

Stochastic Modelling and Computational Sciences

INTERSECTION OF NATIONALISM AND GENDER POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Nationalism, with its emphasis on national identity, has a rich history, while gender politics revolves around issues of gender equity and empowerment. The intersection of these two forces is where they interact, leading to complex dynamics. Nationalist movements can reinforce traditional gender roles, but gender politics within these movements can also empower women and marginalized groups. The research aims to uncover historical contexts, exploring gender dynamics within nationalist movements, better understand how national identity impacts gender roles. The research methodology employed in this study is based on secondary data and employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. It utilizes a variety of data sources, including academic journals, articles, reports, and news articles. Data analysis consisted of content and thematic analysis to identify key findings and patterns related to the intersection of nationalism and gender politics. The research first emphasizes that nationalist discourse often adopts inherently masculine characteristics, constructing national identity through what can be termed "masculinized memory, humiliation, and hope." This masculine orientation of nationalism raises questions about gender equality within these movements. While there is a growing presence of women in these movements, their involvement is often driven by a "mythologized label" deployed by other groups to challenge male nationalists. Furthermore, the research highlights the prevalence of digital nationalism associated with men and its entwinement with gender power relations. The paper underlines the role of femininity and motherhood within nationalist movements, where women are sometimes portrayed as symbolic bearers of the nation closely linked to the concept of the nation as a woman in need of protection from external threats. However, there is again an ambiguity in women's roles, as some choose to adopt a more combative, "virgin warrior" identity. The case of Hindu nationalism in India serves as a practical example of how the intersection of nationalism and gender politics unfolds. These groups emphasize the dominance of Hindu culture and assert the need to protect Hindu women and the nation from threats. The portrayal of masculine Hinduism, the transformation of traditional figures into masculine icons, and the use of symbols like the tiger all promote aggressive militarism within these movements.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The intersection of nationalism and gender politics constitutes a complex and multifaceted area of study within the realm of social and political sciences. This research delves into the dynamic interplay between two significant and interconnected domains: nationalism, a socio-political ideology that underscores the importance of national identity, and gender politics, which encompasses the struggles and negotiations surrounding gender roles, rights, and identities. The origins of these intersecting forces can be traced back through history, illustrating their profound influence on social structures and policy frameworks.

Nationalism, as a concept, has a rich and varied history. Emerging as a significant force in the 19th century, it gained prominence during a period of territorial and political upheaval, when numerous nation-states were in the process of formation. Nationalism's core tenets often emphasize the common cultural, linguistic, or historical attributes that define a nation. As a driving ideology, nationalism has played a pivotal role in shaping the course of modern history, from movements for self-determination and independence to the dynamics of contemporary geopolitics.

Gender politics, on the other hand, revolves around issues of gender equity, identity, and empowerment. It is deeply rooted in the historical struggle for women's rights and gender equality, which gained momentum during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The feminist movement, in particular, has been instrumental in challenging

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and reshaping societal norms and institutions. Gender politics encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from debates over reproductive rights to issues concerning LGBTQ+ rights and the acknowledgment of diverse gender identities.

The intersection of nationalism and gender politics is where these two powerful forces converge and interact. This juncture is characterized by the complex and often contradictory ways in which nationalism influences and is influenced by gender dynamics. On one hand, nationalist movements may champion traditional gender roles and patriarchal values as part of their national identity, reinforcing gender inequalities. On the other hand, gender politics within nationalist movements can provide a platform for women and marginalized groups to voice their concerns and demand equal recognition.

As this research embarks on an exploration of this intricate intersection, it seeks to unravel the historical contexts, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence that illuminate the dynamics of nationalism and gender politics. By scrutinizing the interplay between these two forces, it aims to provide fresh insights and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of national identity on gender roles and rights. This investigation is essential for scholars, policymakers, and advocates working towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To delve into the historical evolution of nationalism and its interplay with gender politics, shedding light on pivotal events and movements where these two realms intersect.
2. To conduct a comprehensive review of relevant literature, encompassing seminal works, theories, and empirical studies in the field.
3. To investigate the intricate gender dynamics within nationalist movements and their influence on both male and female participants, as well as the broader societal implications.
4. To analyze the policies, practices, and measures related to gender within nationalist ideologies and movements, with a particular emphasis on their impact on gender equality and the rights of women.

