.'

Suffering and Oppression

Notwithstanding the above, I view 'nationalist fervour' as a sort of catch-all, 'meta-reason' for joining; beneath this ideological reason there are also more specific, more personal motivations operating. One reason, intertwined with nationalist ideology, is the perception of suffering, oppression and injustice. Sometimes this is related to a personal experience; sometimes it has been received as part of the Tamil narrative of oppression and suffering, and borne out by seeing the experiences of one's friends and neighbours. So, Adele Ann/ Balasingham argues that '[g]rowing national oppression... brought about a situation where Tamil women took to arms' (Ann, 1990). Thus, '[c]onstant exposure to oppression has had a profound effect on the life and thinking of young Tamil women' (Ann, 1993: ii). She claims that the women cadres were often 'from families affected cruelly by the war. In some cases, personal experience was the motivating factor' (Ann, 1990). Other research has found evidence to back this up. For example, female Tiger Selva saw both her parents killed when she was 18, caught in crossfire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army in Jaffna. Today, she attributes her decision to join the Tigers to

the death of her parents (Bulathsinghala, 2002). Similarly, in an interview with Margaret Trawick, Sita made it clear that she and many of the other combatants were motivated to join the LTTE because of their anger at the deaths of loved ones at the hands of the Sri Lankan military and police. An older brother of hers was killed by the Special Task Force of the Police in 1985, and another brother was killed at Vantaramoollai University in 1990. After the 'troubles' of 1990 she and her sister joined the LTTE (Trawick, 1999: 151-152). She clearly emphasised that it was the death of her brothers that prompted her decision: 'my brothers were killed, and out of rage, I joined the movement'; 'I wanted to die as my brothers died' (Trawick, 1999: 157 and 152-153).

This notion of personal suffering as a motivation to join the movement was also substantiated in my own research. Four women mentioned the death of a family member. Banuka's father was killed by the Sri Lankan Army in 1990, which she gave as a major reason for joining. She joined in 1993, at the age of 16; she is now the Women's Political Wing Leader for Batticaloa-Amparai District. Malarville's father was killed by the Army in 1987, which affected her deeply; she must have been about 11 at the time, since she is 26 now. She told me that after she lost her father, her 'mental situation' was very bad and she could not immediately think of joining the LTTE, but in 1990 she did; she specifically stated that the death of her father was one of the main reasons she joined. She is currently in charge of the video section in Batticaloa-Amparai District. Thamilnila's father was killed in a boat massacre in Jaffna in 1985, allegedly perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Navy in plain clothes. When I asked why she joined the LTTE, the first thing she said was 'one thing that affected me was I was deprived of a parent, of my father, and that was causing me agitation.' However she did not join until 1998, at the age of 22. She is a photographer for the LTTE and has been to the battlefield documenting the fight, but not as a soldier. Finally, Thamilachi's brother died as an LTTE 'martyr' in

1990. Her family was supporting the LTTE by sheltering and assisting cadres; she noted that 'we were already convinced about the justness of the struggle', but her brother's death hastened her decision to join, which she did in 1991 at the age of 21. She is currently a Public Relations Officer.

Six of the women mentioned that their families had been displaced and/or their areas attacked in the war, and this was clearly a contributory factor for many in their decision to join. For example, Thamilvily's family was displaced in 1995 after her village in Jaffna was bombed. She told me in English that 'all our people is dying and is wounding. Bad situation. My feeling is: not accept.' She joined in 1995, at the age of 17. Like Thamilvily, Barathy's family was displaced in 1995 when the Army retook much of the Jaffna peninsula. When asked why she joined the LTTE, she mentioned the displacement and the occupation of Jaffna, the subsequent lack of food and the deaths of fellow students through aerial bombing. She joined the movement in 1996 at the age of 16. Thamilnila's family was also displaced, and she gave this as the secondary reason she joined the LTTE (after the death of her father). Sudarvili's family, also from the Jaffna peninsula, was displaced more than once. While on the move during one displacement, she witnessed a horrific massacre which also contributed to her desire to stop the insecurity and suffering her community was experiencing, through joining the LTTE; she said that 'we feel this is the only way... to keep fighting against the military and safeguard the people'. She joined in 1998 at the age of 19, and is a soldier. Malarville's family was also displaced; after the death of her father she gives not being able to live in her own home and having 'no security' as reasons she joined.

Many cadres I spoke to joined because of their anger over the suffering of others in their communities; eight of the 13 women gave this as a partial or the main reason for joining. For example, Sudarvili

stated that 'our people have been suffering.... The common places and the churches and the kovils was bombed by the government, without any reason.... [W]e don't have anybody to save us, and what we feel is if we have someone to safeguard us then there won't be any problem.' She heard many stories about the St Peter's Church bombing and other incidents, and also witnessed a massacre. Prasanthi said that at the time she joined (at the age of 14 in 1990), Trincomalee was always being attacked by the military; the family of one of her classmates was killed, she saw people being cut and thrown into fires, and people being dragged off buses and killed. Thamilini witnessed suffering all around her and used to see dead bodies every day. Thamilachi explained that 'the time I joined, about 1990, was perhaps the worst in this ongoing war.... And we had seen with our own eyes children who had been orphaned, parents who had lost their children. And there was no question of these children getting minimum education.... So what we saw, at that juncture, only convinced us that something must be done, there was an urgent need to do something.'

Educational disruption and restrictions

Given the importance accorded in the literature on Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism to the scheme known as 'standardisation', which has effectively discriminated against Tamils in university entrance, I was expecting this to be given by some of my interviewees as part of their reasons for joining the LTTE. For example 'Anu', a PANOS oral testimony participant, is a Tamil university student in Jaffna who has had to flee her home and has suffered disrupted education. She feels the standardisation system is definitely discriminatory and works against Tamils, and sees this as one reason for young Tamils (female and male) to take up arms (PANOS oral testimony project, SRI 19). However, what was revealed in my own research was that perhaps even more significant than the standardisation system is the general

disruption to secondary school education caused by the war, particularly linked to experiences of displacement. Naturally, if one is prevented from even completing high school, it is impossible to get access to tertiary education for this reason – without even factoring in the impact of standardisation. Five of the interviewees discussed disruption to their education as a result of displacement, and three of them included this as part of the reason they joined. Sudarvili was doing A Levels, but was unable to sit her exams because of displacement. She said 'I wanted to continue my studies, but I was unable to continue my studies by the Army operations. Again and again we were displaced.... When I was studying AL, I was unable to take exam, so I decided to join our movement.' She does not want this disruption to education to happen to future generations and wanted to do something to help stop it. Thamilini was also studying for A Levels when she joined the movement at the age of 18, and wanted to go to university. Unfortunately she was doing A Levels in 1990, and the war situation was so bad at that time (she is from the Tenmaradchi area of Jaffna) that it was extremely difficult to study. Malarville only completed up to Grade 7 in school, and said that she could not continue because of the death of her father and their displacement; she also joined the LTTE right from school.

Before moving on to discuss gender-specific reasons for joining the LTTE, it is important to mention two women who do not fit the general patterns emerging from the above discussion. Shanthi is now 27 and joined the LTTE at the age of 15, in 1991. She is from an impoverished family in a border village that has suffered frequent attacks from all sides in the conflict. At the age of 10 she was sent by her family to live with a family in Jaffna, to be raised as their daughter; her biological family was financially unable to care for all their children. She lived in Jaffna for five years, until the family she lived with moved to India and left her behind. Alone at 15, female, and with little connection to her biological family, she felt she could do nothing else

but join the LTTE. She fought in battle five times, being so seriously wounded in 1996 that she has been advised not to marry, as having children would paralyse or kill her. After her injury she joined the Political Wing, and as a reward for her cleverness in battle she was made the LTTE area leader for a village on the Jaffna peninsula. Two years ago she wrote to her biological mother (who had been unaware that she was in the LTTE), and her mother travelled to Jaffna, tracked her down and insisted she come back to her village. Shanthi struck me as bored and restless; she has had no job since returning to the village, and appeared to miss the sense of purpose and family she had in the LTTE. The other woman who does not 'fit' is 'K', who is now 28 and lives in the same village as Shanthi. She was forcibly conscripted by the LTTE from her Batticaloa boarding school in 1990, when she was 15. They kept her for 10 months and she went through the weapons training, though was never in combat. When she became seriously ill she was released and sent home. She was immediately arrested for having been in the LTTE and was imprisoned for a year; she was beaten and tortured with electrical currents for information about the LTTE. In 1991 her father disappeared; the family believe the Sri Lankan Army was responsible, as further retaliation for her having been in the LTTE. Three months after her release from prison she was married, at the age of 18, and now has three children. She is a Montessori teacher now. Amazingly she does not seem to bear grudges towards either side, and supports the LTTE's political agenda, though not their methods.

Sexual Violence Against Women

It seems clear that as well as motivational factors common to both women and men, there are some reasons for taking up arms that are gender-specific to women. Ann/Balasingham claims that in regard to women's recruitment, the presence of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) 'was a water shed. The Indian army was brutal and male

chauvinist. The rapes, and molesting made a bitter impact' (Ann, 1990). Bose also suggests this, saying that the IPKF presence in the northeast in 1987-1990 'was marked by hundreds of rapes and assaults on women by Indian soldiers, yet another instance of the violence of the state abetting oppositional strategies of social mobilisation' (Bose, 1994: 109). Sarita Subramaniam notes that the IPKF period 'saw the highest recruitment of women as it was also the time when women were the worst sufferers of the war' (Subramaniam, 1997). This idea that the fear (and reality) of rape is sometimes a factor motivating women to join the Tamil militants does seem to be borne out. When I raised the issue of sexual violence against women by the IPKF and the Sri Lankan military, seven of the 13 women discussed this as a reason for women in general to join the LTTE, and fear of or anger about this was part of their own reasoning for four of them. Thamilachi and Shanthi both reported that although this was not part of their own reasons for joining, they both have met many female cadres who have suffered this, were very angry and had joined for that reason. Thamilachi also mentioned the infamous case of the rape and murder of schoolgirl Krishanthi, claiming that 'had she been in the movement she would have been safe.' In the context of a question about if she felt that being in the LTTE has been good for her, Barathy volunteered the information that 'particularly in the Jaffna peninsula, Tamil girls are raped by the Sri Lankan Army. I am a female; I have to liberate the Tamil women from the occupation. So we are, also fighting for the women's liberation.' When I then asked if fear of rape was part of her reason to join the LTTE, she answered 'yes, it was part of the reason for joining. Everyone has to protect themselves.... And also I have to protect the Tamil people'. Similarly, when I asked, Thamilini answered that the fear of sexual violence was a part of her motivation, because she felt that there was nobody who could protect her, so she had to be able to safeguard herself. She said that although only a relatively few number of women and girls were actually raped or assaulted, this created such a climate of fear

that all girls and women were afraid of it. She also said that in normal society women are usually blamed for their own rape; she claimed that the LTTE does not do this, and instead views sexual violence as an 'accident', meaning that it was not the victim's fault. Sailajah,[4] who joined in 1990 at 21 and is the Cultural Affairs Leader for Batticaloa-Amparai District, stated that from an early age she knew that women were 'suppressed' by the Army, including through sexual violence. One of her reasons for joining the LTTE was the desire to 'deliver the women' from this suppression.

Ideas of women's emancipation

As well as the fear of or anger about rape, it has been suggested that perhaps some women have joined the LTTE for a variety of reasons surrounding ideas of women's emancipation and increasing their life opportunities. This was something I was particularly interested to test. Bose suggests that it is possible 'that many women have joined the movement at least partly because they see their participation as a means of breaking taboos, and, in particular, destroying the stultifying straitjacket of conformity and subservience traditionally imposed upon them by a rigidly and self-righteously patriarchal society' (Bose, 1994: 111). Hoole et al. cite some of the reasons for women joining as the social set up of Tamil society: 'its restriction on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system' (Hoole et al., 1990: 326). Peter Schalk asserts that '[t]he main belief of the Tamil women fighters is that their participation in armed struggle will bring them advantages in future, in a society at peace. This is one of their principal motives for taking up arms.' Obviously another of their fundamental objectives is the independence of Tamil Eelam, thus '[i]n their minds, these two objectives are connected: there will be no equality for women without an independent state' (Schalk, 1994:163). I disagree with what I believe to be Schalk's over-emphasis on future advantages for women as a 'principal motive' for joining the movement, but certainly he is right

that according to the ideology of the LTTE the only way for women to gain equality is through the nationalist movement.

The majority of the women I interviewed said that they had not been aware of issues surrounding women's social conditions, women's rights or equality before they joined the movement; however, all of them have had this awareness raised since being with the movement, and many of them now seem to have a clear commitment to wanting to improve life for Tamil women (discussed in the next section). Interestingly, five of my interviewees did report that they had had some ideas about the social problems faced by women before they joined the LTTE; however, only two of them said that this was part of their reason to join the movement. Sumathi, who writes for the LTTE's women's journal, *Birds of Freedom*, was 14 when she joined the LTTE in 1990. When asked why she joined, alongside seeing many people killed by shooting and shelling and wanting to help achieve 'Tamil rights', she also said that when she was growing up at home there were some 'superstitions' surrounding female behaviour – that girls should not climb trees, go out alone or ride bicycles, for example – and she rebelliously 'wanted to break everything', so she joined the movement. She stated that even at a young age she had had a desire to help 'deliver' women from their problems. She heard about the women cadres in the LTTE and felt 'they are doing everything, so why can't I?' When she finally met some women cadres with their weapons, she knew she wanted to join the movement. Sudarvili said of herself and other female cadres that despite societal expectations, 'we are able to see that the boys have joined the LTTE... so we thought, if they can, why we can't do these things? The whole crowd is not thinking like that, few people are thinking that way, and the people who thought like that have joined the LTTE.' She asserted that 'through our struggle for liberation we are fighting for the women's liberation also.... [N]ot only within the movement, outside also.' When I asked if she had had these ideas before joining the movement, she

answered 'I had these ideas before, but most of the women cadres did not. I had a question why these girls were oppressed by these men'. She hoped to assist the struggle for women's liberation as well as Tamil national liberation but was unsure whether or not she could; once she joined she became convinced that she could do this within the movement.

'Women's Liberation' Within the LTTE

Kumudini Samuel views female armed militants as one group of women who have rejected traditional notions of femininity, but in common with others she notes that '[f]or them the national liberation struggle is the paramount issue; women's subordination within it is not a question' (Samuel, 2001: 196). Slightly more optimistically, Sitralega Maunaguru maintains that

> [a]ll major Tamil nationalist groups addressed the woman question as part of their political agendas. This was framed in a conventional Leftist format, which aimed at first eliminating the barriers for women to participate in the national liberation struggle. In addition, it was argued that women would be equal in a society that would eventually emerge out of the conflict. Even though this is an ideological commonplace, which did not recognize the specific oppression of women within the movement for national liberation, the acceptance of the concept of women's liberation, even in this very limited form, provided an important space for issues relating to gender, power and oppression to be debated by feminists (Maunaguru, 1995: 164).

A lot has been written about the question over the possibilities for women's emancipation and empowerment within the LTTE. Many feminists have questioned the ideology of women's liberation expounded by the movement, challenging its militant and militarist

nature as inherently anti-feminist. Radhika Coomaraswamy asserts that '[u]nless feminism is linked to humanism, to non-violence, to hybridity and a celebration of life over death, it will not provide society with the alternatives that we so desperately seek' (Coomaraswamy, 1997: 10). On the other hand, despite their criticism of the militant groups Hoole et al. admit that '[o]ne cannot but be inspired when one sees the women of the L.T.T.E., two by two, in the night, with their A.K.s slung over the shoulder, patrolling the entrances to Jaffna city. One cannot but admire the dedication and toughness of their training' (Hoole et al., 1990: 325-326). As Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake has poignantly suggested in regard to the varying ways that women's agency has changed and expanded as a result of the war, '[t]he argument that 18 years of armed conflict might have resulted in the unintended empowerment of women... is dangerous and disturbing for those of us who believe in and advocate the peaceful resolution of conflicts arising from social injustice.... We have been wary of analysing the unintended transformations brought by war, of seeing positives in violence, lest we be branded "war-mongers".' (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001: 106-107.) For many feminists committed to peace, this notion has been particularly painful in regard to women combatants; my own deeply ambiguous and unresolved thoughts on this matter are precisely why I undertook this research.

Many people also highlight instances of the LTTE oppressing Tamil women outside the organisation. For example, University Teachers for Human Rights has documented how the LTTE had in its prisons until 1990 about 200 Tamil women, 'held because they were believed to be anti-LTTE and who received brutal treatment at the hands of women Tigers' (Subramaniam, 1997). Similar examples are the alleged LTTE murders of Rajani Thiranagama in 1989 and Tamil poet Selvy in 1991 (de Mel, 2001: 227). Other significant examples are the various attempts by the LTTE to impose restrictions on how Tamil women dress, such as the 1986 statement 'that Tamil women should

keep their ethnic identity in their dress and make-up', asserting that they should maintain the sari, long hair, and the *pottu*. The statement maintained that '[i]t doesn't mean that we are enslaved if we dress according to our tradition.... Women should dress simply, and they should not attract men by their way of dressing.... We are engaged in a struggle for national liberation. But, the changes which have been taking place in our culture will only demean our society' (Maunaguru, 1995: 169). Naturally these dress restrictions are not considered to apply to LTTE women themselves; their defence of this to me was that they wear a uniform within the LTTE that suits the type of work they do, and at home or in peacetime they would wear whatever suits the work they are doing and is appropriate – though many also smilingly admitted that they find trousers more comfortable. Attempts at restricting women's apparel to that which is seen as culturally appropriate have not vanished; in Colombo newspapers I found recent rumours of an LTTE dress code for women in Jaffna. Although my research discovered that the pamphlets released 'suggesting' 'appropriate' clothing for women had actually come out in the Eastern Province and not in Jaffna, they certainly do exist; for many non-LTTE women I spoke to in the east, this was one of their main concerns about the movement. I had a fascinating conversation with two of the women cadres in the uncleared area near Batticaloa about this. Essentially their argument, unpalatable to most feminists, is that these are merely recommendations, not orders, and that they are for women's own protection; Sailajah told me that if women wear tight fitting clothing it will sexually arouse men and 'create many problems'. Similarly, Sumathi said that women wearing immodest clothes 'are only creating problems for themselves'. When I suggested that implying that women bring sexual violence upon themselves through what they wear is extremely dangerous, that all kinds of women wearing all kinds of clothes are raped, and that perhaps instead we should be focusing on changing the attitudes of men rather than policing women's bodies, they agreed in principle but said that it is

very difficult to change men or tell them what to do; it is much easier to change women. I replied that this may well be so, but that does not make it acceptable. When I asked about the stories I had been told by women in Batticaloa of male LTTE cadres cutting the skirts of women wearing 'immodest' outfits, Sailajah vehemently denied this and said it must have been other men trying to discredit the LTTE, as their cadres would never do that. Interestingly, Sumathi added that they are less strict nowadays on this issue; in earlier days they were 'stricter' (whatever that means exactly), but then they spoke to women in the community who told them that they felt the LTTE was restricting their freedom, so they stopped compelling women to wear certain things.

Intellectual changes in women cadres of the LTTE in regard to women's rights

Notwithstanding the attempts to control the thoughts, actions and dress of women outside the movement, participation in the LTTE has definitely brought about significant changes in the roles and actions of the women cadres themselves, and does seem to have radicalised many of them and altered their thinking about 'women's liberation'. Vidyamali Samarasinghe argues that through women's participation in armed struggle in civil war, they also 'become actors in the public arena.' The question is whether this public sphere activity is temporary and transitory, ending with the war, 'or whether the gains they made in times of war could be consolidated in terms of gender equity in times of peace.' She reminds us that 'women's participation in the public arena of the armed struggle is certainly no guarantee that women have finally penetrated into the public sphere of activities on a basis of gender equality' (Samarasinghe, 1996: 217 and 213). Even Adele Ann/Balasingham herself notes that '[t]he overall impact made by the fighting girls on Tamil society is yet to be assessed. It is also too early to predict the future in relation to the position in Tamil society after the war is over' (Ann, 1990). The question of the impact of the

women cadres on other Tamil women and on Tamil society generally, and whether or not their current gains will or can be consolidated in peacetime, are part of my broader research project but cannot be addressed here. Accordingly, I focus only on changes in the thinking of women cadres as a result of their experiences in the LTTE. I do agree, however, with those who argue that in post-revolutionary states 'the priorities of governance and statehood change, and with that the agenda for women may also change. Evidence from other liberation movements illustrates that often times women are politely told to go back into the reproductive sphere and to the kitchen' (Samarasinghe, 1996: 218).

The majority of the women cadres I interviewed (eight of the 13) stated that they had been unaware of the social problems faced by the Tamil women before they joined the LTTE, and as discussed earlier only two of the five who said they had had some awareness had actually joined in part with ideas of achieving liberation or empowerment for women. However, all but one reported being taught in political classes in the LTTE about women's social oppression, and nine of them appeared to now possess a strong commitment to changing women's oppression. Unsurprisingly the depth of their intellectual conceptualisation of and ability to articulate on such issues varied from woman to woman, but the depth of their commitment to women in their communities was unquestionable and humbling – even given the fact that such things as dress recommendations may strike many of us as an unfortunate way of expressing this. In terms of their own personal experiences in the LTTE, four of the cadres discussed social restrictions on women such as not riding bicycles, not going out alone, not going in the sea or on boats; they were all happy that within the LTTE they have had the opportunity to do these things that they were raised to believe were inappropriate or dangerous for women. Krishna and Banuka both mentioned that far from their childhood of being prevented from even riding bicycles, they can now ride motorbikes and drive armoured

vehicles. Krishna described being told not to go into the sea, as it would 'take' her; now she can swim for long distances. She was also told that women should not go on boats as they will make the seas rough; now, of course, women cadres make up a large percentage of the LTTE's navy, the Sea Tigers. When I asked Thamilini if being female made it a harder decision to join the LTTE, she reflected the frequently implied problem of the social construction of gender (though none of the cadres used those terms) when she replied that

> I wanted to join, but that time I was not sure whether I can.... Because we had grown in some other way in our houses.... [A] girl, she is very soft person – we were treated like that. I knew that we have to go to the jungles and we have to fight and we must go alone in the night; I know that I can do that, I want to do... but a small suspicion was in my mind, whether I am capable of doing these things, because of the way I was brought up in my house.... But I was able to see the other military cadres, the girls, who were doing all sorts of things. So then I thought, if *they* can do, why I can't do these things?

