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Introduction:

On December 6, 1992, thousands of Hindu militants destroyed the Babri Mosque in the North Indian city of Ayodhya. The militants claimed that the Mosque was built over a Hindu temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu God, Rama. The incident was part of a series of communal battles that occurred throughout India. Violent mass riots occurred in most major cities and politically, the polarization of religions allowed the Hindu nationalist movement to emerge as a dominant force in Indian politics. While Hindu men dominated the forefront of the movement, Hindu women played an increasingly active role in the rise of Hindu nationalism. Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara, two powerful female orators, recorded cassettes and delivered public speeches that encouraged Hindu men to rise up in violence against members of the Muslim community (Basu *Women's Activism* 105). The ideological beliefs espoused in these cassettes and speeches are based on the notion that the indigenous religion of India is Hinduism, and therefore Muslims are foreign oppressors that must be controlled. Hindu nationalists believe that India must culturally unite under one belief system and that much of the reason for dissention among Indians is a result of India's religious diversity. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-winged Hindu party, claims that Hindu nationalism is the "'unifying force' that will create a national identity and ensure national cohesion" (Chowdhry 100). The BJP claims that the basis for their philosophy is the belief in "one people, one culture" (qtd in Chowdhry 100). However, the belief in 'one people, one culture' tends toward a cultural fascism, which implies the extermination of all non-Hindu cultures from India. This philosophy is not only reserved

for prominent male BJP politicians, but apolitical domestic Hindu women have also shared the belief of Hindu exclusivism. After the gruesome police killings of Muslims in Bombay, "some Hindu women stood on their balconies looking down at the dead bodies of two Muslim women and insisted that these women had died of natural causes, and, in any event, 'Muslims deserved to die'" (Basu *Women's Activism* 105).

This statement exemplifies the dissemination of violently political Hindu Nationalist anti-Muslim rhetoric into the lives of domestic Hindu women. Thus, demonstrating that Hindu Nationalism is not limited to the political sphere, but has also been able to influence the feminine domestic sphere. In fact, the Hindu Nationalist movement has incorporated previously domestic women into their agenda and has allowed them to emerge as powerful vocal activists. Yet the agenda of the Hindu Nationalist movement largely rests on the preservation of the Hindu family structure and the supremacy of Hindu patriarchy. Therefore, Hindu Nationalist women function within a movement that is heavily patriarchal and although they have been able to achieve opportunities for their own empowerment, they advocate traditional roles for other Hindu women. "The active participation of women in the public arena of violent politics under the aegis of a Hindu fundamentalist organization is an unusual social phenomenon, as the Hindu right has never officially critiqued the patriarchal norms that relegate women to the private sphere where their primary roles are as wife and mother" (Banerjee 217-8). The Hindu nationalist movement has sought to 'traditionalize' gender roles by promoting the role of women as domestic figures and occasional political participants under the auspices of nationalist patriarchs.

Therefore, the active role of Hindu nationalist women is puzzling because it seems as if there is little for them to gain through their participation. If the Hindu nationalists achieve their goal of a traditionally patriarchal Hindu nation, women will merely be relegated once again to their domestic roles. If there is little to gain from Hindu nationalist activism, then why are these women emerging as prominent activists in the Hindu nationalist movement? What aspects of Hindu nationalism appeals to them? What is their function in the movement and how does their role as 'traditional' Hindu women facilitate the goal of a Hindu rashtra? How is the role of women in the Hindu Nationalist movement similar to other right-winged conservative movements and how is their role unique to India? This paper will examine these questions in detail in attempt to ascertain a better understanding of the role of women in the Hindu nationalist movement.

To understand the specifics of women's participation in the Hindu nationalist movement, the first chapter will examine Hindu nationalist women's organizations as well as the activism of powerful female leaders. In particular, this chapter will focus on the Hindu nationalist organizations, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti and the Shiv Sena. This chapter will also examine the powerful female leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement and the manner in which the collective ideals of 'high' Hindu nationalism trickle down to common housewives on the individual level. By exploring both organized women's activism and individual activism, this chapter will establish the basis on which a detailed analysis will follow in subsequent chapters.

The second chapter will examine the political importance of the figure of the 'Hindu woman' in the nationalist movement. By examining the colonial emphasis on

womanhood, this chapter will explain the manner in which nationalist leaders internalized the definition of civility in terms of Hindu women. I will also explore the gender ideals as established by Mohandas Gandhi and the manner in which his philosophies reverberate in the nationalist agenda of gender construction.

The third chapter will explore the issues of sexuality, morality and motherhood that play a central role in the Hindu nationalist movement. Here, I will focus on the polarization of Muslim and Hindu sexuality while demonstrating the idealization of the Hindu woman as the symbol of ultimate purity. Lastly, the chapter will examine the ideals surrounding the concept of Hindu motherhood and the manner in which the act of 'mothering' becomes entangled in a political battle between Hindus and Muslims.

The fourth chapter will situate the ideology of the Hindu nationalist movement comparatively in the context of other movements. I will examine similarities between the role of women in the rise of Nazism and other right-winged movements. This chapter will also examine the relation between women Hindu nationalist activism and feminism in order to ascertain the manner in which the two philosophies accept and reject each other's ideologies.

Chapter One:

The Manifestations of Women's Activism in the Hindu Nationalist Movement

Rashtrasevika Samiti (Samiti):

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hegedewar. Its primary objective was to create a religious, Hindu-orientated, nationalist movement to offset the secular goals of the Indian nationalist independence movement. Hegedewar is noted for being disgusted with the manner in which a small group of British colonial administrators were able to “rule over a vast country like India with such ease” (Andersen and Damle qtd in Jaffrelot 34). Hegedewar thus loathed the British colonial belief that Hindu men were weak and effeminate. He felt that the pacifistic nature of Hindu men, as espoused by Gandhi, created a subordinate Hindu community destined to be dominated by foreign invaders. Hegedewar envisioned India as an independent *Hindu* nation and felt that Bharat Mata (Mother India) would be free only when it had returned to its indigenous roots of Hinduism. In order to achieve the goal of a strong Hindu nation, the RSS advocated rigorous physical training to strengthen the minds and bodies of young Hindu boys. The RSS also advocated the preservation of ‘Hindu’ culture as a means of preventing the foreign influence of other cultures and nations. This preservation largely focused on the importance of Hindu family structures and the feminine task of retaining traditional Hindu culture. In order to provide Hindu women with an outlet for activism as well as provide them with an organization dedicated to Hindu traditionalism and cultural preservation, the Rashtriyasevika Samiti was established in 1936.

It must be noted that the RSS was established as a sexually segregated organization and currently remains an all-male organization. The Samiti was created by Lakshmibai Kelkar to provide an outlet for women's participation, but remaining distinct from the functioning of the RSS. The RSS and Samiti are supposed to function "just like parallel lines which go in the same direction, but never meet, maintaining a specified distance between them" (qtd in Bacchetta 129). Therefore, by creating Samiti as a counterpart to RSS, the polarization of gendered identities was institutionalized and their task as Hindu nationalists were divided along traits of masculinity and femininity. The RSS was entrusted with the task of providing masculine leadership and the Samiti would be entrusted with the task of cultural preservation and maintaining the 'traditional' Hindu family unit.

However despite the RSS' emphasis on cultural preservation, the female members claim that they had an additional reason for creating Samiti. Official Samiti literature states that the Samiti "was formed because Hindu men failed to protect Hindu women from sexual harassment in the streets and Hindu women needed to learn to defend themselves" (Bacchetta 129). Therefore the goals of the Samiti do not only reflect a desire to preserve culture, but also a desire to physically defend Hindu women. Kelkar was adamant that Hindu women have strong, healthy bodies and she created a rigorous practice of physical exercise for Samiti members. The Samiti does not only replicate the RSS, but it also provides additional services for women that *men are unable to provide*. On the surface level, the physical training of Samiti members has the allure of empowerment by offering women the opportunity to be somewhat self-reliant. "The physical-training programs of shakas have proved to be extremely attractive, with

their promise of a powerful body and the self-confidence that it generates. The empowered body would be a shield against gender oppression within domestic as well as within public spaces" (Sarkar *Heroic Women* 205).

In addition, the division of genders allows the Samiti members to move freely within the organization without the restraints of a male presence. Paola Bacchetta writes that, "The Samiti provides a nurturing feminine space; camaraderie; a language; an emotionally and intellectually comfortable mode of entry into the wider public space to which many members, given their background would not otherwise have access; a place where they can be active and mobile" (127). Hindu society is framed upon notions of public and private spaces, where public life is associated with masculinity and private life is associated with femininity. Men go out into the public world to work, while women remain in the private world to maintain the family structure. The Samiti feminizes the public world, or brings the private world safely into the public, by allowing women the opportunity to participate in public activism within a feminine organization.

The male members of the RSS were aware of the public/ private divide and to a large extent, respected the Samiti's decision to create a feminine public space. Upon creation of Samiti, Hegedewar gave complete authority to Kelkar and claimed that he "'knew nothing' about women, and left Kelkar to determine 'the basic principles and philosophy of women's life in Bharat (India)'" (qtd in Bacchetta 131). Kelkar was therefore able to create an organization that incorporated icons of feminine strength and empowerment. Her only restraint was that her ideals should further the goals of the Hindu nationalist movement and adhere to its basic philosophy. To illustrate her ideal of Hindu femininity, Kelkar created the goddess Ashta Bhuja (Eight-Armed Goddess).

Ashta Bhujā combines the characteristics of three goddesses: “Mahakali (a fierce, protective goddess), Mahasaraswati (goddess of learning and the arts) and Mahalakshmi (goddess of wealth” (Bacchetta 131). Ashta Bhujā therefore represented the ideals of Samiti members and represents a “co-ordination of Strength, Intellect and Wealth’, which ‘elevates the *nation* to a higher plane” (131). Kelkar envisioned Ashta Bhujā as a goddess possessing the strength to elevate ‘*the nation*’. Thus, she assigns great importance to the feminine realm by entrusting the Samiti and its signature deity with the task of moral elevation.

Yet although Samiti members internalize Hindutva (Hinduness) ideology, not all adhere to a uniform ‘traditional’ Hindu female lifestyle. In her article, “Militant Hindu Nationalist Women Reimagine Themselves”, Bacchetta points out that Samiti members and Hindu nationalist women do not have a fixed identity, rather they define themselves using selected portions of Hindu nationalist ideology and manipulate the beliefs to justify their lifestyles. “Hindu nationalism becomes for each woman who so self-identifies, a point of referentiality, a position from which to speak and act with a maximum of agency and personal safety” (Bacchetta 126). The rhetoric of the RSS and Samiti allow these women to construct their own legitimate political sphere from which they can play a somewhat active role. Yet, they do not wholly subscribe to Samiti ideologies and often manipulate the Samiti discourse in a manner that justifies “their personal, intellectual, emotional, physical, and spatial expansion as new political agents” (Bacchetta 125).