1.3 Significance of this Study

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to contribute valuable insights to the academic discourse surrounding the complex intersection of nationalism and gender politics. Given the historical and contemporary significance of these two interrelated concepts, understanding how they intersect can shed light on critical aspects of society, identity, and political dynamics. This research seeks to uncover nuanced relationships and patterns that may inform public policy, promote gender equality, and ultimately foster more inclusive and equitable societies. By examining the impacts of nationalism on gender politics, this study addresses pressing questions about the dynamics of power, identity, and social change. Moreover, the findings may provide a foundation for further research and contribute to the development of more informed and effective policies aimed at advancing gender equality and social justice within nationalist contexts. Consequently, this study holds considerable academic and societal significance, making it a pertinent area of inquiry for scholars, policymakers, and advocates alike.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Collins, P. H. (1998) explored how recent theoretical developments in viewing race, social class, gender, and nation as dimensions of interlocking systems of oppression might suggest new directions for Black family studies. Traditional social science approaches typically treat race, class, gender, and nationality as descriptive variables attached to individuals who are then reinserted into existing theoretical models of the family. In contrast, intersectional approaches view institutionalized racism, social class relations, gender inequalities, and nationalism expressed on both sides of state power as analytical constructs that explain family organization in general and Black family organization in particular. By exploring three such intersections, namely those of race and class, race and gender, and race and nation, this article examines how selected issues in Black family studies might benefit by approaching Black family studies via an intersectional lens.

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Thomson, J. (2020) in her study stated that nationalism has long been understood to be a deeply gendered phenomenon. The article provided an overview of some of the key concepts and literature in the study of gender and nationalism, including women; gender; the nation, and the intersection of sexuality, race, migration; and gender within nationalist imaginations. It offers some future research agendas that might be pursued in work on gender and nationalism—namely the gendered dimensions of populism or “new” nationalism.

Collins, P. H. (1998) stated in her study that intersectionality attracted substantial scholarly attention in the 1990s. Rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct one another. The author explored how the traditional family ideal functions as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality in the United States. Each of its six dimensions demonstrates specific connections between family as a gendered system of social organization, racial ideas and practices, and constructions of U.S. national identity.

Rao, S. (1999) aimed to explore the connection between Indian nationalism and gender identity. The author provided a critique of Radhakrishnan and Chatterjee's notion of the outer/inner dichotomy of Indian nationalism by stating that religion, in postcolonial India, has emerged as a discursive totality that has subsumed the politics of indigenous or inner identity more so than other rhetoric of caste, tribal, gender, and class. The author provided the groundwork for this debate via the writings of Nehru and Gandhi. The authors concluded, through an analysis of the practices of amniocentesis and Sati, that women and their bodies have been used as representations of the conflicts surrounding national subjectivity.

Peng, A. Y. (2022) aimed to determine how digital nationalism influences gender politics in the context of gender-issue debates on Chinese social media platforms. To this end, the author presented an original case study, collecting empirical data from the most popular Chinese community question-answering (CQA) website, Zhihu. By using a mixed-method research design, consisting of content analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), the author explored gender-issue debates among Chinese internet users. The analysis reveals how such debates inform divided opinions between women and men internet users, and how misogynistic men invoke a nationalist discourse to distort the debates.

De Silva, M. (2000) is concerned with a particular rendition of women as discursive subjects. More specifically, the author is concerned with what women's sexuality (or more precisely its production and suppression) might have signified for the deployment of nationalist ideology and its counter historiography. The author's theoretical frame treats as central the question of why women's sexuality foregrounds in nationalism, a discourse which was articulated in the late 19th and early twentieth century colonial Sri Lanka, a conjuncture that marked the Buddhist revivalism, the launching of the anti-colonial struggle against the British rule towards national independence. The reading of the author problematizes, in a fundamental sense, the relationship between nationalism and sexuality; how does nationalism relate to women's sexuality or how does it appropriate female sexuality? Starting off from the theoretical terrain of Chatterjee, whose provocative essay "nationalist resolution of the Women's Question" left many questions to be formulated, my analysis will be mainly informed by writings, narratives, and historical texts of historians and feminists in the main such as Jayawardena, Chatterjee, de Alwis, and Sangari and Vaid. This interrogation, the feminist questioning looks especially at the period of nationalist reformism in the latter and early part of the nineteenth and twentieth century in Sri Lanka and India. In re-examining Chatterjee's concluding political statement in his essay on "Women and Nation" in his *Nation and its Fragments*, that the ethical domain of nationalism remains a contested site, the author drew from pioneering work of social historians and feminists to primarily challenge tradition and signifying practices that oppress and disempower women. Chatterjee argues convincingly that nationalism holds an unenviable capacity to appropriate with varying degrees of success, dissenting and marginal voices. The author agreed with Chatterjee in his postulation that the history of Indian nationalism is largely phallogocentric. My task is to explore how nationalism as a social process subdued, subsumed, or erased women's voices, and women's agency, and how female sexuality became the premise on which this historical task was accomplished. My theoretical labor therefore delineates female sexuality as a contested site of power that continues to function as a regulating mechanism of social control. Enabled and informed largely by

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Foucault's analysis of power, I will attempt to demonstrate how our bodies are subjected in the sense that they are dominated, made to conform to particular institutional regimes and practices in that they are made productive and useful. In so far as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a subjected and practiced interiorised body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers.