She went on to say that

> In our society, they have separated the work for the men and the women, so from the childhood the girl is brought up by a – that you can't do certain things.... Even the girls, the ladies, feels that she can't take some decision on behalf of her, so she needs others to do that on behalf of her. Because she doesn't know herself. You know, we have been brought up in this LTTE movement that we have to take decisions for us; others can't take on behalf of us.

Further, she added that 'now I have the self-confidence, now I don't need anybody.... Now I won't allow any others to take decisions for my life.' She feels that girls and their abilities should be respected by

others, and to get that respect girls 'must develop themselves and they must make others respect them.'

As far as the social problems faced by Tamil women go, many cadres emphasised the need to help women become free and independent, particularly economically independent. Sailajah told me 'the ladies are always depending on others; that is the main problem.' Barathy also said that women should not depend on others; they need to 'live freely and independently' and earn money for their families. Sudarvili maintained that

> 'through our struggle for liberation we are fighting for the women's liberation also. But we want to... free the girls in this country, not only within the movement, outside also. They must be able to – they must become to positions in which they can do the things which have been done by... males in the country.'

Krishna told me that women must be free; when I asked her what 'freedom' meant to her in this context, she replied that

> 'here women do not come forward for anything; they have been asked to keep quiet and do the housework. So... the future generation should not be like that, women must be free, socially and economically and they must have a place, equal rights with men.'

Sudarvili mentioned that especially young widows need to be able to be independent and live alone; the problems of widows, particularly young widows, was a recurring theme. Prasanthi claimed that the LTTE wants 'the women in society also to come forward and do everything – especially the widows and unmarried women, old maids who are still inside the house without working. So their aim is to bring them out and let them get self-confidence and look after themselves'.

Prasanthi works forming women's societies in the Trincomalee area; through these societies they organise sports events for women, put on cultural shows, and encourage women to engage in self-employment; Banuka mentioned people speaking ill of women who attempt to go into self-employment as a severe problem. Interestingly, Thamilvily told me that in the Vanni there are 'various projects we have... for the women, especially women who have been affected.... [There is] an organisation, a project, where women are given training in auto-mechanics... which has been a domain of men. And... we have encouraged them to start an auto-repair shop of their own and they are doing it well.' Three cadres also mentioned dowry practices as a problem – which was a smaller number than I had expected, given LTTE declarations on the evils of the dowry system. Interestingly and problematically, only Thamilini mentioned alcoholism and domestic violence as problems faced by women. Although this is worrying, I also found it intriguing since at the same time I know from what many non-LTTE women told me that the organisation opposes domestic violence and punishes offenders. In the uncleared areas victims of domestic violence report this to LTTE cadres, who deal with it through their de facto judicial system. Rajasingham-Senanayake was told by a young woman in an uncleared area that at the first complaint of domestic violence the abuser is given a warning, at the second he is fined, and at the third he may be put in an LTTE prison (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001: 114). This policy is supported by all the Tamil women who told me about it, including by women who in all other ways are opposed to the LTTE.

Summary and Concluding Thoughts

For the 13 women I interviewed who joined the LTTE voluntarily, patterns emerged in regard to their reasons for joining. Their primary motivations seem to have been: nationalist sentiments and ideas of 'freeing' the Tamil nation; experiences of suffering and oppression

(whether personal or witnessed in their communities), particularly the deaths of loved ones and experiences of displacement; educational disruption and restrictions; and sexual violence against women. Two women also joined in part because of ideas of women's emancipation. While I do not wish to try and make concrete generalisations from such a small sample, especially given the problems mentioned earlier with interviewee selection, I do suggest that the above patterns may be reasonably representative. However, it is important to note that there are likely to also be other more individual reasons connected to poverty for some of the poorer cadres – such as Shanthi, who joined because she was left on her own with no support at the age of 15. It is also important to note that, as the case of 'K' illustrates, conscription is a reality (though possibly less so now than in the past), and it is impossible to estimate how many women this has affected. Although eight of the 13 women reported that they had had very little or no idea about the problems women face in their communities prior to joining the LTTE, all but one are now fairly clear in their minds that the main issues or needs are for women to be independent from others, particularly economically and particularly widows; to be able to do traditionally 'male' jobs and engage in self-employment; and to put themselves forward and express their opinions with self-confidence. Additionally, three women mentioned dowry practices as a problem and one mentioned alcoholism and domestic violence. Finally, some women also mentioned enjoying doing things in the movement that they were raised to think women should or could not do – such as riding bicycles, driving vehicles, going out alone, swimming and going on boats. Nine of the women now have a strong commitment to changing the position of Tamil women, and when asked what they want to do in peacetime they expressed a desire to keep helping to 'develop' women – although all of them want to continue doing this from within the LTTE.

Hoole et al. assert that 'it would be a positive result if a few of those [female combatants] who come out, with a richness of experience and

self-criticism, become a catalyst for the further advancement of the position of women in this land.' They suggest that 'after a decade-long history of the freedom struggle, and with major liberation movements even boasting of armed women's sections, one would have expected tangible cracks in the ideology of Tamil society and some liberating experience for the women' (Hoole et al., 1990: 330 and 323). They themselves are pessimistic about what has actually been the reality, but it is worth bearing in mind that their book was published in 1990 – 12 years ago and only five years after women first began joining the LTTE as combatants. One reason for the pessimism of many is the apparent lack of women in highly placed decision-making positions within the LTTE. Chandra de Silva maintains that although there is a women's military wing and they are well known as suicide bombers, there is no evidence of their participation in policy-making, decision-making or planning at the highest levels (de Silva, 1999: 61-62). Similarly, Kamala Liyanage concludes that women have generally been excluded from decision-making in militarised political movements, with the LTTE being no exception (Liyanage, 1999: 135). Samuel also asserts that despite their strong military involvement, 'no woman was allowed into the patriarchal male echelons of political decision making of the LTTE' (Samuel, 2001: 195). Finally, Radhika Coomaraswamy has said of LTTE women that '[t]hey are not initiators of ideas, they are only implementers of policy made by someone else, by men.... They become cogs in the wheel of someone else's designs and plans.... They are the consumers, not the producers of the grand political project' (Coomaraswamy, 1997: 9).

In contrast to these authors, Bose claimed in 1994 that '[t]hree of the LTTE's ten-member Central Committee, the movement's top decision-making body, are women' (Bose, 1994: 108-109). Thamilini told me that there are currently 12 members on the Central Committee and five of them are women. There is also a separate women-only committee on women's development, with members drawn from

various sections of the organisation. When I asked her about the allegation that women are much more represented in the military activities than in political activities, Thamilini agreed that in the past women were not so involved in the Political Wing, but said that this is changing. She explained that since men have been involved in the LTTE and in the military activities for longer than women, they have had many more opportunities than women to rise to high political positions. However, women are not obstructed from political activities, so once they have developed the necessary capabilities they will 'come and catch that position'. Logically, she told me that

> the males, they have been brought up from society to – as leaders, you know? And only in the females there are few people have been brought up like that, so the amount will be fewer, they [men] will be the majority in these things. But there are [female] leaders here this side [Political Wing] also, but they have to make the others work also, they must bring others to this position. Through the training process – that's happening now.

Although I imagine that many readers will still remain unconvinced that women cadres have much power within the LTTE to direct overall policy, before becoming too despondent it is worth bearing in mind that it seems that there could well be more women in decision-making positions within the LTTE than in traditional political parties either in Sri Lanka or in most Western countries. Reportedly there are a number of women who are now LTTE area leaders and administrators; the Women's Political Wing is growing; and if it is true that five of the 12-member Central Committee are women, at 41.67% that is a higher percentage than the percentage of women Members of Parliament anywhere (barring the Scandinavian countries) and is much higher than usual percentages of Cabinet members.

Liyanage argues that the pattern of women's participation in the LTTE is similar to that of women's participation in liberation struggles in Algeria, China, Eritrea, Namibia, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Palestine and Zimbabwe. As in these movements, the LTTE 'recognised the importance of mobilising women and formed the women's front.... [However,] [s]imilar to most of these liberation movements, the LTTE has considered women's issues as secondary and their assumption has been that the emancipation of women will automatically be achieved by the victory of the struggle.' In reality, the experience of these other struggles has shown that after war ceased, 'women were usually expected to assume their traditional roles or were largely limited to supportive positions in political and public life.' Liyanage asserts, therefore, that 'one is justified in concluding that the LTTE movement has been projected and defined by men particularly by Prabhakaran, executed by men and that women fight to fulfil men's nationalistic aspirations' (Liyanage, 1999: 131-132). Although I would agree that it seems likely that so far the main thrust of the LTTE project has been defined by men, I would not go as far as Liyanage does. It is worth emphasising that women have 'nationalistic aspirations' as well, and women in the LTTE generally view these as of primary importance; it is equally true, however, that their specific nationalist aspirations may sometimes vary from those of men, as may their vision of an independent state. Joke Schrijvers asserts that '[t]he feminist discourse is the only one in which women are defined in their own right, without being linked to the interests of nationalist and ethnic struggles' (Schrijvers, 1999: 328). I would contend, however, that this is equally problematic. Which feminist discourse does she mean? The LTTE women cadres and Women's Political Wing do express a form of feminism – but clearly not the form Schrijvers is referring to. Also, it seems that she is implying that being a woman in one's 'own right' entails being somehow 'unethnicised'; as though concepts of nation and nationalism are unimportant (or should be unimportant) if one is a woman (sisterhood is global?). Many white Western feminists

in countries not affected by nationalism or political violence have been particularly guilty of assuming this; my experiences living in Northern Ireland and researching in Sri Lanka have forced me on a day-to-day, practical level to challenge this. Women involved in nationalist struggles all over the world have shown that in their position, for many the above assumption is not only untrue and impossible, but also undesirable; commitment to the perceived needs of one's perceived nation or ethnic group is viewed as just as important, or more so, than one's needs 'as a woman'. Similarly, the debate over whether LTTE women are agents or victims, liberated or subjugated, emancipated or oppressed strikes me as an unnecessary and unsophisticated binary. Ultimately Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake's phrase 'ambivalent empowerment' seems to fit best. She argues that

> [t]he reality of LTTE women is probably somewhere in-between [this binary]. For while they may have broken out of the confines of their allotted domesticity and taken on new roles as fighters, it is indeed arguable that they are captive both to the patriarchal nationalist project of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran and the history and experience of oppression by the Sri Lankan military. However, to deny these Tamil nationalist women their agency because they are nationalist is to once again position them within the "victim" complex, where the militant woman is denied her agency and perceived to be acting out a patriarchal plot. (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001: 113).

End Notes

1 Although she insisted that it would be fine to use her real first name, I was still concerned for her safety and decided to refer to her only as 'K', as well as withholding the name of her village.

2 All names given for LTTE cadres are their movement names.

3 Barathy told me that as a teenager she thought many times about joining the LTTE, and even went to them a number of times to ask them to accept her. Although many of the women I interviewed who joined around 1990 were extremely young at the time – in fact, all of the five women I interviewed who were only 14 or 15 when they joined had joined in 1990 or 1991 – later on LTTE policy does seem to have partially taken on the criticisms of many in Sri Lanka and the international community about their child recruitment, as Barathy was turned away many times, being told that she was too young. She was told that she could join the movement when she turned 18, but she kept persisting until they accepted her, at 16 – at the end of 1996. However, she added that they did not let her fight in combat until she was 18. This is not to try and deny the fact that the LTTE is still in some areas taking child combatants, and even conscripting some, which makes Barathy's testimony even more interesting. I do not believe that she was lying to me, as if she were trying to hide the fact that she joined when she was under 18, it would surely have been easier to lie to me about her age. Besides, all the cadres I spoke to who joined under 18 were perfectly open about that.

4 Sailajah was the only married cadre I managed to meet, but many of the others were quick to tell me that they are allowed to marry while in the movement, providing they are over the accepted age (23 for women and 28 for men) and have permission. The LTTE even has a body to arrange marriages for cadres. They refuted the 'armed virgin' image of themselves (though unsurprisingly pre-marital or extra-marital sex is unacceptable). I was also told about childcare centres in the Vanni, where cadres can leave their children to be cared for while they go to work or to fight.

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SL1: Thamilvily; interviewed 16 and 26 August 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokuvil, Jaffna. Interpreter: S Pathmanathan. (Partially conducted in English.)

SL2: Thamilnila; interviewed 16 August 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokuvil, Jaffna. Interpreter: S Pathmanathan.

SL3: Thamilachi; interviewed 19 August 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokuvil, Jaffna. Interpreter: S Pathmanathan.

SL4: Thamilini; interviewed 28 August 2002, LTTE Political Wing Head Office, Kilinochchi. Interpreter: M Krishnadevy.

SL5: Barathy; interviewed 28 August 2002, LTTE Political Wing Head Office, Kilinochchi. Conducted mostly in English. (Some assistance from M Krishnadevy.)

SL6: Sudarvili; interviewed 28 August 2002, LTTE Political Wing Head Office, Kilinochchi. Interpreter: M Krishnadevy. (A few parts conducted in English.)

SL7: Krishna; interviewed 6 September 2002, Green Road, Trincomalee. Interpreter: Mrs Somadeva.

SL8: Prasanthi; interviewed 6 September 2002, Green Road, Trincomalee. Interpreter: Mrs Somadeva.

SL9: Banuka; interviewed 14 and 16 September 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokadichcholai, Eastern Province. Interpreter: T Subashini.

SL10: Malarville; interviewed 14 September 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokadichcholai, Eastern Province. Interpreter: T Subashini.

SL11: 'K'; interviewed 15 September 2002, in a northeastern border village. Interpreters: Thilak Ranasingha, Renuka Kalupahana and another (anonymous).

SL12: Shanthi; interviewed 15 September 2002, in a northeastern border village. Interpreters: Thilak Ranasingha, Renuka Kalupahana and another (anonymous).

SL13: Sailajah; interviewed 16 September 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokadichcholai, Eastern Province. Interpreter: T Subashini.

SL14: Sumathi; interviewed 16 September 2002, LTTE Political Office, Kokadichcholai, Eastern Province. Interpreter: T Subashini.

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4

CONCEPTUALISING INTERNATIONAL SECURITY — — WHERE ARE THE WOMEN!

Amena Moshin*

As a woman and student of International Relations I have often wondered and asked myself where are the women in the realm of politics and security, be it at the local, national and international levels. This of course is not to suggest that women are not to be seen anywhere and in any form, the latter two indeed are critical and important. One does see or is made to see a very visible presence of women as 'victims', 'followers', 'supporters', 'comforters', but rarely as agents or actors. Women it is suggested here as will be substantiated later are integral to the processes of politics, peace and security, yet they are invisible from the realm, where the edifice of security is built. Women appear as objects not subjects and their roles have been marginalised and inferiorised. The discourse of security has been built upon values and ethos conventionally understood and accepted as male values and ethos. The presentation attempts to analyse the

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gender bias inherent within the construction of the security discourse. It suggests that the discourse and realm of international security predicates itself upon concepts and ideas that have a distinct gender bias. The discussion below will make this clear.

International Security and Women

The security dilemma has remained the major and unresolved dilemma of international relations. International Relations as it emerged, as an autonomous discipline in the backdrop of major world wars has remained imbricated within the security paradox, as theorists and practitioners of international relations sought to build a security system. Of all the academic approaches to international relations, political realism is mostly closely associated with the worldview of foreign policy practitioners, particularly national security specialists. For the realists paradoxically enough the security of one state is based upon the insecurity of the 'other'. Realism grew as a reaction to the idealism of the interwar period that is the period between the first and second world wars. It pinned its hopes and faith on the values and capability of international law and international institutions to maintain peace and security. The Second World War however shattered these beliefs and idealism was put in the backyard. Realism appeared as the most realistic option to the theorists as well as practitioners of international politics and till date it is the dominant security paradigm.

Hans J. Morgenthau spelt out the bases and principles of this formulation that took its roots from the works of Hobbes, Rousseau and Machiavelli. To the realists the world is characterised by chaos, anarchy and lawlessness and without any international central authority to regulate the state of affairs between and among the states. This, the realists believe is natural and cannot be changed because the cause of this state of affairs is rooted in human (read as man) nature. Man according to the realists is selfish, self-seeking and politically ambitious with an inherent lust for power. Human nature

again has its roots in objective laws and so cannot be an issue of subjective debate or opinion. In other words the above attributes are universal as well as inevitable in human beings. Within such an insecure and unstable environment, states can only ensure their security by increasing and maximising their power. Power according to this school constitutes military power. It entails control, domination and the capability to force another state to do something that it otherwise will not do. According to the realists international politics is a struggle for power, where each state attempts to increase its power in order to protect its national interest. Power and interest are the two key words for the realists. Since each state is attempting to increase its own power so the rational option for any policy maker is to increase its own power and thereby enhance its own security. Politics according to the realists should be thought of in terms of power and it is this concept of power that gives autonomy to the sphere of politics. Morgenthau is acutely conscious of the tension between morality and realism and he attempts to resolve it through drawing a line between the private and public. He counsels the policy makers to keep the national interest in perspective. According to him a state must be guided by reason and rationality, which can be attained through following the realist paradigm, where end justifies the means.

In this formulation state is the reference point of identity of individuals and the state is supposed to provide security to the individuals. Security is therefore tied to the state and since insecurities also emanate from other states within the international system, which is otherwise characterised by insecurity in the absence of any central authority, so maximisation of military power is the key to the security of states. The realists thus attempted to provide a universal and general theory of security. The theories of Balance of Power and Balance of Terror evolved as a consequence of this understanding or conceptualisation of security. Balance of power attempts to attain security through the act of acquiring a balance of forces between and

among states. In actuality however, an imbalance in one's favour is sought for, hence the situation essentially remains imbalanced and insecure, so the armaments race goes on. On the other hand the approach of balance of terror is more psychological in nature. The objective is to amass such a huge arsenal of power that the adversary is deterred from attacking in view of the tremendous loss that it would incur as a consequence of the attack. When the loss from the attack far outweighs the gains, it is assumed that states would be deterred from wars. While balance of power premises itself on conventional forces and power the latter is based upon strategic or nuclear power.

The above conceptualisation of security has a distinct gender bias. According to this framework in order to attain security states ought to pursue a kind of politics that is associated with the conventional understanding of masculinity. Here I want to bring in the notion of gender. Gender is the socially constructed category of masculinity and femininity. Human beings are socialised through the institutions of family, education and society into certain roles and attributes that are regarded as masculine and feminine. The attributes of objectivity, reason, rationality, autonomous, control, and domination are associated with masculinity. Rousseau made a case for this in his book *Emile*. He believed that the "rational man" is the perfect complement for "emotional woman," and vice versa. According to him men should be educated in virtues such as courage, temperance, justice and fortitude, whereas women should be educated in virtues such as patience, docility, good humor and flexibility. He believed that such development of mental capacities would make a man a rational, moral, self-governing, self-sufficient citizen and husband\father and the development of the women's sensitivities will ereate in her an understanding, responsive wife and a caring, loving mother. Such constructions and stereotyping of gender roles have had the effect of creating a hierarchy in gender relations where man and masculinity is privileged in society and politics.

The dichotomy between private and public is also a construction that has privileged men, since the private or domestic is considered to be the domain of women while the public that is the realm of politics or matters of 'high politics' like state, security, war are realms of men. Women thus have been kept out of critical issues and institutions that affect and shape their lives and impacts upon their security through constructions and conceptions articulated through a masculine paradigm. The nation-state, which is the fundamental and basic unit of the international system and the reference point for international security is also a gendered construction.

Nation, State and Women

The nation-state predicates itself upon the conception of a collective identity that is the nation. This collective constructs myths of common origins, history and a set of boundary markers that gives the collective a homogeneous identity and sets it apart from the other collectives. This supposedly homogenous nation interacts with the external world through a political system called the state. This state is again sovereign, independent and autonomous – attributes associated with masculinity. The sovereign however legitimises its power through the nation, hence nation and state are often used interchangeably. This nation or collective in the discourse of nationalism has been likened to a clan or kinship. Authenticity of the clan members is therefore imperative. Women thus become the biological as well as cultural bearers of this nation. They become the property and symbols of honour of this nation. Arguably if woman were so integral to the process of nation construction then one would associate tremendous power and authority with her as well.

This has been curtailed through the construction of the dichotomies between public and private. This divide has its origins in the Greek states, which are looked upon as conceptual models for the western

state. This brought into play a notion of citizenship that relegated women to the domestic sphere. Formation of the state depended on a sexual division of labor to establish and reinforce economic and political structures. Two sets of social relations were established. Female roles revolved around the work of the home and the family; and male social roles extended to the duties of citizens and war and to relations with other city-states. The process of distinction began at the level of family. It is argued here that the private or the domestic, though supposedly the realm of woman is not in actuality a realm where the woman reigns due to the construction of gendered roles and attributes of masculinity and femininity. Women's work in the private sphere is devalued and is not looked upon as productive work.