This modification of traditional Hindu nationalist ideology is demonstrated in the figure of Kamlabehn, a thirty-one year old Samiti member. She teaches karate, lathi wielding and sword fighting within the Samiti. She arranged her own marriage, proposed

to her husband, but does not live with her husband because they have jobs in different cities. While this is not the traditionally accepted role for a 'good' Hindu woman, her parents approve because she has not "disrupted their caste or political continuity" (Bacchetta 138). Kamlabehn accepts the Samiti rhetoric of a Hindu rashtra and is a full participant in the Hindu nationalist goal, yet she frames her independence within these ideals while living a life free from the direct influence of patriarchy. She lives alone, earns her own income and is an active participant in a political movement. She represents the creation of a new Hindu 'feminist' woman as she realizes her independence within the contexts of the Hindu nationalist agenda.

Kamlabehn is also allowed a certain level of mobility within the Samiti because its members are largely homogeneous. The RSS was created by a group of upper caste Maharashtrian men and the Samiti counterpart largely involves the male RSS members' female relatives. Therefore, the Samiti consists mostly of upper-caste Hindu women, which allows them to maintain a level of homogeneity and does not compel them to question the ideals of other social groups. The Samiti

"does not expose women of the Hindutva brigade to polluting lower-class/ caste milieus or take them away from familial environ. It does not confront them with the larger problems of their socially exploited sister, so that Hindutva women are never forced to choose between gender and their own class/ caste privileges. It keeps them tied to family interests and ideology while spicing their lives with the excitement of a limited but important public identity" (Sarkar *Heroic Women* 185).

The isolation of the Samiti makes it easier to internalize anti-Muslim Hindu nationalist rhetoric. Samiti members do not come into direct contact with Muslims. They are therefore unable to identify with the Muslim community, and view Islam as a foreign culture that must be defeated to ensure Hindu survival. Nilabehn, a sixty-one year old Samiti member, states “We are not angry. We are only defending ourselves... Today the asurs (demons) are ignorance and Muslims. They must be eliminated”(qtd in Bacchetta 134). Nilabehn’s comments are disturbing because as a Samiti member she probably has little interaction with the Muslim community yet, she advocates their ‘elimination’. The belief in the necessity of Muslim expulsion is echoed in the words of other Samiti members. Ratna, a fifty-one year old Samiti member, states “The Muslims must go... They treat their women badly... They became traitors. Now if they want to stay in our Bharat they must become Hindus again”(qtd in Bacchetta 137). Ratna’s comments are interesting because she specifically singles out the Muslim treatment of women as a *reason* why they must leave India. Yet, the Samiti does not formally work with the Muslim women’s community to uplift or empower them; rather they merely condemn their culture without offering assistance.

While these comments illustrate the level of anti-Muslim sentiment present in Samiti rhetoric, the participation and support for violent pogroms against Muslim communities illustrates the extremity of their beliefs. Teesta Setalvad writes that the recent involvement of Hindu women in communal riots, “turns on its head an earlier assumption that women, with children, worst victims of any kind of violence, stick together and ‘protect’ other women” (234). Rather, there is much evidence that Hindu women are often aware and approving of violent physical and sexual attacks against

Muslim women. Sarkar notes that Samiti members displayed a level of informed consent during gang rapes of Muslim women and the tearing open of pregnant wombs in Bhopal and Surat in December 1992 and January 1993 (*Heroic Women* 190). As a woman's organization Samiti did not condemn these acts nor even recognize their occurrence. The response could be described as silent acceptance and, perhaps, relief that they themselves were not the victims. Samiti members do not feel solidarity towards women of other castes, religions or classes, they provide strength training and empowerment opportunities to their own members, but do not feel the necessity to work towards the upliftment of all women. The result of their actions is the reinscription of upper-caste Hindu patriarchal values within which they are allowed slight opportunities of 'independent' political mobility.

In fact, rather than protesting the treatment of Muslim women or, protesting the genocidal attempts to eliminate the Muslim population, Samiti members are often the instigators of massive riots. Members participate in "door-to-door whisper and rumour campaigns in normal and relatively peaceful times, they disseminate prejudiced readings of current situations, interlaced with history" (Setalvad 235). During communal outbursts, the pent up anger creates a "paranoia, fuelled by gory tales of blood and revenge caused by the 'enemy'" and "are precondition enough to justify blood-letting from 'their' side" (235). Therefore, Samiti members facilitate communal violence by disseminating false knowledge that motivates Hindus to rise up against members of the Muslim community. In addition, Samiti members also pass on RSS propaganda versions of Indian history, depicting evil Muslims to their children so they will become fighters when they grow up.

The Hindu Female Trinity:

Organizations such as the Samiti and the Shiv Sena provide women with a network from which they can participate in a Hindu nationalist sisterhood, but most women are restricted by their familial duties and do not hold prominent leadership positions. However, a few women have managed to hold very visible roles as powerful Hindu nationalist activists. These women are able to participate in the political realm because they are relatively uninvolved in the domestic sphere and for the most part, do not have family responsibilities.

Uma Bharati, Sadhvi Rithambara and Vijayaraje Scindia form the Hindu nationalist trinity of activist women. These women are elevated to a heroic stature as they deliver fiery speeches that encourage men to rise up against the Muslim community. By contrast to the Gandhian female activists, these women do not preach non-violence but, rather, they are the catalyst that often instigates massive attacks against the Muslim community. This section will examine the function of these women as well as the manner in which they justify their violent actions.

While Samiti and Shiv Sena largely advocate a domestic role for Hindu women, these activists defy almost every aspect of the creation of a 'good' Hindu woman. Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara are both unmarried, celibate women and Vijayaraje Scindia is a widow with an estranged son. None of these women is situated in the ideal patriarchal family nor do they wholly conform to the traditional roles of Hindu women. "Vijayaraje Scindia is an elderly matron who dresses in white, as customary for widows,

and radiates an aura of piety and sobriety. By contrast, Sadhvi Rithambara exudes a passionate rage that is said to have instigated riots in many places where she has delivered public speeches; Uma Bharati is a spirited, extroverted woman, who seems to revel in the role the press accords of her the 'sexy sanyasin' (a person who has taken religious vows including vows of celibacy)" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 159-60).

The legitimacy accorded these women is similar to that granted to Kamlabhen of the Samiti. They function within the sphere of the Hindu Nationalist movement to the extent that they employ nationalist rhetoric and frame their personal independence within the context of nationalist ideology. Their freedom from the patriarchal structure of the Hindu family is justified because they are working for the cause of a Hindu rashtra. They, therefore, gain a sense of legitimacy as they selectively manipulate the nationalist agenda to suit their own needs.

Although these women are isolated from the familial structure, they have a legitimate place in the Hindu community because they are celibate renouncers. The ability to renounce the material world garners a great deal of respect within Hinduism and contributes to the deification of their leadership. "Renunciation-both sexual and material- exercises enormous moral force in India....Simply put, it is difficult to imagine that people who eat, dress, and live simply could be corrupt, ambitious and cruel" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 161). Their renunciation allows them to subvert the role of a traditional Hindu woman and allows them to still garner a large amount of respect from the Hindu nationalist community.

In addition to the moral weight of celibacy, these women are also respected because of their strong support for Hindu nationalist philosophies. Basu notes that

rather than admonishing the women for the violent undertones of their nationalist speeches, the “BJP accorded these women greater prominence as they became more militant and vociferous, by nominating them to run in parliamentary elections” (*Feminism Inverted* 163). If one accepts the socialized construction of gender where violence is associated with masculinity and pacifism is associated with femininity, then it appears that these women were able to become politically successful because they assumed the masculine traits of militant violence. By contrast, the feminized trait of Gandhian non-violent rhetoric would not produce political success within the nationalist movement.

These women have also been able to rise to success largely because they do not subscribe to a leftist notion of female solidarity. They divide their loyalty to Indian women along religious lines. Bharati commented, “I feel for my Muslim sisters, but they do not seem to feel for themselves. Why do they agree to wear the burqa? How can they abide by Muslim law?” (qtd in Basu *Women’s Activism* 110). Bharati therefore justifies her prejudices against Muslim women by blaming them for subscribing to a culture and religion that Bharati feels is denigrating to women. The contempt that these activists have for the Muslim community focuses on its Muslim women to the extent that they often view Muslim women themselves as an enemy. Basu states that, “At their most benign they render Muslim women invisible; more often they seek to annihilate Muslim women” (*Feminism Inverted* 164).

However, Bharati, Rithambara and Scindia do not critique the patriarchal nature of the Hindu nationalist community nor do they advocate the complete empowerment of the Hindu women. By contrast, they encourage women to remain in traditional Hindu family structures and support traditional Hindu customs. In 1987, Scindia led bands of

women in a protest march “against anti-sati legislation and in ‘preservation of past glory and culture’” and argues that “Indian religion and culture supported the notion that women’s primary duties were as wives and mothers” (qtd in Setalvad 242; Basu *Feminism Inverted* 168). Therefore, while these women use their role in the Hindu nationalist movement to subvert the traditional roles as wives and mothers, they do not advocate a similar position for all Hindu women, rather they support the patriarchal structures of the Hindu nationalist movement. Ironically, the trinity selectively condemns Islamic patriarchal familial values as contributing to the subjugation of women, yet promotes the patriarchal Hindu family structure as espoused by Hindu nationalists.

It is arguable that their role as Hindu nationalist activists has allowed them to transgress traditional gender and class restrictions inherent in Hindu society. Although Scindia comes from a relatively wealthy background, Bharati and Rithambara come from low caste, poor backgrounds. Yet, their class status has not prohibited them from participating in the Hindu nationalist movement, by contrast their subaltern status aides in their appeal to the common Hindu that is distrustful of elite politics. In addition, these women are not restricted by the roles of traditional Hindu femininity nor, do they rely on male relatives for economic prosperity. “Unlike the vast majority of Indian women, none of these three women is economically dependent on fathers, husbands or sons; none of their identities is defined by their roles as wives and mothers” (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 167).

The ideas voiced by Bharati, Rithambara and Scindia are heard by people all over India as their speeches are recorded and sold on cassette tapes. As a result, common housewives that are unable to physically participate in Hindu nationalist rallies

or political women's organizations are still exposed to the female orators. Basu claims that the introduction of political ideologies into the private domain of the home is perhaps one of the most influential impacts that these women are having on Indian society (*Feminism Inverted* 170). Interviews with women in North India showed that women held "Bharati, Scindia and Rithambara in great esteem and rarely found their positions extreme. Many women praised their strength, courage and oratory powers and claimed to have been inspired by their leadership" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 169).

As stated earlier, violence equals power for these women. Therefore, their participation in and facilitation of violence elevates them to a position of power from which they can transgress their own gender limitations. None of these women is under the constraints of patriarchy, yet they promote Hindu patriarchal family structures as essential to the survival of a Hindu rashtra. They assume a semblance of 'Hinduness' by being celibate and by dressing in Hindu clothes. Yet, they do not 'practice what they preach' nor are they under the constraints of Hindu societal structure. They have transcended Hindu social stratification, transgressed their gender limitations, and risen to the higher stratum of public life because of their propagation of violence and cultural xenophobia. Most importantly, they have manipulated selected Hindu nationalist ideologies to justify their independence from patriarchy while promoting the patriarchal family structures that entrap millions of women.