Siim, B., & Stoltz, P. (2013) in their study stated that feminist scholars have pointed out that constructions of gender and gender equality are embedded in national narratives and politics of belonging (Yuval Davis 2011; Siim & Mokre 2013). The paper aimed to explore the gendered approaches to nationalism and to discuss how nationalism in Scandinavia is associated with 'social democratic' welfare and gender equality. Brochmann and Hagelund (2010) have pointed towards a specific form of Scandinavian welfare nationalism which is challenged by globalization and increased migration. The authors added that gender equality is a key aspect of the Scandinavian politics of belonging and that this has implications for our understanding of the challenges which can be recognised in the contemporary politics of gender and welfare in Scandinavia. This point can be illustrated using a focus on the problematic ways in which contemporary nationalist parties in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway have formulated welfare and gender equality politics. These observations in turn raise theoretical and analytical questions about understandings and conceptualizations of the intersections of nationalism, welfare, and gender. The first section briefly introduces two approaches to nationalism and gender: those of Nira Yuval Davis (2011; 1997) and Umut Özkirimli (2005; 2010). Second, the paper presents key aspects of the Scandinavian welfare and gender regimes as identified by Scandinavian feminist researchers and discusses the potentials and problems of Nordic equality politics using Yuval Davis and Özkirimli. Third, it explores the framings of welfare, gender equality, and the family of three nationalist parties: the Norwegian Progress Party, the Sweden Democrats, and the Danish Peoples' Party. The last section reflects on the challenges that authors recognized as being the result of current reformulations of the Nordic welfare and gender equality policies and discusses the need for feminist approaches to reframe gender equality/justice from a transnational, global perspective. The authors proposed that one way of doing this would be overcoming the exclusive notions of solidarity tied to the nation-state and formulating more inclusive notions of solidarity and justice beyond the nation-state.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study is based on secondary data but adopts a mixed-methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative elements to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection of nationalism and gender politics. This approach allows for the triangulation of data from various sources and enhances the robustness of the research.

3.2 Data Sources

This study primarily relies on secondary data obtained from a diverse range of academic journals, articles, reports, and news articles. The selection of data sources follows a systematic approach to ensure the relevance and credibility of the information used in the analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

A comprehensive search of relevant content was conducted on platforms such as PubMed, JSTOR, Google Scholar, relevant institutional libraries, and reliable news websites was conducted. The search primarily targeted pieces related to "gender", "gender politics", "nationalism," "intersection" "intersectionality" and related phrases. Non-English sources were excluded due to language limitations.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data underwent a rigorous process of content analysis and thematic coding to identify key findings and patterns related to the intersection of nationalism and gender politics.

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3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to ethical principles, ensuring that all data sources are properly cited and referenced. The author has made efforts to avoid any form of plagiarism, and the paper respects copyright laws and intellectual property rights.

4. NATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN GENDER POLITICS

In gender-issue debates, nationalism may come to the fore because nationalist discourse is inherently masculine (Deckman and Cassese, 2019) as a result of national identity being constructed through “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 1989). According to Anne McClintock (1993), “Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to the national agency”. There is no nation providing women and men citizens with the “same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state” (McClintock, 1993). The achievements of a nation, measured in terms of relative economic and military strength, are also associated with its national institutions, which across the world are generally dominated by men (Enloe, 1989). In this way, nationalist politics is shaped into a “major venue for accomplishing masculinity” as evidenced in the gendered basis of the Scottish Nationalist Party in British politics, Donald Trump’s victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election (Deckman and Cassese, 2019), and differing representations of men and women in the Catalan independence movement.

Although there seems to have been an increase in women’s participation in nationalism, a recent study conducted by Kecheng Fang and Maria Repnikova (2018) reveals that this increase relates to a “mythologized label that was deployed by other [...] groups to challenge and rebuke [male nationalists]”. Mirroring the masculine nature of nationalism, digital nationalism is still predominantly associated with male Internet users and entwined with gender power relations (Fang and Repnikova, 2018). Yinghong Cheng’s (2011) case study of digital racism, for instance, has touched upon the manifestation of nationalist rhetoric in men Internet users’ invectives against migrants living in the country. This nationalist rhetoric invokes the masculinity of nationalism by defining transnational marriages between a native woman and a non-native man as a form of foreign invasion and calling for the preservation of “racial stock” (Cheng, 2011). These findings provide vivid examples instantiating the potential of digital nationalism to distort gender-issue debates.