As the biological reproducer of the nation woman's body has often been controlled by the state through state regulations on reproduction rights and duties. In many instances the state has intervened through family planning mechanisms for the reproduction and growth of nation, through outlawing abortions and providing incentives for giving births. In Croatia in the early 1990s the regime proposed a legislative program called the "The renewal of the Republic of Croatia". It was argued that majority of Croatian families in 1992 had two or fewer children and given the losses of war the nation was on the road to certain extinction. To reverse the process the nationalist statesmen proposed a package of laws aimed at restructuring the family so that more Croatian children would be born and cared for. In other instances the state has controlled population growth through forced sterilisations or providing incentives to women for adopting family planning measures. In Bangladesh under the directives of donor agencies like the UNFPA and the USAID, the state channels most of the development funds to population control, ignoring other vital human development aspects like health and education. Women are the prime targets of population control. This is reflected in the nature of contraceptives supplied and the services rendered by the family

planning clinics. The motivation programmes also target the women. Though sterilisation programs among the men can help in bringing down the population mainly because of the prevalence of polygamy, especially in the rural areas among the low-income groups. At a model family planning clinic in Dhaka city, only three men accepted vasectomy services compared to 750 women undergoing sterilisation and about 10,340 women adopting various clinical and hormonal birth control methods in 1995. In order to motivate women, contraceptives are provided free of cost but the donors do not fund any services for the treatment of health problems caused by contraceptives. The poor and the marginalised women are the targets of the family planning workers who have to meet a monthly target of sterilisation, failing which their salaries are stopped. When women become weak and sick due to the side effects and are unable to perform their household and wifely duties, the husbands either torture them physically and mentally or get married again.

States also go for selective breeding. In Singapore highly educated women are asked to produce children who would be genetically superior as part of their patriotic duty, while poor uneducated mothers were given a cash award of SD 10,000 if they agreed to be sterilised rather than continue to produce their genetically inferior children. Where there is strong pressure to limit the number of children, and where male children are more highly valued for social and economic reasons, practices of abortion and infanticide are mainly directed towards baby girls. Female babies are also the ones more easily available for international adoption. Rigorous family planning measures by states are often due to international pressures linked to international security. A CIA report described the effects of high birth rates as leading to political instability to third world countries, which in turn would cause security problems to the US.

In the name of protecting the honour of the nation, time and again women's freedom has been curtailed. As the bearer of culture she has to carry the burden of being a 'proper woman', which again is a construction. This more often than not puts her in an inferior position to man. Many states even legitimise honour killing when women supposedly cross the boundaries since the nation-state has imposed upon them the burden of being the bearers of the honour of the nation. Thus in 1947 the abducted women on both sides of the borders of India and Pakistan were forced to return to their respective countries even without their consent by the state, though in many cases their families refused to accept them. Susan Brownmiller has pointed out that about 200,000 Bengali women had been raped by Pakistani soldiers in 1971. Yet the 14 volumes of officially documented history of the war of independence carry only a few testimonies of rape. The government had set up a rehabilitation centre in each district for the affected women. The centres however did not keep any records of the affected women. The idea at that time was to rehabilitate these women in the society as quickly as possible. Therefore at present no proper record of the rape victims is available, nor were they ever properly compensated. According to Maleka Begum, who was in charge of a rehabilitation centre in Dhaka, a doctor at the centre had told her that during the first three months of 1972, 1,70,000 rape victims were aborted, and more than 30,000 war babies were born. This list however is not an exhaustive one and excludes the most marginalised women. Most of the war babies were given up for adoption despite protests and pleadings from their mothers. In this context Neelima Ibrahim points out that she had called upon Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman, the Father of the nation to decide about the fate of these children, his response was:

> Send the children, *who have no identity of their father abroad.* Let the children of human beings grow up like proper humans. Besides I do not want to keep that polluted blood in this country.

The attitude of the Father of the nation epitomised the gendered attitude of the state and society. It reified the privileged position of men in society and more importantly over women. At this point one may however ponder over several critical questions, like where was the voice of the women who had lost and suffered most during those nine months? Who gave the state the right to snatch away the child from her? The state never made any attempt or created any space for these women to rehabilitate themselves psychologically. Values of society meant values of men, where in order to grow up like proper human beings one needed the identity of ones' father; why do we then glorify the mother figure in our nationalist construction; are we then talking of a mother sanctified and legitimised by a male?

Susan Brownmiller has pointed out that the Bengali men were totally unprepared to accept these women; some of them were even rejected by their own family members. The authenticity of the nation had to be preserved. The women's voices were silenced. Yet in the process of nation building they had played their due role, that is they were there as symbols not actors.

This construction of women's image as the honour of a nation, it is argued here has largely contributed to the adoption of rape as a systematic war strategy. Raping a woman's body is equated with dishonoring the enemy's property and honour. It boosts up the morale of the soldiers who are able to inflict this upon the enemy property and honour. At the same time it demoralises the forces whose women have been violated. In the process however the woman's voice is silenced as it is considered a national shame and women and society have been socialised into considering the discussion of this as a taboo. The women thus suffer doubly for while death in wartime is valorised rape is stigmatised. Wars often have been fought in the name of protecting women and children, who are considered weak and vulnerable. In conventional understating and the parlance of security discourse men

appear as the protectors and women the protected. This it is suggested here is a myth created to perpetuate the hegemony of men over women and keep them out of the security parlance. To discuss this the concept of citizenship is analysed below.

Women and Citizenship

Citizenship is the agency through which an individual becomes the member of a state. It supposedly ensures certain basic rights for the individual in return for taxes, obedience to law and loyalty and patriotism during times of war. The individual citizen's rights to life, security and liberty are to be guaranteed by the state. The notion of the individual citizenship was centered on the idea of individualism. It was expected that such a person would be a rational being, able to make moral and political choices independently and autonomously, that is a citizen with agency. The citizen of the modern state was also expected to be objective and rational. Historically, however as suggested earlier the notions of an individualised, autonomous, agentive, rational and objective person were associated with maleness, while subjectivity, personal care, dependence and emotionality was associated with femininity. Hence initially the notion of a citizen was premised on masculinity and extended only to men. Women were excluded from citizenship as they were considered dependent, irrational, subjective and part of the private, rather than independent, autonomous persons in their own right. Women were excluded from the right to vote, stand for election, and hold public office. However with time the notion of universal franchise developed. At present nearly every state recognises the equality of all citizens before law and does not uphold the differentiation at least in theory. This however is not to suggest that women have full access to their citizenship rights. Culture and religion have often been used to curtail women's citizenship rights. They have been forced to remain indoors (right to movement), not to speak up for their rights (right to speech),

not allowed to marry the person of their choice. In many instances even the right to vote has been prevented through fatwas. In other words women's social, political and economic rights have been violated by appeals to family, clan or even nation. The citizenship laws are also mostly gendered, for instance in Bangladesh citizenship is determined through paternity; in other words it is mediated through a male.

The sacrifice of one's life for the sake of the nation is considered to be the highest form or duty of citizenship. A patriot is the most revered citizen. This again is a masculine notion for in conventional wisdom war is men's domain while women are associated with peace. This has been so religiously hyped up by the media and instilled in the popular imagination. In recent times the Kargil war fought between India and Pakistan brought in its wake a series of Bollywood films loaded with the image of a patriot, the ideal citizen, the man going to war; while women were portrayed playing the typical 'proper' women as supportive mothers, emotional and dependent lovers and wives yet sending the brave men to battlefield for the protection of the honour of their motherland, women and children. I still remember a song played repeatedly in the Pakistan radio sung by male singers in 1971, with the mocking that war was not a game for women, the reference was indeed to Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Yet under her leadership India was not only able to establish herself as the hegemonic power in South Asia but also tested her first peaceful nuclear explosions in 1974. The Indira doctrine setting the parameters of a South Asian security doctrine was also an offshoot of the Indira regime.

The association of women to peace is an essentialist one. The language of compromise, flexibility, accommodation usually associated with women and femininity is in effect the language of the marginalised, of those who have been kept outside the structures of power, and whose lives have been a struggle both within and without,

as one of the rape victims of 1971, whom I had interviewed had so poignantly put it to me, " how else could I have contributed to 1971 when I myself had lost everything, when life has been a war for me all through". Her husband who had left for the Indian state of Tripura in 1971 never came back to her, but she stayed back all alone in the house protecting it for her children who had also fled following the war. Her children including a grown up son returned after the war was over to the house so zealously protected by their mother. In another instance while the male children had left the widowed mother (husband had been killed by the Pakistan army in 1971) she stayed alone in the house for six long months again protecting the house for her children. Quite boldly she told me that she could not leave the house, as she had to protect it for her children. I leave it up to you to draw the lines between the protector and the protected in these instances. Women in fact in some instances in 1971 in Bangladesh and also elsewhere in the world, had even slept with the enemy to protect the freedom fighters and members of their families from the wrath of the military. Yet these sacrifices have been silenced in the name of honour. Wars are games of men; hence their roles and sacrifices appear in the pages of history. Women appear as footnotes as supporters or symbols. Such constructions and conceptualisations not only fail to recognise and acknowledge the active role played by women in the security parlance, but also relegate them as inferior in need of protection, thus strengthening the gender bias in the security discourse. Cynthia Enola forcefully points this out as she argues maleness alone has not been deemed sufficient to guarantee the formation of militaries that states could trust. In all the societies for which we have information, ideas about what it means to be male- that is, masculinity, not mere biological maleness – have been considered by the militarisers to be the sine qua non of effective and trustworthy soldiering. Militaries are composed of men as a result of quite conscious political policies. State officials – themselves primarily male – create an explicit link between the presumed cultural and physical

properties of maleness and the institutional needs of the military as an institution.

It needs to be emphasised that the security discourse has reinforced the asymmetrical gender power position in which women have been structurally subordinated It is therefore no wonder that despite being the worst victims of war no woman has ever been included in the committees responsible for framing the code of conduct for war, nor are they made members of the formal peace process or negotiations, the exceptions being Ireland, Palestine and recently Afghanistan. It is important to include women within these processes and integrate their experiences and perspectives for the sake of sustainable peace. Empirical studies of the post Yugoslav and Israeli-Palestinian conflict have demonstrated the linkages between nationalism, militarisation, misogyny and domestic violence. It has been observed that the violence used against men make them violent at home, commonly referred to as "protest masculinities."

Relocating the Women

Feminist scholarship has challenged the marginalisation and exclusion of women's perspectives and experiences from the security discourse. Arguably they bring in a more comprehensive notion of peace and security not because they are naturally peaceful but having remained outside the structures of power and being inferiorised and burdened with managing day-to-day security, they have critical insights about these notions. Women have been challenging the existing paradigms since long. Jane Addams spoke at Hague during the World War 1 of the need for a new internationalism to replace the self-destructive nationalism that contributed so centrally to the outbreak and destruction of World War 1. Resolution adopted at the conclusion of the Congress questioned the assumption that women and civilians could be protected by war instead it called for general disarmament.

Feminist scholarship has challenged the realism and state-centricity of the security discourse. A reformulation of the above has been sought from a feminist perspective with an emphasis on equality, justice, structural symmetry in gender relations and elimination of all forms of structural asymmetries and violence. It is argued that there is a linkage between patriarchy, war and violence against women. While there is no one feminist approach yet certain common themes and arguments run through the scholarship. Feminists challenge the connection between objective laws and human nature, instead they argue that objectivity is culturally defined and is associated with masculinity. Human nature is both objective and subjective and both man and woman possess these attributes, so objectivity cannot be attributed to man or more specifically masculinity. Feminists also believe that national interest is multidimensional and contextual. It cannot be linked to power and international politics cannot be looked upon as zero-sum game where the loss of one is the gain of the other; rather the interconnectivity and interdependence of problems like environment, poverty, nuclear warfare, terrorism demand cooperative behaviour constant dialogue and negotiations between and among states. The notion of 'power over' has been contested and sought to be replaced by 'collective empowerment' or 'power in concert'.

Feminists also question the assumption of 'autonomy' of politics not only on grounds of it being grounded in masculinity but also because it draws a line between the public and private. Claiming that militarism, sexism and racism are interconnected, most feminists contend that the behaviour of individuals and the domestic policies of states cannot be separated from state's behaviour in the international realm. For feminists violence is not a discrete or distinct event, rather it is a continuum and ought to be analyzed at all levels. Women's perspectives on security thus attempt to move out of the state-centricity of realism and calls for the analysis of violence at various levels, individual, national and international. Only by seeing the

interconnectedness and attempting to eliminate those sources of violence and insecurities can one envision to have security. Feminists along with peace researchers emphasise upon human security where the basic needs of individuals are secured.

Feminists have also challenged the linkage between national security and protection, by pointing out that in wars and conflicts women are the worst victims. According to a UNHCR report women and young girls constitute at least 80 per cent of the world's refugee population. They suffer the brunt of man-made violence frequently twice. First their search for security and protection may be triggered by situations of violence and conflict; secondly they may suffer violence during their flight, upon arrival in a camp or even during the process of settlement in the camps. Rape it has been argued earlier has been systematically used as a war strategy. Yet a gendered notion of citizenship based on war and patriotism prevails. Feminists have challenged this equation of war with masculinity and service to state. It has been suggested that women should demand the right to fight and join the armed forces as combat soldiers to do away with the myths constructed around militarism, masculinity, protector and so on that help to sustain and reify the structural subordination of women. The association of women with peace, as argued earlier has also been questioned. Such conscription it is suggested would enable women to be the actors and agents instead of passive victims and subjects. Others however have quite rightly, I would argue suggested that instead of making a case for conscription of women into armed forces one should question the meaning of service to one's country. Instead of a notion of citizenship that glorifies dying for one's country as the noblest and highest form of duty, one should make a case for a notion of citizenship that has the courage to sustain life.

Women's notions of peace and security are indeed based on life sustaining premises. They have strongly argued that security of one

entity cannot be built upon the insecurity of others. Violence is multidimensional so security has to be multidimensional as well. It has to be a human approach that weaves into its fabric the voices of both man and woman as equal partners. Such perspectives are important not only from a human point of view but also because it questions the appropriateness of a state-centric military approach in addressing the problems and kind of insecurities that the world faces today.

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5

ON SECURING WOMEN'S SECURITY PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH ASIA

Imtiaz Ahmed*

Ma Durga[1] or Goddess *Durga* is revered in South Asia, mainly for her divine power and the legacy she carries with her from time immemorial. I have no intention of reflecting on *Ma Durga's* divinity, but the legacy she holds to date is extraordinary. Indeed, one such legacy is the power of making us perceive things in a precise manner. I must quickly add, however, that this is as much South Asian ingenuity as *Ma Durga's*. Let me explain.

I have always been awed by *Ma Durga's* ten hands and three eyes. I have repeatedly asked myself, what do the ten hands and the three eyes represent? What message does this unique formation carry? A sage I met by chance was quick to point out that *Ma Durga* must be looked at in absolute motion, ten hands doing ten or more different things with the middle eye representing the mind's eye. The complex

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nature of things was somewhat unnerving, but then there was nothing exceptional in what is now largely called the *South Asian tradition*.

In fact, Mahatma Gandhi had an interesting way of interpreting the fate of Draupadi, a woman of immense strength and character in the epic, *Mahabharata*. As Gandhi noted:

> Draupadi had five husbands at one time and yet has been called 'chaste'. This is because in that age, just as a man could marry several wives, a woman (in certain regions) could marry several husbands. The code of marriage changes with time and place.
>
> But from another point of view, Draupadi is a symbol of the mind. And the five Pandavas are the five senses brought under its control. And it is indeed desirable that they are so controlled. Since all the five senses were under the control of the mind and had become refined, the mind (Draupadi) can be said to have wedded the five senses (Pandavas) [Gandhi, 1987:392].

Incidentally, if the five senses (Pandavas) are viewed separately and in isolation, there remains the possibility of them being distorted and exploited for one's narrow interests, including making the epic, which like Gandhi I also take to be essentially 'non-violent,' advocating violence at critical or selective moments. A quick citation of a story in the *Mahabharata* will make this clear.

Amongst the Pandavas, Yuddhisthira, the eldest brother, was more a philosopher, while Arjuna, the third brother, was an astute fighter. Once during practical training, Drona the teacher, asked Arjuna (while the latter was aiming at a bird with his bow and arrow): 'What did he see?' Arjuna, the astute fighter, without a moment's hesitation, replied: 'The head of the bird!' But when Yuddhisthira was asked the same

question, while being pointed at a bird resting on the tree: 'What did he see?' Yuddhisthira, with all his love for wisdom, answered: 'The bird, the branch, the tree, the leaves, the blue sky...' and on and on he went.

A selective focus on Arjuna tempts one to conclude that 'the head of the bird' is all that we need to see if we are to kill the bird, while a selective focus on Yuddhisthira invites anarchy with no guarantee of getting the bird at all. Conversely, the bird or the reality remains ill defined with Arjuna, while Yuddhisthira in looking at the bird captures the reality in all its complexity. In the aftermath of the *kurukshetra*[2] and in the wake of the Kurus landing in Heaven while, save Yuddhisthira, all the Pandavas condemned to Hell, at this point, it is not difficult to understand which of the two approaches is more meaningful and requires greater attention, but if we are to extend Gandhi's contention, the two approaches (Arjuna and Yuddhisthira) in relation to the mind (Draupadi) still remains partial. And there lies the merit in Gandhi's interpretation, in essence highlighting the immense capacity of the mind to think, create and act not only differently but more importantly in multiple ways and that again simultaneously. Both plurality and creativity are otherwise embedded in the complex nature of things.

Much of this wisdom, however, is lost with modernity, whose critical features have always been *separateness* or *parcellisation* as well as *linearity*, and by implication, *mono-logic*, in the understanding of reality [Hall and Gieben, 1992]. Colonial discourse has further entrenched their hegemony over South Asian minds. In fact, colonial modernity, apart from contributing to a mechanical and fragmented understanding of 'security,' has marred the prospect of *securing* woman's security in South Asia. There is a critical need to reformulate our perspective and have it made more relevant to South Asian conditions.

There is another element in both *Ma Durga* and Draupadi that is less discussed, and that is their immense power to remain *silent* or work

out things *silently* or even suffer *silently*. Ma Durga, with all the weapons of the world at hand, kills the demon almost silently. In fact, she is never sculptured as a woman on the verge of speaking or shouting. She is usually idolised tight-lipped. And what about Draupadi? Did she not remain "chaste" by *silently* comforting all her five husbands and that again, all at the same time? Silence is intrinsic to the nature of both *Ma Durga* and Draupadi, the legacy no less haunting.

There is some merit in the statement that South Asian women generally experience violence in *silence* [Ahmed, 1998]. This refers not only to the personal silence of the woman while experiencing violence but also to the pervasiveness of (invisible) structures reproducing violence, incidentally with the woman (again, silently) suffering the most. Both in combination contribute to women's insecurity in South Asia. Indeed, in so far as the silencing of the woman is concerned, it is reproduced at three different but inter-related levels. At each of these levels women are not only subjected to (*man-made*) *misrepresentation* but also, and more importantly, reduced to *unrepresented* beings. A closer exposition will make this clear.

Silencing the woman as a minority member

This refers to the marginalisation of the minorities in the wake of over-governmentalism and the corresponding reproduction of the modern 'majoritarian' state.

By the fag end of the 20th century the mode of governance could be described as either 'regimented' or 'democratic.' Apart from having both military and civilian compositions, the former regimes are generally of two distinctive types, authoritarian and totalitarian.[3] Democratic regimes, on the other hand, are less varied, with all having civilian control, although a certain amount of precise shades and

colours are always there. What distinguishes regimented regimes from the democratic regimes is the fact that the latter is more conducive to the goals of human freedom than the former. Such should not however lead us to conclude that there are no commonalities between them; the most significant of them is the *will of the majority*. Indeed, modern states, whether regimented or democratic, are all modern 'majoritarian' states, which are principally organized and reproduced on the principles of *nation* and the *nationalities*.

In the case of regimented regimes, such organisation is more deliberate and often crude, marked by a policy of using and reusing things and ideas to 'unify' the majority section of the people nationally. Such things and ideas range from religion to race on the one hand, on the other hand, from governmentalised schooling to social engineering [Ahmed, 1993 and 1994]. But once these things and ideas mature, directed as they are towards the majority of the people, they tend to alienate those who do not fit the 'unifying' categories. The minority communities thereby come to life!

In the case of democratic regimes, however, the organisation of majoritarianism is more related to electoral politics, where parties, albeit somewhat structurally, are forced to woo the majority section of the people to win elections. This has critical implications for a country, which is pluralist and has a number of historically constructed 'ethnic,' 'sub-national' or 'minority' groups.

In the first place, if the configuration of the parliament is based on the country's demographic strength, the parliament is sure to remain pro-majority community. Indeed, political parties would be less inclined to put up candidates who are less representative communally or ethnically.

A pro-majoritarian electoral politics, however, could also give rise to *illusive* representation. This could come about in a situation where the

minority community opts for a majoritarian candidate, hoping that such a candidate would be politically more effective in view of her or his community-centered access in the majoritarian parliament. This is an interesting development, and it is particularly found amongst the heavily deprived 'tribal' communities. What this practice does is that it effectively reproduces and further solidifies the power of the majority community. The very recognition of the fact that the majoritarian candidate will have greater access in the majoritarian parliament only strengthens the argument that the said parliament is nothing but 'pro-majoritarian'! As such, the fate of the 'tribal' community remains fated as before.