Shiv Sena and Common Women:

The Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist political party, was founded in Bombay in 1966 to further the goal of the creation of a Hindu nation. Unlike the RSS, the Sena is not an elite, upper caste organization, but rather, most of their members are poor residents of urban Bombay slums. The construction of the Sena, therefore, differs greatly from the RSS, yet their goals are the same. It is important to realize that the RSS was initially created to protect the interests of upper-caste Hindu men who felt threatened by lower-caste Hindus and Muslims. The establishment of the Shiv Sena counters the original elitist intention of the Hindu nationalist movement and is evidence that Hindutva ideology and anti-Muslim beliefs have trickled down to lower-castes.

The Sena has proved itself as a worthy partner to the RSS and has achieved a great deal of political success in Bombay often by using violent tactics to achieve their goals. Recently, the Sena has been a major factor in communal battles and has openly declared their involvement in violent attacks against Muslim communities. The Sena has specifically been successful in mobilizing large numbers of poor women to support their causes. During the Bombay riots in the early nineties, "the Shiv Sena mobilized women to block the arrest of several of its leaders, to prevent fire engines from going to Muslim areas engulfed by fire and even to loot stores and attack Muslim women" (Banerjee 216).

The Samiti was able to appeal to women through the selective usage of Hindu icons and the female orators were able to appeal to Hindu women through fiery speeches laced with empowerment rhetoric that merely reinscribed Hindu patriarchal

ideologies. Similarly, the Sena elicits the use of selective Hindu ideologies that allows poor Hindu women to establish a point of reference from which they can justify activism. The Sena's women's wing, Mahila Aghadi, was established in 1985 out of a need to counter the influence of the autonomous women's movement. The Sena realized the need to empower women, however they also wanted to encourage women to remain 'traditional' and not challenge the Hindu patriarchal family. Therefore, the Sena offered limited opportunities of empowerment that allowed women to remain in the domestic realm.

The Sena ideology manifested in the establishment of income-generating programs to teach women skills to earn their own money, yet at the same time they sponsored Hindu rituals, such as Shivaratri that emphasize their role as wives (Banerjee 223). While the women may be somewhat empowered by the income programs and political activism of the Sena, their identity is linked to Hindu ideology and the notion that they must conform to the construction of a good 'Hindu' woman trapped by patriarchy.

The Sena makes Hindu women feel important and in fighting against the Muslim community, the women are empowered as violent warriors. Yet, the Sena does so in a manner that allows the women to maintain their domestic roles as Hindu women. "Women can feel powerful as wives and workers or warriors. They do not have to choose....they may slip from one role to another" (Banerjee 224). The Sena reinforces a sense of Hindu community that becomes a powerful force in anti-Muslim activism.

The success of the Sena is perhaps attributed to the fact that its members are extremely economically disadvantaged and disheartened with a government that is not

providing for them. Banerjee writes, "Fifty percent of the population of Bombay and a larger proportion of Shiv Sena supporters live in urban slums choked by sewage, rife with unemployment, and torn apart by criminal violence" (228). Therefore, the Sena women-centered income-generating programs are greatly appreciated and allow women not to question Muslim hatred. In an urban slum where residents have to internalize a strong 'survival of the fittest' mentality, poor Hindu women do not have the luxury of questioning their source of income. In fact, Sena women are often grateful of their status as Hindu women because it allows them to participate in the Sena's programs. "The economic benefits flowing from the Sena's projects strengthen the appeal of being a 'Hindu' woman in the slums of Bombay" (Banerjee 224). As low class Hindu women, Sena members occupy the ultimate subaltern status. By hating Muslims, Sena women feel as if there is someone beneath them and they are not completely denigrated.

The Sena members, both men and women, have been ignored by an Indian government that has been unable to provide them with adequate economic opportunities, yet exploits their interests for political gain. They are unable to relate to the intellectual, liberal ideologies established by Nehru and the Congress party. The Sena uses Hindu icons and ideology that is familiar to them. The Sena implements grassroots programs that are visible in the slum communities while the Indian government is removed from the daily functioning of slum life. The Sena provides slum residents with a community and a shared collective identity when they had previously been outcasted by Indian society. Banerjee writes, "Residents of (Bombay) slums feel that they have no roots, no sense of belonging, and no meaningful context for their day

to day life” (Banerjee 228). The Sena gives them a collective identity and a sense of purpose. This is particularly important for Hindu women that have internalized the notion that their lives should be restricted to domestic duties with very little outside purpose.

The peripheral location of the Sena with respect to the Indian government allows them to subvert governmental bureaucracy and in many cases provide its members with results that the government is unable to provide. This form of ‘quick retribution’ or, ‘rough justice’ is particularly beneficial to women that are unable to wait years for a court case or unable to handle the heavy corruption of police departments. Mahila Aghadi has adopted the usage of ‘rough justice’ as justification for the empowerment of women and through violence has often produced ‘successful’ results. Setalvad relates the story of a Hindu woman seeking justice:

“a woman employed in Saudi Arabia as domestic help was victimized by her employers and after being bundled back to India, came to the Women’s Centre (an autonomous women’s group) for help in settling the wages that were due to her. With no aid from either the Indian government or the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Bombay, the Centre had to throw up its hands. Some weeks later, the woman came back to inform the Centre that the matter had been settled successfully. Apparently, the Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi had gone to her employer’s house, threatened him with his life, and recovered her dues” (239).

This form of ‘rough justice’ both subverts the rule of law and, yet it constitutes a visible form of women’s empowerment. The woman was unable to rely on the efficacy of the Indian government, yet the violent actions of the Shiv Sena provided physical results.

With specific regard to women's 'empowerment', the Sena advocates castration for male rapists as retribution for the violation of sexual assault. However, sexual assault is largely an act of male domination that results from the patriarchal belief that men are owed sex. The Sena does not question Hindu patriarchy nor, does it advocate gender equality. It does not attempt to stop the cause of sexual assault, but merely reinscribes violent actions as a prerogative of a male-dominated society.

However, violent actions are not limited to the Shiv Sena organizational structure and common housewives have demonstrated the belief in violent retribution. A women's organization in the town of Kotach said that their group "had responded to Rithambara's calls by training its members to use guns, in preparation for the final battle in Ayodhya" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 170). The apocalyptic nature of Hindu nationalist ideologies appeals to women who displace their unhappiness as a creation of 'the other'. In this case, the Muslim community becomes the 'other' that is preventing them from enjoying life's successes. After the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque, "Hindu women often goaded crowds to attack Muslim families and properties" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 170). While much of Hindu ideology encourages women to be self-sacrificing and non-violent, Hindu nationalist propaganda portrays women as avenging goddesses that must aid in the elimination of the Muslim community.

The use of female activists also allows the Hindu nationalists to enter into the private domain of the household. In addition to the taped speeches of the female orators, the BJP also assigned women to participate in door-to-door campaigning where they spoke with housewives about political issues. The effectiveness of this method lies in the fact that housewives would have been reluctant to speak to male activists, but are

more willing to allow other women to enter into their home. Therefore the political ideology of the Hindu nationalist movement is able to enter into the private realm of Hindu women and is able to incorporate a selective usage of female empowerment issues within their agenda.

Chapter Two:

The Gradual Politicization of the Hindu Woman

In order to understand the emergence of women in the Hindu nationalist movement, one must realize that the figure of the 'Hindu woman' was a central issue around which the nationalist agenda was framed. The British had accused Hindus of being uncivilized because Hindu men supposedly degraded their women. Therefore, if Hindus were to become a true 'civilization' and legitimate self-rule, they must uplift their women. Hindu men thus internalized British definitions of civilization and in creating an ideology of the Indian secular nation, the specific British criticisms of Hindu women resonated in political thought.

However, while the figure of the 'Hindu woman' became an important political issue, Hindu women themselves were often not consulted. Rather, the problem of what to do with women (termed the 'woman question') became an abstract political problem from which the personal voices of women were often silenced. Partha Chatterjee explains that the nationalist movement was not actually concerned with uplifting women, but rather they simply wanted to provide the semblance of empowerment to appease political critics and those who labeled them as uncivilized.

This chapter will examine the gradual politicization of the 'Hindu woman' and assess the manner in which 'the woman question' was manipulated by politicians to further their own agendas. This chapter will also examine how politicians created ideals of 'good' Hindu womanhood that provide the backdrop for female activism in the Hindu nationalist movement.

The Colonial Period

During the colonial period of British occupation, the status of women was a prominent issue among the British as well as Indians. The British viewed Hindu practices such as sati, purdah and child marriage as a sign of Indian cultural inferiority. The British felt that the treatment of women defined the level of civilization and because barbaric Hindu practices subjugated women, Indian culture was obviously inferior and needed the reforming influence of the British. James Mill, author of the *History of British India*, states that "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted....nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women...They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation" (qtd in Forbes 13). While making the characterization of Indians as rude and uncivilized, Mill also implies that British civilization has attained a level of moral superiority because of the exaltation of its women.

The status of Indian women therefore became politicized as the British justified their domination over the subcontinent. Reverend E. Storrow visited India in 1848 and stated that the lack of unity among Indians was a consequence of the low status of

women. Storrow claimed that strong countries such as Israel, Rome and Western Europe all derived their courage and virtue from the high position accorded to women. "Having linked military strength with the status of women, the British concluded that the domination of India was natural and inevitable" (Forbes 13). Sir Herbert Hope Risley continues the British justification by stating that, "A society which accepts intellectual inanition and moral stagnation as the natural condition of its *womankind* cannot hope to develop the high qualities of courage, devotion and self-sacrifice which go to the making of nations" (qtd in Forbes 14). The British criticisms of Hindu women were thus given much attention and seen as a justification for Hindu subordination. By drawing a corollary between women and civilization, the British established a precedent whereby Hindu men internalized the notion that the status of women 'defined' the level of civilization.

In doing so, the figure of the 'Hindu woman' was of utmost political importance to those attempting to establish a 'Hindu civilization'. Hindu men carried the colonial burden of being viewed as 'savages' and thus attempted to reform the status of women in order to prove that they were in fact 'civilized'. Rammohun Roy, a Bengali activist, led the way for reforming legislation that banned sati (widow immolation) and other Hindu traditions. He wrote, "'evil customs' such as child marriage and polygyny, were not in harmony with nature" (qtd in Forbes 17). Roy's justification that evil customs are not in harmony with nature is clearly a British influenced notion because many Hindus felt that it was precisely those customs that allowed nature to remain in harmony. Hindus believe that the natural order of the world is maintained through rituals and therefore, many Hindu traditionalists opposed his reforms. Roy's use of British legislation to reform

Hindu practices was despised by those that resented the colonial intrusion into the religio-cultural Hindu world.