In particular, feminism is widely considered an imported Western concept. This worldview engenders contextual, ambivalent non-Western attitudes towards the West, which are based on a socio-economical hierarchy in which the West represents an aspirational fantasy, while the nation represents undesirable traditions. While men are understood to lead the economy, the socio-economical hierarchy encourages women to evaluate the “quality of domestic men” against that of Western men. As part of the masculine crisis, this evaluation further encourages men’s acceptance of misogynist voices by providing them with a perception of being discriminated against by their women compatriots. In this way, the debates on gender issues between women and men are complicated, paving the way for the intersection of nationalism and gender politics in society.

5. CONTEMPORARY HINDU NATIONALISM AND MASCULINITY

The RSS (founded in 1925), the VHP (1964), the Shiv Sena (1966), and the BJP (1980) constitute the four major voices of Hindu nationalism in India. These organizations do not necessarily share an identical definition of Hindutva. However, all of these groups would, with minor modifications, accept the following outlines of Hindutva. Briefly, a true India is a Hindu India, and minorities (read Muslims) can live in India only if they accept Hindu cultural dominance. All who identify themselves as Indians must accept the cultural primacy of Hindu heroes such as Ram and Shivaji. Any refusal to do so will represent an act of disrespect towards India. Frequently, minority communities (mostly Muslims and recently, Christians have been added to the list) are perceived as being anti-national because of their allegiance to religious prophets who are seen as being outside the context of Hindu India. More moderate proponents of Hindutva, will perhaps emphasize ideas of Hindu pride and cultural dominance and downplay notions of aggression against perceived enemies of the Hindu nation while radical followers will agitate for acts of war against the “other” or “enemy” of the Hindu nation, be it Islam or Christianity.

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A BJP manifesto delineates the nation, which these masculine heroes are striving for:

Diversity is an inseparable part of India's past and present national traditions. The post-independence tendency to reject all ancient Indian wisdom in political life led to all pre-independence values and symbols—be it the idea of spiritual nationalism expounded by Swami Vivekananda...or the soul-stirring 'Vande Mataram' song...as unsecular and unacceptable. The BJP rejects this attitude....

In the above excerpt from the BJP election manifesto, the reference to the "post-independence tendency to reject all ancient Indian wisdom" reveals this party's belief that contemporary India has moved away from its Hindu cultural background (represented by Swami Vivekananda and Vandemataram). Given the BJP's celebration of Hinduism, it may be argued that such a configuration of nationalism signifies the subordination of non-Hindu traditions to a monolithic Hindu nation constructed by the BJP.

The Sena's outline of its aims and objectives proclaims: "We are Hindustanis and therefore, Hindu is the belief of our party. We love Hindustan more than we love ourselves. Therefore, Shiv Sena's fight against anti-national forces shall be ceaseless it is Shivsena's (sic) belief that whatever may be our religion, whatever our form of worship, our culture is Hindu. We are a national force. Hence, we say with pride that we are Hindus". These statements very clearly outline a nationalism rooted in Hinduism. The distinction that the Sena attempts to make between Hinduism as a religion and as a nationalism is not very clear and open to slippage between the two. For example, it is not clear what a Hindu nation emptied of the dominance of the Hindu religion looks like or what the markers separating Hindu culture and Hindu religion. The Sena is also vague as to why people who are not Hindus by religion should pledge allegiance to a Hindu nation and say "with pride" that they are Hindus.

The VHP also draws on a similar vision of a Hindu nation as it aggressively asserts its right to protect Hindu temples, rituals, and idols. To this end, it has led to the struggle to build a temple in the North Indian town of Ayodhya to celebrate the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram. Young male VHP activists flooded this town in February and March 2002, aggressively agitating for the construction of this temple. The threat of potential violence led to heightened security and increased military presence. The VHP's militant tactics and stance in this endeavour highlight the use of a very simple and aggressive interpretation of Hindu masculinity.

The RSS, Shiv Sena, VHP, and BJP use religious symbols and icons to facilitate the spread of masculine Hinduism. It is important to begin with the RSS as this is the oldest of the three and has heavily influenced the others in their interpretation of Hindu nationalism and masculine Hinduism. Indeed most BJP politicians and VHP activists were members of the RSS during their youth while the Shiv Sena divides its party along the same organizational lines into shakhas or branches, a nomenclature borrowed directly from the RSS. When the RSS began its first training camps in 1927, young boys and men were encouraged to learn sword fighting, use javelins, and become proficient in the use of daggers. They saluted saffron flags (commonly believed to be associated with Hindu warriors). Their method of training and organization was distinctly martial and highlighted their beliefs that male Hindu warriors were being trained to defend Bharatmata. This method continues in its present training camps.