Mahasweta Devi precisely came to this conclusion while narrating the fate of tribal women in West Bengal [Ghatak, 1997]. According to a survey carried out under her supervision in 1984, Mahasweta found that West Bengal was a major recruiter of tribal women who come from adjacent areas to work in the brick kilns. Their contractors, however, exploit them regularly, not only by paying them far below than the government-fixed minimum wage but also by way of harassing them sexually. No political party, however, is interested in taking up their cause because, as Mahasweta contends, "they come for about 5 months a year, and do not vote in the state" [Ghatak, 1997:xxii]. Put differently, a non-representative community (and in this case, more so without a vote) can hardly attract a majoritarian-centered representation.

Silencing the woman as a majoritarian member

There are two sides to this, one directly related to political *representation*, while the other related to the *environment*. Let me focus on representation first.

The current system of representation in South Asia, particularly in the light of the actual vote cast, is structured towards delegating powers to

a person who, while representing only a minority section of the people, decides the fate of the majority section of the people. While this may be true for all democracies, including that of the West, the situation in South Asia has reached a pathetic level. India's case is the oddest of all. In terms of vote cast one Indian Member of Parliament (MP) represents on the average around 600,000 people, while in terms of total population the MP represents on the average over 1.7 million people. Put differently, representation is structured to reproduce the power of the dismally few over the excessively large.

The greater the gap between the representatives and the represented the more sinister is the power of corruption in representation. In fact, largely as a result of this gap, whether in India or elsewhere in South Asia, 'intermediaries' (ranging from *mastans*, corrupt officials, hired goons, and the like) end up having the *real power* as both MPs and the people, in many regions for different reasons, become dependent on them. Representation must reckon with the fact that in most cases it is neither MPs nor the people but self-seeking intermediaries who do the representing! Unless a way is found to correct this situation, many voters, particularly women even while being in a majority, will remain *under-represented* by the predominantly *male-centric* majoritarian politics. But this is only one side of the issue.

Women are also the most vulnerable lots when it comes to environmental hazards. There is a growing literature that suggests that much of the environmental problems that we now face result from *man-made structures* [Kritz, 1990; Shiva, 1989; Durning, 1989][4] or *male-centric* developmental agenda [Ahmed, 1999]. Take the case of water development and its impact on women, for instance. As Ajaya Dixit, Ashis Nandy and I tried to highlight while working together on *A South Asian Manifesto on the Politics and Knowledge of Water*:

> Historically, women in South Asia have played a critical role in water conservation. As water-bearers, women had specialised knowledge of conservation, purification and treatment of water. The role of South Asian women in water conservation and water management has, however, shrunk with modernisation. Indeed, development has brought the subject-matter of water management under the hegemony of "masculine reductionist science," as one scholar-activist calls the pathology, and helped displace women from water conservation and water management. This displacement, and the silence and powerlessness it has enforced on women, has distorted the basic configuration of the cultures in this part of the world and impoverished them [Ahmed, Dixit & Nandy: 1997:6].

Water development has otherwise contributed to a state of 'water insecurity,' particularly to the bulk of underprivileged women in South Asia. The same is the case with 'land' or 'cash-crop' development, which soon led to 'land insecurity' and at times 'food insecurity' to a sizeable section of the people and that again, the vulnerable lot were mostly women [Ahmed, 2000a]. In fact, modern *maldevelopment* has largely contributed to a precise state of environmental insecurity in the South Asian region. The victims here are from both majority and minority communities, although it must be added quickly that, given the organisation of majoritarianism, often the victims are first from the minority community, only to be followed by the members of the majority community. It may be mentioned that most of the victims end up becoming displaced persons at home or environmental refugees across the border, which only tends to reproduce both intra- and inter-state stresses and conflicts jeopardising further the security of women.

Silencing the woman as woman

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan came out with an interesting poster with the following statement:

**MEN MAKE UP ONLY HALF OF PAKISTAN FAMILY
WOMEN MUST HAVE EQUAL SHARE IN
POWER PRIVILEGE PROSPERITY**

No where else is this statement found wanting and relevant than in the question of political representation. In fact, as one Pakistani commentator maintained that 'non-representation of women in legislatures, coupled with the lack of institutional support for women and hesitancy on the part of the judiciary, has resulted in the total absence of gender perspective in legislation' [Jilani, 1995:15]. Pakistan's case, however, is no exception. In fact, in South Asia, women, although consisting of nearly 50 percent of the population, have on the average only 6.6 percent representation in the parliament.

Even this 6.6 percent is partly illusive, since women representation in many of these countries is based on reservation or nomination. In the case of Bangladesh and Pakistan, for example, the relatively high percentage is due to their respective parliament having reserved seats for women - 30 in Bangladesh and 20 in Pakistan. Without the reserved seats, female representation in Bangladesh and Pakistan comes down to barely 1.3 (1991) [Chowdhury, 1994:23] and 1.6 percent (1988)[5] respectively. Currently, however, there are no reserved seats for women in both Bangladesh and Pakistan parliaments. If we deduct women's reserved seats of both Bangladesh and Pakistan, the South Asian average of women representation figures only 4.7 percent. This is far below the 30 percent target set by the Economic and Social Commission of the United Nations, and that again, by the year 1995 [Chowdhury, 1994:21]!

Indeed, the *under-representation* of women in South Asia is somewhat of an irony, particularly in the backdrop of the fact that in four of the seven South Asian countries women politicians became Prime Minister or President, and had immense power at their disposal. The list is impressive, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh), Sheikh

Hasina (Bangladesh) and Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka). There is a general impression that these women became leaders because of family connections, and in most cases, because their husbands or fathers were killed. While there is some merit in this argument, it is also true that all of them rose to prominence through sheer hardwork and by showing political ingenuity of their own. Moreover, even if we accept that family connections were responsible in their becoming leaders, it does not save them from the criticism (particularly with all the power at their disposal) of why they fail in increasing women's representation in parliament.

Merit for greater women representation, however, does not lie in demography alone. Women have virtually been signaled out as targets of (masculinized) *violence* (from sexual to domestic). The following table sums up well the state of violence against women in Bangladesh:

Violence against Women in Bangladesh (1995-97)

Forms of Violence	1995			1996			1997		
	Incide-nts	Killed	Case File	Incide-nts	Killed	Case Filed	Incide-nts	Killed	Case Filed
Rape %	240 (38.2-2)	25	138 (21.9)	262 (49.1-2)	27	152 (26.3)	753 (45.4-1)	62	460 (30.0)
Dowry %	124 (19.7)	66	82 (13.0)	77 (13.3-4)	38	45 (7.7)	177 (11.5-4)	109	109 (7.2)
Fatwa* %	23 (3.7)	5	15 (2.3)	22 (3.81)	1	5 (0.8)	28 (1.83)	2	5 (0.3)
Acid burn %	38 (6.05)	0	27 (4.2)	51 (8.84)	0	27 (4.6)	130 (8.48)	3	77 (5.0)
Domestic Violence %	203 (32.3-2)	180	146 (23.2)	55 (9.53)	50	27 (4.6)	234 (15.2-6)	204	120 (7.8)
Suicide %	N/A -	N/A -	N/A -	110 (19.0-6)	-	29 (5.0)	211 (13.7-7)	-	93 (6.3)
Total %	628 -	276	408 (64.6)	577	116	285 (49)	1533	380	864

One could clearly see that the number of incidents reported had virtually doubled in less than three years, from 628 in 1995 to 1533 in 1997. This, however, includes only those cases that were reported and therefore is much less compared to actual occurrence of violence against women. Both the fear of being ostracised socially and retaliation by the perpetrator has prevented many women victims from reporting the violence.

In the context of the above forms of violence and its toll, it may be pointed out that the difference between physical and mental violence, although significant, is fast becoming irrelevant in some of the victims' lives. To give one example, in 1997 there were 211 suicides committed by Bangladeshi women,[6] almost all of them in their young or middle age. This is particularly significant because even in Japan, which probably has the highest number of suicides in the world (21,679 in 1994), most of the suicides are committed by Japanese male (over 67 percent) and that again in their old age (over 51 percent) [Ahmed, 2000]. Indeed, in Bangladesh often a woman commits suicide (no doubt, a physically violent death) to overcome her mental agony arising out of an experience largely imposed by a masculinised social structure. The latter includes male-dominated *shalish* (civil/village court), incest, sexual harassment in the streets, etcetera. Let me explain *shalish* a little more.

It consists of informal village mediation councils, which are generally called upon to negotiate, mediate and pronounce judgement on social matters, from land dispute to adultery [SHRB, 1994:56-58]. Often the sentence by the *shalish* includes stoning, flogging or death. What is critical, however, is that (male) community and religious leaders invariably *man* such *shalish*. *(Male) representation* then is no less a factor in the organisation and reproduction of violence against women.

The case is no less different in other countries of South Asia [SHR, 1996; Das, 1996:188-202; Jabbi & Rajyalakshmi, 1993:84-95]. In the case of Pakistan, for instance, the practice of *karo kari*, that is, instant killing of the person suspected of adultery, is biased more against women than men. As the following statement, put forward by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, indicated:

> [*Karo kari*] in practice victimised the women much more than the men. The custom continued to be practised...in parts of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab.... In Jacobabad district alone an average of up to two killings of the kind were said to have occurred everyday.... The police had a big hand in the continuation of the gruesome custom as also of its compounding abuse. They received their connivance money. The going rate in 1995 was said to be Rs. 150,000 to Rs. 200,000 per killing [SHR, 1996:146].

Furthermore, women are doubly victimised in so far as *rape* is concerned. This is particularly true when the rape is related to race riots or nationalist wars. The first victimisation comes as a result of their bodies being violated. In fact, during race riots or nationalist wars, 'women of the oppressed group,' as one commentator noted in connection with the rape in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, 'become vulnerable targets for the males of the dominant group' [Maunaguru, 1995].[7] Many women in Karachi, Bombay, Kashmir, Jaffna, Chittagong Hill Tracts and many other (race cum sub-nationalist) conflict-ridden places in South Asia have become victims of such violations.

These women are victimised for the second time when they become the *unrepresented* lots in the very cause for which they have been raped. Cynthia Enloe has highlighted this issue:

> Rape and prostitution have been central to many men's construction of the nationalist cause. They have permitted men

> to hear the feminized nation beckoning them to act as 'her' protectors. The external enemy is imagined to be other men, men who would defile or denigrate the nation. *Too often missing in this gendered nationalist scenario are the voices of the actual women who have suffered rape or have been compelled to seek an income from prostitution.* Thus, Bangladeshi women who had been raped during the war of secession from Pakistan were rarely asked to help build the identify of the new nation, though news of their rapes had the effect of mobilizing the anger of many Bangladeshi men. Likewise today, women who have been raped are *more symbols than active participants* in countries such as Sri Lanka and Kashmir (emphasis mine) [Enloe, 1993:239].

This only implies that even when women become targets of violence and contribute towards the construction/protection of the nation; the nation makes no effort to free itself from the practice of *male/ misrepresentation*. The nation it seems is very much in the business of *silencing* the women!

Concluding remarks

There is a good indicator of the kind of change that is required. Let me cite one incident that I had a chance to experience as an Election Observer in the 1996 national elections in Bangladesh.

On the Election Day my colleagues and I came across a bizarre scenario. On a trip to a polling centre we found that suddenly almost all the male voters were running helter-skelter with some armed police chasing them. On enquiry we found that the cadres of two political parties clashed at the polling centre and that the armed police were called in to tackle the situation. But interestingly in the midst of all that chaos the women voters refused to quit. They all stood firmly in line, one holding the other, unwilling to leave the place of voting. I could not

hide my curiosity and asked them the reason of their action. Almost in unison they replied: "Sir, if we leave now, *the men* will simply cast all our votes." The supposedly feminist statement otherwise signaled a remarkably newer dimension in the Bangladesh election. In fact, women voted as much as men in both 1996 and 2001 national elections,[8] resulting in an overall turnout of about 70 percent [Thiagarajah, 1996]![9]

Much of the credit, however, goes to the NGO or non-governmental movement in Bangladesh, like the role of Grameen Bank, BRAC, Proshika and other NGOs, all of which had agenda for women's development. In fact, 95 percent of their members are women and all are involved in various programs, like micro-credit, health and sanitation, informal education, and (surprisingly with Grameen) even providing service to the rural people with mobile cellular phones! Collectively the programs succeeded in *empowering* the women. But then, this alone is not sufficient.

In our everyday attempt to empower women, we tend to forget the position and activities of men. In fact, we take pride (for instance) at the increased level of women's education, employment, mobility, etc., and conclude from there that women are being empowered. But what about men? Is our empowerment of women simultaneously disempowering men? Or, are we taking it for granted that the empowerment of women would lead to the voluntary disempowerment of the *purush jat* (masculine society)? But is it not true that the structures that have for centuries organised and reproduced patriarchy are still there? Do we have an agenda to dismantle them?

Two things I believe are very much present here. One is the empowerment of women in an isolated and separate manner (nothing surprising given the power and influence of modernity!) and the other is the very idea that men are already empowered, so women must also be empowered. But power and empowerment are relative terms. Two

uneven, but related, things cannot simultaneously be empowered and made equal. To put it differently, if there are topdogs, there must be underdogs, and vice versa. If you remove the topdogs, the underdogs will cease to exist. But this is a prescription for revolution still without a successful precedence! On the other hand, if you try to remove only the underdogs, leaving the topdogs intact, the topdogs will only become "super-topdogs" [Ahmed, 1995]! This is precisely the situation we are all in, particularly in South Asia.

There is yet another dimension to the problem. "Woman" as a universal category has been problematic for sometime, particularly in redressing some of the problems faced by women of socially marginalised classes and groups. While the tension between *purush* (empowered man) and *mohila* (disempowered woman) is a valid one, equally important is their division on class lines, between *bhadramohila* (women of upper class) and the so-called *o-bhadramohila* (women of lower class). Unless there is a clear cut recognition on the part of *bhadramohila* of the plight of *o-bhadramohila* and that again, ***o-****bhadramohila* of marginalised groups little can be done towards the task of disempowering the masculinised structures and correspondingly in overcoming women's state of insecurity.

I do not have a ready-made answer as to what we would require to overcome the problem. A multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary approach with plurality and creativity at the centre, indeed, of the *Ma Durga* variant, is the least we can ask for given the complex nature of things. In this context (and still more for the sake of brevity and convenience), let me group the most urgently required activities into two, *political* and *intellectual*.

At the political level, women representation in the national parliament must be brought up at par with that of men. Since almost half of South Asia's population are women, women representation in the parliament should not be less than 50 percent. This could be done in two ways.

One is by making mandatory the number of women candidates for all the political parties contesting the election. The second is by having a fixed number of reserved seats for women with the provision of direct election. It may be mentioned that in Bangladesh in view of protracted women's movement on the issue there is already a general consensus amongst the major political parties in favour of the second approach with sixty-four as the likely number of such seats. The proposal however is yet to be tabled and approved by the parliament. Increased political representation must not be viewed as a panacea to all the ills suffered by women, but will surely be a milestone towards the task of empowering women and disempowering men.

At the intellectual level, a serious campaign ought to be initiated at schools, colleges, Universities, radio, television, print media, billboards, and all other places that we can think of, that would have the effect of demasculinising the state and society and of simultaneously reorganising the relationship between men and women. Only then possibly we will able to cultivate a place where women will no longer suffer from insecurity.

But can these be accomplished *silently*? If South Asian *tradition* is any guide there is no reason to answer in the negative. I guess this is where ingenuity will have to play its part the most, transforming *silently* women's silence into formidable power of powerlessness. Since history is replete with examples of the latter kind (Buddhistic, Gandhian, Havlac's anti-Sovietism, and the like), there is always the hope that exceptionality would cease to haunt women's emancipating struggles, making them in turn a part of the creative endeavours of human civilisation.

End Notes

1. In Hindu mythology, one of the many forms of Sakti (the goddess), and the wife of Siva. Hindus consider her as a goddess.

2 The battle field where the Pandavas defeated the Kurus.

3. There is sharp difference between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The former, in the backdrop of being a 'weak state,' relies heavily on coercive machineries, while the latter enjoys 'blind consent' of the people and the state is not necessarily weak. Of course, in the land of blind, a person with one eye is the king!

4 There is also a growing (counter) literature, which downplays the negative impact of environment, arguing that the 'environmentalists' have deliberately blown the thing out of proportion or have put forward a worst-case scenario [Deudney, 1992; Singer, 1992; Gray & Rivkin, 1991]. In confronting such views, Jeremy Leggett made an interesting observation:

> In evaluating military threats throughout history, policy response has been predicated on a worst-case analysis. The standard military yardstick must also apply to environmental security [1992:33].

5. Four women were directly elected in 1988. If we add this four with the 20 reserved seats for women, it would mean that there were altogether 24 women representatives in the 237-seat parliament in 1988.

6. In 1993 some 6000 women! See [SHRB: 1994:55].

7. Amy Friedman's comment on rape is noteworthy here: Rape is a military strategy used to humiliate and demoralize an opponent. Since women are a symbol of honor in many societies, they are not the only targets of rape.... As a form of torture, men are often forced to watch while their wives or daughters are raped. In such circumstances the humiliation of the woman and helplessness of the man are the desired results [1992:67].

   For a related understanding, see also [Agger, 1992; Uyangoda & Biyanwila, 1997].

8 This is, however, based on subjective assessments and pre-polling surveys, for there is no official record of the actual votes cast on the basis of gender. Lack of such account, however, is somewhat surprising, for women always vote in separate booths and is therefore not a difficult task to perform. For pre-polling surveys, see the surveys conducted by PPRC (Power and Participation Research Centre), Dhaka in 1991 and 1996.

9 2001 estimate is based on the author's interactions with the members of the various local election monitoring bodies.

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6

MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF (IN)VISIBILITY IN LATE COLONIAL BENGAL

Mahua Sarkar*

Introduction[1]

In recent decades there has been an explosion of scholarship on women in India. However, as a survey of this body of literature quickly reveals, much of it is focussed on Hindu women. In contrast, studies of Muslim women are noticeably scarce. What is more, when Muslim women do appear, they seem to be overwhelmingly portrayed as "oppressed" and "backward". Such images of Muslim women as victims are also common in contemporary popular discourse in India. Even when Muslim women participate in public debates, as after the Shah Bano controversy in the mid-1980s[2], or more recently around the issue of instituting a Uniform Civil Code–their agency is usually ignored. What looms large in both mainstream academic and popular discourses in contemporary India is their apparent difference (read:

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backwardness/conservatism) from the ideal modern (i.e. Hindu middle class/upper caste) women.

If most studies of Muslim women in India today represent them as passive victims, nationalist historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is all but silent about them. It is as if with the end of the Mughal era, Muslim women simply disappear from public discourse and they do not re-emerge as subjects of official history until well into the twentieth century. Hindu women, on the other hand, were constantly the focus of debates between the Hindu orthodoxy, the British government, the reformists, and later the nationalists throughout the nineteenth century.[3] So whatever happened to Muslim women in colonial India?

A common assumption underlying this silence about Muslim women is that very few among them wrote anything in late colonial India which merits attention[4]. And the most frequently invoked explanation for their lack of public involvement is, of course, their religion.[5] Recent research, however, reveals that by the beginning of the twentieth century, a fair number of Muslim women in British India were writing. Their contributions in the form of women's journals, articles in many leading periodicals of that time, short stories, poems, autobiographies, travel accounts–all of which went into changing the positions of Muslim women within the home and outside–have been considerable.[6] Yet, it is practically impossible to find any mention of Muslim women, or their contributions in Indian nationalist, or even post-Independence history. The recorded history of women in pre-Partition Bengal, for instance, is overwhelmingly a narrative of the reformist experiments undertaken by a small minority of mostly *Brahmo*[7] and some Hindu women who actively participated in the modernising projects of the new "liberal" elite.[8] Until recently, the efforts of early Muslim women writers such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein[9] (1880-1932), or Sufia Kamal [10](1910-1999), published by a number of periodicals spawned by the vibrant

late colonial material and cultural economy of urban centres such as Calcutta and Dhaka, have largely remained unnoticed.[11] Needless to say, the intellectual and reform efforts of many other accomplished Muslim women in other parts of colonial India have gone similarly unnoticed.[12]

Recent work by scholars such as Gail Minault and Sonia Amin has addressed this silence surrounding Muslim women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the focus in these studies has been mostly on rendering "historical" what, in the words of Joan W. Scott, has hitherto been "hidden from history".[13] Consequently, identity formations among Muslim and Hindu women in late colonial India appear as parallel processes that can be apparently documented separately. And while these studies provide a wealth of information that was previously unavailable, they do not necessarily explain why the many accomplishments of early Muslim women intellectuals and activists were written out of normative history in the first place.

This paper is an attempt to understand the ways in which gender and racially defined communal ideologies worked simultaneously to deny Muslim women even the limited visibility granted to Hindu/*Brahmo* women within a Hindu-dominated hegemonic nationalist discourse, and to produce them either as invisible, or as silent victims, even when they wrote/spoke. As I argue here, the representation of Muslim women as "backward/victimised" were intimately related to the production of the category modern "ideal Indian woman" as Hindu, upper caste/middle class[14] and the category "Muslim" as predominantly male, violent, dissolute and "medieval" in late colonial Bengal. These images of the "backward/violent" Muslim and the "modern/liberated" Hindu woman in turn, underpinned the reconstruction of the "effeminate *babu*"[15] (Hindu middle class men) as "civilised", "liberal" and hence, capable of leading the emergent nation.

Finally, the paper draws attention to the central role played by early *Brahmo*/Hindu women writers in producing Muslim women as the "backward" *other*, and hence, in bolstering their own image as "liberated/modern".[16] I will argue that while the literary productions of middle class Brahmo/Hindu women have been much lauded as signs of "progress" and "enlightenment" among the Bengali *bhadrasampraday*,[17] little attention has been paid to their complex ideological functions within nationalist discourse.