It is important to realize that the British specifically targeted Hindu practices and in condemning the treatment of Indian women, the British used the term 'Hindu'. Therefore, many Hindus viewed the British condemnation of the treatment of women as a direct attack on Hindu culture. The British used the terms Hindu and Indian interchangeably yet when discussing the condition of Indian women, Hindu customs were specifically targeted by the British. "Colonial officials agreed that religion was central to Indian life, Indian people were slaves to religion and sati (and many other customs were religious practices)" (Forbes 17). Yet, while the colonials accused 'religion' in general of enslaving the Indian people, the specific practices that they condemned were associated with Hinduism.

Therefore nineteenth century Indian reformers consisted of Hindu men attempting to reform their own cultural practices towards women. Many claimed that there was a 'golden age' during Vedic times when women were treated well, but their status declined as foreign invasions occurred. By internalizing this 'golden age' philosophy, Hindu men were able to reject Mill's philosophy regarding the inferiority of the Indian race and blame foreign invaders (Muslims) for the mistreatment of women. Therefore, in reforming Hindu practices, the male activists were not accepting blame for the mistreatment of women, but merely restoring women to their pre-colonial position.

The prominence of the 'woman question' in colonial politics is important because it forces Indian men to accept certain beliefs regarding the status of women. As we examine the progression of the Hindu nationalist movement, the ideals espoused by the

British reoccur as Hindu nationalists readdress colonial criticisms and politicize the 'woman question' in accordance with their political goals.

The Independence Movement and Gandhi:

As anti-colonial sentiments emerged and the independence movement began, Indians began to address their stature as a capable civilization. Mill had already made the assertion that the low status of women justified the inferiority of the Indian race and necessitated British domination. Therefore as the independence movement began to formulate its ideology, the nationalists needed to address the 'woman question' in manner that legitimated their belief in self-rule.

As a primary philosopher of the independence movement, Gandhi considered the 'woman question' as a central consideration in the formulation of a successful independence movement. Mill claimed that in civilized societies women are 'exalted' and Gandhi sought to prove that Indian civilization exalted women because it entrusted them with the task of preserving culture. Gandhi attempted to elevate the status of women by proving that women were the mothers of the nation and the sole bearers of Indian culture.

"It is not in the hands of the Brahmins, or of men, to preserve dharma. It is entirely in the hands of the *women* to do so. The foundation on which society rests is the home and dharma is to be cultivated in the home. The fragrance in the home will spread all over society....Women are the

presiding deities of the home. *If they do not follow dharma, the people would be totally destroyed.* " (Gandhi qtd in Bald 90)

Gandhi's comments traditionalize Hindu women by urging them to remain untainted by western influences and become bearers of Hindu dharma. However, Gandhi's request for a return to traditionalism essentially promoted patriarchal Hindu customs that subjugated women. Partha Chatterjee notes that the nationalist response to the woman question produced a retrogression in the status of women. He states, "the new politics of nationalism 'glorified India's past and tended to defend everything traditional;' all attempts to change customs and lifestyles began to be seen as the aping of western manners and thereby regarded with suspicion" (Chatterjee 234). Chatterjee argues that this return to traditionalism often burdened women with ancient Hindu customs rather than allow them to emerge as equal partners with men.

In the fight against colonialism, the internal strength of the Indian people depended on a strong sense of unity and belief in traditional Hindu culture. Gandhi manipulated the use of 'Hindu culture' in order to create a unified British enemy and, in the process created a form of patriarchal nationalism that sought to preserve 'traditional Hindu women'. Chatterjee argues that the nationalist discourse, "situated the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state" (qtd in West xvii). Therefore, the Hindu woman became associated with a protected 'inner domain' that the British were unable to reach. Hindu nationalists thus emphasized the importance of the traditional Hindu family and preached the preservation of the family unit as a means of fighting the British. Chatterjee argues that "women's association with the home came to represent the very

essence of Indian nationalism- as the spiritual, private world of Indian tradition and customs untainted by colonialism" (West xvii). Gandhi emphasized the traditional role of women within the family structure and entrusted them with the task of Hindu cultural preservation.

Gandhi also allows women to believe that the domestic sphere of preserving culture is an important task and is essential to the independence movement. Thus, the women feel important and feel that their domestic role is not a mundane task, but has some higher purpose of which they can feel proud. Indeed, he politicized the domestic world by making women feel as if their common housewife lifestyle was an act of political activism and made them feel as if they were 'equal' partners in the independence struggle.

Yet Gandhi was an intelligent political strategist and although he exalted the position of women in the domestic sphere, he also encouraged them to leave their homes and become public activists when he felt that the independence movement could be benefited. He mobilized women to picket outside shops selling liquor and foreign cloth because he claimed that the use of women would "ensure that the picketing would remain non-violent" (Bald 87). He also felt that the "moral power" of women could "make a more effective appeal" to the hearts' of foreign cloth and liquor buyers (Bald 87). Therefore while Gandhi manipulated the use of women activists for the betterment of the independence movement, he also established the notion that women were inherently non-violent, loving and moral.

Although Gandhi felt that he exalted the status of Indian women and rallied them in support of the independence movement, he did not support the total liberation of

Indian women. He felt that women had natural inclinations towards domestic life and therefore, they should remain out of public life. "He reiterated that a woman's real place was the household where she was the 'queen'. It was his genius that he was able to support women's involvement in the public arena of politics at the same time that he defended their traditional roles as mothers and wives" (Bald 82). Gandhi's message to Indian women is therefore somewhat contradictory and ambiguous. At times he urges women to listen to their husbands always and at other times he urges women to think for themselves. This ambiguity allowed women to enter the public realm of politics, yet placed limitations on their abilities, as the legacy of Gandhi's emphasis on a woman's domestic *natural* duties became a fixture in Hindu nationalist ideology.

Gandhi was able to further establish ideals for Hindu women by associating them with Hindu Goddesses. In a speech entitled, "Think of Sita", Gandhi encourages women to be like Sita and free themselves of material worries.

"Do you imagine that she went about with Rama in his 14 years' forest wanderings with heavy ornaments like you? Do you think they add to your beauty? Sita cared for the beauty of her heart and covered her body with pure khaddar (homespun)...Free yourselves of these shackles and relieve the poverty of people who have no clothes, much less ornaments to wear" (Gandhi qtd in Bald 89)

The use of associations with Hindu goddesses allowed Indian people to be proud of their culture as well as convince themselves that their culture was one that was worthy of self-rule and not inferior to British civilization. "His use of the chaste Sita, courageous Damyanti and fearless Draupadi became as much a means for making Indian women

(and men) feel pride in their heritage, a heritage that had come under attack by the British” (Bald 84).

However, while the use of popular Hindu goddesses united the Hindu community, it also isolated and alienated non-Hindu Indians. The colonial criticism of Indians largely centered on Hindu practices and, therefore, when the independence activists addressed ‘the woman question’ they did so from a defensive stance that addressed Hindu beliefs. Similarly, Gandhi wanted to rally Indian women to fight for the independence cause and since most of these women were Hindu, he addressed their situation with regards to Hinduism. While this seems like a legitimate claim, it allows non-Hindu communities to become isolated from the independence movement.

Comparison to Women Activists in the Hindu Nationalist Movement:

Many of the above ideologies manifest in the current Hindu nationalist campaign as the status of women is currently used to define the level of civilization. Hindu nationalists criticisms of Muslim purdah and polygamy are reminiscent of British colonial criticisms during the 19th century. Just as the British justified their domination over the Hindus by claiming the Hindus degrade women, the Hindu nationalists believe that their domination over Muslim communities is justified because Muslims degrade their women. This is echoed in Ratnaben’s comments as she states, “The Muslims must go...They treat their women badly” (qtd in Bacchetta 137).

However, Hindu nationalists do not criticize their own patriarchal structures. Rather, they encourage women to accept Hindu traditions as a way of resisting

modernization and preserving culture. They mobilize women when it suits their political agenda and yet, like Gandhi, they also feel that women should remain in the domestic realm. The Hindu nationalist provision of contradictory models of female empowerment is reminiscent of Gandhi's political manipulation of women during the Independence movement.

Yet, Gandhi encouraged women activists to be non-violent and peaceful. He cited Goddesses such as Sita and Draupadi as the ideal Hindu woman. By contrast, the Hindu nationalists also use Goddesses such as Shakti and Kali to encourage women to rise up in revenge against the Muslim community. The Hindu nationalists realized the effectiveness of Gandhi's political tactics and manipulated them to suit their own agenda. Basu states, "while the RSS may idealize women from the epic literature who embody notions of suffering and self-sacrifice, they also celebrate brave and powerful women who use *violence* if necessary to protect their communities" (*Feminism Inverted* 171).

The goal of the nationalists during the time of independence and the goal of the Hindu nationalists today are similar, but their enemies are different. The nationalists during the independence struggle viewed the British as the enemy, and the Hindu nationalists view the Muslim community as the enemy. Yet, as stated earlier, the tactics of the Hindu nationalists are different because they glorify violence and mass extermination.

The 'woman question' is often manipulated to fuel anger towards the Muslim community as the sexually threatened Hindu woman is used as a metaphor for the

threatened Hindu nation. The next chapter will examine how the sexuality of Hindu women is manipulated to further the agenda of the Hindu nationalists.

Chapter Three:

Sexuality, Morality and Motherhood

In the battle between Hindu and Muslim communities in India, the figure of the raped woman has achieved mythic proportions in response to which massive riots have occurred and thousands of men have risen up in anger. The sexual purity of women is equated with the honor of a community and, therefore, the sexual violation of a woman is considered a violation of the entire community. Agarwal writes that, "it is the woman who symbolizes the honour of the family and community. Exclusive control of her sexuality by the legitimate 'owner' is the practical aspect of the notion of honour" (38). The physical and sexual body of a woman therefore becomes the battleground upon which communities defend their honor.

In the Hindu community, the evil, lustful Muslim male has become a demonic caricature that is often used by the nationalists as a justification for Muslim hatred. Hindu men also feel that in fighting Muslim men they are protecting their women and protecting the purity of their community. While the Hindu nationalist paranoia promotes a defensive stance, it also encourages the belief that Hindu women are sexually and morally pure.

The purity of Hindu women also relates to the belief that Hindu women are inherently mothers of the nation and the preservers of the Hindu rashtra. The last

section of this chapter will examine the ideals surrounding motherhood and the manner in which the symbol of the Hindu mother achieves a heroic stature.