Elements of masculine Hinduism can also be found in the BJP's iconography. The BJP's reconfiguration of Ram (mythic hero, commonly believed to be the incarnation of the god Vishnu) most dramatically represents this emerging masculinist imagery. Most traditional Indian depictions of Ram are androgynous and unmasked; his curves are feminine in terms of a British gender dichotomy based on hegemonic masculinity (Kapur, 1993). Further, he is ethereal and unfocused, not engaged in the tensions of the human world (Kapur, 1993). But recently, Ram has become aggressive and masculine, engaged in the process of human desires and violence (Kapur, 1993). In BJP posters, Ram's muscles ripple as he towers over a Hindu temple protecting it against aggressors. The disengaged, androgynous, divine Ram has become a masculine Hindu warrior. The BJP has seized upon the figure of a newly configured warrior Ram as an icon representing an armed masculinity that demands Hindu anger against national enemies should be expressed, through, among other ways, aggressive action.

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The offer of bangles or jewelry worn by women is an insult to Hindu men because they have failed to protect their people. This equation of weakness with the feminine and strength with the masculine places this interpretation of masculinity squarely within the parameters of hegemonic masculinity.

The politics of the Shiv Sena exhorts the Hindu nation to arise and Sena activists paint the walls of cities in which they are influential with the snarling tiger emblem of the party. Statues and portraits of a muscular Shivaji holding a bow and arrow are found in their party offices. In all Shiv Sena-sponsored religious processions, the young male participants carry tridents. Their icons—the warrior Shivaji, weapons, and the tiger—all represent aggressive militarism. The tiger symbol of the Sena presents a provocative cultural reading in terms of masculine Hinduism. Bhavani, the traditional patron goddess of Shivaji, is usually associated with a tiger. Notice how, in the Sena’s symbolic configuration, the goddess (a female representation of martial prowess) has disappeared and the tiger stands alone. Finally, the Shiv Sena activists refer to themselves as *sainiks* or warriors. The word *sena* means army. The facades of local Shiv Sena offices imitate historic Hindu forts. The saffron flag of Hindu warriors flies from the painted spires proclaiming war on the enemies of Hinduism. The VHP’s headquarters in Delhi also flies the saffron flag of Hinduism and its activists speak passionately about the need to protect Hindu religion. During the 1992/1993 Hindu–Muslim riots in India as well as in the 2002 riot in Gujarat, young VHP activists were armed, angry, and aggressively projected themselves as warriors fighting for the Hindu nation.

Most of the policy makers as well as the foot soldiers of the RSS, BJP, VHP, and the Shiv Sena are men, the icons they use are resolutely masculinized, and the message they disseminate focuses on being “masculine” warriors in politics. The position of women within this context of masculinization and militarism becomes contested and ambiguous. Where do women fit in? Do they take on masculine traits to become “masculinized warriors” or do they disappear completely from this political arena based on masculine Hinduism?

6. NATIONAS WOMAN

“...Motherland is a woman’s body and as such is ever in danger of violation—by ‘foreign’ males. To defend her frontiers and her honor requires relentless vigilance and the sacrifice of countless citizen warriors...” Peterson (1998).

In the RSS and BJP offices, it is common to see India depicted as a beautiful woman. Not only do masculine Hindus—the citizen warriors referred to above—protect the nation as women, but they are forever on guard defending the honor of Hindu women who are in danger of being defiled by the enemy of the Hindu nation: the Muslims. V.D. Savarkar—discussed in the historical section and one of the early articulators of masculine Hinduism—linked nation as woman, honor, and rape: “The souls of...millions of aggrieved women might have perhaps said, “Do not forget Shivaji Maharaj...the unutterable atrocities committed on us by...Muslim noblemen and thousands of others, big and small. ...Once they (i.e., the Muslim noblemen) are haunted with this dreadful apprehension that Muslim women, too, stand in the same predicament in case the Hindus win, the future Muslim conquerors, will never dare think of such molestation of Hindu women. It was the suicidal Hindu idea of chivalry to women that saved the Muslim women. Their womanhood became their shield...” (Agarwal, 1995).