Discourses of representation should, of course, not be confused with "material realities".[18] As I mentioned above, not all Muslim women were silent victims; nor were all middle class Hindu women "modern" even according to the definition of modernity privileged by nationalist discourse in Bengal. The focus of the current paper, however, is not on *correcting* the problem of invisibility/victim-image of Muslim women in nationalist discourse. Instead, the intent here is to understand the discursive practices that produced that invisibility, and to locate the material contexts in which such discourses were embedded.[19] Elsewhere, I have dealt in some detail with middle class Bengali Muslim women's own efforts to forge identities against the grain of dominant representations at the end of the nineteenth century.[20] Here, I merely concentrate on untangling some of the links between the invisibility/victim-image of Muslim women, and the specific visibility of both Muslim men, and *Brahmo*/Hindu women within a hegemonic Hindu nationalist discourse in late colonial Bengal. In other words, this paper concerns itself mainly with an important part of the discursive context that framed the early intellectual and reform efforts of Muslim women writers and social reformers in the twentieth century.

The empirical focus of this essay is on colonial Bengal; however, the problem of invisibility of Muslim women it addresses–admittedly within a limited context–was certainly not unique to Bengal.[21] The paper takes feminist theories of the state and nation as its point of departure.

However, it also brings the theoretical insights of Black and Third World feminist critiques to bear on the problem of double exclusion of Muslim women produced by intersecting discourses of gender, community (religious, in this case), and nationalism in late colonial Bengal. In the second part, the paper uses articles from several Bengali periodicals that were circulating in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to show the ways in which Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular were constructed in the Hindu/*Brahmo* nationalist imaginary. Here, I also reflect on the relationship between this economy of representations and the social, economic, and political formations that produced it. The paper ends with some thoughts on the implications of Muslim women's relative invisibility within both feminist and post-colonial scholarship in India.

Family-Nation-Woman

Feminist scholarship in recent decades has repeatedly pointed out that women's integration into the modern nation-state system has historically followed a path fundamentally different from that of men.[22] According to feminist readings of the Social Contract theory, men's original political rights in the public sphere, derive not from their rights as "free-born" sons, but from masculine rule or the *husband's unquestioned sexual access to his wife's body* in the private sphere. And it is this "God-given" sexual right exercised over women within the family that defines men as "individuals" or "citizens", and women as their *other*, the fundamentally dependent subjects.[23]

The feminist argument about the connection between women's subordination within the private sphere and men's claim to political power can be profitably applied to the study of anti-colonial nationalisms. One could argue, for instance, that in a colonial context, which by definition violates the "natural freedom" of colonised men, gaining legitimacy within the private or inner/spiritual realm of the

family/nation takes on a certain poignancy for anti-colonial nationalist men. In the context of colonial India, for instance, forging a modern nationalist culture thus involved the re-formulation of precisely this inner sphere and its institutions such as education, language, and especially the family. And, of course, re-forming the family necessarily meant scrutiny and change of women's positions within it.[24] The ideal woman of nationalist imagination was, therefore, not necessarily the invisible subject confined within the bounds of the family in colonial India. A series of highly contested reform efforts put her at the very centre of public discourse throughout the nineteenth century. She was expected to "modernise" herself in order to be a fitting emblem of the emergent (Hindu) nation.[25]

However, for all the changes that women's lives underwent in nineteenth century Bengal, in the final analysis their roles *were* scripted to meet the needs of a male nationalist politics, specifically the twin exigencies of vindicating Hindu men and culture. The reforms in the nineteenth century were ultimately meant to prove that Hindu men were capable of being "modern" and "civilised", not to allow women to be independent of men. As the debates around issues such as higher education for women in the last two decades of the nineteenth century show, the only context in which women would be allowed visibility and agency was under the guardianship of men, and to further the nationalist cause in some way. Any agency shown by women that fell outside these acceptable limits was liable to be ridiculed, denounced, and ultimately given short shrift within nationalist historiography.

Between Women

Feminist scholars have taken universalist pretensions of nationalist discourses to task by making exclusions (or inclusions) based on gender visible as a constitutive element in the process of nation-

building, and the definition of citizenship. However in their efforts to foreground the importance of gender, feminist theories have sometimes homogenised the divergent experiences of different groups of women produced by the mediation of factors other than gender. In recent decades, Black and Third World feminists have made powerful arguments against the definition of women's oppression purely in terms of gender. Here, I would like to highlight three important insights coming from this internally differentiated, but still loosely identifiable body of literature that are of crucial importance to the present paper.[26] First, as many of them have pointed out, the experience of being a woman is necessarily mediated through the *simultaneous* workings of factors other than gender, such as race, class, nation, or sexuality.[27] Second, Black/Third World feminists insist that gender, racial, or class oppressions (or privileges) do not just co-exist, but that they are in fact *mutually constitutive*.[28] As they see it, treating these oppressions as parallel, obscures the compound exclusions faced by poor women, or women of colour.[29] Third, and perhaps most importantly, Black/Third World feminist theories argue that gender, racial, and class oppressions/privileges are *relational* in nature.[30] As Kamala Visweswaran puts it, women become "women" not just in relation to men, but also in relation to other women.[31] According to this understanding of identity-formation, then, the construction of the "self" is inextricably linked to the definition of an "other".[32]

Unfortunately, the relational and contingent nature of identity is mostly ignored in studies of women in India. It is quite common, for instance, to treat the "problems" of different classes/communities (religious or otherwise) of women as distinct objects of enquiry; comparisons of the "status" of one group of women to that of another are also not uncommon. But it is hard to find attempts at systematically relating the "backwardness" or "oppression" experienced by one group of women to the "privileges" enjoyed by another. Gender exploitation is widely defined as a problem of men dominating women. Without in

any way minimising that particular equation, I would like to turn our attention here to the problem of unequal relations between different groups of women in colonial India.

In the nineteenth century, the more "liberal", mostly English-educated sections of the new Hindu middle class embarked on the difficult programme of creating a national culture and history that supposedly originated in a classical past. However, the "myth of golden age of Indian womanhood", which was at the very centre of this new history, foregrounded the image of the "Aryan" (upper caste Hindu) woman, not that of the enslaved "*Vedic dasi*".[33] The new Indian woman of nationalist imaginations, fashioned after the figure of the "Aryan" woman, had to be educated and modern; her creativity, however, was to be confined to the realm of the family. Women's participation in any activities outside this social space in performance, religious preaching, or the labor force would mark them out as deviants and prostitutes.[34] Thus, in colonial Bengal, for instance, poor women who had to seek work outside the domestic sphere, and could not possibly meet the standards of refinement and chastity required of the *bhadramahila*,[35] found themselves simply written out of the new nation's normative history.

Class and caste were not the only mechanisms of exclusion, however. In late colonial Bengal, yet another set of unequal relations which remains mostly unexamined obtained between Hindu and Muslim women. Feminist scholars of colour would contend that it is not possible to understand representations of Black women and their sexuality in the Americas without considering the corresponding constructions of White women as chaste. As I see it, it is similarly impossible to fully appreciate the figure of the Muslim woman represented as victimised, invisible, and immoral without considering the simultaneous foregrounding of the Hindu elite woman as the *adarsha bhartiya nari*.[36] I will further argue that this hegemonic

nationalist discourse also produces "*Mussalman*" as a violent, and almost exclusively male category by making Muslim women invisible. In other words, it simultaneously genders muslim-ness, and renders Hindu (racialises?) the category "ideal Indian woman".[37] But first, a few words about the socio-economic, and political contexts, which both gave rise to and were in turn shaped by these discourses of representation, are in order.

Hindu Constructions of Muslims

By the mid-nineteenth century, the new Hindu middle class in Bengal had clearly established its position as the indigenous elite in the spheres of both business and education; by all accounts, Muslims were not yet part of this process of middle-class formation.[38] As one author puts it, the nineteenth century "intellectual revolution" in Bengal, and the social reforms that came in its wake were mainly the achievements of a particularly "enlightened" section of this new middle class; Muslims had little to do with this "renaissance".[39] Consequently, public debates over reforms in Bengal—as reflected in the pages of a slew of Bengali periodicals and newspapers which appeared from the mid-nineteenth century onward— were mostly preoccupied with issues pertaining to Hindus. Muslims did not participate in these debates on *Sati*, widow remarriage, or the systematisation of Bengali as the appropriate medium of instruction; they took to the print media much later.[40] Yet, interestingly enough, by the end of the nineteenth century we find these periodicals run by Hindus replete with examples of disparaging representations of both Muslim men and women. How can we explain this sudden interest among Hindus in defining Muslims as the "inferior" other? The answer, I believe, lies partly in shifts in British discourse about Indians, especially from the 1870s onward.

In 1872, the colonial government published the first census reports, followed by settlement reports in an attempt to enumerate and

categorise Indian populations. In these reports, the British made a crucial distinction between the "foreign-born" *ashraf* or supposedly "authentic/original" Muslims, and the *atrap* or "low-caste converts" from Hinduism. According to these official accounts, the *atrap* apparently formed the bulk of the Muslim population in colonial India. In order to prove the original "hindu-ness" of the majority of Indian Muslims, the British introduced the ethnographic scale of measurement (Cephalic index), thereby further intensifying an already racialised discussion. W.W. Hunter's characterisation of the *atrap* as "fanatic" and "jihad-seeking" in an influential book published in 1872 further consolidated the picture of a population, hostile to British interests.[41] It also produced the majority of Muslims in India as both low-caste, "no longer Hindu" (read/Hindus who no longer want to be Hindu/traitors), and "inauthentic Muslim", thus creating pressures among Muslims and Hindus alike to calcify identities that were relatively fluid until then. Religion, thus, emerged as a complex combined code for class, caste and race in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in colonial India.[42] It also became a vital axis around which "loyalty" to the (Hindu) nation would henceforth be measured.

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw a marked change in British attitudes towards Indians in general. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, in which Hindus and Muslims came together in a spontaneous expression of hatred and mistrust for the British, consolidated in the eyes of the colonisers an essential "Indian-ness" that was irrational, untrustworthy, superstitious, and intrinsically, racially *different*.[43] To the British, one of the most important signs of the primitiveness of Indian men, and by extension their incapacity for Reason and progress, was their tendency to have a plurality of wives.[44] The availability of new "knowledge" about the invisible "dark *zenanas*", produced by the increasing numbers of British women who came to India after 1857, further undermined the "manliness" of Indian men in

colonial discourse. Even the western educated Hindu *babu*—the erstwhile trusted allies of the British —were increasingly ridiculed as "effeminate" in colonial discourse. By the 1880s, the British could no longer count on these "little brown Englishmen" to help them rule in a foreign land as they became more politically conscious and vocal. Consequently, the *bhadralok*'s[45] western ways, so encouraged by the British earlier in the nineteenth century, began to appear "unnatural" amidst hardening beliefs about the intrinsic inferiority of the "Indian".[46]

The Hindu *bhadralok*'s perceptions of their own manliness also suffered as both profits from land ownership, and their hold over foreign and local trade, dominated respectively by the British and the *Marwaris*[47], declined significantly at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, the *bhadralok* found themselves more dependent on administrative and professional employment under the colonial government than ever before. By the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially after the first partition of Bengal (1905-1911), even this last bastion of economic security was threatened by swelling numbers of educated Bengalis, among them members of a slowly developing Muslim middle class. The increasing interest in representing Muslims as the "inferior other" at the end of the nineteenth century should therefore be read as part of the Hindu middle class's attempts to establish/salvage its legitimacy as leaders of the nation within a rapidly shifting discursive and material context. As we shall see presently, the contemporary literary efforts of the Hindu *bhadramahila*, that I concentrate on here, must also be understood as fulfilling a complex set of ideological functions within this same context of flux and uncertainty.

The publication of vernacular periodicals and newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is typically considered to be part of the intellectual awakening of the Bengali middle class. In the light of the preceding discussion, however, these periodicals appear to

be much more than the intellectual coming-of-age of a colonised people. Together, they represented an important space in which the idea of India as a national community could be imagined and experienced simultaneously by a growing vernacular readership.[48] They also provided a discursive site in which battles over defining the ideal Indian woman (symbol of the nation) and man (the normative citizen-subject) were fought. As the following discussion will show, fledgling elements of right-wing Hindu political rhetoric—so common in contemporary India—can already be found in the pages of popular periodicals run by the most educated and "enlightened" sections of the Hindu/Brahmo *bhadrasampraday* –both men and women—in late colonial Bengal.[49]

Of the four periodicals I quote from here, three — *Antahpur, Mahila*, and *Bharat Mahila* – had women editors. The articles taken from the first two were published at the turn of the nineteenth century; those quoted from *Bharat Mahila* were all published in 1913. The fourth, *Bamabodhini Patrika*, a monthly periodical meant explicitly for women, was established as early as 1863.[50] Each of these periodicals was chosen because of its explicit interest in women's issues, and because women regularly contributed to them.[51] Apart from the four periodicals mentioned above, I also draw on the *Nabanoor*—one of the early influential periodicals published by Muslim intellectuals, which was in circulation between 1903 and 1906.

A close reading of the articles, written mostly by Hindu and *Brahmo* women at that time reveals certain common tendencies.[52] First, Muslims are overwhelmingly portrayed in these articles as unscrupulous, debauched, and abusive—in short, an uncivilised "*jati*"—a word that translates variously as "caste," "race," "community" or "nationality".[53] Second, the real aim of these articles seems to be to explain the "fall" of Aryan/Hindu "civilisation" from its "glory" in a supposed "classical" antiquity to a period of "medieval" backwardness;

Muslims are introduced into these discussions mostly as agents of this "tragic downfall" of Hindu civilisation. Third, the authors, who were mostly "liberal" in their outlook, frequently pick on very specific institutions such as *pardah*[54], child-marriage, and polygamy—which were at the heart of hotly contested contemporary debates—and blame the Muslims for having introduced them to "India". This manoeuvre served the dual purpose of both vindicating the essential "humanism" of "Hindu culture" in the eyes of the British, and strengthening their own arguments regarding the illegitimacy of such practices in the struggles against the Hindu orthodoxy. For instance, an essay published in 1891 in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, claims with perfect certainty that the institution of *pardah* was not even known to India before the arrival of Muslims.

> It was in emulation of this Muslim practice, and to save themselves [or their women] from the reckless exploitation of Muslim rulers that Hindus gradually adopted the practice of *pardah*.[55]

In another article, which appeared a decade later in a women's magazine in 1902, themes such as nostalgia for an Aryan (read/Hindu) past, hatred for Muslims, and the projection of the modern idea of an "Indian nation" on to a mythical, timeless, past find forceful expression. Note also the use of the word *"jati"* to signify innate difference in this case. As the reference to Europeans would suggest, the difference being invoked here is racial difference.

> Today when we talk of civilised *jati,*[56] we usually refer to inhabitants of Europe and America. But how old is this civilisation in England and America? Indians had reached the highest level of civilisation much before [the Westerners]....At that time...many women were equal to men in learning and thinking. Women used to participate in academic discussions with men in public forums....Mussalman... attacks and

> Mussalman rule put an end to the flow of progress in this country, and it fell into the clutches of moral degeneration and miserable times. [The Mussalmans] indulged in all kinds of debauchery. They also practiced seclusion of women....[57]

The theme of degeneration under Muslim rule, be it moral, political, cultural, or social, was common enough at this time. As the following excerpt from an article written by a male author shows, accounts of a "glorious Hindu history" often came with prejudicial statements about Muslims. It is also worth noting that the Muslim subjects foregrounded in all these "historical" accounts was always male and tyrannical, an object of only fear and hatred.

> By the 15th century, Bengali literature....which had already reached a certain maturity, was... wiped out by the destructive practices of oppressive Muslim [rule]. If the destructive policies of Muslims had not ruined it, Bengali literary tradition would certainly have been acknowledged as both an ancient and a great tradition. So many invaluable manuscripts have been lost under the torture and oppression of Muslims....[58]

Clearly, the author sees Muslim rule only as destructive and subjugating. And from where did these authors derive their ideas? They cite various "historians," interpreters of *Vedas*, and of course, both Orientalist and other European scholarship—which was accepted as the most authoritative source on India's history. Thus, in the closing years of the nineteenth century *Bamabodhini Patrika* carried the following translation of a speech given by Mr. Bethune almost fifty years earlier at the inaugural function of the Bethune School,[59] ostensibly in support of the claims made by contemporary Hindu authors in its pages:

> The practice of secluding your women and their present ignorant state are not sanctioned by your ancient [Aryan]

> society. I believe that it is in emulation of the conquering Muslims that this practice started here....The women of your sages and of the nobility enjoyed considerable freedom...[60]

Where did Mr. Bethune get this information that allowed him to speak with such certainty about a *Vedic* past? We do not know. Most of the writers apparently were unconcerned with the authenticity of these sources, or the claims they made. It was quite acceptable, fashionable even, to openly air negative opinions about Muslims in late colonial Bengal, without having to furnish supporting evidence. There is considerable debate, for instance, surrounding the beginnings of *pardah* as an institution in the subcontinent. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati,[61] who was widely known as an exceptional scholar and social reformer of that time, believed that the practice of secluding women was already in place in what is India today as early as the sixth century BC.[62] Not one of the authors quoted above, however, even as much as engaged this debate. A few Hindu authors did protest against this tendency to fabricate histories to fit the increasingly dominant story about India's past. In an article titled "*Gotadui Katha*" (A Few Words) published in 1904, Nirmal Chandra Ghosh commented on the unfair representations of Muslims by Hindu authors. He pointed out that many articles, which come out in monthly magazines, are presented in the guise of history, but in fact have little to do with "reality".[63] However, Ghosh seems to have been in the minority.[64]

From numerous such articles which were published at that time, it appears that the only history that the Hindu Bengali nationalist elite would allow Muslims in India was one of shame, of immorality, of misrule, and finally of defeat by a superior power. It is as if the Hindu intelligentsia of nineteenth century Bengal was entirely in denial about the traditions of secularism, rationalism, and non-conformity of pre-British Muslim India.[65] What is more, the category "Muslim" is not only vilified, but also almost always masculinised. The dominant trend

at the end of the nineteenth century seems to have been to blame "Muslims" for inventing all oppressive practices against women, thereby absolving Hindus of any responsibility for the most severely criticised aspects of "Hindu society".

The Zenana and the Woman Question

And how were Muslim women represented? In a recent article on the writings of Englishwomen on Indian women Janaki Nair has discussed the importance of the *zenana*—the "cavernous depths of 'idolatry and superstition'"— as a trope in colonial discourse on India. As she argues, the *zenana* had come to be practically synonymous with "Indian womanhood" and women's "oppression". Given the centrality of this trope in colonial criticisms of "India's culture", it is not hard to comprehend why self-professed "liberal" Hindu/*Brahmo* writers, men and women, would be keen on distancing themselves from the institutions of seclusion or *pardah*, and polygamy that the *zenana* symbolised. It is also easy to see why they would want to pin the invention and widespread adoption of these "primitive" practices on Muslim rule. However, following Nair I would argue that for Hindu/*Brahmo* women, representing Muslim women as "hapless victims" of lustful Muslim men fulfilled two other important purposes. First, by portraying Muslim women as "sexual servants"[66] unable to resist Muslim men, and hence somehow weak, both morally and physically, Hindu/*Brahmo* women highlighted their own emergence outside the home as chaste, strong mothers/consorts. More importantly, it provided them with an opportunity to "count" their "blessings" as members of the "dominant community", rather than advance a thorough criticism of their own continued subjugation by Hindu/*Brahmo* men.

By the end of the 19th century, Hindu and *Brahmo* women from educated "progressive" Bengali families were participating

enthusiastically in the project of (re)writing history. Not surprisingly, many of the articles written by them at this time focus exclusively on women; other essays deal only with Muslims, and are full of negative allusions to "dissolute Muslim men". Muslim women, however, are rarely mentioned in these articles, except in oblique references in relation to Muslim men. When they do appear, mostly in the writings of Hindu/*Brahmo* women, Muslim women are almost always portrayed as helpless victims of male oppression on the one hand, and their own moral, sexual ignorance/weakness which allowed such oppression in the first place, on the other. For example, one article, published in 1903 in a periodical for women claims:

> "Each *badshah*, *nawab* or *amir*[67] would keep hundreds of wives imprisoned in the inner quarters....One man could do anything that pleased him,...he would keep hundreds of helpless women enslaved in dark prisons[68]—what terrible exploitation, what injustice!"[69]

For all her apparent compassion, the author here clearly distances herself from the masses of "helpless women", who appear strictly as sexual beings, and hence by implication, somehow inferior. In another essay titled "Child Marriage and Seclusion", published around 1901, the author Shyamasundari Debi actually spells out the "difference" between "backward" sexually exploited *other* women, and "liberated" women like herself. According to her, in societies that are against female education and "liberty", and advocate *pardah*, women tend to have "loose morals". She then goes on to cite "Muslim society" as an example of such a society. Syamasundari Debi's article was so well received within *bhadralok* intellectual circles that it actually won an award.[70]

This attempt on the part of "modern" Hindu/Brahmo women to distinguish themselves from "other" women marks many of the articles written at the turn of the nineteenth century.