Muslim threat to Hindu women:

In order to construct a pattern of communal hatred, it is necessary to have a passionate issue which can mobilize masses of people and convince them that violent actions are not only justified, but are necessary to ensure self-survival. The myth of the lustful Muslim male is one of these flash points, which Hindu nationalists use to gain sympathy for their cause. Basu writes that:

“The BJP is faced with a serious contradiction between its need to foster Hindu-Muslim violence in order to gain Hindu votes and its desire to depict Hindus as victims whose violence is defensive and reactive. Given the realities of economic and political life, the BJP cannot plausibly allege that Muslims dominate Hindus today. But it can justify Hindu violence by pointing to the sexually predatory Muslim male and the vulnerable male”
(Basu *Feminism Inverted* 163)

Yet the Hindu nationalist belief in the hypersexual Muslim male is also evident in the historical foundations of ‘Hindutva’. Sarvakar, one of the founding fathers of Hindu nationalism, in his historical account of Muslims states that, “the aggressive Muslims of those times considered it their highly religious duty to carry away forcibly the women of the enemy side as if they were commonplace property, to ravish them, to pollute them, and to distribute them to all and sundry, from the Sultan to the common soldier” (qtd in

Agarwal 49). In his accusations of the Muslim community, Sarvakar reinforces the belief that Hindus have been historically wronged and therefore, revenge is justified. Sarvakar also alludes to the notion that Hindu men did not partake in the ravishing of Muslim women and, therefore, were able to be dominated by the sexually dominant Muslim males. Sarvakar writes that Hindu men were “haunted with the fantastic idea of chivalry to women and blind eye to time, place and person, the Hindus of that period never tried to chastise the Muslim women-fold for their wrongs to Hindu women, even when the former were many a times completely at their mercy” (qtd in Agarwal 50).

Sarvakar's historical account of battles between the Hindu and Muslim community establish the Muslim male as the dominator and the Hindu man as the victim. In addition, Sarvakar directly attributes the weakness of Hindu men to their historical inability to rape Muslim women. In focusing on the issue of rape, Sarvakar associates the domination of women with the domination of land. Hindu men were unable to protect their land or their women and Muslim men were able to dominate other women and conquer ‘someone else’s’ land. The link between land and the sexual body of the woman is, therefore, alluded to in Sarvakar's writings, as a contested space of battle.

However, members of the Hindu nationalist movement do not restrict the Muslim male threat to the historical past. They believe that Muslim males are still viable threats to Hindu women. Ratnabehn, a member of Samiti, states that, “The Muslims must go....This is our country, the land of the Hindus. They rape our women” (qtd in Bacchetta 137). Similarly, Kamlabehn, also a member of Samiti, believes that “all Muslim men are potential rapists; thus, all Hindu women should be armed for self

protection" (Bacchetta 140). The foundations of Sarvakar's philosophies are evident in the statements of these women and Ratnabhen directly associates the *land* of the Hindus with the fact that Muslims rape women.

In his article, "Sarvakar, Surat and Draupadi", Purshottam Agarwal argues that women are not viewed as individuals, but rather they are transformed into symbolic figures of political contestation. He states,

"The sexuality of women is nothing but an arena, a medium, a symbol; just as you die for holding the honour of your national flag and consider it your national duty to save the flag from the enemy, so also your attitude towards women should be the same, that is, uphold the dignity of yours and violently defile the others as retribution or pre-emption" (Agarwal 52).

The loss of self-identity for women is evident in Agarwal's statement as well as in the battle between Hindus and Muslims. Women become objects of sexual conquest in the same manner that land is viewed as the object of conquest in battle. In this sexual battle, women are raped on both sides and become the victimized figures that motivate additional uprisings.

In the aftermath of partition, Sarvakar's historical accounts of lustful Muslim men appealed to many Hindus. Several women had been kidnapped by Hindus and Muslims as the two communities migrated from their homes. "The number of Hindu and Sikh women abducted in Pakistan was roughly 33,000....Lists received from Pakistan showed the figure of Muslim women abducted in India to be around 21,000" (Butalia 63). The Indian government attempted recovery operations, but these were not always successful and the issue became a rallying point for Pakistan-hatred.

The figure of the abducted and raped Hindu woman served as a loss of honor for the Indian nation and specifically, Hindu men. Hindu nationalists had previously used the image of the honorable, sacrificing Hindu woman as the ideal of 'Mother India'. In the post-partition period, Hindu women were collectively invoked as an image of an Indian motherland in danger of being violated by a foreign Pakistan. A writer in the *Organizer*, a Hindu nationalist newspaper, states "Tens of thousands of our pious mothers and sisters who would faint at the sight of blood, were kidnapped and sold for so many rupees, annas, pies...the problem of (recovery of these women) is a *challenge to our manhood, no less than to our nationalism*" (qtd in Butalia 69).

The Hindu community regarded the threatened Hindu woman as similar to their own condition as a threatened new nation. Nationalists *feminized* their struggle by symbolically viewing 'Mother India' as being violated by a masculine, aggressive Pakistan and Muslim community. This masculine aggression manifested itself in the violation of its women and, therefore, Hindu women were further idealized as a rallying cause. The status of Hindu women was once again politicized in a framework that did not attempt to reform the position of Indian women, but traditionalized it and preserved it as a pure form of Hindu culture.

Sarvakar advises Hindu men not to accept victimization of themselves nor of their women. He encourages Hindu men not to be weak and honorable, but to avenge the rape of Hindu women by enacting the same violence on Muslim women. He states:

"Let these sultans and their peers take a pledge that in the even of a Hindu victory our molestation and detestable lot shall be avenged on the Muslim women. Once they are haunted with this dreadful apprehension

that the Muslim women too, stand in the same predicament in case the Hindus win, the future Muslim conquerors will never dare to think of such molestation of Hindu women" (qtd in Agarwal 51).

Sarvakar's statements propagate a cycle of sexual violence within which women of both the Hindu and Muslim communities are victimized. Each community believes that it is avenging the other's wrongs, yet the battle of their revenge is carried out upon the innocent bodies of women.

The literal destruction of female bodies is disturbingly evident in quotes from Begum Anis Kidwai's Azadi ki Chaon Mein:

"I did not see them myself. Instead I was told by a volunteer that 'Pakistan Zindabad' was engraved on the foreheads and on the hands and breasts of a number of women....a large number of Muslim girls were also brought on whose hands miscreants had tattooed even the dates of their crimes and their names....It's true that when Hindus caught hold of Muslim girls, they, partly with a view to taking revenge upon them, partly due to anger and partly with the intention of demonstrating they were Hindu, felt the necessity of tattooing different parts of their bodies....Girls who were found in Delhi were brought to us with the mark of 'Om' engraved on their hands. At the same time we also came across those victims on whose private parts were tattooed the names of rapists and whose breasts were stamped with the marks of savagery these rapists had indulged in" (qtd in Agarwal 29-30).

Kidwai's recollection of communal rapes is evidence that both Muslim and Hindu men objectify the female form and view it as a physical space for political contestation. The back and forth defiling of these women can be viewed as a form of sexual warfare where women serve as the physical battleground.

Ironically, Hindu nationalist women who are subject to this cycle of victimization do not protest against these actions and, in many cases, Hindu women themselves are the promoters of sexual violence against Muslim women. Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati "exhort Hindu men to fight their emasculation and take revenge for the wrongs meted out to Hindus by Muslims. Rithambara declares that Muslims inflict cruel punishments on Hindu women, where as the 'impotence' of Hindu men does not permit them to kill Muslim men" (Chowdhry 106). Basu argues that since Hindu nationalist women do not critique Hindu patriarchy, their anger towards Hindu gender inequalities is displaced onto the Muslim community. She states, "In the case of Hindu women militants like Bharati and Rithambara, it would appear to be anger against Hindu men in their own community that is displaced onto Muslim men" (*Feminism Inverted* 165). It is therefore arguable that because of Bharati and Rithambara's subaltern status, they are unable to directly critique Hindu nationalist patriarchy, yet they can displace their anger onto another community and justify violent aggression.

While Bharati and Rithambara indirectly promote sexual violence against Muslim women, Krishna Sharma, of the VHP's women's wing, states that, "if they (Muslims) rape 10-15 of our women we must also rape a few (of theirs) to show them that we are no less" (qtd in Chowdhry 106). The importance of self-preservation is stressed so heavily in the Hindu nationalist movement that Hindu women participants are unable to

sympathize with Muslim women and, by contrast, advocate their sexual violation as a means of revenge.

It is important to realize that although Hindu nationalists use religious icons and selective Hindu philosophies, the battle between Hindu and Muslim communities is 'racialized'. The figure of the Muslim 'other' does not involve their spiritual beliefs as much as it involves the notion that the Muslim community is the 'racial other'. Therefore, the implication in Sharma's statement is that if Muslim men are able to impregnate 10-15 Hindu women, Hindu men should do the same to ensure that the Muslim seed does not overpower the Hindu seed. This is implicit in the Hindu nationalist belief that the Muslim community presents a demographic threat to the Hindu community. Sarvakar writes that:

"One side-issue of the Muslim religious aggression, which caused a continuous drain on the *numerical superiority* of the Hindus was the diabolic Muslim faith that it was a religious duty of every Muslim to kidnap and force into their own religion non-Muslim women. This incited their sensuality and lust for carnage and, while it enormously increased their number, it affected the Hindu population in an inverse proportion" (qtd in Agarwal 48).

In addition to the abduction and conversion of Hindu women, Hindu nationalists also believe that the hypersexual Muslim male produces large families to increase their number and overpower the Hindu community. Traditional customs such as polygamy facilitate the growth of large Muslim communities, while the outlawing of polygamy in the Hindu code contributes to the decline of the Hindu population. Rithambara states that:

"The Hindu was dishonored in Kashmir because he was a minority. But there is a conspiracy to make him a minority in the whole country. The state tells us Hindus to have only two or three children. After a while they will say do not even have one. But what about those who have six wives, have thirty or thirty-five children and breed like mosquitoes and flies" (qtd in Chowdhry 108).

Therefore, in raping Muslim women, Hindu men believe that they are evening the score and ensuring the self-preservation of the Hindu race. Muslim rape of Hindu women is seen as increasingly diabolical because it is perceived as part of a greater conspiracy by Indian Muslims to overpower Hindus.

Shambu Prasad, a member of the VHP from Gujarat, even went as far to encourage Hindu women to "abandon birth control so that the Hindu population could keep up with the Muslims" (qtd in Chowdhry 108). This request directly illustrates the manner in which Hindu women's sexual bodies are identified as a space of political battle. Prasad views the Muslim demographic as a political threat and Hindu women are viewed as the political space upon which the battle can be won. The irony of Prasad's statement and the concern over the Muslim demographic is that population control is a nationwide problem in India. By encouraging women to discontinue birth control, Prasad is harming the entire nation and giving the already strained Indian government the burden of taking care of more people.

However, the goal of Hindu nationalist political parties is to gain a collective vote bank from which their leaders can rise to power. This necessitated the creation of a single issue, or rallying point, from which Hindus could unify against a minority

community. Since the Muslim community is the largest minority and since the bitter resentment of Islamic rule is still present in Hindu society, creating Muslim men as a sexual enemy allowed Hindu men to unify in anger against the Muslim community. In addition, the BJP needed to create the notion of a 'victimized Hindu male' in contrast with the 'treacherous Muslim male'. The BJP therefore "made the raped Hindu woman symbolic of the entire Hindu community" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 165). By feminizing the entire Hindu community and masculinizing the entire Muslim community, the BJP was able to portray the Hindu community as vulnerable victims under threat from a powerful Muslim community.