By adopting the voice of dishonored Indian women, Savarkar is implicitly rebuking Hindu men for not being manly enough to protect their women and hence their national honor. A rather chilly implication of this rebuke is the notion of the “suicidal Hindu idea of chivalry,” it seems Savarkar wants masculine Hindu men to rape Muslim women to vindicate the dishonor of Hindu womanhood. Indeed, during the 1992/1993 Hindu–Muslim riots, rape of Muslim women by a few militant proponents of Hindu nationalists was justified using this language of vindication and dishonor (Agarwal, 1995), and “rape” has also been used as a rhetorical device to call Hindu warriors to the defense of their nation. For example, the rape of Hindu women during the periods of Islamic rule in India and Hindu–Muslim riots in the wake of the Indian subcontinent’s partition into Pakistan and India are repeatedly used by the BJP and RSS in their speeches to urge masculine Hindu warriors to protect their motherland and their women (Basu, 1995).

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7. WOMEN AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN POLITICAL IDENTITY STRUGGLES

But the passive role of the nation as a woman is not the only model of the intersection of female identity and masculine Hinduism within the Hindu nationalist narrative. Women themselves can become citizen warriors by adopting the traits of masculine Hinduism, but they must do so cautiously by constantly emphasizing that such an action will not challenge the present gendered structure of society. The Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (literally “Organization of Women in Service to the Nation” and hereafter Samiti) was founded in 1936 by Lakshmi Bai Kelkar as the women’s wing of the RSS. According to an official publication of the Samiti, Kelkar persuaded Dr. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, that women needed to be a part of nation-building because “Men and women are both wings of the society. Unless both were strong, the society will not progress properly” (Rai, 1996).

Young girls brandish wooden daggers and practice wrestling moves. The juxtaposition of India imagined as a warrior goddess and young Indian women performing martial moves, eloquently illustrates the female representation of the citizen warrior. It must be noted that these young women are not practiced in martial arts, rather their moves are stylized, almost a dance, symbolizing the Samiti’s emphasis on the need for Hindu women to cultivate their ability to protect themselves and their nation.

The reason given for a woman’s need to protect herself is the fear of rape. The Samiti’s official publications (Rai, 1996) emphasize this rationale by retelling a well-known story about founder Lakshmi Bai Kelkar. It seems that just after the founding of the Samiti, she was horrified to hear of a Hindu woman who was raped in public while her husband and other men stood by. Given the Samiti’s link to the narrative of Hindu nationalism and their depiction of the nation as woman, it can be assumed that the rapists were to be demonized as “the other,” the enemy of the Hindu nation, i.e. Muslims who dared to pollute Indian womanhood (and hence nation as woman) while cowardly Hindu men looked on. The publication does not mention the religion of the assailants but the Samiti members, in response to my question, claimed that they were Hindu. So the Samiti claims that women must also embody traits of hegemonic masculinity—martial prowess and physical hardiness—not only to protect Mother India but also to prevent the Hindu sons of Mother India from attacking her daughters.

While the Samiti encourages young women to perform martial arts, the Mahila Agadhi and Mahila Morcha show their reverence for the feminine representation of martial prowess by valorizing divine figures such as Durga and historical icons such as the Rani (Queen) of Jhansi who rode to battle against the British as role models for female behavior, performing rituals celebrating warrior goddesses, and prominently displaying statues and portraits of these female figures in their offices. But does this celebration of feminine warriorhood lead to women taking up arms or participating in violence? The 1992/1993 Hindu–Muslim riots, which followed in the wake of the demolition of a Muslim religious structure, respond to this query.

The BJP, claiming to represent the voices of Hindu nationalism, demanded that a mosque built on the ruins of an ancient temple celebrating the birthplace of Lord Ram and occupying sacred Hindu ground should be torn down to make way for a new Hindu temple. It had been agitating around this issue throughout the 1980s and in December 1992, its political agitation culminated in the destruction of this building. This event unleashed a wave of violence that swept throughout the country, as Hindus clashed with Muslims. The politics of Hindu nationalism—i.e., the need to protect the Hindu nation from attack by the “the other,”—provided the context of these riots. The city of Mumbai—a stronghold of the Shiv Sena—was one of the most violent conflict zones. During this period of turmoil, a feminist activist commented in a daily newspaper on the feminization of violence, “A very, very disturbing aspect of these killings was that women were some of the most aggressive participants in the riots...”. Other scholars agreed with this assessment, “...large numbers of women have been extremely active and visible, not only in the rallies and campaigns but even in the actual episodes of violent attacks against Muslims” (Sarkar, 1995). Given the nature of such participation, it becomes reasonable to conjecture that certain women, in a specific situation, have indeed taken on traits of masculine Hinduism to enter into the fray as citizen warriors protecting the Hindu nation. But this feminization of violence is of course only one model of active female participation.