In yet a prize-winning essay, which appeared serially over ten months in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Mankumari Basu, one of the more accomplished, well-known, and respected women writers of late nineteenth century Bengal, discusses the "situation of Indian women in the past hundred years." Mankumari was an educated woman, a poet. Yet her essay features the same predictable figures of the accomplished Aryan woman, the tyrannical Muslim ruler, the weak Hindu men, and the British as saviours from the clutches of Muslim rule. It is remarkable how she effortlessly equates "Indian" with Hindu, so that Muslim rule itself becomes yet another incarnation of colonial rule. Through this narrative manoeuvre, the story of Hindu middle class women becomes the story of "Indian" women. Muslim women are clearly not a part of this national imaginary that Mankumari and her middle class/upper caste Hindu contemporaries shared. However, although Mankumari does not explicitly mention Muslim women in her essay, I would argue that their presence is still palpable. Consider the following statement about the beginning of the Bethune school, for instance:

> At that time there was much agitation around the issue of women's education in this country. Many men, who realised that Mr. Bethune was...providing education to women with the help of Hindu pundits, in an atmosphere in which there was no fear of contact with the daughters of *lowly*, and *dishonest* people, sent their daughters and sisters to school.[71]

As I discussed earlier, by the third quarter of the nineteenth century ideas about the low-caste origins of most indigenous Muslims, and by extension, their "innately untrustworthy", even "violent" nature had been authenticated by colonial discourse.[72] It is thus fair to assume that in the above article, Mankumari is probably referring to both low caste Hindus and Muslims when she talks about "lowly and dishonest people" against whom the Hindu *bhadrasampraday* defined itself.[73]

One could go on, but I will only cite one more set of examples of Hindu/Brahmo women's perception/representation of Muslim women from the turn of the century. In 1903, *Mahila*–a women's periodical—carried a provocative essay by a then unknown Mrs. R. S. Hossain, a Muslim woman. The essay, titled "*Alankar* or the Badges of Slavery", was a severe criticism of gender inequality in which Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain compared the gift of jewelry, the ultimate sign of a husband's affection, with chains of bondage. The essay shocked and infuriated progressive *Brahmo* and Hindu women, many of whom responded angrily in writing. In one article, the author wrote

> It seems that the author wants to see wanton behavior amongst women. Instead of womanly modesty, grace, gentleness, devotion, [and] the willingness to serve... [she] wants to see the development of a harsh, abnormal independence....[74]

Almost everyone who responded felt that women ought to be "governed" by their husbands, and that "too much freedom" was not good for women. As another woman commented,

> Accepting one's subordination to one's husband is not slavery, it is a woman's [most prized] ornament....I don't know what kind of a woman would equate serving one's husband with slavery....A woman must always be subordinated to her husband, there is nothing wrong with that....[75]

These assertions of women's "natural subordination" to men clearly show that the authors, all of whom were "recuperated" and "modern" female subjects who enjoyed the privilege of both voice and visibility outside the *zenana*, were nonetheless fundamentally uncomfortable with the idea of women's independence. What is even more interesting, however, is that a majority of the respondents sought to explain away Rokeya's criticism as a kind of rabid reaction precipitated

by the extreme exploitation that Muslim women were subjected to within "Muslim society", rather than seriously engage her criticism. As the editor of *Mahila* wrote,

> For various reasons, women and daughters in Muslim families have to put up with many different forms of torture and hardship from their menfolk....Perhaps this is why [Rokeya's] attack on them has somewhat crossed [accepted] limits. But...not all men are...against the education and overall progress of women....In fact many among the *bhadralok* [educated/civilised men] are quite in favour of such changes.[76]

By invoking the familiar images of extraordinary oppression faced by Muslim women, the author refuses to deal with the implications of Rokeya's trenchant criticism of women's collusion in perpetuating gender and sexual exploitation for a more critical understanding of Hindu women's position. Nor was every article quite as tempered in tone as the editorial quoted above. For instance, one respondent attacked Rokeya for her apparent "unreasonableness":

> The way in which the Muslim sister...has painted men as cruel and selfish...I can swear that no *bhadramahila* can agree with her....I don't know about the Muslim community, but there is quite a wave of advancement amongst Hindu women throughout Hindu society these days. In India, women are treated as goddesses by Hindus; they worship women....If the Muslim sister could demonstrate even one improvement...[that she suggests in her essay] with her own life, then many of the problems of society would be solved of course. When will this terrible practice of *pardah*, so common in her community, stop?...It is so ridiculous to cover one's beautiful body entirely with an ugly veil such as the *burqa*[77] ....[It is] grotesque.[78]

But is it really true that women's oppression was no longer an issue among the Hindu *bhadrasampraday*? Or did Rokeya's criticisms touch upon an issue that did not bear scrutiny? How can we account for the stark contrast, for instance, between these assertions of women's exalted positions in Hindu society, and the descriptions of abject misery of the "high caste Hindu woman" denounced so eloquently in the contemporary writings of Pandita Ramabai?[79]

The irony of course is that contrary to what her critics assumed about the "oppression that she must have faced as a Muslim woman", Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein had a happy, if short marriage. After the untimely death of her husband, Rokeya, who herself had never attended school, spent the rest of her life struggling to help women, particularly Muslim women, achieve education and self-sufficiency, even within the context of *pardah*. What is unfortunate, however, is that while Rokeya's Hindu critics were quick to pity Muslim women for their "backwardness", they were still unwilling to share their social space and privileges with Muslim women. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, fifty years after the Bethune school was started, it was still inaccessible to Muslim women.[80]

Recent scholarship on colonial Bengal suggests that although reform efforts of elite Hindu/*Brahmo* men in the nineteenth century benefited women, equality of the sexes was never part of the reformist/ nationalist agenda.[81] In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, once some of the more obvious oppressions faced by women were removed, the *bhadralok* became increasingly uncomfortable with the prospect of further reforms that could affect the private domain, especially their control over women.[82] As Kamla Visweswaran has argued, the reaction of the *bhadralok* must be understood not just as opposition to colonial interference in the "inner autonomous" realm of the nation, but also as a move to contain women's agency.[83]

The articles I discuss above were written in this climate of growing hostility toward the prospect of women's independence. The visceral responses to Rokeya's criticism of women's continued subservience—economic and sexual—must therefore be read as the panicked reaction of elite women who had gained certain privileges, symbolic or otherwise, through their membership in the dominant class and community at the expense of the possibility of gender equality. Making Muslim women "visible" as oppressed and ignorant allowed these elite women to flaunt their own relative privileges, even as it rendered "invisible" their own continued subservience to men. By focussing on the supposed "greater misfortunes" of *other* women, Hindu/Brahmo women hid, perhaps even from themselves, their own collusion in foreclosing the troubling question of women's equality that was superceded by the putative greater cause of national independence. Thus, it is not hard to see why a majority of the Hindu *bhadramahila*, for whom education was a way to ensure acceptance by educated husbands, found Rokeya's call to "self-sufficiency" threatening, perhaps even incomprehensible.[84]

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the ideas about *Bharat* (India) as a nation, and its essential hinduness seem to have condensed further in the minds of the Hindu middle class. As a survey of essays published in a prominent periodical, *Bharat Mahila* (Indian Woman) from 1913 shows, most of the issues discussed[85] were all focused on the experiences of Hindu/Brahmo women. And if the articles from the turn of the century seemed anxious to establish the "superiority" of Hindus, the tone of the articles in 1913 seem to be one of quiet confidence. Muslim women are almost never mentioned in these articles, as if such explicit comparisons are no longer necessary. Thus, for example, in a report on the *Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan* (Bengali Literary Conference), the editor writes:

> *Bharat* [India] is currently absorbing the lights of all the civilisations of the world. This will change the Bengali ideals of women's lives as well. The great Indian ideals of *Sita*, *Sabitri*, *Subhadra*, *Damayanti*, *Gargi*, *Maitreyi*, *Gautami*, *Sanghamitra* will also once again find expression in us.[86]

Or as Pratibha Nag writes in another article from the same journal,

> In the middle ages...women's lives were entirely subject to the mercy of men ....Who does not know about the [in]famous practice of *Sati*, or the infanticide of little girls in Rajputana? And everyone knows about the cruel, hard oppression of women by the Muslims....When will those days of *Sita-Sabitri's* devotion [for their husbands], *Gargi-Maitreyi's* divine knowledge, *Lilabati-Kshana's* learning and intelligence, or *Draupadi-Subhadra's* caring arrive in *Bharat* [India] once again?[87]

Note how easily the authors invoke mythical Aryan women as the ideals for modern Indian womanhood in these essays. All the women mentioned as potential models for emulation and respect are Aryan/ Hindu. In contrast, not even one Muslim woman is acknowledged as accomplished in any way. There is no mention, for instance, of Gulbadan, the daughter of the first Mughal emperor Babur, who wrote the famous panegyric *Humayun-Nama*[88] (c. 1587) among other pieces; or of Salima Sultan Begum—a highly educated woman and a poet—known as "Khadeja[89] of that era" for her wisdom; or the politically astute Nur Jahan who practically ruled the Mughal empire as emperor Jehangir's wife between 1611-1628; or even of Aurangzeb's daughter Jahan Ara—a woman of great learning and wisdom who commissioned the *Jumma Masjid*[90] in 1647.[91]

Conclusion

It can be argued that this combination of outright silence, overtly unflattering representation, and oblique, negative allusions over time consolidated a picture of Muslim women as "backward," or simply "invisible" in the national imaginary. In fact, it is in the *figure of the traditional woman*—silenced and victimised by the barbarity of Muslim men—that Muslim women make one of their few appearances in Hindu nationalist discourse.[92] Once they are incorporated into the larger story of Indian womanhood in this particular capacity, everything else they do simply becomes invisible to a Hindu-dominated normative historiography. It is as if the subcontinent was colonised, the nation was born, the lives of Hindu (middle class/upper caste) women changed immensely, and all these tumultuous changes simply passed by Muslim women, who continued to languish in their misery arising from their religion. In turn, these constructions of Muslims as the quintessential others of ideal Indian citizen-subjects, put forth by Hindu men *and* women, facilitated the appropriation of several centuries of Muslim rule in the subcontinent simply as an unfortunate chapter in the otherwise glorious career of the Hindu nation.[93]

End Notes

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2 In 1985, Shah Bano, a Muslim woman, took her husband to court for leaving her without adequate financial support after forty years of marriage. The Supreme Court's ruling in favour of Shah Bano, and the subsequent amendment passed by the government undermining the ruling, sparked off a nation-wide controversy. See Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Shahbano." *Signs* (Spring 1989.): 558-582; Madhu Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim? The Shah Bano Controversy." *Manushi*, No. 32 (1986): 4-13; Muniza Rafiq Khan, *Socio-Legal Status of Muslim Women*. London: Sangam Books Ltd., 1993); Paula Bacchetta, "Communal Property/Sexual Property:on representations of Muslim women in a Hindu nationalist discourse," Zoya Hasan ed., *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State* (New Delhi: Kali for Women), 188-225. Zoya Hasan, "Communalism, State Policy, and the Question of Women's Rights in Contemporary India." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 25, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1993): 5-15.

3 Recent feminist and postcolonial scholarship in India too have followed the general trend within Indian historiography in focusing mostly on Hindu women. See for instance, Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (London: Verso, 1993). Even the Subaltern studies collective which has dealt with tensions between different religious communities, is curiously silent about Muslim women.

4 Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutantes: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905* (Rajshahi: Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi University, 1983):17; Sombuddha Chakraborty, *Andare Antare: Unish Satake Bangali Bhadramahila* (Calcutta: Stree, 1995).

5 It is worth noting here that Bengali Muslim women in Bangladesh—an Islamic nation—are far more actively involved in the public sphere than Muslim women in West Bengal—the half of Bengal that became part of India after the Partition in 1947.

6 For discussions of writings by Muslim women, see Gail Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz `Ali and Tahzib un-Niswan: Women's Rights in Islam and Women's Journalism in Urdu," Kenneth W. Jones ed., *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 179-199; Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars : Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Barbara Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India," Zoya Hasan ed., *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994), 1-21; Faisal Fatehali Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: the movement for women's reform, 1857-1900," Zoya Hasan ed., *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*. (New Delhi: Kali for Women), 23-37; Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, *Sultana's Dream and Selections from The Secluded Ones*, ed. and trans. Roushan Jahan (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1988); Sonia Amin, *The World of Muslim Women In Colonial Bengal: 1876-1939* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996). For excellent discussions in Bengali see Farida Pradhan ed., *Begum Rokeya O Narijagaran* [Begum Rokeya and the Awakening of Women] (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1995); Ghulam Murshid, *Rassundari Theke Rokeya: Nari Pragatir Aksho Bachhar* [From Rassundari to Rokeya: Hundred Years of Women's Emancipation] (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993); Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolan*. [The Women's Movement in Bengal] (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1989); Salim Jahangir, *The Life and Works of Sufia Kamal* (Dhaka: *Nari Udyog Kendra*, 1993).

7 A faction amongst Hindus in Bengal who were influenced by Unitarianism, and were against the ritualistic excesses of Hinduism as it was practiced in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Brahmos were especially against idolatry. See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of Modern Indian Mind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

8 According to Joya Chatterji, the *bhadralok* or Bengali (predominantly Hindu) elite comprised only about five percent of Bengal's population. Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutantes* (Rajshahi, 1983). Needless to say, an even smaller proportion of this already small group actually supported the reform initiatives of the nineteenth century.

9 Rokeya was born into an orthodox Muslim aristocratic family in East Bengal in 1880. Like most women of her class, she grew up observing strict *pardah*. After her husband's death, Rokeya started a school for Muslim girls in his memory first in Bhagalpur, and later in Calcutta in 1911. Apart from numerous essays published in a whole array of periodicals run by both Hindus/Brahmos and Muslims, Rokeya also wrote a novel (*Padmaraga*), and various short stories. She was also active in social work, mostly involving women. Her works include, *Sultana's Dream and Selections from the Secluded Ones*, tr. R. Jahan, 1988; two volumes of collected essays, *Motichur*, 1905 & 1921; *Pipasa*, 1922; and one novel *Padmaraga*.

For discussions of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, see Hasina Joarder & Saifuddin Joarder, *Begum Rokeya: The Emancipator* (Dhaka: Nari Kalyan Sangstha, 1980); Sonia Amin, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Legacy of `Bengal Renaissance'". *Journal of Asiatic Society*, Bangladesh (Humanities). Vol. XXXIV, no.2 (December 1989): 185-192; Farida Pradhan, ed. *Begum Rokeya O Narijagaran* (1995).

10 Sufia Kamal was born in 1910 in Shaistabad, East Bengal. She came from the local *nawab* family—a well-known and respected rural aristocratic family in undivided Bengal. Sufia never went to school, but learnt to read and write at home. Although cultivation of Bengali language and literature was frowned upon in aristocratic families like hers, she still managed to master the language secretly. Sufia was one of the first Muslim women writers who won wide acclaim in the literary circles of Bengal. After the Partition, Sufia played a crucial role in the *bhansha andolan* (language agitation) in the 1950s in East Pakistan, against the Urdu-speaking political elite. Until her recent death, she had been centrally involved with social and political reform and activism, not to mention the vibrant intellectual life in Dhaka.

11 For a welcome exception to this pattern of ignoring Muslim women's work, see the invaluable collection, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds.) *Women Writing in India, 600 BC to the Present* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). It is important to note that most of the existing scholarship on Bengali Muslim women is published out of Bangladesh.

12 See for instance Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter: A Political Autobiography*. (Lahore, West Pakistan: Nigarishat, c. 1950); Shaista Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars* , 1998. For discussion of this point, see also Amin, *The World of Muslim Women* (1996); Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolan* (1989); Ghulam Murshid, *Rassundari Theke Rokeya* (1993); Mahua Sarkar, *Visible Symbols/ Invisible Women* (1999).

13 Joan W. Scott, "Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (Summer 1991): 773-797.

14 For a discussion of the disappearance of lower caste/working women from the discourse of "ideal womanhood" in colonial India, see Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past," Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 27-87.

15 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the Effeminate Babu and the Manly Englishman* (Minnesota University Press, 1995).

16 For discussions of the importance of the "other" to a western sense of self, history and culture, see Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995); Janaki Nair, "Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in English-women's Writings, 1813-1940." *Journal of Women's History* 2 (Spring 1990): 8-34; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

17 The Bengali term for the educated middle class coined in the nineteenth century. Literally it means the "civilised class/community".

18 I am drawing here on Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," C.T. Mohanty, A. Russo and L. Torres edited *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51-80. See also, Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review*, (1987): 27-58.

19 Muslim women from poorer, working class backgrounds were of course entirely invisible to this discourse. The nationalist project in British India, as in most other parts of the world, was dominated by the middle classes. Because of its particular focus on this middle class discourse, this paper does not deal with Muslim women from the working classes. The concern here is to show that Hindu dominated nationalist discourse in colonial India rendered Muslim women—even from the middle/upper classes—invisible.

20 Sarkar, *Visible Symbols/Invisible Women* (Doctoral dissertation, 1999).

21 Bengal, before partition/independence, was one of the few Muslim-majority provinces in India. Calcutta was also the main seat of colonial power. Thus, it is not necessarily representative of the rest of India. However, because of particular socio-political configurations in Bengal—especially the presence of one of the first, and more vocal nationalist elites, and their strident efforts to create a national culture— the divides between modern/traditional, national/communal, Hindu/ Muslim become sharpened here. It, thus, provides a good site to study these processes. Also, as recent research has pointed out, similar problems of silence and invisibility of Muslim women obtain in the written history of other parts of

colonial India as well. See Shahida. Lateef, *Muslim Women in India: political and private realities* (New Delhi: Kali for Women/London: Zed Books Ltd., 1990); Gail Minault, "Political Change: Muslim Women in Conflict with Parda: Their Role in the Indian Nationalist Movement," Chipp and Green eds., *Asian Women in Transition*, (College Station: Pennsylvania University Press, 1980), 194-203; Gail Minault, "*Begamati Zuban*: Women's Language and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Delhi." *India International Quaterly*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (1989): 155-170; Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women, 1994.

22 Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents," 376-91; Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,1989); Carol Delaney and Sylvia Yanagisako eds., *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Valentine Moghadam ed., *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994); Sian Reynolds, "Marianne's Citizens? Women, the Republic and Universal Suffrage in France," *Women, State And Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1986), 102-122.; Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

23 Pateman, *Disorder of Women*, 36-41. See also, Carol Delaney, "Father State, Motherland, and the Birth of the Modern Turkey," Delaney and Yangisako, eds. *Naturalizing Power*, 177; David Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968)

24 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993). For a discussion of the use of gender ideology in colonial and nationalist discourses, see also Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi eds. "Gender and Imperialism in British India." *Economic and Political Weekly* (October, 1985.): WS 72-78; Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" *Recasting Women*, 27-87.

25 In mid-nineteenth century Bengal, for instance, modernisation for middle class Hindu women entailed learning to read and write, picking up various hobbies including music, gardening, sewing, and more significantly, leaving the seclusion of the inner quarters, and playing hostess to their husbands' guests. In time, women began attending schools, and even taking up jobs outside the home. See Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, 99-127; Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

26 See for example, Bambara, Toni Cade ed. *The Black Woman : An Anthology* (New York: Penguine, 1970); bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman. Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1981); hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1990);

Moraga and Anzaldua eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1981); Hazel Carby, "White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood," in CCCS, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (The Crossing Press, 1984).

27 Chandra T. Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," *Third World Women*, 12.

28 See Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*, 1994; Kamla Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography," eds. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 83-125; Susie Tharu and Tejeswini Niranjana, "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender," *Subaltern Studies IX*, (1996) 232-260.

29 Hazel Carby, "White woman listen," *Empire Strikes Back*, 214; bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1992).

30 See Chandra T. Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," *Third World Women*, 13.

31 Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender," *Subaltern Studies IX*, 87.

32 William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Here I am also drawing on a vast body of postcolonial scholarship that includes Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, Sage Publications, 1996), 1-17; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity,* 1995; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions* (1999). Also see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London, Routledge, 1993).

33 In "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" *Recasting Women*, 46-47, Uma Chakravarti documents the instrumental role played by European Orientalist scholars in popularising a racist Aryan version of the Hindu golden age.

34 Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* , (Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1998).

35 The women of the *bhadrasampraday*.

36 Directly translated, "ideal Indian woman".

37 Tharu and Niranjana also discuss such masculinisation of the category *Dalit* (untouchable), and the marking of the category "woman" as upper caste. Susie Tharu & Tejaswini Niranjana, "Problems," *Subaltern Studies IX*, 243.

38 Moslem Education Commission Report, 1934; Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 3; Amar Dutta, *Unish Satake Muslim Manas O Bangabhanga, 1905*, (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1995), 16.

39 Morshed Shafiul Hasan, *Begum Rokeya: Samay O Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1982). See also Kopf, 1969; V.C. Joshi ed. *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (Delhi:Vikas, 1975); Basu, 1995.

40 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 106-132. Muslims, in fact were quite wary, if not dismissive, of the sanskritisation of Bengali in the middle of the nineteenth century, because it delegitimised mussalmani Bengali used in the *punthi* or manuscript literature that was popular among Muslims in Bengal. Mussalmani Bengali is distinct because of its use of many Arabic and Persian words.

41 W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Mussalman* (London, 1872).

42 Gauri Viswanathan, "Ethnographic Politics and the Discourse of Origins." *Stanford Humanities Review*, vol. 5, #1 (1995): 121-39. H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 2 vols.* (London, 1892).

43 Stanley Wolpert, *History of India* (1987).

44 Janaki Nair, "Uncovering the Zenana," *Journal of Women's History*. Vol. 2, # 1 (Spring 1990): 8-34.

45 *Bhadralok* is used to refer to educated Bengali middle class men. The term was first coined and used by Hindus, who apparently reserved it to refer to themselves only. See Sonia Amin, *The World of Muslim Women* (1996).

46 Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995). Also see P. Robb edited *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

47 An ethnic group from the northwestern part of India. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, (1995).

48 I am drawing here on Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

49 Partha Chatterjee makes a similar argument in *Nation and Its Fragments*, 94. See also Tanika Sarkar on the centrality of Hindu conjugality at the "formative moment" of militant nationalism in Bengal. "Colonial Lawmaking and Lives/Deaths of Indian Women: Different readings of law and community," Ratna Kapur (ed.) *Feminist Terrains in Legal Domains: Interdisciplinary essays on Women and Law in India* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), 210-42.