Moral Purity of Hindu Women:

Reminiscent of the Gandhian ideals of Hindu female purity, Hindu women are accorded with a higher level of morality. This allows Hindu women to transgress the restriction of domesticity and critique immoral behavior. For example, Hindu nationalist women activists are allowed to act in ways that male activists are not. Bharati and Rithambara often use vulgar language and deliver angry coarse speeches that arouse strong emotions in crowds. Basu writes that, "As women they may have particular license to speak from emotion rather than reason" (*Feminism Inverted* 164). If masculine politics is associated with reason and logic conversely, feminine politics is associated with emotion and morality.

Rithambara has often made biting criticisms of well-known Indian political officials and in many cases she has used denigrating insults and name-calling. Basu notes that

Rithambara is allowed to make these insults partly because, as a woman, she is viewed as being isolated from the corrupt world of politics.

“Rithambara’s cassettes seem to reflect a widespread hatred of politicians which is rooted in turn in the Hindu conceptions of the inferiority of the worldly domain of political life compared to the other-worldly domain of religion. *Women* are well suited to make this critique of the political world from the distance afforded them by the protective inner sanctum of the home” (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 162)

Ironically, Rithambara is very much immersed in the realm of the political world and is not secluded in the ‘inner sanctum of the home’. However, her gender allows her to assume the persona of the spiritual Hindu woman that has a higher moral sensibility than Hindu men. Sarkar notes that the figure of the Hindu wife is associated with the notion of moral purity that is untouched by outside influences. “Hindu woman’s body, hemmed in with scriptural ritual, was imagined as a pure space that escaped the transformative effects of colonization, whereas the Hindu man, seduced by the operations of western power and knowledge, had surrendered himself and lost his autonomy” (*Heroic Women* 186). Although Rithambara is not a traditional Hindu woman, her association with the morality of the Hindu woman allows her the freedom to criticize male politicians.

In addition to the issues surrounding the sexual violation of the Hindu woman, Hindu nationalists are also concerned with the moral purity of Hindu women to the extent that they want to preserve the Hindu woman as the ideal of Hindu culture. Sarkar writes:

"The woman- the sign and ground of Hindu supremacy- was thus vested with a moral ascendancy over the Hindu man and the non-Hindu woman, an ascendancy simultaneously made nonactivist and nontransformative for the woman herself, even though her passivity indicated a complete transformation for the community. Thus, the woman had *the* political function, but that function was exhausted in her act of embodying unchanged domesticity in an age of flux" (Sarkar *Women, Community* 93).

Therefore the role of the Hindu nationalist female activist is not to restrict herself to the domestic sphere, but rather to protect the 'inner sanctum' of Hindu femininity as a place unreachable by colonial or Muslim invaders. Although the ideal that is being protected is largely obsolete in the face of consumerist capitalism, womanhood and family life are figured as the sacred realm of Hindu culture that must be protected. Orators such as Rithambara and Bharati therefore encourage women to become mothers and wives because in doing so, they will preserve the domestic sphere of Hindu culture.

However, the perception of an idyllic domestic existence is steeped in the preservation of upper-caste, patriarchal Hindu values. In preserving the Hindu domestic life, one is also preserving traditional gendered roles where men exist in the public realm and women exist in the private realm. Female Hindu nationalist activists are able to emerge as public figures themselves, but they are able to do so because they reinscribe traditional roles for other Hindu women.

Motherhood:

In the Hindu nationalist movement, the figure of the Hindu mother is specifically politicized as India becomes 'Bharat Mata' (Mother India) and Hindu women are entrusted with the task of disseminating Hindu nationalist ideologies to their children. Also, symbolically every Hindu woman is a potential mother and it is essential that every Hindu woman exercise her 'mothering' capabilities. Politically, as the nationalists feminized the independence struggle, the icon of "Bharat Mata" (Mother India) is associated with the identity of the Hindu woman. Urvashi Butalia writes, "each Hindu woman is mother India in her individual capacity, and their collective energy, the basis for the real mother India" (73 MHMW). The notion of the collective strength of Hindu mothers was therefore stressed as an essential part of Indian civilization.

Upon creation of Samiti, its members were given the role of encouraging proper Hindu motherhood. The physical training of the Samiti was intended to build up the bodies of future mothers so they would then produce healthy sons to fight for the Hindu nationalist cause. Sarkar writes that "the leisure-softened, incarcerated bodies of upper-caste women was the reason that Lakshmibai Kelkar's request for a separate organization for the women of RSS families was eventually granted" (*Women, Community* 98). Hindu nationalists feared Muslim over breeding and "this inspired anxiety about the Hindu female body and its capacity for bearing strong and heroic sons who would grow up to be protectors of the community" (Sarkar *Women, Community* 98). The physical ability of Hindu mothering was therefore an integral part of the Hindu

nationalist plan and did not take into consideration the individual female self, but rather viewed the physical act of motherhood as important to furthering the Hindu rashtra.

In addition to the physical strengthening of Hindu mothers, Hindu nationalists also wanted the mothers to be familiar with Hindu nationalist ideologies so they could teach them to their children. Samiti provided an ideological training “to open women’s minds to the basic lessons to Hindutva politics, primarily to fierce and aggressive Hindu supremicism” (Sarkar *Women, Community* 99). However, Samiti members were not exposed to several Hindu texts, but rather a selected few portions and most members today display a very limited knowledge of Hindu scriptures. The historical education of the Samiti is largely influenced by nationalist propaganda and these accounts are then passed on in Samiti schools to young children.

Golwalker, a former RSS leader, outlines the role of the nationalist mother:

“Let our mothers make the children wake up early in the morning, make them salute their elders, and offer worship to the family deity.’ Mothers should teach their children to resist ‘a blind aping of the West’ and their girls to avoid European dress and not to ‘expose their bodies more and more.’ They should keep alive the observance of sacred occasions and ceremonies and take children on regular visits to temples. Mothers much also teach literacy, but teaching ‘noble *samskaras*’ (refinements) or a pious disposition was far more useful than formal learning. *Samskaras* would included a deference to family elders, Hindu historical heroes and deities, and RSS great men. The mother’s mediation thus renders the family,

the RSS, and the nation into a single all-encompassing yet intimate reality" (qtd in Sarkar *Women, Community* 99-100).

Golwakar thus assigns a tremendous task to Hindu mothers and entrusts them with passing on the heritage of the RSS to the next generation. He also asks women to be moral judges to their children and help them avoid temptations that will turn them away from nationalist beliefs. As Gandhi pleaded to Indian women to preserve Hindu culture and heritage, Golwakar also asks them to do the same. Like Gandhi, he gives women the impression that their task as mothers is integral to the success of the Hindu nationalist cause and allows women to feel as if their role in the domestic sphere is just as important, or even more important to further their cause.

The ideal of motherhood is heralded so much that it can be claimed that Hindu motherhood attains a somewhat heroic status. Rithambara speaks to men as a strong mother chiding her children and asks them to rise up as dutiful sons to protect 'Mother India'. (quote) In one of her cassettes, Rithambara narrates the story of Bhagat Singh's mother who wept after her son's execution. According to Rithambara Bhagat Singh's mother was a hero because she did not cry for her son's death but, because she had *no more sons who could die a similar heroic death* (Sarkar *Women, Community* 101-2). Rithambara idealizes Bhagat Singh's mother because she supports the nationalist cause so greatly that she wants her sons to die in martyrdom.. Sarkar writes that the Samiti makes "some new departures in norms and conventions by expanding the horizons of domesticity and adding serious, politicized dimensions to femininity" (*Women, Community* 102). Nationalist rhetoric politicizes motherhood to the extent that it glorifies militarism and violence above all. The introduction of violent rhetoric into the

private realm of child rearing introduces a new facet of mothering and creates a new ideal of domestic motherhood.

Chapter Four:

Feminism and Fascism

While the Hindu Nationalist movement is uniquely 'Indian' as it adheres to notions of 'Hinduness', it can be compared to other ideological movements. As its primary goal is the creation of a Hindu nation, the Hindu Nationalist movement has often been labeled as fascist. Indeed, the movement is self-contained as it views outside influences with disdain. Reminiscent of colonial hatred, Hindu Nationalists distrust 'modernizing' Western influences and other foreign cultures. The Hindu Nationalist movement is therefore fundamentally xenophobic and with regards to women, they view feminism as a western influence. This chapter will examine the Hindu Nationalist movement's specific relationship to feminism and fascism by exploring the manner in which the nationalists accept and reject these ideals.

Feminism and Hindu Patriarchy:

The ideals of left-wing feminism were first introduced to Indian women by British feminists who felt that it was their duty to 'modernize' backward Indian women as part of the colonial project. British feminists attempted to uplift and empower Indian women, yet

much of their philosophy was rooted in western ideology and, therefore, only introduced to urban, educated Indian women. In order to counteract the assumption that 'Indian feminism' was restricted to upper class women, Indian women's organizations began to incorporate Hindu icons that would appeal to a variety of classes. Flavia Agnes, an Indian feminist, states that, "In order to reach out to women from a different class, caste and culture and to propagate the new ideology of the strong and assertive woman, the movement adopted a populist approach and relied upon mythical symbols of Shakti and Kali to convey the newly constructed feminist ideology" (139).

The autonomous Indian women's movement merely replicated the same political strategies that were used by Gandhi and the Hindu nationalist movement. However, the message of the left-wing autonomous Indian women's movement is 'equality' and not 'cultural exclusivism'. The movement did not intend to exclude women of other religions, yet in their attempt to incorporate lower classes, the movement created a sharp religious divide. Agnes writes,

"The feminist movement also had to constantly counter the allegation that it was 'Western'. So in order to establish its 'Indianness' it relied on Hindu iconography and Sanskrit idioms denoting woman power, thus inadvertently strengthening the communal ideology that Indian, Hindu and Sanskrit are synonymous" (Agnes 139).

Yet, despite the Indian feminist movement's attempt to reach out to women by using Hindu icons, they are still viewed as an alien movement that will destroy Hindu culture. Samiti leaders "charge Indian feminists with wanting to be like men and constituting a threat to the family, the social institution that the Samiti identifies as

central to the Hindu nation” (Bacchetta 132). The ideology of Indian feminists is based on gender equality, cultural equality, religious equality and social equality. These concepts of ‘equality’ are basically foreign because the nature of Hindu society is inherently stratified. The legacy of caste-defined occupations still exists and there is little social mobilization. Therefore, if Hindu society is based on feudal notions of inequality then, the feminist concern with gender equality threatens the entire Hindu social structure. Note that Samiti members accuse Indian feminists of wanting to be ‘like men’ as a reason why they are despised. Hindu culture has very defined gender roles, from which one cannot escape. The patriarchal legacy of Hindu society allows men to have an elevated status, and one that they do not wish to have questioned. Similarly, Hindu women themselves do not desire the change of feminism because they are comfortable in their static gender roles.