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Sadhavi Rithambhara, who is a prominent female proponent of Hindu nationalism, provides another model of female participation, not a foot soldier in direct combat, but an eloquent speaker, celebrating the idea of masculine Hinduism. Although she does not take up arms or embody martial prowess, she can by no means be dismissed as a “cheerleader” for the “real” male warriors. The power of the sadhavi’s words equals that of a Hindu warrior’s weapons. The prefix “sadhavi” refers to the female counterpart of the male sadhu, who, in the Hindu world’s view, has renounced worldly life to search for personal salvation and enlightenment. The sadhavi’s message to Hindus is not one of tolerance and non-violence. Rather, it focuses on lamenting that Hindu passivity has enabled Muslims to enjoy special privileges at the expense of Hindus and eloquently argues that the time has now come for Hindu warriors to demand their rights and protect their nation: “I mean to say that the long-suffering Hindu is being called a religious zealot today. The Muslims got their Pakistan. Even in a mutilated India, they have special rights. What do we have? An India with its arms cut off. An India where restrictions are placed on our festivals, where our processions are always in danger of attack.” (Kakar, 1995). It is interesting to note that even though she does not use a nation-as-woman metaphor to explicitly describe India, she very clearly embodies the nation by invoking ideas of mutilation as she refers to the partition of India by the British (supposedly in response to Muslim demands). Embodying the nation enables masculine Hindu warriors to more effectively imagine a defense of the Hindu nation as “what” they are protecting is no longer abstract or lifeless but rather becomes alive. She warns the Muslims, “Live among us like the son of a human being and we will respectfully call you “uncle.” But if you want to behave like the son of Babar (the founder of the Mughal empire in India, The Mughals were Muslim) then the Hindu youth will deal with as Rana Pratap and Chhatrapati Shivaji did with your forefathers (Rana Pratap, like Shivaji, is a Hindu warrior celebrated by Hindu nationalists as a popular symbol of Hindu resistance)” (Kakar, 1995). Her speeches continue in this vein skilfully invoking Ram, Shivaji, ideas of a glorious Hindu nation, casting Muslim/Islam as the “other” of this nation, and calling upon masculine Hindu warriors to defend their nation.

Sadhavi Ranthambhore, along with two other important female participants of the Hindu nationalist movement—Uma Bharati and Vijayraje Scindia⁴— offer an interesting interpretation of the intersection of masculine Hinduism and female identity. All three of these women are celibate. Scindia is a widow, and Uma Bharati, like Rithambhara, is a sadhavi, a female renunciate (Basu, 1995). Widowhood implies celibacy because in certain interpretations of Hinduism, widowed women cannot marry again and since sexual relations are allowed only within the confines of matrimony; a widow is, by definition, celibate. All three women also wear plain clothing with a minimum of make-up and jewelry.

This image of virgin warrior becomes even more potent with the founding in 1998 of a women’s organization affiliated with the VHP: the Sadhavi Shakti Parishad or the Organization of Sadhavi Power (Parishad). All active members are celibate female renunciates with short hair, no jewellery, and are dressed in saffron robes. Their activities include speaking in public about the need to protect the Hindu nation (many use the fiery speeches of Sadhavi Rithambhara as a model), organizing gatherings where young women are trained in martial arts and taught about the ideals of Indian womanhood, and coordinating the worship of Hindu mother goddesses in public spaces. To enter the masculinized reality of Hindu nationalism, many women are symbolically and practically shedding outer markers of their femininity.

8. WOMEN MOTHER

In a nationalist narrative constructed with ideas of masculine Hinduism, women do not necessarily have to take on masculine traits or erase tangible signs of femininity to become political actors, they can play complementary roles that draw on their socially constructed gender roles based on ideas of hegemonic femininity, motherhood for example. This focus on “woman as mother” also circumvents any potential criticism of their perceived violation of societally prescribed gender roles as they enter nationalist politics. The ideals of motherhood and women’s role as mothers intersect with the nation-building process in three ways. One, women have the physical ability to bear children, especially sons, who will become citizen soldiers ready to defend the nation as women. Two, as primary caregivers of children they socialize future warriors by passing on culture, rituals, and nationalist myths to the

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next generation. Finally, the concept of “motherhood” assumes that women can play multiple roles and this can prove useful in shaping political rhetoric aimed at bringing women into the nationalist conflict. An official publication of the Samiti uses all three methods to legitimize the nationalist work of the Samiti: “Even though the Sevikas (members of the Samiti) were not after power if the occasion demanded they must have the capacity to become able administrators. It is a mother who can train the children to shoulder any responsibility in life. Hence, she had to be an able administrator as she is the commander of her home.... ‘Motherhood’ has vast dimensions, it extends beyond the family to town, society, country, nation...” (Rai, 1996). Here, the role of women as both cultural and biological reproducers is emphasized as is their ability to transfer skills learned in the private sphere as mothers to the public sphere of nation-building.

