



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 20 – WOMANHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Women's Role In Nation Building

❖ *Woman, Community and Nation* – Tanika Sarkar

- In a traditional Indian set-up, a woman's class, caste, geographical and even communal belongingness are entirely predicated on her male relations, which she virtually repeats.
- She is automatically enfolded and made a symbol of the respective patriarchal frontier in which she is born or located by virtue of marriage. In this way, a woman's body is utilized to represent the class, caste and community of her male kin, and thereby in defining rivalry among different patriarchal groups.
- Amrita Basu - interplay of religious, class and gendered identities both creates women's activism as well as undermines their autonomy. Owing to contradictions in women's agency and activism, they do not possess unified identities or interests. Complexity arises when women reject the feminists' opposition to religious nationalism; the religious nationalist's negation of class, caste, gender and regional identities; and the nation-state's assumption of them primarily as self-sacrificing mothers and wives (Basu, "Appropriating Gender" 4).

Women's Role In Nation Building

- 1870s – Hindu elites threatened by Christian and Muslim proselytization – while the Christians control the masses by offering educational facilities, Muslims offer a refined Urdu culture
- The numerical majority of Dalits threatened to split, weakening Hindu society's hold on power.
- Formulation of new colonial rules pertaining to land and business services put the new Hindu middle-class under significant hardship.
- **This threat is countered by Swami Dayanand's agenda in Punjab** for a reformed Veda-based Hindu fundamentalism seeking authentic Hindu sources



Women's Role In Nation Building

- Since the 19th century in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra, Hindu women have been a political resource for militant Hindu nationalism.
- Representing women as willing members of the community by reimagining them.
- Representing Hindus as persecuted, besieged, and naturally superior to non-Hindus gives the community a moral claim to political power.
- Hindu militant reformist programmes emerge, which blame the Muslims instead of Hindu caste hierarchies.

Women's Role In Nation Building

- **Domestic sphere as a space of relative autonomy** – in critical response to colonial discrimination in the economic, political, and administrative realms, and because of marginalisation in public space, the Indians insisted on rights to self-determination in the domestic sphere.
- **Personal law as a realm of self-activism** — widespread public participation in the legal reform process, resistance to divorce, and modification of Hindu marriage laws.

Women's Role In Nation Building

- The notion of a coherent, unified community was immediately tied to personal laws, which were assumed to be the concrete expression of religion.
- Modernity in this aspect was in the claim that the true Hindu wife accepted scriptural rule out of her own free will, devotion and commitment, for which she embraced the pain of widowhood, child marriage and strict monogamy.
- Tanika Sarkar - Hindu militant reformist schemes saw a Hindu woman's abduction as a sign of the community's attenuation of power, through the capturing of fertile wombs. Women are at the same time powerless and marginal, and yet incorporated into a new politics as mothers of future leaders .

Women's Role In Nation Building

- The Hindu woman's moral ascendancy made her a non-transformative pre-fixed identity, yet her passivity indicated a complete transformation for the community (Sarkar).
- The Congress's strategy for **universal adult suffrage** and social justice is focused on ensuring that **women are adequately represented in the democratic system.**

Women's Role In Nation Building

- Nationalist sensitivity (originating with the elite) was linked to a sensitivity to subjection of women, lower castes, and lower social classes - a reaction to the nationalists' own submission to colonisers.
- Gandhian rhetoric – associating the socially dispossessed within the nationalist organization, which bestowed an iconic status on the peasant, the untouchable and the women as ideal patriotic subjects.
- The figure of the threatened woman became fundamental to these outbursts of aggression, and violence became a necessary condition for the Hindu male honour to be preserved.



Women's Role In Nation Building

- **V. D. Savarkar** rewrites Indian history by claiming that **Hindu women integrated with their communities and became a cause and symbol for the motherland's defeat.**
- The image of a threatened woman - **Lakshmibai Kelkar**, the founder of the **Rashtra Sevika Samiti**, was plagued by this anxiety and desired for Hindu women to develop physical strength to combat attacks.
- Sevikas, on the other hand, spent their time meditating on the weaponry of the eight-armed goddess symbol, a radical departure for an upper-caste woman attending a martial arts school.

Women's Role In Nation Building

- The Sevikas, unlike women terrorists, had no urgent political purpose and no plans to fight against the colonial power.
- Sevikas as 'mothers' - gender ideology of "**call to motherhood**," physical training to shape up women's bodies for reproduction, and *buddhik* or ideological training sessions to inculcate the basic principles of Hindutva politics and a sense of Hindu supremacism.
- Since the radical women's organization often face social isolation and emotional deprivation, RSS gender ideology is a submission to and integrity with patriarchy. Gender insensitivity and retrogression guarantee safety, acceptance and merging with a broader caste-class milieu.

Women's Role In Nation Building

- Women achieve transition from domesticated to a more public domain with consent from family and with comforts of old, inherited, safe and uncontested values intact.
- **Sadhvi Rithambara**, a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) woman ascetic leader, speaks about Bhagat Singh's mother's lack of motherly sadness – the warrior ideal underpinning the construction of heroic women ideally – giving political dimensions to femininity that are typically confined to the horizons of domesticity.

Thank You