This is echoed in the words of many Samiti members. Nilabehn supports widow remarriage and women’s employment, yet she states:

“I am not a feminist. I am a Sevika. The feminist women are westernized. They are not proud of our culture. They are against men, but they want to imitate men. They do not mind that the Muslims humiliate us. They do not want a Hindu nation. They want a mongrel nation, or a Muslim nation” (qtd in Bacchetta 134).

The fear of westernization is evident in Nilabhen’s words as well as the disgust with the feminist goal of complete equality. Nilabhen supports reforms for women, yet her primary goal is a Hindu nation.

Kamlabehn, a militant Samiti member, opposes dowry, condemns sati and says she supports the “total equality of women’ in the paid workforce and through out the public space. Yet, she is ‘against feminism. The feminists are westernized. They have lost touch with our culture” (qtd in Bacchetta 140). Kamlabehn manifests several characteristics of an independent woman, yet she charges that the feminists have lost touch with their culture. Kamlabehn does not support the ‘total equality of women’ in the domestic sphere, she only supports gender equality with regards to career and public goals. She realizes the patriarchal Hindu family unit is inherently stratified and does not question the legitimacy of the gender hierarchy. It is important to note that Kamlabehn frames her lifestyle within the ideology of Hindu nationalism while still maintaining her own independence. Indian feminists may have the same lifestyle and beliefs as Kamlabehn, but because ‘feminism’ is viewed as a foreign ideology, Kamlabehn must denounce their beliefs.

For the Samiti and the other Hindu nationalist organizations, the preservation of Hindu culture and the creation of a Hindu rashtra is the ultimate goal to which everything else (including women’s equality) are secondary. For example,

“the Samitis teach the battered wife to accept her lot in life and blame herself for her own failure to achieve harmony. To the wronged wife, they say that men are necessarily faithless and one has to live with this biological fact. They discourage talk of divorce or legal help, and they silence protest through persuasion and through invocations of Hindu patriarchal examples- the legendary wives who accept conjugal tyranny with a smile” (Sarkar *Women, Community* 100).

As the goal of the Samiti is to preserve Hindu culture and as they view the Hindu family structure as essential to the preservation of the culture, then the domestic role of women is firmly linked to the success of the Hindu rashtra. The acceptance of patriarchy is essential to the success of the traditional Hindu family unit and, therefore, the acceptance of patriarchy is essential to the primary goal of the Hindu nationalist movement. Samiti members do not question the patriarchal nature of the Hindu nationalist movement because it will help them achieve the goal of a Hindu rashtra. Sarkar states, "The Rashtra Sevika Samiti gender ideology, then, is a form of surrender to patriarchy, in which the Samiti forwards the cause of the RSS" (*Women, Community* 101).

Although the Hindu nationalists denounce feminist ideology as a western influence, nationalist women often protest against similar issues as Indian feminists. For example, Indian feminists organized a campaign against obscenity in the media and Hindu nationalists joined in the protest. Yet, the reasons behind the protest differed between the two groups. Indian feminists protested "against using women's bodies as sex objects or portraying women in derogatory and subservient roles" (Agnes 141).

Indian feminist organizations have attempted to maintain a secular agenda, so they do not discriminate along religious lines. However, in the process of reducing Hindu goddess iconography and using more secular means of activism, they have distanced themselves from the many women. Hindu nationalists appeal to women because they allow them to occasionally enter the public realm, yet do not force them to challenge the familial structures in which they are immersed. This is possible because "religious devotion has always provided Hindu women the opportunity for some degree

of collective identification and freedom from domestic drudgery" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 167). By associating Hindu nationalist activism with religious devotion, women are able to justify participation and men are able to allow women out of the domestic sphere. Uma Bharati states, "religion has earned me my freedom" (qtd in Basu *Feminism Inverted* 168).

Hindu nationalist activism provides an easy escape from the home, while feminist activism entails a direct confrontation with patriarchy. It is important to note that while Hindu nationalist activism is safe, it is also temporary and will not produce much long-term benefits for its female participants. Agnes writes, that "those who threw stones at the Muslim men and helped in (communal) violence and looting, would nonetheless have to approach women's organizations for help in problems of domestic violence, etc. in peacetime" (151). Note that the Samiti advocates the preservation of the Hindu patriarchal structure and asks women to cope with domestic violence and adultery. The Shiv Sena participates in 'rough justice' yet, they too do not interfere in the patriarchal structure of the family.

However, Hindu nationalist organizations do provide women with a place of collective identity from which they can associate with people of similar class, caste and religious backgrounds. Upon observing the Shiv Sena, Madhushree Datta, a feminist activist, notes that, "it gives them a different kind of belonging. Now our (feminist) weakness is we did not realize this desire to belong. We thought of need, of rights (but not of the desire to belong)...Rebellion does not make a movement, does not make a craze. Rebellion remains an alienating isolating factor" (qtd in Banerjee 228). The Shiv Sena, and other Hindu nationalist organizations, provide women with a place to belong

from which they can exercise their right to rebel, without threatening their way of life. By promoting a secular, non-religious, non-regional, women's movement, the Indian feminists stripped many women of the very defining qualities that determined their identity. The Indian feminists asked women to focus on their gender as a primary concern, yet most Hindu women are taught to be self-sacrificing and not focused on their individual struggles. Therefore, in asking women to focus on their 'gendered rights' the Indian feminist movement alienated women from their familiar culture. By contrast, Hindu nationalists provided them with a society from which they could act while maintaining their identity.

Yet, though the BJP is inherently patriarchal, they advocate certain liberties for women as long as their agenda of creating a Hindu rashtra remains intact. Basu states, "While the BJP is in important respects deeply patriarchal, it has sometimes advanced women's rights in order to fulfill its more critical objective of vilifying the Muslim community" (*Feminism Inverted* 170). The BJP has internalized the preoccupation with the status of women as an indicator of civility. Therefore, in that respect, the BJP is willing to offer selective liberties to Hindu women in an attempt to prove the 'high' level of Hindu civilization in contrast with the 'backwardness' of Muslim civilization. The current Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has stated, "We have created only two roles for women: as either *devis* or *dasis* (goddesses or slaves) to the exclusion of other roles. But women are above all human beings who deserve respect and justice" (qtd in Basu *Feminism Inverted* 171).

While Vajpayee's rhetoric may not always be translated into action, the gist of his words is that the BJP is willing to create a semblance of female empowerment, but

does not advocate a feminist stance that would directly challenge patriarchal structures. This illusion of female empowerment is a political tool that also allows the BJP to recruit support from women voters. Vajpayee's statement is also evidence of "the BJP's recognition that its popularity among women rests at least partially upon its appeals to their interests as women" (Basu *Feminism Inverted* 172). Yet, these appeals are largely unfounded and little action is taken to secure the rights of women. The words of BJP politicians appease women who feel the injustice of patriarchy and provide women with an illusion of action. Rather, it is arguable that the goal of Hindu nationalist organizations is not to liberate women, but to strengthen the gendered roles within the family. Basu states, "if in some respects the BJP seeks to strengthen the family, it also seeks to redistribute patriarchal authority among Hindu men" (*Feminism Inverted* 173). In other words, the BJP does not wish to give Hindu women direct power, but rather they seek to return power back to Hindu men that might have given women autonomous opportunities.

Fascism:

In his detailed analysis of the movement, Christophe Jaffrelot states, "the RSS should be regarded as an 'Indian version of fascism'" (51). Although direct contact between Hindu nationalists and European fascists occurred after the establishment of the RSS, the formation of the Hindu nationalist movement can be seen as reflective of several worldwide anti-liberal movements during the early twentieth century. Jaffrelot points out that the movement "represents a specifically Indian phenomenon which is not simply a reproduction of European fascism" (51). Rather, Hindu Nationalist leaders were

inspired by the ideals of European fascism and praised their efforts to create racially pure nations. Golwalker, a leader of the RSS, praises Nazi Germany in his book We, Our Nationhood defined:

“To keep up the purity of the Race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic Races- the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by” (qtd in Jaffrelot 55)

Thus, Golwalker derives inspiration from the European fascist movements, yet exemplifies their success within the specific context of “Hindusthan”.

As the goals of the European fascist movement and the Hindu nationalist movement both involved the notion of ‘racial purity’, there are several ideological similarities between the two movements. In describing the European fascist movements, Martin Durham remarks, “The construction of a national mythology with its pantheon of heroes (and sometimes heroines) casts doubt on the loyalties of minorities, seen as owning allegiance not to the land in which they live but to the one from which they or their forebears came” (3). This is particularly evident in the Hindu Nationalist movement as the heroic figure of Ram contributes to the construction of an ideological Hindu nation. In addition, the specific creation of the Samiti goddess “Ashta Bhuj” represents the female entity in the Hindu rashtra. The usage of Hindu deities as national heroes alienates the Muslim community and is used as evidence that Muslim Indians are not loyal nationalists, but rather are traitors that owe allegiance to Islamic nations.

European fascists were concerned with cultural and racial purity in the same manner that Hindu nationalists seek to preserve the Hindu 'race'. European fascists sought to preserve a superior race and destroy a degenerate race in order to elevate their nation. They believed that their "nation (was) in danger. Threatened by external enemies, it (was) also under threat from enemies within" (Durham 3). The attempt to preserve a superior race and culture thus inherently involved the inclusion of women as physical bearers of racially pure children. The European fascists were therefore concerned with the birth rate of women and sought to encourage women of their race to have numerous children.

Benito Mussolini, an Italian dictator, was particularly concerned with the Italian birth rate and worried that the Italian race would die out if more women did not have children. He therefore banned the sale of contraceptives and "gave monetary awards for marriages, for births and for the hygienic raising of children" (Durham 14). Not only did Mussolini encourage motherhood, he also discouraged women's employment because he felt he distracted women from fulfilling their innate maternal obligations. Though Mussolini encouraged marriage and pregnancy, his primary concern was racial purity and he passed many laws outlawing interracial relationships. In 1937, he passed a law "prohibiting co-habitation between Italians and colonial subjects from Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somaliland, with a term of from one to five years' imprisonment" (Durham 15). Later that year, he became more racially specific by forbidding "marriages between Aryans and non-Aryans" (Durham 15).

Similarly, Nazi Germany passed laws outlawing "both marriage and sex between an Aryan and a Jew" (Durham 23). German Nazis, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler,

were also concerned with the preservation of the Aryan race and felt that the mixture of racial inferiors degraded German society. Therefore the role of women as mothers was also heralded under Nazism as essential to the preservation of a German race. Nazis discouraged women from entering the workforce and claimed that bearing children was a form of loyal support. Rudolph Hess, Hitler's deputy, proclaimed "'The highest service' a woman could 'render to the community' was 'the gift of racially healthy children for the survival of the nation'" (qtd in Durham 24).

