



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 19 – WOMANHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Woman as Goddess

- The term "the Goddess" is misleading: the Hindu pantheon includes a number of female deities, who are traditionally divided into two categories: benign goddesses and fierce goddesses, based on a set of characteristics such as character, appearance, mobility, kinship, residence, worshippers, priests, and so on.
- However, "The Goddess" is usually either Kali or Durga, who are imagined and embodied as deities without consorts and symbolise the total **Shakti**, or the cosmic, feminine principle of power.

Woman as Goddess

- The symbolic representation of the Indian nation as a beloved, suffering, deified mother: **Bharat Mata**, i.e. "**Mother India**," a character portrayed by nationalist Bengali writer **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** in his novel, *Anandamath* published in 1882, which coincides with the first political participation of Indian women as a group.
- As her iconography demonstrates, **Bharat Mata** has a lot in common with Durga. She rides a lion (or tiger) and has the same matronly, smiling appearance as Durga. Durga is the most popular of all the fierce mother-goddess avatars.

Woman as Goddess

- **Bharat Mata** is a popular theme in Indian nationalism, shown on banners and flags and by **painters like Abanindranath Tagore and Amrita Sher-Gill**.
- In the words of **S. Ramaswamy**, she is shown as a woman whose body defines the subcontinent's borders from 1930 onwards, and she is unmistakably "the fetish object of Indian nationalism."
- As a result, she moves, appeals to, and mobilises both women and men in the widest meaning of the term.

Woman as Goddess

- In the Indian Freedom Movement, two leaders devised mobilisation techniques that significantly focused on women. Women's engagement in the independence struggle was a major concern for both Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose.
- Both were certain that only with women's full participation could a new India be established, and both invented new political roles for them, evoking the Goddess as an example for Indian women.
- **S.C.Bose** specifically urged women to follow Durga's example and come to the nation's aid.

Woman as Goddess

- Gandhi frequently alluded to another female deity, **Sita**. The Mahatma used the chaste, devoted wife of the god Ram in the **Ramayana** (the most popular epic in north India) as an example for women. Gandhi was convinced that women's participation was essential to India's freedom.
- His political strategy, which relied on non-violence and the great symbolic value of occupations like spinning, was intended to fully incorporate women into the fold of the nationalist struggle. In his lectures to women, Gandhi frequently drew explicit analogies between Sita's mythical fight against the demon Ravana and Indian women's fight against the British.
- The symbol of Sita was also used by the Gandhians during the recovery operations of the abducted women, urging families to espouse their estranged female kin.

Woman as Goddess

- The Goddess thus appears to fulfil one vital purpose for any movement: mass mobilisation, in the context of the nationalist fight. For her likeness to the most popular image of **Durga** and her empathetic appeal as a mother that needs to be salvaged, Bharat Mata is a national symbol that deeply touches both men and women.
- Sita, on the other hand, is a prominent goddess who Gandhi invokes primarily for the sake of women. Sita is portrayed as a **role model for women** who want to participate in the national struggle for freedom.
- Sita portrays the ideal codes of gendered conduct for women that would enable the **Ramrajya**, the concept of a governance that is just for all its subjects.

Woman as Goddess

- The mobilisation caused by the Goddess's invocation uses two separate, if unified, methods. To begin with, the continuous battle against the imagined evil is recast through symbols and terms that are popular among the masses. Durga (through Bharat Mata) and Sita offer their potency to the nationalist cause by endowing it with an emotional appeal.
- Second, the Goddess's invocation turns **a political goal into a sacred one**. The ongoing conflict is given a religious dimension, reducing the conflict to a battle of good against evil.
- Nation-worship is viewed as a *yajna* or holy cause that is meant to protect and inspire the inhabitants – children of the nation

Woman as Goddess

- The invocation of the Goddess legitimises women's role in the movement as a result of these two processes, which is especially essential for women.
- The transformation of political action into religious terms changes its fundamental nature: engagement with politics, which was formerly associated with the public arena and hence reserved for men, can now be seen as the fulfilment of one's religious duty, which is now open to women.
- The question of including women in roles outside the domestic space is envisioned as a result of the Goddess's invocation. They can then walk down the street, socialise with strangers, and even associate with men who are not family, without compromising their respectability. They can engage in traditionally masculine activities while still maintaining their femininity.