50 Ghulam Murshid describes the objective of *Bamabodhini* as an attempt to "educate its readers in subjects such as Bengali, History, Geography, Elementary Science, Hygiene, Astronomy, Childcare, Housekeeping, and Religion" Murshid,

The Reluctant Debutantes (Rajshahi, 1983), 233. The *Bamabodhini Sabha*, the association behind this enterprise, also began a correspondence course for women through the *Patrika,* known as *Antahpur shiksha* (or education in the *zenana* or women's quarters). Until the 1860s, *zenana* education had been mainly carried on under the aegis of Christian missionaries. See also Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (1984); Dagmar Engels, *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal 1890-1939* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). For an account of early education and reforms among Bengali middle class women in Bengali, see Sombuddha Chakraborty, *Andare Antare* (Calcutta: Stree, 1995).

51 Although I have in fact consulted many other periodicals of that time, in this paper, I have focused on these four only. It should be mentioned here that it is in fact increasingly difficult to obtain such records because of problems of preservation both in Calcutta and Dhaka.

52 All translations from Bengali are by the author.

53 In this context the following clarification offered by Partha Chatterjee is useful: "Significantly, the word *jati* in most Indian languages can be used to designate not merely caste, but caste agglomerations, tribes, race, linguistic groups, religious groups, nationalities, nations" Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 166.

54 Literally curtain. *Pardah*, also spelt as *purdah* or *parda*, refers to the seclusion of women. Seclusion itself can take various forms ranging from women's confinement within the home, to the use of veils by women in public places.

55 Unknown, "*Abarodhprathar Utpatti*"(The Beginnings of Pardah), *Bamabodhini Patrika*, July-August, 1891.

56 See Viswanathan, "Ethnographic Politics," 121-39. It is important to remember, however, that "race" as it was used in the South Asian context does not necessarily carry the same meanings with which it is invested in the West. See Robb, "South Asia and the Concept of Race," *Concept of Race in South Asia*, 1-76.

57 Sri Mrinmayee Sen, "*Bharatmahilar Shiksha*" (Education of the Indian Woman), *Antahpur,* August-September, 1902.

58 Kedarnath Majumdar, "*Sanjayer Nutan Grantha*," (The New Book of Sanjay) in *Aarati Patrika*, 2nd year, # 6 and 7. Cited in *Nabanoor* Aug/Sept 1903.

59 The first girls' school meant exclusively for the Hindu middle class in the country. It should be noted that in 1849 Bethune School was known as the Female Normal School.

60 Speech by Lord Bethune, reprinted in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1895. Translated from the Bengali reprint by author. See also the *Bethune College Centenary Volume: 1879-1979* (Calcutta, 1979).

61 According to Tharu and Lalitha, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati was a "legend in her own lifetime...(and) one of the few nineteenth-century women who were able to support themselves with their writing" Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., *Women Writing in India*, 243. Her books include her autobiography, *My Testimony*, 1907; *Stree Dharma Neeti* (Morals for Women), 1882; and *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, 1888. For a recent thoughtful discussion of Ramabai's life and work, see Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late Victorian Britain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

62 According to Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, the deep-rooted distrust and low opinion for women revealed in the laws of Manu—the source of much of Hindu opinion about women—is: "...at the root of seclusion of women in India. "This mischievous custom has greatly increased and has become intensely tyrannical since the Mahometan invasion; but that it existed from about the sixth century, BC, cannot be denied....All male relatives are commanded by the law to deprive the women of the household of all their freedom..." Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, *The High-caste Hindu Woman* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1888/1984), 29-30.

63 *Nabanoor*, January/February, 1904.

64 Muslim responses to these allegations against them can be seen in the pages of Muslim-edited periodicals which began to appear from the beginning of the twentieth century. See Sarkar, *Visible Symbols/Invisible Women* (dissertation, 1999).

65 Sumit Sarkar, "Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past," V.C. Joshi ed. *Rammohun Roy*, 52-53; Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions," Sangari and Vaid eds. *Recasting Women*, 114.

66 See Engels, *Beyond Purdah?* (1996), 84-85; Mary E. John & Janaki Nair (eds.) Introduction, *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998): 1-51.

67 Both the terms refer to Muslim regents.

68 It is important to mention here that life in the *zenana* was not always as oppressive for all women, everywhere, as it is generally assumed. According to Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, "It is generally assumed that women in the Mughal harems lived a miserable, degenerate life filled with only luxury and mindless pleasure. Historically, however, many of the Mughal women we come across astonish us with their learning, the breadth of their knowledge...and their many literary and artistic achievements". Bandopadhyay, *Mogul Juge Strishiksha*, 1-3. [Translated from Bengali]. I have also come across similar arguments in conversations with Muslim and Hindu women who had spent some part of their lives in seclusion.

69 Unknown, "*Mahiladiger Aborodhpratha*" (The Practice of Secluding Women) *Mahila*, September-October,1903.

70 Cited in S. Emdad Ali, "*Mussalmaner Prati Hindu Lekhaker Atyachar*"(The Unfairness of Hindu Writers toward Muslims), *Nabanoor*, August-September1903. This article by Syamasundari Devi elicited a sharp response from the editor of *Nabanoor* in one of the earliest known public written protests by Muslim intellectuals.

71 [My emphasis]. Mankumari Basu, *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Nov-Dec, 1894—Sept-Oct, 1895.

72 Hunter in his much quoted book *The Indian Mussalman* (1872) divides Muslims into essentially two categories: the aristocracy or Mughal *ashraf*, and the fanatical *jihad*-seeking masses of converts. According to Hunter, the Mughal *ashraf*, who had suffered due to the economic and political changes brought by British rule, had little in common with the indigenous Muslims.

73 It should also be noted here that in 1822, a Muslim woman had started a school for girls in the Shyambazar area of North Calcutta. The school started with 18 students, but did not last long. In December 1823, *Samachar Darpan*, a newspaper, reported an examination held for 150 Hindu and Muslim girls. Unfortunately, schools at that time only attracted girls from poor and often low-caste Muslim, Christian and Hindu families. Students were lured into schools mainly by the small compensations offered to them for attending See Binay Ghosh, *Bidya Sagar O Bangali Samaj*, cited in Morshed Shafiul Hasan, *Begum Rokeya: Samay O Sahitya*, 1982. Given the uniqueness of these attempts, it would be surprising if the Bengali intelligentsia, of which Mankumari was a prominent member, was unaware of it.

74 Unknown, *Mahila*, July/August, 1903.

75 Unknown, *Mahila*, July/August, 1903.

76 Editorial, *Mahila*, July/August, 1903.

77 Veiling gown designed to cover the whole body of a woman, from head to toe. There are two holes for the eyes; sometimes a separate piece of cloth is attached to the front that can be flipped back to expose the face.

78 *Mahila*, July/August, 1903.

79 See Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, *The High-caste Hindu Woman*. For a discussion of the continued subjection of the *Bhadramahila*, see Engels, *Beyond Purdah?*, 1996.

80 Reported in a leading Muslim periodical; *Mihir O Sudhakar*, 1895, cited in S. Hasan, *Begum Rokeya: Samaye o Sahitya*, 1982.

81 As Mr. Bethune succinctly put it in his speech at the inauguration of the Bethune School in 1849, women's education was important first because educated men

wanted and needed educated wives. Moreover, women's education was also a significant measure of the level of civilisation in any society, and since women had an immense influence on the minds of children, educated mothers were essential for proper upbringing of children. See *Bamabodhini Patrika* (1895).

82 See Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments* (1993); Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the *Vedic Dasi*," *Contentious Traditions* (1989); Chakraborty, *Andare, Antare* (1995). See also Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995) and Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante* (1983) for discussions of the Age of Consent controversy in 1891.

83 Visweswaran, "Small Speeches", *Subaltern Studies*, IX (1997).

84 For a comparison of the work of Rokeya and that of other Bengali women, see Ghulam Murshid, *Rassundari Theke Rokeya*, Dhaka, 1993.

85 The issues discussed in Bharat Mahila in 1913 were: the activities of various women's organisations in major urban centres in Bengal (*Calcutta Mahila Parishad*, *Dhaka Mahila Samiti*, and the *Maimansingh Samiti*), the backwardness of women in the previous generation, and the problems of widows, prostitutes and low-caste Hindus.

86 Unknown (ed., Sarajoobala Debi?), "*Bibidha Prasanga*", *Bharat Mahila*, April-May, 1913.

87 Sri Pratibha Nag, "*Mahilar Karjya*", *Bharat Mahila*, December-January, 1914.

88 The manuscript for *Humayun-Nama*—a long panegyric in Persian written by Gulbadan about her brother, the emperor Humayun—is preserved in the British Library. A Mrs. Beveridge has also translated it to English. For a rare study of education among Mughal women, see Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, *Mogoljuge Stree Shiksha* [The Education of Women in the Mughal Era] (Calcutta: Manashi Press, 1919).

89 Khadeja was the Prophet Muhammad's first wife. An independent, wealthy woman, Khadeja—herself a widow in her forties—married Muhammad when he was a young man. She was instrumental in the development of both his person and his vocation. See Leila Ahmed, "Women and the Advent of Islam." *Signs*, 11, no. 4 (Summer, 1986): 665-691.

90 A famous mosque in Delhi.

91 These are only a few examples of very accomplished elite Muslim women who are nonetheless routinely ignored by nationalist historiography. There were many others, even within the Mughal aristocracy, who could be inspiring symbols of Indian womanhood. See Bandopadhyay, *Mogul Juge Strishiksha* for further discussion on this subject.

92 The other common role given to Muslim women is that of the *baiji* or the courtesan/ prostitute. See Neeta Sen Samartha, "*Tinsho Bachharer Kolkata: Nareeder Bhoomika.*" [Three Hundred Years Old Calcutta: The Role of Women]. *Desh* (17th March, 1990): 27-35. Also see Tanika Sarkar, cf. "The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement." *Economic and Political Weekly* XXVI: 35 (Aug 31, 1991): 2057-2062.

93 I am drawing here on Ranajit Guha's insights on liberal historiography and its implications for colonial domination in *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

7

OUR COMMON GROUNDS WOMEN IN WAR AND ARMED CONFLICT

Indai Sajor*

Currently there are more than 132 countries where situations of wars and armed conflicts prevail and where violence against women is being perpetrated. The international community is struggling with the effects and implications of these armed conflicts, attempting to create mechanisms towards a peace process that address justice for the survivors and accountability for perpetrators of war both for state and non-state actors. The international community is trying to address one of the greatest challenges facing it today, that is reconciling past-wartime atrocities as an essential step in ending the cycle of violence during war situations and in peacetime.

Violence against women in armed conflict situations is one of the most heinous violations of human rights, in terms of its scale, the nature of

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the atrocities and the number of persons affected. Yet history has hardly recorded war crimes committed against women. Even under conditions of war and internal conflicts, in which states and non-state actors are the protagonists, war crimes against women were hardly addressed and in many cases their occurrence has been repeatedly denied. One of the most painful reasons for this denial is violations perpetrated against women are not viewed as being important.

Violence against women in war has confirmed the treatment of women as sexual objects in a terrible way. The world has corne to speak of rape as an inevitable fact of war - as part of the reality of the behavior of the armed forces. But the origins of the systematic practice of rape, why it is rampant in armed conflict situations, and its universal but at the same time violent nature needs to be examined.

The manifestations and causes of violence, such as of mass rape, sexual slavery, custodial violence and enforced prostitution cannot be understood without attention being given to the patriarchal mode of society in general and the domination of men over women in all spheres of public and private life.

It is clear from many accounts that mass rape and rape by enforced prostitution was practised by armed forces of many nations in large-scale military operations. Analysis of the phenomenon of military mass rape has rarely been undertaken despite the extensive evidence, which exists of the practice. These include the mass rape that took place during the Nanjing Massacre in the Sino-Japan (1931-37) and the mass rape of the women in the village of Mapanique, Candaba, Pampanga in the Philippines during the genocidal attack by Japanese troops in 23 November 1944.

It had been stated that there are more than 200,000 women from Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, China and Indonesia as well as some of the women from the Netherlands, who were forced to

become comfort women or sex slaves for the Japanese Imperial Army during World War 11. Historical records had proven that there was systematic conscription, recruitment, abduction, and kidnapping of the women from the colonized countries and forced them into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial forces. The establishment, staffing, operation and control of the comfort stations was part of the logistics of war. The enormity of this tragedy, its unprecedented nature, the vastness of its scale, as well as the sheer ruthlessness of those perpetrators and the ruined lives of the women cannot be overstated.

During the conference, information was presented, inter alia, about mass rape during World War 11, the Bangladesh war of independence, the ongoing conflict in Algeria, and the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia. Papers were presented which described the mass rapes, which took place in China following Japan's invasion of that country and the treatment of women in the Philippines following its occupation, by Japan. Also discussed was the establishment of military brothels and numerous instances of rapes being perpetrated against Vietnamese women by the US armed forces during the Vietnam War. During the war of independence in Algeria, the French Army brought Algerian women into the battle zones and forced them to work as prostitutes. In the former Yugoslavia in 1993, soldiers from all factions used mass rape as a terror tactic and part of the infamous campaign of "ethnic cleansing".

War is an inherently patriarchal activity, and rape is one of the most extreme expressions of the patriarchal drive toward masculine domination over the woman. This patriarchal ideology is further enforced by the aggressive character of the war itself, that is to dominate and control another nation or people. Repeated instances of the recruitment of a large number of involuntary prostitutes (which is itself a form of rape) has demonstrated that subjugating some women does not prevent the rape of other women.

Considering the magnitude of the use of rape and mass rape in war and armed conflict situations in all the countries around the world for hundreds of years, it is vital that the international community repeat its commitment to prosecuting rape as a war crime as well as a crime against humanity.

Analysis of Issues and Patterns of Violations

In Afghanistan the practice of banning women from work and girls from school was imposed recently by one of the ruling armed groups. Single women or widows are unable to obtain food because they are banned from working or from going out without being accompanied by a close male relative. Women's mobility and public appearances have been hampered and controlled by ruling armed groups.

Armed groups in Afghanistan massacre defenceless women in their homes or brutally beat and rape them. Scores of women were abducted and raped, then taken as wives by commanders and sold to prostitution. Other women have "disappeared" and several have been stoned to death. Hundreds of thousands of women and children have been displaced or live as refugees. Many are traumatized by the horrific abuses they have suffered or witnessed during Conflict.

In Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Cambodia and Burma human rights violations against individual women or a group of women, have included illegal arrest and detention, torture, rape, disappearances, extra-judicial executions, forced labor under slavery-like practices, forced conscription, sexual harassment, looting, deprivation of property due to political affiliation of husband, and political harassment.

Aside from violations committed against individual women or a group of women, there are also indiscriminate war making practices that have a strong impact on women. In Cambodia, for instance, these

have included strafings, indiscriminate bombings, forced relocations and evictions; although it may be argued that women were not specifically targeted by these acts of war, it is a fact that the male population has been reduced significantly because of their involvement in the war.

There is also an ethnic/racial character to the violence experienced by women. In wars where military and civilian leaders appeal to ethnic or racial identity, such as Rwanda, Kashmir and Yugoslavia, women are targeted for sexual violence because of their gender as well as their race or ethnic identity. Similarly there can be racial or ethnic overtones in conflicts involving wars of independence such as those which took place in Algeria and Bangladesh, and there are often racial/ethnic overtones to the treatment of women which results from the presence of foreign military bases such as Okinawa and the Republic of Korea.

In some circumstances rape or the infliction of sexual violence perpetrated against women can also be characterized as genocide. In the cases of Rwanda and Yugoslavia the crime of genocide, manifested itself through widespread and systematic rape, forced impregnation and other sexual violence. It is important that the international community recognizes these acts as a form of genocide and prosecutes them as genocide as well as conventional war crimes and crimes against humanity. In order to conform to the Genocide Convention, rape and other sexual violence must be intentionally inflicted as a method to incur the eventual physical destruction of a group.

The indefinite and long term nature of forced migration due to war and having to stay in refugee camps has created special problems for women who were forced by circumstances to earn a living in unfamiliar territories. Under such situations they are prone to violent attacks not only from the soldiers involved in the civil war, but also by the civilians- these result in violence perpetrated by forces or people of the host

country. Given the inevitability of refugee movements during armed conflict situations, there is a need to take care of refugees hosted by the neighboring countries, and address the crisis it creates. Examples considered during the conference were: Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, Burma, Afghanistan, Palestinian women and Algeria.

Recently increased recognition has been given to the impact of forced evictions on the lives of women. During the process of a forced eviction women lose their homes (which may represent a substantial personal investment particularly for poorer women) and neighborhoods, In addition, the lack of warning given to many women leads to the loss of personal possessions. Furthermore, there is the trauma of witnessing the physical destruction of their homes by bulldozers or demolition squads.

Bearing in mind that the individuals concerned are being involuntarily removed from their homes, the process almost inevitably is violent in nature. In addition to its impact on the individuals the process of forced evictions has an effect on the group or community where it takes place as it can be accompanied by population transfers, relocation to foreign countries or refugee camps, or resettlement. Forced evictions may also take place as part of a policy of ethnic cleansing or slum clearance.

The experiences of Kurdish women in Turkey, women from various ethnic groups in Burma and Palestinian women in the occupied territories are the clearest examples of how forced evictions are used by men as a strategy of war and the relationship between this brutal practice and the violence women experience during wartime. The available information suggests that some forms of violence women experience can be directly attributed to force evictions.

Understanding the similarities between all forced evictions, those that occur during and outside of conflict situations and armed conflict

situations is a strategic move based on the knowledge that unless forced eviction is considered a brutal act of war against the poorest people in society, and unless the violence of development and related projects are adequately recognized, it is unlikely that victims of forced eviction will ever receive the international and domestic legal and social protection required to address and ultimately eliminate this practice both during and outside of conflict situations.

Atomic, chemical or biological weapons of war can and have had a devastating impact on people as well as the earth's ecology. During the Vietnam War (1961-1975) the United States used the chemical weapon Dioxin, referring to it as a "defoliant," for more than 10 years. Agent Orange has had a highly toxic effect on the reproductive system of humans (both civilian and military including the United States and Australian military). Considering the toxicological effects on humans, the harm done to the women in Vietnam must be regarded as of continuing importance. Agent Orange still affects the lives of a significant number of Vietnamese women and considering its devastating effect, it will disrupt their human reproductive functions, as it sustains a delayed attack over 20 to 40 years later. Even today many Vietnamese women have to undergo an abortion because of the high incidence of fetuses with congenital defects. The impact of chemical warfare on women's health is a time delayed violence against women.

It is recognized that women's lack of control and negotiating sources to decide whether or not to have children in a situation where there is great possibility of their having abnormal pregnancies, attention must be given to enable women to access genetic counselling and family planning services. When children are born seriously disabled, women must be given the necessary support system by the government, because of the added responsibility to women, of taking care of a deformed generation of children

It is vital that all information gathered thus far on the effects of Dioxin be made public and that international assistance be offered in respect of the consequences it has brought about. All member states of the United Nations have an obligation to work in cooperation with other member states to assist in fulfilling the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

There is an intent to conceal tragic damage brought by the use of chemical weapons, for instance the enormous anomalies revealed in Vietnam and the Gulf War, in Iraq, which would again threaten people in peace time. Today people in many countries are also threatened by the widespread dioxin in the environment emitted from various sources. We therefore urged the United Nations to take appropriate action in relation to the use of chemical weapons, biological warfare, to stop its manufacture and to ban its use.

Although it is more than half a century after the first explosion of an atomic bomb, it is crucial that we continue to give adequate attention to the impact that modern weapons will have on civilization. It is also important to remember the problems caused by the initial explosions, particularly on the reproductive systems of women exposed to atomic radiation. The long range impact on their off spring must also be monitored. Our understanding of those issues is one of the crucial factors in our opposition to war.

Fundamentalism is a worldwide phenomenon. In the United States of America Christian fundamentalist have been involved in attacks on family planning centers; medical doctors who are performing abortions according to the laws of their country have been killed during some of these attacks. In India, Hindu fundamentalists propagate hatred through the radio calling for the murder of Muslims, arm their troops and organize "religious cleansing" of Hindu land during communal riots. During these "cleansing " ceremonies, women of the Muslim Communities have been murdered. "Communalism" is the terminology

commonly used in South Asia to refer to the antipathy, which can exist between different religious communities.

In Iran, Afghanistan and Algeria, Muslim fundamentalists have engaged in acts of violent repression against certain people in order to force them to accept their version of Islam and the coming to power of theocratic regimes. In Bangladesh, Algeria and Afghanistan women have been killed because they did not conform to the norms of behaviour being espoused by fundamentalist groups. Women are being killed, tortured, harassed and persecuted by fundamentalists because they do not abide by certain dress codes or they wish to pursue their education or engage in paid employment. Women who do not wish to live in seclusion or in specific quarters, pursuing a notion of separate development, become victims of repression. This type of targeted conflict and violence against women is a form of 'femicide'.

Even conforming to the rules set out by fundamentalist groups may not prevent women from becoming a target. The list of women victims includes women who were veiled, to girls confined within their homes, to women going out to work, to women totally accepting their traditional roles of wives and mothers, to women who were pious Muslims, to those who did not choose religion as the main marker of their identity, to women who were likely to have voted for the fundamentalists.