The similarities between the European fascist emphasis on motherhood and the Hindu nationalist emphasis on motherhood are striking. Hess' quote is reflective of Hindu nationalist ideology and it can be imagined coming out of the mouth of a BJP politician. In addition, European fascists were very concerned with the rising birth rates of their racial enemy. Similarly, Hindu nationalists are equally concerned with the rising birth rates of Muslims. Both the European fascists and Hindu nationalists desire the construction of a superior race, and similar to the German hatred for Jews, Hindus are able to construct a racial identity prefaced in religion.

Similar to the construction of a hypersexual Muslim male threat, the Nazis also viewed Jewish men as a sexual threat to Aryan women. In Mein Kampf, Hitler's autobiography, he claims that "'hundreds of thousands' (of Aryan Germans) were seduced by Jews who, with 'satanic joy' lurked 'in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her own people'" (qtd in Durham 17). Hitler's depiction is similar to Sarvakar's quotes regarding hypersexual Muslim men who rape Hindu women. By using the term '*satanic joy*' Hitler is able to convey the inherent evilness of the Jewish community much in the same manner that Sarvakar constructs

an evil Muslim community. Hitler's views were echoed by other Nazis who feared the pollution of the German Aryan race by Jewish men. In his newspaper Der Sturmer, Julius Streicher used "scandalous allegations and pornographic cartoons to present Jews as the enemy not only of Germany but of *German womanhood*" (Durham 18). Thus in anger over the defilement of their women, German Nazi men were able to view the Jewish community as a threat to their way of life.

In addition, European fascists also denounced feminism much in the same manner as Hindu nationalists. Italian fascists claimed that "feminism was a Jewish invention" and the Guida Diehl, a female Nazi activist, claimed that "feminism had devalued motherhood and housework and women had succumbed to 'the search for pleasure'"(qtd in Durham 15, 19). Feminism is therefore seen as an outside influence and counter to traditional culture. European fascists claimed that their traditional societies had propagated gender equality, but foreign influences had contributed to the current gender hierarchy. In asking for more rights for women, Emma Hadlich, a Nazi woman, argued not in support for "*alien* feminism", but for a return to "the order that had prevailed in ancient society. Indeed, it was foreign values that had infected German society with the belief in women's inferiority" (Durham 21). Similarly, Hindu nationalists denounce feminism as 'western' influence and claim that the suppression of women is not inherent to Hindu culture, but resulted out of foreign (Muslim) invasions.

The construction of European youth training camps that disseminated fascist ideology is also very similar to Hindu Nationalist camps. Teesta Setlavad compares the Shiv Sena *shakas* (training camps) to the statement of the member of the Thalburn Hitler Youth"

“without really meaning to, this organization grew rapidly. I think most boys joined for the same reason I did. They were looking for a place where they could get together with other boys in exciting activities. I don’t think the political factor was the main reason boys joined....we weren’t fully conscious of what we were doing but we enjoyed ourselves and felt important” (qtd in Setalvad 242).

This quote is reflective of the nature of the Hindu Nationalist movement and also relates to female participation because many women joined out of a need to escape domesticity, enjoy themselves and feel important. The political ramifications of their actions did not become clear till massive communal riots occurred and by that point, the women were protecting their way of life that had become accustomed to participation in Hindu nationalist activities.

European fascist movements also created female training camps that resemble the Samiti shakas. The British United Front (BUF) created a women’s section in 1933 to assist the role of men in the BUF. The BUF women’s organization comprised of a “small squad of women stewards...all trained in ju-jitsu” (Durham 50). These women also participated in public meetings that involved “propaganda, speaking to women’s audiences, and the organization of a political section” (Durham 50). Thus, women in the BUF function similar to women in the Samiti as they incorporate violence into political action. The anti-fascist newspaper, The Daily Herald, reported that a BUF women had directly participated in violent acts. Miss Taylor, a BUF woman, allegedly “seized a steward by the hair and spat at him. She also seized (a woman) by the hair and kicked her” (Durham 54). The BUF offers women an opportunity of legitimate violence and

empowerment by framing violent activism within the context of a political agenda much in the same manner that the Hindu nationalist does.

While Nazism and other European fascist movements largely died out after World War Two, the Hindu Nationalist movement has only recently come to power. The Hindu Nationalists established their ideology during the same time as the fascists, but they were unable to gain control of the Indian government in the first half of the twentieth century. With the rise of the BJP, the Hindu Nationalists have finally been able to obtain control of the government and their emergence is reflective of several other post-cold war right-wing movements.

Claudia Koonz comments that in the former Soviet bloc, leaders “extol feminine virtues as part of their call for ‘purified’ ethnic unity against evil ‘outsiders’, especially Jews and Muslims” (238). In the former Yugoslavia, while soldiers exterminated their enemies, they also “systematically raped ‘enemy’ women” and established “‘rape camps’ where women prisoners were forced to endure daily, multiple rapes” (Koonz 241). The premise of ethnic purity is therefore not limited to Hindu nationalists, nor is it limited to the fascist ideals of early twentieth century European fascist movements. It shapes the ideals of nations struggling to establish an unified identity and during times where ethnicities are at war with each other, ideas of ‘racial purity’ emerge as a primary concern.

It is important to realize that the role of women is essential in ‘purity’ theories because it is their bodies that produce ‘pure’ progeny and by contrast, it is also enemy female bodies that produce ‘impure’ progeny. Therefore many of the theories propagated by Hindu nationalists are visible in other right-winged movements, simply for

the fact that they desire the establishment of a 'pure race'. Inherent in the emphasis on motherhood in right-winged movements is a return to traditional gender roles and the restriction of women in the domestic sphere. For example, Hitler wanted women to have more children and called for "more masculine men and more feminine women" (232). Thus, reinscribing societal gender construction in support of patriarchal authority and feminine subordination.

Taking this fact into consideration, the active involvement of women in right-winged movements seems puzzling. However Koonz points out that, "Women at the far right express anger at the 'system', hatred for 'godless' materialists, resentment against ethnic 'others', and a longing for a stable and gender-distinct social order" (233). Several right-winged women are not coerced into supporting patriarchal values, rather they accept these views out of their own volition. By accepting traditional gender roles, right winged women are secure and comforted in their position without having to challenge authority. Rather, they can displace anger onto ethnic others without questioning their own gendered subordination. Similarly, the Hindu nationalist movement offers its women limited opportunities of activism while binding them to traditional patriarchal familial structures.

Conclusion:

The active participation of women in the Hindu Nationalist movement has proven that the largely patriarchal agenda of the nationalists has not deterred women from participating. Rather, numerous women have joined Hindu Nationalist organizations and

publicly participated in Nationalist campaigns. These women fiercely protect the notion of a 'Hindu way of life' and view outside influences as threats to the Hindu rashtra. Hindu Nationalist women abhor the Muslim community and the feminist movement as forces attempting to destroy the Hindu family. Thus Hindu Nationalist women promote the domestic role of women as essential to the Rashtra while also participating in the public activism of the Nationalist movement.

The resurgence of Hindu Nationalism and the participation of activist women can be examined in within the context of political history. According to Claudia Koonz, "Weimer Paradigm" states that progressive change is possible during times of economic growth and by contrast, when "economic downturn or political instability threatens business as usual, backlash parties mobilize previously apathetic or complacent citizens" (231). Koonz explains that these backlash movements often criticize attempts at gender modernization and call for a return to traditional gender roles. While Koonz' use of the Weimer Paradigm deals primarily with European right-winged movements, it can also be related to the Hindu Nationalist movement.

During the political instable period of independence, Gandhi and Hindu Nationalists such as Hegedewar called for a preservation of the Hindu Nationalist woman in the face of the tyrannical British Empire. The Hindu woman therefore became the icon of purity and formed the basis of the struggle for an autonomous "Mother India". While India struggled to become a unified nation, the Congress party's secular agenda dominated the political scene till the late twentieth century. By that time, the Hindu Nationalists had created a strong grassroots following and masses of people joined the nationalist cause during the eighties because they were discontented by the dire

economic situation. The Ayodhya mosque provided a rallying point from which the Hindu Nationalist movement could stir up emotions of past-wrongs, and religious defamation. In addition, the focus on a single issue allowed the nationalists to gain a large vote bank for the BJP.

Yet the call for traditional gender roles is an essential aspect of backlash movements and therefore, the role of the 'traditional Hindu woman' achieves heroic proportions. The symbolic figure of the pure Hindu woman exemplified the threatened Hindu community and women activists were able to voice the call for traditionalism by bringing the nationalist agenda to the confines of domestic life. The excitement of the Hindu nationalists allowed domestic women to have opportunities in the public arena as well as offered them an 'enemy' to displace their anger. Instead of questioning the constraints of their family life, the Hindu nationalist women blamed their hardships on the Muslim community and allowed Islam to manifest as the primary enemy to Hindu culture. It is also important to realize that to facilitate the defamation of the Muslim community, Hindu nationalists condemned Islamic patriarchy and in turn, attempted to demonstrate that Hindus respect their women. Female activists such as Scindia, Rithambara and Bharati have been able to manipulate this fact and rise to power while framing their independence within nationalist ideology.

The backlash conservative movements traditionally reinscribe patriarchy and often claim that modernization or foreign influences have created economic discontent. Koonz points out that backlash conservatives "aim to restore a world that has already been lost...backlash leaders demonstrate an extraordinary talent for mobilizing grassroots activism with calls for a social order marked by ethnic solidarity, 'natural'

gender roles, and an absolutist value system" (231). Hindu Nationalists do all of the above and in the process, Hindu Nationalist women have been restricted to the patriarchal family structure with little hopes of autonomy.

Basu points out that, "One striking feature of women's activism in ethnic and religious movements is its tendency to uphold and defend the family rather than challenging it, as feminists have" (*Appropriating Gender* 10). Yet, feminists challenge the *patriarchal* family unit because women are often bound to subordinate domestic roles. In addition, 'feminist' organizations in India have specifically dealt with issues surrounding domestic abuse and sexual assault that arise out of the belief in male domination. Therefore, as 'feminists' in India urge women to reject familial abuse, they are perceived as being 'anti-family' and 'anti-Hindu'. By contrast, Hindu Nationalist women's organizations stress the importance of the Hindu family unit as essential to the survival of the Hindu Rashtra and urge women to endure hardships for the 'greater good'.

Hindu Nationalists offer women the opportunity to participate in the public realm without directly challenging patriarchy. Women's organizations such as the Samiti provide a safe, gender-segregated outlet of political activism that husbands, fathers and other male relatives will approve. In addition, the elevation of the 'traditional Hindu woman' to a heroic stature further encourages women to develop a sense of pride in Hindu Nationalist activism. On the surface level, the involvement of women in the Hindu Nationalist movement seems paradoxical as women reinscribe repressive patriarchal traditions. Yet, it is important to realize that women can be mobile within the confines of the Hindu Nationalist movement and achieve limited levels of autonomy. Thus, while

Hindu Nationalist women are not entirely independent, they have managed to obtain semblances of independence within the movement.

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