Woman as Goddess

- Bimala (Tagore) prefigured Manto's women in whom one could see the completion of that project of making the nation visible by a surrealist juxtaposition of images.
- In **“Ghare Baire”** (The Home and the World) Bimala's wish to be recognised by Sandeep, the fierce nationalist, as goddess Jagaddhatri, one who holds the earth, than a mere friend's wife, and she moans her ordinary looks for not being extraordinarily stunning.
- Sandeep sees himself as: **“Am I simply constructed in language? Am I just a book constructed of flesh and blood?”** (Das)



Woman as Goddess

- Sandeep invokes devotional stream towards nation through iconization of Bimala's figure as goddess.
- Upon seeing Bimala, Sandeep changes **Vande Mataram** (nation as mother) to **Vande Priyam** (nation as beloved), and **Vande Mohinim** (nation as the enticing one).
- Sandeep's imagination of nation in and as the woman is forceful and deeply invested with emotionality and rhetoric; in comparison, Nikhilesh's view of nation and nationalism is far less romantic, identifying with the real coordinates of the common people and rendering mundane services to them, and therefore does not dwell of an abstract concept or deification of the nation as goddess

Communal Identity and Women's Bodies

- ❖ **Veena Das'** *Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain*
 - “In the work of mourning in many societies it is the transactions between language and body, especially in the gendered division of labor, by which the antiphony of language and silence recreates the world in the face of tragic loss” (Das).
 - Bodies of women on which desire for nationalism brutally inscribed and a memory of future made.
 - The symbols of nation are inscribed on women's bodies, yet these narratives of nation are not transposed at the level of family on an everyday basis.

Communal Identity and Women's Bodies

- The national rhetoric constitute the threshold, perhaps metaphysical, within which the ordinary lives are lived.
- Veena Das - women are excluded from the originary imagination of national social order. Their reproductive facility is seen to be rightly belonging to the state, as the “legitimate” sons are taken into the nation’s services (Das, “Violence, Gender and Subjectivity” 285).
- Das - Violation of woman’s body by rape is seen as “an offense against the property rights of the man who is her guardian” (292).
- In the genre of lamentation, women have control both through their bodies and through their language. Grief is articulated through the body, for instance, by inflicting grievous hurt on oneself, making present the inner state, and is finally given a home in language. Grief is enacted as a spectacle.



Communal Identity and Women's Bodies

- On his Delhi journal, M K Gandhi writes about the exchange of women and prisoners, urging the return of Muslim women as a form of repentance.
- Jawaharlal Nehru asked Hindu men to accept women who had been abducted and not to punish them for it.
- The subtle everyday brutality against women is amplified in the nationalist project.
- Communalism, a twin of nationalism, is established when a woman's body is appropriated for the cause of the nation, both in terms of deification and violent inscriptions of national history.



Communal Identity and Women's Bodies

- The objectification of grief on the body, both in terms of surface and depth, as well as in terms of language, bears witness to the loss that has been inflicted.
- In India's mythological imagination, war victory or defeat was etched on the bodies of women. The texts on the *Vilap* (**Gandhari's or Mandodari's grieving laments in the Mahabharata or Ramayana**) at the slaying of their kin in the epic war are literary classics.
- Acoustic and linguistic codes make the loss public through adding a performative dimension to the laments, from women witnessing death to wearing the sign of possession of their body by the adversary.



Communal Identity and Women's Bodies

- The recollections of pain and grief have been compared to poison, which causes a woman's insides to dissolve.
- Das - “Even the idea that we should recover the narratives of violence becomes problematic when we realize that such narratives cannot be told unless we see the relation between pain and language that a culture has evolved” (Das, “Language and Body” 88).
- Interviewed women by Menon, Bhasin and Das were found to perceive themselves as polluted bodies and objects of consumption, who had to carry “poisonous knowledge of Partition.”



Thank You