Case studies showed that women have been forced into legal prostitution under the name of "mutaa marriage" which means temporary marriage or marriage of pleasure. This is a very localized Shia Muslim practice, unheard of in other parts of the Muslim world, which allows a man to 'marry' a girl for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks etc. In order to keep their soul clean, men have been encouraged by the state to contract temporary marriages rather than resort to prostitutes. Women have been forced to accept such 'marriages' as an acceptable Islamic practice.

In Algeria fundamentalists raid villages and areas of cities. They take a woman to their guerilla camps where they are submitted to slavery, including sexual slavery. They are being made pregnant to breed 'good Muslims'. In cases of resistance, women and girls are mutilated before and/or after being killed. Mutilations of their breasts or genitals frequently occur; in some cases women's throats are cut or their stomachs are cut open. Some women are being beheaded and their decapitated heads paraded in the streets or left in public places as a warning to other women. All this is done publicly in order to terrorize the population.

There is a disturbing trend wherein fundamentalists are granted asylum by Western countries on the grounds that they are persecuted by the State. On the other hand many democrats and human rights defenders are denied asylum due to lack evidence of persecution. It seems highly inappropriate that those who have engaged in or encouraged such heinous crimes should be granted asylum when the ordinary person would assume that someone granted asylum on the basis that they fear persecution has not themselves perpetrated acts of terror on others. This is a particularly egregious situation when women seeking asylum because of gender based persecution find if to difficult to attain it.

Many women who have been subjected to sexual violence during armed conflict have been ostracized and discriminated against by their families and communities. They are unjustly persecuted because of what has happened to them. In many instances women have had to flee from their countries for fear of their lives and that of their families. These acts of violence which are forms of political and gender based persecutions should be recognized as such by the international community and asylum given more readily. In addition support systems should be developed to assist in the adjustment process; these should include programs aimed at helping women achieve

economic stability, as well as services for counseling and should also assist women to develop a long term sense of security.

Custodial violence has been a continuing source of violations of the rights of women. It has been perpetuated by the military, police and armed groups. It has taken place in jails, hospitals, refugee camps, 'safe houses'. In times of armed conflicts, women can be held in prison for hours and days and repeatedly raped. Custodial violence happens when a person is totally powerless, when any form of protest or resistance could be met by retaliation including sexual violence or sexual assault, abusive and degrading language, mistreatment and forced confessions, strip searches and constant threats to life and privacy.

One of the many obstacles to the eradication of custodial sexual violence is its invisibility at the national level. In order to make the system of sexual abuse visible in all its forms, either in prison, or 'safe houses' we have to recognize that this violence is so entrenched in the conduct of handling prisoners of war or of conscience, that there is no redress for immediate remedies to this violation. Internal investigation procedures which occur only when the violation is exposed do not give protection to complainants for possible retaliation or punishment. Many women raped or sexually abused in custody seldom complain while still under authorities, for fear of retaliation.

Due to lack of protective mechanisms for women victims of custodial violence, very few of them would bring to court and file a case against the perpetrator. The lack of investigation procedures that will not prejudice any case filed while still in detention, is totally absent and therefore abuses of sexual violence is extremely difficult to substantiate as the complainant will always be under duress. Cases of torture, physical mutilations, psychological terror, fear of death and lack of support system, inhibit the women even to talk about these abuses while in detention.

It has been recognized that the existence of US military bases in countries like the Republic of Korea and Japan have caused military prostitution and the trafficking of women to proliferate. Numerous cases of sexual assault, rape, enforced prostitution and sexual violence have been recorded within the communities surrounding these military bases. One consequence of this has been the increase in the number of Amerasian children, a number of whom have been abandoned. Many of the fathers have refused to recognize their paternity and have refused to accept responsibility for their children.

People living near military bases have questioned the benefit of those bases. Although military bases are often established as a result of treaty commitments, questions have been raised about the security interests at stake and whether there is an ultimate benefit for the "host" nation. For those living near the bases there is a concern about the long-term impact of air pollution and the dumping of toxic waste. In addition there are the long-term consequences of having to de-mine extensive areas, as land mines are sometimes planted in areas connected to the bases.

The existence of military bases can also be construed as a form of domination and control of one country over another and therefore an affront to the sovereignty of the host nation. It is imperative therefore that all-military bases existing in foreign countries should be withdrawn. Women must be included in the negotiations surrounding any withdrawal so that the impact of military bases on the lives of women is given sufficient consideration and provision is made for necessary assistance to rehabilitate women whose lives have been affected. In addition account must be taken of the impact both the existence and withdrawal of military bases have and will have on the communities surrounding the bases. Further adequate consideration must be given to the manner in which crimes committed against women will be handled if the perpetrator is identified after the withdrawal has taken place.

One view is that the existence of military bases is akin to military occupation. There is little doubt that military occupation has a devastating impact on the lives of the local community and in particular on the lives of women. Indian and Pakistani soldiers each control and occupy part of Kashmir. These forces of occupation have committed acts, which violate the human rights of the residents and also violate norms of international humanitarian law Indonesian soldiers continue to occupy East Timor, where innocent civilians have been murdered and tortured. Women have been raped, forcibly impregnated and suffered various forms of sexual abuse and harassment under the occupational forces.

Women's Access to Justice

Every woman who has been the victim of sexual violence during the course of an armed conflict has her own sense of what constitutes justice. Increased attention should be given to the necessity of consulting with women who have experienced sexual violence during armed conflict in order to determine the most appropriate remedies. Otherwise the women are being further dis-empowered as they are having inappropriate solutions imposed on them by those who believe they know what is best. Unfortunately it continues to be the case that the majority of those who perpetrate violence against women do so with impunity.

In order to bring about redress and prevent such violations from occurring in future the international community has to make a genuine commitment to the rights of women. As long as women remain in a subordinate position, violations of their rights will continue and they will not have access to effective redress. As part of this process mechanisms should be put into place, which make state and non-state actors responsible for the violations of their armed forces. Those in charge as well as those committing the violations must be held

accountable. Judicial institutions remain the most important mechanism for the defence and promotion of fundamental rights. However more work must be undertaken to ensure that gender based persecutions come within the mandate of the judiciary, whether it operates at a national or international level. In addition steps must be taken to ensure the safety of victims, witnesses and their families.

Although existing norms of humanitarian law allow for the prosecution of rape and enforced prostitution as a war crime those norms are based on violations to the honour and reputation of the woman and thus themselves contain gender specific biases about the value of women. To put it bluntly, the prohibition against arbitrary deprivation of life or torture do not depend on the honour of the victim. There is no rational basis for making the prohibition on sexual violence depend on the honour and reputation of the victim. Sexual violence must be seen as an assault on the fundamental human dignity of the women. It is the invasion of the dignity of the person of the women, which must be addressed.

Changing the focus of the discussion in this way should help to alleviate some of the ostracism that women experience when they come forward to complain. The rejection they experience compounds the effects of the violations they have experienced. Therefore it is imperative that any trial or judicial proceedings must assist in restoring the woman's sense of control over her life. It should also bolster her confidence in the judicial system and in her community.

It is important that comprehensive protocols be developed for the monitoring of armed conflicts so that violations of women's rights are adequately documented from the outset. Further guidelines for the conduct of investigations must ensure that sufficient attention is given to violations of both women's rights and international humanitarian norms applicable to women. These guidelines must be accompanied by the allocation of resources sufficient to carry out a thorough

investigation. As noted above the rules of procedure for the court process must take into account the needs of the victims and witnesses. In particular the issues of confidentiality, anonymity, counseling and the necessity of ensuring the security of victims and witnesses must be addressed.

It is now recognized that judges, lawyers and legal personnel must receive training that increases their sensitivity to the gender discrimination problems inherent in the legal system. Such training programs should be offered to national and international judges and include sessions which consider the various forms of sexual violence and assault that occur during armed conflict. In addition attention should be given to the procedures which could be adopted to ensure that trials are conducted with an understanding of the emotional trauma experienced by women during the trial of such cases.

Further consideration must be given to making the commission of acts of violence against women during armed conflict an international crime. Individual states should be allowed to enact legislation, which would allow them to bring criminal charges against the perpetrators of such crimes. The provisions of the Torture Convention could serve as a useful starting point in these discussions. Further, increased attention must be given to the possibility of civil redress.

Even if an international criminal court were to be established, not all of those who perpetrated acts of sexual violence against women will be brought to trial. This means that a significant number of women will feel that the harms committed against them have not been given any recognition. For them justice will not have been achieved. It is imperative that the international community devise mechanisms by which women can instigate civil proceedings against those responsible for violations of their rights, including members of the government and armed forces. Consideration should be given to the means by which non-State actors can be made accountable in civil proceedings.

Attention should be given to the use of administrative proceedings, which would avoid each woman having to testify in detail to the horrors of the acts inflicted on her.

Discussions about this issue should give serious consideration to devising procedures whereby women would be able to bring civil proceedings in their own countries or alternatively in the country where the perpetrator resides. The Hague Convention on Land Warfare and the Geneva Conventions and Protocols recognize the right of those who have suffered as a result of violations of the rules of international humanitarian law to receive compensation. The right to compensation recognized in these documents would be strengthened if the international community made recommendations as to the appropriate procedures for giving effect to the right. In addition the principles governing the right to compensation should make reference to the importance of compensation which is proportionate to the harm suffered, the need to take into account the necessity of making restitution, the importance of rehabilitation and the symbolic significance an award of damages.

It is also important that the international community consider other measures of accountability which would require those who have committed acts of violence against women during armed conflict to make available documentary or other evidence which would allow an accurate historical record to be made of the events. In cases where a government has changed as a result of armed conflict, successor governments should accept that it is part of their obligation to retain such records and to assist in the location of witnesses. Another factor, which must not be overlooked, is the importance of strengthening domestic disciplinary measures against members of the armed forces who commit acts of violence against women. Again the international community must take into account the methods by which non-State actors can be held accountable for acts committed by armed forces under their control.

Much information was provided about some of the cases which have been brought on behalf of women seeking compensation for acts of violence committed against them. One of the best known of these, cases is that of the comfort women of the Asia-Pacific region. Women from South Korea, Taiwan and the have instituted lawsuits m the Tokyo District Court. They are Philippines demanding legal compensation and reparation from the government of Japan. Currently, the Japanese government is trying to settle the issue by raising donations from the public and giving the funds as 'atonement money' to the surviving victims. However, justice will never be realized unless Japan clearly admits the responsibility of the state and offers legal compensation.

Another case being pursued is that against an alleged Algerian war criminal who is living at present in the United States. Strong solidarity linkages among women from two continents have made this case possible. The cases concern atrocities he authorized against women in Algeria. A further example of such litigation is that of a Bangladesh war criminal based in London who was responsible for ordering the rape of the Bangladeshi women during the civil war in the 1970s.

It is deeply troubling that insufficient attention continues to be given to the violence committed against women during armed conflicts. Rape has been clearly listed as a war crime since the conclusion of World War I. During the investigations of war crimes initiated by the Allied Nations during World War II, rape and enforced prostitution were clearly listed as war crimes. Yet when the Statute of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was negotiated those responsible for its drafting failed to mention rape in the paragraph detailing war crimes. To some extent the drafting of that document could be seen as a step backward. Although the Security Council subsequently gave explicit recognition to rape as a war crime, it remains of concern to women that issues affecting their lives are not given immediate attention by the international community.

The participants in the conference were aware that recent indictments of the tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda do concern acts of violence against women but they are also mindful of the difficulties facing prosecutors and investigators. The steps taken thus far do not address the full range of concerns repeatedly raised by women and women's organizations throughout the world. If international tribunals fail to deal adequately with the crimes committed against women, then they will be part of the process that leaves an inaccurate historical record.

In considering the creation of an International Criminal Court (ICC) we must learn from these past mistakes. It is important that the word 'rape', 'sexual assault', 'enforced prostitution' and 'mass rape' be used and specifically listed as 'war crimes', 'crimes against humanity' and 'grave breaches of the human rights of women'.

The naming of violence against women in war, in the statutory construction of the ICC is an important exercise, so that we may detail the types of crimes committed against women and pave the way for its recognition as a war crime and crimes against humanity. The ICC will codify international criminal law and set a standard for domestic as well as international proceedings. The fact that the ICC jurisdiction will address serious violation of human rights and the laws of war will enable the women living in conflict situations to have the most immediate stake in the process. The recognition of gender crimes and gender sensitive methodologies in the ICC will enhance the future standard of the national laws.

Considering the current International War Crimes Tribunal in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the past Tokyo and Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, it should be noted at the outset that the legal proceedings that followed have paid little or no attention to gender based persecutions. Despite the fact that, historically, the Tokyo

Tribunal was the first to have introduced the crime of rape as evidence leading to the conviction of war criminals, and the Article S of the Nuremberg Charter, as amended by the Berlin Protocol of 1945, explicitly named rape committed in a widespread and systematic manner as a crime against humanity, yet, the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda failed to indict war criminals on charges of mass rape or sexual slavery. They did not reflect the reality of these wars, they have constructed a version of it.

The failure of previous war crimes trials to address adequately the impact of war on women has undermined women's faith in the potential for such trials to bring about justice. It is important that more work be undertaken to detail the gendered nature of such trials. Although significant steps have been taken in respect of the trials covering events in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, it is not clear that we understand enough of what happened in the past to put in place permanent mechanisms that will ensure equality of justice for women in the future.

The Need for Documentation, Monitoring, Advocacy and Networking

It is recognized that documenting, reporting and monitoring violence against women in war is a challenge in and of itself. While an armed conflict is on-going it may be difficult to locate the victims. Once the conflict has subsided or concluded women may be afraid to speak; this may occur out of fear of reprisals being taken against themselves or their family or because they worry about the consequences to their participation in the life of the community. However, it is vital that documentation, monitoring and reporting of the violations be one of our primary tasks.

Documenting cases will help women to seek redress, demand accountability from the perpetrators and bring their cases to court. In

determining the form and methods by which such violations will be documented, it is important that those working in this area bear in mind that there are political, social and legal implications to their work. Undertaking this work has the potential to affect the way the international community approaches violations of women's human rights.

There can be little doubt that human rights activists and organizations have brought the issue of gender and the gendered nature of international law to the attention of the international community. Significant amounts of time and resources have been devoted to the collection of unbiased documentation and testimonies. Further, much of the progress to date has been the result of solidarity work, campaigns, conferences, information sharing, capability building, collective lobbying, networking and coalition initiatives. There is a need to consolidate these efforts. We must continue to strive for a better understanding of the causes of violence against women and search for more effective preventive measures as well as remedies.

There is a need to establish a network among activists, researchers and scientists who are working on the issue of violence against women in all its forms, including the use of chemical weapons. More research needs to be undertaken into the long-term effects of such weapons. Consideration should be given to the possibilities of pursuing state accountability for the consequences of atomic and chemical warfare.

It is imperative to push for the withdrawal of military presence in foreign countries and to address comprehensively the effects of the withdrawal, in particular its political, social, economic and cultural aspects. Compliance with the environmental law, as part of the negotiated settlements, so that issues relating to toxic wastes and chemical subsistance may be addressed.

The issues of concern of women victims of armed conflict must be brought to the UN Commission on Human Rights, and other UN mechanisms, to amplify the definition and understanding of human rights to cover all forms of violence against women in war and armed conflict. In doing so we hope to expand the scope of state responsibility for the protection of women's human rights in war and enhance the effectiveness of the human rights system at both national and international levels.

South Asian Feminist Researcher's Association

South Asian Feminist Researcher's Association (SAFRA) was initiated by Women's Education & Research Centre after the South Asian Conference in Colombo in 2001. The participants of this conference ranging from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, jointly wished for such a forum, the first of its kind in the history of South Asia. Members represent the South Asian countries and the coordinating secretariat is housed at WERC the broad objective of SAFRA is to disseminate feminist scholarship in the region through research publications, journals and conferences. Moreover it also serves as a resource and documentation centre in South Asia, while intending to become part of the network of Research and Study Centres working on women's issues in South Asia.

The need to link researchers and scholars in South Asia is an imperative that we have been looking for fulfilment. With this in mind we want to create a fellowship fund for South Asian scholars to enable them to come to Sri Lanka, and be here for two to three months, meeting scholars, exchanging views, and even to understand comparative research on a team basis. The said scholars would have the opportunity to deliver lectures, get acquainted with the NGO research forums, and University research teams for mutual benefit. We are anticipating two scholars per year. Food, accommodation and travelling will be either paid or subsidised. The membership is open to all scholars and researchers in the South Asian region. You can send your inquiries to safra@itmin.com

Gendering the Peace Process

After nearly two decades of war that has tolled lives of thousands of people, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has once again entered into peace talks with the state, creating yet another hallmark in the history of Sri Lanka. Even though the gender aspect of the war was not incorporated during the first rounds of peace talks held in Norway, it was integrated into the process later by appointing a **Women's Committee for Peace**, consisting of gender specialists who are committed to the cause.

This Committee is now called Sub-committee on Gender Issues.(S.G.I.) The primary function of this Committee is to see that gender concerns are incorporated into the rehabilitation process and ensure that they are being addressed in the peace process in a holistic manner.

In the meantime donors such as the World Bank, ADB and the UNDP have constantly sought the assistance of gender specialists in their planning activities, with the objective of main streaming gender concerns into the rehabilitation, reconstruction reconciliation process.

Information and News

Available:

A booklet on Code of Ethics for gender representation in the Electronic Media drafted by WERC with a view to change media messages and images.

The Research Project of Women's Education and Research Centre on the portrayal of women in the electronic media focused on a number of programmes telecast on five channels over a three month, period. Programmes on News and Current Affairs, Films, Tele-dramas and Advertisements were monitored. The results of this research revealed that in the majority of television programmes and films, women are presented as homemakers or performers of service roles in society. Even career women are usually portrayed in conventional employment areas, performing, roles such as secretaries, teachers and salespeople.

It was evident from the research findings that the media does not generally perceive contemporary Sri Lanka as being a place where, in reality, women are often breadwinners and are significant economic contributors. Neither does it adequately acknowledge that Sri Lankan women today share more and more responsibility and decision making with men, both in the community and in the family. Perpetuating familiar female stereotypes, the media tends to encourage and reinforce negative images of women.

Another limitation in the portrayal of women by the electronic media, is the lack of sensitivity in dealing with subjects such as rape and sexual abuse. Such scenes are usually sensationalised. Television programmes often project the idea that rape is a form pf punishment for women victims and their families. In addition, women are often portrayed as victims of verbal, physical and psychological violence. The manner of the depiction of violence has become an issue of controversy. Whether such levels and types of violence are really needed is questionable. The second question is even more important; whether such overtly aggressive violence that we see leads to violence in actual life situations in society is a moot point that deserves to be taken into consideration.

In *the area* of *news and* current *affairs* programming, apart from the coverage of a few female politicians, women's issues and concerns are largely neglected. Other factual programmes, even those produced by women mainly for a women audience make too many assumptions about women's interests and are usually limited to such subjects as cookery demonstrations, home decor and beauty pageants.

Advertising is powerful and is persuasive by nature. Advertisements are constantly seen and heard by members of the public. The images thus portrayed should have some relevance to social norms and social reality. The advertising that appears along with news and other items has a high credibility factor. Hence, it is imperative that advertising agencies should act with a great degree of moral and professional responsibility. In addition advertisements tend to exploit women's sexuality, reduce them to limited gender roles, or use them as 'dressing' in selling products. Advertising was seen as an area where women are not depicted often enough as being independent, fulfilled or productive outside in the public scene.

The power of television lies in its ability to influence audiences with representations of the world. All the 'messages' we receive from television tend to shape and structure our perceptions and expectations of society, as well as affect our patterns of behaviour. Grasping this as an opportunity the electronic media in Sri Lanka should provide a balanced picture of women that reflects their diverse contribution to a rapidly changing society. This would help and reduce to a great extent situations of violence against women and the negative stereotypes of women. It is hoped that this Code of Ethics will encourage media managers and practitioners to recognise the importance of gender equality in producing and scheduling television programmes for Sri Lankan audiences.

The booklet contains the following

- Recommendations for Policy makers and Managers of Television Stations
- Guidelines for Television Producers
- Guidelines for formulating Advertising policy
- Action Plan for Gender equity in the media

This booklet is available with us for US $ 6/-.

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- convergences between intellectual, popular and corporate culture.
- cultural studies of neglected regions or areas of inquiry
- debate on the adequacy and future of various disciplinary traditions, methods and topics in cultural studies

The journal publishes work that is grounded in concrete analysis of a definite object of study but which suggests new directions, ideas and modes of inquiry to reinvigorate studies for a new generation of researchers and readers. The journal also contains sections that encourage debate, as well as reviews of conferences, journals and books and films.

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The Journal welcomes submission in all disciplines and is especially interested in paper/articles written from an interdisciplinary approach on gender issues.

- Research papers should be of 15-20 A4 pages.
- Reviews should be approximately of 500-600 words.
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- All papers/reviews etc. must be sent in typed on A4 papers and be double spaced.
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- An abstract may be submitted not exceeding 100 words in length.
- A statement of two or three lines about each author should be typed on a separate sheet.
- The Journal cannot pay contributors. Each author will receive one issue of the Journal.
- Papers should be mailed to the following address:

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Authors should retain one copy of their manuscript and send two identical copies, each fully numbered and typed in double spacing throughout, on one side only of white A4 paper.
an alphabetical References section should follow the text (and end notes if any), using the Harward system.

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Use a clear readable style, avoiding jargon. If technical terms or acronyms must be included, decline them when first used. Use non-racist, non sexist language and plurals rather than he/ she.

Spellings

UK spellings may be used with 'size' spelling as given in the Oxford English Dictionary (e.g. organise, recognise)

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Use single quotation marks with double quotes inside single quotes. Dates should be presented in the form 1 May 1998. Do not use points in abbreviations, contractions or acronyms (e.g. AD, USA, Dr, Ph D)

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