The BJP draws on a similar policy, “We can begin to see the extent to which the traditional discourse of women as *matrishakti* (author’s note: maternal power) infuses the BJP’s policies” (Kapur&Cosman, 1995). Evidence for the Shiv Sena women’s use of ideas of maternal power is found not so much in written texts but rather in the fact that many of the publicly performed rituals of the Shiv Sena women’s wing celebrate female strength in the nation as deriving from women’s role as mothers. In the narrative of Hindu nationalism, mothers of historic warriors are as celebrated as their sons. For example, Jijabai, Shivaji’s mother, who encouraged her son to resist the injustice of Muslim rule and protect the Hindu nation provides a powerful model of Hindu motherhood as does Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi, who fell in battle defending her infant son’s kingdom. The Parishad is also eloquent in its defense of the power of motherhood. In *Matrimahashakti* (2000) or “Great Maternal Power,” a published collection of essays by *sadhavis* and other women who support the Parishad, most authors celebrate women’s role as mothers who nurture proper citizens and warriors. For example, in an essay titled “Mothers are Divine,” *Sadhavi Nayasargika Giri* (2000) argues that although the great Hindu warrior hero Pratap Singh’s father was a coward who lost his fort and hid in the surrounding Aravalli mountains, his mother—a great and learned lady—taught her son the value of nationalism, martial prowess, and courage thus enabling Pratap Singh to become one of the greatest heroes of the Hindu nation.

However, the Parishad’s relationship to motherhood is rather ambiguous. It should be noted that even though the Parishad emphasizes that women’s greatest contribution to the nation is her ability to nurture citizens and warriors, the *sadhavis*, because of their celibacy have denied themselves this power. Consequently, through their persons and actions, *sadhavis* are declaring that female strength in a nation can come in forms other than mother. The model of the virgin warrior is central to this ambiguity; women can fight within the masculinized landscape as long as their “femininity” is erased (this erasure represented, for example, by the image of *sadhavi*), however, if women wish to enter this space without shedding cultural symbols that mark them as female, then they must do so in socially prescribed roles such as mother. However, as the Parishad and the Samiti highlight, even within such gendered limits, women can become visible and effective in the Hindu nationalist struggle.

9. CONCLUSION

The research on the intersection of nationalism and gender politics, with a particular focus on the discourse surrounding nationalist masculinity and its implications for women’s roles in these movements, has revealed several significant insights.

First, the research uncovered that nationalist discourse often adopts inherently masculine characteristics. National identity is constructed through what can be termed “masculinized memory, humiliation, and hope.” This perspective shapes nationalist politics as a venue for asserting masculinity, which is evident in examples like the Scottish Nationalist Party’s gendered basis and the contrasting representations of men and women in the Catalan independence movement. This tendency to masculinize nationalism raises questions about gender equality within these movements.

The paper also highlights the complex relationship between women’s participation in nationalism and the influence of male nationalists. While there is an increase in women’s involvement, it is often driven by a “mythologized label” deployed by other groups to challenge male nationalists. This illustrates the contested and

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ambiguous role of women in the context of masculine nationalism. Furthermore, digital nationalism remains predominantly associated with men and is entwined with gender power relations, as seen in online invectives against migrants and the distortion of gender-issue debates.

The research underscores the role of femininity and motherhood within the context of nationalist movements. Women are sometimes portrayed as symbolic bearers of the nation, closely linked to the concept of the nation as a woman who needs protection from external threats. Motherhood, as both a biological and cultural role, plays a crucial part in shaping the next generation of citizens and warriors. While women can contribute to the nationalist cause as mothers, the study reveals that there is an ambiguity in their roles, with some women choosing to adopt a more combative, "virgin warrior" identity.

Hindu nationalism in India illustrates how the intersection of nationalism and gender politics plays out in practice. These groups emphasize the dominance of Hindu culture and assert the need to protect Hindu women and the nation from perceived threats. The portrayal of masculine Hinduism, the transformation of traditional figures into masculine icons, and the use of symbols like the tiger all promote aggressive militarism within these movements.

This research offers a multifaceted view of how nationalism and gender politics intersect. It sheds light on the historical evolution of masculinity within nationalist movements, the complex dynamics of women's participation, and the roles of motherhood and femininity in shaping the narrative. These findings underscore the need for a deeper understanding of how gender operates within nationalist contexts and how it influences the discourse and practices of these movements. As a result, scholars and policymakers should consider the implications of these gender dynamics for society at large, including the promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's rights within nationalist ideologies.

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